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TEXAS Birds ANNUAL

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Editor's Introduction

Every year I "cast my net" for articles not knowing what I will retrieve. This year I was pleasantly surprised at several contributions dealing with bird watching programs involving the next generation of birders. Despite the popularity of electronic games it's encouraging to see at least some children and teenagers are birding. If you have the opportunity I encourage you to take your children or any other youth group into the woods to experience the joys of birdwatching. If the next generation does not find value in wildlife they will be less likely to preserve it.

Most of the press about Mexico in recent years has been bad. Unknown to many is that fact that the horrors of the drug cartels seldom extend into the southern Mexican States or into the Yucatan of southeast Mexico. To illustrate this we present two articles from the Yucatan of Mexico. The first on an exciting birding program in Merida and the second about a birding trip by long time TOS publications contributor Tim Brush. The Yucatan is not only a safe place to visit but also full of Mayan ruins and colorful wildlife.

I would also like to thank a few of the long-standing contributors to *Texas Birds Annual*. William S."Bill" Clark, Tim Brush, Sheridan Coffey, Bron Rorex, Bill Lindemann and Carolyn Ohl-Johnson have all previously contributed to this publication. Their long-standing support is greatly appreciated. While it's not difficult to locate individuals that enjoy this publication, finding individuals willing to contribute to it is another matter! To those that do I extend my warmest appreciation.

Now grab a glass of your favorite beverage, seek out a shady place and enjoy this issue of *Texas Birds Annual*!

Jack Clinton Eitniear, Editor

On behalf of all the writers, photographers and artists that made this publication possible.

Screech Owl. Artist Lynn Delvin.

Front cover art: Lynn Barber, winner of the TOS tee shirt art contest.

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Wood Ducks are frequent residents of the eastern three quarters of the state. Photo Peter Forton.

President's Message

by Steve Gross

Summer is a time when a lot of binoculars get stowed away, out of the blistering heat of parked cars. At times, it's hard to convince oneself that braving the heat will be worth the effort. However, parts of the state that aren't riddled with high humidity can offer very comfortable birding, particularly in the morning and evening. Birds like the Black-tailed Godwit found at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge in June are testimony to the fact that great birds can be found in less hospitable seasons.

This July, a new birding festival was held in Marathon, Birds and Butterflies of the Big Bend. Temperatures were great, there were birds on their nests throughout the region, and morning and evening allowed for spates of birdsong. Since the festival was held in late July, there were even southbound migrants, including Spotted Sandpiper, Least Flycatcher, Long-billed Curlew, and Purple Martin. Christmas Mountains Oasis, the bird-rich habitat owned and maintained by Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, even saw its first Louisiana Waterthrush. In short, the birds are there if you make the effort to look for them.

Users of eBird will note that there is a dearth of data on many species during the summer. Let's see what we can do about that. Even a few hours at your local patch can add to our storehouse of knowledge. Also, in the next few years, TOS will offer opportunities to help expand the limits of knowledge of bird distribution across Texas, focusing on a few unique species. More on that as the time draws nigh.

As we move into fall, we will pick up where we left off with our state parks bird walks. If you'd like to host one at your local park, please contact your Regional Director.

Over the next year or so, TOS will continue to offer in-state opportunities for birding. In addition to our semi-annual meetings (see your next newsletter for Winter Meeting information), we consider it our obligation to bring Texas birders together in appreciation of the avian diversity of our wonderful state.

I hope to see you in the field in the coming months.

Steve Gross
TOS President

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Raptor Banding In The Rio Grande Valley: Winter 2011-2012

By William S. (Bill) Clark
Photos by Author.

I have been banding raptors in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) since I moved here in 2002. Most of my banding activity has been in the winter, but I have captured and banded raptors in every month. I captured more raptors last winter than during any previous winter. Herein I will describe the raptors caught by species as to age, sex (if applicable), and subspecies and describe some unusual ones, as well as some others caught in previous years.

I caught a total of 347 raptors from November 12, 2011 to March 11, 2012 during 21 full days and 4 partial days of active banding. The totals by species, subspecies, age, and sex are shown in Table 1. I theorize that the reason for the greater number of raptors caught is that there seemed to be more raptors here last winter, most likely because of the extreme drought in most of Texas north of here, where they would presumably winter in normal years.

Raptors were captured using Bal-Chatri traps, most often with house sparrows and domestic mice as lures. Raptors were caught either in sugar cane fields that have recently been harvested or from perches along sides of roads. A full set of measurements were taken on each raptor: wing chord, body mass, culmen, hallux, and tail length. Photographs of many were taken with one wing extended from front and back.

My studies. I am doing a study of the molts and plumages of White-tailed Hawk. They are unique among Buteos in that they do not reach adult plumage for three or four years, not one year as in most other Buteos. One study is on the plumages of each age class as determined by the molt of the remiges and rectrices, and another study, with coauthors, will present differences in plumages by sex, based on sexing by DNA. I am doing a similar plumage and molt study of Harris's Hawk. All of these studies are based on data from captured raptors.

I am also studying Harlan's Hawk, but few of these occur in the Rio Grande Valley, and this study is conducted elsewhere. I am trying to characterize the many differences between

Table 1. Number of raptors captured by species, age, sex, and subspecies Winter 2011-2012.

Cooper's Hawks: 10,	5 adults and 5 juveniles.
Harris's Hawks: 39,	23 adults (14 males and 9 females)
	16 juveniles (5 males and 11 females)
Red-shouldered Hawks: **35**,	21 adults (2 east. & 19 *texanus*)
	13 juveniles (2 east. & 11 *texanus*)
Swainson's Hawks: **2**,	both juveniles
White-tailed Hawks: **125**,	24 adults (12 of each sex)
	4 Basic III (3 males & 1 female)
	17 Basic II (10 males & 7 females)
	80 juveniles (40 of each sex)
Red-tailed Hawks: **85**,	26 adults (14 west, 8 east, 3 Fuertes, 1 Kriders, & 3 undetermined)
	13 Basic II (4 west, 7 east, and 2 undetermined)
	47 juveniles (1 west (rufous morph) & 46 east (incl. Fuertes & Kriders))
American Kestrels: **51**,	31 adults (15 males & 16 females)
	20 juveniles (11 males & 7 females) & 2 unknown age females

Harlan's and Red-tailed Hawks. Surprisingly, there has been no good taxonomic rationale published to justify including Harlan's Hawk as a subspecies of Red-tail. You can read four draft presentations on my preliminary findings at this web site: http://www.globalraptors.org/grin/ResearcherResults.asp?lresID=155

The first four paragraphs are results of my Harlan's Hawk studies and can be downloaded as pdfs.

Recaptures. Two raptors captured last winter were already banded. One was a Basic III (third plumage) female White-tailed Hawk that I banded two years previously as a juvenile; it was caught not far from the original banding site. It is shown in Fig. 1. Its wing chord was about the same both times, but its body mass, culmen, and hallux had all increased. It was in the proper plumage for a hawk of this age, with the expected molt pattern. The other already banded raptor was an adult female kestrel that Mark Conway had banded six years earlier in almost the exact same place. I correctly aged it as an adult.

Unusual capture. An adult Red-tailed Hawk caught its talons in the mesh of the trap. It had no nooses holding it. This is shown in Figure 2.

Multiple captures. Two raptors were caught together on the same trap sixteen times. Twelve cases were of two White-tails together,

Fig. 1. Basic III White-tailed Hawk recaptured. This hawk was banded by me two years previously as a juvenile.

Fig. 2. Adult Red-tailed Hawk captured because its talons were stuck in the mesh of the trap.

and one each was a White-tail and a Red-tail, a White-tail and a Kestrel, and two Harris's. In previous years, I have caught three raptors on numerous occasions and three times have caught four raptors at the same time: twice four White-tails and once four Harris's.

Molt. A Basic II Red-tail had skipped over P4 in its primary molt on the left wing. The retained P4 was juvenile. A juvenile Harris's in molt had replaced P1 on both wings but also P3 on the left wing, skipping over P2 is shown in Fig. 3.

Five adult hawks showed four waves of primary molt: three White-tails and two Red-tails.

Full crops. Many captured raptors had full or half full crops. Fig. 4 is a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk with a full crop. I theorize that although the crop was full, the stomach was still empty and that the raptors were still hungry and actively hunting.

Diseases. A juvenile White-tailed Hawk had a crossed beak (Fig. 5). This is a type of

Fig. 3. Juvenile Harris's Hawk in molt. Primary two was abnormally skipped over.

Fig. 4. Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk. One of many raptors caught with a full crop.

'long-bill syndrome' seen on many Red-tailed Hawks in the Pacific Northwest, in which the beak continues to grow and becomes abnormal in structure and color. A juvenile Red-shoulder had a broken-off beak tip (Fig. 6). This is another variation of the long-bill syndrome. Another juvenile Red-shoulder had pox around its eyes (Fig. 7). A juvenile Red-tail had pox on its foot.

Fig. 5. Juvenile White-tailed Hawk with crossed beak. One type of abnormal beak resulting from the 'Long-billed syndrome' when the beak continues to grow and becomes abnormal in structure and color.

Cooper's Hawk. Cooper's Hawks are only occasionally seen along the RGV roads, and the three captured last winter was about normal. But last winter I caught seven in my back yard, which is a record. I have banded 26 from 2002 through last summer, with a maximum of five in any one year.

Harris's Hawk. Some of the Harris's Hawks caught had unusual plumages. One adult female was a partial albino, with some white feathers on the belly, leg feathers, and the under wing coverts (Fig. 8). Another had an unusual tail with odd white banding. In

Fig. 6. Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk with broken tip of beak. Another type of abnormal beak resulting from the 'Long-billed syndrome,' with the abnormally long and weakened tip broken off.

Fig. 7. Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk. It has pox around its eyes.

previous years, I caught a dilute-plumage adult. My previous high annual banding total was 40, just about the same as the 39 caught last winter. I had banded 258 Harris's from 2002 through last summer.

Red-shouldered Hawk. The number of this species in the RGV last winter was much higher than in previous winters. The total of 35 banded was much greater than the overall total banded from 2002 until last summer of 14. The maximum captured in any previous year was only five.

Fig. 8. Adult female Harris's Hawk. Partial albino with some white feathers.

Red-shouldered Hawk adults usually complete their remige molt every year, but I caught two adults that had not replaced all of their primaries. One had both adult primaries P10 (outer) old and the other had both juvenile P10 old. The first adult also had old adult feathers on Secondary S9 right and tail feather T3 left. Most of the Red-shouldereds captured were the subspecies *texanus* or intergrades with nominate. Fig. 9 is a typical juvenile *texanus* with underparts marked with blobs rather than the streaks shown my nominate juveniles.

Fig. 9. Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk. Typical *texanus.*

Fig. 10. Swainson's Hawk juvenile (right) with juvenile White-tailed Hawk (left).

Swainson's Hawk. I caught two Swainson's Hawks last winter, both juveniles. They occur regularly in winter in the RGV. A pic of one in hand with a juvenile White-tail is shown in Fig. 10. I usually see them in winter associating with flocks of White-tails, almost always at sugar cane fields that have just been harvested. I have captured between one and three of this species every winter. A dark morph in Basic II plumage caught several years ago is shown in Fig. 11. All winter captures were in sugar cane fields.

Fig. 11. Basic II dark-morph Swainson's Hawk.

In previous years, I caught quite a few migrant Swainson's in spring, with a maximum of 37 for a year, for a total banded of 124 from 2002 until last summer.

White-tailed Hawk. White-tailed Hawks have three immature plumages due to delayed plumage maturation, reaching adult plumage when they are three or four years old. I have captured 523 from 2002 until last summer, with many individuals of each age and sex class. The most captured in any previous year was 124.

White-tailed Hawks were aged based on the molt of the remiges and also by plumages. Juveniles show no remige molt, Basic II hawks show one wave of primary molt, Basic III hawks show two waves of primary molt and two ages of replacement secondaries, and older hawks show three or more waves of primary molt. Females are generally larger than males, and there are some differences in plumages for each age class. I took feather samples on about 200 hawks that will be sexed using their DNA.

Red-tailed Hawk. The only western Red-tail juvenile captured last winter was a rufous morph, shown in Fig. 12. All other juveniles captured were either Eastern or Fuertes Red-tails. Some of the adults captured were Western, but most were Eastern or Fuertes.

I have banded 152 Red-tails from 2002 until last summer. The most caught in any one year was 59.

In previous years I have caught a partial albino adult, shown in Fig. 13 and an adult that is mostly Krider's Hawk, shown in Fig. 14.

Fig. 12. Juvenile rufous-morph Red-tailed Hawk. This was the only juvenile Western Red-tail caught last winter.

Fig. 13. Partial albino Red-tailed Hawk. I have caught only this one.

American Kestrel. I sent 21 photos of male kestrels, especially their tails, to Beth Womack, who is studying the tail variation geographically. I also gave her the measurements taken on each kestrel. One male had a very odd tail pattern (Fig. 15). A juvenile female kestrel also had an odd tail pattern, with some extra growth on the tip (Fig. 16).

I have banded 140 kestrels from 2002 until last summer, all in the winter or spring as the species does not breed in the Rio Grande Valley. I banded a maximum of 31 in a previous year.

Fig. 14. Adult Krider's Red-tailed Hawk.

Fig. 15. Male Kestrel with odd tail.

Fig. 16. Female Kestrel with odd tail.

Species not banded last winter. Table 2 is a list of raptor captured in other years but not this past winter. These are discussed below.

Turkey Vulture. I caught a juvenile a few years ago in a sugar cane field. They regularly gather around the traps in the harvested fields, but they almost never get on the traps. I guess that this juvenile was impatient and tried to get the mouse even though it was alive. I did not band this vulture because it is not permitted because they defecate on their legs. Many years ago when that was permitted, several banded Turkey Vultures were found with serious leg infections under their bands.

White-tailed Kite. Kites are encountered regularly in the RGV, especially in the winter. But they do not respond to traps placed near them, as they hunt exclusively from hovering. And it is difficult to get traps under hovering kites, as they do not stay in one place for long. I caught the three on three different late afternoons at a large winter night roost (Clark 2006). I noticed that the kites were hovering around the peripheries of the roost late in the afternoon for a while. I placed lots of traps with mice and covered them somewhat with grass to make the traps less visible but managed to catch only three of them. One immature is shown in Fig. 17.

Table 2. Other raptors banded in the Rio Grande Valley.

Species	Total
Turkey Vulture	1*
White-tailed Kite	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2
Gray Hawk	5
Broad-winged Hawk	5
Crested Caracara	2
Merlin	4
Aplomado Falcon	8**
Prairie Falcon	1
Peregrine Falcon	

*Captured but not banded **Banded under an Endangered Species Permit.

Sharp-shinned Hawk. This species is rather rare in winter in the RGV, and is usually found in woodlands. One of the two caught was in a sugar cane field and the other in my back yard. Both were juvenile females.

Gray Hawk. The RGV is a great place to see Gray Hawks. But they are usually found in one of the refuges or sanctuaries. However, I occasionally encounter them outside these areas and have captured five. Two were adults, one is shown in Fig. 18, and three were juveniles.

Broad-winged Hawk. Although Broad-wings pass through the RGV in great numbers twice a year on migration, they are seldom encountered perched beside the roads. Over the years I have caught only five juveniles.

Crested Caracara. This is another difficult species to capture, even though they are predators, as they are wary of the traps. The two banded, one adult and one juvenile, were captured at harvested sugar cane fields. Like vultures, they regularly gather around the traps in the fields, but almost never try to get the lures. The juvenile is shown in Fig. 19.

Merlin, Merlins are regular winter visitors in the RGV. But although they are attracted to

Fig. 17. Immature White-tailed Kite.

Fig. 18. Adult Gray Hawk.

sparrows in the traps, they are usually trap shy and will not actually get on the traps. However, over the years I did manage to catch five, three along roads and two in sugar cane fields.

Aplomado Falcon. I had an Endangered Species permit for six years and caught eight Aplomados, three of which had already been banded by Peregrine Fund personnel. Four were adults, two males and two females, and four were juveniles. An adult female is shown in Fig. 20.

Prairie Falcon. I caught only one Prairie Falcon in the RGV. It was an adult female. It was caught with a special trap called a Phai. I rarely use this trap as this is not a species that I am studying.

Peregrine Falcon. I caught only two Peregrine Falcons in the RGV. Both were adult females. They were caught with a special trap called a Phai. I rarely use this trap as this is also not a species that I am studying.

Banding Demos. I regularly give banding demos for groups that are meeting in the RGV,

Fig. 19. Juvenile Crested Caracara.

Fig. 20. Adult female Aplomado Falcon. This female is breeding now on the Laguna Atascosa NWR.

Fig. 21. Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival raptor banding field trip.

especially every November for the RGV Birding Festival. This field trip spends the morning with me and I show them the raptors caught and the banding process. Fig. 21 is the group from the 2011 festival, along with one of the juvenile White-tails. That morning we caught eight White-tails, one Swainson's, one Kestrel, one Harris's, and one Red-tail, so they saw a variety of raptors in the hand.

The future. I will continue to band raptors in the RGV, and next winter try to finish my studies on White-tailed and Harris's Hawks.

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American Wood Warblers: Butterflies of the Bird World

By Bill Lindemann

Early in my forty-seven years of birding, I found myself attracted to the tiny and beautiful wood warbler family and the fascination continues today. I am not sure why they interested me, but it was not because they were easy to identify. The most likely reason was the wide array of colors and plumage patterns found among the males. Like most birders, I accepted the challenge to learn how to identify these colorful and highly active small birds. What I did not anticipate was that it would take me about 45 years to find and identify all of them in North America.

