

The



ROADRUNNER

VOLUME 21 (4)

EL PASO/TRANS PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER, 1991

The El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon Society meets on the third Monday of every month, September through May. The General Meetings are held at the Garden Center, Memorial Park, 3105 Grant, El Paso, Texas. The public is cordially invited.

SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING

Monday, Sept. 16, 7:30 PM - FRANKLIN MOUNTAIN STATE PARK is about to enter a new and very exciting phase. Ever since its creation in 1979, land acquisition has taken top priority for this 25,000 - acre natural area. Now, with acquisition nearly complete, the time has come to begin making the Park fully operational. That takes careful planning, and you're invited to take part!

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is getting ready to prepare a management plan that will guide Park operations for the next 6-10 years. Before they start, they want to hear El Pasoan's views on how this remarkable natural area should be cared for. The TPWD will hold a series of workshops in September and October to get public input for the plan. The first will take place at our September general meeting! Please come, meet the TPWD planning staff, learn what the future holds for Franklin Mountains State Park, and offer your ideas on how best to protect El Paso's greatest natural treasure.

And don't forget to bring your non-disposable cup so you won't have to use the very disposable Styrofoam cups.

OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING

Monday, Oct. 21, 7:30 PM - When scientists look for answers about wild bird behaviour, such as navigation and learning, they often turn to domesticated birds for the answers. Our guest for the October general meeting is Becky Kroger and she will be bringing show and racing pigeons. These are Chinese Owl Pigeons that she has raised herself. This promises to be a fascinating demonstration of the techniques used to train these birds. For their part, the pigeons may shed some light on the behaviour of wild birds.



CONSERVATION

ACTION ALERT

The funding to establish the Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge, approximately 50 miles northeast of Houston was deleted from the recently passed U.S. House of Representatives version of the FY92 appropriations bill even though the Bush Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials had earmarked \$2,000,000 for initial acquisition.

The Senate will take up this issue very soon and we need to let Senators Bentsen and Gramm hear from us. Please write to them and request their assistance in restoring the \$2,000,000 for this refuge to the appropriations budget. Especially if you have ever enjoyed canoeing or hiking along the Trinity, let your Senators know how important it is to save these 20,000 acres of mature bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands. The area has the highest concentration of wintering waterfowl in the lower Trinity River Basin, including large winter populations of mallards, four colonial wading bird rookeries totalling some 15,000 birds, numerous other bird species as well as bald eagles and American alligators.

Please take the time to write Senators Bentsen and Gramm today. We are very close to winning this one, and with a push from their constituents we should be able to convince our Senators to restore the \$2,000,000.

Senator Lloyd Bentsen
The U.S. Senate
703 SHOB
Washington, D.C. 20510-4301
202/224-5922

Senator Phil Gramm
The U.S. Senate
370 SROB
Washington, D.C. 20510-4302
202/224-2934

National Audubon Society Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to join.

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter. Please send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to the address below.

My check for \$20 is enclosed.

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Please make all checks payable to the National Audubon Society.

Send this application and your check to:

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El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Soc.
PO Box 9655
El Paso, TX 79986

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ACT DELEGATE		

ON THE TRAIL

Sat., Sept. 21 - FORT BLISS PONDS - The fall migration has begun and the best place to see large numbers of waterfowl is at these ponds in far northeast El Paso. At this time of year, there are often large flocks of Dowitchers, Black-necked Stilts, Avocets and other shore birds. Numerous ducks and grebes will be there, possibly some cormorants, hawks and perhaps a gull. We may get the chance to see the elusive Sora. The leaders are Paul and Matthew Bingham, 755-9496. Meet at the Wilderness Park Museum on Transmountain Road at 7:30 AM. The trip will last 3 to 4 hours and you may want to bring some refreshments.

Sat. and Sun., Sept. 28 and 29 - MANZANO MOUNTAINS AND HAWK WATCH. This is an overnight expedition to catch migrating raptors traveling from North to South America for the winter. This trip will give you the opportunity to see up to 200 individual hawks each day. And it is just a matter of sitting still while the birds do all the work. The leader is Nancy Wilson and she can be contacted at 833-3907 for information about camping, itinerary, etc. Meet at I-10 and Transmountain Road at 7:30 AM on Saturday.



