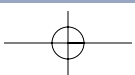
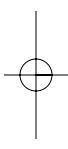
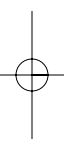


TEXAS *Birds*
ANNUAL

VOLUME 6 (2010)



*Editor's Introduction

At a recent gathering a friend was lamenting over the varied and increasing threats to birds in Texas. "What can we do other than send money to the endless number of groups that are involved with birds"? While I am certainly supportive of ALL activities to protect birds I was wondering what we could do OURSELVES to protect the birds (other than write a check). The following activities (of many) are examples of areas where we can directly assist birds. The first reducing mortalities and the final program is how we can encourage the appreciation of birds. As the saying goes "We save what we know, We know what we are taught". The more people are made aware of the abundance, variety and beauty of their birdlife the more they will protect it.

Limiting window mortalities. . . .

According to a Cornell University study involving 5500 residences participating in "Operation FeederWatch" an average of 7.70 birds/home/year die from hitting windows in the United States. These were not just House Sparrows either as over 66 species were documented among the mortalities. Expanding this number to all houses and factoring in large multi-story buildings has resulted in estimates from 3.5 million to 975.6 million birds. Regardless of what the number actually is it's a significant mortality. So what can we do? First, those who feed birds have a significantly larger number of window strikes due to higher bird densities near windows. The majority of fatal window strikes are due to "panic flights" so feeders should either be close (.3m), which will keep birds from getting to fatal flight speeds, or very distant from the window so that escape paths do not take the bird into the window. The best method, in general, to deal with all window strikes is to place a nylon garden netting (such as shade cloth) on a frame 25 cm in front of the window. This netting allows light to pass through but is not reflective and has been shown to essentially solve the problem. One does not have to do this to all windows, just those with a history of window strikes.

Donate used equipment to the ABA Birder's Exchange. . . .

Increasing awareness results in increased public value being placed on birds. Rallying against development that impacts bird populations often is initiated by birders that value the birdlife more than the development! In many countries appreciation of birds is limited due to the high cost of field guides and optics. To meet this need in 1990 the Manomet Center for Conservation Science (MCCS) established a *Birders' Exchange*. In 1996 MCCS partnered with the American Birding Association. Finally, in 2002 the American Birding Association began running the program in its entirety. Since its inception the program has provided hundreds of binoculars, scopes, field guides etc. to organizations and individuals throughout Latin America. With birding materials the birds can be better observed and identified. Anyone considering purchasing new birding equipment should seriously consider donating the old equipment to this program. You can obtain additional information on this at www.aba.org.

Whether you modify your residence to prevent bird strikes, restrict the movements of your cat (or talk to your neighbor about theirs) or send that old pair of binoculars to *Birders Exchange* you'll have a greater appreciation of the birds in your yard knowing that you did something directly to protect them.

Now enjoy the birds and the 2010 issue of *Texas Birds Annual*!!!

*The article represents the views of the editor and not that of TOS or its Directors/Officers.

Jack Eitnien
Editor/T.O.S. Publications

TEXAS *Birds* ANNUAL

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Front cover: Rosette Spoonbill. Painting by Evelyn Atkinson.

Back cover: Brown Pelican. Photographer Mark Bartosik

Three finches frequented Clay Taylor's thistle feeders from January until May 2009 – Pine Siskin, Lesser and American Goldfinch. For details see "Building a Yard List".
Photo: Clay Taylor.



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President's Message

By Lynn Barber

I am over halfway through my term as T.O.S. president, and will do a summary article on it when I have finished my term. Right now, however, I would like to tell you my priorities for the remainder of my presidency, about the things that I particularly value about T.O.S. and /or really hope to emphasize and see move forward. I have discussed four of my priorities below, and you will note that I have included a request to each of you for each of these priorities.

Of course, I very highly value our T.O.S. sanctuaries, and it is one of the things I first point to when discussing T.O.S. with other birders. As is evident, however, in order for the sanctuaries to be valuable to birds and to birders, they must be maintained, sometimes at great cost if there has been hurricane or other damage. We can always use financial support for this, as well as for potential new land purchases (such as through the Ray Little Habitat Acquisition Fund) if a suitable piece of land becomes available at a price that we can afford. The best birding areas are often also highly valued by developers. I would hope that by a year from now, our "Sanctuary Fund" will have increased sufficiently so that we can begin to consider another purchase if the opportunity presents itself.

Another valuable T.O.S. asset is our T.O.S. publications. These publications are how Texas birds, Texas birding and our T.O.S. activities are seen by our T.O.S. members as well as by non-T.O.S. members. I think these publications are uniformly



valued by others. We need to be sure that those of us who are doing research or make important laboratory and field findings about Texas birds

submit our information to the *Bulletin* and do so in a timely manner. T.O.S. members also want to know about what is happening in the bird world and in the world of birders and like to see reports and pictures in *T.O.S. News*, so we welcome your submissions there. And of course, in this *Texas Birds Annual*, we all look forward each year to a wide diversity of interesting articles about Texas birds and Texas birding. These publications do not write themselves – please consider submitting contributions to our T.O.S. publications.

The third valuable T.O.S. asset is its **field trips** throughout the year and at its meetings. They are the main reason that I became involved with T.O.S. when I moved to Texas and why I stayed involved. I particularly have valued the weekend trips to different locations around the state. They helped me get to know this wonderful birdy state and where to find some of its diverse bird population. In my last year as president, I am hoping to work with the T.O.S. field trip committee to see how we can more broadly cover the state with local low-cost or free field trips. To help us out, I would appreciate your thoughts on where you would like to see future T.O.S. field trips, and I would appreciate volunteers willing to show us their local birding hotspots and to help lead such local T.O.S. trips.

Finally, I would like to point to our brand-new T.O.S. **grant program**, advertised in the just-published T.O.S. newsletter. In my view, one of the most important functions that T.O.S. can have is to encourage research related to Texas birds and their habitats. To that end, the T.O.S. board authorized research grants at its last meeting. This is all new to us and to the Texas birding community, and we don't know how it will go. To make it succeed of course, we will need biology, ornithology and other wildlife-related researchers, including amateurs, to put together research proposals and submit them to us. That might

be you, and if so, we'd love to hear from you. Whether or not you are engaged in ornithological research, you can help us spread the word of our new grant program to your local university and other researchers. And as mentioned in the newsletter announcing the

program, we can use your financial support of the grant program. It is to all of our benefit to increase the knowledge of our Texas birds!

Lynn Barber, TOS President
E-mail: Dalybar@aol.com

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Texas Rarities and Vagrants

By Eric Carpenter

2009 was another great year for Texas birdwatchers, with good number of rare birds discovered in all parts of the state. A steady number of good finds started out the year and continued thru late spring. Summer time and early fall saw an unusual number of rarities only to be punctuated at the end of year by a first record for Texas and the United States.

As is often the case, the first few months of 2009 proved to be a good time to be birding in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Long-staying **Blue Buntings** were at 4 locations with single birds at Frontera in Weslaco and at Estero Llano Grande State Park, and 2 birds each at Bentsen State Park and Laguna Atascosa N.W.R. **Masked Ducks** could also be found in 4 locations including 2 birds that were discovered at Laguna Atascosa in mid-March that lingered thru the end of May. Elsewhere in the state, good wintertime finds included 2 **Costa's Hummingbirds** out west with one in Terlingua 26 January thru

8 February, and another in El Paso on 10 February. A pair of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** discovered at McNary Reservoir in far west Texas lingered there until 14 February.

The end of winter and the beginning of spring brought 2 records of **Red-necked Grebe**, with one in Cox Bay (Calhoun County) on the middle coast on 23–24 February, followed by an alternate-plumaged bird on Lake Buchanan (Llano County) in the middle of the state on 15–24 March. Another **Black-legged Kittiwake** was discovered on 27 March on South Padre Island where it remained until 13 April; two additional individuals near Bolivar Flats on 13–15 April helped usher in the spring season. **Black-whiskered Vireos** had been documented at one coastal location or another for 10 consecutive years from 1997 to 2006 but no records at all for 2007 or 2008. This species made a strong showing in spring of 2009 with 4 different birds at Sea Rim State Park on 16–17 April, at High Island on 30 April



One of the most striking of species to be found in Texas, this **Northern Jacana** was also one of the longest staying and most observed individuals during its stay at Choke Canyon State Park from 2 November 2009 to 16 April 2010. Photo by Lee Pasquali.



Birding in the Lower Rio Grande Valley during the first few months of 2009 was quite good. This **Rose-throated Becard** at Estero Llano Grande State Park was a holdover from early November 2008, and was seen by many through 15 April 2009.

Photo by David McDonald.

to 3 May, a surprising inland bird in Russ Pittman Park in Bellaire on 10 May, and the last one at Port Aransas on 12 May. Still, the highlight of the spring season had to be a stunning **Surfbird** present at the Port Aransas jetty on 1–9 May. Spring also saw the start of the **Green Violetear** invasion of sorts. Seven individuals were documented in the state in 2009, starting with a one-day wonder in Corpus Christi on 17 Apr, and finishing with another one-day appearance of a bird in east Texas near Grapeland (Houston County) on 15 August.

The long hot Texas summer and early fall is often a great time to retreat to the comforts of home, though there can be a variety of interesting birds to be found at this

time. This was much in evidence in 2009 when an exceptional variety of unusual birds were uncovered. Things got kicked off on 10 June with a wonderful **Jabiru** seen briefly at the Nueces Delta Preserve (San Patricio County) as well as a **Brown Noddy** seen from North Padre Island. Another **Brown Noddy** would be photographed offshore from Matagorda County on 8 July. **Evening Grosbeaks** have been in decline for the past several years, and were added to the T.B.R.C. review list in 2008. Thus, a lone bird that put in an appearance in El Paso on 15–16 June was rather unseasonal but a welcome visitor. The mountains of Big Bend National Park held a **Flame-colored Tanager** on 18 July, while a pair of **Rufous-capped Warblers**



The 27 prior records of **Brant** in Texas are during the winter and early spring seasons, between November and April. This individual at Brazoria N.W.R. on 26 July–2 August 2009 was unexpected and completely out-of-season. Photo by Joanne Kamo.

along the Window Trail often proved difficult to find during their long stay from 17 July through 15 September. Pelagic

birding was also rewarding in the summer of 2009 with a pair of **Leach's Storm-Petrels** found on each of the 25 July and 29 August excursions out of South Padre Island. Completely out-of-place and out-of-season was a **Brant** enjoyed by many at Brazoria N.W.R. from 26 July to 2 August.

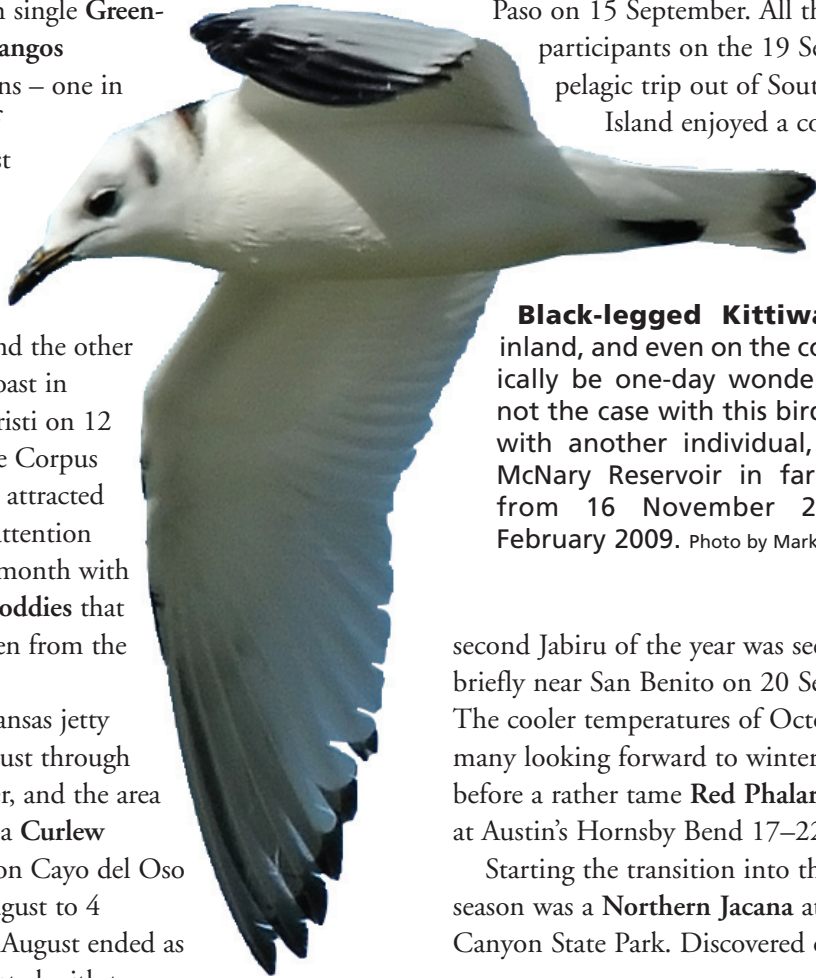
Birding continued red-hot into



Top billing for 2009 was this **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** discovered on 21 December 2009 by Rick Snider and Rick Nirschl just outside Bentsen State Park. Swarms of birders from across the country came to see this first Texas and United States record during its stay in the same area through 20 January 2010. Photo by Rick Nirschl.

August with single **Green-breasted Mangos** in 2 locations – one in the heart of the state just southwest of Austin in Hays County on 1–2 Aug, and the other along the coast in Corpus Christi on 12 August. The Corpus Christi area attracted additional attention during the month with 2 **Brown Noddies** that could be seen from the end of the Port Aransas jetty from 8 August through 8 September, and the area also hosted a **Curlew Sandpiper** on Cayo del Oso from 17 August to 4 September. August ended as hot as it started with two one-day wonders in the Lower Rio Grande Valley on 30 August – an alternate-plumaged **Masked Duck** at Santa Ana N.W.R. and a nicely photographed **Mangrove Cuckoo** at Laguna Atascosa N.W.R.

With September came 3 more **Costa's Hummingbirds**: one in Alpine 3 September through 19 October, another stayed in the Christmas Mountains 6 September until 31 December and one more appeared briefly in El



Paso on 15 September. All the participants on the 19 September pelagic trip out of South Padre Island enjoyed a cooperative

Sooty Shearwater, while the

Black-legged Kittiwakes found inland, and even on the coast, can typically be one-day wonders. Such was not the case with this bird that, along with another individual, lingered at McNary Reservoir in far west Texas from 16 November 2008 to 14 February 2009. Photo by Mark Lockwood.

second Jabiru of the year was seen ever so briefly near San Benito on 20 September. The cooler temperatures of October had many looking forward to winter though not before a rather tame **Red Phalarope** lingered at Austin's Hornsby Bend 17–22 October.

Starting the transition into the winter season was a **Northern Jacana** at Choke Canyon State Park. Discovered on



A great needle-in-a-haystack discovery was this **Curlew Sandpiper** at Corpus Christi's Cayo del Oso, discovered on 17 August 2009. Providing just the 12th record for Texas and the longest-staying of those records, this bird was seen by several folks through 4 September 2009. Photo by Christopher Taylor.



