

NEWSLETTER  
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EL PASO AUDUBON SOCIETY  
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Geth Osborn White, Editor

CALENDAR

Sat. - May 6

A hearing is set by the Forest Service at City Hall at Alomorgordo at 9:00 A. M. The Service proposes the hearing to determine how many roadless areas in New Mexico merit study for inclusion as wilderness. Conservation Chairman Bob Barto has a map which shows the roadless areas within the various national forests. He and fellow Sierra Club members have devoted much time lately making surveys on foot and by plane to personally acquaint themselves with acreages under consideration. It is important to have a showing of conservationists who are for including as much as is appropriate of these areas as wilderness to counteract the desires on the part of local ranchers for access for grazing, etc. Just your presence counts. Call Bob Barto at 755-4744 if you can go and plan to leave his house at 6:30 A. M., breakfast at Holiday Inn, Alomorgordo.

Tue.-May 9th

SPRING DAY COUNT. Wish it could have been over a weekend, but due to conflict of interests and time, we hope everyone who possibly can give just a little time or as much time as possible to take part. If you can get out early in the morning and look around your neighborhood and call in what you see, it will help. A year ago on May 8 we had a respectable record. We are not confined to the Christmas Count circle and lakes and ponds can be included in El Paso County and nearby New Mexico. Call the Whites at 565-1024 or better still, come by at the end of the day.

Sat.-May 13th

Field trip to Cave Creek in the Chiricuhuas, leader Ralph Fisher of Silver City. If you plan to go, drop a card to him at P. O. Box 1029, Silver City, N. M. There are accommodations for camping and cottages along the creek. It's a well watered canyon of great beauty and boasts some unusual species of birds.

Mon.-May 15th

REGULAR MEETING at Centennial Museum, 7:30 P. M., U.T.E.P. campus. Carrie Bell Roberts, who went on a Windjammering cruise to the Galapagos last year, came back with a marvelous pictorial record of the birds of the islands, remarkable close-ups of the boobies and frigate birds. She talks like an ornithologist but swears she is an amateur. Don't miss this one.

Sat. - 20th  
of May, 7:00

FIELD TRIP to Horizon Lake. Rendezvous at the Lake at this earlier hour to see water birds. It warms up so early we must start earlier to see the birds. To find the Lake take Horizon City exit off Interstate 10 East. Follow highway about 5 miles straight north until you run out of telephone poles on right; turn left on graveled road for about 1/2 mile making right turn with lake visible straight ahead.

BIRD NOTES

Horizon Lakes, just eleven miles east of El Paso and in the County is one of the most choice birding spots. This is a lake with an irregular shore line and a separation into distinct pools, fed by water pumped by a well nearby. Certainly the lake must be visible for miles to migrating birds which are reputed to follow water courses.

If the birds are following the Rio Grande this year as they approach El Paso County they will find grass growing in the narrow river channel, a result of a prolonged drought (.44 inches of rain since January 1, 1972) and low reservoirs in the watershed.

The Hueco Mountains lie just east of the lake which has been developed by the Horizon Land Development Company as a part of its recreation. We appreciate their giving us permission to watch birds here. Mountain contours reflected in the still water of the shallow lakes give the place a unique beauty as ones eyes follow the drifting sands held down by yuccas, saltbush and other desert vegetation. Mexico's mountains on the distant western horizon purple the sunsets.

To further enhance the value of this watering place for the birds is a food supply -- thousands of insects swarming just above the water's surface and at its edges. In the water are tiny salt-tolerant minnows swimming in the clear, brackish water. What if the birds do have to tolerate being raised by a speeding motor bike or an aimless car circling the lake and raising dust in spurts of speed. Resting places are few and far between on the desert. A slow-approaching birdwatcher has a good chance for close observation. Our picnic at water's edge about dusk was shared by four curlews and a dozen avocets while Lesser Nighthawks almost brushed us with a wing as they dipped and glided for the myriad insects swarming over the water.

The Shelfers first reported a good migratory water bird presence on Saturday, the 29th of April. Most unusual was a flock of 15 White-faced Ibis. Their bird list included Great Blue Heron, Mallards, Gadwalls, Blue-winged Teal, Shoveler, Lesser Scaup and Ruddy Ducks; Common Merganser, Coot, Semi-palmated and Snowy Plovers, Long-billed Curlew, Willet, White-rumped Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Eared Grebes.