Sat., Oct. 5 - HUECO TANKS STATE PARK - Meet at the "flying saucer building" at the junction of US Hwy. 62/180 and FM 2775 at 8:00 AM. Hueco Tanks is a jewel of a state park, and it gets a lot of use, use that sometimes leads to resource damage. Again this year, we're going to help the Park staff with a project to repair some of that damage by reseeding eroded areas. Once our work is done, we'll conclude the trip with some birding in the Park and a picnic lunch before our return to El Paso.

Please bring gloves and a rake. Also, please call leader John Sproul at 545-5157 if you plan to attend, so we can let the Park staff know how many to expect.



Sat., Oct. 12 - WESTERN FRANKLIN MOUNTAINS - This is where desert meets mountain, so there will be the chance to see a wide variety of birds from both ecosystems. The leader is Hugh Jameson and he can be reached at 562-1768. Meet at the entrance to Tom Mays Park off Transmountain Road at 7:30 AM. Wear comfortable hiking shoes and you may want to bring refreshments as this trip will last 3 to 4 hours.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Sat., Nov. 2 - LOWER VALLEY TREK
John Sproul (545-5157)

Sat., Nov. 16 - MOUNT RILEY
Tom Baker (877-3365)

Sat. and Sun., Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 -
BOSQUE DEL APACHE
Nancy Wilson (833-3907)

Sat., Dec. 14 - CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT -
El Paso. Bob Johnson (751-0125)



AUDUBON BIRDATHON

You did it again, Birdathon fans! For the 11th year in a row, this event was a major success. Backed by 202 generous contributors, we raised \$5,628. Thank you, one and all!

Birdathon is vital to our chapter's effectiveness, allowing us to tackle major projects otherwise not possible. This year's Birdathon has helped expand our Audubon Adventures youth-education program. It financed several capital improvements at the El Paso Environmental Center. It made possible another significant contribution to Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue. And, it provided crucial support to Audubon's Southwest Regional Office.

Nationally, Birdathon raised over \$1.3 million, with over \$450,000 raised by

235 Audubon chapters. Our chapter's performance was again quite respectable: 3rd in our size category (300-999 members) nationally, 2nd regionally.

Well done! Thank you, Birdathon contributors. And a special encore for the folks who were in the field birding with our Birdathon teams: Tom Baker, Matt and Paul Bingham, Pat and Tom Brasfield, Joyce Davis, Dayle Edwards, Jane Fowler, Terese Garcia, Joe Guinn, Bob Johnson, John Kiseda, Paul Milios, Jo Nagel, Betty Pagel, Mark, Peggy and Peter Riede, Susie Schneider, Sid Shepperd, Barbara Shults, John and Lorraine Snelling, John Sproul, Mary Ann Vernon, Nancy Wilson, Scott Wilson, and Barry Zimmer. We couldn't have done it without you! /John Sproul/

1991 BIRDATHON CONTRIBUTORS

Vicki Adkins, Mary Lou Alcorn, Anonymous, Ronald Armstrong, Art and Donna Arteaga, Margaret and Walter Autrey, Baker Glass Co., Tom Baker, Doris Lee Bakken, James Baptist, Bertha Barnhart, Helen Barto, Dolores S. Beyer, Judy Lynn Bellinger, Ken and Lois Beno, Elaine Bernat, Linda Bingham, Matt Bingham, Paul Bingham, Bob and Patti Bleau, Donna Bloodorn, Betty and John Bowen, Anne Bowman, Mary Bradley, Carl Branan, Ann Brand, Pat and Tom Brasfield, Carolyn Breck, John Bridges, Janet Brockmoller, Charles H. Brown, Thomas L. Brown, Lou Burmeister;

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OBSERVATIONS

May 13 - August 10, 1991
 Uncommon, rare & casual sightings

AL - Album Park
 CP - Crossroads Pond
 DM - Doniphan Marsh
 FL - Feather Lake
 FH - Ft. Hancock
 HT - Hueco Tanks
 HTR - Hueco Tanks Road
 OW - Owen, s. Farm
 QC - Quitman Canyon
 TR - Tornillo Rest Stop



Sightings by a field trip member are noted by a (+) after the leader's initials; sightings in an observer's yard or area are indicated by an (*) after his/her initials.

