

the ROADRUNNER



Newsletter of El Paso/Trans-Pecos
Audubon Society - P.O. Box 9655
El Paso, Texas 79986

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March 1983

GENERAL MEETING

MON., MARCH 21, 1983, 7:30 PM, Garden Center, 3105 Grant St. in Memorial Park. This month you will have an opportunity to learn about the activities of your chapter's EDUCATION COMMITTEE. You'll be introduced to a new National program called Audubon Adventures, a program which has been developed especially for young people. There will also be a short presentation on the Audubon Expedition Institute from Gloria Basden who participated in this program last year. The "classroom" for this accredited educational program is the American wilderness! The group travels throughout the nation to learn about our natural environment first hand. The highlight of the evening will be our slide program on local bird-life and habitats, featuring many familiar sights and sounds of the El Paso area. We often give this program to school classes and other groups; it is ideal for newcomers and beginners of all ages. Remember! This is your chapter. You won't want to miss this opportunity to learn about our educational activities and what we are trying to accomplish through them.

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FIELD TRIP CALENDAR

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
PRI-SUN., MARCH 18-20, 1983. Be sure you have reservations at the Chisos Mountain Lodge (915-477-2291) or if you're "toughin" it" camp at

the Basin, at Rio Grande Village or at Castolon campgrounds. Please call Art Arteaga (598-5723) for further information.

FEATHER LAKE

SUN., APRIL 10, 1983. This will be a very special outing - a "sunset" spent at Feather Lake, this tells it all! Bring something to eat so that suppertime will be spent at our lake. Remember, sunset. Oh yes, don't forget your binoculars and scopes.

PERCHA DAM, NM

SAT., APRIL 16, 1983. Details are being worked out on this trip. There is a possible option of camping Sat. night at the Bosque del Apache and birding there on the 17th.

###

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MON., MARCH 14, 1983, 7:30 PM. The Board will meet at the home of Sara Jane Dodds, 2809 N. Florence, El Paso, (533-7990). All members are welcome.



GREAT OFFER TO SPRING CLEANERS

Looking for an easy way to dispose of hard-to-get-rid-of stuff? We have the answer! Just call Bart Rumaker (w.side, 544-6432), Jane Fowler (central, 772-0296) or Jo Warbin (e.side, 594-7318).

We'll take anything because we know it might sell at, you guessed it, our NEXT HUMMAGE SALE! It's April 10th, and with your help, will be a big money-maker. ##

INSTITUTE OF DESERT ECOLOGY

The 13th annual Institute of Desert Ecology sponsored by Tucson Audubon Society will be held April 29-May 2, 1983 at Catalina State Park 25 miles north of Tucson. The Institute brings together 60 participants and 6 scientists and educators for Field Studies in the Sonoran Desert. Camping will be the mode of living and meals will be provided on site by a caterer. Registration fee of \$165 for 3 days or \$195 for 4 days includes all meals. One unit of college credit is available from the U. of Arizona for an additional fee. For more information write: DESERT ECOLOGY INSTITUTE, Tucson Audubon Society, 30-A N. Tucson Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85716 or call Jo Nagel(566-2143) for a brochure and registration form. ##

WHAT HAPPENED?

Sat., February 5, 1983. White Rock Canyon. A nice day no doubt helped 15 participants see a goodly number of birds. Some of the more interesting things seen were a Golden Eagle, a Rufous-crowned and Black-chinned Sparrow and a Grey Fox. A suggestion when going to White Rock is to wear sturdy shoes and leg protection against cacti and rocks.

Sat., February 12, 1983. The 8 participants on the raptor search in the lower El Paso Valley numbered 8 birds of prey among the 44 species they found. A pair of adult Harris' Hawks highlighted the day, with the Western Grebe seen and the Sora heard at Tornillo being added bonuses. Thank you, John Caraway, for an enjoyable morning.

Sat., February 19, 1983. Indian Hot Springs. Fifteen hardy folks made this trek. It is an interesting area and should be worth another visit.