Providing just the tenth record for Texas, this sharp-looking **Surfbird** was easily approached on the Port Aransas jetty from 1–9 May 2009. Photo by Lynn Barber.

2 November, this bird was likely enjoyed by hundreds of visitors during its long stay, lingering in the park until mid-April of 2010. A serendipitous discovery was an adult **Northern Goshawk** that landed briefly on a private lake near Ingram, Texas on 3 December.

Saving the best for last, a **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** was discovered and photographed by Rick Snider and Rick Nirschl along the levee at Bentsen State Park on 21 December. For many this was an early present for the Christmas season as it was not only the first record for Texas but also the first for the United States. It was not always easy to locate, but countless birders from

Texas and visitors from around the country enjoyed it for almost a month (last seen on 20 January). As birders drove to and from the Lower Rio Grande Valley as 2009 came to end, little did they know they would have a reason to head to south Texas again very quickly. Though most birders would not become aware of it until after the New Year broke, a **Northern Wheatear**, only the 2nd record for the state, discovered near Beeville on 30 December would be a hint of another solid year of Texas birding in 2010.

Eric Carpenter
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Tips and Tricks for Finding and Identifying Wintering Sparrows

By *R. Craig Hensley*

“There it is!”

“Where?!”

“There, on top of that shrub!”

Oh, I see . . . dang it, it just dropped down into the grass.”

If you are a birder, you have no doubt had a conversation like this many a time, particularly when it comes to identifying LBJ’s, the little brown jobs known as sparrows. I have led many birding trips over the years and, except for the warblers flitting among leaves often larger than they are, no group of birds can be more frustrating to get a decent look at than our native sparrows.

They are small, various shades of brown, off white and gray, and have a seemingly amazing ability to frustrate the heck out of birders, particularly those who are attempting to learn to identify them for the first time. Sparrow identification provides distinct challenges to the birder, beginner or not. That said, you can become proficient with sparrow identification through the tried and

true technique of . . . practice, practice, practice. And, since Texas is home to a wide variety of sparrows during the winter months, you have many opportunities to do just that. Let’s begin with the first question then: where do you begin?

The fact is there are several ways of approaching sparrow identification, and what I present here is only one method, but one that I use regularly. Last winter I attended a wonderful sparrow workshop in the valley which broke sparrow id down by first looking at the various genera of sparrows. I have taught sparrow workshops and have used habitat, streaked vs. non-streaked birds and even began by talking about what isn’t a sparrow. For our purposes, let’s narrow down this large group of birds into something manageable in terms sparrow identification.

There are, in the United States and Canada, 19 genera of birds in the family Emberizidae. Of these, we’ll begin by tossing out the seedeaters (*Sporophilia*), grassquits



The **Field Sparrow**’s crown is a pale, rusty color while the **Chipping Sparrow**’s crown is streaked red and blackish during the winter months. Photos by A.D. Patton.

(Tiaris), towhees (Pipilo), Lark Bunting (Calamospiza), juncos (Junco), longspurs (Calcarius), Old World buntings (Emberiza), and snow buntings (Plectrophenax). In addition, for those of you new to birding, keep in mind that house sparrows are not the sparrows of which we are addressing. They

belong to the family Passeridae and are not native to North America (and frankly, those folks “across the pond” can have them back!).

Of the remaining genera of sparrows, a total of 12 species breed in some part of Texas, while another 18 species spend the winter. The chart below breaks these down:

Breeding Sparrows of Texas:

Olive Sparrow
 Bachman's Sparrow
 Botteri's Sparrow*
 Cassin's Sparrow
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow
 Chipping Sparrow
 Field Sparrow
 Black-chinned Sparrow
 Lark Sparrow
 Black-throated Sparrow
 Grasshopper Sparrow
 Seaside Sparrow

Winter Sparrows in Texas:

American Tree Sparrow
 Clay-colored Sparrow
 Brewer's Sparrow
 Vesper Sparrow
 Sage Sparrow
 Savannah Sparrow
 Baird's Sparrow
 Henslow's Sparrow
 Le Conte's Sparrow
 Saltmarsh Sparrow
 Nelson's Sparrow
 Fox Sparrow (Red)
 Song Sparrow
 Lincoln's Sparrow
 Swamp Sparrow
 White-throated Sparrow
 White-crowned Sparrow
 Harris's Sparrow

*The only species that breeds in the state that migrates south of the border in winter; all others remain in at least part of Texas for the winter.

So, with 29 species that we could encounter during an average winter, where do we start? Probably by purchasing two excellent sparrow identification books, *Sparrows of the United States and Canada The Photographic Guide* by David Beadle and James Rising, and *A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of The Sparrows of the United States and Canada* by James D. Rising with illustrations by David Beadle. Both of these books are wonderful reference guides to get down to serious sparrow identification as well as providing excellent range maps and life history information. If you don't want to do that, then a good field guide is a must. My preferring birding bible is David Sibley's

The Sibley Guide to Birds, but any good guide will suffice. Now let's get down to business.

To simplify things a bit, I am going to focus on what I will call the grassland/old field/brushland sparrows. This eliminates the need to spend time on those sparrows with limited habitats (black-chinned, Nelson's Sparrow and Saltmarsh Sparrow, seaside, sage, black-throated, olive, Bachman's, Baird's and Henslow's). The reality is that if you are searching for these, then you most likely already have a good grasp of sparrows and are hunting very specific areas with all the proper knowledge on how to nail them down.

Okay, that now leaves us with those sparrows that we are most likely going to



Adult **Harris's Sparrows** are very large, wonderfully marked sparrows, the pink beak contrasting well with the black forehead and throat and brown head (This first winter bird has only a black necklace). Photo by Wiki Commons.

encounter at some point during our winter wanderings, so follow along.

Those things I consider when I begin with identifying a particular sparrow include looking at/for the following: habitat, streaks or no streaks on the breast/flanks, white on the tail, eye ring or not, size and obvious colors or markings unique to a particular bird.

Let's begin with habitat. My first rule of birding is: "All birds fly," and this is especially true in winter, so what I am about to share is what I generally find to be true.

Brush piles are, most of the time, wonderful areas in which to look for or "pish up" sparrows, particularly early in the morning before the birds leave to feed, and just before sunset as they head in for the night. If the brush piles are in field settings, watch for Lincoln's, white-crowned, Harris's, field and occasionally, lark sparrows. If the brush piles are in brushy areas or along

woodland borders, watch for fox, white-throated, Lincoln's and perhaps Rufous-crowned Sparrows, and if water is nearby, add in song, and if lucky, swamp sparrows.

If you are searching open fields with scattered small trees and brush along fencelines you'll most likely encounter vesper, savannah, Harris's, Lark, field and white-crowned sparrows. Areas with dense, tall grasses and wildflowers with scattered shrubs will hold grasshopper, Le Conte's, field and Lincoln's. You may notice I didn't say anything about one of our most common winter sparrows, the chipper. Fact is, chipping sparrows travel in flocks and are quite ubiquitous, seeming to be encountered in just about any setting.

With habitat out of the way (and again, remember that birds fly), we can turn our attention to other characteristics of individual birds. Let's knock out size first. Harris's, white-crowned, Lark, vesper, rufous-crowned and



White-crowned Sparrows are dapper-looking birds, with a clean gray chest and distinctive black-and-white streaked crown in adults, the crown being streaked with chestnut and buff in first winter birds. Photo by Grady O'Shields.

Fox Sparrows are the big boys and girls of these sparrows. And fortunately for us, each is distinctly marked.

Adult Harris's are very large, wonderfully marked sparrows, the pink beak contrasting well with the black forehead and throat and brown head (first winter birds have a black necklace). These markings along with their large size distinguish them from any of the other sparrows. In terms of behavior, this is one of the few sparrows that will, when alarmed, fly up to the top of a brush pile or thicket to survey the surroundings; in fact, along with the occasional white-crowned sparrow, my experience has been that this species is one of the very few that will do this with regularity, thus aiding in identification from a distance.

White-crowned sparrows are dapper-looking birds, with a clean gray chest and distinctive black-and-white streaked crown in adults, the crown being streaked with chestnut and buff in first winter birds. This combination of markings is really all you need to identify this common winter sparrow. Of these two birds, you will most often encounter the white-crowned.

The beautiful lark sparrow is another distinctly patterned bird and perhaps the most easily recognized sparrow of all. Smaller than either of the first two, it is still among the larger of the sparrows and with striking head markings of white and chestnut, a bold central spot on the white chest and distinct white outer tail feathers, the lark stands out among all of our winter sparrows. And, while



The beautiful **Lark Sparrow** is another distinctly patterned bird and perhaps the most easily recognized sparrow of all.

Photo by Linda Williams.

the Vesper Sparrow also has white outer tail feathers, its streaked chest and much drabber markings easily separate these two species.

Speaking of the Vesper Sparrow, let's take a look at a close look at this bird for of all the large sparrows it is the one that is most readily confused with other smaller but similarly patterned cousins. Unlike other sparrows in this group, the identifying marks of this species are less subtle but very important in its identification. Vespers have a

distinct, complete white eye ring and white outer tail feathers (the first one in nearly all white, the second one inward white only on the tip). These two marks in combination will separate this bird from the similarly streaked Savannah Sparrow, its closest look-alike. The white on the tail is best seen in flight by the way, so often times watching the bird fly off is as important in its identification as when it is at rest. One note about the vesper sparrow — often times people want to use the rufous color in the lesser coverts as a field mark however, during the winter months it is generally absent thus cannot be relied on — looking for it is typically a waste of time in terms of getting a positive identification.

Like the Lark Sparrow, the Rufous-crowned Sparrow is one of the few typical winter sparrows that is also a year-round resident, and like the lark also has markings that readily identify it from other overwintering sparrows. Several sparrows will have rufous or reddish coloring on the top of the head, but only the rufous-crowned's is as boldly rufous, with a grayish streak down the center. The Field Sparrow's crown is a pale, rusty color while the Chipping Sparrow's



In open fields, the **Savannah Sparrow** will present perhaps your greatest challenge, mostly because of its similarity to the larger, previously discussed, similarly-streaked **Vesper Sparrow**. Photos by Gil Eckrich, A.D. Patton.



One distinguishing mark other than color (our **Song Sparrows** tend to be brown versus reddish) is that the **Fox Sparrow** has a yellowish bill compared to the gray bill of the **Song Sparrow**. Photos by A.D. Patton, Linda Williams.

crown is streaked red and blackish during the winter months. Add this to the pale to white malar bordered by a distinct, black throat stripe with a pale gray breast and again, you have a sparrow that is readily identified.

Lastly, among the larger sparrows is the wintering fox, a sparrow of such amazing plumage and size variation as to be mind-numbing. Fortunately for us here in Texas, we need only remember that any large, heavily streaked, reddish sparrow is the Fox Sparrow. This is a stunning sparrow when found, and it is seldom found generally, and for the most part, can only be confused with the smaller, more commonly found Song Sparrow. Both birds are heavily streaked on the chest and flanks and both can have a centralized dark chest spot where the streaks appear to come together.

One distinguishing mark other than color (our Song Sparrows tend to be brown versus

reddish) is that the fox sparrow has a yellowish bill compared to the gray bill of the Song Sparrow. In addition, habitat can help with these two birds. Fox Sparrows tend to like densely brushy areas within woodlands or at woodland edges whereas the majority of Song Sparrows I encounter tend to be in more open settings, often close to wet areas. Finally, if you see a heavily streaked sparrow pop up in front of you, and you notice it



Both **Grasshopper** and **Le Conte's Sparrows** have a good deal of buffy coloring on the chest and flanks but only the Le Conte's has fine streaking on the chest and flanks.

Photos by A.D. Patton.



Clay-colored Sparrows are only going to be seen early in the fall migration, disappear to the south for most of the winter, and reappear for a short time in the spring, and most of the time you won't have to worry about them. Photo by Craig Hensley.

swish its tail while it is flitting around, most likely you have just encountered the song sparrow.

With the larger sparrows out of the way we can focus the real challenges in sparrow identification, the medium-sized and small sparrows (and yes, until you've seen some of these birds together, size is most definitely a relative thing). Included in this group are the song, savannah, white-throated, Lincoln's, field and Chipping Sparrows. The small sparrows I will consider are the grasshopper and Le Conte's.

I begin the identification process by determining whether or not the bird has streaks on its chest or flanks (remember we are talking winter time). If the answer is yes, then I know I have four choices: savannah, Le Conte's, song, and Lincoln's sparrows. Let's attempt to separate these birds.

Of these birds, the Song Sparrow is the most heavily streaked, with thick, bold streaking on the chest, and flanks. The song sparrow has heavy brown streaking with a usually distinct central spot (which the fox and other streaked sparrows have) but for

me, the two things that make them easy to identify are the heavy brown malar and its habit of flicking its tail when in the brush and when it's flying away. Add in habitat difference between this and the other streaked sparrows and most of the time you should be able identify the song sparrow.

In open fields, the savannah will present perhaps your greatest challenge, mostly because of its similarity to the larger, previously discussed, similarly-streaked Vesper Sparrow. That said, it doesn't have to be that difficult. First, if it doesn't have a distinct white eye-ring, it won't be a vesper. Secondly, if you don't see white outer tail feathers when you flush it, it won't

be a vesper. This leaves you with the savannah. The savannah's other field mark that people look for is the yellowish tint on the supraloral area. However, this can be extremely variable, particularly in poor light and during the majority of winter months. If you see it in combination with its streaked breast and flanks, chances are it is a savannah.

Lincoln's Sparrows are a pretty common small to medium-sized sparrow found in a variety of habitats. For me, the most recognizable field marks are broad gray supercilium, rufous wings, and the finely streaked, buffy breast. Lincoln's sparrows, of all the medium to small-sized sparrows, are the most commonly encountered, at least in my forays into the field. They have an appearance that I can best describe as dainty. They are birds that respond to pishing readily and often give the viewer good looks.

Now, not with the intention of confusing you, I am going to throw in the Swamp Sparrow. This bird, like the Lincoln's has a gray supercilium and rufous wings and, here is where it always got tricky, at least for me.

I generally consider Swamp Sparrows as birds without streaks on the breast, however in winter these sparrows can have a hint of blurry streaking on the chest as well as a hint of buff against the overall gray colored chest. However, the prominence of streaking and buff color on the Lincoln's, added to the fact that Swamp Sparrows are going to primarily be found around streams or in other wetland situations, should be enough to properly separate them. But, beware I always say.

Now we come to two final pairs of birds I will discuss. The first pair is represented by the Le Conte's and the Grasshopper sparrows. Of the two, you will most often encounter the grasshopper, assuming you encounter them at all. Both are less common during the winter months than many of the previous sparrows, and because of their love of grasslands with tall grasses, they can present a real challenge to actually get a look at.

Both sparrows have a good deal of buffy coloring on the chest and flanks; however, only on the Le Conte's will you find fine streaking. Secondly, in silhouette, the grasshopper sparrow appears to have a flat forehead and a heavier bill than the Le Conte's. Finally, if you are still confused, look at the side of the face. The Le Conte's is deep ochre while the grasshopper's is paler with a brighter yellowish-ochre loreal area (in front of the eye).

Still with me? If so, we are down to three birds, two of which are very common and one that is only seen during fall and then spring migration, generally. These three are similar in that they have unstreaked breasts and flanks. And for the pair I will consider next, that is where they begin to differ.

