

the ROADRUNNER.....



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

Editor: John Spreul

June 1981

Volume 11, Number 6

GENERAL MEETING

You're all excused for summer vacation. Come back in the fall for Clark Champie's talk on the plants of the Franklin Mountains, MONDAY 21 SEPTEMBER. #

FIELD TRIPS

SUN. 7 JUNE 1981. APACHE SPRING/BREAKFAST. Meet at 6 AM at the Wilderness Park Museum (2000 Transmountain Rd., on the e. side of the Franklin Mtns.) for breakfast. We will have stoves available; bring your own food, cups, plates and utensils. Also bring water for the trail. After a leisurely breakfast we'll walk to Apache Spring and back, 3-4 miles total. We should see common breeding birds of the Franklins: Red-tailed Hawk, Scaled Quail, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Cactus Wren. Leader: Peggy Heisel (821-0989).

SAT. 20 JUNE. ALAMO MTN., NM. Meet at 5:45 AM at Bella Napoli Restaurant, 10600 Montana. The Cornudas Mtns., including Alamo Mtn., lie some 20 miles e. of the Huecos. We'll be visiting the Bennett Ranch, a spread that boasts Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, pronghorn, mule deer, 2 springs, walking trails and petroglyphs. Leader: Joe Guinn (566-8438).

SUN. 12 JULY. RANDEL'S POOL. Meet at 6 AM at the Good Time Store, 1098 Country Club Rd., in the upper valley. Check out

the cuckoos and more. Leader: Jeff Donaldson (755-2455).

SAT. 25 JULY. AGUIRRE SPRING. Meet at 5 AM at the blue spire in the Sunrise Shopping Center, 8500 Dyer. A search for Hepatic Tanagers. Leader: John Sproul (545-5157).

WED. 12 AUGUST. PERSEID METEORS. Meet at 3:20 AM at Bella Napoli Restaurant, 10600 Montana. What, a nonbirding trip? We'll drive to the rest stop 40 miles e. of El Paso on Hwy. 62/180. The moon will be down, we'll be far from city lights, and the annual Perseid meteor shower will be at its peak to entertain us. For birders, a side trip to Hueco Tanks can be arranged on the way back. Leader: Tony Worth (592-4926).

SAT.-SUN. 22-23 AUGUST. LAKE ROBERTS, GILA NATL. FOREST, NM. Meet at 5:30 AM at I-10 and Transmountain Rd., on Sat. 22 Aug. Details of this trip are still being worked out. Coordinator: Jeff Donaldson (755-2455). #

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON. 8 JUNE, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Kris Kohlhoff, 6945 La Cadena, El Paso (581-3565). All members are welcome. #

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Some time back, I promised to write more about hawk identification. Since this will be the last newsletter for the next few months, I will make good on my promise this month.

Birders have little trouble with hawks of the genus Buteo in summer, but winter seems to be a different matter. The most common misidentifications are in calling immature Red-tails either Rough-legged or Ferruginous. Keep in mind that the overwhelming majority of buteos wintering in our area are Red-tails, so the odds are against the other species from the start. Ferruginous Hawks are present in low numbers every winter, while Rough-legs are rare and sporadic in occurrence.

The biggest problem results from the wide variation of plumages found in young Red-tails. They lack the orange tail of the adults, and each individual seems to show a different amount of barring below or mottling above. Many young hawks (including Red-tails) show a white rump in flight. This point is not brought out in the field guides and has led more than 1 birder to mistakenly call "Rough-leg" because they think they are seeing the white upper tail of that species.

Both the Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks are huge birds, recognizably larger than a Red-tail to the trained eye. The proportions of the 3 species are also different. Both Ferruginous and Rough-legged are longer-winged and tailed than is the Red-tail. Flight pattern is also helpful. The Rough-legged often hovers in 1 spot while hunting, in the manner of a large kestrel. The Red-tail and Ferruginous do not hover and are similar in flight profile, but the Red-tail typically flies with a flatter profile, while the Ferruginous exhibits a slight dihedral.

