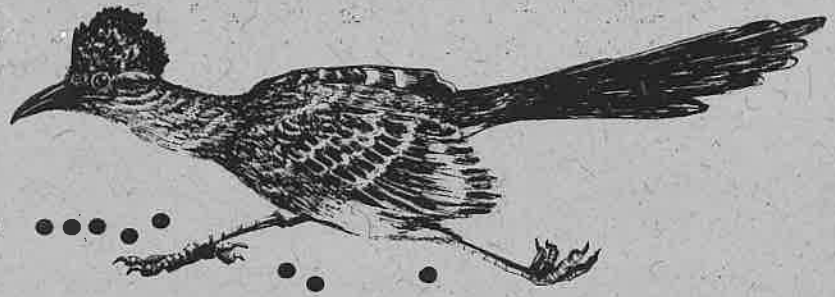


# the ROADRUNNER . . . . .



newsletter of  
EL PASO-TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY  
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September, 1976 Vol. VI No. 5

Lucretia Chew, Editor

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Wednesday, September 15  
7:30 p.m.  
REGULAR MEETING  
EL PASO GARDEN CENTER  
3105 Grant

Members Slide Show. Bring your recent slides--birds, flowers, nature in general; a limit of 20 slides is suggested. Quite a few unusual bird sightings in the area this summer, and the slide show should bring you up to date on new species around El Paso.

Friday, September 17  
7 p. m.  
PLANNING PARTY  
8911 Galena

Session to plan a fall migration count. Everyone interested is urged to come. Please call Mrs. Zimmer, 751-0552, if you will attend.

Saturday, September 18  
ALL DAY  
FALL COUNT

Fall Migration Count. Everyone is needed. See details inside the newsletter and above.

Friday, October 1  
6 p.m.  
NOCTURNAL WATCH

Something new to our chapter--a night field trip into the desert in the vicinity of Hueco Mountains. If the group gathers promptly, the first stop can be at Horizon Lake for a look at water birds. Bring a sack supper and meet at the Bordertown Drive-In, 9200 Montana.

## BIRD LISTING CONTEST

The second quarter of our listing contest ended July 31. Because there were no meetings, field trips, or newsletters during the summer, only a very few lists have been turned in for the second quarter. If you have not sent in your second quarter list, you are urged to do so. Everyone should be reminded that Kevin is interested in receiving your lists even if you know already that they are not high enough to win. At the end of the year Kevin will be going over all the lists and compiling a master list of all birds seen in 1976. This should give us some excellent basis for a revision of our area checklist. For this reason your contribution of a list is quite valuable.

We are also well into the third quarter, which will terminate at the end of this month. This contest is being hotly disputed by about four people. However, these four are all under the one-hundred mark, so chances are that anyone could catch them by really getting out and doing some birding. Lists for the third quarter will be due on October 15.

All bird lists and information about bird sightings should be sent to Kevin Zimmer, 8911 Galena, El Paso.

## CURRENT ACTIVITIES

After a summer of almost complete inactivity, the local chapter will be back in action this next week. At the regular meeting (Details on the front page) members will show slides. In the past this has proved an especially good program with many outstanding bird slides. We hope you'll sort through your recent slides and choose 15 or 20 to share with the group.

The following weekend our chapter will hold its first fall migration count. The plans for this event will be completed at a party at the Zimmers on Friday evening. (Details on the front page) Since there are many areas to be covered, a good turnout of members is needed if the count is to be successful. If you are a beginner there is probably no better place to learn than on an all-day count. If for some reason you are able to participate in the Saturday count but can not attend the party on Friday night, please contact Kevin Zimmer in advance so that you can be included in a group and given a meeting place and time. All indications are that the migration has already begun and that an all-day count should provide opportunities for some excellent birding.

## BILL HUNT

We regret to report that board member Bill Hunt and his family left El Paso in June for Sweetwater where Bill has accepted ministerial duties at a Presbyterian Church. Bill is an outstanding birder who has been invaluable on bird counts and especially dedicated to the work of the local chapter at Feather Lake. He will be much missed, but we wish him success in his new church and also good birding!