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45 species of birds were seen including a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Vermillion Flycatcher, Common Egret and a solemn Great Horned Owl. A great time was had by all, especially after the wind died down. Everybody had a good time -- except ART and DONNA. Reason? 2 blow-outs, a dead battery and a dead C.B., plus a stern warning from a customs inspector.

Please keep in mind my new addition to the "What Happened" column - NEW ADDITIONS FOR: If, on any of our field trips (or any other time) you come across a new bird for your life list, please let me know (598-5723) and I'll be glad to mention it in this new column. /Art Arteaga/ ##

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE April-August 1983

- Sat 30 Apr Big Day Count/Birdathon

- Wed 4 May Memorial Park, El Paso
- Sat 7 May Hueco Tanks with Mesilla Valley Audubon Soc.
- Wed 11 May Arroyo Park, El Paso
- Sat 14 May Beginners trip to lower El Paso Valley
- Wed 18 May Memorial Park, El Paso
- Sat-Sun 21-22 May Chiricahua Mts. AZ
- Wed 25 May Arroyo Park, El Paso

- Sun 5 June breakfast at Wilderness Park Museum/
Franklin Mts. canyons
- Sat-Sun 18-19 June lower Gila River Valley, NM

- Sat 9 July Rio Bosque Park, El Paso
- Sat-Sun 23-24 July Sacramento Mts., NM

- Mon-Sat 1-6 Aug no trips (would conflict with National Smile Week)
- Fri 12 Aug Perseid Meteors
- Sat-Sun 20-21 Aug Guadalupe Mts. Rattlesnake Spring, TX/NM

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THE EP/TPAS CHAPTER OFFICE

We refer occasionally to "our chapter office," mainly because it sounds impressive to say we have an office, but when you call the number listed in the phone book, the response you'll get is, "Hello, Gavit Sheet Metal." That's because the Gavits are kind enough to let us use their home phone for our chapter listing. Thank you, Al and Madeline, for helping us in this way and for fielding all those calls from cranks, inquiring citizens, out-of-town birders, heads of state and others seeking guidance from Audubon.

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NONGAME BILL MOVING

After over a year of preparation, the time for ACTION is drawing near. By the time you read this, the Audubon Council of Texas (ACT) bill to establish a Special Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Fund probably will have been introduced in the Texas legislature. The fund is critical to ACT's effort to expand the wildlife-management horizons of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. (TPWD). It would finance a variety of new programs for endangered species and other species that are not hunted.

Borrowing an idea from the duck-stamp program, the main source of fund income will be sales of special wildlife art prints, decals and/or stamps. The concept has support from TPWD, statewide hunting groups, and other conservation organizations. It needs support from YOU. There should be no serious opposition to the bill, but inevitably there will be skeptics who will need convincing of the fund's value.

ACT wants to demonstrate that the idea has widespread backing and that it will work. To that end, the Council will circulate sign-up sheets soon for people to in-

dicating their willingness to buy a "nongame" emblem and to support the program. The completed sheets will be submitted to the legislature.

ACT estimates its drive to get the bill passed will cost \$6000. It has established a Support Texas Wildlife Fund to finance the effort. You can send contributions to this fund to: Audubon Council of Texas, 2525 Wallingwood, Suite 1505, Austin, TX 78746. Another excellent way to help is to buy and wear a "Support Texas Wildlife" T-shirt.