One hundred and twelve wood warblers are found only in the western hemisphere and more than one-half of them can be found in North America north of Mexico. Fifty-seven of them have been sighted in Texas at one time or another as they migrate in the spring and fall seasons. One species, the Bachman's Warbler, is considered likely extinct and one species, the Golden-cheeked Warbler, is on the endangered list. Most are migratory, but eight species can be found in the state throughout the year. Twenty-two species breed in Texas and fifteen consistently winter here.

What makes our American Wood Warblers so special? These small insectivores generally tend to be colorful, well-marked, and very active, attributes often used to describe our butterflies. They have adapted to a broad diversity of habitats from swamps to deserts and can be found in every corner of our large state. As their name implies, they are considered to be talented singers, whether or not they can warble. As a large family, they display a broad array of behavioral habits that make them entertaining to watch and study.

American wood warblers can be challenging birds to identify, particularly so in their non-breeding plumage. Add immature plumages to the mix of females and non-breeding males and you understand why Roger Tory Peterson coined the phrase "confusing fall warblers." In this state of dress they might aptly be lumped with the sparrows and called little olive "jobs." Most avid birders I know love the challenge in bird identification and the American wood warblers fit that bill.

American wood warblers can be confused with members of the vireo family who generally share similar habitats. Warblers and vireos are roughly the same size and often migrate together. One way to differentiate between these small songbirds is bill shape – vireos have sturdy, slightly hooked tips in contrast to the sharply tipped warbler bills. A number of the vireo species have eye rings or spectacles, whereas warblers display a wide variation in eye rings from non-existent to prominent eye rings.

Before I get into the identification strategies, I want to pay tribute to a friend and fellow employee at Exxon, Barth Schorre, who spent endless hours photographing warblers in Rockport during the migration seasons. Barth, passed away a few years ago, but wrote a book, *The Wood Warblers: An Introductory Guide*. The photos included in this article are a tribute to his love of warblers.

We Texans are fortunate that many of the warblers pass through our state and are concentrated in migratory "traps" along the Gulf Coast from Brownsville to Sabine Pass. In their travel from the Central and South America tropical regions, the birds often take the direct route over the Gulf of Mexico to the Texas coastline. Many species that follow the Mississippi and Central flyways depart Mexico from the Yucatan Peninsula or Caribbean Islands and fly north across the Gulf of Mexico to the Central and Upper coastlines of Texas and Louisiana. The trip takes roughly thirty hours and the birds are generally exhausted by the time they reach landfall, especially if they faced headwinds.

When the migrants reach the coastline they are looking for any habitat in which

they can hide and rest. Oak mottes, suburban backyards, forests, and even shrubbery are targeted by the tired birds. These rest sanctuaries are often called migrant "traps" and provide exceptional venues for finding songbird migrants, including warblers. Corpus Christi, Port Aransas, Rockport, Bay City, Galveston and High Island are favorite venues for birders to practice their avocation. The optimum time to visit these traps is after a spring "norther" crosses the shoreline and the exhausted fliers literally "fall out" of the sky. Conversely, a strong south wind will carry the birds past the shoreline leaving the birders with empty traps.

When identifying the colorful male warblers, eye-rings, wing bars, under-tail coverts color, bill length, feet color and breast-streaking patterns can be useful. Knowing where the warblers hang out (ground vs. canopy) and their preferred habitat is very useful. Songs and calls are useful to birders who take the time to learn them; however, the males are not as vocal here as they are in their northern breeding territories. Knowing behavioral tendencies, such as bobbing tails, flaring wings and tails, and feeding tactics are also helpful. Although identifiers can be subtle, most male warblers will have four or five features or tactics helpful in making the correct identification.

The plan for this article is to cover as many of our Texas warbler species as space permits by highlighting several identifying characteristics for each species. Readers can study their field guides for the general description for each bird covered. Breeding males will be given preference. The order will be that found in most bird field guides.

Texas Warblers

Photos by Barth Schorre

Blue-winged Warbler

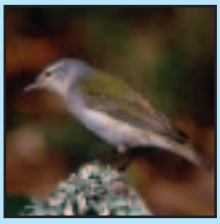
This eastern warbler has a yellow head with a narrow black eye line and yellow under parts. Adult males have blue-gray wings with two white wing bars; females have similar, but duller plumage. Their under tail coverts are white. Look for them in mid-level brushy habitats.

Golden-winged Warbler

This eastern warbler has a beautiful head featuring a bright yellow crown, black throat, and black ear patch trimmed in white. Upper plumage is blue-gray and accented by a significant yellow wing bar. Underparts are white including the underside of their tails. Note their thin bills.

Hybridization

The two species above are genetically similar and often interbreed to develop hybrids with separate names. Brewster's hybrids have a thin eye line, whitish under parts and wing bars more similar to Blue-winged. Lawrence's hybrids feature the black ear patch and throat found in the golden-wings; wing bars can be either white or yellow.



Tennessee Warbler

This eastern warbler has a gray head with black eye line and white eye brow. Males have an olive green upper plumage that contrasts with their white under parts, including under tail coverts. Females are similar, but with yellow wash on breast. Look for them in tree canopies.

Orange-crowned Warbler

Widespread across North America and similar to the Tennessee Warbler, this warbler is duller with yellowish green replacing white in the Tennessee. With faint streaking on an olive gray breast, it is one of our most non-descript warblers. Note yellowish under tail coverts contrast with the white of the Tennessee. The orange crown is not evident for most of year.

Nashville Warbler

Widespread except for Rocky Mountains area, this warbler has a gray head, prominent white eye ring and yellow underparts from throat to coverts. His olive upper plumage and absent wing bars are good identifiers. His brown crown patch is evident in spring. He prefers brushy habitats.

Colima Warbler

This Chisos Mountains resident in Big Bend National Park features a gray head with eye ring and brown crown spot. His plumage features dull yellow rump and under tail coverts; he has dark olive upperparts and lighter underparts. Knowing this warbler's song is an important tool in finding him in the oak and maple habitats in the Chisos Mountains.

Virginia's Warbler

Similar to the Nashville Warbler, this warbler lives in our western states and Trans-Pecos Mountains of Texas. His plumage is lighter gray overall with yellow restricted to upper breast, rump and under tail coverts. He has a bold eye ring. He lives in mountain brushy habitats.

Parula warblers

The Northern Parula is a common eastern warbler with a broken eye ring on a gray head, and a yellow throat. Its upper breast features a gray, orange, and yellow band. His white belly and under tail coverts contrast with its dark gray upper plumage. Its olive back and prominent white wing bars are also good identifiers. His song is a rising buzzy trill. A close relative from the Rio Grande Valley, the Tropical Parula, is very similar, but lacks eye ring.

Yellow Warbler

This overall yellow warbler has reddish streaks on his breast. Its black eye contrasts with yellow head. Very common across Texas and country, this warbler is known for its song, "*sweet, sweet, sweet, I am so sweet.*" He favors wet brushy habitats and open woodlands.

Chestnut-sided Warbler

This colorful eastern warbler features flashy chestnut flanks and a golden crown; he also has black eye line, black whisker stripe

and white eye ring. His dark streaked upper plumage contrasts with his white underparts. This warbler's non-breeding plumages are lime green. He often cocks his tail as he works in secondary growth habitat.

Magnolia Warbler

This very marked and colorful warbler has a heavy black eye line, white eye brow, and yellow throat. Also note his black streaks on a yellow breast and belly, and a yellow rump. His large white wing bars compliment his white tail patches, which he flashes while feeding. Look for this butterfly-like bird in mid-level brush and canopy.

Black-throated Blue Warbler

This eastern warbler is arguably one of the most beautiful of the family. His blue upper parts and black throat vividly contrast with his bright white under parts. His black flanks and diamond shaped wing patch add to his overall beauty. Look for the diamond-shaped wing patch in the female.

Yellow-rumped warblers

Soon to be split into Myrtle and Audubon's warblers, these birds are affectionately called "butter-butts" and are among the more dapper warblers in their breeding plumages. The eastern Myrtle has a white throat while its western counterpart, Audubon's, has a yellow throat. In addition to a yellow rump, the bird features a yellow crown spot and side patch. White is featured in the tail, belly and wing bars. Unfortunately Texas birders see the drabber plumaged birds as common winter residents. Yellow- rumped warblers are considered woodland birds in Texas.

Black-throated Green Warbler

This dandy eastern warbler has a yellowish olive back with a black throat, upper breast and flank streaks on a white under plumage. The warbler's face is yellow with an olive ear patch. His dark wings with bright wing bars and dark tail edged in black complete his attire. Females lack the black throat. He feeds in the middle to upper sections of the tree canopies.

Golden-cheeked Warbler

This Hill Country endangered species is very similar to the Black-throated Green. Its brighter face has a thin black eye line. The female's plumage is similar, but with less contrast. He lives in cooler deep slotted canyons where mature ashe juniper trees provide stringy bark to weave into a nest. Knowing this warbler's song is important in locating this elusive warbler.

Townsend's Warbler

This western warbler has a dark crown, eye line, ear patch bordered in yellow, and a black throat. The adult's breast is black-streaked on yellow, while the belly and under tail coverts are white. He has streaked flanks, and an olive back and rump. His white wing bars and white in his tail are helpful identifiers. His breeding habitat is coniferous forests in the mountainous Trans-Pecos Region.

Blackburnian Warbler

This eastern warbler has a unique fiery orange throat. His orange head and throat

has an orange central crown stripe framed in black and black ear patch. His white underparts have black streaks on its flanks; his wings have a large white wing bar. He feeds in tree canopies.

Cerulean Warbler

This bluish, eastern warbler features blue upper plumage and white under parts. He has a dark breast band and black streaked flanks on white under plumage. His blue wings contain two prominent white wing bars. This warbler also feeds in the upper tree canopies.

Palm Warbler

An eastern warbler with a yellow plumage this warbler has a rufous crown and red streaks similar to a Yellow Warbler. His plumage features an olive eye line, ear patch, wings and back. Has very faint wing bars with yellow rump and under tail coverts. Wags its tail as it feeds in bogs and swampy habitat.

Yellow-throated warblers

The eastern Yellow-throated Warbler has a bluish gray back with bright white wing bars. He features a dark crown, black eye line and ear patch. His under plumage is bright white except for black streaked flanks and yellow throat. This warbler winters in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and South Texas. His western counterpart, Grace's Warbler, is very similar except for a yellow eye brow line instead of the white in the Yellow-throated Warbler. Look for the Grace's Warbler in ponderosa pines in the high Guadalupe and Davis mountains.

Prairie Warbler

This eastern warbler is olive-backed with bright yellow underparts. He has black streaking on his flanks, a black eye line and yellow ear patch bordered in black. Look for indistinct wing bars and white tail spots on the underside of his tail. Has a nervous tail twitch. His name is a misnomer as the Prairie Warbler feeds in open woodlands, weedy fields and swamps.

Bay-breasted Warbler

This eastern warbler has a distinctive chestnut throat, crown and flanks. His black mask terminates at a cream-colored patch on the side of the neck. The upper plumage is dark with white wing bars, while the under plumage is creamy white.

Blackpoll Warbler

This eastern warbler is completely black and white with a solid black crown and white ear patch. The male has white under plumage with black streaked flanks. The yellow legs are also very distinctive and helpful in identifying female and immature birds. This warbler is a long distance flier departing New England states and flying offshore in the Atlantic to his winter destination in South America. He is found in various habitats.

Pine Warbler

A common warbler in pine forests and mixed woodlands of East Texas and the southern states, his plumage features a streaked yellow breast and a white lower belly and under tail coverts. This warbler has a relatively large bill and long tail. His strong white wing bars and greenish back are useful identifiers. Large numbers winter in the

southern states mixing with flocks of ground feeding songbirds.

Black and White Warbler

An eastern warbler and likely the most recognized of all of the wood warblers, the Black and White Warbler is best known for his nuthatch-like limb-walking habit while feeding. His plumage is completely black-and-white streaked including a central white crown stripe. He breeds east of the Rocky Mountains, including East Texas and the Edwards Plateau. His song sounds like a creaky screen door opening and closing.

American Redstart

The warbler best represents butterfly-like color and behavior in brushy woodlands. He has orange and black plumage. Using flared tail and open wings, this bird commonly chases prey in flight. The black and yellow female is also easy to identify using color and behavior.

Worm-eating Warbler

This eastern warbler has unique dark stripes on a buffy crown. His upper plumage is olive brown blending with buffy underparts. Despite fairly plain plumage, his striped crown is difficult to miss. He feeds in low level brushy undergrowth.

Swainson's Warbler

This secretive eastern warbler prefers to walk thus making him most difficult to find. His rufous cap with olive upper plumage and light gray under parts blend into marshy swampy habitat of East Texas. He has a longer bill than most warblers.

Prothonotary Warbler

This warbler's golden yellow head with prominent black eye produces a striking effect. This warbler is very yellow, except for his olive back, dark wings and tail. Its white under tail coverts and tail patches are good markers. He is known for his loud song, "*sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet*." Look for this eastern warbler in swampy wetland forests.

Ovenbird

This unusual eastern warbler features an orange crown stripe, bold eye ring and dark streaks of spots on his breast. He is best known for his ground-walking behavior. He walks with tail cocked (when not bobbing) as he forages in the leaf litter. His loud call "*teacher, teacher, teacher"* is reminiscent of a Carolina Wren. Look low for this denizen of wet woodlands.

Louisiana and Northern waterthrushes

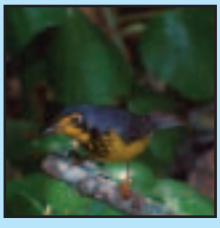
The Louisiana Waterthrush is an eastern warbler that prefers walking along water edges showing his stylish bubblegum pink legs. Generally safe markers for identification include his eye brow stripe flairing to rear, white throat and buffy flanks. Similar to the Louisiana Waterthrush in habitat and behavior, the Northern Waterthrush has an eye brow stripe tapering to rear, streaked throat and white flanks. The Northern's dark legs are not as showy as its close relative. Both birds bob their tails when walking.

Mourning and MacGillivray's warblers

A dark gray hood with dark eye and no eye ring separates the eastern Mourning Warbler from his western counterpart, MacGillivray's Warbler. The latter warbler has a dark hood featuring a bold broken eye ring. Both species have olive upperparts and yellow underparts. Both birds hop rather than walk, preferring brushy streamside habitats. Look for them late in spring migration season.

Kentucky Warbler

This eastern warbler which has all yellow underparts and dark olive green upperparts, features bold yellow spectacles that are separated from his yellow throat by a thin black line that joins a broader black line along the side of the neck. This configuration reminds me of a backward figure "seven." He has a shorter tail than most warblers. Look for them feeding on or near ground in moist woodlands.



Canada Warbler

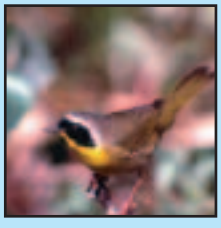
This eastern warbler has bright yellow spectacles on a dark head and a necklace of short black streaks on bright yellow breast. The male also has distinctive white under tail coverts. Look for this warbler in dense understory brush in woodlands.

Wilson's Warbler

A fairly non- descript yellow and olive warbler that features a very distinctive black skullcap. This common migrant can be found all across the country, but is more common in the West than the East. They can occur in irruptive numbers in some years. The birds prefer wet woodland thickets and bogs, but in migration they seem to be in all habitats.

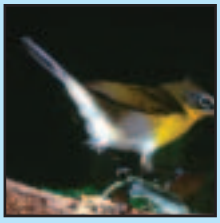
Hooded Warbler

Unlike the Mourning and MacGillivray's warblers, this eastern warbler's hood has a large yellow mask that is very distinctive among the warbler clan. Also very distinctive is the bird's habit of flicking its tail open to expose outer white tail feathers. Look for this warbler in low brushy habitat only a few feet above the ground.



Common Yellowthroat

This widespread warbler has the opposite head pattern from the Hooded Warbler, featuring a yellowish hood and a black mask. The male's plumage is very distinctive; however, the female can be confused with a number of other female warblers. Her yellow under tail coverts and buffy to brownish flanks will help separate her from other warbler females. Their habitat of grassy fields, reeds, and brushy stream sides will be helpful in identifying females.



Yellow-breasted Chat

This warbler is somewhat a misfit with other wood warblers because of his large size and non-musical abilities. Chats feature distinctive white spectacles on a dark head with an oversized "warbler bill." His bright yellow breast and dark upperparts make for great contrast. His white under tail coverts and long tail are also helpful identifiers. His wide array of rattles, clucks, and squawks provide mystery about how many different birds might be in the nearby thicket.

In summary, when searching for warblers, it is important to look at all levels of the forest and brush habitats. If you search high you will miss the ground loving birds and visa-versa. Work on the characteristics of the colorful and patterned males and gradually expand your knowledge to the female's more subtle characteristics. Concentrate on spring migrating venues while keeping in mind fall birding, warblers can leave you frustrated and confused.

As a seasoned warbler birder, I feel compelled to inform the readers that prolonged searching for warblers in tall tree canopies can cause a malady called "warbler-neck syndrome." To avoid this stiffness of the neck muscles, try to alternate your viewing between the high tree canopies and the ground and lower sections of the brush habitats where these tiny birds like to hide. Keep in mind that wood warblers may look and act like butterflies, but they have much more character than those colorful insects. To become an expert warbler hunter requires three attributes—patience, patience and patience, sprinkled in with lots of practice, practice and practice. Your rewards will be many fold.

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Chasing the Brown Jay

By Sean Paul Kelley

The Brown Jay (*Cyanocorax morio*) ranges from Central America to northern Mexico. "Visitors," says the World Birding Center in McAllen, will find the Brown Jay "along a short stretch of the Rio Grande corridor from about Salineno to the woodlands below Falcon Dam." But the birds are rare; at any given moment there might be half a dozen Brown Jays in the Lower Forty Eight. The good news about Brown Jays is that they don't require a vigorous hikes through swamps or mountaineering, sailing in a nausea-inducing boat, or much in the way of special skills or equipment. A rental car and a map is all you need. Plus some patience, but that seems to come naturally to birders.