The field and Chipping Sparrows are often among the most common winter sparrows you will encounter, and often found in the widest array of habitats. Field sparrows

are beautiful, cleanly marked birds. I like to tell people I am leading on a hike, "pink beak, pink feet, no streaks, pale reddish cap, it's a field sparrow." And it's true.

The Chipping Sparrow is, I believe, a similarly easy bird to identify because of one field mark, the dark line through the eye. No other sparrow you are going to encounter has this dark line beginning at the base of the bill and passing through the eye to the back of the head. None. Add in the red and blackish streaked head (again, we are talking winter) and you should not mistake this gregarious smallish sparrow – unless you are lucky enough to encounter it's close relative, the clay-colored.

For all practical purposes the clay-colored might look like chipping sparrow to most, and this is where your final test comes. The Clay-colored Sparrow is indeed very similar, but it lacks a black line between the eye and bill. Add in the distinct, dark malar and the fact that for most of us, the clay-colored is only going to be seen early in the fall migration, disappear to the south for most of the winter, and reappear for a short time in the spring, and most of the time you won't have to worry about them. But when you do identify one, celebrate because I think it always a treat to see this little beauty.

Okay, there you have it. No, I haven't covered every species – shoot, that's what books are for, but hopefully some of the pointers above will help you when you are out in the field this winter. Sparrows to me are one of a birder's greatest challenges, but often among our most rewarding. Heading to the field on a winter day and returning with 12 to 13 species of sparrows makes, in my mind, a satisfying experience; I hope you'll find it to be the same. Good birding!

Craig Hensley
E-mail: rcraig.hensley@gmail.com

HUMMINGBIRD BANDING: A PHOTO ESSAY

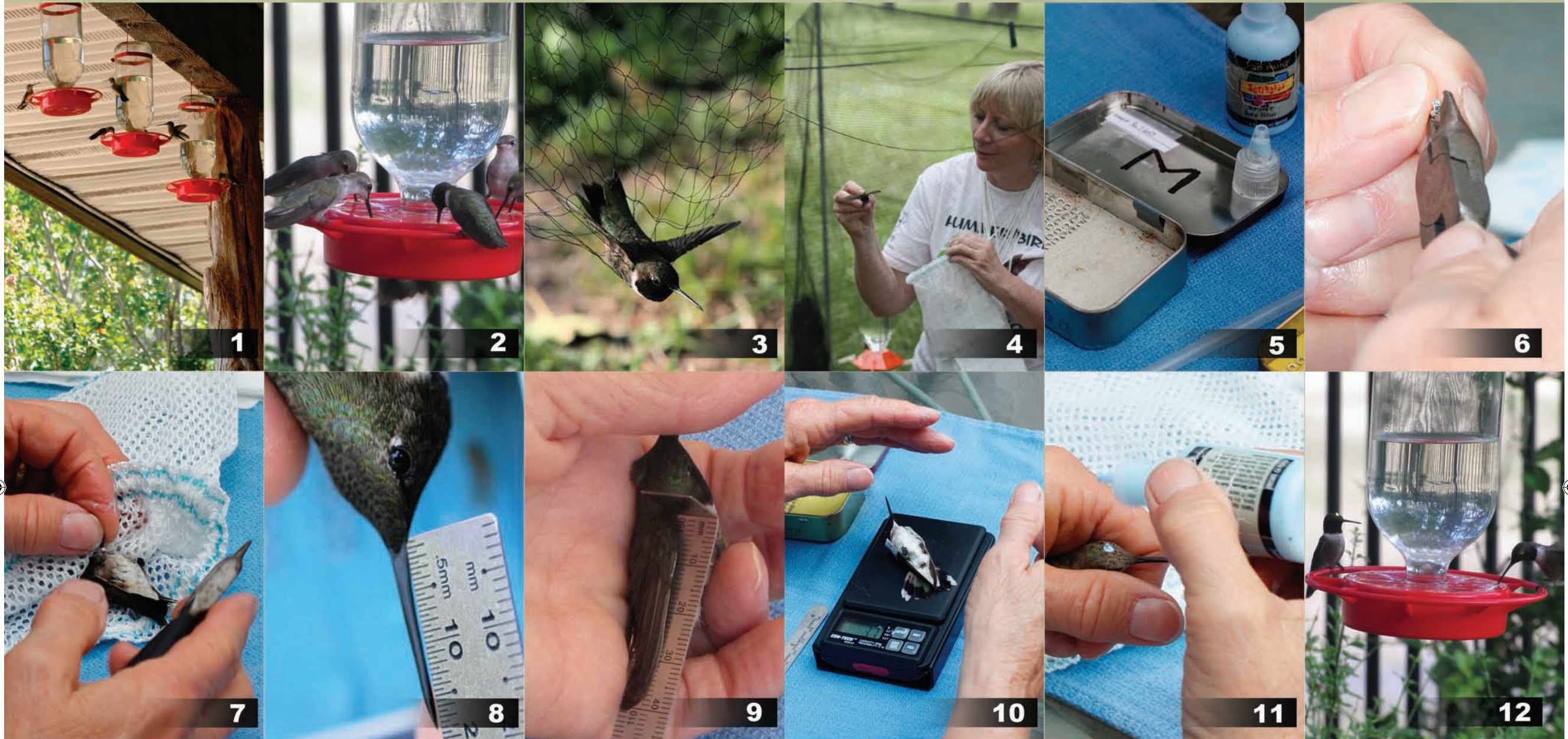


Photo 1 Hummingbird feeders are often effective when clustered.

Photo 2 Black-chinned Hummingbirds clustered at a feeder. Have you ever wondered how a licensed hummingbird bander processes a hummer?

Photo 3 Hummer caught in mist net. Hummers can be captured in a variety of traps and nets.

Photo 4 This hummer has been removed from the net where it was caught. Sandi Wheeler will place this bird in a holding bag prior to banding. This is a modified Russell trap, a walk-in tent-like affair, which is useful for capturing hummers.

Photo 5 Each hummingbird band is printed with one letter and five numerals. Each is cut to the correct size for the species of hummer (& its sex in some cases). Hummingbird bands are stored and used in sequential order to facilitate accurate record keeping. Banding data is forwarded monthly to the National Bird Banding Lab in Patuxent, Maryland.

Photo 6 The hummingbird bander, Bron Rorex, places the pre-shaped hummer band into the hummingbird banding pliers prior to banding the bird.

Photo 7 This hummer was gently restrained on its back in its holding bag while the band was placed upon its leg. The band is now visible on its right leg. The bird and its body measurements are recorded on the data sheet.

Photo 8 The culmen (bill) is inspected, and measured (in millimeters) for the data sheet. Magnifying visors are helpful when dealing with measurements as small as tenths of millimeters.

Photo 9 The hummer's wing is measured (in millimeters) with a specially designed ruler.

Photo 10 It is weighed (in grams) while being restrained, in this case, in a partially opened duck band.

Photo 11 A dot of washable marker may be placed upon its crown as a temporary indication that this bird has been processed with in the event of its recapture the same day.

Photo 12 The bird is then released and can often be seen going about its business and feeding with other hummers. Note bird on left has white crown dot.

Text by Bron Rorex

Photo credits: Sandi Wheeler, Sue Ortego, and Fran Dendy

We thank Brent Ortego for his comments on this photo essay.

A Year Long Study of the Abundance and Distribution of the Endangered Piping Plover on the Upper Coast of Texas

By John Arvin

The Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* consists of three different populations. One, considered “threatened”, nests on the northeast Atlantic coast from southeastern Canada to North Carolina. Another population, officially designated as “endangered” by the US Fish & Wildlife Service, nests around the Great Lakes. The third, also considered “threatened”, nests on the northern prairies from the Dakotas to Saskatchewan. All three populations winter along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts from North Carolina to Florida and around the Gulf to Texas and Yucatan. Small numbers are found in the Caribbean as well. Winter censuses have shown that over 50% of the entire world population winters on the coast of Texas.

There is a fair sized body of literature concerning the abundance, distribution, and aspects of winter ecology of Piping Plovers on central and lower coasts of the state (although much of it is unpublished), but almost nothing had been studied concerning these birds on the upper coast. We surveyed the upper coast of Texas from the mouth of the Sabine River on the Louisiana border to the mouth of the Colorado River, about 150 air miles to the southwest. We tried to count and mark with GPS locations all the Piping Plovers encountered along this coastal transect between January 2008 and January 2009. We divided the coastline up into segments that could be surveyed in one day, or two or more smaller segments that could be joined for a one day survey. We surveyed the beaches and tidal flats using automobile with four-wheel drive, all terrain vehicle (ATV), boat, foot, and/or bicycle, depending on the circumstances.

For convenience we named the coastal segments as follows: McFaddin Beach, all of

the Jefferson County shoreline; In Galveston County, Bolivar Peninsula, High Island to Bolivar Flats, and Bolivar Flats itself.

Continuing southwest to Galveston Island, we surveyed Apfel Park on East Beach and West Galveston Island, the undeveloped beach within a couple of miles of San Luis Pass. The Brazoria County coast was divided into Follett’s Island, between San Luis Pass and Surfside, Quintana/Bryan Beach between Freeport and the mouth of the Brazos River, and Wolf Island, an undeveloped and relatively inaccessible stretch of coast from the Brazos to the vicinity of the Matagorda County line. Matagorda County was divided into Sargent Beach and Matagorda North (Figure 1).

Our survey was greatly disrupted by the landfall of Hurricane Ike at just about the center point of our study transect on September 13, 2008 (Figure 2). Large portions of the entire coastline were inaccessible for weeks and normal operations did not resume until mid October (and were greatly curtailed in some of the more heavily impacted areas). Unfortunately this resulted in our data being divided into two distinct sets which cannot be directly compared. On the other hand we were afforded the rare opportunity to observe the responses of a shorebird species to massive disruption of its wintering habitat.

We also counted, but did not map, the numbers of both Snowy Plover, also considered “threatened”, and Wilson’s Plover, a species with a small world population (but which so far has shown no evidence of decline). We gathered incidental observations of interactions, if any, among these small “sand plovers”.

We found that the annual cycle of Piping and Snowy Plovers was similar with peaks



Figure 1. We divided the upper Texas coast into 10 survey segments.

during fall and spring migration periods and relatively high plateaus during the winter months. Most species virtually depart the upper coast between late May and August. This area includes part of the breeding range of Snowy Plover but only two pairs were found that exhibited breeding behavior. Conversely the Wilson's Plover was virtually absent in winter, but returned to the breeding grounds early, beginning in late February and peaking in March. Breeding behavior was observed through the late spring and summer. Wilson's Plovers stage in late summer after the fledglings are independent before departing rather abruptly in early September. Only a single Wilson's Plover was recorded after Hurricane Ike but this was in part due to the conditions which did not allow field operations between mid September and mid October. We believe that most Wilson's Plovers had departed prior to landfall of the storm.

We could use our GIS data to construct maps that illustrate a number of the Piping Plover use of the upper coast. For example, each official "endangered species" has a recovery plan which includes maps showing "Designated Critical Habitat". Designated Critical Habitat are those areas that are considered vital to the species' survival and where alteration of the habitat is discouraged or prohibited. Figure 3 shows the heavy usage of Follett's Island by wintering Piping Plovers. Currently Follett's Island is not included as Designated Critical Habitat.

Operating on the assumption that Piping Plover activity would be higher in areas with little human disturbance in contrast to those coastal areas that received relatively heavy human use, we decided to test that assumption by surveying two adjacent stretches of coastline which differed greatly in human usage. Plover use of Bryan Beach, near Freeport, to the north of the mouth of the Brazos River was

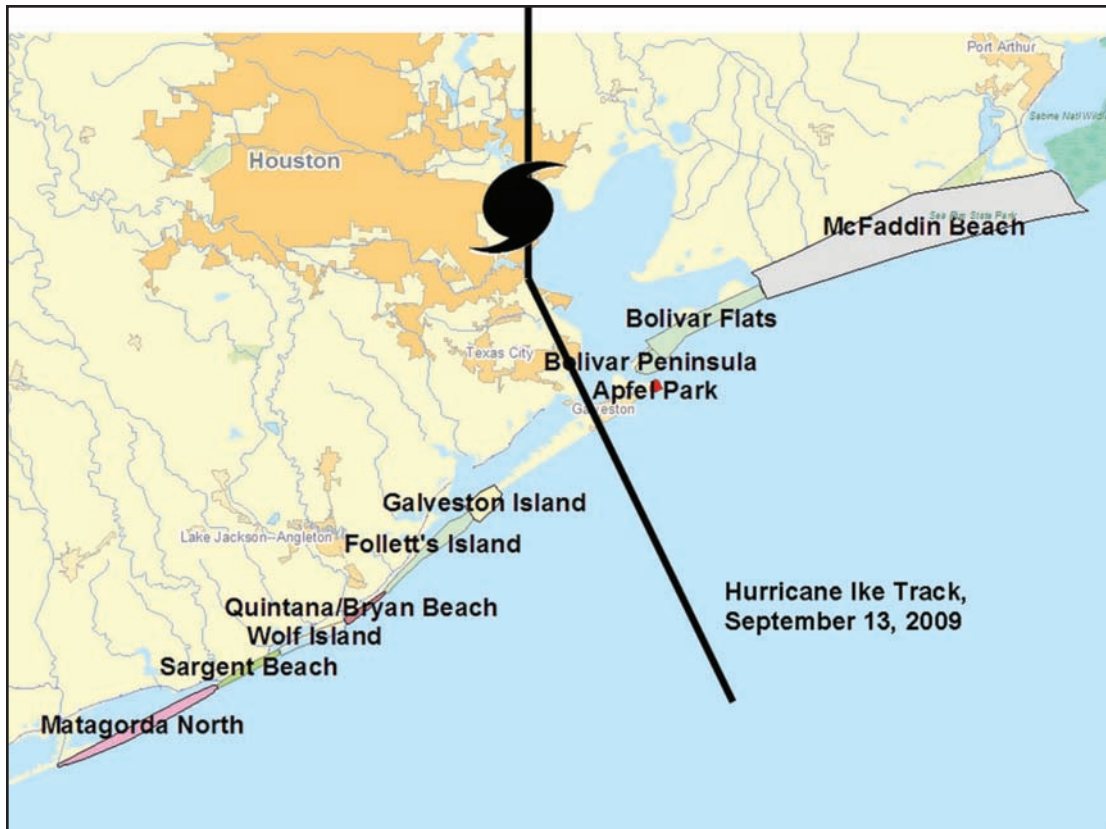


Figure 2. Landfall track of Hurricane Ike, 13 September 2008.

compared to that on Wolf Island, just a few hundred yards away on the south side of the river mouth. Wolf Island is only accessible by boat and is almost unvisited by people.

To our surprise, Bryan Beach consistently showed considerably higher plover usage. We think this can be explained by several factors. The sediment out-flow from the Brazos River is considerable as can be seen by the heavy deposition of driftwood on the Wolf Island beach. Longshore currents along the upper coast flow parallel to the coastline from northeast to southwest. Thus, debris and sediment are heavily deposited on Wolf Island, possibly rendering its shorelines less suitable for the marine worms that form the base of the Piping Plover diet. Also, Wolf Island could not be surveyed until April when migrants were departing because we did not have boat access before that month.