When the time for a vote draws near, letters to your legislators will be vital. So sharpen your pencils and get ready to ACT for Texas wildlife. Copies of both the Nongame Fund bill and ACT's comprehensive Nongame Wildlife Plan for Texas are available from John Sproul (545-5157 h, 541-6126 w). / John Sproul/

DIRECTORY

EL PASO/TRANS-PECOS AUDUBON SOCIETY

President	Joyce Davis*	581-9470
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Finance	Jo Warolin	594-7318
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Publications	Jo Nagel*	566-2143
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Sanctuary	Joe Guinn*	566-8438
Audubon Council of Texas Delegate	John Sproul	545-5157
Clean Air Act Coordinator	Joyce Davis	581-9470
ROADRUNNER Editors	Jo Nagel	566-2143
	Jane Fowler	772-0296

* - Board of Directors

18 people participated and 48 bird species were counted. 458 Sage Sparrows were seen, an unusually high number. The temperature was cool, and in some areas there was heavy fog. Thanks to Trudy Berman for covering Hueco Tanks Park, and to all who not only spent all day counting, but paid \$2.00 to do it. Some of the group met later at Tony Worth's for a tally of the count and a pot-luck dinner. One member is still trying to duplicate Tony's delicious chili.

Cooper's Hawk 2; Red-tailed Hawk 15; Golden Eagle 1; Marsh Hawk 9; Prairie Falcon 2; American Kestrel 9; Scaled Quail 65; Gambel's Quail 10; Kildeer 1; Mourning Dove 41; Roadrunner 4; Burrowing Owl 1; White-throated Swift 20; Common Flicker 1; Ladder-backed Woodpecker 3; Say's Phoebe 1; Horned Lark 127; Scrub Jay 4; Cactus Wren 27; Canon Wren 4; Rock Wren 16; Curve-billed Thrasher 5; Crissal Thrasher 6;

American Robin 2; Hermit Thrush 1; Western Bluebird 10; Gnatcatcher Species 1; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1; Loggerhead Shrike 36; Starling 11; House Sparrow 65; Western Meadowlark 89; Brewer's Blackbird 6; Great-tailed Grackle 4; Pyrrhuloxia 28; House Finch 42; Green-tailed Towhee 3; Rufous-sided Towhee 7; Brown Towhee 62; Lark Bunting 124; Rufous-crowned Sparrow 8; Black-throated Sparrow 450; Sage Sparrow 458; Dark-eyed Junco 107; Grey-headed Junco 26; Chipping Sparrow 8; Brewer's Sparrow 27; White-crowned Sparrow 61;

Total: 48 species; 2011 individuals.

Participants: Joseph Arteaga, Tom Baker, Ken Beno, Trudy Berman, Sean and John Coyle, Elaine and Dayle Edwards, Jane Fowler, Al and Chris Gavit, Ralph Gomez and Ralph Jr., Joe Guinn, Bob Johnson, Sid Shepperd, John Sproul, Tony Worth.
/Al Gavit/

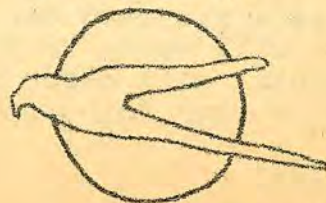
March 1983

Start to line up your sponsors - the '83 Birdathon is April 30. Those who were at Cielo Vista to view the display Feb 12 or at the meeting Feb 21 saw our Grand Prize. It's a beautiful stained glass Northern Cardinal, fashioned and donated by Peter Riede. The Birdathon committee is working on more great prizes. Read about them in the April Roadrunner. Let's surpass '82 by getting more sponsors, having more counters and by raising more money for this year's Birdathon project, improvements at Feather Lake. ##

A WINNING COMBINATION

Our display and Book Fair at Cielo Vista Mall on Feb 11 and 12 were very successful, with an estimated 600+ people viewing our chapter's educational display. B. Dalton generously donated \$417 to our chapter for our efforts. A Big Texas THANK YOU to B. Dalton Bookseller. We sincerely thank all who helped: Harry Assad, Ginny Baker, Bertha & Berttye Barnhart, Ken Beno, Trudy Berman, Betty Bowen, Jeanette Cole, Sarah Jane Dodds, Marguerite Dunnell, Elaine Edwards, Jane Fowler, Elza Gilboe, Liz & Joe Guinn, Virginia Hair, Neil Keith, Betty Pagel, Peggy Riede, Betty Roberts, Bart Rumaker, Sid Shepperd, John Sproul, Lucile Swick, Layon & Al Warfield, Jo Warolin. (And Bob Johnson deserves a round of applause for the many hours he spent constructing our display and getting it out for El Pasoans to view.-Ed.)