It was dark when I left Mission, Texas headed up the valley just south of Falcon Dam. The Valley birding grapevine reported a sighting of the Brown Jay just the day before and I was determined to see it.

I'd been chided by one resident for not coming down sooner to see the bird. "There aren't more than two or three of these birds in the United States at any given time," he told me. As it turned out he would only appear two more times after March 21, 2012. And another Brown Jay seen at Chapeno a few days before was never seen again. Thus were the only two documented Brown Jays in the United States of America in March of 2012.

I faced poor odds as the sun rose over the Rio Grande. The drive from Mission, Texas up towards Falcon Dam was terrible, each new small town an agony of speed bumps and trickier speed traps: traffic fines in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are outrageous. It was also too early and I'd not had enough coffee.

Brown Jays are big birds, much bigger than the common back yard Blue Jays. Brown Jays usually weigh about seven ounces. Their wingspan is roughly thirty inches and they average between nine and sixteen inches in length. The pattern of a Brown Jay varies by geography. The Brown Jays most likely to be seen in Texas are from the northern portion of the clade and have dark brown upper parts, with a solid back patterns and a light creamy breast darkening to the belly. They have large dark liquid eyes and a dark beak. Brown Jays are monogamous and solitary nesters—so it wasn't like we would see multiple Brown Jays, like the Green Jays which are to be seen all over the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Brown Jay female lays from one to eight blue-gray eggs and incubates them for eighteen to twenty days.

The area around Salineno is tough country. Within seventy miles the lush fertility of the Lower Rio Grande Valley has given way to semi-aridity, a place known to Texans as the Brush Country, a swathe of Texas landscape that does little except sting, stick or bite: scorpions, mesquite bush and rattlesnakes. In short, it's perfect country for the largest Jay species in North America.

I pulled right off of Highway 83 and drove down the small county road towards Salineno, an old farming community just south of the Falcon Dam. The road meanders for a few miles and then enters town where you are highly advised to slow down, the speed bumps a size which could rip out the oil pan of a car driving too quickly. Having successfully navigated that peril I looked for the RV park where the bird had been sighted recently.

After driving around a few minutes I located it, Salineno is not that big, and parked the car seventy-five yards from the Rio Grande. And that is the full extent of the Brown Jay's range inside the United States: between seventy-five and one hundred fifty yards from the river and not much more. I walked into the RV park and found the bird blind, quietly acknowledged the others and sat down to wait.

In the next forty five minutes I'm treated to a parade of birds: a Pyrrhuloxia and Northern Cardinal pirouetted around each

The air felt electric, as if a large predator or raptor were nearby. Suddenly a brown blur swooped across my field of view and perched on a branch.

other while an Olive Sparrow chirruped in the grass. An Altamira Oriole was quickly followed by a pair of Hooded Orioles. A Brown Thrasher was there to be seen. And another highlight was actually seeing the orange crown on an Orange-crowned Warbler. How often does that happen? Several Golden-fronted Woodpeckers could be heard and seen above the racket of two Great Kiskadees. Spotted Towhees flitted shyly through the branches and a pair of Green Jays whistled to each other.

Suddenly everything grew quiet, even the half-dozen House Sparrows behind the bird blind were silent. The air felt electric, as if a large predator or raptor were nearby.

A brown blur swooped across my field of view and perched on a branch.

They eat from trees and this one was no different, eating suet spread on a log and later eating tortillas and spicy chicken. Their typical diet, however, consists of insects, small vertebrates, eggs, seeds, nuts, fruits and berries. They forage in shrub brush, hence their appearance in the southernmost extremities of the Texas Brush Country, in trees and occasionally on the ground.

This is not a migratory bird and not one you are likely to see show up in a suburban back yard in San Antonio like the occasional Green Jay, its more colorful and raucous cousin. Where Green Jays look like characters out of a Marx Brothers special, the Brown Jay looks serious. If they wore spectacles they'd be intellectuals. Like most birds in the Corvid family they have big personalities, are bright birds, giving the lie to 'bird brained' and inquisitive.

And he was a beauty. Much bigger than I estimated, he looked about three times the size of our back yard Blue Jays. He swooped in and had a large wingspan. Again, larger than most of our backyard jays, he had a roguish and playful charm, a devil may care bird with a raucous screech.

To say that the Brown Jay was a "get" is to understate your case. I've noticed in the months since I saw him that when other birders ask me what birds I've seen lately inevitably the Brown Jay comes up. I'm immediately treated with respect and envy—and birders are an envious lot.

And even though the Brown Jay eludes many who come to see him, I consider myself extremely lucky to have seen one. "For the last three months I'd been seeing pictures of this exact same bird on this exact same branch," I said after he left. "Glad to know he really exists." At that the tension around the blind evaporated and everyone laughed.

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Birding In The Yucatan Peninsula Of Mexico

By Tim Brush

As a birder and ornithologist living in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, I have long been interested in Mexican birds. So many of "our" Valley birds have their main populations in Mexico, and many other species only occur south of the border. In 2001, my son John and I began our birding explorations of northeastern Mexico. We birded mainly in the Gomez Farias/El Cielo and Ciudad Victoria areas of Tamaulipas, and saw many great birds like Great Curassow, Thicket Tinamou, Ornate Hawk-Eagle, Altamira Yellowthroat, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, Yellow-headed Parrot, and many other species. I also gathered useful data on nesting Altamira Orioles, Rose-throated Becards, and nesting associates, for comparison with my Valley data. Unfortunately, in Spring 2010, the sudden upsurge in narco-violence brought those trips to a halt, and the border highways remain unsafe. Being frustrated and wanting to explore more of Mexico, we began our trips to the Yucatan Peninsula.

The Yucatan Peninsula has a lot of habitat left and has not experienced the violence associated with dueling cartels. It also contains a very respectable number of endemic species plus more widespread tropical residents and migrants. John and I did a very successful exploratory trip in January 2009, while I was attending a scientific conference in Merida, and I began planning additional visits, during the breeding season. In this article, I will discuss the major sections within the Yucatan Peninsula, based mainly on my limited experience. I am still learning a lot about the Peninsula, and readers are encouraged to gather information and explore on their own. I have birded mainly in Yucatan state, with emphasis on a recent trip to Quintana Roo and southern Campeche.

Yucatan state is the driest, particularly from Merida north, which is thorn-forest somewhat similar to southern Texas. In the coastal scrub and lagoons north and west of Merida, we've seen American Flamingo, White-lored Gnatcatcher, Mexican Sheartail, Zenaida Dove, and Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. The area between Telchac Puerto and Progreso is easy to explore by car. We also birded Celestun with some success, but a chartered boat-ride might be a good idea there. In the somewhat wetter forests south of Merida, we've had great birding at the various Mayan ruins in this Puuc region, such as Uxmal, Sayil, Kabah, Labna, and nearby fields and roadsides. One can be based in Merida for maximum hotel choice, but we found it best to stay in Santa Elena, a 15-20 minute drive

The author birding in the Yucatan of Mexico.

from many of the ruins. We found Yucatan (Yellow-lored) Parrot several times, plus Lesser Roadrunner, Orange Oriole, trogons, motmots, saltators, and many other species. Yucatan (Black-throated) Bobwhites foraged quietly in dry forest and clearings around the ruins, Cave Swallows swarmed out of their nest-sites in the ruins, and we even found a Gray-collared Becard building its nest along a quiet forest trail. Yucatan Jays and Altamira Orioles are common in other areas of the Peninsula, but here we saw them in largest numbers—Altamiras built their long hanging nests over clearings and along forested roadsides, often accompanied by nesting Rose-throated Becards, Social Flycatchers, and Orange Orioles. Most of the Puuc region ruins are little visited, so we did not feel crowded. Uxmal gets busy by late morning, but it is a large site

Yellow Oriole. Photo Paul Wood.

Yucatan Jay. Photo Paul Wood

with plenty of nooks and crannies. Chichen Itza, a spectacular site very much worth seeing for cultural reasons, did not impress us with its bird-life in our winter visit, but Ek Balam, farther east, supported a diverse bird community.

We typically birded just outside the various ruins until 8:00, when gates opened and spent most of the morning at one or more ruins. Afternoons were good for a larger meal and siesta, leaving us rested for some later afternoon/evening birding along roadsides and other accessible areas (most ruins closed at 5:00 PM). Overall, a winter/early spring visit would provide more moderate temperatures and a greater diversity of birds, since winter resident warblers, flycatcher, vireos, and many other Neotropical migrants will also be present. May trips have allowed us to study nesting birds, to learn bird songs and use those songs to find secretive birds, and to be able to focus on unique tropical species. It is hotter then, but many sites are forested, and we were able to find birds fairly easily all morning. Of course, we brought plenty of water, took frequent breaks, and wore comfortable, protective field clothing.

On our May 2012 trip, we covered new territory, in Quintana Roo and southern Campeche states. These areas receive more rainfall and support taller, lusher forests and

some wetlands. Our trip was set up so that drives between birding sites were 2 hours or less, and so that we were fairly close (if possible) to at least one major birding site. In some cases, such as Coba, we could bird right on the hotel grounds and along the adjacent lakeshore, seeing Limpkins, Mangrove Swallows, and other species before the very short drive to the ruins' parking lot. Coba ruins, which are very spread-out across the forest, supported a good diversity and density of birds. We saw our first Piratic Flycatcher, coming out of an Altamira Oriole nest that it had evidently pirated, and watched with fascination as a flock of Yucatan Jays raided an active Clay-colored Thrush nest. By getting there early we avoided the crowds that began to arrive mid-late morning. From Coba, we headed south, getting away from the congested coastal highway once we got south of Tulum. We enjoyed birding the well-known (to birders) Vigia Chico Road in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, using directions by Steve Howell and more recent visitors. This was "drive-and-stop" birding along a very lightly travelled road. Highlights were nesting Royal Flycatchers, a quick glimpse at a roadside Thicket Tinamou, and our only view of a Gray-throated Chat. We saw an army-ant swarm attended by a Barred Woodcreeper, and I briefly stepped into the ants' trail while getting out of the car. As we continued south, Chacchoben was our first site in more humid, southern Quintana Roo. Here we found our first Keel-billed Toucans and watched a Vaux's Swift and a Black-cowled Oriole gathering and carrying nesting materials. A non-birding bonus was a troop of Spider Monkeys jumping from tree to tree and feeding on palm fruits.

A good base was Chetumal, which left us an hour or so from Kohunlich, Dzibanche, and Kinichna, close to the Belize border. Of those, Kohunlich was the wettest, with our only Red-capped Manakins and Smoky-brown Woodpecker of the trip, but Dzibanche provided Collared Aracaris and a

Flatbill nest. Photo Tim Brush.

Green Kingfisher foraging over a dry clearing in the forest. Chetumal provided a good choice of hotels and restaurants, plus a chance to take out more pesos before heading to Xpujil, which lacks ATMs. We saw Laughing Falcon and some shorebirds in roadside wetlands, and Yellow-billed Cacique at Oxtankah ruin, near Chetumal.

The Xpujil area of southern Campeche provides at least 5 easily accessible ruins, including the famed Calakmul, in a biosphere reserve of the same name. Some mornings we drove only a few kilometers, but to get to Calakmul required a drive of over two hours

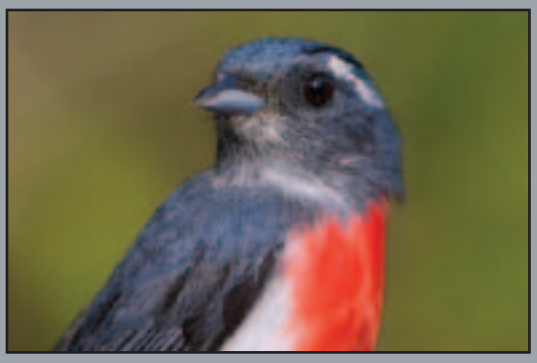
from our hotel in Xpujil. It is well worth the time and cost to travel on the entrance road, when one can see displaying Ocellated Turkeys right along the road. They and a couple Great Curassows were using the road as a convenient clearing, and one turkey even displayed to us a bit as we slowly passed by. The ruins themselves provided our only Gray-headed Kite of the trip, plus Bright-rumped Attila, more Keel-billed Toucans, Lesser Greenlet, and Tawny-winged Woodcreeper, among others. We could have stopped and birded more along the entrance road, but it would make more sense to come back another morning. Roadside wetlands in the Xpujil area contained Limpkin, Northern Jacana, Snail Kite, Gray-necked Wood-Rail, and Wood Stork. Each of the other ruins was worth visiting, for species like Hook-billed Kite, Bat Falcon, a pair of Roadside Hawks (also seen along roadsides!), and we saw a Yellow-tailed Oriole from the car in a roadside thicket. Our drive back to Cancun involved several stops, with a highlight being Magnificent Frigatebirds soaring above the cliffs at Tulum.

Driving in the Yucatan Peninsula is fairly easy, given the flat terrain and generally good roads connecting most towns and birding sites. Cars can be rented on the Internet and picked up in Cancun, the major airport for the region, or Merida, and normally at least some personnel speak English. In our experience, only Merida was somewhat frantic, and even there the grid system and abundant traffic lights helps control things. In most areas, *topes* (speed bumps) are one of the main concerns, since they will reduce your speed, one way or the other. On major roads, they are usually indicated by signs and are fairly standardized. On side roads through smaller town, watch for extra-high *topes*. We found that most roads are in good shape, but some may be pot-holed or a bit rough, depending on how recently there was a hurricane or tropical storm passing through the area. One does need to watch for pedestrians, especially in towns. There are relatively few cattle or other large livestock to worry about, at least in areas we have visited. We avoid driving long distances at night, although short-distance driving in towns is okay, especially if you are familiar with the area. On our recent Quintana Roo/southern Campeche trip, we used the mid-day lull to cover ground between the different areas we were visiting.

Keel-billed Toucan. Photo Paul Wood.

Often in a day's drive, we encountered at least one security check-point. At some, we just

Ocellated Turkey. Photo Tim Brush.



Gray-throated Chat. Photo Paul Wood.

needed to slow down as we drove through, only stopping if indicated by hand-motion. At others, often near state boundaries, the security personnel stopped each vehicle and spoke to the driver. It is helpful to know at least some Spanish, although there will probably be one person who knows English. You will probably be asked to show registration (or the car-rental agreement) and sometimes passports. We were searched once briefly and then allowed on our way. Only once we were asked to pay a "fine."

Although one should always be aware of one's surroundings, we felt quite safe and comfortable in birding around the ruins and along rural roads. Birding the ruins is easy, since large areas are kept clear of undergrowth but have abundant trees for the bird-life. Forest trails are comfortably wide and also kept very open. As a general rule, we don't walk too far down side paths in rural areas, since my lack of fluent Spanish might make communication difficult in case we got lost, and we might be more likely to encounter venomous *fer-de-lance* snakes along narrow, shady forest trails. Our only real problem was fast-moving taxis in the Xpujil area of southern Campeche, and we often had to just move along quickly when we saw a car approaching over the crest of a hill!

In summary, we highly recommend birding the Yucatan Peninsula, based on our experience, and we are already planning our next trip. Other areas, such as Rio Lagartos, Cozumel Island, Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, and coastal and western Campeche are also worth considering. There are other, lesser-known areas, where a local guide would be useful. Trip reports available on the Internet, Howell's Guide to Bird-Finding in Mexico, checking range maps in Howell and Webb's Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America, and eBird data will help you figure out where to go and when. Although each has its strengths and weaknesses, and they can become quickly out-dated, travel guides such as Lonely Planet, Rough Guide, Moon Guide and others are also very helpful finding likely hotels and restaurants and also historic and cultural sites.

Rose-throated Tanager. Photo Paul Wood.

Using common sense, getting enough rest, and being aware of the factors mentioned above should allow for a safe and productive trip. It won't be as easy as US travel, but then think of all the birds that you wouldn't be seeing if you stayed north of the border.

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Assessing The Impacts Of Wildfires On The Bird Life Of The Davis Mountains

By Rich Kostecke

Photos by Author.

The Davis Mountains of west Texas are the state's most extensive mountain range (675 square miles above 5,500' elevation). They form a relatively lush island of habitat that rises out of the drier Chihuahuan Desert. Major forest types in the Davis Mountains include pinyon pine (*Pinus cembroides*), gray oak (*Quercus grisea*), alligator juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*) and mesic, mixed conifer (including *P. strobiformis*, *P. ponderosa*, *P. cembroides*, and *J. deppeana*) associations. As an extension of the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Madre Oriental, the Davis Mountains share many species typical of the "sky islands" of southeastern Arizona and adjacent Mexico. As a result, the Davis Mountains have become one of the iconic birding destinations in the state with Montezuma Quail, Common Black-hawk, Mexican Spotted Owl, 16 species of hummingbirds, Greater Pewee, Buff-breasted Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Painted Redstart, winter-irruptive montane species (e.g., Clark's Nutcracker), rare and sporadic Texas breeders (e.g., Dusky Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler and Red Crossbill), and vagrants from Mexico (e.g., Slate-throated Redstart and Flame-colored Tanager) among the species sought by birders.

PRIMED FOR DISASTER?