LOONS - FALCONS

Pied-Billed Grebe - DM 5/19, 6/16, CP 8/3 (JD)
 Double-Crested Cormorant - FL 5/10, 5/11, 5/16 (JS)
 Least Bittern (m & f) - FL 5/10 - 8/4, (JS)
 Great Blue Heron - FL 5/20 - 8/5, QC 6/9 (JS)
Snowy Egret - FL 6/8 - 8/5 (JS) DM 5/19 8/3 (JD) FH 7/14 (A/MG)
 Green-Back Heron - DM 7/14 (JD) FH 7/14 (A/MG)
 Black-Crown Night Heron - FL 6/20 - 8/4 (JS) FH 7/14 (A/MG)
 Cinnamon Teal - DM 5/19 (JD)
 Ruddy Duck - DM 5/19 - 8/3 (JD)
Gadwall - FL 6/4, 6/8 (JS)
Redhead - FL 7/4 (JS)
 Mississippi Kite - AP 6/21 (FS) 7/12 (JS) 7/24 (AA) 7/17 nestling taken to Gay Kozusco
Harris Hawk - FL 5/11, 6/4 (JS) QC 6/9 (JS+)

QUAIL - WOODPECKERS

Black-Necked Stilt - DM 6/16 - 8/3 (JD)
 Avocet - DM 5/19 (JD)
Least Tern - FL 5/24, 8/5 (JS)

Yellow-Billed Cuckoo - QC 6/9 (JS+)
 OW 6/23 (JD)
Lucifer Hummingbird - 7/23 (A/MG*)
Belted Kingfisher - FL 6/4 - 8/5 (JS)

FLYCATCHERS - VIREOS

Western Wood Peewee - FL 6/8 (JS)
 Vermillion Flycatcher - QC 6/9 (JS+)
 Ash Throated Flycatcher - FL 8/4 (JS)
 N. Rough winged Swallow - MR 6/9 (JS+)
 Black-Tailed gnatcatcher - FQ 6/9 (JS+)
 Hermit Thrush - HT 5/18 (JS)
Curve-Billed Thrasher - OW 6/23 (JD)
 Phainopepla - OW 6/23 (JD)

WARBLER - WEAVER FINCH

Summer Tanager - TR 7/13 (A/MG)
Chipping Sparrow - HT 6/18 (JS)
Lark Sparrow - QC 6/9 (JS+)
Eastern Meadowlark - HTR 6/21 (JS)
Yellow-Headed Blackbird - DM 7/4 (JD)
Bronzed Cowbird - HT 6/1 (JS,JD,JF)
Orchard Oriole - QC 6/9 (JS+)
 Lesser Goldfinch - HT 5/18 (JD)

EXOTIC: 2 monk parakeets, Love Rd./ Lombardy Ave. 8/4 (JD)

Observers: Art Arteaga, Joyce Davis, Jane Fowler, Al & Madeline Gavit, Florence Simon, John Sproul.

//Joyce Davis, Observations Editor, 591-9470//

From time to time THE ROADRUNNER will print "Site Guides": instructions and information on birding spots in the El Paso area. The Site Guides will include such spots as Ft. Bliss Ponds and others that are regularly listed in the On The Trail and Observations pages. (So just where is the Doniphan Marsh?) We would also like to include those places that are less well known and are visited by only one or two people. If you have a favorite birding spot and would like to share it with our readers, please contact the editor: George Barnett, 5905 Oleaster, El Paso, TX 79932; (915)581-1829.



The EP/TAS Wildlife Sanctuary is located at 9500 North Loop.

Our Feather Lake Wildlife Sanctuary was popular with local wildlife this summer. At least one pair of Least Bitterns was present all season. Late May brought a Least Tern, only the fourth ever recorded in the El Paso area (all from Feather Lake!). A lone Belted Kingfisher spent the summer, as did many more common residents, from muskrats to spiny softshell turtles to Red-winged Blackbirds.

One bird, the Common Yellowthroat, did not summer at Feather Lake for the first time in memory. Its absence was a sobering reminder that our sanctuary is increasingly an island of habitat in a sea of developed land. In fragmented habitats, the potential for localized extinction increases. Let's hope yellowthroats recolonize Feather Lake soon.

Storm runoff and excess irrigation water kept the lake high all summer but also brought a disgustingly broad of trash floating down Mesa Drain. To the rescue came the Audubon Navy, as Gene Groth made a rowboat available for aquatic garbage patrol. Thanks, Gene! Also due thanks this month is Dr. Oswaldo Cajas, who generously donated excess rock from a rock-wall project for use at the sanctuary.

Feather Lake opens to the public this year on Sat., Oct. 5. Once again, hours will be 8:00 to 11:00 AM on the first and third Saturdays each month and 3:30 PM to dusk each Sunday afternoon. The Feather Lake schedule will be included in the calendar on the back page of this newsletter throughout the season. As always, this program depends on volunteers. Can you spend a morning or afternoon at the sanctuary this year greeting visitors, answering their questions and enjoying a productive wetland habitat? Please contact Betty Pagel (772-2686). Also, let Betty know if you would be available during the week to help with group tours. Feather Lake is an increasingly popular destination for school groups, scout groups and others.

