

the ROADRUNNER

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9655, El Paso, TX 79986



Editor: Sarah Dodds

September 1981

Volume 11, Number 7

CALENDAR

GENERAL MEETING

MON. 21 SEPT. 1981, 7:30 PM Garden Center, 3105 Grant St. in Memorial Park. The guest speaker will be Mr. Clark Champie, local botanist and researcher of the Franklin Mountains. Mr. Champie will present us with a most colorful program on the Flora and Fauna of the Franklin Mountains and inform us how these plants adapt to the desert climate of the Southwest. This presentation is very important if you are planning to participate on the September 26th field trip to the Franklins. Here is your chance to learn to recognize those desert beauties that we're always admiring on our field trips.

FIELD TRIPS

SUN. 13 SEPTEMBER. WEST COTTONWOOD SPRING. Meet at 7 AM at the entrance to the Tom Mays picnic area, off Transmountain Rd. on the west side of the Franklins. We'll visit a favorite birding spot within our new state park. The hike to the spring and back is about 2 miles, some of it steep. Common resident birds of the Franklins should be in evidence; West Cottonwood Spring could hold some unusual migrants. Leader: Jeff Donaldson (755-2455).

SAT. 26 SEPTEMBER. Franklin Mountains with Clark Champie. Meet at 7 AM at the Wilderness Park Museum, 2000 Transmountain Rd., on the east side of the Franklin Mountains. This trip complements our September general meeting. After whetting our appetites with slides on Monday night, Clark will lead us afield on Saturday. This will be an OUTSTANDING trip!

FIELD TRIPS (continued)

SUN. 11 October. Durling's Farm. Details in October newsletter.

SAT.-SUN. 24-25 OCTOBER. MCKITTRICK CANYON/RATTLESNAKE SPRINGS. (Tentative.) #

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 14 SEPTEMBER, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Jane Fowler, 8212 Parkland, El Paso (772-0296). All members are welcome. #

EL PASO/TRANS-PECOS HOSTS ACT

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society will host the Audubon Council of Texas (ACT) on Saturday, October 31 and Sunday, November 1. ACT will meet Saturday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the Memorial Park Garden Center. Members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos are welcome to attend all or part of the meeting, which will include a Saturday lunch and birding in Memorial Park, a Saturday evening dinner and guest speaker, and a Sunday morning birding trip. A complete agenda of events will be published in the October ROADRUNNER.

About 16 delegates from out of town are expected. To help cut down on their expenses, we are asking our members to share their homes. Please call Helen Barto at 755-4744 if you have sleeping space available. #

RUMMAGE SALE SUCCESS

June 14th was a wheeling, dealing day for participants in the rummage sale at the Woolco Shopping Center on Dyer Street. with lots of perspiration and determination the following members, Gretchen Bleicher, Joe Guinn, Jane Fowler, John Sproul, Jo Nagel, Peggy Heisel, and Jo Ellen Warolin, managed to raise over \$300 for our local chapter. The effort was well worth it and we're hoping to repeat this sale sometime next spring, so please continue to save your unwanted items. Our sincere thanks to all contributors and to all the above named members for their help in making the rummage sale a success. #

FEATHER LAKE OPENS FOR VISITORS

Feather Lake will be open to the public on Saturday mornings from 8 to 11 AM starting October 10th. This will give our chapter a better opportunity to enjoy our sanctuary. Volunteers will be needed to assist our visitors. Please call Ginny Baker at 562-9461 if you will help us. #

FRANKLINS FIRE DAMAGES UNIQUE RESOURCE

Generally ignored in all discussion of the fire that burned some 200 acres in the Franklin Mtns. in mid-July was the fact that about half of one of the few remaining juniper stands in these mountains was killed and several huge dead tree trunks went up in smoke. The fire, which local naturalist Clark Champie believes was started accidentally by youths camping in the area, burned for nearly a week on the slopes above Apache Spring Canyon near the Wilderness Park Museum.

Clark considers those junipers a unique and valuable resource, probably the most accessible relict examples of a species once widespread in the Franklins. Some of the most striking specimens, including one dead trunk that measured 90 inches in diameter, are gone forever. Aesthetics and educational value aside, consider the sci-

entific information in that 90-inch-diameter trunk. Properly evaluated, its tree rings could have revealed a record of the area's weather, predating by at least a century and a half our earliest systematic weather records. Now, that's a book that will never be read.