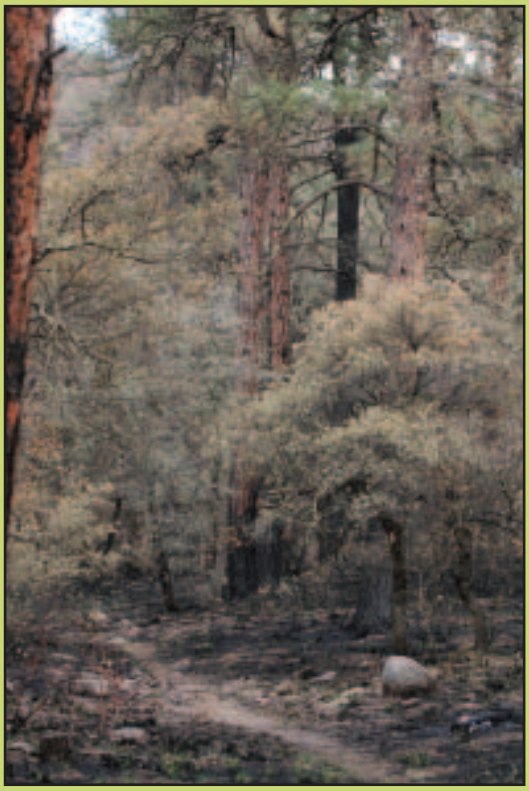
Historically in pre-settlement and early ranching years, frequent, low-intensity fire was a keystone process for maintenance of healthy pine forests in the southwestern United States. Such fires recurred every decade or less and were sufficient to maintain an open, park-like forest structure with reduced understory fuels. These low-intensity surface fires rarely killed large, fire-resistant trees. However, southwestern pine forests have experienced major changes in ecological structure, composition, and process due to relatively recent human activities such as livestock grazing, fire suppression, and logging. Such activities have produced denser stands of smaller pines and a general build-up of fuels. The end result has been an increase in the number, size, and severity of canopy-killing (i.e., crown), stand-replacing fires. The forests of the Davis Mountains are no exception to this trend. Forest stand densities and fuel accumulation are high in the Davis Mountains as a result of fire exclusion related to grazing activities beginning in the early 1900s.

Less is known about the role of fire in maintaining other southwestern forest types such as piñon-juniper (a common forest type in the Davis Mountains). However, human-induced changes to forest structure similar to those for ponderosa pine forests also seem to have occurred within piñon-juniper forests. Structure of many piñon-juniper forests has shifted from open savanna to denser stands that are now encroaching into grasslands and shrublands. Unlike other piñon-juniper forests in the U.S., recent research suggests that piñon-juniper forests in the Davis Mountains likely experienced frequent (recurring on average every 11 years), low-intensity surface fires. Indeed, tree ring and other data suggest that fire was more frequent within piñon-juniper forests in the Davis Mountains prior to 1930.

In addition to changes in forest structure that increase risk of wildfire, the southwestern U.S. climate is projected to become hotter and drier. Length of the fire season is projected to increase with spring conditions occurring earlier and overall spring and summer temperatures being higher. Extreme fire weather conditions such high temperatures, low relative humidity, and high winds are projected to become more common. Coupled with increased forest stand densities, fuel accumulations, and drought-stressed vegetation, these extreme fire weather conditions will promote enhanced (more frequent and more severe) wildfire activity.

Mount Livermore, the highest peak in the Davis Mountains, with ponderosa pine forests on the slopes and pinyon-oak-juniper forest in the foreground.

Mosaic of burned, unburned, and drought-impacted habitat looking north from upper Tobe Canyon (May 2012).



Lower intensity fire effects in Madera Canyon which burned understory but left large ponderosa pines intact (May 2012).

Moderate to high intensity fire effects in Madera Canyon which burned understory and scorched large ponderosa pines (May 2012).

Severely burned area in Madera Canyon where soil has been reduced to ash and rock and where trees experienced crown fire (May 2012).

Ash-throated Flycatcher, a species that appears to have increased following the fires.

DISASTER

Texas experienced both its worst single-year drought on record and historically extreme and extensive wildfires in 2011. The Davis Mountains were impacted by both the drought and several major wildfires. Started by an electrical short in an abandoned building near Marfa on April 9th, 2011, the Rock House fire swept north, burning 314,444 acres of Presidio and

Plumbeous Vireo, a species whose numbers appear to have remained stable regardless of drought or fire.

White-breasted Nuthatch, a species that may be decreasing following the fires.

Jeff Davis counties, including numerous private ranches and much of The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve. More than $4 mil in estimated damages were attributed to the Rock House fire before it was contained nearly a month after it started. The Rock House fire is the 3rd largest wildfire in Texas since the Texas Forest Service started to keep acreage data for wildfires in 1985. A few weeks later, the Rock House fire was followed by the human-caused Tejano Canyon fire on June 2nd, 2011. It burned an additional 12,311 acres of the Davis Mountains before being contained on June 8th. In 2012, the lightning sparked Livermore Complex fire (comprised of the Livermore Ranch and Spring Mountain fires) started in late April and burned 24,123 acres (including the high country around Mount Livermore which had escaped burning in the earlier fires) and threatened the Davis Mountains Resort. All told, 27,500 acres of The Nature Conservancy's 33,000-acre Davis Mountains Preserve burned.

Buff-breasted Flycatcher, a rare breeder in the Davis Mountains whose population appears to have recently declined. Habitat structure created by the fires may benefit the species.

WILDFIRE IMPACTS ON THE BIRD LIFE OF THE DAVIS MOUNTAINS

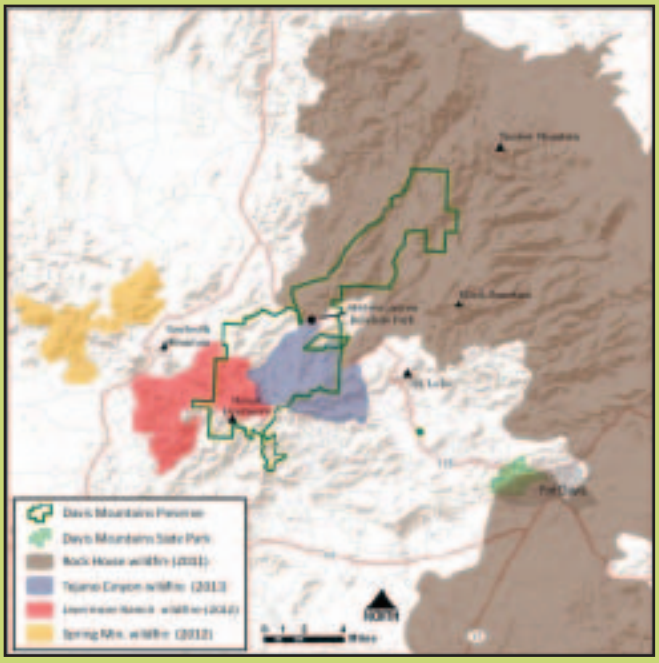
Intuitively, it makes sense that the birds of the Davis Mountains experienced some impact from the wildfires of 2011 and 2012 and there have been many anecdotes to back up that supposition. However, quantifying those impacts is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Direct impacts, such as fire-caused mortality, are generally considered to be minor for adult birds (adult birds are mobile and can escape approaching fires). However, all of the recent fires occurred during the breeding season, though. While undocumented, mortality of less mobile nestlings and fledglings could have occurred. Typically, fires are more likely to affect birds indirectly through impacts to habitat structure and food supply, as well as changes in the abundance of competitors or predators, all of which could impact demographic parameters such as nesting success and survival. These effects vary with the extent and intensity of the fire and can be positive or negative, since species or guilds of species respond differently to fire and some may benefit from fire. Large fires certainly impact greater extents of habitat and, thus, more birds than smaller fires. Therefore, the Rock House, Tejano Canyon, and Livermore Complex fires are likely to have a noticeable impact on the bird life of the Davis Mountains if only because of their size. High severity crown fires or stand-replacing fires will also have a greater impact than lower intensity surface fires that may only burn the understory. However, at a landscape-level, fires rarely burn uniformly. Places with complex topography and varying vegetation types (like the Davis Mountains) usually have a mixed-severity fire regime. For example, some dry south-facing slopes with lower fuel loads or stands that had been managed by prescribed fire or thinning may burn at low severity, whereas mesic north-facing slopes that support greater tree densities may burn at high severity. Based on differenced

normalized burn ratio (dNBR) or burn severity maps, a relatively small proportion of the Davis Mountains burned at the highest severity. Most of the range burned in a mosaic of low to moderate severities. Such variability in fire effects makes it more difficult to assess avian response to the fires. Temporal scale also matters. Impacts from a high intensity burn may initially be severe, but over the long term may be necessary to maintain the mosaic of habitats characteristic of natural forest succession. Finally, in the case of the Davis Mountains, it is important to remember the historic drought conditions. Impacts of the wildfire may be exacerbated by the on-going drought conditions.

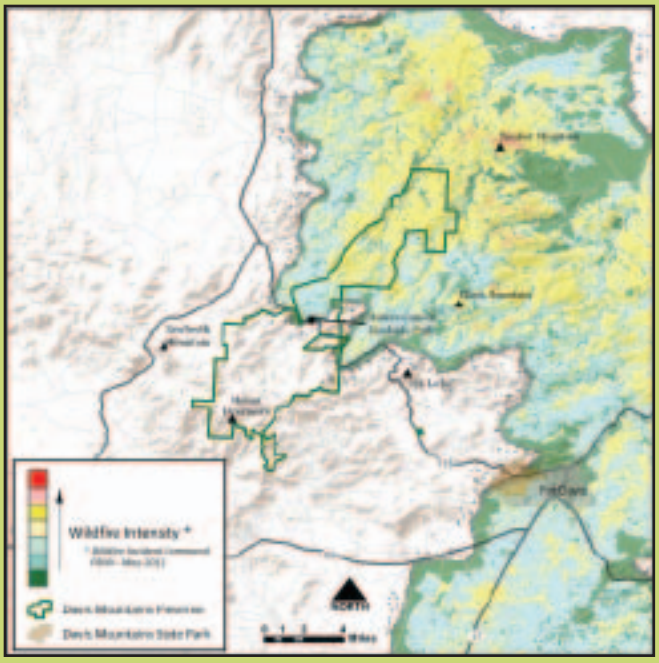
ASSESSING WILDFIRE IMPACTS ON THE BIRD LIFE OF THE DAVIS MOUNTAINS

Some data are available to help assess the impacts of the recent fires on the birds in the Davis Mountains, at least for some of the mid- to higher elevation forests. In 2006 and 2007, Jay Packer, then a masters student at Angelo State University, conducted point count surveys within ponderosa pine and pinyon-oak-juniper forests on The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve. Of the 121 points he established, >90% of them were burned-over during the 2011 and 2012 fires. I revisited those points during May and June 2012 and I plan to revisit them again during the 2013 breeding season, as well as at regular intervals after 2013. Return visits are essential to assess both the short- and long-term effects of the fires on the bird life of the Davis Mountains as the true impacts may not be immediately obvious. Coupled with data on forest stand structure that is also being collected on the Preserve and efforts to ground-truth burn severity imagery across the Davis Mountains, these point count surveys may provide some insight into how the birds are responding to fire-induced changes in habitat.

I will present some early observations on how the fires could be impacting the birds of the Davis Mountains. As additional analyses are conducted and additional data are collected, initial observations and predictions on the impact of the fires may very well need to be adjusted. However, the initial impact of the fires on the birds does not appear to be catastrophic. Overall number of species (62) observed during post-fires surveys in 2012 was similar to the number of species observed during pre-fires surveys (60 in 2006 and 57 in 2007). Additionally, the 14 most common species reported by Packer in 2006 and 2007 (in descending order of abundance, Bushtit, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Chipping Sparrow, Gray Flycatcher, Mourning Dove, Bewick's Wren, Black-headed Grosbeak, White-winged Dove, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-crested Titmouse, Western Wood-Pewee, Hepatic Tanager, Spotted Towhee, and Plumbeous Vireo) were still, with only a few exceptions, the most common species observed during post-fires surveys in 2012 (Table 1).



Extent of the 2011 and 2012 fires in the Davis Mountains, TX.



Differenced normalized burn ratio (dNBR) or burn severity imagery indicates that the Rock House fire did not burn with uniform intensity across the Davis Mountains.

Still, such broad and general statistics may not be telling the full story and it can be instructive to examine the responses of individual species. Such an examination is complicated, however, and it may be difficult (if not impossible) to tease apart individual species responses to fire based on abundance data alone. For example, often there is a bigger difference in numbers during the pre-fires survey years of 2006 and 2007 than there is between pre-fire surveys and post-fire surveys of 2012. Specific examples of this phenomenon include the crash in Bushtit and Mourning Dove numbers in the Davis Mountains Preserve from 2006 to 2007, which has been attributed to a lag response to the 2006 drought. There are still other species (Plumbeous Vireo and Black-headed Grosbeak) for which abundance seems to be more or less stable, at least for the time being, regardless of drought or fire. Stable numbers do not necessarily indicate successful reproduction or survival, though. If colonization is sufficient, population numbers may remain stable within fire-impacted habitat even if the habitat cannot support successful reproduction (i.e., even if the habitat is a population sink). A handful of species (Chipping Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Western Tanager) seem to have increased after the fires and there are at least some reports in the literature of these species responding similarly at other locations. Western Wood-pewee, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-crested Titmouse, and Hepatic Tanagers also seemed to increase, but there are either conflicting reports in the literature on their response to fire or no data have been published on the fire responses of these species. Additionally, one species not observed at survey points during 2006 and 2007, the Black-chinned Sparrow, may also be on the increase after the fires as several were detected during the post-fires surveys of 2012. Only a few species exhibited substantial declines in their numbers compared to 2006-2007. Negative responses to fire have previously been reported for the White-breasted Nuthatch and there are likely no data available for White-winged Dove.

Other species of interest, like the Mexican Spotted Owl and Buff-breasted Flycatcher, occur in low numbers in the Davis Mountains. Traditional sites for these species experienced some of the higher burn severities. Because of their rarity, current and past survey efforts may not provide sufficient data with which to assess these species' responses to the fires. For the Mexican Spotted Owl, data on its response to fire has been equivocal (i.e., it may or may not be negatively impacted). The Buff-breasted Flycatcher established a small breeding population in the Davis Mountains Preserve in 1999, but seems to have declined in recent years. Within the species' Arizona range, dense forest caused by fire suppression

Table 1. Mean number of individuals detected per survey pre-fires (2006 and 2007; from Packer 2010) and post-fires (2012) within ponderosa pine and pinyon-oak-juniper forests in The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis County, TX. Species listed in descending order of abundance based on Packer (2010). Only the 14 most abundant species reported during 2006 and 2007 and during 2012 are listed.

Species	2006	2007	2012
Bushtit	96.5	7.75	22.33
Ash-throated Flycatcher	27.25	28	43.33
Chipping Sparrow	28.25	25.5	37
Gray Flycatcher	26.5	18.25	16.33
Mourning Dove	34.75	2.5	17.33
Bewick's Wren	26.25	9.75	27.33
Black-headed Grosbeak	18.25	15.5	16.67
White-winged Dove	21.25	9.75	3.33
White-breasted Nuthatch	14	13.25	8
Black-crested Titmouse	14.25	12.75	18.67
Western Wood-pewee	16	10.75	22
Hepatic Tanager	14.25	12.25	39.67
Spotted Towhee	17.5	8.5	16.33
Plumbeous Vireo	12	13	13.33
Western Tanager	7	5.25	12
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	6.25	4.75	12.22
Yellow-rumped Warbler	0	0.25	10.33

has been implicated as a cause of population decline. Further, Buff-breasted Flycatchers have been associated with recently burned forests in Arizona and are positively associated with severity of recent fires. In particular, they were associated with areas that had evidence of high-severity surface fires. It has been hypothesized that fire reduces dense understory vegetation that could limit foraging by the flycatchers. Therefore, assuming a sufficient population of Buff-breasted Flycatchers is still present in the Davis Mountains, the species could ultimately benefit from habitat changes produced by the fires.

Finally, while we have begun the process to formally assess the impacts of 2011 and 2012 fires on the birds of the mid- to high-elevation forests of the Davis Mountains, such assessments will not tell us the full story of the impacts of the wildfires in the Davis Mountains. Fire, as well as drought, impacts to the lower elevation canyons, foothills, and desert grasslands in the region were extensive and in many instances impacted different suites of birds than found on the Davis Mountains Preserve. To my knowledge, little or no formal assessment of the impact of the fires on the birds at these lower elevations has been initiated. In the future, we could perhaps use regional Breeding Bird Surveys or Christmas Bird Counts to provide some insight into both drought and fire effects at the lower elevations. Ultimately, nature is resilient and the story of the impacts of the 2011 and 2012 wildfires will continue to unfold. Some species or habitats may benefit; others may be harmed. Only time will tell if the early impacts and trends we are observing will persist. So, stay tuned, as there will be more to the story.

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The History Of T.O.S.: A Forty-Five Year Perspective

By Keith A. Arnold

The Texas Ornithological Society celebrated its 50th anniversary at the 2003 meeting in Victoria. Although I haven't been associated with T.O.S. that long, I have the benefit of participating in the organization and watching it evolve over the past 45 years. I began my association with T.O.S. in 1967, during my first year on the Texas A&M University faculty, when Jerry and Nancy Strickling came to ask my assistance with the planned meeting that spring. It's been a long and interesting time as I watched T.O.S. grow and change.

I STUCK MY NOSE INTO T.O.S.

Over my [then] modest lifetime, I had been associated with two state organizations at opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to how they operated. In my many years as a member of the Michigan Audubon Society, I watched as the group increased its level of complexity. M.A.S. has long published a quarterly journal, the *Jackpine Warbler*, a newsletter and had annual meeting (much like those of T.O.S.) As I recall, M.A.S. had chapters across the state. While I was in college, M.A.S. established permanent headquarters, hired an executive director and established a day camp program at their two sanctuaries. Unfortunately, the income did not increase sufficiently to support all of these activities. Today, M.A.S. maintains a permanent address, but the journal is now the equivalent of a newsletter and the executive director lasted but three or four years; the society has increased the number of sanctuaries and has short day camp programs at some of the sanctuaries.

