

the ROADRUNNER



newsletter of the
El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
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October 1980

Editor: John Sproul

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CALENDAR

PROGRAM

TUES. 14 OCTOBER 1980, 7:30 PM, Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., in Memorial Park.
GALAPAGOS, LAND OF THE BLUEFOOT. Shuffle through your old AUDUBON magazines and find the articles on the Galapagos Islands in the September 1973 issue. They will introduce you to what we will see at our next general meeting: a fantasy land of species found nowhere else, a great evolutionary experiment, the unique natural environment of the Galapagos Islands. We'll learn about the general history and natural history of these islands astride the equator off the coast of Ecuador and hear about current efforts to preserve their integrity.

Rhea Copenig, Assistant Southwest Regional Representative for Audubon, will travel from Brownwood, Texas, to give us this special program. It is based on her experience as co-leader for an Audubon International Ecology Workshop that visited the Galapagos and mainland Ecuador for 16 days in 1975. Rhea came to Audubon's Southwest Regional Office just over a year ago, and this is her first opportunity to meet with our chapter. It's a good opportunity for you to find out what's going on in Audubon's Southwest Region. And it's a golden opportunity to be inspired by the Galapagos, a land that inspires and intrigues naturalists everywhere. Y'all better be there.

Remember that this meeting is on the second Tuesday of the month, not the third Monday. This is your final warning.

FIELD TRIPS

SAT. 11 OCTOBER. FORT BLISS PONDS. Meet at Furrow Building Materials (Fred Wilson at Railroad) at 7 AM. We should see avocets, yellowlegs and many other shorebirds. Some of the winter-resident ducks will have arrived, and several raptors should be working the ponds. Leader: Jo Nagel (566-2143).

SUN. 19 OCTOBER. MEMORIAL PARK. Meet at the Garden Center, 3105 Grant St., at 7:30 AM. We'll be looking for late fall migrants and early winter residents. Leader: Joe Guinn (566-8438).

SAT. 8 NOVEMBER. LOWER VALLEY. Details next month.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 13 OCTOBER, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Elza Gilboe, 1305 Oakdale, El Paso (772-1942).

OBSERVATIONS - 24 August to 24 September 1980

GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

Most notable bird at Santa Teresa Country Club in New Mexico recently has been the HORNED GREBE on 1 of the ponds 15 Sep (JD). It shared the pond that day with an immature Cattle Egret (JD). Tornillo Lakes held 2 Double-crested Cormorants and a Great Egret 24 Aug (PJ, SJ). An AMERICAN BITTERN was at the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds 11 Sep (JDiP).

Was the immature Cooper's Hawk in the Tornillo area 24 Aug (JC, CT) just a very early migrant or more suggestive evidence of breeding in our area? Golden Eagles have been reported regularly in the last month from the Franklin Mtns. (JD, mob) and the desert n.e. of El Paso (JG, SL). An OSPREY soared above the Ft. Bliss Ponds 12 Sep (KZ). In the falcon department, we had single Prairie Falcons in the Franklin Mtns. 19 Sep (JD) and over the desert n.e. of El Paso 22 Sep (JD) and a male MERLIN at Durling's Farm 6 Sep (KZ).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

No surprises from the shorebirds yet this fall, though there were 2 Northern Phalaropes in with the Wilson's Phalaropes on the Ft. Bliss Ponds 18 Sep (KZ). Six Forster's Terns were at Tornillo Lakes 24 Aug (PJ, SJ), 1 over the Rio Grande in the upper valley 2 Sep (JD), 5 at Santa Teresa CC 8 Sep (JD) and 2 at Tornillo Lakes 11 Sep (JDiP). Another RINGED TURTLE DOVE turned up. Possibly an escapee, it visited a yard near Memorial Park 13 Aug-8 Sep (SB). Memorial Park had a Yellow-billed Cuckoo 4 Sep (JDiP) and 1 stayed at Durling's Farm from 5 to at least 21 Sep (KZ, JF, JN, JS). It provided a handy standard for comparison with the immature BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO at Durling's 5-11 Sep (KZ, GB, JG). Photographed 11 Sep (KZ); the bird was apparently only the 3rd documented record of this species for New Mexico. (The Durling's Farm woodlot is just over the state line.) Also at Durling's 11 Sep was an immature male ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

(KZ). A female or immature male Calliope Hummingbird visited Memorial Park 31 Aug (JDiP).