Our general observations regarding plover response to human activity were affected by

two factors. One is that we were constrained from surveying on weekends and holidays in return for permission to use a non street-legal vehicle (ATV) on the beaches. Also, the seasons when Piping Plovers are most abundant are the same seasons that human recreational use of the coast is at its lowest. With those factors in mind, we found that plovers were little affected by human presence. Most of the automobile traffic was well about the swash zone where Piping Plovers foraged. Automobile traffic was generally ignored by Piping Plovers unless cars stopped nearby, or drove through or close to resting/roosting areas on the upper beach where plovers of all three species congregated.

Pedestrians, except for those accompanied by dogs, caused only temporary and short distance relocation of foraging plovers. Dogs off-leash that chased any shorebird encountered were particularly disruptive and



Figure 3. Follett's Island had consistently heavy plover use but is not included in the "Designated Critical Habitat" in the USFWS Recovery Plan.

usually caused plovers to leave the area entirely. In our pre-survey reconnaissance we found very few plovers of any species on the beaches that were fronted upon by dense residential or business development. These areas included parts of Bolivar Peninsula and almost all of Galveston Island. Access was also a problem at the latter location and that stretch of coastline was not surveyed. We are not sure why plovers don't seem to use such beaches but narrowing of the beach and the constant presence of pedestrians, dogs, and free-ranging cats probably have negative influences.

Whenever Piping Plovers were encountered they were examined by telescope to try to determine sex and age and also to determine the pattern of any banding on color-marked birds. Of the 1131 Piping

Plovers encountered 61 carried unique marking patterns. All these birds had been banded as fledglings in the northern prairie regions (Dakotas to Saskatchewan). Before Hurricane Ike most of the color marked birds were re-sighted from one to multiple times at essentially the same location as the original sighting, showing that these birds were quite sedentary and that long distance movements were rare. After Hurricane Ike we re-sighted five plovers that had been originally sighted during the preceding season on the northernmost beaches (i.e. those most heavily affected by the storm) up to 125 miles to the southwest where damage had been minimal. These birds had survived the migrations to and from the breeding grounds as well as the effects of the hurricane, but had to relocate due to habitat destruction.



Figure 4. Heavy beach erosion removed all the sand from the northernmost beaches, exposing the clay subsoil, upper Bolivar Peninsula, October 2008.

The coastline of McFaddin Beach and Bolivar Peninsula suffered heavy erosion, in most cases losing several feet of sand and exposing the heavy clay subsoil (Figure 4.) No plovers were recorded from these areas after the storm. Figure 5 shows the relocation of Piping Plovers from the northeastern coast southwestward to less affected coastline segments. Birds appeared to relocate no further than necessary. Notice the jump in usage at West Galveston Island, Wolf Island, and Sargent Beach after the hurricane. Probably the high population of Piping Plovers on Follett's Island kept newcomers from finding a new winter home, as pre- and post hurricane encounter rates were about equal.

Having ascertained which areas of the upper Texas coast were most important to wintering Piping Plovers we attempted to estimate the degree of short-term (five years or so) threat to those areas from

man-made sources (residential, recreational, or industrial). We were not able to identify any new threats that might endanger these habitats using our own observations and monitoring the print and electronic media. There are several proposed projects which are currently inactive (e.g. a causeway bridge from Galveston to Bolivar Peninsula) which might be revived at some future date which

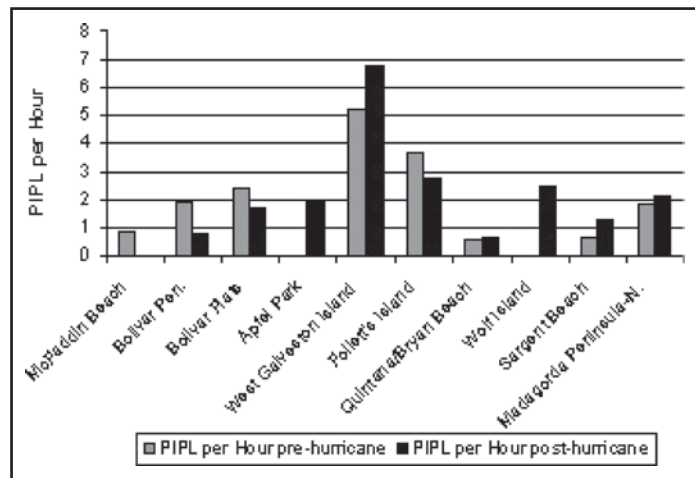


Figure 5. Piping Plovers encountered per survey hour before (gray bars) and after (black bars) Hurricane Ike.

would have profound impacts on the affected areas. However there is a continuing gradual degradation of shoreline habitat by coastal development for residential and recreational uses for virtually all the coastal segments we surveyed. McFaddin Beach, and upper Sargent Beach are protected from development within National Wildlife Refuges, but the rest of the upper Texas coast is vulnerable. We strongly recommend that undeveloped parts of Matagorda Peninsula and Wolf Island be brought under some form protection from coastal development.

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In Search of the Northern Wheatear

By Jimmy Jackson

On December 29, 2009 I received a call from John Borntrager, a young Amish birder who said he had a Northern Wheatear on his farm in Southwestern Bee County, Texas. John is a self-taught birder with remarkable skills, but even so I was at first skeptical of his ID. It was late in the afternoon when he called and I was reluctant to drive out there so late on the off chance the bird could be seen and photographed or even if it was a wheatear. Only because John was young and enthusiastic did I make myself go. Driving out there, I was feeling foolish but still studying my Sibleys while driving the country roads. Effort is sometimes rewarded as the wheatear appeared quickly, allowing me to take diagnostic photos. The tail markings are so unique even with my limited birding skills I knew it was a Northern Wheatear. The photos were sent that night to Willie Sekula and Mel Cooksey.

By the next morning, pictures had circulated and people started showing up to see for themselves. The wheatear stayed in the same small area for the next three months nearly always being visible to visitors. It was



Wheatear poses near barnyard water tank. Photo Jimmy Jackson.

estimated that more than a thousand birders from all over the U.S. and some from Europe came to see the bird. Earlier in 2009 another wheatear was spotted on an Amish farm in Ohio raising speculation about the Amish habitat being conducive to this species. The area was heavily used by horses and chickens, with vegetable gardens, horse manure and hay. This was an old-fashioned insecticide free barnyard.

The Northern Wheatear, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, was formerly thought to be in the thrush family, but now believed to be an old world flycatcher. They are insectivores and



Birders waiting for the Wheatear. Photo Jimmy Jackson.



Birding in the Amish farm yard. Photo Jimmy Jackson.

breed mostly in northern Europe and Asia. Small populations breed in northeastern Canada, Greenland and northwestern Canada and Alaska. All migrate south in the winter with most going to Africa and some to southern Asia. For whatever reason, this Bee County bird chose to go south in the Americas. It probably was here for some months before it was spotted. This is the second Texas record, the first being seen for six days at the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge beginning November 1, 1994.

Rarities come and go, but this one was special as birders were introduced to the generous and hospitable Amish and they in turn were exposed to birders, arguably some of the nicest people around. There were numerous news stories published raising awareness of birding and habitat. Due to Borntrager's keen eye, many birders have added a Northern Wheatear to their life list.

Jimmy Jackson
E-Mail: greenjay43@gmail.com

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New Birding Opportunities.....

Medina River Natural Area

By Tom Rueckle

With increasing demands for public recreational areas the new Medina River Natural Area in south Bexar County was met with enthusiasm. Constructed on the site of the proposed Applewhite Reservoir this new area includes 500 acres transected by 6 miles of trails. The facility has restrooms and a covered pavilion and 6 tent pads. There is no electricity at the tent pads and except for a drinking fountain at the restroom no water is available. The area is a great place for the novice birder or naturalist. With the plant marker key in hand (print one from www.sanaturalareas.org) I visited recently with a birder friend. Walking along the spacious well groomed trails we tried our best to identify the plants. Most of the plants marked are common trees in the area so if you do not know your Brazil from your soap berry this is a great place to enhance your abilities.

Birds were not very abundant when we visited but it was mid-day and very warm.



Poison Ivy is a problem at most local natural areas including MRNA. Photo Jack Eitniear.

We did spend considerable time, however, observing nest construction by a pair of Least Grebes. The marquee states that Northern Parula and Great Kiskadee have been sighted. Georgina Schwartz, a popular San Antonio Audubon Society tour guide, mentioned that Green Kingfishers and Audubon's Oriole have also been sighted. A bird list can also be downloaded. Since the area has only recently



A real treat in 2010 at the area was a breeding pair of Least Grebes. Photo Lee Pasquali.



One of several views of the Medina River in the area. Photo Jack Eitnrear.

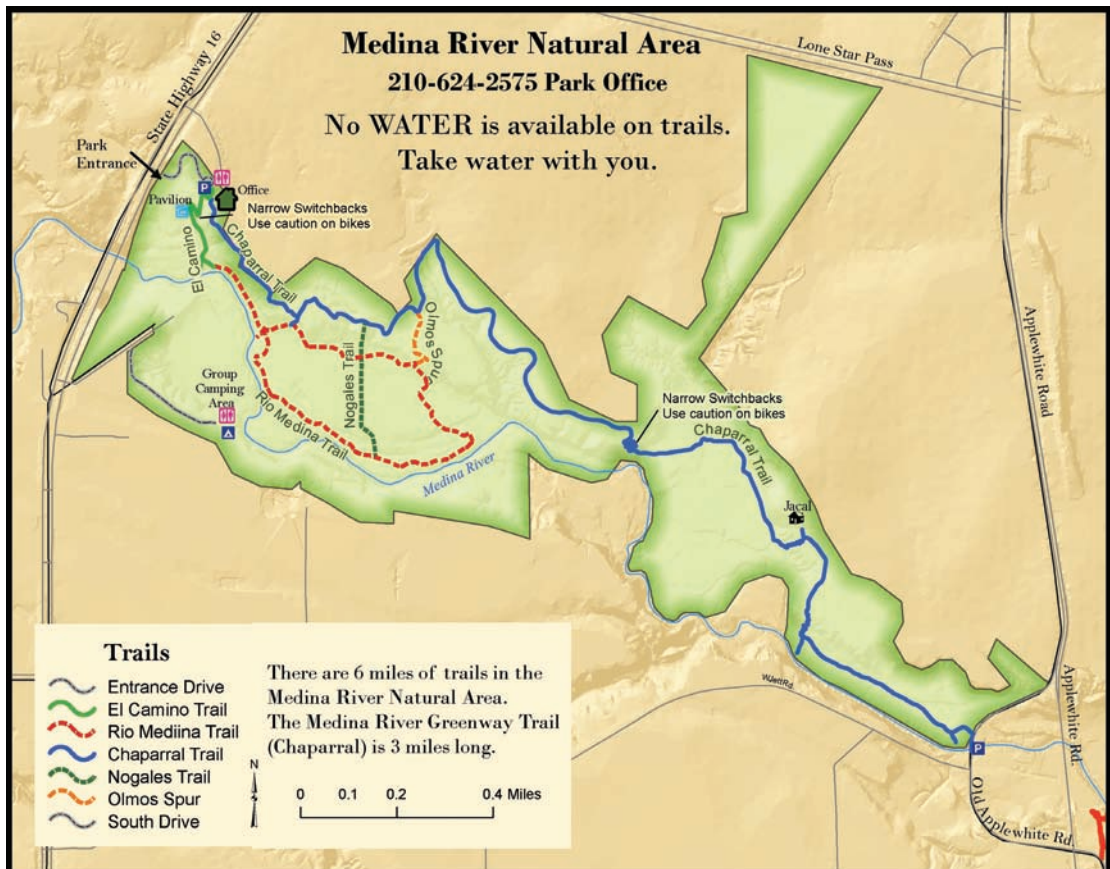
opened the list will likely grow rapidly especially with the river providing riparian and aquatic habitats. If you have a visitor from a northern state several regional species are worth taking note of including the Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Common

Ground-Dove, Inca Dove and Pyrrhuloxia. I encourage everyone who visits to record what they observe and report additions to the bird checklist to the park staff and the San Antonio Audubon Society.

The natural area can be reached by traveling the San Antonio Loop



The Hop Tree is one of many labeled plants along the trail. A complete list can be printed from <http://www.sanaturalareas.org/fp/marker.html>. Photo by Jack Eitnrear.



410 to Hwy 16 then south 4.2 miles towards Poteet. Entrance is on the east (left) side of Hwy 16, as you head south. The park is open from 7:30 am to sunset every day except Christmas and New Year's Day. Birdwalks are sometimes scheduled by the San Antonio Audubon Society (SAAS). For additional information on this consult the SAAS webpage.

Tom Rueckle
E-mail: trueckle@yahoo.com



Great Kiskadee one of several speciality birds observed along the trail.
Photo Steve Bentsen.



The author along the MRNA trail. Photo Jack Eitniear.

The Great Adventure: Alaska

By Jim Hailey

As I begin writing I have no idea where I want to take this article so I guess I should start from the beginning. In 1998 Ermine (my wife) and I joined two other couples on our first trip to Alaska. The five thousand mile drive from South Texas to Anchorage is in and of itself a Great Adventure. After clearing the barren Great Plains of the American West, the boreal forest of Canada extend seemingly endlessly to the horizon. The Alaska Highway, which begins at Dawson Creek in British Columbia and ends in Delta Junction, Alaska, covers 1422 miles of wilderness interspersed with the occasional pockets of civilization (maybe I should say enclaves of *Homo sapiens*). At the end of the journey you have arrived in Alaska, a giant

land of amazing contrast—majestic snow capped mountains, boreal forest, magnificent coastlines, rushing rivers fed by snow melt spilling into a landscape peppered with crystal clear lakes, and treeless tundra stretching to the horizon. If you need more adventure you can travel out the Aleutian Chain to small, rocky islands shivering in the cold waters of the Bearing Sea. I have had the great fortune to experience all of the above. And if you haven't, you must!

Trips to Alaska for the Texas Ornithological Society have been my good fortune to lead for several years now. As I write this article final preparations for our upcoming 2010 trip are now complete. As usual, my excitement and anticipation



Assortment of photos by author,

increase with each passing day as May 31 approaches when I leave for Anchorage this year. On these trips I have had occasion to meet and come to know many of you on a more personal level. And as the result my life has been enriched and new friendships established that I cherish. So thank you TOS and to all of you who have shared our mutual love of nature and birds in this great frontier, Alaska. Now to the article at hand.