On the same day, checking things out, the Whites missed the ibis and the Great Blue Herons but did see one Little Blue Heron and added Sanderlings and Baird's Sandpipers. The reservoir near Acala down the valley yielded big flocks of Dowitchers, about 100 in all, one Western Grebe and three Horned Grebes and a single Marbled Godwit feeding with large flocks of peeps, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Avocets, Wilson's and Northern Phalaropes, the latter only four in number. A flock of 30 Franklin's gulls floated on the far side of the lake along with many duck species including Ring-necked, Canvasback, Bufflehead, American Widgeon, Green-winged Teal. Shovelers were the most numerous of the ducks and there were probably 200 Phalaropes, all actively feeding.

Water birds were on the move on the 29th.

Land birds have been unusually slow with few reports other than the common Wilson's Warblers, some Townsend's and McGillivray's Warblers, a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Jim and Pamela Koons have had Summer Tanagers passing through; a robin has been singing in Memorial Park vicinity the week of May 1st.

CONFERENCE FOR RARE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES IN TEXAS.

On April 5, Clyde W. Graham, State Conservationist of the Soil Conservation Service, scheduled a conference of all interested parties to discuss rare and endangered species of plants and animals in Texas at Austin. Some 64 people were present, representing 12 universities, 4 state agencies, 3 federal agencies, 9 citizen organizations and 1 newspaper.

The primary purpose was to initiate a coordinated approach to accomplishing four major objectives:

1. Prepare watchlists of rare and endangered species.
2. Develop lists of measures important to preservation of the species.
3. Develop a monitoring system for rare and endangered species and their habitats.
4. Plan for appropriate action to protect species found to be in danger.

SCS has specialists trained in biology, wildlife management, agronomy and related disciplines working in every county in the state and are uniquely able to carry out conservation programs and to influence land treatment for preservation of rare and endangered species. They will be of great aid in monitoring in their field work and are to be praised for their leadership in initiating the program.

Dennis Russell, representing Texas Parks and Wildlife, stated that too often species were allowed to decrease to a dangerous level before people became concerned, citing the ivory-billed woodpecker and the whooping crane as examples. The Department is presently engaged in cooperative work with other agencies in studying some 8 or 10 endangered species of animals and birds including the desert bighorn, red-cockaded woodpecker, lesser and Attwater Prairie Chicken, bald eagle, osprey, red wolf and alligator.

Dr. Keith Arnold said their activities in the past has been centered on control of pest species.

Dr. Eric Bolen of Texas Tech asked that the group guard against provincialism. Many of the rare and endangered species are migratory and preservation depends on a national or regional approach. He also asked the group not to overlook certain species such as the Colima Warbler (breeding in the Chisos in the Big Bend) not necessarily rare but extremely limited in their range. Disturbance or change in habitat could be extremely dangerous.

Mr. Charles Ramsey of the Texas Extension Service pointed out that preservation efforts must be aimed toward people who own and manage the land. They need to be able to identify and know habitat requirements for rare species in order to be interested enough to assist in the preservation program.

Robert Stephens of U. S. Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, Albuquerque, briefly discussed the Rare and Endangered Species and said there was presently an act being considered which would redefine rare and endangered and possibly add a third category, "threatened species." The Bureau is spending considerable time and funds on species such as the whooping crane, bald eagle, black-footed ferret. Grants-in-aid are also being made to state wildlife departments to assist them in studies.

George Sultemeier of Texas Research Foundation, called attention to their book, Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas, by Correll and Johnston. More than 5000 plants are described in this book with many identified as being rare or endangered. More areas for nature studies and habitat preservation are needed.

Dr. Marshall Johnston of the University of Texas, told of the Rare Plant Study Center and its efforts to identify and preserve rare species. They presently have about six plants of Texas pistachio and some of the very rare Styrax. He believes a coordinated information gathering effort was needed.

Edward C. Fritz of Texas Committee for Natural Resources stated that more natural environment habitat was needed. A Texas Natural Area Survey was recently issued containing some 700 natural areas in Texas. Nature Conservancy has funds and is prepared to purchase and preserve areas of unique interest.

Dr. Fred Gehlbach of Baylor University sees a need to study population characteristics of a rare and endangered species. Their graduate ecology students are beginning to make studies of some such species.