With advance planning and prompt action when fire threatens them in the future, the remaining few trees can be protected. Clark is now organizing a volunteer network that can take the necessary measures. If you want to help, contact Clark Champie at 10388 Menzies, El Paso, 821-9114. /John Sproul and Clark Champie/

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ASARCO HEARING REPORT

The hearing on ASARCO's request to convert a natural-gas-and-oil fired furnace at its El Paso smelter to a coal-burning one (RR in June) is underway. Round 1 took place in El Paso 13-17 July. This phase of the hearing addressed 2 threshold issues:

1. Would the conversion be a physical change that increases the amount of air pollutants emitted to the atmosphere and/or result in the emission of new pollutants?
2. If there is an increase in pollutants, would it be a significant increase?

Even though it has requested a permit from the Texas Air Control Board (TACB) for the conversion, ASARCO contends that the answer to both threshold questions is "NO" and that neither a permit nor resumption of the hearing is necessary. Other parties (the Audubon chapter among them) argue that the answer is "YES", that a permit is necessary and the hearing should continue.

(continued on page 3)

ASARCO HEARING' (continued)

Malcolm Harris and Tom Spieczny, the lawyers representing Audubon, the Sierra Club and others, point out that:

1. The removal of certain physical objects (burners) and their replacement with other physical objects (a different type of burners) is indeed a physical change.
2. Even using ASARCO's dubious data, an increase in pollutants will occur.
3. Even using ASARCO's dubious data, that increase will be significant, for it will exceed fivefold the SO₂ increase that TACB defines as a "major modification."

At the close of the hearings on 17 July, ASARCO indicated its wish to get a transcript of the hearing to that point and file a brief on the threshold issues, based on that transcript. Our lawyers argued that such briefs are unnecessary, the threshold decisions should be made now. Hearing Examiner Nathan Johnson then requested that all parties file briefs addressing our lawyers' position. (Still with me? Then you have a bright future in the legal field.)

After reviewing those briefs, Hearing Examiner Johnson decided that, when the transcripts become available, all parties should indeed prepare full briefs on the threshold issues. Based on these briefs, he will decide those issues. At press time he had not yet set a date for the latest round of briefs. /John Sproul/ #

FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

On our Chiricahua Mtns. trip 30-31 May twenty Audubon members saw approximately 80 species of birds, among them nesting Elegant Trogon, Black-headed Grosbeak, Painted Redstart, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Black Phoebe, Bridled Titmouse, and Elf Owl, to name a few. (Participants on the trip will be interested in knowing that on 20 June the trogons fledged 3 young.) Also seen were Magnificent and Blue-throated hummingbirds, Zone-tailed Hawk, Brown-backed Woodpecker and Black-throated Gray and Olive warblers. Javelina and Apache fox squirrel were also seen.

FIELD TRIPS (continued)

On 7 June, 17 early birds breakfasted at the Wilderness Park Museum. To keep things symmetrical, they then found 17 species of birds in Apache Spring Canyon. Next trip was 20 June to Alamo Mtn., where our crew of 11 found Curve-billed and Crissal thrashers, Scott's Orioles, Blue Grosbeaks and a Barn Owl.

A sunny 12 July saw 15 Auduboners meet in the upper valley for a walk to Randel's Pool. Birds seen included an immature Black-crowned Night Heron, an adult Common Gallinule, a male Belted Kingfisher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Crissal Thrasher, several Phainopepla, Yellow-breasted Chat, male Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Blue Grosbeaks and a male Cardinal singing west of the pool, a fitting end to a pleasant trip.

Next, a small but game group of 5 Audubon members visited Aguirre Spring in the Organ Mtns. 25 July. Notable birds seen were Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Flycatcher, Western Wood Pewee, Acorn Woodpecker, Scrub Jay, 2 adult Golden Eagles, Bushtit, Black-chinned Sparrow and Hepatic Tanager. Number of species totaled 28.

August is Perseid Meteor month. The 5 sleepy travelers who ventured east of El Paso at 3:15 AM on 12 August saw 27 meteors and no birds.