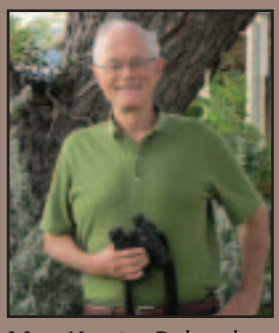
In contrast, the Louisiana Ornithological Society is one of the loosest groups with which I have been associated. They publish a newsletter a couple of times a year which promote their meetings – these are very similar to the early years of T.O.S. meetings. I don't recall exactly, but somehow officers were chosen. Today, the newsletter has more substance, usually featuring articles from personnel at the Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science.

In 1968, T.O.S. more closely resembled the L.O.S. organizational level. Today, it comes closer to the M.A.S. model. My question was this: did the T.O.S. membership have goals beyond the semi-annual meetings which consisted of birding trips, a banquet with an invited speaker, and, of course, the count-down! I don't know what effect, if any, my letter (Letters BTOS 2 :38) had on the T.O.S. membership. Afterall, I really was a neophyte to Texas birding! Nonetheless, other changes did come about that changed T.O.S.

IN THE BEGINNING

In 1952, Charles McNeese contacted a few friends and placed an "advertisement" in *The Spoonbill* of the Ornithology Group, Houston Outdoor Nature Club. On February 14, 1953, McNeese and a group of enthusiasts met in Austin and formed the Texas Ornithological Society. Anyone who joined by May 24, 1953, would be considered as a charter member: 325 charter members paid dues of $2.00!

Dr. Stan Casto reviewed the early years of T.O.S. in the society's Handbook for 1991-1994. The first officers included: Charles McNeese, president; William D. Anderson, vice-president; Bascom B. Watson, secretary-treasurer; Carrie Holcomb, corresponding secretary; and Frank G. Watson, newsletter editor.



M. Kent Rylander, founding editor of the *Bulletin.*

The T.O.S. regions follow, more-or-less, the biological regions of the state, with modifications to include all of each county in the same region. After approval of the constitution in 1954, McNeese named Peggy Acord, W. D. Anderson, L. Irby Davis, Keith L. Dixon, John Galley, Janice B. Lacey, Frances A. Wier, and Eula Whitehouse as the Regional Directors. Manual Armand Yramategui became the first chairperson of the Conservation Committee.

A NEW PUBLICATION, BEYOND THE NEWSLETTER

In 1968, the board approved the establishment of the *Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society.* Dr. M. Kent Rylander was both founder and first editor of this publication. He served until 1975. Although intended as a quarterly, Dr. Rylander discovered that it was too difficult to gain sufficient material for four issues per year and it soon was published semi-annually. Dr. Rylander published a brief history of the *Bulletin* for the early ten years of the journal, and his perception of it in the *Bulletin* for 2003 (36(1): 1-2).

Editorship of the *Bulletin* moved to Texas A&M University in 1976 and remained there for about 20 years; table 1 shows the sequence of editors, years of service, and volumes edited. During this time, emphasis increased on the scientific matter as content in the *Bulletin.* In 1997, Jack Clinton Eitniear became editor and continues to this day.

Over the years, the relationship between the *Newsletter* and the *Bulletin* has been a variable one. In some years, the two were combined in that T.O.S., meeting notices, etc., appeared in the *Bulletin.* This turned out to be impractical from a time standpoint. At the same time T.O.S. has had a number of problems in maintaining the editorship and publication of the *Newsletter.* This situation has stabilized and the addition of a web site has even made notifications from the society more efficient.

The story is not complete however, without including the establishment and demise of *Texas Birds*, a semi-annual publication intended to bring coverage to the birding aspect of T.O.S. Although well intended, this publication lasted only through eight issues and ceased because of the cost to T.O.S. Subsequently, Eitniear began the *Texas Bird Annual*, a publication which also concentrates on birding. Finally, Eitniear resurrected the *Occasional Papers* series, a publication whose origin seems a bit of a mystery, to cover topics of greater length. T.O.S. is fortunate to have all four of these publications for the members.

LIFE MEMBER ENDOWMENT FUND

After Dr. W. B. Davis and I had discussions about the financial structure of T.O.S., Dr. Davis published a letter in the *Bulletin,* suggesting that Life Member dues should be set aside in an endowment, rather than be "thrown" into the general funds. As a long-time member of the very successful investment committee for the American Society of Mammalogists, Dr. Davis had helped grow their investment fund into a significant contributor to the society's annual budget. Shortly thereafter, the Board approved such a program and allocated $4,000 as the initial

Table 1. Editors of the Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society

Editor	First Year	Last Year	Volumes
M. Kent Rylander	1967	1976	1-8
R. Douglas Slack	1976	1984	9-17
Robert Benson	1985	1988	18-21
Karen L.P. Benson	1989	1996	22-29
Jack Clinton Eitniear	1997	current	30-

investment. Ed Kutac, Bob Aikens and I were named to the Endowment committee, with Ed as chair. Currently, this Life Member Endowment exceeds $225,000 and funds not only the cost of membership for Life Members but several other T.O.S. programs.

I was once asked if perhaps T.O.S. had attained a sufficient sum or upper limit. I replied that this fund should **never** stop growing as expansion and increased income is needed to meet society needs such as repairs and upkeep of their sanctuaries increasing publication costs, and increase programming such as the research grants (see below) or to establish new programs. I would like to see T.O.S. underwrite the costs of young for membership and to attend meeting. Certainly, T.O.S. might contribute financially to outside conservation efforts. This by no means exhausts the possibilities as the fund grows.

Green Jay, object of first research grant.

THE TEXAS BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

In 1971, the Board authorized President George Newman to set up a Bird Records Committee which would have two primary responsibilities: act as a clearing house for rare and unusual Texas bird records, and publish an "official" state checklist. In 1972, President Newman asked me to form such a committee. (Perhaps the fact that George was my graduate student might have impacted his decision to ask me!). I selected a person from each of the T.O.S. regions, usually based on my familiarity with the individual. At that time, these individuals could serve on the committee as long as they wished.

In 1987, Greg Lasley became a member of the committee. I only learned as time passed that we had elected a "buzzsaw"! Greg took it upon himself to search literature for Texas records of rare species. In the process, he created the "Rare Birds of Texas Master List of Review Species. The list is constantly in revision as new records are entered, new species added, and some species removed when they meet the criteria: an average of four records per year over a ten-year period, although some exemptions do occur.

Equally important, Greg compiled a set of bylaws for the committee, something never accomplished before this. These bylaws not only set out the organization of the committee, but also lay out the criteria for acceptance

Loggerhead Shrike, object of latest funded research grant.

Robert Benson and his friend, Rainier.

of records, and appeals for non-acceptance records. The bylaws set up the committee with a chairman, secretary and five members-at-large; later, the position of academician was added. This also began the selection of new members based on their knowledge of Texas birds, rather than T.O.S. regions.

A RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM

In 1984, Ed Kutac proposed to the Board the establishment of a research grant program, funded from the Life Member Endowment

Replanting at the Sabine Woods Sanctuary.

The evolution of the *Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society*. Initial small format (L) then large format, size stabilized but only black and white, color added, finally stiff cover and full color. Photo Jack Eitniear

Fund. The Board approved the proposal and set rather wide guidelines: grants would be available to high school students, college students, and amateurs. Sandy Beach was appointed as committee chair, with Ralph Moldenhauer and me as members. Thus far, grants have been givens only to graduate students. The first grant went to Doug Gayou of the University of Missouri for his research on Green Jays). The last recipient, as far as I know, was Susan Craig from the University of Colorado for her study on Loggerhead Shrikes. Susan still comes to Texas to work on wintering shrikes. Although the list is not complete, other grants went for studies on Crested Caracaras, Tufted/Black-crested Titmice, and Piping Plovers. This is a program in which T.O.S. ought to invest more funds, although advertising of the program remains a problem.

SANCTUARIES – A NEW FRONTIER

In 1987, then president Robert Benson pushed T.O.S. into a new conservation effort: acquiring sanctuaries! Up to this point, our conservation activities consisted mainly of sending letters of support or opposition on issues raised by the Conservation Committee, or sending financial support to other conservation efforts.

Benson persuaded T.O.S. to acquire properties, now known as Sabine Woods, from the several land owners, by selling bonds to

Tidal flats at the Magic Ridge Sanctuary.

members. Sabine Woods is widely known as a stop-over for Trans-Gulf migrants. Since that original acquisition, T.O.S. has added four other sanctuaries, three by gift of the land and one by purchase. Table 2 lists each of the five sanctuaries, year and means of acquisition, and approximate size.

Effects of Hurricane Ike on Sabine Woods.

Owning sanctuaries places a large burden on T.O.S., but is certainly a proper effort for the Society. Funding for maintenance and repair, such as was needed after our Upper Coast sanctuaries suffered under Hurricane Ike, places a large financial pressure on T.O.S. Although a sanctuary fund exists for donations, I think we also need to consider the establishment of a second endowment expressly for this purpose. In the meantime, as urged by Steve Gross, Tony Gallucci and Brush Freeman, those visiting these sanctuaries ought to voluntarily donate a few dollars to the fund.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF T.O.S.

The structure remains much the same as when I first asked the question in 1968: officers and regional directors. Semi-annual meetings remain the focus of most members, although these have expended, on occasion, to include scientific presentations. Although the current president strongly influences the selection of meeting sites, with input from the board, would a meeting committee be an improvement or does the board serve that purpose?

We have seen significant changes with the Life Member Endowment, acquisition of sanctuaries which has strongly affected our conservation efforts, and an expanded series of publications which has a mix of serious ornithology and "birding" articles. The sanctuaries are, perhaps, the greatest challenge for T.O.S. in future years.

Entrance to the Williams Henry Schroeder Island Sanctuary.

Table 2. T.O.S. sanctuaries, county, acquisition, size, year

Sanctuary	County	Acquisition	Size	Year
Sabine Woods	Jefferson	Purchase	30 acres	1987
Mary Crawford	Galveston	Donation	2.6 acres	1997
Magic Ridge	Calhoun	Purchase	200 acres*	2000
Hook Woods	Galveston	Donation	1.8 acres	2001
William Henry Schroeder Island	Calhoun	Donation	41 acres	2003

*This number includes additional acquisitions in 2006, 2007 and 2010.

Do we continue to acquire additional sanctuaries, either by purchase or by gift? And how will we maintain the current sanctuaries, especially **who** will be responsible for their maintenance?

So, while some things remain the same in the way in which T.O.S. operates, we have seen a number of significant changes. After 45 years of observing T.O.S., I am very confident that the best is yet to come.

Keith A. Arnold
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Birding In The Park A Success

By Jimma Byrd

On April 24th, San Saba Bird and Nature Club sponsored a birding event in the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) San Saba River Nature Park. West Texas Avian Research, Inc. and volunteers from SSB&NC helped more than 250 people increase their appreciation of the natural world we all share. After seeing the announcement in the April issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine, folks from as far away as Leander, Arlington, and Belton attended. Students from San Saba Elementary,

Charles Floyd teaching about birds

Listening to a hummingbird heart

Closeup kids and cardinal

Listening to nature

Hummingbird watching

Making bird feeders

Nature journaling

Cherokee ISD, and San Saba Christian Home Educators all participated in activities including nature journaling, bird feeder making, and an educational program provided by Master Bander Charles Floyd and his wonderful team.

The group obtains data without harm to the birds banded and makes reports to the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Bird Banding Laboratory where it is available to all who are interested. They maintain an extensive database of their efforts for sharing with local and state researchers. Without the ability to capture birds, study their molt patterns, measure them, determine their age and sex, mark them and then release these birds back into the environment for subsequent recaptures, our knowledge of these most marvelous of creatures would be greatly reduced. The safe, efficient marking of birds rests in the hands of trained, experienced bird banders that are licensed by the state and federal government for this purpose.

Bird Banding in the Park was a great event that served over 175 students from all over the county. San Saba Bird and Nature Club is a 501(c)(3) non profit group that strives to increase the understanding and appreciation of wild things and wild places and the use of state and local parks for nature activities. Donations that help fund activities like this are appreciated. If you'd like more information about SSB&NC call Jimma Byrd at 325-372-7615. For more information about bird banding visit www.conchovalleybirdbanding.com or www.westtexasavianresearch.org

Jimma Byrd
E-mail: byrdjimma13@gmail.com

Warbler Warriors: Aledo Students Fighting For The Golden-Cheeked Warbler

By Julie Frey

In the middle of Bearcat Country in a small, rural city there are 118 fifth graders that were striving to save a petite black and yellow Warbler. The fifth grade class at Stuard Elementary, which named themselves the Warbler Warriors, worked on a yearlong project to promote public awareness about the Golden-cheeked Warbler. The school won the Toyota Tapestry Grant through the National Science Teachers Association, which was quite an honor with only one grant awarded in each state. The year began with extensive research and gaining knowledge about this little known bird. Each student acquired an understanding about this local Texas songbird that has been on the endangered species list for 21 years. Their first project was creating a brochure that both informed and persuaded the public to help out the Golden-cheeked Warbler. Each individual brochure explained how the female bird strips the bark from only one tree, the Ashe Juniper, and builds her nest. She combines the Ashe Juniper bark with spider webs and feathers to create the perfect home for her clutch of three to four eggs. Over 300 species of birds nest in Texas, but the Golden-cheeked Warbler is the only bird that nests only in Texas; making each warbler a native Texan.

After entering the front doors of Stuard, you are greeted by a photographic timeline which documents the yearlong journey of each completed project and activity. Each entry in the timeline has a picture of a warrior that is dedicated to spreading the news about this endangered bird. As you follow the timeline around and down the hall, it will end under the branches of the Warbler Forest. All 118 colored brochures are on exhibit alongside the forest which displays a handmade replica of the Golden-cheeked Warbler made by each fifth grader. An amazing visual of the dwindling numbers of this warbler is shown through a fingerprint activity in the forest area. There are 15,000 fingerprints made by the fifth graders to represent the number of Golden-cheeked Warblers in 1974. A much smaller group of 2,200 fingerprints show the number left in the world today.

The Warbler Warriors also worked with a partner class in Chiapas, Mexico. The letters, pictures and local temperatures that were shared and mailed traveled

Warbler Warriors show off their art work for the Golden-cheeked Warbler Art Show.


Sam Manning


Sophie Collins


Will Klansek


Alex Bobalik


Audrey Patterson


Eden Wise


Elizabeth Allanach


Grant Bostick


Hanna Hordynski


Jordan Diomede


RJ Slayton


Riley Hicks


Katie Church

along the same path that the Golden-cheeked Warbler takes when migrating for the winter. The students in Chiapas are also studying the endangered bird that shares the winter with them. This special bird nests in only 33 counties in Texas, and then migrates to Mexico for the winter. Sightings of the birds from their friends in Chiapas took place while the bird lives in Mexico from approximately July to February. Then the warbler makes the long journey back to Texas for their nesting season.

In the spring, the Warbler Warriors put together their most impressive project. It started with Warbler Wednesday, where each student at Stuard Elementary created a picture of the Golden-cheeked

The Warbler Forest is filled with handmade replicas and brochures each made by a fifth grader at Stuard Elementary.

The Warbler Warriors pass out student created brochures about the Golden-cheeked Warbler at a local mall as part of their public awareness program.

Warbler using different art mediums. All 580 pictures became a part of an Art Show that was displayed at a prominent mall in Fort Worth. Donning their Warrior t-shirt, fifth graders passed out the printed brochures to the public. The students also helped children with Warbler crafts and a student designed color sheet. As news of their endeavors spread, it gained recognition of their conservation work with Texas Audubon Societies. Parts of the art show traveled to the Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center where the students were honored and had an opportunity to view the habitat where a Golden-cheeked Warbler sighting was made.

One Friday morning in Aledo, the local newspaper was delivered with an article revealing another facet of their project. The fifth graders dedicated an Ashe Juniper tree at Aledo's Community Center along with a student designed awareness sign. Aledo's Mayor Kit Marshall along with Stephanie Adams, the Assistant Principal of Stuard Elementary made the first honorary dig. Twenty-six Warbler Warriors followed by planting the large Ashe Juniper with an assortment of shovels and tools. The sign will help the public identify the Ashe Juniper tree and recognize the importance of protecting this tree for the habitat of the Warbler.

Loss of habitat is the major reason for their dwindling numbers of Warblers. The Ashe Juniper tree has been cleared for development and cattle pastures. In

The Golden-cheeked Warbler Art Show displays 580 drawings created by students of all grade levels along with data and research from their yearlong project.

addition, the Juniper tree must be mature in order for the bark to be strippable. So the Warbler Warriors decided to conduct a scientific experiment based on the germination of the Ashe Juniper. They prepared three variables of the juniper seed. The first group of seeds remained in the berry. In the second group, the seeds were scarified and removed from the berry. The third group of seeds went through a digestive scarification process. This occurred when the berries were fed to goats and then the seeds were collected. All 450 seeds were planted and then the waiting process started. There were six seeds that germinated in a new, beautiful cedar greenhouse that was furnished through the grant. A long weekend of building by the principal, Ron Shelton, and the grant director's husband Bill Frey provided a new home for the six small junipers. The children learned that this evergreen tree is not only being cleared, but is also very difficult to germinate.

Later in the spring, the Warriors spent their time in music class learning an original composition that was written just for their project. The song is titled "Today" and the lyrics followed the life and migration of the Golden-cheeked Warbler. On recording day, the fifth graders all gathered in the cafeteria and sang their final take of the score. Pictures of the children and their grant work were added to the song to create a video that can be shared with other educators and classrooms that will pursue this project.