Plumage is a less subtle character than size or flight profile. Ferruginous Hawks usually appear very clean when seen perched. They are generally very white below with no real barring (Almost all young Red-tails show a decent amount of barring below.) and are also rather white on the head and neck, giving a white-headed look to some birds. The white underwings with rufous at the wrist and the rufous thighs are sometimes helpful (more often at close range), but these may be of little value at long distances or in poor light. The rusty shoulders are usually distinct on closely-perched birds, and the upper back is usually heavily streaked with dark rust, very different from a Red-tail. By far the best field mark on flying birds (and 1 not mentioned in many field guides) is the presence of LARGE white "windows" on the UPPER surface of the primaries. These have been clearly visible from above on every adult Ferruginous Hawk I've ever seen. Nothing comparable is seen on any other North American hawk except the Caracara.

Rough-legged Hawks are a little harder. The light-phase bird shown in the field guides is very striking and requires no elaboration. The problem is that Rough-legs show a continuum of plumage variation from the "typical" light-phase bird to the chocolate-colored dark-phase birds discussed in an earlier article. In truth there is probably no "typical" plumage. The black wrists and the terminal tail band are the most consistent marks. A SOLID dark band across the lower belly is helpful, but beware of young Red-tails with wide, BARRED or STREAKED belly bands. If you are not sure of a closely-perched bird, don't be afraid to flush it. Most hawks are easiest to identify in flight, and with some juvenal-plumaged birds flight profile and wing-body-tail proportions may be the only sure ways to identify the bird. /Kevin J. Zimmer/

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The ROADRUNNER is sent to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Nonmembers can subscribe for \$3 per year. Mail payments to RR Editor, P.O. Box 9655, El Paso, TX 79986. Make checks payable to El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society.

The next ROADRUNNER will appear in September. The deadline is 26 August.

OBSERVATIONS - 25 April to 24 May 1981

GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

Two Western Grebes swam on the cooling pond at the Newman Generating Station 5/2 (GB, JG, SS, JS). The Tornillo Lakes hosted 25 WHITE PELICANS 5/9 (MG, AG) and 2 cormorants 5/17 (m.ob.). A Cattle Egret flew N along an irrigation ditch near Doniphan Dr. 5/2 (JD, PH) and 14 in breeding plumage were in 2 groups in fields near Fabens 5/23 (JD, EA, PH, TW). Also in the ardeid department, we had a Great Egret at the Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds 5/6 (JD, BJ, TW) and an American Bittern heard calling at Tornillo Lakes 5/2 (AG, MG, TW).

White-faced Ibis were reported regularly from Tornillo Lakes and Ft. Bliss Ponds this month. Maxima were 21 at Tornillo 5/9 (AG, MG) and approximately 50 at Ft. Bliss 5/3 (AG, TW) and 5/6 (JD, BJ, TW). The Snow Goose reported last month was late, but the 1 at Ft. Bliss Ponds 5/24 (BJ) needs migration lessons. Late migrant ducks at the Ft. Bliss Ponds included a Pintail and 2 Redheads 5/24 (BJ) and 2 Buffleheads 5/9 (JD, KZ). Also late were 2 Blue-winged Teal at a pond 10 miles w. of Indian Hot Springs 5/23 (JD). The hot springs are 90 miles downriver from El Paso.

A pair of Mississippi Kites were at their El-Paso-area nest site 5/10 (JD), almost a month earlier than last year. One also was spotted in the lower valley 5/23 (JD, EA, PH, TW). Last reported accipiter for the spring was an immature Sharp-shinned Hawk near Santa Teresa Country Club in NM 4/26 (JD). An adult Harris' Hawk was in the lower valley 5/23 (JD, EA, PH, TW) and single Ospreys appeared near Randel's Pool 4/26 (JD) and at the Ft. Bliss Ponds 5/3 (AG, TW). Top raptor for the month, though, was the adult PEREGRINE FALCON at the Ft. Bliss Ponds 5/2 (KZ, SJD, DD, KK).