The last trip of the summer was, like the last rose, a special one. On 21-23 August 13 Auduboners converged at the Pierce cabin at Lake Roberts in the Gila National Forest. To the dear and gentle folk named Pierce - Helen, Ed, and Shawn - the remaining ten express their gratitude once more. Even the chiggers couldn't mar this weekend. Birds seen included a Williamson's Sapsucker, Mexican Jay, Purple Martin, Painted Redstart, Blue-throated Hummingbird, Evening Grosbeak and 2 Spotted Owls. 52 species in all. /Jane Fowler/Jeff Donaldson/John Sproul

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OBSERVATIONS - 25 May to 23 August 1981

Kevin Zimmer has moved to Las Cruces. Kevin was observations editor for much of 1981, and we are very grateful to him. John Sproul edited this set of observations and the mantle will in the future be worn by Jeff Donaldson. We all thank you, Jeff!

The El Paso area includes parts of Texas, New Mexico and Chihuahua. Observations from the first 2 states and occasionally the third get mixed together in this column. I am going to try an experiment. To make it clear which birds were found in Texas and which in New Mexico, I am going to separate observations by state. (Let me know if this change is an improvement or if you can't stand it.) Regardless of political boundaries, this summer was eventful. Spring migrants lingered into late June, fall migrants were appearing by early August, some even in July. Several exciting vagrants made the season complete.

TEXAS

GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

Eared Grebes nested at the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds; they were seen with young throughout July and August (the early part of the month) by many observers. Top off-the-wall bird for the summer was an immature Brown Pelican found injured and ailing at Ascarate Park 7/29. Though taken to Carole Beach for care, in its weakened condition it died the next day (CB,JD). Its origins are pure speculation. Some 20-30 White-faced Ibis made the Ft. Bliss Ponds their summer home (mob) as the ponds continue to provide excellent wildlife habitat. Migrant ducks stayed late at the ponds this year, with the following all reported on 6/25: 12 Pintail, 25-35 Blue-winged Teal, 25-35 Redhead and 1 Lesser Scaup (JD, BJ). First returning Marsh Hawk for the fall was at the ponds 8/4 (EP,SP). A pair of Prairie Falcons summered at Hueco Tanks (DP, fide JD) and Prairies also appeared in the Franklin Mtns. 6/10, 6/16 (both JD,PH) and 6/18 (BJ, fide JD).

QUAIL THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

A Bobwhite, probably an immature male, visited an east El Paso yard 8/4, 8/9 and 8/20 (BR,JF). Again, origins are unknown, but it could well be a released bird. Back out at the Ft. Bliss Ponds a Sora showed itself briefly on 8/9 (JS). A Long-billed Curlew was at the ponds 7/21 (EP,SP), followed by 3 on 8/9 (JF,JN,JS). Other shorebirds at the ponds included: an early Willett on 7/8 (KZ,SZ), 1 Baird's Sandpiper and 11 Stilt Sandpipers on 8/3 (KZ, SZ), and single Marbled Godwits 7/12 (KZ) and 7/21 (EP,SP). Over 200 Black Terns were wheeling over the ponds 7/18 (KZ,SZ)

A Ringed Turtle Dove was in an upper valley yard (BF) and another continues to frequent the Cielo Vista area (EG,ELG). Yellow-billed Cuckoos also found yards to their liking. Two were in Kern Place 6/6 (SJD) and 1 in the upper valley 7/10 (BF). Best yardbird, though, was a Groove-billed Ani, carefully studied for over 3 hours in east El Paso 7/1 (BR,TW). It was a first for El Paso; the last ani in our area was 4 miles north of Las Cruces on 12/7/1974.

A Common Nighthawk was calling over Sunset Heights the evening of 7/20 (JS). The first fall-migrant Rufous Hummingbird materialized 7/5 (JF), compared to 7/6 last year. Most intriguing was the report of a possible Allen's Hummingbird in the Cielo Vista area 8/7 to 8/21 (EG,ELG).

PASSERINES

Two Willow Flycatchers were at the Ft. Bliss Ponds (JF, JN,JS) and a Gray Flycatcher at Hueco Tanks (BZ) 8/9. A Horned Lark lit on Cielo Vista Golf Course as early as 8/5 (EG).

(continued page 5)

OBSERVATIONS (continued)

Hueco Tanks had some notable parulids on 8/9, including single Nashville, LUCY'S (both DD,DT) and Virginia's (BZ) warblers. The Lucy's is only our 2nd record in recent years. A singing male Summer Tanager graced a Morningside Hgts. yard 6/2 to 6/6 (LS). Some 4-5 Indigo Buntings were at Hueco Tanks 8/9 (BZ). Finally, a single male and a pair of Painted Buntings at Rio Bosque Park 5/31 (EA, TW) raised suspicions that this bird may breed within the El Paso city limits.