The final pep rally of the year for Stuard Elementary took place on May 11. However, for the Warriors it was a special day for another reason. This day was International Migratory Bird Day. The celebration began with a wildlife biologist from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizing the amazing conservation work completed by the fifth graders. "Because of the enthusiasm and hard work of these students, more people in our community will know about the fragile status of this very special and endangered Texas bird." The cheering and pride from the Warbler Warrior section in the gym was infectious. Hands in the air adorned with black and yellow bracelets inscribed with 'It's not just a tree, it's a home!' After the presentation, the focal point of this extraordinary day turned to visually demonstrating the number of Golden-cheeked Warblers left in the world. The fifth graders of Stuard created a black and yellow paper chain that contained 2,200 links, each link representing one Warbler left in the world. The students created one long line, each Warrior in their black Warbler Warrior T-shirt and paper chain in hand and went outside to wrap around the school. The children jumped and waved as the plane passed over and circled the school to take aerial photographs of the children's Warbler chain. "Maybe someday the chain will be long enough to circle the whole school, which means there would be a lot more Golden-cheeked Warblers in the world" exclaimed one student.

The end of the year wrapped up the project with students creating bookmarks and going on a grade level field trip to a nature center that supports animal conservation. There were groups of students presenting power point shows to younger grade levels and some that wrote children's books about the life of a Golden-cheeked Warbler and reading to younger students. A package from Mexico came during the last week of school, containing answers to questions that were asked and a collection of Golden-cheeked Warbler drawings from the students a country away.

On the last day of school my students left my classroom with Warbler replicas in hand and an assortment of black and yellow items that they completed throughout the year. My hope is that they left my classroom with so much more. I hope they discovered passion about their purpose throughout the year; fervent in their belief that children can make a difference and impact the community around them. I hope they learned that the world we live in is a delicate balance, one that should be respected and protected. And I sincerely hope that they always remember the beauty of a small black and yellow bird- the Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Julie Frey
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A LEWIS'S WOODPECKER IN TEXAS

By Rhandy J. Helton

There is an old adage in the real estate business that emphasizes the importance of "location, location, location". Oftentimes that also applies to observing birds. On January 4, 2012 this author happened to be at the same location as a Lewis's Woodpecker in Junction, Texas (Kimble County). My original plan that morning was to take photographs of a Cactus Wren that was present across the highway from the Hill Country Fairgrounds Complex on the south edge of town. Those plans changed when my birding companion remarked "look at that crow". There are no small crows in Kimble County but prior experience with Lewis's Woodpecker led to a quick and positive identification. The bird moved out of sight behind large Live Oaks and in the general direction of the South Llano River .5 miles to the north. We checked that area and re-located the bird in the tall, native pecan trees across the river from our observation point.

We needed to photo-document the sighting but that was difficult to do with my Nikon Coolpix P500 camera. The bird was across the river at least 300' away. My solution was to try and coax the bird back to our side of the river. By using the IBirdExplrPro application in my Ipod Touch, with an external speaker, I was able to amplify the bird's weak call. Shortly, the bird flew to our side of the river and landed on the cross-member of a telephone pole less than 50' away. My photographic prowess leaves much to be desired but identifying images were taken. Of course, in the following months many photographers with top-of-the-line camera equipment would take some spectacular images of the woodpecker.

Author's original photograph revealing distinctive coloration on face, lower breast and belly.

The Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) was named after famed explorer Meriwether Lewis, leader of the 1803-1806 Lewis & Clark Expedition through the uncharted pacific northwest and the recently acquired Louisiana Purchase. On the return trip to St. Louis and while waiting for snow to melt at a mountain pass in the Bitteroot Range of Idaho, Lewis collected a few birds that he originally called "black woodpecker". He described the bird in detail to science and later forwarded a specimen to bird artist and pioneer American ornithologist Alexander Wilson at the Pease Museum in Philadelphia. Wilson gave the bird its first scientific name *Picus torquatus*, or "bird with a necklace". The bird's native range includes the area Meriwether Lewis explored and all of the mountain states west of the Great Plains. The woodpecker prefers groves of cottonwood trees along riparian zones and burned-over tracts. Dead limbs high in the tree are a favorite perch from which to observe, glean insects and fly-catch.

Lewis's Woodpecker has often been called the most "un-woodpecker-like" of all woodpeckers. The bird does not undulate while flying but flies slow and straight. At times the bird even seems to be distracted while flying. A closer look at the species reveals a really striking bird. The back looks black from a distance but is actually a deep forest green. The belly and breast has been described as pink, peach, rose or salmon in color and all 4 are appropriate. The face is almost cherry red and the neck is circled by a gray collar. Considered medium in size, the bird is 11 to 12 inches in length and has a wingspan of near 20". This

The Lewis's Woodpecker quickly found a food source in the native pecans along the river. Photo Harry Forbes.

bird is mostly silent and we rarely ever heard any call, or even any drumming. Lewis's is known to make a weak "churr, churr" call which we possibly heard the first few days the bird was in Junction. This species nests in cavities, like other woodpeckers, and mostly uses cavities already prepared by other birds.

The Lewis's Woodpecker has perfected the ability to hawk or fly-catch aerial insects and is very remarkable in this regard. The Acorn and Red-headed Woodpeckers, and to some degree the Northern Flicker, all show this characteristic but the Lewis's Woodpecker has been reported to be more specialized in this function than all the others. Watching the Junction bird hawk insects over the South Llano River was awe-inspiring. Often flying insects were over 100' away yet the bird could see them, sometimes going after more than one insect. Even while the bird was motionless on one of his favorite limbs he would be scanning the sky with bill upturned. Then, he would suddenly dart off in a direct flight that ended with some aerial acrobatics and captured prey. When not fly-catching, the bird spent much of the day flicking bark off of dead limbs, which apparently were rich in some type of beetle or other insect. Lewis's does not excavate or bore deeply like other woodpeckers. Some sources contend the bird lacks specialized anatomy for deep boring, possibly alluding to its smaller head and neck musculature relative to body size. If insects are in short supply the bird will eat nuts, especially acorns. We never saw the bird in any oak trees but in January through early March, when insects were fewer, the Junction bird feasted on the small, sweet native pecans that were abundant in the tops of the trees. We even observed the bird storing them in a knothole on numerous occasions and then visiting the hole later.

Early after discovery it was apparent that the Junction bird did things as if on a schedule. He would visit certain trees in the morning and certain other trees in the afternoon. He always seemed to sit motionless in one of two dead trees across the river just before he went to roost. The pecan trees at this time did not have leaves so he was easy and reliably seen in these trees. About an hour before sunset he would fly south out of sight to his roost site. I was determined to locate his roost site and did on January 18th, two weeks after discovery. Like the species is known to do, the bird was using an already excavated hole in a telephone pole across the highway from the Fairground complex, .75 miles from his feeding area on the river. Birders in town would later be encouraged to watch the pole at a specific time late in the day for a great view. Some observers must have thought I was some kind of "bird whisperer". Not really. The bird was just extremely predictable in following his routine. This aspect of his behavior amazed this observer more than any other.

The Lewis's Woodpecker was removed from the Texas Review List in 2002. Up until that time 59 occurrences of the bird had been documented in Texas. Considered very rare in Texas, one or two can usually be expected to be found seasonally from late Fall into early Spring. From January to March in 2012 four birds were located: the Junction bird (Kimble Co.), two at the Nature Conservancy Independence Creek Preserve (Terrell Co.), and a one-day bird in Medina County. A bird like Lewis's Woodpecker could be easily missed

in the immense area that is the western half of Texas. Most of the acreage is privately owned and observers are not plentiful. If I had arrived 5 minutes later that first morning, the Junction bird would in all probability not have been found. The last sighting of the Junction bird was on April 22nd. He was present for at least 110 consecutive days. Previous Texas records for the species indicate some tendency for long stays from winter into early Spring. Two separate birds in Kerrville (Kerr Co.) in 1987 and 1988 stayed for over 3 months. Since 2000, Lewis's Woodpecker has been documented in such Texas locales as Abilene (2000), Midland (2010 and with many prior reports), Fredericksburg (2001), Ozona (2009), Brownwood (2005), Hartley (2002), Big Bend National Park (2002 & 2009), Guadalupe Mountains National Park (2006), Choke Canyon State Park (2001) and Balcones Canyonland National Wildlife Refuge over the 2003-04 winter. All previous reports and documented sightings do indicate some pattern of irruption into Texas but it generally appears to be weak. Ebird records seem to show a stronger irruptive pattern of Lewis's Woodpecker into SW New Mexico and SE Arizona.

The Junction bird was observed by hundreds of birders and nature enthusiasts from all over Texas and the USA. On one particular day I had observers from both Massachusetts and Hawaii. The Junction merchants certainly appreciated the attention! It was my privilege to be able to extend the noted Texas hospitality.

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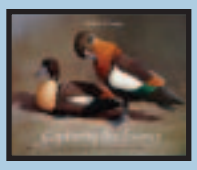
Media Reviews

Edited by Sheridan Coffey



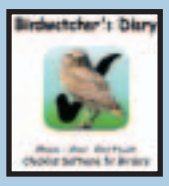
Capturing the Essence: Techniques for Bird Artists

By W.T. Cooper

Paperback: 128 pages; Publisher: Yale University Press [2011]; Dimensions: 10 x 0.4 x 11.5 inches; Weight: 15.5 ounces; ISBN: 978-0300176261

William T. Cooper's "Capturing the Essence" is a richly illustrated guide to further the experienced bird artist's technique in a sit-at-home workshop format. The inclusion of many preliminary color studies and pencil sketches with thorough explanations and tips is a treat. How these can be applied to producing a completed painting whether in watercolor, acrylic, or oil adds to the enjoyment. Mr Cooper's book is an inspiration to anyone interested in an accomplished artist's approach to his art.

Lynn Delvin



Birdwatcher's Diary by Stevens Creek Software

Stevens Creek Software, developer of Birdwatcher's Diary, has been developing software since 1988 and moved to portable computing with the Palm OS in 1990 and the iPhone in 2008. Their company is named for Stevens Creek that runs through their area of California, and is a popular birding spot for the Stevens Creek staff. Because they are birders! And, I'm going to make a little generalization here; we birders have certain ways of thinking about things and doing things. And because they are birders too, they know that and the app reflects it.

I've been using Birdwatcher's Diary (BWD) since the Palmetto Christmas Bird Count in December of 2010. Getting started with BWD involves first reading the manual which I did not do until the second day I was using it. The app is complicated. It can have a steep learning curve. This is a feature-rich app which requires some instruction. My second day using BWD I managed to completely delete a full day's bird list. You might, too. It has to do with how the app archives sightings. This is also one of the best features of BWD when it comes to outputting sightings that are ready for upload to eBird. Once I read the manual and figured it out I never lost another checklist.

Let's say I am heading out into the field. I start by setting up my first location in BWD. This can be accomplished in many ways, such as using a location that I've already set up in BWD – all of my locations get saved for future re-use. Next I select the list of birds that my sightings will be drawn from. I usually use the Texas list, but I can also create a custom list that cuts down on the number of possible birds and shortens the list. For instance, when I did a Texas Big Day I created a custom list of the birds I expected and hoped for along the route. Now I have my location and my list, and it's time to start recording birds.

For this example I'm going to start my birding day in my back yard. I hear a Northern Cardinal as soon as I step outside. Now I want to find Northern Cardinal in the list of birds and record one individual. This is where I can really start customizing the app to suit my birding style. I use 4-letter banding codes when I record birds. So in the app I can sort my list in that way. I could also sort by first name, last name, taxonomic order or order that the birds were seen in. But I'm looking for a banding code, so NOCA is my quest. Along the right side of the screen are letters, A through Z, top to bottom (just like in my phone's contacts screen). I tap N. Next the letters MA through OV are displayed from top to bottom on the right side of the screen. This is the "Intelliscroll" feature that narrows down my search and is an innovation unique to this app. I tap NO and the next screen displays NOCA. I tap it once and have recorded my first bird. Oh, but wait! I just saw a male and female fly by in front of me. I need to record a second individual. I can filter my screen to show only birds that I have already recorded by tapping an icon on the screen. I do that, and my NOCA sighting is there. I tap the name and increase my count to 2 individuals.

As I continue my birding morning, I record Blue Jay, European Starling, Black-crested Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and 10 other species. At this point I decide it's a pretty birdy morning and decide to head out to Hornsby Bend to see what's on the ponds. Once I arrive there I change my location in the app and continue to use the same list to record the birds there. This is significant. The app will tag each new sighting with the new location. Let's say I just saw a Northern Cardinal. Using the filter to show only the birds I've already seen, there are only 16 species to look through to find NOCA and tap it. This is a tremendous time-saver, and keeps my eyes on the birds instead of on my phone. And I can easily

toggle between only the birds already seen and all of the birds on the list. When I see that American Coot, I'm going to need to expand my list because I did not find one in my yard. Yet.

Remember the Texas Big Day I mentioned? Not only did I use a custom list, but I then filtered my bird list to show only the bird I HAD NOT seen. How cool is that?

Now it's time to head home so I archive my sightings and use the output feature to send myself a file suitable for upload to eBird. The app makes this really simple by asking me to select what type of output I want. Once complete I send the file to my email address. The archive is saved in BWD so I can retrieve it at any time in the future. The next release of BWD will include the capability to upload checklists directly from the app to eBird. I don't yet know how that will work, but I'm excited to find out!

For now, when I get to my computer my file is waiting in my inbox. I save it to my computer, and then import it into eBird. Remember that I was in two different locations? The single spreadsheet that I received will be uploaded to eBird as two separate checklists. That's so cool!

I consider BWD to be much more than a simple listing app, and I didn't even scratch the surface of the features available for use. For instance, since I can use my own custom lists, I can even use it to record lists of mammals, butterflies, moths, baseball cards, any sort of list that I feel like creating. I could even make a list of my lists, which now that I think about it is kind of a good idea. I recommend this app without hesitation to my birding friends, and I recommend it to you too. Oh, and be sure to read the manual.

Laurie Foss lauriefoss@gmail.com

Nature Watch Austin
Guide to the Seasons in an Urban Wildland
By Lynne Weber and Jim Weber

Nature Guide - Natural History; 5.75 x 8.5, 256 pp. ; 179 color photos. 78 sketches. 2 maps. Ref. Index.; Pub Date: 09/28/2011; 978-1-60344-431-6

It would be wonderful if every metroplex in Texas had a reference book like this. Amateur naturalists Lynne and Jim Weber have succeeded in capturing many different elements of the natural world, and organized them by month so that the reader does not have to digest the material all at once. In fact this book shines when one dips into it periodically to learn new information or refresh the memory about a topic. Dragonflies, spiders, insects like butterflies and moths, amphibians, reptiles, mussels, bats and other mammals, celestial showers, plants, gardening for wildlife, and geology are spotlighted in addition to various birds. If you are an Austin birder who wants to be a little less bird-centric, this book deserves your attention. It will make your day in the field or your backyard observations all the more satisfying.

An excellent introduction to the ecology of the Edwards Plateau grounds the reader in the underlying geology of the western part of Austin. Then, in each chapter the Webers cover several different topics. For example February covers owls, mountain lions and bobcats, roadrunners and ferns. March features the Golden-cheeked Warbler, bats, doves and cacti. August showcases meteor showers, scorpions and centipedes, spiders and caverns. At the beginning of each chapter is climatic data for that month, and after each topic is a "Where to Watch" section that encourages the reader to get outside and actually see the bird, plant, lizard, etc. that was mentioned. If you get hooked on a topic there is an excellent reference list at the back of the book, so you can build your nature library.

This book provides an outstanding foundation for further nature study. Jim Weber's photos can be used to help identify various species, and Lynne's sketches will inspire you to begin creating your own. It will enhance your perception of the changing seasons.

It must have been quite a challenge for the Webers to decide what to leave out of a book like this. Surely the amazing Highland Mall Purple Martin roost merited inclusion, and a photo of the charismatic Painted Bunting might have converted some readers into birders. The east side of Austin in the Blackland Prairie deserved more than one paragraph. However, the book has amazing breadth, even featuring wintering sparrows arriving in November, and puncturing myths about the often maligned Ashe Juniper (cedar).

This book would be a perfect gift for any Austinite you know, whether newly arrived or long time resident. The only prerequisite is a modicum of interest in the natural world. The Webers will do the rest.

Media Reviews

Petrels, Albatrosses & Storm-Petrels of North America

By Steve N.G.Howell

Hardcover: 520 pages; Publisher:Princeton University Press [2012]; Dimensions: 67 x 1.7 x 10 inches; Weight: 4 pounds; ISBN: 978-069-114-2111

Mention the word "tubenoses" to most North American birders and their minds conjure up a steady diet of pterodromas and storm-petrels over a towering sea off the Atlantic shelf, or vast mixed feeding flocks shamefully close to the Californian coast. But for Texas pelagic birders the pickings are depressingly meager compared to our lucky cohorts on each coast. Nonetheless there are moments of tubenose excitement to be had in the northern Gulf – in-between the long scorched periods of emptiness. No matter where you enjoy/endure your pelagic birding, identification of the tubenoses presents one of our greatest birding challenges – as much for the circumstances as for the inherent similarities of many species pairs or groups. We have all tried to interpret Harrison's books and the limited data in each new general Field Guide, but are usually left with more questions than answers – and thinking that maybe empids aren't so bad after all…

No more. Finally there is THE book for tubenoses. With the possible exception of Hadoram Shirahai no-one has spent more time at sea with tubenoses of such variety than has Steve Howell. His personal experience, enhanced by extensive museum work and conversations with the Who's Who of Global pelagic birding, have lead to a spectacular guide to the tubenoses of our region – a book that fills you with confidence in the author while at the same time pulls no punches about the difficulties we all face when attempting to identify these charismatic birds. After such praise a Reality-Check is in order: This book will not turn you into a great pelagic birder; only EXPERIENCE at sea can do that, as Howell clearly points out in the introduction sections. The author provides a sobering but very helpful summary of the pitfalls of this craft, distance, lighting, wind strength, wind direction, the bird's direction, the bird's behavior, the bird's physical state (body mass; molt timing), and most importantly your knowledge of the potential candidate taxa. This information, coupled with Howell's tips on how to "do" a pelagic, will enable anyone with the right desire to make significant strides in learning about tubenoses and how to identify them.