RAILS THROUGH KINGFISHERS

One Sora was heard calling and another found dead at the Ft. Bliss Ponds 5/6 (JD, BJ). This year could not match last for shorebirds. A Long-billed Curlew was near

Fabens 5/23 (JD, EA, PH, TW) and the Ft. Bliss Ponds produced 1 Baird's Sandpiper on 5/2 (KZ), 2 on 5/6 (JD, BJ, TW) and 2 on 5/9 (JD, KZ), but there was little else. A 2nd-year HERRING GULL visited Tornillo Lakes 5/17 (JD et al.) and 3 Franklin's Gulls were at the Ft. Bliss Ponds 5/2 (m.ob.), followed by 2 on 5/9 (JD, KZ). The Ft. Bliss Ponds also were the place to find Forster's Terns, with 2-3 on 5/2 (m.ob.), 1 on 5/6 (JD, BJ, TW) and 2 on 5/9 (JD, KZ).

Three adult Barn Owls were w. of Santa Teresa 4/25 (JD) and again 5/9 (JD, KZ). The call of the Poor-will is a common night sound in late spring but not something you expect during the day. Still, 1 was calling at mid-day on the w. side of the Organ Mtns. near Las Cruces 5/11 (KZ). A male Broad-tailed Hummingbird buzzed the w. slopes of Mt. Franklin 5/2 (JD, PH). Last reported Belted Kingfisher for the spring was at Diez Lagos fishing camp in the upper valley 5/10 (JD).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH THRUSHES

Two Wied's Crested and 3 Vermilion Flycatchers were reported from the Indian Hot Springs area 5/2 (AG, MG, TW). Vermilions also were confirmed as breeding at a ponding area in that vicinity when 2 adults and 2 young were observed 5/23 (JD, EA, PH, TW). Rough-winged Swallows are nesting in the upper valley again this year; at least 1 nest is in a bank off Country Club Rd. near Santa Teresa (JD). Two PURPLE MARTINS at Tornillo Lakes amazed field trip participants 5/17 (JD et al.). Just when it seemed El Paso would go all winter and spring with no Brown Thrashers, a late report surfaced: 1 was in Arroyo Park 4/19 (DD, DT). At least 1 of 2 American Robin pairs near Memorial Park is nesting (m.ob.), and another male was singing in Kern Place 5/5 (JD).

WARBLERS THROUGH SPARROWS

It's been a slow spring for warblers, but that doesn't dim the luster of the 2 male GRACE'S WARBLERS at Hueco Tanks 4/26 (TW),

nor of the single Northern Waterthrushes at Durling's Farm 5/2 (KZ) and Horizon City 5/18 (MG). Single Eastern Meadowlarks were heard at Hueco Tanks (KZ) and from the Rio Grande levee near Tornillo (AG,TW) 5/2. Scattered along the Rio Grande between Ft. Hancock and Indian Hot Springs were 3 male Orchard Orioles on 5/2 (AG,MG,TW) and 4 on 5/23 (JD,EA,PH, TW). A stockpen on the e. edge of Tornillo yielded a Common Grackle 5/2 (TW). The big find from the midweek field trips in Memorial Park was a male HEPATIC Tanager, carefully observed 5/13 (BJ,JD, JN).

Cardinals were reported from Tornillo Lakes 5/17 (PH,JD) and a bosque w. of Randal's Pool 5/24 (JD). The spring's only Rose-breasted Grosbeak was a male in Memorial Park 5/7 (TB). Hueco Tanks held a male Indigo Bunting 5/2 (BJ) and a male Cassin's Finch 4/26 (TW). The American

Goldfinch in Mountain Park stayed through 5/2, then disappeared (JB).

The year's 1st Cassin's Sparrow was singing in an alfalfa field near Santa Teresa 4/26 (JD), and a FIELD SPARROW visited Hueco Tanks that day (TW). Durling's Farm hosted single White-throated Sparrows 5/2 and 5/9 (KZ), and 1 also was in the nearby Owen yard 5/2 (SJD,DD,KK). Last of the 5/2 notables was a Swamp Sparrow at the Ft. Bliss Ponds (KZ).