Don't forget, we will be at Bassett Center Apr 8 & 9. If you want to help man the display, but can't attend the March general meeting, call Bob Johnson (751-0125) to volunteer. ##



4-The Roadrunner

OBSERVATIONS - January 16 to February 19

Birding this past month was for the most part banal and unexciting. Rarities were few, and even many regular species were hard to find. A total of 116 species were recorded for the month with 7 of these being of casual or accidental status. Noticeable absences included Snowy Egret, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, and Swamp Sparrow.

LOONS - FALCONS

A Western Grebe was sighted at Tornillo 2-12 (JS et al.). A lone Olivaceous Cormorant was found at Tornillo 1-31 (BZ), and was seen in the same location again 2-10 (BZ,JD,RM). A Great Egret, presumably the same one seen 11-23, was at the McNary Reservoir 1-31 (BZ). Cattle Egrets were seen on numerous occasions throughout the month, with a high count of 59 near Clint 1-21 (BZ). A single Black-crowned Night Heron roosted in a large cottonwood off Montoya Rd. 2-12 (BZ). A lone Snow Goose, apparently injured, hung around Tornillo throughout the month (BZ,JD,RM, JS et al.). Two female Common Golden-eyes were spotted at McNary 1-31 (BZ), while a lone bird frequented Santa Theresa Country Club (STCC) from 2-5 until the end of the period (JD).

The first Common Mergansers of the winter appeared at Feather Lake 1-31 (BZ). A probable Northern Goshawk (still hypothetical for the checklist area) was flushed from Indian Springs Canyon 2-17 (JD). A dark phase Ferruginous Hawk was seen off the Fabens levee 1-31 (BZ). Harris' Hawks were sighted frequently in the lower valley (BZ,RM,AG,JS et al.), with a high of 5 at Tornillo 2-12 (AG).

QUAIL - WOODPECKERS

Sora rails were heard calling from the Tornillo drainage 2-10 (BZ,JD,RM) and 2-12 (JS et al.). Three Sandhill Cranes soared high over the Franklins 2-17 (JD), while another was sighted in the upper valley on the same date (GB). A flock of 60 Long-billed Curlews was near the Fabens levee 2-10 (BZ,JD,RM). Prior to this year, there was only 1 winter record for this species in our area. Now however, they seem to be regular in the lower valley. Although not in the checklist area, a PARASITIC JAEGER

at Caballo Lake 1-23 (DJ,BZ,JD) and a THAYER'S GULL at Elephant Butte the same day (BZ,JD) were definitely noteworthy. The gull was seen again in the same location 2-4 (KZ,DJ). A group of over 350 White-winged Doves near Tornillo 1-21 was very unusual (BZ). White-throated Swifts were noted on many occasions throughout the month (BZ,JD). Two Anna's Hummingbirds are still present at a westside feeder (FB), where 1 was photographed 2-9 (BZ).

PASSERINES

Bird-of-the-month honors go to an ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER sighted on the UTEP campus 2-17 (BZ). This is only the second record for this species in winter in the El Paso area. American Crows were present all month in the lower valley with an incredibly high count of 5000 near Socorro 2-10 (BZ,JD,RM). Memorial Park seems to be the only place around with any montane species left. Both Red-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, and a small flock of Mountain Chickadees were seen there 2-10 (JD). Several Western Bluebirds and Townsend's Solitaires were observed in Indian Springs Canyon 2-18 (JD). A flock of 7 bluebirds was at Hueco Tanks 2-10 (BZ,JD,RM). At least 1 Brown Thrasher remained at Durling's Farm through 2-7, and on 2-17 three Phainopeplas were seen there (BZ). Two Black-chinned Sparrows were seen in White Rock Canyon 2-5 (JS et al.).