PASSERINES

A Cassin's Kingbird and a Gray Flycatcher were in Memorial Park 24 Sep (JDiP). Other recent records from the park include a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 17 Sep, 1 Warbling Vireo 26 Aug and 2 on 17 Sep (JDiP). A Warbling Vireo also was in e. El Paso 1 Sep (BR). Yet another surprise from Durling's Farm was the HUTTON'S VIREO 6 Sep (KZ).

A female Black-and-white Warbler has been in Memorial Park since 17 Sep and Black-throated Gray Warblers have been there 4(1 bird), 22(2) and 24(2) Sep (JDiP). LUCY'S WARBLER, once a rare migrant through the El Paso area, had not been seen in recent years until 1 appeared at Randle's Pool 5 Sep (KZ). It has been a good fall for NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH, with 1 in a lower-valley yard 27 and 30 Aug (JH), 1 at Randle's Pool 5 Sep (KZ) and 2 at Hueco Tanks 11 Sep (JDiP). Single female American Redstarts were at Randle's Pool 5 Sep (KZ) and along the road into Hueco Tanks 11 Sep (JDiP).

The male Cardinal at Randle's Pool 5 Sep (KZ) was probably the 1 mentioned last month. Lazuli Buntings appeared in Memorial Park 31 Aug (1 male), 4 Sep (1 female) and 11 Sep (2 females) (JDiP). The park also held female or immature Painted Buntings throughout that period, with a maximum of 3 on 6 Sep (JDiP). Clay-colored Sparrows flocked in Memorial Park 4(10 birds), 11(5) and 17(5) Sep and 15 were at the Ft. Bliss Ponds 3 Sep (JDiP).

OBSERVERS: Saleme Barber, Greg Books, John Caraway, Joe DiPasquale, Jeff Donaldson, Jane Fowler, Jack Gothard, Joe Guinn, Jan Hayse, Perry Jamieson, Stephanie Jamieson, Steve Lopez, many observers (mob), Jo Nagel, Betty Roberts, John Sproul, Christos Thomaidis, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso 79902; ph: 545-5157 home, 543-6126 work.)

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OBSERVATIONS (Continued)

NOTE: Geth White is now working on a checklist of birds for Balmorhea St. Park and Balmorhea L., north of Ft. Davis. If you visit that area and make any noteworthy observations, pass them along to Geth at P.O. Box 425, Alpine, TX 79830

(915/837-5393). Geth reports some shockers in the wake of Hurricane Allen. Would you believe 2 white-phase REDDISH EGRETS, a ROSEATE SPOONBILL and 2 BLACK SKIMMERS at Balmorhea L., 3 SOOTY TERNS at Ft. Davis and an Eastern Kingbird at Balmorhea St. Park, all 30 Aug? #

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Way back last March, your Board sent out a questionnaire to learn your interests and to help us plan the Chapter's future. Of the 230 questionnaires mailed, you returned 30, for a respectable 13% response rate. This is a biased sample, naturally, for it represents only those concerned enough to respond. Yet we believe those members who show such interest are the ones who most deserve our attention.

The results were revealing. Most-cited reasons for joining El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon were to receive AUDUBON magazine and to support National Audubon's cause (73% each). Only 67% said their expectations at joining had been fulfilled, so clearly we have room for improvement.

Member interests proved no great surprise. Most popular is birdwatching (80%), followed by hiking (73%) and nature study (70%). You belong to at least 16 other conservation organizations besides Audubon, with the National Wildlife Federation (23%), the Wilderness Park Coalition (17%), The Nature Conservancy (13%) and the Sierra Club (13%) heading the list.