From the moment we arrive in Anchorage until we depart after 15 days of hardcore birding, our lives are filled with excitement. Each year we travel to Nome for five days of exploring its miles of unspoiled tundra, rivers, lagoons, and coastline. In Nome, as elsewhere in Alaska, besides the potential for rare Asian vagrants, we can expect to see species dressed in their Sunday best as they go about attracting mates and raising their young. Of special interest are always the beautiful Bluethroat, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Yellow Wagtail, Gyrfalcons, and ever present thousands of Tundra Swans. And we find Musk Ox, Grizzly Bear, Red Fox and Reindeer. The list is almost endless. Next we head to the far north, Barrow. There we search for King, Steller's and Spectacled Eiders, Snowy Owls, Yellow-billed Loon and hopefully Arctic Fox and, with all great respect, Polar Bear. Here we also find Barrow House Sparrows—Snow Buntings—which are everywhere you look. With our appetite now wetted we head back to Anchorage, Seward

and the Denali Highway, where our adventure continues. Anchorage holds out opportunity to see American Dippers, Red-necked Grebes, Varied Thrush, Glaucous-winged and Mew Gulls—and one year an Ivory Gull—among many other forest nesting and coastal species. Not to be outdone, the Denali Highway offers spectacular scenery as we travel paralleling the magnificent Alaska Range as well as birds of interest—Smith's Longspur, Trumpeter Swan, waterfowl of many species, Horned Grebe and moose, bear and fox. And we spend a day on the water in the awesome Kenai Fjords NWR viewing auklets, puffins, murrelets, murre, shearwaters, humpbacks and orca whales, seals, sea lions and my favorite, sea otters. And you cannot help but be inspired by the spectacular snow capped peaks that line the shoreline nor be awed as we sit having lunch by a nearby calving glacier as it ends its creeping course to the endless ocean below.

When we leave this amazing land of contrast our senses are overloaded and in much need of rest. And the first thing we notice as we leave the aircraft back in Texas is the heat of mid-June. The question always comes to my mind—do I want to return to Alaska? And the answer is always, Yes! Join us in 2011 for another life experience!

Jim Hailey
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Elf Owls in West Texas

By Carolyn Ohl-Johnson

When I built my home in the Big Bend region of West Texas many years ago, I automatically called the local power company and had electricity installed. In those days solar or wind energy wasn't a viable option. Totally absorbed with the gargantuan task of building a rock earth-sheltered home high into a mountainside, I gave little thought to where the transformer pole should be located. I trusted the utility company to put it where it needed to go.

After about fifteen years, it became obvious to me that I could no longer endure the unsightly pole looming over my courtyard wall, nor could I any longer tolerate the noise the transformer made. It had to go! When I contacted the power company about this problem (to their credit they didn't laugh, as I had expected them to), they came and assessed the situation. Then they proceeded to inform me how costly the operation would be. Did I mention that my home is built into the side of one enormous

rhyolite (granite) boulder? I vaguely remembered broken drilling equipment when the pole was installed. But once the feasibility of moving it was pole-vaulted into my mind, I couldn't let go. It would never become cheaper to do it, I rationalized, so with a little juggling, cutting back, and dipping ever so slightly into my life or death emergency fund, I came up with the full payment in advance that they required.

With the assurance that I would not be able to see the relocated transformer pole from my swing in the courtyard, I eagerly awaited the upcoming transformation. Months went by as I waited patiently for my turn on their list (people needing new service took priority), but finally one spring-like day in late winter, equipment rumbled up the mountain and began drilling.

Their engineers spent a great deal of time studying the view from my swing seat, which I found reassuring. They understood the challenge. They got it! That was good. Even



This Elf Owl is like the one that emerged one day from the top of my utility pole.

Photo Greg Lasley.



Unfortunate for nesting Elf Owls the power company was planning on replacing ALL their power poles at one time!. Photo Greg Lasley.

so, nearly a month went by before they succeeded in getting the new pole hole deep enough. The first rig couldn't cut it; the second bigger rig needed a new drill bit; one delay after another. As we had had to use dynamite when gouging out a niche for the house, all this was understandable.

Eventually one afternoon they put in the new pole while I sat in my swing, ecstatic that I couldn't see it ascend. It was down the hill just far enough that I could not even see the tip of it over the courtyard wall. Soon now the transformer would be upon it and the workers could remove the old pole.

Near dusk that evening I sat in my swing happily visualizing the soon-to-be pristine view, when, horror of horrors, a tiny owl

appeared out from the top of the old transformer pole. An Elf Owl! What choice did I have?

The next day, I instructed the workmen to move the transformer but under no circumstances were they to remove the old pole. Again, to their credit, they didn't laugh.

Months later, after the owls had migrated south, I had my husband cut down the pole. We cut off the top portion and mounted it way down the hill on top of a pipe cemented into the ground. For good measure, we mounted an Elf Owl nesting box, built to specifications, on the side of the new transformer pole. Additionally, a Ladder-backed Woodpecker started a new hole in the new pole before the workmen had even



No poles in sight. Photo by author.

removed all their equipment. Every year since, these tiny owls have nested right there in that pole. Many pleasant hours are spent listening to their puppy-like calls as they forage among the trees in the courtyard.

Fast-forward another fifteen years. The world's smallest owl, measuring a mere six inches long, grabbed my attention even more intensely this time. They're endangered in California, probably extirpated in Baja California, and no one knows their status in West Texas. While they may not be endangered here (they're listed as a species of concern), their numbers suddenly faced a new threat.

Rio Grande Electric Co-operative (RGEC), which has the largest service territory of any electric co-op in the contiguous United States, is the only electric provider for south Brewster County, the largest county in Texas, and major Elf Owl breeding ground. According to RGEC, they have never replaced all the poles at one time since they put them in 38 years ago, but that is precisely what they decided they should do in order to reduce the frequency of power outages. At the same time, they added a new

cable to increase the power the system carries. When they told me they planned on doing it in June of this year (2010), which is the middle of Elf Owl nesting season, they got my attention. These owls are almost totally dependent on abandoned Ladder-backed Woodpecker holes in this area of the country, which means they're almost totally dependent on utility poles. Elf Owls arrive in March, leave in July, and nest one time per season. While Ladder-backed Woodpeckers and Ash-throated Flycatchers also use the poles, their future isn't as uncertain as that of the Elf Owl.

Before the American Ornithologist Union lumped our West Texas *Micrathene whitneyi whitneyi* and South Texas *Micrathene whitneyi idonea* into one species (*Micrathene whitneyi*), our west Texas Elf Owl, was a separate species that looks distinctly different from the south Texas Elf Owls.

Historically, the dead, and most of the living, trees in this area were systematically removed to fuel the mercury mines in the Terlingua area, as well as the candellia wax plants that once dotted the whole region. So man has not only destroyed their natural nest

sites, but the utility poles are themselves trees that have been cut down by man. Elf Owls will also nest in artificial nest boxes, yucca, agave, or even fence posts. Three-fourths of their diet is insects.

I don't believe any study has been done to determine the percentage of poles used by the owls in any given year, but at my property, I would estimate 25% percent of the poles have Elf Owls in each year, and perhaps close to 100% do at one time or another. If you include woodpeckers and Ash-throated Flycatchers, that number may be as high as 50% occupancy every year unless it's a drought year.

Obviously, every time a raging summer storm breaks a pole, that pole has to be replaced, often in the middle of the night, resulting in the loss of a potential Elf Owl nest. Species have adapted to sustain that kind of loss. That's one or two, not a mass removal like is occurring now.

The pole replacing project was two-thirds completed before I found out about it. I immediately flew into action. After notifying

the Texas birding community of the crisis via Texbird listserv, I had extensive talks with RGEC, and the game warden, to name a few. RGEC president, Dan Laws, had been forwarded a copy of my post to Texbird listserv before I even reached him on the phone. He was reading up on Elf Owls by then. I have now been assured that the new poles in my area will most likely go up in June, but the subsequent removal of the old poles will happen at a later date, after the owls have gone. And they've agreed to leave my old poles alone, and a few other minor concessions. I intend to see that it goes down that way. I'm sure the Texas birding community putting pressure on them softened their stance considerably. A big thank you, Texas birders.

Meanwhile, I wonder if Elf Owls will still be nesting in Brewster County fifteen years from now. They will if I have anything to say about it.

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CollidEscape

Even though there is much publicity surrounding bird deaths when it involves oil spills, pesticide poisonings, and even cats we rarely hear about one of the most lethal enemy of birds - glass.

Biologist Dr. Daniel Klem Jr. of Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania conservatively estimates that over 100 million birds die as a result of colliding with glass every year. Although it's obvious to us that a window has transparent and reflective characteristics, glass is invisible to a bird whether it is tinted or clear.

CollidEscape adheres to the exterior surface of windows and uses thousands of tiny perforations to allow ample light to pass through the window. This effectively reduces the window's overall exterior reflectivity and transparency and eliminates the bird collision problems.

Other advantages of CollidEscape include solar reflective features, a decrease in ultraviolet radiation, and the opportunity to observe nature up close without disturbing the animal's activities. CollidEscape can also be used as a substitute for window blinds and provide privacy during the day.

Inside, looking out. Outside, looking in.

bird collision prevention
{ LFDcollidescape.com }

Aransas NWR: a Bird's Paradise

By Dan Alonso

Aransas is your National Wildlife Refuge totaling 115,000 acres on five tracts of land located on the Texas Coastal Bend. Its mission is to serve as an inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds, 409 species to be exact. The most imperiled bird species which make the Refuge its winter home is the Whooping Crane. This majestic bird was resurrected from a mere 14 birds in the 1940's. At last count, 263 cranes were observed, 60% of which were found on the Refuge and the remainder on private lands. The Recovery Plan for the whooping crane identifies 1000 birds being needed to consider down listing to threatened and approximately 7000 for delisting from the Endangered Species List.

The Whooping Crane is the largest North American bird species which once inhabited much of North America. Some of the causes for its near extirpation in the 1940's still exist today. Most threatening is the loss of habitat.

Other present day threats such as power lines strikes in migration, and reduced freshwater inflow into the bay system pose serious limitations to recovering the species.

In an effort to combat any additional loss of cranes due to natural drought conditions and unnatural low abundance of marine organisms, the Refuge launched a Water for Wildlife Program and refurbished freshwater holes and water wells and initiated a Supplemental Feeding Program in 2009. In 2010, the Water for Wildlife Program continued in spite of receiving ample rainfall, the premise being drought years will return and many more water wells need refurbishment. With the assistance of our Zone Refuge Biologist, we are seeking new and innovative ways of providing natural food items such as blue crabs when and if needed as opposed to corn. Also in 2010, the Refuge partnered with The Whooping Cranes Trust



Whooping Crane the "crowned jewel" of Aransas NWR. Photo by author.



Adult pair Sandhill Crane with young. Photo by Dick Fischer.

in capturing ten cranes for a radio telemetry study which will provide much needed information on the wintering grounds, during migration, and on the nest grounds. The

satellite, GPS radio telemetry transmitters are applied to the cranes leg just above the knee. We know 8% of the population is lost annually during migration, but where and



Whooping Crane taking flight. Photo by Dick Fischer.



According to GPS radio data 8% of the Whooping Crane population is lost each year during migration. Photo by Dick Fischer.

why is what we hope to answer. The GPS real time data will provide irrefutable evidence of areas utilized by cranes which should not be allowed to be developed or otherwise rendered unusable to them. Another annually occurring task is the collection of abandoned crab traps of which Refuge staff collected 411 in 2009 and 263 in 2010.

So what can you do to perpetuate the species? First and foremost, slow the water's flow, we need every drop we can get returning to the bay system to reduce salinity

to normal. Volunteer during the February abandoned crab trap collection effort to pickup traps. Volunteer at the Refuge, become a Friends of Aransas and Matagorda (FAMI) member or donate funds to FAMI's Whooping Crane Fund.

I encourage you to beckon the birds' calls and support their cause by visiting your National Wildlife Refuge.

Dan Alonso
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Building a Yard and a Yard List in Texas

By Clayton Taylor

We told our relatives and friends in Connecticut that we were moving to Corpus Christi, Texas. “Oh,” they replied, “is that near Dallas?” Um, no, not really . . .

We made excuses about escaping the winter weather and high prices, but they knew me well enough to figure that it was all about the birds. In 35 years of birding, my Connecticut Yard List stood at 143 species, which is pretty good for an inland location. However, we were moving to The Birdiest City in the United States, right? After living for my entire life in the same house in CT, “we loaded up the truck and moved to Corpus-christ-ee” (sing to the tune of “The Beverly Hillbillies” theme song . . .)

Two thousand miles later, we signed the papers and moved into a brand-new house. Wow, air conditioning, a sewer system, garbage pickup, a two car garage that we could actually park cars in – now I know how the Clampetts felt! It was July 4, 2008, and the first Official Yard Bird was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher that flew out of one of the mesquite trees. Way cool. The first-day bird list included urban residents like Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Great-tailed

Grackle and House Sparrow, but lurking in the neighborhood were Great Kiskadees, Black-crested Titmouse, and heard (but not yet seen) Green Jays. When I told my CT birder friends that I had traded Blue Jays for Green Jays, they turned green with envy.

Now, we all know that when looking for birds, the top three things to consider are location, location, and location. My house was brand-new, with a sodded lawn of St. Augustine grass (I call it Creeping Crud), but I also bought the 1/2 acre lot next door. This was pretty much a patch of bare dirt bordered along the north edge by a few trees. Unfortunately, the builders had cut down a lot of trees, so while the yard had promise, it would need time to grow and fill in. What I did have were a few mesquite trees, a Retama, one Huisache, two dense Anacua clumps, and a Desert Hackberry (Granjeno). The neighborhood was comprised of houses that were about 20 years old, so their trees were all pretty big – a mix of oaks, pines, palms, etc. One of the most important features was across the street from the property – a densely-vegetated ravine that ran down to the Nueces River about 1/4 mile

away. Just a half mile away along the Nueces were the outstanding Yard Lists of Jimmy Swartz and the Simons, both over 290 bird species, so I knew that the area should yield some good birds. Just give it time.

With Lake Corpus Christi to my west and the Nueces River connecting it to Corpus Christi Bay in the east, there were lots of shore and water birds flying past the house, so summer sightings included both Whistling Ducks, Whimbrel,



The lawn sprinkler gave the fall migrant ruby-throats a morning bath. Photo by author.



Three finch species frequented the thistle feeders from January until May, 2009 – Pine Siskin, Lesser and American Goldfinch.

Royal Tern, and a nice mix of herons. Exactly 1/2 mile to my west is Hazel Bazemore County Park, site of the Corpus Christi Hawkwatch, so as August rolled around I discovered that sitting in my driveway gave me a ringside seat to the upcoming hawk migration. I will never forget August 9th, when that approaching Turkey Vulture “turned into” a Zone-tailed Hawk, flying low over the ravine, then passing by my house at less than 200 feet from me. Wow! August is also the time for migrating kites, and streams of Mississippi Kites (one kettle was 3100!) were scanned until I finally

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found a beautiful adult Swallow-tailed Kite on August 25th.

September brought hummingbirds. Oh, boy, did it! Back in New England, we were happy with our two families of breeding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, so when the yard hosted 60+ on the feeders at any given time, Debbie was fascinated. There is a resident Buff-bellied Hummingbird in the neighborhood, but it kept away while the migration was in full swing. The Simons spotted our first Rufous Hummingbird – they have the eye for that sort of thing.