CONTRIBUTORS: Gloria Basden, Flora Bittick, Joyce Davis, Sarah Jane Dodds, Jeff Donaldson, Al Gavit, Linda Green, Dan Jones, Red Mason, John Sproul, Barry Zimmer, Kevin Zimmer.

Note: With spring migration just around the corner, and therefore the possibility of rarities greatly increased, I must once again beseech you to call in any unusual sightings immediately. It is extremely important that rare species be verified, and in order for this to happen, I must first know about them. If you do not know whether a bird you have seen is noteworthy, look it up on a current El Paso checklist. Species listed as rare, casual, or accidental should

all be reported. If you do not have a checklist (one can be obtained at the monthly meetings), give me a call anyway. Again, I must stress the importance of calling in your observations as soon as possible after you have sighted a bird. I enjoy hearing from all of you, and will greatly appreciate your cooperation and promptness. Thank you. (545-5184-any time between 8AM - 11PM)

/Barry Zimmer - Observations Editor/
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SOUTHWESTERN BIRDING TOURS

Are you new to the area? Eager to see some of the speciality birds of the southwest, but don't know where to find them? We can help. Whether it's local birding you are interested in, or out of town trips to the far reaches of the southwest, we can find the birds that you're after. We run tours to the Trans-Pecos of Texas (including local El Paso tours), southern New Mexico, and southeastern Arizona. We go where you want, when you want, for as long as you want at a fraction of the cost other tour groups charge.

Would you like to see Gray, Black, and Zone-tailed Hawks, Pygmy, Spotted, Elf, Whiskered, and Flammulated Owls, Elegant Trogon, up to 12 species of hummingbirds, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Colima and Red-faced Warblers, Painted Redstart, Varied Bunting, or any of the other numerous southwest specialities? Then you need to call us. Our tour leaders are all intimately familiar with the southwest and can guarantee you most any bird that you are after. For information on prices or setting tour dates call Barry Zimmer (545-5184) or Jeff Donaldson (755-2455)./BZ/

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THE ROADRUNNER is sent to all members of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society. Nonmembers can subscribe for \$4 per year. Make checks payable to "El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society" and mail to: RR Editor PO Box 9655 El Paso, Tx 79986. Please send any changes or corrections in name, address, or telephone # to this same address.

NOTICE: The deadline for the April Roadrunner is March 23.

March 1983

The new officers of the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society got off to a good start with a large crowd for Dr. Jim Koschmann's slide talk show about parrots. Everybody enjoyed his pet, Scotty, who kept interrupting the speaker.

Another plus was the number of people who signed up to work on committees. It is through our committees that we can introduce more people to our bird friends and educate them on ways to improve their habitats.

For those of you who were not at the general meeting and would like to extend a helping hand now and then, here are some committees needing help. While Jo Nagel (Publications) has a couple of helpers, she could use another hand or two to fold and label the newsletters. Joe Guinn (Sanctuary) would like to have some help looking after the trees and plants at Feather Lake. While the field trips and programs have been planned for several months, Art and Sarah could use some assistants in getting leaders/guides for the field trips and assisting in arrangements for program speakers. Bob Johnson (Membership) is always looking for some enthusiastic aid. Last but not least, Jo Ellen Warolin (Finance) and Annamarie Shields (Hospitality) are looking for people who can help with our money raising projects (rummage sale, book fair, etc.) and in preparing refreshments for our meetings.

If anyone is interested in any of these committees, please call 581-9470.
/Joyce Davis/

RARE BIRD ALERTS

With spring migration fast approaching, you may want to know what's happening in other Texas and southwestern birding hot spots. These tape-recorded rare bird alerts will keep you posted:

Austin, Texas	512/451-3308
Lower Rio Grande Valley	512/565-6773
Texas Coast	713/821-2844
Tucson, Arizona	602/881-94

6-The Roadrunner

BOUNDARY PRESERVATION PROJECT: WERE WE SOLD DOWN THE RIVER?

