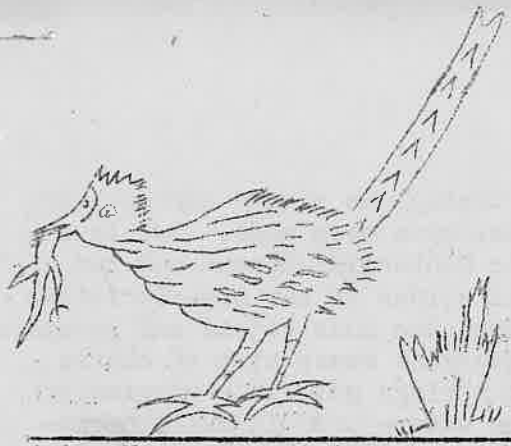

The Roadrunner

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Vol. IV, March, 1974 Geth J. White, Editor

CALENDAR

March 18
7:30 P. M.
MONTHLY MEET.

Place, the Centennial Museum, UTEP campus. New members are especially invited to come and get to know people in the local club. A most interesting program is promised. John Nowak, who is Ecologist for Horizon Land Company, will tell us about his long range effort to create a small preserve around the lake at Horizon. Around 2000 trees will be planted by the end of April and a marsh habitat created with plants appropriate to the soil and region, providing both food and cover for waterfowl and marsh birds. Formerly with the U.S. Bureau of Wildlife and Sports Fisheries, he has had many different assignments from the Dakotas to Oregon to the Salton Sea. He will bring slides from the Salton Sea -- a somewhat similar habitat to Horizon Lake.

In addition to Mr. Nowak's talk, there will be a 20 minute film on the life of the osprey.

FIELD TRIPS

Sun.-Mar 24
8:00 A. M.

Bosque in the upper valley. Meet at Coronado Parking area. Spring migrants should be picking up in numbers with early vanguards of swallows, shorebirds and flycatchers arriving.

Mar. 29-30-31

A weekend trip to the ranch of the Clay Millers in the Valentine Valley and Sierra Vieja Mountains. They have extended an invitation to camp overnight on beautiful campgrounds on their ranch. Mrs. Miller says birds seen last year included Hermit Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, Virginia's Warbler and she's still hoping for the Colima Warbler.

If you plan to go, please call Charlie Jensen 584-7626. We can carpool to save gas. To reach the ranch, turn west off of Highway 90 about 3/4 mile west of Valentine and follow the signs into the ranch, approximately 200 miles from El Paso.

Apr. 6

Explore for birds the unnamed high canyon with the spring which begins as an old jeep road. Meet at the parking lot on the crest of Trans Mountain Road at 8:00 A. m.

MONTHLY MEET.
Apr. 15-7:30 PM

Place, the Centennial Museum, UTEP campus. Members please bring slides of their own -- of birds, or places -- they wish to share with the group.

A short film, "The Private Life of a Kingfisher," will also be shown.

Apr. 20

TOS Spring Meet, to be held in Beaumont, Texas. There will be field trips to unique habitats such as High Island which is a landfall for migrants crossing the Gulf, and the Big Thicket, which we hope will soon become a national park.

Apr. 27

A weekend at Casas Grandes in Chihuahua by private charter is tentatively offered. Could be that the Archaeology Society membership might share in the trip as the ruins are of special interest to them. Many Mexican species of birds could be seen, including the Eared Trogon, according to Luis Santaella. Call Charlie Jensen, Field Trip Chairman if you're interested.

Mar. 25

Board meeting at home of Carl and Linda Jones, 351 Thunderbird, 7:30 PM

LAST MONTH'S MEETING was all mixed up. Due to a mix-up in timing, we missed our speaker for the evening, John Morrison, for which regrets and apologies have been made. Due to a mix-up in scheduling (or something) we were unable to get into Centennial Museum and had our meeting in the Library where we saw Mary Moore's beautiful slides of her post-Christmas trip to Mexico, including Rancho Cielo and the trip home through San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas.

People are really getting out on the field trips, not everyone every time of course, but a good group. The levee trip up the Rio Grande to Radium Springs gave us a promise of spring with a few Violet-green and Tree Swallows following the watercourse in swift northward flight, and as many as seven Great Blue Herons in a flock on a sandbar. Four Black-crowned Night Herons perched in what must be a roosting tree in a wooded section came in for much attention. They are probably early spring arrivals who may nest.

Trip to the grasslands and Bennett Ranch had few birds but wide-sky scenery unsurpassed. Horned Larks were everywhere, some of them paired off and fighting territorially. One bird particularly crouched on a fencepost, raising his horns aggressively to threaten a second bird he had just driven off, his yellow throat a beautiful contrast to the patterned head. Some of the party saw Ferruginous Hawks perched on a high relay tower. Most unusual bird was a Coues Flycatcher, calling over and over as if on territory, around ranch headquarters in New Mexico.