OBSERVERS: Elizabeth Alvarez, Tom Baker, Gloria Basden, Janet Brockmoller, Sarah Jane Dodds, Jeff Donaldson, Diane Dutton, Al Gavit, Madeline Gavit, Joe Guinn, Peggy Heisel, Bob Johnson, Kris Kohlhoff, many observers (m.ob.), Jo Nagel, Sid Shepperd, Jason Smith, Dorothy Tobkin, Tony Worth, Kevin Zimmer. (Report observations to John Sproul, 601 W. Yandell #25, El Paso, TX 79902; 545-5157h, 543-8126w.) #

1981 BIG DAY COUNT/BIRDATHON

THE COUNT

Fair skies on 2 May, after heavy rains the night before, promised good birding. Good it was, but not exceptional. When midnight came and the Big Day Count was over, we had tallied 149 species: 138 from the El Paso area, an additional 11 from Alpine.

The El Paso total, up 4 over last year, was due more to expanded coverage and more people afield than to more birds in the bushes. We had 28 El Paso (and 2 Alpine) participants, compared to 21 in 1980. Those birders stayed out longer and covered more ground this year than last. As a result, we picked up several species overlooked in 1980: Cattle Egret, Great Horned Owl, Poor-will, Common Flicker, White-necked Raven, Phainopepla, Virginia's Warbler, Hooded Oriole. Also, coverage down the Rio Grande as far as Indian Hot Springs added species such as Vermilion Flycatcher and Orchard Oriole.

These gains were balanced by some notable losses. In particular our shorebird total dropped from 16 species in 1980 to 11 in 1981. Ducks went from 13 species to 11

and warblers from 10 species to 8. In general, the birding was hard work. But enjoyable work. And satisfying work, given the incentive of the Birdathon. All 2 May observations in the OBSERVATIONS report are from the Big Day Count. /John Sproul/

THE BIRDATHON

The deluge on the night of 1 May was of short duration, as prophesied by our chapter optimists, Bob Johnson and John Sproul. May 2 dawned bright and beautiful for our 1st Birdathon. There were 163 sponsors for our crew of 30 counters, and we raised \$1,241.54 for National Audubon, 1/3 of which we will retain for Feather Lake improvements.

A contest is not without prizes. Our deserving winners were:

- * Lucile Swick - our Grand Prize winner of Lois Carson's Peregrine Falcon etching.
- * Kevin Zimmer - for raising the most money won a \$25 gift certificate to Pelican's Restaurant, and also a year's subscription to AMERICAN BIRDS for counting

the most species (94).

* Jeff Donaldson - obtained the most sponsors and won a JanSport daypack, courtesy of Am-Camp, Barley Square.

* Bob Johnson - the new birder to count the most species won Audubon's Western Field Guide.

* Dinah Hayse - our youngest counter won a \$5 gift certificate to McDonald's.

* Bob Dukes - our oldest counter won a \$10 gift certificate to Duncraft, Inc.

My thanks to all counters for your hard work and to the sponsors for your generous donations. As someone once penned for Hallmark Cards, "You done good."
/Jane Fowler/

FIELD TRIPS FOLLOW-UP

On Sun. 17 May, 16 Auduboners birded the Tornillo Lakes area and found 51 species, among them Summer Tanager and Painted Bunting. There were also surprises: 2 Double-crested Cormorants, a 2nd-year Herring Gull and, last but not least, a pair of Purple Martins. All in all, an enjoyable trip.

The first 3 midweek trips in Memorial Park attracted 7, 8 and 7 participants. Species totals were 18, 20 and 14, respectively. Among the birds found were Yellow Warbler, Solitary Vireo, nesting American Robins, flocks of Cedar Waxwings, Western Tanagers and a surprising male Hepatic Tanager, plus a pair of Gambel's Quail.
/Jeff Donaldson/

CONSERVATION

AUDUBON STAND ON ASARCO COAL REQUEST

ASARCO has requested a permit from the Texas Air Control Board (TACB) to convert a natural-gas-and-oil-fired furnace at its El Paso smelter to a coal-burning one.

Once converted in the manner now proposed, pollutant emissions from the furnace would increase. Daily sulfur dioxide emissions would increase by an estimated 1.4 to 3.8 tons (or an estimated 5%), daily particulate emissions by an estimated 250 to 360 pounds (or an estimated 20-25%). ASARCO is not proposing additional pollution-control measures to prevent these increases.

absolute no-no. We are saying it is unacceptable without stringent environmental safeguards. If ASARCO re-evaluates its position and includes adequate pollution-control measures, then we will re-evaluate ours.