While the book is limited to "North America" – defined as Alaska/Canada south to Panama - Howell has included all the taxa that have been documented in the region, including accidentals plus a handful of forms that the author feels are candidates for an appearance. Thus 70 taxa are covered, making this guide just as useful for European birders. I have deliberately used the terms "taxa" and "taxon" rather than "species" at certain points in the review because a number of the forms treated in this book are considered to be subspecies by some authorities (including the author). Tubenose taxonomy is in a state of flux, and the author explains in depth his take on the situation, and provides references for alternate views.

The taxon accounts vary in size – mostly related to the extent of identification issues – and reflect the very latest in knowledge about identification and distribution, that is until the publication cut-off point, probably some time in 2011. Howell has borrowed from his "Gulls" book the very useful feature of having a "similar species" subsection that lists - in decreasing sequence of importance according to the author – the confusion taxa, with details of the identification criteria compared to that taxon. Another nice touch is having separate subsections for the Pacific and Atlantic, so that us Texans don't have to plow though paragraphs about exotic Pacific taxa! There are some occurrence nuggets for Texas birders, such as the July 2000 record of a moribund Short-tailed Shearwater on the Gulf side of Florida – henceforth making our assumptions about dark shearwaters in the Gulf less simple!

Although this guide comes close to being perfect, I have a couple of small criticisms:

1) Each species account includes a series of photos labeled so that any reference to such a photo is easily located (e.g. "P12-3" will be the third photo in the Audubon's Shearwater section that starts on page 125, as stated in the well-designed "List of Species Covered" at the front of the book) – but the book also has a number of photos and a few illustrations that are only numbered ascendantly through the entire book. Thus the account for Audubon's Shearwater lists – in addition to the P12 photos – "Figure 66, 90, 92, 97". There is no way to know what page any of these figures is on – you have to flip backwards through an unknown number of pages until you find the figures.

2) As with his terrific Gulls field guide Howell has made the citation look-up process unnecessarily cumbersome. In this case there are two sections; one titled "works" and then a second titled "geographic references" – which is then subsectioned into three geographic subregions. If the reader wants to find a cited publication he/she has to potentially look in four lists, and there is no clear key as to what type of

publication appears in which of the two types of list (e.g. a paper by Wetmore describing a new subspecies appears in the second list but a paper by Nichols describing a new subspecies appears in the first list – and "Lockwood & Freeman 2004" appears in both lists!)

However the above are just minor quibbles. Any birder anywhere who wants to know more about the molt, taxonomy, distribution, and/or identification of tubenoses MUST get this book.

The Albatross and the Fish: Linked Lives in the Open Seas
By Robin W. Doughty and Virginia Carmichael
Foreword by H.R.H. Prince of Wales
Introduction by John Croxall
Paperback: 336 pages; Publisher: University of Texas Press [2011]; Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.1 x 9.3 inches; Weight: 1.1 pounds; ISBN: 978-0-292-72682-6

This book is filled with information regarding the history of the albatross and efforts to save the more than twenty species from extirpation. The authors go into detail about the work done in the Southern Ocean from the early 1900's onward. They describe efforts in Japan, New Zealand, and Australia as World Heritage Sites were developed to protect these endangered species.

The authors do a fine job tying in the problem of overfishing, particularly of the Patagonian Toothfish (aka Chilean Sea Bass) and Bluefin Tuna. A detailed description of longline fishing shares how the vessels of some countries used ONE HUNDRED MILLION hooks a year to catch tuna within a five year period in the early '80's. Thousands of Albatross were unintentionally hooked as they dived for bait. So…both the tuna and the Albatross experienced a tremendous decrease in numbers. Researchers recommended demersal fishing, whereby the lines drop farther down into the waters as opposed to riding the surface. Frozen bait could be used to drop the lines more quickly. Streamers could be added to the stern to scare off the birds, petrels as well as Albatross. On land the rodent and cat threat during nesting season was devastating. The Albatross only breeds every two years. Rats find the eggs particularly appealing and the Albatross is a relatively non-aggressive bird. Generations of birds were being lost.

The reader comes away recognizing the interdependence of ocean life. Great attention focuses on the powerful efforts of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Life Resources (CCAMLR) and the Commission for the Conservation of Bluefin Tuna. To address the Albatross one must address fishing and vice versa, in terms of bycatch. Political diplomacy, education, intense outreach, and patience have been a prerequisite for disparate groups to work together.

The authors are careful to avoid labeling countries as obstructionistic regarding these environmental efforts. Quiet praise is given to Australia, New Zealand, and Britain. The authors are particularly admiring of the work of John Croxall (he wrote the introduction) and Nigel Brothers. Both men studied the impact of fishing on the Albatross and recognized the wholesale depletion of fish by the profound overfishing. They advocated for regulation of the longlines and the tonnage of the catch. Praise is also directed towards the work of Lance Richdale on Taiaroa Head in New Zealand. His studies, in the 1950's, on the survival of the eggs and subsequent fledging of Northern Royal Albatrosses have influenced the work of future generations of researchers. On Torishima, a Japanese island, Hiroshi Hasegawa has devoted more than forty years to saving the Short-tailed Albatross from extirpation.

Doughty and Carmichael weave the stories of these independent researchers into what has become a global effort to save the albatross. That seems to be the purpose of the book. Life-long commitment and effort must stand alongside patience as countries across the world are encouraged to save the birds and the fish. I'm pretty sure that Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherds have other ideas about how to achieve ecological conservation but then…that is their book to write.

Sandra G. Moore sgjjm@sbcglobal.net

Journal Of The Texas Nutting's Flycatcher Sightings—A First Texas Record

By Carolyn Ohl-Johnson

December 31, 2011: On the afternoon of this New Year's Eve day a post appeared on Texbirds listserv from Mike Austin of Friendswood, TX, titled, "Possible NUTTING'S FLYCATHCER Big Bend N.P." The message read, "David Bradford just called me from Big Bend. This afternoon at the Santa Elena Canyon parking lot he and another found which may be a Nutting's Flycatcher. The call was totally unlike Ash-throated Flycatcher and photos were taken. More details from David when he gets back into cell phone range."

I recognized that name, David Bradford, as the leader of a tour group, Penfeathers, which was staying at Terlingua Ranch lodge near my home in the Christmas Mountains, and were scheduled to bird my Christmas Mountains Oasis the following day. On this last day of 2011, the weather was perfect. The next day was predicted to be horrible. All I wanted to do was learn more about the sighting first hand, or better yet, go to Santa Elena Canyon in person. But I had other obligations. Besides the group due the next day, I had a house full of holiday guests.

Jan 1, 2012: The enthusiastic group of six arrived on schedule early in the morning. It took little to persuade them to have some coffee in the warm house and wait for the weather outside to warm up before looking for birds. (It never did warm up.) Also at the house was my warmed up computer.

Brandon Percival was the person in the group who had taken photos of the bird in question, 189 of them. He is from Colorado and very familiar with the Ash-throated. He related to me how in midafternoon the group was returning to their vehicle when he heard an unfamiliar call note. Upon tracking the sound he saw that the bird looked quite similar to an Ash-throated, and immediately entertained the thought that it might be a Nutting's, based on the sound and that it was "brighter yellow underneath." Just in case, he made sure the whole group got a look at it,

Nutting's Flycatcher at Santa Elena Canyon by Kelly Bryan.

One of many tour buses that came and went from the Santa Elena Canyon parking lot.
Photo by Carolyn Ohl-Johnson.

and started snapping photos of it for documentation. None of the group had ever seen a Nutting's. The bird called so rarely that the unprepared birders were unable to capture any kind of recording of it. They didn't have a Mexican bird guide among them either.

Brandon downloaded his photos to my computer, sending a couple to Eric Carpenter, a member of the Texas Birds Record Committee (TBRC). I questioned the whole group extensively while it was still fresh in their minds. We searched my library of bird guides, listened to myiarchus vocalizations, and all concluded it had to be a Nutting's (myiarchus nuttingi). The only other myiarchus possibility was an Ash-throated. I was very familiar with that species; they nest all over my property every year, so I was convinced it couldn't be that, based on what they all totally agreed they had seen and heard. However, I had to take into consideration that I don't often observe Ash-throateds out of breeding season, and Brandon probably didn't either. I had seen one last winter at Rio Grande Village in Big Bend National Park when the Tufted Flycatcher was being seen there, but had paid very little attention to it.

Noting that Susan Billetdeaux, who singlehandedly runs the Texas Rare Bird Alert, had not mentioned the possible Nutting's, I emailed her that I was confident it was a genuine Nutting's sighting. When asked about it later, she said she had posted it as a "possible Nutting's." I must have overlooked it somehow. At any rate, she now prudently posted it as a "**probable** Nutting's." She further stated that "deciding just what is possible or probable is always a challenge." I have to add that she does a lot of homework before deciding.

Next, I emailed photos and description to Kelly Bryan and Mark Lockwood, both bird experts. They both thought it looked good for a Nutting's and agreed a voice analysis would be required to be positive. Both were away from the area for the holidays. Eric posted a link to the photos on Texbirds at Brandon's request. The sighting and the New Year were both less than a day old. Nutting's or not, it was a dynamic way to start 2012.

Jan 2: The birding community was understandably skeptical and cautious. The species

Nutting's Flycatcher at Santa Elena Canyon by Kelly Bryan.

had never been documented in Texas before. One sighting had recently been denied record status in California after the voice was analyzed. On the other hand, Arizona currently had two accepted Nutting's. This species is an uncommon species, even in its home range in Mexico. Their range comes closest to the United States in Southeastern AZ.

Matt York and Heidi Trudell put pressing personal business on hold to go down from their home in Marathon and attempt a voice recording, albeit with amateur recording equipment. The intrepid couple succeeded, and for the first time the world heard a faint, innocuous call note of the Santa Elena flycatcher.

Santa Elena Canyon is considered one of the country's most gorgeous places, and was my late mother's favorite place on earth. Just the day before the flycatcher was spotted, my daughter and her boyfriend posed there for romantic photos. She then declared it to be her favorite place on earth, not knowing that it had been her grandmother's also. But they were not birders. I had never seen any special birds at Santa Elena Canyon. It wasn't even on my normal park birding route.

Jan 3: Kelly got back to his home in Ft Davis late on this afternoon. I asked to go with him the next day for the professional recordings he hoped to get. (His bird recordings end up archived at Cornell University.)

Steve Glover posted an excellent post to Texbirds on why one should be cautious about Nutting's identification. Apparently, it could only be done with rigorous voice sonogram analysis. Regarding the California bird rejected by the committee he said, "…observers consistently stated that it didn't sound like any Ash-throated call they were familiar with… The point here is that while it may not sound like an Ash-throated, it may just be that it is giving calls it doesn't typically give on the breeding grounds or in migration…" Doubts began to intrude into my thoughts. I figured the next day would make or break the identification…. a Nutting's, or not!

Jan 4: Early on this morning Kelly, Dale Ohl (my sister-in-law), and I made haste to Santa Elena Canyon geared up with cameras, as well as Kelly's expertise and recording equipment. After about an hour of searching, along with a group of other birders, I finally located the bird in the vicinity of its original discovery site. Virginia birders, Bill and Kathy Mauck had just come from getting unsatisfactory looks at the Arizona Nutting's. When

Another view of Nutting's Flycatcher at Santa Elena Canyon.
Photo Kelly Bryan

this bird was spotted, Bill just happened to be the person closest to me. In a loud birders' whisper I told him I had the bird in view, "get Kelly!" That sweet man headed in the opposite direction of his coveted sighting to fetch Kelly before getting as much as a glimpse of the bird for himself.

As Kelly prepared to record the bird, with all the birders quietly gathered in attendance, a tourist vehicle was approaching. I ran over to get them to turn off their engines, but by then Kelly had recorded a few call notes from the bird, then his recorder stopped working. As it turned out the bird never vocalized again while we were there. Everyone got ample good looks at the bird though, as well as many photos.

Before Kelly was able to get his recording posted online, Chris Benesh, possibly the Texas expert most familiar with Nutting's, posted on Texbirds regarding Heidi's recording, "While the fidelity of the recordings is poor, it does document one of the characteristic sounds of Nutting's, a two-noted stutter call. I'm used to hearing the call when birds are slightly more vocal and excited than the bird in the video, but it matches quite well with a comparative example from a Nutting's I recorded in Oaxaca…." He goes on to detail technical features he sees in the photos making it look like a Nutting's, including, "The Big Bend bird shows a classic Nutting's tail pattern too. A similar pattern is only rarely shown by Ash-throated, and in such instances, there is still usually greater contrast between the brown and rufous bits (i.e. Nutting's has a more blended tail pattern blurring the boundaries between brown and rufous)."

Jan 5: Kelly's excellent recording pretty much convinced the birding community of the legitimacy of the sighting. Not one person was convinced it was not a Nutting's. A few were skeptical, but most agreed it was positively a Nutting's.

Susan now updated the rare bird website from "probable Nutting's" to "Nutting's." Plans were being made all over Texas, and likely from farther away, to come see the bird. It was seen by at least five birders again this day.

My personal observation was that besides the voice being nothing like an Ash-throated, but similar to a Great-crested (which no one considered it could be), it foraged mostly low to mid-canopy, and in a manner very unlike an Ash-throated. The belly was yellower, the

top of the head was browner, and when it flew much more rufous showed on the tail. It appeared to be smaller, although that in itself was not reliably diagnostic.

Referring to Kelly's recording, Chris wrote on Texbirds' Facebook page, "… To my ear, these calls sound much like those of Nutting's that I hear in Mexico, though finding a close match in recordings was more challenging than I anticipated…. I'm convinced the Big Bend bird is a Nutting's based on the photos and vocal evidence..."

Jan 6: The bird was seen this day by numerous observers. However, Martin Reid of the Texas Birds Record Committee and his companions, Sheridan Coffey, Willie Sekula, and Ed Wetzel, arrived after it had been seen, and missed it. They resolved to go back the next day and search again.

Jan 7: This day devolved into somewhat of a fiasco. The question had segued from "Nutting's, or not?" to "Will we see the Nutting's, or not?" (Some seekers may have been thinking, "Are we nuts, or not?")

People started arriving before 9:00AM, and continued arriving throughout the morning. The bird was nowhere to be found. By around 2:00 PM some birders had given up and left, others were searching at various nearby locations. Martin Reid and his group gave up and decided to bird elsewhere. He suggested they check out the Santa Elena Canyon Overlook. Their route took them past it anyway. Sheridan recounted later (Texbirds post), "As we pulled into the parking lot we saw a small myiarchus flycatcher come in and briefly land on an ocotillo. The bird then shot down the hill towards the picnic area [original location]. We immediately drove back down, where the flycatcher was found by Heidi almost immediately."

By that time only Heidi, Matt, and a couple of others were at the original trailhead location. Kelly Bryan, and a group with him were just returning from spending the previous hour searching the nearby Cottonwood Campground. This is what happened next, according to Heidi (personal email, reprinted here with her permission), "At about 2 pm, Sheridan, Martin, Ed, and Willie came screeching back into the lot… to say they'd gone to the Santa Elena Overlook, and a small Myiarchus had flown down in this direction. At the trail head… I saw a flutter of bird on the ground, in the grass under a mesquite. It stayed on the ground while I got bins on it and saw the gray face - didn't even wait for the rest of the body to pop up - better to yell at everyone and have a false alarm than kill time. Since Steve [Collins] was next to me, I got him on the bird while yelling at everyone else…" Then, with the group's help, Heidi telephoned any of the seekers they had numbers for. One party they were able to reach had to return from 23 miles away. Some were unable to be contacted, unfortunately.

The "putative Nutting's Flycatcher," as one expert called it, hung around for nearly an hour this time. Not a few hopeful seekers were "grinning from ear to ear." Before Heidi and Matt left, it "gave a nice, clear series of calls." By then, no other birders were present, and no audio was recorded of that surprise final performance. Nevertheless, most of the day's seekers went to bed happy.

Kelly surmised that the bird was expanding its foraging range along the swath of vegetation toward the overlook and along the west side of the road, rendering it harder to locate in the future as there are no trails in those areas. His words turned out to be prophetic.

Jan 8: No sightings were reported. It was reported that someone looked for it, but not whether they were successful, or not.

Jan 9: Seen this day only between 9-9:30 AM.

Former TBRC member, John Arvin, posted on Texbirds regarding likelihood of acceptance of the Nutting's Texas sightings, "… my best guess is that it will be accepted since all the evidence seems to point to Nutting's as opposed to Ash-throated Flycatcher, its closest look-alike, and with which it was lumped for several decades in its history." That will be a

Birders searching for Nutting's Flycatcher at Santa Elena Canyon.
Photo by Maryann Eastman.

big sigh of relief to all who made sacrifices to see and document it.

Jan 10: This day I was determined to drive to Santa Elena Canyon to spend the day helping others find the bird, and try for better photos of it. I thought that would be a fun challenge. When I arrived at around 10 AM, a couple from Houston had already been there for half an hour, with no success. We ended up trying every strategy I could come up with… the bird simply did not put in an appearance. Other birders from Dallas arrived later in the afternoon and were still searching when I left around 5 PM. All vowed to return the next day.

Besides the procession of birders to Santa Elena Canyon, the place is a popular tourist destination. At times the parking area would be empty for extended periods of time, but more often there were literally busloads of people coming and going. I didn't get the sense that the activity affected the flycatcher's behavior though.

Jan 11: I got a call midday from Carlton Collier, the Houston birder who had searched with me the previous day to no avail. He said the group had seen it foraging at a distance, but had not gotten satisfactory looks at it.

Jan 12: Many birders waited all day long for the bird to appear, but it didn't. I even bush-whacked a mile downstream, the direction the bird had been seen arriving from. There was some suitable habitat at several places, but it was like finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Jan 19: Brady Surber and companions claim to have heard the bird around 11:30 AM in the parking lot area but did not see it.