You favor variety in our monthly meetings, but the clear favorite is programs on birds and their biology (40% rated 1st, 14.8 points when given 7 points for 1st rank, 6 points for 2nd, 5 for 3rd, etc.).

Next in line are programs on local natural history (7%, 126.5 points) and local conservation issues (13%, 116.5 points). Not surprisingly, the most preferred part of the newsletter is the calendar (27%, 128.5 points), but bird observations rate virtually as high (10%, 128 points). Next most popular item is one that has yet to appear in the ROADRUNNER, descriptions of good birding areas (7%, 117 points). We hope to bring you a series of "site guides" in the future.

Some 73% of those responding showed willingness to contribute in some way to our wildlife sanctuary at Feather Lake. However, 23% wanted to know, "What and where is Feather Lake?" Apparently we need to make our program at the lake better known. On the positive side, no one indicated, "I don't think we should keep Feather Lake as a sanctuary."

Those responding showed a gratifying willingness to be contacted by phone when major conservation issues arise; the 87% positive response was the highest for any item on the questionnaire. Next highest response (80%) was in support of an Audubon-sponsored environmental education program for youngsters. Since we have no such program now, this is another obvious place where we are not meeting your needs. #

FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

Only field trip recently was the 13 September outing to White Rock Canyon in the Franklin Mountains near the Wilderness Park Museum. The 15 participants saw birds of 22 species, including an

immature and 2 adult Golden Eagles that soared together above the Franklins as the trip ended. Some members of the group also got good looks at a gray fox and a black-tailed rattlesnake. #

MEMBERSHIP

The National Audubon Society will be having a membership drive from 1 Oct 1980 to 1 Mar 1981 in the form of a contest, complete with prizes. Each chapter will have 3 categories in which to strive for winning, on a regional level, an all-expense-paid trip for 1 person to the National Audubon Society convention in Estes Park, Colorado, next July and/or, as an honorable-mention prize, an Audubon Wildlife Film lecture at the national society's expense. The categories are: 1) having the highest membership-renewal rate during the 6-month period, 2) recruiting the largest number of new members and 3) having the greatest percentage increase in new members.

As members, all of you know already the importance of Audubon's efforts in the areas of conservation and preservation of our resources, and we're hoping to draw on your support in helping our chapter to grow. In the coming months, I'll be offering ideas for ways you can help to increase our membership, as well as keeping you informed of our progress. Our strength lies in numbers and now, more than ever, we need all the support we can get to make our influence felt on issues of both national and local concern. /Jo Ellen Warolin/

RUMMAGE ROLLS AGAIN

Flushed with success from our last rummage sale, we're going to try again. We are planning a sale for 1 Nov 1980 and another for early next spring. The 1 Nov sale will take place at the flea market on Dyer St. If you have anything (yes, anything) you don't need, we'll take it. Contact either Peggy Heisel (821-0989), Joe Guinn (566-8438) or Jane Fowler (772-0296) and they'll arrange to pick up your unwanted items. Also let them know if you can help with the sale. #

CONSERVATION

NEW WETLAND POSSIBLE IN LOWER VALLEY

El Paso has an opportunity to make up for the loss of wildlife habitat that will occur when the Ft. Bliss Ponds are destroyed. Whether we seize it or not is up to you.

On 17 Sep 1980, El Paso's Public Service Board (PSB) approved a \$58-million sewage plan designed to meet the city's sewage-treatment needs until the year 2000. The PSB now will seek a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for detailed-design work. The plan includes expansion of the Socorro Sewage Treatment Plant in the lower valley, and here is where the wildlife habitat comes in.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently advised the PSB that, in view of the impending loss of the Ft. Bliss Ponds, wetland creation adjacent to the Socorro Treatment Plant would be highly desirable and should be pursued.

An excellent idea, but we are a long, long way from making it a reality. It needs the backing of the City of El Paso and various government agencies, or it will surely wither. That backing won't come easy. The inertia built up over years of ignoring wildlife needs will be hard to overcome. Pressure from Audubon, from other

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The ROADRUNNER is sent to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Non-members can subscribe for \$3.00 per year. Mail payments to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso, TX 79902. Make checks payable to El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.