## BACKPACKING IN THE GILA WILDERNESS

At last we did it--a backpack trip with Patti and Al Canaris to the high spruce-fir forest in the Southwest Gila, starting at Sandy Point just beyond Mogollon up to Hummingbird Springs the first day and overnight there. The five-mile uphill climb led us through the ponderosas to the spruce-fir. Wild geraniums and Indian paintbrush lent color to the springy trail deep in needled duff. Blue penstemmon grew in a spring high in the spruce forest. Pigeon-like cooing revealed the presence of band-tailed pigeons, and Al and Patti who were a half-mile ahead of us saw a half-grown bear scramble down from a tree. Thrushes sang their flute-like songs and flirted in and out from low perches in courtship again with the summer rains. Red-shafted flickers were still being pestered by their young who hoped to be fed, whole families drilling on long-dead pines.

We camped at a little over 10,000 feet under the canopy of the conifers on duff that was soft to the foot but hard on the back. Our little pack tents kept off the rain but the night was chilly. Al and Ed and the dog flushed a covey of blue grouse. Our second day was mostly downhill through some of the most beautiful wilderness anyone could hope to see--distant peaks and valleys, pure stands of forest, aspen meadows chest high with ferns and bracken. The heaviest shower of the trip came up as we approached its end at Willow Creek. Lightning raked the trees and thunder clapped and our trail became a river as we sloshed along under our ponchos. Our ten-mile hike made us grateful for a ride up the highway to the trailhead where we had left our car. Our bird list was short: hermit thrush, robin, blue grouse, red-shafted flicker, chipping sparrow, gray flycatcher, empidonax flycatcher, gray-headed junco, broad-tailed hummingbird, band-tailed pigeon. Our animal list was unusual: black bear, elk, deer, coyote, jackrabbit.

Geth White

## MASKED DUCK IN EL PASO

On the afternoon of Thursday, July 8, Barry and I decided to make a routine check of the Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds after having spent the day birding in the Upper Valley. Our visit to the sewage ponds turned out to be anything but routine. As we drove onto the first dike, I stopped to scope the ducks on the pond to the left, which is the most open of the ponds. At first it appeared that the only birds on the ponds were ruddy ducks, coots, and eared grebes. But then I focused in on a strange-looking duck that I had skipped over before. After closing and opening my eyes a few times, I realized that the bird was really there. It was a male masked duck!

I immediately told Barry, and after I finally got him to stop laughing, I showed him the bird. When he agreed that it was indeed a masked duck, I became aware for the first time just how rare the bird we were seeing really was. The masked duck is extremely rare in the United States. It is found regularly only along the Gulf Coast of Texas, from the Brownsville area north to the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Even in that area it is not found every year. This species reaches the United States only as a straggler from Mexico (where it is also rare) and the West Indies. The bird that we found was about 700 miles farther west than the species had ever previously been recorded in the United States.

We rushed over to the White's house to tell them about the duck. Early the next morning Mrs. White and Sarah Jane Dodds joined us at the sewage ponds. Within minutes we found the duck. Knowing that such a rare bird would need verification, we tried to get close enough for a photograph. In doing so we discovered a second male masked duck. After digesting this latest incredible development, I managed to get close enough for two substantiating photos.

That night the word went out. First the local birders came to see the rare ducks. Then Bill Principe, a graduate student in ornithology at NMSU, made the trip from Las Cruces. After seeing the duck for himself, Bill called several birding friends in California. That started the rush. For the next week Mrs. White conducted birders from all over California and Arizona out to see the masked ducks. (We left for Arizona on July 11 and the Phoenix birders had already heard about the ducks.) Before it was over an estimated 25-30 birders had seen at least one of our rare visitors. The last known sighting was on July 18. Those of us who were lucky enough to play some part in that exciting week are still dreaming about the masked ducks returning next summer; only this time we want at least one female to show up too.

Kevin J. Zimmer

## FORT BLISS SEWAGE PONDS

There is one bright spot to report regarding a favorite local birding spot--the Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds. For the past several years those of us who bird there regularly have been in peril of life and limb because of increasing numbers of hunters both in and out of season. And of course we have also noted more and more dead and injured non-game species. On Sunday afternoon while birding there, it was an absolute pleasure to be stopped by a game warden. We don't know what magic words (or whose) it was that finally got some action, but we are delighted. If you note hunters violating the law, you should contact Special Agent Tom Riley, United States Fish and Wildlife Service at 543-7460.