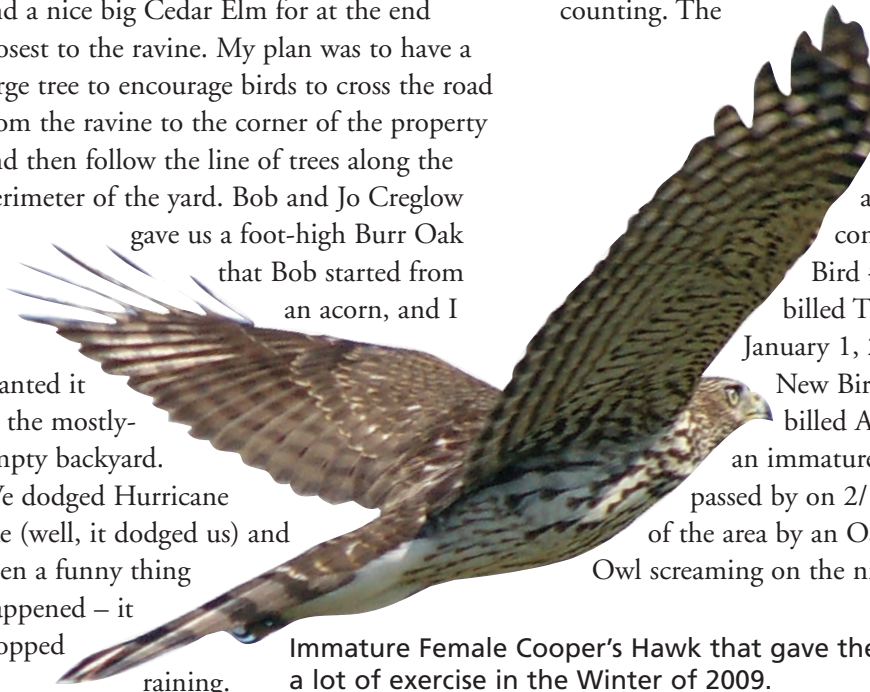
Digital photography is wonderful for retrieving dates of bird sightings, but I was being remiss at keeping track of my Yard List, so when the Audubon Outdoor Club of Corpus Christi reconvened for the fall, I joined up, picked up a bird list, and jotted down the species I had seen. In mid-September the list was 96 species – not bad! Bird # 97 was a Common Yellowthroat on 9/29 that flew into my open garage and had to be “helped” back outside. September 30 saw Northern Pintails flying by, and a Common Ground-Dove. Yard Bird # 100 came on October 1, in the form of a reminder of my CT yard – Eastern Phoebe. How ironic - the bird that in CT is truly the Harbinger of Spring is now the Sign of Approaching Winter here in South TX.



Yellow-billed Cuckoo photographed from my dining room.

While all these birds were happening, the yard was slowly growing. Most of the trees and bushes were thorny, and almost everything was new to me, so I had no idea what plants needed removal and what needed adding. Since I am also an avid butterfly, we bought some flowers and planted, finding out in the process that the soil was pretty dense and, when wet, pretty gooey. By this time I had purchased a few Live Oak trees, and a nice big Cedar Elm for at the end closest to the ravine. My plan was to have a large tree to encourage birds to cross the road from the ravine to the corner of the property and then follow the line of trees along the perimeter of the yard. Bob and Jo Creglow gave us a foot-high Burr Oak that Bob started from an acorn, and I

planted it in the mostly-empty backyard. We dodged Hurricane Ike (well, it dodged us) and then a funny thing happened – it stopped



Immature Female Cooper's Hawk that gave the doves a lot of exercise in the Winter of 2009.

The ground became hard as a rock, and what we had planted needed daily watering. Well, it will certainly rain during the winter, right? Well

Meanwhile, the birds kept coming – Dickcissels, House Wren, Sandhill Crane, Lincoln's Sparrow, Gray Catbird. The first "contributed" species were Franklin's Gull and Ruby-crowned Kinglet as the Simons house-sat on October 23, 2008. The lack of large trees in the yard kept the warbler numbers low, but I was enjoying the sparrows – Savannah, Lark, Vesper (11/13/08), White-crowned, Field, Chipping and Clay-colored by year's end. November 13, 2008 was a great day for new birds – Vesper Sparrow, Gadwall, Monk Parakeet

(they breed 8 miles away), Golden-crowned Kinglet, Pyrrhuloxia, Black-chinned Hummingbird, and Lesser Goldfinch (# 134).

The Green Jays were banding together for the winter, and on the morning of 10/28 they were raising heck in the pine trees across the street. As I sat there in my lawn chair, they started streaming out from the trees, across my yard, and into the yard to my east. Well, this looked like fun, so I started counting. The

caboose jay was # 54 in the flock – Holy Cow!!!!

In came 2009, and the hit parade continued – Yard

Bird # 150 was a Long-billed Thrasher on

January 1, 2009 (Happy

New Bird!), two Groove-billed Anis on January 2,

an immature Bald Eagle

passed by on 2/15 (escorted out of the area by an Osprey), and a Barn

Owl screaming on the night of 2/18. The

thistle feeders became THE place to meet – daily we had 100+ American Goldfinch, 30+ Lesser Goldfinch, and up to 18 Pine Siskins. The siskins would last into May, and the Lesser Goldfinches were present well into summer. Spring starts to come to Corpus in March, with American Golden and Black-bellied Plovers, Roseate Spoonbills, and Black-necked Stilts passing by. Now I was looking forward to those trees sprouting up, the butterfly plants blooming, and the bare dirt greening up. Um, did I mention that we were in a drought? We ended up with hoses and sprinklers all over the yard, watering almost daily in an effort to keep things green. Any plans for further plantings were put on



Zone-tailed Hawk flyby photo taken from my driveway on Aug. 9th, 2008.

hold, pending a return to rain. Any day now, the weathermen said . . .

The American Birding Association brought its Annual Convention to Corpus Christi in late April, 2009, and constant, howling southeast winds kept the neotropical migrants to a pitiful handful at local hotspots like Blucher Park, Paradise Pond, Pollywog Ponds, and Hazel Bazemore County Park. While the ABA participants still managed to set an all-time Convention Species List record of 270+ birds (remember that America's Birdiest City title?), I only added four species to the Yard List through that period, the best one being a flyby Yellow-crowned Night Heron as Brenda Gibb, Tamie Bulow and I sat outside at sunset while unwinding from the rigors of the Convention.

I was on a business trip when my wife reported an all-brown bird at the feeders. I asked her what it resembled, and she said "it's shaped exactly like a Robin, but the color is wrong" (back in CT, the American Robin was the State Bird). D'oh! Add Clay-colored

Robin to the list, and then change the name to Thrush (# 168). The end of May brought late migrant flycatchers – Acadian, Least, and Traill's. Debbie videotaped two Hooded Orioles at the hummer feeders in June, and flyby Black Skimmers (# 177) in July became a morning event, with up to 22 at one time heading west. Going where? I have no idea. The other notable event was a visitor to our feeders – a Roadrunner. Only thing is, it was NOT coming for bird seed or suet, it was coming to catch House Sparrows! Way cool!

Still no rain. This was not a lot of fun. The hawk flight in 2009 was a LOT different –

poor wind directions let the hawks slip by to the west, and numbers of passerine migrants were way down, too. I did find a Bell's Vireo of the Eastern race on 9/23/09, which was a very pleasant surprise (# 180), and the last new Yard Bird of 2009 was a Ringed Kingfisher that flew down by the Nueces River on October 28.

The winter of 08-09 could NOT have been more different than the previous year – it rained quite a lot, temperatures were a lot cooler, and the wintering bird population was totally different. There were very few finches, almost no sparrows, and a notable lack of blackbird flocks passing by in the mornings and evenings. We had four consecutive days in January where the temperatures dropped into the 20s, and a LOT of my plants looked pretty bad. Aw, nuts.

It is now March, 2010, and the hydrated ground has burst forth with all kinds of wildflowers, my trees are popping leaves, and the first new Yard Bird since that October kingfisher was a singing Northern Parula (# 186) on March 16, 2010. The Chipping



A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (not this individual, though) was the First Bird on the Yard List.

Sparrows have started singing a song that is totally unfamiliar to me – it sounds a lot like a Parula Warbler, and I can find no reference to it in the literature. Evidently, it is often heard in late winter / early spring in south and west Texas, so I'm calling it the "Texas Song" of the Chipping Sparrow. Oh yes, the Roadrunner was back on March 30 for the first time in about six months. I guess it's time to harvest the House Sparrows.

After 20 months living in Corpus Christi, I have a great place to live, nice neighbors, and a pretty decent Yard Bird List. Bird species that I had expected to see / hear but so far have missed include White-tipped

Dove, Chuck-will's Widow, Ferruginous Hawk, and even one Yellow-headed Blackbird in one of those big blackbird flocks. Big surprises to me were Sandwich Tern, Brown Pelican (a flock of 17 flew by!), and that Clay-colored Robin / Thrush thingie.

I hope to finally get some decent warbler numbers this spring, but it will take a few years for all my trees to grow enough to give some understory for ground-feeders and foliage-gleaners. Bring on the rain, and bring on the birds!

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Understanding the Behavior of Geese

By Kent Rylander

If we look carefully at a flock of wintering Canada Geese, we might see families feeding together, even though the young are almost as large as their parents. Family integrity like this beyond the nesting season occurs in geese, but it isn't typical for dabblers, such as Mallards and teal. Male dabblers generally do not participate at all in raising the young (there are exceptions) and even the mother abandons them early on.

Family cohesion in waterfowl, as well as permanence of the pair bond, is actually correlated with plumage coloration. If the sexes look alike (or almost alike), as in geese and swans, they tend to stay paired for several years, if not for life; and they also tend to remain together longer as a family group. If, however, the sexes differ significantly in color, as in most dabblers, then typically the male mates with more than one female during the breeding season and family structure is weak.

This raises an interesting “chicken and egg” kind of question: Were geese originally sexually dimorphic (sexes different in

coloration), and did the male's presumed brighter plumage “evolve out” because monogamy (having one mate) didn't require it? Or were the sexes always similar, with monogamy favored as a default strategy because it did not require the evolution of a bright plumage? The question becomes even more complex in dabblers when we consider the Mottled Duck and the Black Duck, two close relatives of the Mallard, which are not sexually dimorphic.

One advantage of being monogamous and having a strong family structure is that by remaining longer with their offspring, parents can teach them survival tricks that other young waterfowl must learn on their own. Another is a certain amount of extended parental protection.

Several years ago I had an opportunity to study the social behavior of a flock of some forty Barnacle Geese—a close relative of the Canada Goose—for four summers at an animal behavior institute in Austria. The geese were wild and free to leave, but they were lured every day to feeding troughs so



Gosling Canada Geese stay with their parents much longer than most waterfowl.

Photo Wiki Commons.

that they could be closely observed. Color-coded leg bands permitted me to observe and record the behavior of each individual and its progeny over the course of several years and therefore learn how their social dynamics changed from year to year. Many of the behaviors in Barnacle Geese are undoubtedly similar if not identical in Canada Geese, and to a lesser extent, in Snow Geese as well.

One interesting observation had to do with which family member makes the family decisions. Families feed together by wandering through the meadow eating grass, but it is the goslings, not the parents, that determine where the family will graze. The goslings dash here and there, seemingly in random directions, and the parents casually follow them wherever they go, as human parents might patiently follow their children's unpredictable explorations in a park.

At the feeding trough, however, authority quickly changes. The father regularly bullies the mother and the young, pushing them farther down the trough as he insists on feeding where he wishes. After a while the mother apparently tires of being bullied and leads her young to the nearby forest. When the father suddenly realizes they are gone, he emits a wail that, to the human ear, clearly suggests panic and desperation, and he immediately races to the forest to find them.

Interestingly, I noticed comparable behavior in a pair of unmated young males that always stayed together as they swam, fed, and rested throughout the day. They had established a dominant/subdominant relationship, as most paired animals of the same or different sex do, and the dominant male (named "Wotan") regularly bullied the subordinate male ("Siegmond") at the trough. (Many of the geese had been given classical, Teutonic names.)

Eventually Siegmond would apparently tire of being bullied and would retreat to the forest. When Wotan suddenly realized he was alone, he uttered the same desperate wail as

the father in the example above, and rushed to the forest in search of his buddy.

Not only did this pair behave like the family at the trough, but their grazing behavior also was similar. It was subordinate Siegmond who, like the goslings, wandered in the meadow wherever he pleased. Wotan seemed content to follow him, as would a parent. This behavior shows that one's place in the dominance hierarchy, or "peck order," can dictate behavior in unexpected ways in pairs as well as in families.

Dominance hierarchy among males in this flock was typical of many animals: males with families were at the top, males with mates but no young were next, and unmated males were at the bottom. Every male dominated all males below him.

Also, all males were dominant over all females and juveniles, but dominance among females was less predictable. For example, the alpha male's mate (the "queen") was very gentle and always yielded when Number Two female (the mate of Number Two male) bullied her. She even yielded when her own goslings reached for food she was eating. Number Two female would never permit her goslings to do this!

It was not always easy for a male goose to defend his family. Fathers had to be vigilant—even against Wotan and Siegmond, who habitually attempted to kill goslings. On one occasion Siegmond lured the father from the nest while Wotan rushed in and attacked a gosling in front of its helpless mother. (Should we dare call this "guile"?) The gosling was saved only at the last moment by the returning father.

One day death struck a member of the flock, a gosling that had been ill the day before. The institute's director, Dr. Konrad Lorenz, unapologetically identified what followed as "grief," a term shunned by most animal behaviorists. What happened was this: the father, not the mother, went over to the carcass, looked down at it, and began

calling loudly; and after “grieving” for a few seconds he slowly led his family away and never returned.

As soon as the family departed, a young, unmated male approached the carcass. Like the father, he looked down at the carcass and began wailing. And, like the father, he left and wandered back to the meadow. I wondered why he was so sensitive to the death of someone else’s gosling.

To my surprise, he returned to the carcass a few minutes later. He looked down at it and began wailing a second time, suggesting more “grief” than even the gosling’s father had shown.

He repeated this behavior two more times, wandering into the meadow and then back to the carcass. What was particularly fascinating and somewhat baffling was that on the fourth approach he softly wailed while still walking towards the carcass—about thirty feet *before* he had reached it! His “grieving” actually had concluded before he arrived at the carcass. In fact, as he silently walked passed the carcass he seemed indifferent to it and did not even stop to glance at it. His “grief” now seemed

to be nothing more than a stereotyped, hollow ritual. He never returned to the carcass after that.

Behavior as subtle as the above, whatever its survival value might be, would hardly be expected in dabblers, where family structure is only strong enough to insure that the young reach maturity. Interestingly, these two contrasting ways of raising a family happen to work, and to work well, as evidenced by the large populations of both geese and dabblers. The question as to why different species, or groups of species, evolved drastically different mating strategies is a popular and enduring topic for speculation, especially in academic circles. There is a good chance that the answer may have long been lost in history.

“Greylag Goose and her gosling at bedtime.

Like children who want a last drink of water before bed, the gosling leaves its mother one last time at sunset to run down to the water for a drink, then returns to its snug bed beneath its mother’s wing.”

Kent Rylander
E-mail: kent.rylander@mac.com



The author discovered, while studying Barnacle Geese in Austria, that it is the goslings that determine where the family will graze for grass. Photo Wiki Commons.

Tropical Kingbird Nesting in Rockport

By Bron Rorex

While visiting Rockport on April 21, 2010 Victor Emanuel and Barry Lyon recognized the calls of a Tropical Kingbird. Upon investigation they located a pair of kingbirds carrying nesting materials to an oak tree located in the Rockport HEB store parking lot. They alerted friends with whom they had been birding and from there the word spread about the first documented nesting attempt of Tropical Kingbirds north of the lower Rio Grande Valley.