Deadline for the November ROADRUNNER is 22 October.

CONSERVATION (Continued)

organized conservation groups, and a few interested citizens will not be enough. There will be a wetland at the Socorro site only if there is a widespread, sustained show of support from citizens throughout El Paso.

Do you want to see a wetland created to mitigate loss of the Ft. Bliss Ponds? You can have it, but not by sitting back and leaving the work to others. You can have it if you are willing to work for it. As a first step, you should write:

Myron O. Knudson
Director, Water Division
Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6
1201 Elm St.
Dallas, TX 75270

and request that the detailed-design grant for El Paso's sewerage-facility plan include a stipulation that requires the PSB to design multi-use features into the expanded Socorro Treatment Plant. Specifically, wetland wildlife habitat should be created on land next to the existing plant.

Some points worth making:

* When the PSB builds the new sewage-treatment plant in n.e. El Paso and eliminates the Ft. Bliss Ponds, we'll lose perhaps the finest wetland wildlife habitat in El Paso County. A wetland at the Socorro site can provide sorely needed mitigation for this loss.

* The wetland at the Socorro site can be created and maintained with brackish water from existing wells in the area. This water is unsuitable for urban or agricultural uses, thus there would be no conflict if it is dedicated to wildlife.

* The PSB owns considerable land adjacent to the Socorro plant that it has no plans to use for sewage-treatment facilities, and the City of El Paso owns the 277-acre Rio Bosque Park immediately n.w. of the plant. Wildlife habitat is included in plans for development of the park. With these sites available, there need be no land-acquisition expenses.

* The wetland would be a buffer around the plant, desirable for esthetic and protective reasons.

* The wetland would be within the Rio Grande floodplain, an area of historic riparian habitat.

* The USFWS and the Heritage Conservation & Recreation Service (HCRS) are potential sources of funds and expertise for design and creation of the wetland.

* The energy needed to operate the water pumps would be more than offset by the energy recovered through a methane-gas recovery system planned for the Socorro plant.

* The PSB and EPA can score points with the public by taking such a positive step on behalf of wildlife.

* EPA has an operating agreement with HCRS to promote multi-use objectives at wastewater-treatment facilities.

Use your own words. Send copies of your letter to:

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, I want to join the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Chapter of the National Audubon Society.

name

address

city state zip

Membership category desired:

___ Individual/\$20 ___ Student/\$13.50
___ Family/\$25 ___ Sr. Citizen/\$13.50

This is a ___new___ renewal membership.

Make checks payable to National Audubon Society. Mail to Jo Ellen Warolin, 1406 N. St. Vrain, El Paso, TX 79902.

CONSERVATION (Continued)

- Rolland B. Handley, Regional Director,
HCRS, 5000 Marble Ave., NE, Albuquerque,
NM 87110;

- John Hickerson, General Manager, El
Paso Water Utilities, P.O. Box 511,
El Paso, TX 79999; and

- Dale Tate, Director, El Paso Parks and
Recreation Dept., 7969 San Paulo, El
Paso, TX 79915.

Your letter will help get the ball
rolling. But don't expect instant suc-
cess. We will have to demonstrate by
out tenacity and perseverance that El
Pasoans do care about wildlife and do
want a wetland. Tell your neighbors to
write. Tell your relatives. Tell your
friends. End of sermon. #

CITY COUNCIL MAY VOTE ON RECYCLING SOON

Recycling has been a hot issue in El
Paso of late. The debate over whether
or not to begin a garbage-separation
program may come to a head at the Tues.
7 Oct City Council meeting. Mildred "Tin
Can Lady" Smith hopes to see the program
up for a vote that day. If it gets on
the agenda as expected, she is urging all
supporters of recycling in El Paso to
pack the council chambers and let council
members know the citizens are behind the
program and are watching how council
votes. Keep an eye on the newspapers
to see if 7 Oct will be the day. #

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