## UPDATE FEATHER LAKE

The summer at Feather Lake has been very much like a soap opera--full of ups and downs. Throughout recent months, the trees and shrubs planted at the lake have been painstakingly watered every Saturday morning using a pump donated by Ed White and water from the canal leading into the lake. A variety of people have been faithful to the cause, including Al and Chris Gavit, Jeanette Cole, Joe DiPasquale, Joe Guinn, Carlisle Navidomskis, Bertha and Berttye Barnhart, Ed and Geth White, Eddie, Steve, and Lucretia Chew, and most especially our president, Charlie Jensen. Most of the plants have prospered through tender loving care (and some timely rainfall) and even the native grasses planted the preceding summer are beginning to thrive.

During June, a watering system was installed, using 200 feet of one-inch plastic pipe which could be attached to the pump. At the same time a 4 by 8 foot storage shed was constructed and set on railroad ties so that the pump, hoses, hand tools, and other pieces of equipment could be left at the site. Members active in the construction of the shed and the watering system included Steve Chew, Joe DiPasquale, Al and Chris Gavit, Charlie Jensen, Joe Guinn, and Lucretia Chew.

Throughout the summer, increasing traffic was evident at the lake although it is surrounded by a high chain link fence and gates which remain locked except when a chapter member is present. By late July regular trails for foot and bicycle use had developed along the canal and lake banks, and the amount of weekly litter had multiplied many times.

At various times sections of pipe were pulled out of the ground and hand tools disappeared, but the climax came during the third week in August. Some time between August 14 and August 21, the door of the storage shed was ripped off at the hinges and all remaining equipment including the hoses and pump were stolen. The shed itself was rolled into the canal. Because it seemed useless to replace the equipment at this time, the remaining pipes have been taken up so that they too will not be stolen.

Despite the vandalism and the increased litter, the shrubs and the wildlife at the lake so far appear to remain undamaged, and in general birding opportunities continue to be good.

The officers of the chapter have approached City officials (from whom the site is leased) for help in making the area more secure. Specifically requests have been made to fill in holes along the fences and to provide a fence across the canal bridge as it passes North Loop Road. It is at this bridge that the majority of entrances are being made.

Presently a committee is meeting to prepare plans for additional improvements at the lake, but these are contingent upon some method of improved security.

Under the terms of the agreement with the City, our chapter is responsible for keeping the lake open to the public several hours each week. Thus far the responsibility for being present at the lake has fallen to the same few people every weekend. If you could help with this particular aspect of the lake management, please contact Lucretia Chew at 532-6410 or Charlie Jensen at 584-7626. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

## MARY BELLE KEEFER

Miss Mary Belle Keefe, charter member and past president of the El Paso Audubon Society and co-editor of the first published checklist on birds of the El Paso region, passed away on April 21, 1976.

With her parents, she moved to El Paso from Maysville, Kentucky, in 1903. After her mother's death, she made a home for her father, Judge Keefe, until he too passed away. A grand nephew and grand niece are her nearest surviving kin.

Miss Keefe was an alumnus of Smith College, a member of the Presbyterian Church, Pan American Round Table, Women's Department of the Chamber of Commerce, and several ornithological societies.

Among books citing her for contributions to ornithology are J. Stokley Ligon, NEW MEXICO BIRDS; Roger Tory Peterson, A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF TEXAS; and Peter Alden, FINDING THE BIRDS IN WESTERN MEXICO. In November, 1973, the Texas Ornithological Society honored her for her work in connection with bird life in the El Paso area.

She was especially interested in field trips. As the driver of her own friendly car, she introduced many a birding visitor to choice spots of observation near El Paso. Her own trips extended into Mexico, Canada, and Europe.

With the passing of Mary Belle Keefe, birds and conservation of nature lost a friend of inestimable value.

Lena McBee

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Saturday, September 14: an immature American redstart at Memorial Park; a sora, Virginia's warbler, 5 lazuli buntings, a sage sparrow, 20 Cassin's sparrows, and 300 lark buntings at Hueco Tanks; an immature white-faced ibis and 6 black-necked stilts at Fort Bliss Sewage Ponds. Observers were Barry and Kevin Zimmer and Joe DiPasquale.

Wednesday, September 5: Wilson's warblers, American redstarts, 2 Townsend's warblers, 2 MacGillivray's warblers, a Virginia's warbler, a yellow warbler, an orange-crowned warbler, an olive-sided flycatcher, a female black-headed grosbeak, ten hummingbirds, including some rufous and broad-tailed at Memorial Park. Observers were Geth and Ed White.

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FIRST CLASS