On 13 July, the TACB hearing on ASARCO's permit request begins in El Paso, with Audubon a party to the hearing. Attorneys Tom Spieczny and Malcolm Harris will represent us and several other groups. It promises to be a long, drawn-out affair, nowhere near its conclusion when the next ROADRUNNER reaches you in September.
/John Sproul/

Approved unanimously by the Board of Directors on 18 May, the position of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society, as regards ASARCO's permit request, is to:

- * oppose the request as it is now written, and
- * continue to oppose the request until it is amended to include air-pollution-control measures sufficient to eliminate the incremental increases in pollution now expected with the conversion.

We aren't saying the coal conversion is an

STATUS REPORT: FRANKLIN MTN. STATE PARK

In March, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission accepted a total of 5,498 acres of land from the City of El Paso and El Paso County for the Franklin Mountain State Park. Then, on 23 April, the State acquired 3,520 acres through condemnation. Land speculator Dick Knapp accepted the \$6.4 million awarded him for the block he bought for \$1.4 million in late 1977. The land extends north from Transmountain Rd. along the upper slopes of N. Franklin to Anthony's Nose. Condemnation awards to

others with interests in this land brought total State payments for the 3,520 acres to \$8.1 million.

Additional land for the park is expected to cost the State about \$5 million, so the total acquisition cost for approximately 38 square miles (24,320 acres) would be about \$13.1 million. Some of the remaining parcels of private land to be acquired for the park are expected to be donated to the State.

The state legislature is now considering a bill to redefine the boundaries of the park. It passed in the Senate 22 May. It is expected to pass in the House with little opposition and be signed by the governor.

In the near future Texas Parks and Wildlife is expected to sign contracts with the city and/or county to maintain the park as previously agreed. The parkland owned by the State is now off-limits to the public until the park is opened.

Already private interest groups are attempting to gain concessions in the park, such as placement of communication towers atop N. Franklin Mtn. Hopefully, the members of our Audubon chapter will help support the Wilderness Park Coalition in its efforts to stop encroachment in the park and prevent further destruction of the fragile Franklin Mtns. environment. For further information concerning the park call Joe Guinn (566-8438). /Joe Guinn/

CONTAINER DEPOSIT BILL CRUSHED

This will not be the year that Texas gets a container-deposit law. After State Rep. Paul Elizondo of San Antonio introduced a bill to require deposits of at least a dime on all malt and soft-drink containers, beverage-industry lobbyists struck fast and hard. The bill died without even a hearing. A separate bill by Rep. Ralph

Wallace of Houston to ban detachable pull-tabs met a similar fate.

Container-deposit advocates are persistent and will be back in 1983. Will the outcome be the same? The key to success is strong grassroots support. If city councils, parks and recreation departments, sanitation departments and the like can be induced to endorse the container-deposit idea, the state legislature may realize the beverage industry's is not the only voice on this subject. #

SNAKE RIVER UPDATE

U.S. Senator James McClure (R-ID) plans a hearing in Idaho this summer on the proposed Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (BPNCA) (RR; Jan, Apr). Then what? Here's an educated guess: McClure's BPNCA bill probably will call for a BPNCA of approximately 400,000 acres, and the Senate is expected to go along with his wishes. The House will wait for the Senate to act before debating the issue. Rep. John Seiberling (D-OH) is expected to press for a larger BPNCA; the Idaho congressional delegation probably will attempt to get the Senate bill ratified without changes. Stayed tuned. #

THE AUDUBON ENERGY PLAN

National Audubon Society scientists have taken a long, hard look at our energy problems. Their conclusions? For at least the next 20 years the U.S. can produce more goods and services and provide a better life for a larger population without consuming more energy than we do today. We can increase economic growth 3% per year and eliminate our dependence on imported oil. How? Look for a full account of the Audubon Energy Plan in the July AUDUBON magazine. #

LOOSE FEATHERS

TUCSON BIRDERS' HOTLINE

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name

address

city state zip

phone

Membership category desired:

___ Individual/\$20 ___ Family/\$25

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___ Sr. Citizen, Family/\$15

___ Student/\$13.50

This is a ___ new ___ renewal membership.