It was a classic example of the environmental-review process working to improve an ecologically damaging project. In the mid-1970's, to stabilize the boundary between the U.S. and Mexico, the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) proposed to channelize 198 miles of the Rio Grande between Ft. Quitman and Presidio, Texas. The IBWC planned to dredge a 6-foot-deep-by-44-foot-wide channel, clear all vegetation for 50 feet on either side, and straighten the river in places. Many citizens in El Paso and throughout Texas reacted with outrage (AUDUBON, Nov 1976).

But the environmental review mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act had yet to run its course. Rather than forge ahead with the original proposal, U.S. Boundary Commissioner Joseph Friedkin took the review seriously. He brought environmental groups, state and federal wildlife agencies and his own staff together and encouraged them to develop a more acceptable plan.

They did. The IBWC changed the design substantially. It modified its construction methods to achieve wildlife benefits. It included mitigation measures to help offset wetland losses. Ultimately a project emerged that was acceptable to all and that actually was expected to improve wildlife habitat along the river. As I say, it was a model for what can be done to improve a project environmentally when project proponents and concerned citizens work together. The IBWC gained much praise for its enlightened approach (AUDUBON, May 1979).

Did they deserve it? The project is now approximately 30% complete, and some disturbing things have happened. Compare these statements from the final environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project with the situation today:

• "The second feature...would be accomplished by clearing vegetation on each side in a strip 56 feet wide, on the land side of a fringe of trees which would be kept for a distance of 25 feet on each bank."



Today: Very seldom has the IBWC left the promised 25-foot fringe. Often there is no fringe at all or a fringe only 6-7 feet wide.

• "Channel excavation would be accomplished by use of bulldozers and tractor scrapers at times when the channel is dry."

Today: The work has been done with draglines, less capable of doing precise bank work, and has been done when there was water in the channel.

• "The excavated soil above the piled debris would form mounds four to six feet high and a length of about three times its width..." "The oblong-shaped mounds would be spaced at selected areas and slanted slightly towards the river..."

Today: The excavated soil has been dumped by dragline in small round mounds parallel to the river. Design measures intended to improve habitat value of the mounds and to reduce the potential for private landowners to build levees from the excavated material have not been followed.

• "Insofar as practical, work would be performed during the non-breeding season to minimize disturbance to wildlife."

Today: There is no evidence that the IBWC ever considered the breeding season when scheduling the work done to date.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

• "The mounds would be seeded to thorny shrubs."

Today: Two years lapsed before the IBWC dressed and seeded many mounds, and this action came only after complaints from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In some places, there is still no seeding.

There's more. For example, volumes of excavated material are larger than originally anticipated, thus increasing impacts of the project. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. (TPWD) and USFWS have studied the situation and expressed their serious concern to the IBWC. So have the Natl. Audubon Society, Natl. Wildlife Federation, and Wildlife Management Institute. These groups are united in their desire to see the IBWC:

- redo the work done thus far to meet the conditions specified in the EIS,
- give firm assurances that these mistakes won't be repeated on the remaining work, and
- mitigate for the 2-3 year's loss of wildlife habitat caused by failing to follow the design criteria.

The next move is the IBWC's. Responding to the widespread concern, the Commission is preparing an environmental assessment on the work done to date. One issue it will address is whether a supplemental EIS should be prepared to re-evaluate impacts and consider additional mitigation. Meanwhile, the IBWC is doing no work on the river right now. Many would argue that's a good thing, given the events thus far. /John Sproul/

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

Name

Address

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ZipPhone.....

Membership Category desired:

___ Individual/\$25 ___ Family/\$32

___ Sr. Citizen, Individual/\$17

___ Sr. Citizen, Family/\$19

___ Student/\$15

This is a ___ new ___ renewal membership.

Please make checks payable to National Audubon Society. Mail to Bob Johnson, 5109 Paris, El Paso, Tx 79924.

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