The date of discovery made this pair of Tropical Kingbirds the object of visits by participants in the Great Texas Birding Classic. Encouraged by the photo contest prize announced by the Rockport HEB manager, photographers arrived with their large lenses and tripods. Bird watchers from Texas and beyond visited.

The kingbirds had located their nest on a high branch along one of the parking lot aisles, making it difficult to photographically monitor the nesting progress however the adults could be heard vocalizing and seen carrying nesting materials to the site. By May 15 they were carrying the objects of their aerial flycatching prowess which they poked into their nestlings. Occasionally one of the kingbird parents could be seen in hot pursuit after a Great-tailed Grackle which had been sneaking towards the nest with possible ulterior motives. One time a kingbird parent was seen darting in attack mode from a nearby tree towards an aggressor grackle. Both



Tropical Kingbird nestlings (center) in a Rockport HEB parking lot.

dropped to the ground while the kingbird parent pummeled the grackle on the crown. I'd heard kingbirds were aggressive defenders of their nests and was impressed to see them in action.

Spring storms came and went and the branches surrounding the nest shed more and more of their dead wood to stresses from the elements. The skies overhead were always busy with the comings and goings of herons and egrets for their favored breeding grounds this year were located across the street from the HEB store. Laughing Gulls, ever present on the coast, eyed the kingbird nest as they coursed the skies. Bird watchers held their breath, and watched and waited.

Despite all threats, by late May we were occasionally able to discern baby birds' heads and hear their chirps. By late May the young kingbirds took turns standing on the edge of the nest stretching their wings



Tropical Kingbird Winning Photo by Bruce Sherman.



Tropical Kingbird photo contest winner Bruce Sherman (left) receives a HEB \$150.00 gift card from Rockport HEB Manager Thomas Haegg (right). Photo by Krystal White.

while parents called to them from an adjoining tree. Despite bird conversations between the parents in nearby trees and the nestlings, none of the baby birds took the big step of fledging. Unresolved debates arose among the birders whether two or three nestlings were in the nest.

A very strong weather front was predicted to arrive in Rockport the night of June 2–3. Despite encouragement from birders below warning the babies of the threat of a pending

storm, the babies continued to cling to the security of their nest. Darkness came and later under the cloak of darkness the expected strong winds arrived. When the sun rose in the morning, yet more branches had fallen to the ground below their nest tree. The nest was not to be found. Where were the baby kingbirds? When had they fledged? Were they unceremoniously ejected by winds during the night? The entire kingbird family was reportedly seen feeding a few blocks away shortly afterwards. Birding experts continue to report sightings of the Tropical Kingbird family in and around the HEB parking lot at the

end of July.

Serving as judges in the photo contest were Gene Blacklock, Ted Eubanks and Ron Weeks, authors of Texas Gulf Coast birding books. Bruce Sherman's winning photograph is attached and is now displayed at the Rockport HEB store.

Bron Rorex
E-Mail: bronr@charter.net

TOS 2nd T-Shirt Art Contest Announces a Winner!!

By Bron Rorex

Born and raised in the Texas panhandle in the small town of Panhandle, Evelyn Atkinson says she was always interested in drawing and design. She relates stories of her early childhood art work and of her father's encouragement in that area. Her higher education was at Canyon's West Texas State College and then at Texas Tech in Lubbock where she obtained her architectural degree, remaining especially interested in the construction design aspect of architecture - generating floor plans, construction details, building appearance.

Following graduation Evelyn joined a Lubbock architectural firm where she remained during her professional career, eventually joining her husband Atmar to become a partner in the firm. Their firm designed many buildings around the state of Texas, including several at Texas Tech University.



Artwork in article by Evelyn Atkinson.

They eventually began expanding their horizons with art and were encouraged to pursue this interest by their contacts in the Lubbock Art Association. Atmar's son Michael Atkinson also joined them in both architecture and art and is presently a well-known artist and sculptor.





Evelyn and Atmar's interest in art continued to attract them as retirement years approached. The inspiration and love of seascapes and birds at the Texas coast drew them to retire in Rockport in 1983 where they already owned a home and had already spent many happy vacations.

They soon joined the Rockport Art Association and before long Evelyn's art work graced the walls of regional exhibits and art



Evelyn Atkinson signing TOS t-shirts.



T.O.S. T-shirt. We'll be selling the shirts at the T.O.S. vendor booth at three birding events - Rockport's HummerBird Celebration in September, Harlingen's Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in November and in Fredericksburg's Wings Over the Hills in April. Also look for the T.O.S. sales booth at the January 2011 T.O.S. meeting in Ft. Worth.

Bron Rorex
E-mail: bronn@charter.net

galleries. She has served as a poster artist three times: Shrimporee 1992, Rockport Art Association 1998, Earth Day-Bay Day 2002. She illustrated the book "The Lobstick Prince" about a young Whooping Crane from the famous Lobstick family which survived a rattlesnake bite several years ago and who can at times be seen during whooper boat tours of the area.

Evelyn's Roseate Spoonbill painting now graces our current



Species Profile.....

Brown Pelican

By Jack Eitniear

A trip to the shores of the Gulf is not complete without viewing at least a few Brown Pelicans. While the pelican has been around for 40 million years its association with humans has not always been positive. Back in the 1980s' its luck turned rather sour when using wild bird feathers in fashions became popular. It got so bad that in 1903 the price of feathers had risen to \$80.00 an ounce which was more than the price of gold! During this time hundreds of millions of birds were killed for their plumes and meat. It was about this time when we lost the Passenger Pigeon, the Carolina Parakeet, the Eskimo Curlew and the Labrador Duck. Pelicans were not spared, and they too almost became extinct for their feathers. On March 14, 1903 Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge was created by a presidential decree from then President Teddy Roosevelt. Not only was the first of today's 95 million National Wildlife Refuges a result of the

market and plume hunter but so was the founding of the National Audubon Society.

If plume and market hunting was not enough of a threat soon the pelicans, and other birds that nested in colonies, were under siege by the egg hunters. The price of fresh eggs got so high that the Farralon Egg Company set a record by removing over 120,000 murre eggs within a two day period! And then we had the fisherman! During World War I canned sardines became popular. When their numbers began to fall, due to over harvesting, the pelicans were blamed! Fishermen unjustifiably slaughtered pelicans by the thousands. Finally on July 3, 1918 some protection was afforded the pelican and other birds that migrated between Canada and the United States. In 1936 the "Migratory Bird Treaty Act" was expanded to include Mexico and then Japan (1972) and the former USSR (1976). While the United States population continued to



Brown Pelican. All photos in article by Mark Bartosik.



Brown Pelican showing the "plunge dive" technique of capturing prey. Photo Mark Bartosik.



The fish most often fed on by Brown Pelicans are Menhaden but they will feed on most small fish. Photo Mark Bartosik.

threaten species due to pollution and habitat loss finally the direct persecution of many birds ended.

Nevertheless, they still were not safe! Shortly after its discovery in 1939 DDT became the most widely used pesticide in the world. At one point the United States produced over 220 million pounds a year! Of course we all know that working its way up the food chain DDT resulted in thinning of the egg's shell. The egg simply would break as it was being incubated. In 1969 a pelican colony in California composed of 750 nests had produced only 4 chicks! Scientists soon discovered DDT in the pelican's blood. DDT was not banned in the United States until 1972. Even then it would take up to 15 years for its impact on our birdlife to recover. In 1970 another California Brown Pelican colony composed of 550 nests produced only

a single chick. The species was then placed on the federal endangered species list.

Most authorities recognize seven species of pelicans in the family Pelecanidae. They include the Great White Pelican, *Pelicanus onocrotalus* (southern Europe, African and central Asia), the Pink-backed Pelican *P. rufescens* (Sub-Saharan Africa), the Spot-Billed Pelican *P. philippensis* (southern Asia, Iran to Philippines) the Dalmatian Pelican, *P. crispus*, (southeastern Europe to China) and the Australian Pelican *P. conspicillatus* a species that occurs in Australia and New Guinea plus occasionally on the nearby smaller islands. In Texas we are familiar with the last two being the American White Pelican, *P. erythrorhynchos* that occurs throughout North and Central America and the Brown Pelican, *P. occidentalis* which is a coastal species occurring along both the



The future of the Brown Pelican in Texas will depend on the vigilance of those that enjoy it.
Photo Mark Bartosik.



Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States southward through Central and South America.

Of the six (or so) races of the Brown Pelican we have *P. o. carolinensis* in Texas. This race occurs from the coasts of South Carolina to Venezuela!!

In Texas more than 90% of our Brown Pelicans nest on two islands. The first is Pelican Island in Corpus Christi Bay and the second is on Sundown Island found in Matagorda Bay. Brown Pelicans can be found along the Texas coast throughout the year. Nesting begins in February with records of eggs from that month to as late as July. By late May most eggs (they usually lay 4) have hatched and white-feathered flightless young dominate the colony. Nesting success from

1967 to 1986 was 1.3 nestlings /pair.

In the 10 years span from 1986-1995 Audubon Christmas Counts reported more than 10,000 Brown Pelicans which was significantly more than the 16 in the 1960s.

The Brown Pelican still faces threats from oil pollution and spills, contaminants and pollution like plastics, fishing lines and nets, over-fishing, gill nets, disturbance at breeding colonies, loss of nesting habitat, and now perhaps wind turbines! The Brown Pelican seems to have rebounded but its future status will depend on how vigilant those that enjoy its presence are in assuring its survival.

This paper included materials from the following internet sources:

Fact Sheet, Brown Pelican U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov/angered/>

Karen Benzel, In Harms Way: Endangered Brown Pelicans face an uncertain future. International Bird Rescue Research Center
www.ibrrc.org/pelican_history.html

Elliot, Lee. F. Brown Pelican in Texas Breeding Bird Atlas (K. Arnold and K. Benson, eds)
<http://txtbba.tamu.edu/accounts/brpe/brpeacc.html>

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Edited by Sheridan Coffey



A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America

By Jeffrey Glassberg

Soft cover: 272 pages, Publisher- Sunstreak Press 2007, Language English, ISBN 978-1-4243-2029-5 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4243-0915-8 (pb)

It's an easy progression to go from looking at birds to looking at butterflies. Both have wings; both are colorful; both are found in abundance in Texas. More and more birders are turning their binoculars to these other winged creatures. Jeffrey Glassberg has been instrumental in this conversion with the publication of his *Butterflies Through Binoculars* books, which cover the species found in the United States and Canada. Now he has added another tool for Texas butterfly watchers, *A Swift Guide to Butterflies of Mexico and Central America*.

Texas has long been known for vagrant Mexican birds. Since more people have started looking for butterflies in the Rio Grande Valley, vagrant butterflies are showing up, too. New species for the United States are turning up every year in Texas. There are excellent field guides for North American (excluding Mexico) butterflies, but they cannot keep up with this influx. This field guide fills that gap. It covers more than 1700 species, and includes every species currently found in the Rio Grande Valley and those that might wander into the state.

The book is very well laid out. At 5.5 by 8.25 inches and about 3/4 inch deep, its easy to carry in the field. Due to the high number of species covered it uses minimal text, but still is able to convey a great deal of information. There are 3,250 full color photographs. When possible, photos taken in a natural environment are employed. When these are not available museum shots are used with a neutral green background. The natural shots are very useful, as the position of wings in museum specimens can be very misleading. A good example of this is found on page 210 with the illustrations of the Mexican Underskipper (*Zariaspes mytheucus*). In the top left corner a natural shot of the bug is seen. Two pinned specimens are to the right. The pinned bugs look flat and open, nothing like the live one, which holds its wings in a delta position.

The photos are labeled with both a common and scientific name. Small maps are presented in one corner of the photograph. Field marks are pointed out with a red line, using abbreviations, which are decoded in the front of the book. A small line above the name indicates the length of the forewing. Color-washes over the species name indicate ranges. Different colored boxes also show host plant names, flight periods and habitat. It is a very efficient system. Equally efficient is the visual index in the back of the book, along with a regular index. Tiny thumbnails are presented of basic types of butterflies, such as swallowtails, metalmarks, hairstreaks, open winged skippers, etcetera. This is very handy in the field, allowing one to narrow a butterfly down to a section of the guide.

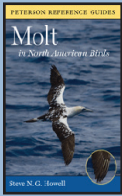
The book is not without fault. Some of the range maps are inaccurate, though it does need to be said that there is a lot to learn about ranges. The author himself states as much in the introduction. There has been some controversy over the common names presented. Scientific and common names were taken from the North American Butterfly Association checklist. Where common names had not been given previously the author created one. In a few cases insects that did have common names in use, were re-named, as in *Colobura dirce*. I learned this butterfly as *Dirce Beauty*, but Glassberg calls it *Little Beauty*. This is a minor criticism. In time consistency will come with common names, as they have in birds.

The photographs are small, but show some spectacular insects. Every time I open the book I find myself aching for my next trip to the tropics. The variety is amazing. It can be a bit overwhelming, but with study one should be able to ID a good number of insects. It does need to be

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mentioned that not every butterfly can be identified by photo. Some similar species require field dissection of genital organs. Obviously this is beyond the scope of the average hobbyist. This field guide will lend itself very well to anyone wanting to step up to the challenge. I include it in my book bag on every trip I take to the valley.

Sheridan Coffey



Molt in North American Birds

By Steve N.G. Howell

Peterson Reference Guides: ISBN 978-0-547-15235-6 \$35.00

Hardcover. Language: English. 267 pages. Illustrations: more than 300 color photographs; 6 diagrams; 2 tables. Size 10.25x7.25x0.8".

If there's one question guaranteed to strike terror into the heart of all but the very best birders, it is: "so what age/plumage is it?" Despite genuine advances in the identification of many species, the Elephant in the room has always been Molt, and how it affects our interpretation of what we are seeing. Steve Howell, along with Chris Corben, Peter Pyle and a few others have been putting in the hard study work and thinking required to sort out this enigmatic element of our hobby. The fruits of Howell's labor is this Reference Guide, and tasting this particular fruit will definitely impart eye-opening knowledge!

The subject matter is not easy to digest, but Howell has done a terrific job of conveying the important fundamentals in an easy-to read, conversational style. The core of this book is the 67-page Introduction that solves the problem of conveying a large amount of information by asking a series of Background Questions. This section provides much useful background (e.g. Molt Cycles) and prepares the reader for the necessary details that follow in a section called Underlying Patterns. The Underlying Patterns section describes and explains the four fundamental Molt Strategies used by almost all bird species (exceptions are briefly mentioned). The last section in the Introduction – Birds in the Real World – discusses the factors that influence the way molts play out, and then describes the core molt patterns (and exceptions).

The bulk of the book comprises family accounts; one to five pages for each family with well-chosen photo examples that demonstrate some of the molt features described therein. Each Account lists the Molt Strategies used by that family, then discusses how these strategies are distributed through the family, plus any exceptions. The book ends with Acknowledgements, a very easy-to-understand Glossary, a comprehensive Bibliography, and an Index.

Molt is a complex subject where large gaps can be found both in published documentation of it and actual data required to properly analyze it. The author does a great job of making clear how much we still don't know, and the book is dotted with succinct questions for which as yet there are no answers.