NEW MEXICO

NONPASSERINES

The Ft. Bliss Ponds were not the only place to find White-faced Ibis, as 3 were at Santa Teresa CC 8/9 (JD). One of our area's Mississippi Kite pairs, last seen at their nest 6/7 (JD), disappeared for unknown reasons. Single Prairie Falcons were hunting in the upper valley 6/8 (JD) and 8/18 (TD). At La Cueva Park on the west side of the Organ Mtns. 4 Band-tailed Pigeons appeared 8/5 (KZ, SZ).

Two pairs of Yellow-billed Cuckoos near Randel's Pool disappeared early. They first appeared 6/7 but were never found after 6/28 (JD). Belted Kingfishers offered another mystery. A male and a possible female were in the area of Randel's Pool and the Country Club RD. bridge 6/18 (BF, JF, JN) and the male remained through at least 7/12 (JD). The female may have been resighted 6/21 (JD). These are our first known summer records. Is breeding in the EL PASO area foreseeable? The female Hairy Woodpecker at Aguirre Spring 7/22 was a good find (KZ).

PASSERINES

Another Wied's Crested Flycatcher turned up this spring, this one at Randel's Pool 6/7 (JD). A Willow Flycatcher was at Diez Lagos fishing camp 8/23 (JD). Conspicuous by their absence this summer were Curve-billed Thrashers; frequent checks of the desert near Santa Teresa CC revealed only Crissals (JD).

Were the Wrbling Vireo and the male Virginia's Warbler near Randel's Pool 7/26 (JD, KZ) early, or do we simply lack the field observations necessary to say just when these species start passing through on the fall migration? Another Warbling Vireo was at La Cueva 8/5 (KZSZ) and 3 Grace's Warblers were at Aguirre Spring 7/22 (KZ).

A pair of Cardinals, observed repeatedly this summer (mob), continues to reside west of Randel's Pool. What was a male Indigo Bunting doing singing s.w. of Randel's Pool 7/26 (JD, KZ)? Or the male Rufous-sided Towhee singing s.w. of the pool on 6/7 (JD)? Last year a male towhee stayed much of the summer, but this bird was found only once. Aguirre Spring held a final surprise, a female Red Crossbill on 7/22 (KZ).

OBSERVERS: Elizabeth Alvarez, Carole Beach, Tony Debona, JR., S.J. Dodds, Jeff Donaldson, Diane Dutton, Jane Fowler, Betty Frederick, Ed Gilboe, Elza Gilboe (ELG), Peggy Heisel, Bob Johnson, many observers (mob), Jo Nagel, Dave Parker, Ed Pierce, Shawn Pierce, Bettie Roberts, John Sproul, Lucile Swick, Dorothy Tobkin, Tony Worth, Barry Zimmer, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to Jeff Donaldson at 755-2455. Please call only between the hours of 1-5 PM. Remember, 1-5 PM. Thanks!) #

COLOR SLIDE CONTEST

And the winners for summer 1981 are... Jo Nagel for her photo of an Elf Owl (Bird category), Bob Johnson for a panorama of White Rock Canyon (Habitat) and John Sproul for his close-up of a kit fox (Flora and Fauna). The drawing of straws to see who emceeds the member-participation show will take place at the September general meeting. Send future entries to Kris Kohlhoff, 6945 La Cadena, El Paso 79912.

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September 1981

6-The Roadrunner

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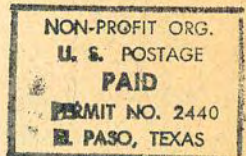
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SIERRA CLUB MEETING

WED. 30 SEPTEMBER, 7:30 PM,
St. Paul's Methodist Church,
7000 Edgemere. Ron Hender-
son of the U.S. Forest Ser-
vice, Gila National Forest,
will discuss the Continental
Divide National Scenic Trail.
Congress established this
trail in 1978. It will ex-
tend approximately 3100
miles from Canada to Mexico,
including portions of New
Mexico, but its final loca-
tion has not been determin-
ed. #

El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9655
El Paso, TX 79986
915-852-3119



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ROBERT S JOHNSON
5109 PARIS ST
EL PASO TX 79924