JUVENILE BOOKS AT LIBRARY

Linda Jones, in researching titles in the library, says the Boys and Girls Section has a good collection of books on birds for the young reader that many adults would enjoy reading. There are several good books for the beginning birdwatcher with nice illustrations and a little information about each bird such as The Birds Around Us, by Henry Hill Collins, Jr., and Bird Watching by Aubrey Burns, and an especially interesting one called Wild Bird World by C. B. Colby.

The best book of this sort is one with unbelievably beautiful drawings entitled Birds At Home by Marguerite Henry -- sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation.

Also available here are books that would provide good research material as well. The Night Watchers by Angus Cameron and Peter Parnell is about owls with those fantastic Peter Parnell drawings and really interesting text. Graywings by Alice E. Goudey is a good simple book about herring gulls with nice drawings. Berniece Freschet has written an intriguing book about a female woodcock and the things that make up her world -- did you know that the female woodcock can pick up her young and fly with them to a safer nesting spot if she feels there is danger? It's all in The Little Woodcock and it's really interesting.

The First Book of Eagles by Robert Whitehead is a really good book on eagles and Diving Birds by Charles L. Ripper includes good material on such birds as loons, grebes, comorants and anhinga. There's also the true story of the taming and training of a falcon called Neeka the Kestrel by David Rook, with his beautiful drawings.

The Audio-Visual Department has a selection of films on birds, ecology and the outdoors worth noting. A sampling of some of the titles follows:

The American Bald Eagle
The Big Thicket: A Vanishing Wilderness
Camping: A Key to Conservation
The Deer Family
The Desert (1962)
The Desert (1971)
Life in a Tropical Forest
Dunes
The Ecology Lady
Ecology Primer
Everglades
Grand Canyon
The Loon's Necklace
The Private Life of a Kingfisher

FOR THE BIRDS COLUMN

Our series has been attracting quite a lot of mail. One of the most frequent requests is to be able to buy it in book or booklet form, most usually when will it be ready, and for what amount -- an unexpected development. But one which your Board will pursue. It could be a fund-raising project. All of which just goes to show you what talent a volunteer group can develop, so congratulations to the writers and researchers and please keep the articles coming.

BLM NEEDS WILDERNESS MANDATE

What is a wilderness mandate? It's a provision to require BLM to identify areas qualified under Sec. 2(c) (definition) of the Wilderness Act as standard inventory procedure. Also needed is an amendment to the land use plans section to insure that the review procedures in Sec. 3(c) and 3(d) of the Wilderness Act are implemented when BLM prepares plans for lands containing a potential wilderness area identified in the inventory process. Public hearings, Interior Secretary recommendations to the President, presidential recommendations to Congress -- and a final decision by Congress -- are the procedures.

The general public knows little about the Bureau of Land Management. We in the west are more familiar with the agency which supervises far more public lands than the Forest Service or the Park Service. From year to year it goes on renting large tracts to sheepmen and cattlemen for grazing purposes and ignoring many of its other responsibilities.

Under the leadership of Senators Jackson of Washington and Haskell of Colorado, the Senate Interior Committee has been at work on a bill to change all that by modernizing and strengthening the BLM. For the first time, its land would be properly inventoried and potential uses carefully charted.

From the desert scenery of Arizona and the canyonlands of Utah to the remote Arctic glaciers of Alaska, the bureau manages some of the most splendid wilderness lands on the North American continent.

Conservationists are asking "How can BLM properly manage these vast holdings <u>without</u> authority to review the <u>only</u> resource Congress has declared an enduring resource of wilderness?

The Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs is now headed toward final mark-up of a bill combining S.424 (Sen. Henry Jackson) and S.1041 (Administration) versions of the "National Resource Lands Management Act." This legislation is designed to give BLM the authority to administer public domain resources for multiple use. However, <u>neither bill</u> contains a <u>wilderness review provision</u> in spite of the fact that a similar bill by Senator Jackson which contained a wilderness review provision cleared the Senate committee in the last days of the 92nd Congress.

Opponents say conservationists want to "freeze" all 450 million acres of BLM lands until wilderness reviews have been completed, thus frustrating proper management. On the contrary, say conservationists, a wilderness review provision would merely assure that wilderness is not overlooked in the BLM planning process.

Apropos of this, on the 16th of February, at the home of Sarah Dodds, local conservationists met with Congressman White for an exchange of views in regard to wilderness areas in the Guadalupes and other areas in the Southwest.