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

CDRI

Dennie Miller gave an excellent presentation on the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute at our last general meeting. If you would like to learn more about CDRI, send Dennie a card requesting a free copy of THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT DISCOVERY, the institute's periodic newsletter: Dennis J. Miller, CDRI, P.O. Box 1334, Alpine, TX 79830. #

LOCK IT

Recently someone visited Feather L. and forgot to relock the gate on leaving. Spinks, a 4-legged Feather L. resident, used the opportunity to do some unauthorized carousing. If the gate is closed when you arrive, please be sure it is also closed when you leave. #

MEMBERSHIP CONTEST RESULTS

In early May I received the final results of the 6-month membership campaign. The good news was that altogether our chapter got 53 new members! Total chapter membership went from 244 (Sep '80) to 266 (Apr '81). We're pleased with the numbers and even more so with the new faces that turned up during the campaign. Thanks to all of you who helped make it a success.

The not-so-good news was that we didn't win anything. Out of 26 chapters in Audubon's Southwest Region, we finished 7th in total chapter-generated new members (28) and 5th in chapter-generated percentage increase (11.48%).

We were hoping to use the prize we were after--an Audubon Wildlife Film lecture--as a fund-raiser to help member Gloria Basden participate in the Audubon Expedition Institute. Though we didn't win, Gloria deserves something for the expert help she gave us in the membership campaign. The Board has decided to present her with a pair of binoculars--which she needs--to show our appreciation.

The campaign is officially over, but our interest in chapter growth is not. We'll continue to happily persuade, entice,

cajole and insist that people become members. We have much to accomplish.

/Jo Warolin/

COLOR SLIDE CONTEST

The May winners were Bob Bleicher in the Bird category and John Sproul in the habitat category. Both winners cheated. Bob took his photo of a Wood Duck in San Diego, John took his of a coyote on a rocky ridge-line in California's Sierra Nevada. Both are now busy planning their Feather L. vacations.

Since John loused up the format by submitting mammal and reptile slides, we now have 3 categories: 1) El Paso birds, 2) their habitats and 3) the catchall, El Paso flora and fauna. The 3 winners in the current contest will draw straws to see who gets to emcee our member-participation slide show in November. Send entries to Kris Kohlhoff, 6945 La Cadena, El Paso 79912; 581-3565. Identify each with: date taken, your name, species and/or habitat, and location. Slides received after 20 Aug will be entered in September's contest. All slides become property of EP/TPAS. #

LIBRARY GROWS

Some new additions to the chapter library (donors in parentheses):

Ellis, Malcolm. THE WORLD OF BIRDS.
(Jane Fowler)

Everett, Michael. A NATURAL HISTORY OF OWLS (Jane Fowler)

Sparks, John and Tony Soper. OWLS: THEIR NATURAL AND UNNATURAL HISTORY (J. Fowler)

Weick, Friedhelm. BIRDS OF PREY OF THE WORLD. (John Sproul)

Until we find it a permanent home, our library will appear, complete and uncensored, at all Audubon general meetings. Drop by and browse. #

GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS

Bob Johnson (751-0125) will visit the Cliff Dwellings and vicinity 13-14 June. He has space available if you want to go along. #

RUMMAGE SALE 14 JUNE

It's true. Our rummage sale is almost here. Clean that closet! Cut that garage! Then call Peggy Heisel (821-0989), Joe Guinn (566-8438) or Jane Fowler (772-0296) and marvel at how fast they can make your discards disappear. #

SIERRA CLUB MEETINGS

Last Wednesday each month, 7:30 PM, St. Paul's Methodist Church, 7000 Edgemere. If the lack of monthly Audubon meetings during the summer leaves a gaping hole in your life, try a Sierra Club meeting. The programs are conservation/travel/outdoor activity-oriented, similar (occasionally identical) to Audubon's. #

HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY,

LENA MC BEE !

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