To get ready for the October 5 opening, we'll hold our next sanctuary workday Sat., Sept. 14. Gates open at 8:00 AM. Don't miss it!

// John Sproul //

EL PASO ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

El Paso/Trans Pecos Audubon is one of four groups currently operating the El Paso Environmental center, located at 800 S. Piedras (Piedras at Paisano). Our partners in this enterprise are the El Paso Group of the Sierra Club, Habitat for Humanity, and the League of Women voters of El Paso.

What's new at the center? Thanks to your Birdathon generosity, the Center now has an attractive sign on its north wall, other needed signs (e.g., for the restrooms) and new chairs in its meeting room. (cont'd)

But all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wildness left to cherish.

- Aldo Leopold, 1887 - 1948

ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER (cont'd)

Due to lack of an available market, the Center has had to stop accepting glass bottles at its recycling operation. Still accepted are:

- newspapers
- aluminum cans
- steel cans
- corrugated cardboard
- white office paper/stationery
- used computer paper

If you are bringing newspapers to the Center, please don't bring them in plastic bags. Bring them in paper bags or tied together with twine. Also, please remove the shiny advertising sheets that typically fatten the Sunday paper; our buyer will not accept them.

Current hours are 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, Wednesday through Saturday. We'd like to expand these hours, but it will take additional volunteers to do so. The new volunteer coordinator for the Center is Pearl La Rock. If you can put in a few hours each week staffing the office and helping with the recycling activities, please contact Pearl (565-8884) or me (545-5157).
// John Sproul //



DONIPHAN MARSH: A SITE GUIDE

There is an area along Doniphan Drive in the Upper Valley that has resisted development, although it was leveled and graded several years ago and was recently considered as the location of a railroad freight-handling yard. It is also an area where the ground water comes to the surface to form permanent shallow pools. Those pools, and the resulting vegetation, are what has come to be known as the Doniphan Marsh.

To reach this area, take the Sunland Park exit from I-10 and turn west towards Doniphan. Turn right (north) on Doniphan. This portion of Doniphan is not well marked and traffic can be heavy, so be observant and careful. About one-half mile up Doniphan you will reach the marsh area. From the road it doesn't look like much - just a very large vacant lot. As soon as you reach Frontera Road begin looking for a place to turn into this lot. There is no road, just something that pretends to be a path, but it's flat and easy to drive. Drive towards the rear of the lot and you will have found the Doniphan Marsh.

This place isn't pretty, but it attracts flocks of small shorebirds who cheerfully feed in the shallows. Black-necked Stilts are known to nest here, as well as A. Coots and possibly Pied-billed Grebes. The fall and winter months will bring ducks and other waterfowl. The surrounding area may yield Burrowing Owls, Kestrels and hawks. Your editor once spotted a Golden Eagle cruising overhead. Check the Observations column for recent interesting sightings.

The Doniphan Marsh will put you in reach of the Crossroads Pond and other Upper Valley birding hot spots. But that's for future site guides. If you have favorite spot, please see the short article on page 5 for more information on site guides.

// G.B. //

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

- Tue., 10 - Board meeting at the El Paso Environmental Center, Piedras at Paisano. 7:30 PM.
Sat., 14 - Feather Lake work day.
Mon., 16 - General Meeting, see page 1.
Sat., 21 - Field trip to Ft. Bliss ponds, see page 3.
Sat. & Sun., 28 - 29 - Field trip to Manzano Mtns., see page 3.

OCTOBER

- Sat., 5 - Hueco Tanks Project, see page 3.
Sat., 5 - Feather Lake open, 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM.
Sun., 6 - Feather Lake open, 3:30 PM to dusk.
Sat., 12 - Field trip to Westside Franklin Mtns., see page 3.
Sun., 13 - Feather Lake open, 3:30 PM to dusk.
Mon., 14 - Board meeting at John Sproul's home, 601 W. Yandell, #25, 545-5157.
Sat., 19 - Feather Lake work day.
Sat., 19 - Feather Lake open, 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM.
Sun., 20 - Feather Lake open, 3:30 PM to dusk.
Mon., 21 - General Meeting, see page 1.
Sun., 27 - Feather Lake open, 3:30 PM to dusk.

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