SPECIAL ACTION ALERT

Through John Spinks in Austin all Southwest Region Chapters have been asked to write, particularly to the Texas delegation, supporting the ban on poisons and especially opposing any transfer of predator control responsibilities from the Department of Interior to the Department of Agriculture. In explanation, two important bills relative to predator control are now before Congress. H. R. 14163, a bill introduced by Mr. Poage, may well be a deception, deliberately drafted so it would be referred to Mr. Poage's own House Committee on Agriculture. The reported political strategy would result in the desirable Administration bill (H.R. 13152, now before John Dingell's Sub-committee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation) being taken over by the Committee on Agriculture.

The consequence of this action would be a legislative attempt to transfer the entire program, including the funding, to the Department of Agriculture. If this happens, predator control programs probably would be administered at the state level by either the State Department of Agriculture or the Agricultural Extension Service. This could prove disastrous. Copies of the bills will be at the next meeting as well as a thick pamphlet entitled "Predator Control - 1971" the report to the Council on Environmental Quality and the Department of the Interior by the Advisory Committee.

This is very interesting reading and contains reports on research with graphs and charts and supporting discussions on range ecology, predators and prey. Recommendations include federal-state funding of predator-control programs (2) Removal of all toxic materials from use for predator control 3() Professionalization of the Division of Wildlife Services (4) Consideration of the establishment of cooperative extension trapper programs (5) Consideration of the establishment of a livestock insurance program (6) Prohibition of broadcast of toxicants having secondary poisoning effects (7) Needed predator-related research (8) Federal and state protection of endangered species. There are other recommendations and supporting discussions.

If you want some background for your letter-writing, this report can give it to you.

ARSTATE PARK FOR ARMAND BAYOU

Armand (Middle) Bayou, a tributary of Clear Lake in southeast Harris County, Texas is one of the few remaining natural bayous along the Texas Gulf Coast. It offers endless opportunities for nature study, hiking and canoeing to the people of Texas.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Governor Preston Smith consider it an ideal site for a state park. Senators John Tower and Lloyd Bentsen and local (Houston area) Congressmen support the project and it can be funded, but --

Public funds -- state, local and federal -- will not be enough to secure the 3,500 acres needed to preserve this part of the Texas natural heritage before it is used for a real estate development planned by the Friendswood Development Co., a subsidiary of Humble Oil and Refining Company.

Individuals and groups who would like to help save Armand Bayou should send their tax-exempt contributions to SAVE ARMAND BAYOU FUND, Box 2000, Pasadena, Texas 77501.

Those who make donations to Armand Bayou will have their names on permanent record at the park site saying they helped save this unique bayou.

SPARROWS OF THE EL PASO AREA

DESERT SPARROWS IN MY GARDEN

by Lena McBee

My garden in 1943 bordered on Van Buren Street, which then was a part of the northern boundary of El Paso east of Mount Franklin.

A pair of Desert Sparrows came with their two flown young in late May to feed on larvae of black aphid and cabbage worm butterfly that infested my cabbage plants. I enjoyed the bubbling melody of the male and repaid him with scraps of food from my table.

On June 10 I found a newly-finished empty nest located five feet up in the crotch of a young poplar near the back garden wall. By June 12 the female was brooding on three eggs. She sat close when I plied the watering hose near, and eventually, beside the nest tree. On June 23 I held a shut-eyed naked nestling except for a few down tufts, and, with a mirror, discerned a second nestling beside the remaining egg which turned out to be infertile.

The male's melody subsided while parents fed their young charges and strove to guard them from my neighbor's kitten.

One of the fledgling on July 3 was trying to hide in a rockpile at a corner of the garden while parent birds sought to lure him into the alley with many a short flight and much bird advice. When he stood perched at last on the wall, but an arm's length from me, I had a good view of him: mottled plumage, a speckled breast without the throat patch, indistinct white line above the eye, a suggested wing-bar and orange lining in the mouth that opened to receive food.

Once down the alley he ate a grasshopper that had been reduced to a pulp, along with several relays of winged insects and some bits that might have been either ants or spiders. I never saw the fledgling again and the kitten came no more to my garden.

It was about July 10 when I began to hear again the song of my sparrow and saw his mate carrying a stem to the nest in the poplar. It held two eggs on July 13th. The third nest was under way. Two days later I left town for a few weeks in Taos, regretful to leave my desert sparrows.

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