It was pointed out that Mr. White was quite candid in his views, but that the group was able to convince him that they were not a militant organized group bent on excluding public lands from public use, but that we were primarily preservationists who wanted to insure our public lands for the benefit of posterity and not just elitist backpackers.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

2/9/74	Immature white-tailed Hawk	Near Tornillo in tall tree near old irrigation ditch on Farm Road #1109. Seen by Geth and Ed White, confirmed by Luis and Sue Santaella.
2/9/74	Great Blue Heron	At reservoir at Tornillo, apparently wintering. Geth and Ed White
2/9/74	Prairie Falcon (2)	Close to Mexican border near Tornillo, GOW & EW.
2/9/74	Canada Goose	On Loop 12 holding reservoir near Zaragosa Road, by field trippers, Eddie Chew, Welden Yeroy, et al
2/9/74	Baird's Sparrows	In mixed flock with chipping and Brewer's at edge of alfalfa field near Tornillo. GOW & EW
2/26	Cattle Egrets (9)	At Surratt's Lake in salt cedars, apparently wintering. Bill Hunt.
2/21	Western Bluebirds (12)	Eating mistletoe berries in old cottonwoods on Rio Grande. GOW and EW.
2/21	Yellow-rumped warblers (30)	Eating along margins of the river in wet soil and drinking water from the river. GOW & EW.
2/23	White-tailed Hawk (1)	In upper valley along Rio Grande. Field trippers, Luis Santaella, Charlie Jensen, et al.
3/4	White-tailed Hawk (1)	Al Gavit, at Horizon Lake.

Bill Hunt reports that in visiting his "study site" he is astonished at the difference in bird species on the site in the two years of observation: last year there were numerous Brewer's sparrows; this year not a single Brewer's; last year sage thrashers were abundant, this year he has seen them once or twice. About one-third the number of lark buntings present over last year, but this year scaled quails have made an appearance. He noted ravens last year, none this year.

QUAIL BLOCK CLOSE OUT. Ed White needs the storage space the remaining 12 quail blocks occupy. For $2. you may have them and he is donating the proceeds to the Audubon Society. He will bring them to the next meeting so take advantage of this rare bargain. Incidentally, they're selling for $5.95 in feed stores in the country.

GREETINGS FROM IRAN from Benedicta and Kent Carnie to all their friends in the Audubon Society. They have been traveling extensively in Europe seeing birds in Spain, and at the time of writing, Kent was assisting the Iranian government in a hawk census . He had enjoyed some hunting with his hawk in Scotland. They expect to be in El Paso in May and to settle down in San Miguel de Allenda, Mexico.

PAUL BECKTON, USDA OFFICIAL, is in El Paso conducting an inquiry into the spread of Newcastle disease among poultry. He has some research teams collecting wild birds in the Rio Grande Valley to check them to see if they carry the virus. Their sampling is small, their research for a serious purpose.

BIRD OF THE MONTH - WHITE TAILED HAWK.

A large dark hawk perched like a sentinel atop a large cottonwood tree towering over thick brush lining an old irrigation ditch which paralleled a spanking new concrete one on Farm Road #1109 near Tornillo in the lower valley. At first glance, the Harlan's Hawk which is now lumped into the Red Tailed Hawk, came to mind. As he left his perch to sail in the air nearby we checked his field marks from below. The tail was light with many fine bands, no terminal band of black. The broad wings were black with light windows, the breast was dark with some white showing almost as speckles of white. Obviously a buteo, and either a melanistic or immature bird. The flight feathers were too dark for it to be a dark form of the rough-legged, the tail pattern different from Swainson's dark form. Ed and I decided it must be an immature White-tailed Hawk, but we did want a confirmation from other birders. From the droppings around the cottonwood, this was a regular perch of this hawk. The following week Luis and Sue Santaella drove down to the area and saw what must have been the same bird as it fit the description, and they too thought it was the White-tailed Hawk.

On the 23rd on the field trip on the Rio Grande toward Las Cruces a large white hawk perching so low on the tree that some thought it could be a gull (on a tree?) in the distance created quite a problem in identification. Hawks have a way of doing this, but then the sport of birding is pinning down the species. One instantly thinks of the Ferruginous when one sees a large, light, white-tailed hawk. It did not have the dark terminal band that the White-tailed Hawk in mature plumage should have. Its tail was solid white, the head and breast very white, the rump was white and a touch of cinnamon looked to be on wing coverts. It looked completely different from a typical Ferruginous Hawk seen within the hour.

In Bent's Life Histories D. Bu Burrows says of this species: "As the bird grows older, the head and mantle become grayer, a soft plumbeous-gray; the lesser wing coverts become more extensively rufous -- cinnamon, and the tail and rump become whiter. The under parts become whiter, including the throat and chin. Apparently there are color changes with the successive moults.

Al Gavit reported a mature White-tailed Hawk in typical plumage near Horizon Lake. He has had an opportunity to study it several times and is preparing an article for the newspaper series.

This bird of the border is in its expected range. Wintering hawks of all species have been abundant this year -- we've had the Perengrine, Prairie Falcon, Cooper's Hawk, Rough-legged, Ferruginous, Swainson's, Red-tailed, Sharp-shinned, Merlin and Kestrel. The bird hawks had a good thing with all the wintering sparrows flocking into winter sun, the rodent catchers had a plentiful supply and there were plenty of insects late in the fall which was warmer than usual, but we can bid them adios for it's about time for their departure to nesting grounds.

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First Class