Remarkably for a book of this size on this subject, I could find very few errors/weaknesses; here are a few that could confuse the reader:

Figure 7 (flying Baird's Sandpiper, page 5): the main text does a good job of explaining that what we call "tertials" are actually elongated inner secondaries - yet the text/lines added to the image to identify the secondaries does not include the tertials, when it should.

Figure 34 (spreadwinged Black Tern, page 25): The caption is accurate in its description of the four generations of primaries evident – yet the text added onto the image for primaries 2–4 are mysteriously called "formative (newest)", when they are actually supplemental and P1 is the newest feather (and wave).

"Environment and Food", page 48: towards the end of the second paragraph of this entry it refers to some Glaucous-winged Gulls as having "an extensive preformative molt in October" –

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it would have been less confusing to have referred to this as a “first prealternate molt” given that preceding sections have stated that large gulls use a molt strategy (SAS) that does not have a preformative molt.

One small criticism related to the above point is that much recently-published information about molt in large gulls has referred to the post-juvenile molt as being a formative molt, but in this book this molt is now called a first-prealternate molt. As a gull aficionado I would have liked this to have been more-clearly addressed and explained.

Lastly, while the concept of the Molt Cycle is introduced and explained well, the matter of exactly what defines the end of one cycle and start of the next one is not discussed. This is important because for most species the technical definition of the start of a cycle is only recognizable on a bird in-the-hand, and birders need a more practical (if less-accurate) definition – typically the shedding of P1.

These very minor problems apart, I find this book to be a Milestone Event for serious birders: at last the mysteries of Molt are laid-bare in a reader-friendly and cogent manner. I unreservedly recommend this book as ESSENTIAL for any birder who wants to better-understand the WHY and HOW of birds, not just the WHAT.

Martin Reid



All About Birds: A Short Illustrated History of Ornithology,

By Valérie Chansigaud. 2010. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, NJ. 240 pp., \$29.95.

This book may appear a bit esoteric for most birders, but it warrants brief mention here because most of us will find that we share the interests and enthusiasm for birds that is evident in the lives of many ornithologists, even those in Antiquity.

The bulk of the book consists of short biographical accounts of both professional and amateur students of birds. (The term “ornithologist” goes back only to 1677, and “professional” ornithologist is a relatively recent career.) The majority are Europeans, but the names of several persons will be familiar because of birds named after them: Audubon, Coues, Nuttall, Bewick, Wilson, Bullock, Swainson, Cassin, Baird, Ridgway, and others.

The book, first published in French, is well written and contains samples of bird illustrations throughout the ages, making possible a rough comparison of historical artistic styles. The appended chronology of events is original and helpful. What surprised me was how the entries for so many of the minor historical figures held my attention not only because of their contributions to science, but also because of the interesting lives they led.

Kent Rylander

**Want an extra copy of this publication?
Question about your membership?
Contact TOSMember@yahoo.com**

Changes in the T.O.S. Board

A brief update of the T.O.S. Board changes during the past year. Chris Pipes is the new Region 4 representative on the TOS board. He lived in Odessa, Texas for 32 years before moving to Alpine in 2008. He worked for the Odessa Police Department for 25 years, starting in 1983, and served as chief of police during the last 6 years. He has a master's degree in biology from the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, and has nearly completed a second master's degree in range and wildlife management from Sul Ross State University. Chris was recently hired by The Nature Conservancy to serve as the Davis Mountains Project Director and manages the Conservancy's 32,000-acre Davis Mountains Preserve, which includes Mount Livermore, the highest peak in the Davis Mountains, as well as the Madera Creek watershed. Chris has been married to his wife, Pamela, for 21 years, and they and their three dogs (their furry children – they have no two-legged kids) recently moved to Ft. Davis so Chris could be closer to the preserve. Pamela works as the Graduate Center Developer for Sul Ross State University.

Pamela has been birding for about 20 years and Chris for about 10. The great birding opportunities in the Trans-Pecos area of Texas



Chris Pipes (left) talks with a TNC volunteer as they examine the state record Ponderosa pine tree on the Springs trail at the Davis Mountains Preserve.

are part of the reasons they moved there following Chris's retirement. Specifically for birding, they have taken trips all over Texas, New Mexico and southeastern Arizona. They have also done some birding during trips to the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. Chris is flattered to serve on the TOS board and is happy for the opportunity to represent The Nature Conservancy within this prestigious group. Chris found birding and nature study to be effective escapes from the stresses of a police career and, he much prefers the current wildlife he encounters on the preserve to the "wild life" he dealt with in Odessa.



New Region 3 Director Boyd Saunders

It was the summer of 1982 that I started birding in South Texas. My brother and I thought we would try out birding after he received Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds of Texas. We took a trip to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and spotted a Crested Caracara fly off the road and I was hooked. The first few years I birded was mainly around Kingsville, Corpus Christi, and the Rio Grande Valley. My father was in the Navy and he was then stationed for the next six years in Maryland. I was fortunate to get in six years of birding on the East Coast before returning to South Texas. I moved to East Texas to finish up college and worked at museums in Tyler. I became a State Park Interpreter at Tyler State Park in the winter of 2008. I started birding tours shortly after with great success. I have been blessed with

being able to work with some really talented birders from all over the state (Eds. We welcome Boyd Saunders as the new Region 3 Director).



Debbie Valdez

Hi! My name is Debbie Valdez, I live in Houston, and I am filling in as Region 8 director for the remainder of Brad Lirette's term on the T.O.S. board.

I currently teach high school biology and aquatic science at Kerr HS in Alief

ISD on the west side of Houston—although I did not originally plan to be a teacher, I've taught for 25 years. It's a challenging career.

Before I became a teacher, I was headed toward a career in resource management. My first degree was in liberal arts/botany at UT Austin, where I learned about plant taxonomy and helped search for rare plants. I decided to study forestry and wildlife ecology, and got my MFS from Yale University. Still wasn't all that excited about birds. I went into the Peace Corps and spent 4 years in Paraguay training teachers in environmental education. By then I was beginning to think birds were kind of interesting, although I didn't know much about them.

I came back to Houston and started a family and at some point my mother, who had been running around all this time on field trips with the likes of Ted Eubanks, David Dauphin, Bob Behrstock, Fred Collins, Jim Morgan, and other OGs, finally took me to a T.O.S meeting in Uvalde . . . and I was hooked. —Thanks, Mom!

T.O.S. is a wonderful resource for us all. I look forward to every field trip and every meeting, and I always come back rejuvenated, with new friends and new

knowledge about birds and the conservation issues that affect them. I'm interested in learning about our organization and I'd like to work to make our sanctuaries places even more people can enjoy. I'd especially like to get more students involved with T.O.S. and the sanctuaries. Let's harness that energy!



Anthony Hewetson

I was born Anthony Floyd in Chico, California, but moved to Oregon, at the age of three months, as soon as was possible. I spent my formative years chasing herps across the western half of Oregon, depending on where my dad's rise as a newspaper reporter had relocated us, and this fascination with amphibians and reptiles continued well into my undergraduate career at Oregon State University. Believe it or not, I actually went on several trips to California, Nevada, and Arizona with the Oregon State University Zoology Club and paid no attention to birds whatsoever!

Then, about half way through my undergraduate years, I met my brother, Martin Campbell and we started pursuing critters together. Back then, Martin's knowledge of birds was, though much better than mine, pretty spotty but he would occasionally point out an 'interesting' bird during a herp excursion. For a year or so, I didn't really pay much attention to his attempts to broaden my interests and then, one fine fall day on the Corvallis campus,

he pointed out a Spotted Towhee. For the first time in my life, I really looked at a bird . . . and I haven't stopped looking since. Given my current obsession with birds and the number of excessively cold, excessively damp, and excessively mosquito-laden venues I have now dragged Martin to over the years, in pursuit of birds, he may, at times, have regretted his attempts to get me to look at them.

After collecting a Bachelor's in Science (Zoology) at Oregon State University, I spent a couple of years doing whatever came along (including some highly entertaining stints as security at various nightclubs – some birders bounce!) before moving onto graduate school at Washington State University. In due course, I picked up a Master's of Science (Zoology) after aborting a research project on Black-billed Magpies (they were far too smart for me) and successfully completing a research project on nest-site selection by three sympatric species of chickadees.

I then spent five years working as a field biologist and attempting to find a real job – back in the halcyon days of federal and state hiring freezes. One year, realizing that I had

worked seven jobs for five different employers in six different states – in a single year - and that things were not getting any better, I decided to pursue a more stable career in molecular biology at Texas Tech University. From there I spring-boarded to a position teaching human anatomy to first year medical students . . . and here I am.

I currently teach human anatomy and run the anatomy lab at Texas Tech University's Health Science Center. I took my wife's last name, Hewetson, on 1 January 2005 – one of two dates I have, as a husband, committed to memory. This should explain for you all, how an Anthony Hewetson showed up in Lubbock right after an Anthony Floyd seemingly disappeared. In my free time, I compile bird records for my local Audubon chapter, I compile bird records for the ABA, I run a few CBCs, I run more than a few BBSs, and I document county butterfly records for BAMONA. I look forward to representing my region, a region that is far more interesting from a birding perspective than many folk are aware. (Eds. Anthony is the new Region 1 Director replacing Erik Breden. We thank Eric for this brief service to TOS!).

Texas Birds Annual Staff

Jack Eitnear Editor Bron Rorex Copy Editor

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President-elect's Message...

By Steve Gross

Now that we've put the second TOS Rocksprings trip to bed, it's time to consider April, 2011, when I assume the duties of TOS president. It's kind of a daunting thought, to be honest. I did, however, want to share with you some of my stray thoughts about events, points of emphasis, etc. that I'm tossing around in my oversized and fervid head.

I'm hoping to hold our Spring, 2011, meeting in Junction. Easter and the dates of an area bird festival have to be taken into consideration, but I'm thinking that we'll have the meeting over the weekend of May 7th. Junction is a great birding location, centrally located amidst many other great locales. The very few Junction-area birders have already offered their help, but I could use all the hands, brains, and backs I can entice into helping. If you'd be willing to lend your efforts to this cause, please contact me. More to come on meeting locations and dates.

I'd also like to find ways for TOS members to mix socially a bit more while still keeping intact the basic format of a meeting. I promise to bring my guitar one of these days, and I'd like to encourage other musicians to bring their acoustic instruments (unless you play the alpenhorn or the zither) and we'll try to find some time to play. This will not be the main thrust of any TOS gathering, but I'm sure that it'll be fun. I continue to amaze at the talent, education, humor, and plain good sense of TOS members, and music's just one more avenue for us to share parts of ourselves with the organization.



I'm also looking for closeted game show hosts to step forward for some fun activities we'll have scheduled at the various meetings.

I'd also like to encourage Century Club birders to host birding days in their areas of

exploration. David Sarkozi started us off with the Chambers County day, and I think that these days, while not officially TOS field trips, really help us to dig in to areas we don't normally bird. All of this field time offers the opportunity to add to our knowledge of Texas bird distribution. It's also an excuse to get together, see some birds, and perhaps meet a few people. The TOS listserv or TEXBIRDS would be suitable venues to alert other members of these Century Club days.

The board also discussed a clearinghouse via the TOS website wherein birders who are hosting Century Club days, looking for carpool partners for travel to meetings, etc. can post their requests, offers, and other communications. This idea is still in its early stages, but it doesn't make much sense for twenty-five cars to drive to a TOS meeting when some of those individuals could have carpooled had they had the chance to communicate with each other. As a leader in an environmentally-related organization, it just seems to be good sense.

As ever, we always welcome your suggestions on how we can do better as an organization. We want to have the broadest possible membership, and that also involves encouraging other birders to join. We'll try to give you good reasons to join and renew your memberships, I can promise you that. If you're willing to help out with one or more of our endeavors, we'll certainly put you to work. If you can donate funds to help us out, that's great, too. Spreading the word about Texas and its birds is one of our prime goals. Let's work together to bring the word to anyone who's interested.

I hope you'll contact me if I can answer questions or address your suggestions. My email is sgross77@comcast.net and my cell number is 281-787-3888. I'd love to hear from you, and I hope to meet as many of you as possible from this point on. I'll do my best to address your concerns and to represent TOS.

Steve Gross, TOS President-elect

E-mail: sgross77@comcast.net

Birders Reflect on the passing of Warren Pulich....

"Yes, Warren was a real stickler for detail in bird notes. Sometimes I handed him my notes as opposed to mailing them. One night he was checking them for correctness when he stopped and said "Where were you standing when you saw this bird. "When I said, "I can't remember" he replied, "Just how my records get messed up. You reported it 2 days early ". I learned to be careful, and also I saw the reasoning for it. He was a great teacher, and an extremely fine man". Myrna Engle

"Warren was a dear friend of mine and will be missed. We met shortly after I retired from the Air Force and moved to Highland Village in 1983. I attended several of his birding classes and joined him on four of his Whooping Crane trips. I quickly became involved in his Lewisville Christmas Bird Count and took over as compiler for him 17 years ago. My wife, Linda, and I also knew Anne and know that they are again together. One of my fondest memories is when he took me to the old Dallas Nature Center to see my first Black-capped Vireo. That day we tallied 18 of them! Fondly remembering Warren." Keith Lockhart

"I came to know Warren Pulich through our shared efforts for many years on the Texas Bird Records Committee. Warren was Old School, preferring not to give solid weight or credence to many sight records of rare birds. To that end, and as evidenced in his review of sightings of the Golden-cheeked Warbler in his monograph, he tended to dismiss many records which might be justifiably re-analyzed by more recent standards, given newer field identification knowledge and tools. Yet his contrarian contributions to that committee helped the entire committee in turn to be more resolute in its examination of evidence and its acceptance of rare bird reports. As a result, the accepted documentation of rare birds in Texas has always been recognized as the gold standard, and for that and so much more, Warren Pulich is owed a debt of gratitude." Chuck Sexton

"To add a footnote to Chuck's fine comments. Shortly after the Endangered Species Act became law, Pulich published his treatise on the Golden-Cheeked Warbler: Warren M. Pulich, The Golden-



cheeked Warbler: A Bioecological Study (Austin: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 1976). Pulich's work provided one of the foundations to start making the case for listing the Golden-Cheeked Warbler as an endangered species. When you still see a Golden-Cheeked Warbler today, he is one of the people, among many, to thank, and now remember." Jeff Mundy

"Jeff mentioned Warren's "The Golden-cheeked Warbler" is a classic. In fact so much so that knowing mine to be falling to pc.s I searched online and found a replacement. There are several on Amazon but there are not that many to be found online. Any serious Texas birder that does not have this historic and still relevant reference in their library is without a complete collection to be sure." Brush Freeman

"I remember taking one of his birding classes when I first moved to the Dallas area 18 years ago. He was very much into "habitat" when birding. I can vividly remember on a field trip [for the class] he said "This is perfect habitat for the Brown Thrasher" and I'll be darn, a Brown Thrasher hopped out! I also was lucky enough to be on Whooping Crane trip of his. A great loss for the birding community." Sue Yost

Warren passed away on November 27, 2010 surrounded by his loving family. In lieu of flowers, contributions in Warren's memory can sent to the Warren M. Pulich Biology Fund-Advancement Office at the University of Dallas-Irving.





Dramatic photo of a Brown Pelican soaring above the shoreline in Texas.

Photo by Mark Bartosik.