I went back on two different occasions but had no success. No additional sightings reports were received. And so, all too quickly, ends the story of Texas's first Nutting's Flycatcher.

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The Streaked One Who Lives Amidst Sea Foam: The Surfbird of 2012

By Rex G. Stanford

The Surfbird that graced Corpus Christi's Packery Channel jetties, at least as early as March 22 and as late as April 1, 2012 was, if for no other reason than its extreme rarity, a cause of great excitement among birders, who came from near and far to visit it. Some visited it more than once. For some—perhaps many—birders there might have been additional reasons for this excitement beyond adding a tick to a list or the fulfillment of catching up with a rarity. Topping those additional reasons surely would be the pleasure of seeing this unusually structured, impeccably groomed, crisply breeding-plumaged shorebird in action on wave-washed, algae-slickened red-granite slabs that made viewing and photography very easy. Byron Stone, having visited this Surfbird, said it well in a TEXBIRDS (03/31/12) posting, "An absolutely stunning bird." This Surfbird exhibited a very special blend of gentle countenance, elegance of markings, athletic vigor, gymnastic dexterity, diverse feeding strategies, and confiding character that made it enthralling to watch. Its approachability was lauded by numerous visitors, and approachability would appear to be a species characteristic (see, e.g., Dunne, 2006, p. 223, on Surfbird behavior). No wonder birders were happy, took many exciting photos, and some, like my wife and I, fell in love with the bird!

Ornithologists were precise and graphic in creating the Surfbird's full scientific name, *Aphriza virgata*, which may be interpreted as indicating "the streaked one who lives amidst sea foam." This scientific name, once understood, may seem like a bit of poetry in scientific garb. My guide to understanding the Surfbird's scientific genus name (Greek-rooted) and species name (Latin-rooted) was *A Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names* (Jobling, 1991), but the phrase (above) in quotation marks, which syntactically conjoins the meanings of both the genus and the species names, is my own rendering. It, though, fully accords with the meanings explained by Jobling, who treated separately the etymological roots of genus and species names.

The Surfbird's uniqueness has been recognized by its being the sole species assigned to its genus, *Aphriza*. Ornithologists obviously did not feel very comfortable with conceptually housing this extraordinary species in any of the other shorebird genera. This one is different, and part of the joy of seeing it may be the revelation it provides of nature's creative generosity.

For starters, Surfbird is the only sandpiper with a plover-like bill, but neither its plumage characteristics nor its possession of a hind toe are plover-like. It breeds on rocky tundra, largely on mountains above tree line in northwest, southern, and western Alaska, and in the Yukon Territory, but its winter habits sometimes take this highly capable migrant as far south as is physically possible from its summer home. The Surfbird is unique in the north/south extent of its winter range. It winters along a narrow, coast-hugging strip of wave-lashed rocky terrain from the southernmost finger of Alaska through the seemingly endless, multi-nation Pacific coast right down into Tierra del Fuego, the southern tip of South America. The largest numbers are thought to winter between southern Alaska and northern Mexico, but smaller numbers winter in appropriate habitat as far south as possible along the Pacific coast. Although its wintering range closely hugs the Pacific coast in rock-strewn areas, a very few of its kind, to the delight of twitching birders, somehow find their way eastward in this country, with vagrants appearing as far east as Florida (Paulson, 2005), including the Texas coast, which has had 10 officially accepted records (review list, Texas Bird Records Committee, http://texasbirds.org/tbrc/reviewsp.htm), including

the long-staying Port Aransas south jetty bird (May 1-9 2009). Lockwood and Freeman (2004, p. 66) provide brief characterization of earlier Texas Surfbird sightings. The 2012 bird, the focus of this article and currently under review by the TBRC, broke the 2009 length-of-stay record by having been seen on 11 days (March 22 – April 1). The Surfbird records, except for one on a sandy North Padre Island beach (April 15-21, 1995, Kleberg Co.), have all been, as expected, on our coast in rocky settings. Their variable-length stays all have been in the spring, with the earliest arrival date being March 16, most birds being seen in April, and the 2009 Port Aransas bird, as noted above, appearing in May.

The 2009 Port Aransas Surfbird, like the one discussed here, attracted my attention, and my wife, Birgit, and I visited its site, the south jetty, on May 6, 2009. For us, however, this was not just a life bird. Given our intense interest in shorebirds, it commanded our special attention as a unique shorebird occupying its own genus and having a decidedly different appearance than any other species likely to be encountered on this side of the Pacific. (Breeding-plumaged Great Knot, an Asiatic bird, might easily be confused with breeding-plumaged Surfbird, except for the Knot's dark legs and its bill being long, tapered, slightly downcurved, uniformly dark-colored, and non-plover-like—not to mention the Great Knot's being a rarely found vagrant to this continent.)

That effort to visit the Port Aransas south jetty (2009) Surfbird was, initially, somewhat rewarding, turned substantially intimidating, but ended curiously inspirational. Shortly after we headed out along the jetty, the Surfbird flew across, heading north toward the north jetty. I saw it fly across, but my wife missed it because her attention was elsewhere along the jetty. Having, then, fruitlessly scanned over to the north jetty to try to find it, we headed farther out on the jetty hoping that the Surfbird might have doubled back and might be foraging farther out, where it often had been seen. The jetty has a reputation for potentially dangerous traversal due to a need for hopping across rock gaps and having to confront the various other dangers attending traversal of jetties that provide uneven footing, some wet surfaces, potential algae, and wind. We had not gone much farther when I tripped on an uneven surface and went flying forward in a fall that could have been disastrous for me and for the camera, long lens, and binoculars around my neck. Astonishingly, I was stopped in mid-fall by the arms of a kind, alert, and dazzlingly quick young lady who had been traveling the opposite direction walking with a child. "Honey, are you okay?' she asked. "Yes! Thanks to you!" I gasped. After we had thanked this extraordinary young lady, we tempted fate no longer and retreated from the jetty. Not having fully accomplished our mission of observation and photography, we departed frustrated but deeply moved by the caring kindness of a total stranger who had made the world seem a better place. Both compassion and the Surfbird had graced the south jetty that day.

I first learned about the 2012 Surfbird via a TEXBIRDS posting (Friday, March 23, 2012) by Fred Collins, who disclosed that on March 22 at 3:00 PM Jim Howard had reported to eBird a Surfbird at the Packery Channel jetties. Should we go there? It felt best to wait to be sure this would not be a very short-term visitor. Then, a TEXBIRDS report on Monday, March 26, by Eric Carpenter relayed news from Jim Howard that on Sunday, March 25 he and Chad Doolen had re-found the Surfbird about halfway down the Packery Channel south jetty. Carpenter had seen excellent photos of the Surfbird taken on March 25 by Doolen. This news ignited my desire to seek this jetty-dwelling Surfbird and to do so quickly. Birgit, remembering our recent near-misadventure on a jetty, declined to join me and begged me not to go. She, however, wanted to see this extraordinary shorebird, and she became eager to go after I promised not to engage in rock hopping but

The Surfbird of Spring 2012: a handsome, crisply marked, breeding-plumaged individual exemplifying its scientific name, translatable as "the streaked one who lives amidst sea foam."

to study and photograph the Surfbird from the closest safely reachable vantage point. If distance there should be too formidable for the long lens, I would resort to digiscoping in a last-ditch compromise. So we headed for Corpus Christi the next morning, Tuesday, March 27, still with some concern that we might get psychologically sucked into rock hopping if the other options should prove unproductive.

Arriving at the jetty, we were frustrated momentarily—not wanting to be delayed--by a sign announcing the surprise that a beach permit was required for parking. After purchasing the permit at a nearby convenience store—$12 for the year seemed like a bargain!—we hastened back to the jetty.

We rejoiced to discover that the design of this jetty left no reason for rock hopping! Reaching the bird, which initially was out on the jetty's far end, was made spectacularly easy by a high-quality concrete walkway, and supporting oneself in the face of wind (or on a wet, potentially slick, surface) was facilitated by a heavy-duty, metal-tube banister on both sides. Seeing the bird from that walkway was aided by flat, inclined (red granite) slabs composing the jetty instead of the diversely angled huge rocks so commonly seen in jetties, boulders that easily and often can block the view of a bird. That easy-to-be-viewed arrangement did not appear to intimidate the calm, approachable Surfbird.

Birgit first spotted it on the north side of the jetty's tip, looking somewhat like a dark Rock Pigeon and initially making her wonder if it might be one. Binocular study easily disclosed its Surfbird identity. Overjoyed, but apprehensive that the young couple with baby in carriage out at the tip might somehow frighten it away, we approached to study the Surfbird at close range and simply informed the couple about our quest and of the rarity of the unusual bird before them. Considering

the bird and our interest, they, like we, talked quietly, and even when they left pushing the carriage, the Surfbird, busy feeding and as oblivious to them as it seemed to be to us, evinced no alarm or retreat. For the next 18 minutes (judged from date/time photo information) we studied this crisply plumaged, dazzlingly novel, shorebird and I took 194 photos, which implies an average interval of 5.7 seconds between photos! The bird as shown in the photos herewith was a strikingly handsome creature, bearing crisp dark/light markings, as streaks and/or as chevrons, over its topside, breast, and flanks, and rich rufous, ornate markings on some of its scapulars (i.e., shoulder-area feathers). (Photo 1 about here)

FORAGING

The Surfbird's movement while foraging was almost constant, and it ranged widely across varied substrates in its search for new and better food items. At times it virtually broke into a run, making us wonder if it would become a skier on the slick, slimy algae, but we never once saw it slip despite some seemingly very slick and slimy substrate. Its heavy legs and strong feet were supplemented by substantial sharp claws. Occasionally it stopped its searching and feeding, lifted its head and breast, revealing the clean dark chevrons on its underside, and, gazed straight ahead, seeming to wonder "Where next for food?" A decision never seemed to take long!

It was fun to watch its foraging, for it employed several strategies to take various foods and to obtain food in differing situations. More than once it used its stout bill to tug mightily at what looked like a strand of algae (but that might have been a worm tunneled under algae), gradually leaning back on its stout legs, using them to gain leverage for breaking the anchorage of its chosen morsel, and using its stout, well-clawed feet to anchor itself during the tug. Occasionally it probed deeply underneath a rock ledge or algal outgrowth, turning its head 90°, usually clockwise, pushing its stout bill underneath the food item at just the correct angle, readying for an athletic tug or to institute a prying motion. At such a time it almost seemed to transform itself into a one-eyed creature, a Cyclops, for only the skyward eye was visible.

It repeatedly made clear that it was an athletic creature, strong and gymnastic, something of a contortionist. Indeed, at times is seemed something of a dedicated acrobat in its search for food. Picking at the substrate was another mode of feeding and was quite frequent. This tactic looked very easy after some of the episodes of twisting, hanging, probing, and tugging that we observed. Sometimes, though, picking seemed a bit less genteel, as when the Surfbird had to push its face into a slimy, sticky mass of sargassum to retrieve a morsel. Fortunately, it found something through the effort, however tiny, that was to its liking.

SURFBIRD TAKES TO THE AIR!

In its seemingly ceaseless and, often, hurried search for food, the Surfbird at one point dashed to the edge of a huge jetty slab, coming to an abrupt halt at the edge of a crevasse between such slabs. From what followed, its pause at the edge of the abyss apparently was to consider flight to the next slab.

Apparent contemplation accomplished, after launching itself straight across the crevasse, the Surfbird executed a sharp left turn followed by a quick descent broken by a flourish of its wings, displaying its largely pure-white underwing coverts. Photographing its underwings had been a long-awaited event that I was quick enough, this time, to catch on camera.

Other opportunities to capture the Surfbird photographically in flight arose when wind-driven waves arrived with such height and force as to make this very alert creature take temporarily to the air in a wave-avoidance maneuver. The substantial south-sector wind threw up waves that sometimes topped the south side of the jetty and washed onto the walkway. Occasionally, too,

they made their way substantially up the rock slabs of the calmer north side where the Surfbird usually had elected to feed. It did not welcome being smacked or even under-run by a forceful wave, and several times it leapt into the air, supported by wing movement, in a lift-off that seemed to spare it such a fate by a split second! At such times it vividly displayed the bright white stripe on the dark topsides of its wings, the white underwing coverts, the white uppertail coverts and tail base, and the black remainder of its tail, except for a terminal, very narrow, white tip.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS EXTRAORDINARY VISITOR

This very welcome visitor proved itself cooperative in every way while we were there. It had been on the north side of the jetty's tip when we arrived, but despite our presence and that of the non-birding couple with child at the time we arrived, it seemed unperturbed and ready to continue foraging. It briefly flew to the south side of the tip but, perhaps finding that too wave-lashed and wind-swept at the moment, moved back to the north side and was better protected from the elements. Thereafter, it systematically explored the flat, slanted red-granite slabs that composed the jetty rocks, quite thoroughly exploring them for food, gradually working its way westward across the slabs. We, ourselves, moved slowly westward, pacing the bird at first, but we ultimately moved farther west, beyond it, to be up-sun of it and thereby able to capture photographically both its crisp light/dark patterns and the rich color in its scapulars. This calm, trusting bird remained busy and unperturbed as we moved beyond it for better light and fewer shadows.

We carefully watched it, amazed, at times, by its rapid examination of the nooks and crannies of its habitat. On account of how it did its exploration, it seemed that it might have known well each of those giant slabs and the prospects for food on the various parts of each. It seemed to know just where on each rock to examine most carefully and closely. We would suppose this species to be naturally proficient at quick assessment of the prospects around it, but it presumably had been around these jetties at least the five days since its discovery. It likely had learned considerable about the chances of finding suitable food on a given slab and at particular places on it. It, at any rate, was a very dedicated searcher, living up to the claim found in several books, that it moves about constantly while foraging! Still, it seemed to us that it was very driven to find food, even on a reasonably warm day.

Not once while we watched did it stop, poke its head under a wing, and take a snooze despite the sun being at near maximum height for the day, and when it was not actively retrieving food or eating it, it was constantly on the move. We admittedly could not see clearly the things it consumed, but we could not feel sure that we ever saw it retrieve and consume either mollusks or barnacles, which should have been relatively easy to spot and that are supposed to be at the top of its menu list during nonbreeding periods (but insects and other high-protein goodies, such as spiders, during breeding) (Kaufman, 1996, p. 207; O'Brien, Crossley, & Karlson, 2006, p. 395). We wondered whether these two jetties, as the major rocky habitat anywhere nearby, would be able to satisfy the Surfbird for long. Surfbirds will, though, during winter or migration, occasionally forage along sandy shorelines as need dictates and suitable resources exist there (Kaufman, cited above; also, April 15-21, 1995 North Padre Island beach visitor, earlier mentioned). This Surfbird certainly, though, did not appear to be starving, but, on the contrary, seemed healthy and highly energetic, a fun bird to watch. There were times, though, when my wife and I were driven to wonder what the Surfbird might be wishing or pondering. Sometimes it stood for some time at the end of one of the huge rock slabs and appeared to look wistfully across the waves rolling in. What might it have been wondering? Or wishing? Or considering doing? Perhaps it simply was considering a flight to the north jetty, but

that never happened at that point or at any time while we were there. Something more seemed to be stirring within it. Certainly there was much it might have desired, given its being so far from its traditional wintering habitat and migration route and so far from where its own kind would be in late March. Possibly it yearned for more food, more typical food, or a mate? It was approaching mating time, and this handsome individual showed something approaching full breeding plumage with evidence, in its scapulars, of more breeding-plumage patterns and color emerging. High on this Surfbird's wish list likely would have been some of its own kind and even some other species with which to associate, in part for safety in numbers on the wide-open rocky slabs. This species is highly sociable, and when it is in its own haunts, it both rests and feeds with its own kind and with other rock-loving shorebirds (Dunne, pp. 222-223.)

In its west coast rocky habitat it often associates with Black Turnstones, so we wondered if it might be joined at some point with the latter species' close relative, the Ruddy Turnstone—a species that often uses rocky areas—but we never once saw those two species together on the rocks. These important social deficits in this creature's life were saddening elements in our visit, for we wished it well, but it had neither its own kind nor the companionship of its ordinary cross-species associates. This Surfbird presumably had some deep needs that were not being met. Perhaps I simply am projecting my own concerns onto this bird, but the Surfbird seemed, somehow, eager for something not being seen and perhaps had grown weary of circulating over the same limited rocky habitat day after day, gaining nothing of the particular things a sociable species and ready-to-breed individual needs. Its food resources on this unusual and rock-limited coastline conceivably were less than typical in quantity, quality, and/or variety, but, even if that were the case, this lively, hard-foraging bird seemed to be in beautiful shape.

We were happy to have seen and satisfyingly photographed the Surfbird but, most of all, to feel that we had gotten to know, in at least some small degree, this unique, attractive, and hugely cooperative visitor. It was hard to leave what now seemed something of a friend.

It is an atypical day when I feel truly sad upon having to leave a bird, however rare and beautiful it might have been. Generally, the feeling is of happiness, fulfillment, and gratitude. Sadness, though, can be mine when the rare bird is a seriously lost one for which

The Surfbird sometimes used its stout bill to tug mightily at a strand of algae (or perhaps a worm tunneled under algae), hinging back onto its sturdy legs for leverage to detach its chosen morsel.

getting back to its own kind would be truly challenging and perhaps impossible. The other case is one in which I have developed something of a warm feeling for the bird I have just encountered for the first time but must leave, probably never again to see it or others of its kind. Both circumstances presented themselves in the case of this Surfbird.

I did not find it easy to turn and walk away from this Surfbird, which still was foraging on the rocks amidst the surf spray. It had a very special beauty, a trusting character, and a gentle demeanor, and I very much hoped that this healthy, lively creature would make it back to its own kind and its cross-species companions on the rocky Pacific coast or to its own kind on the high-mountain tundra of Alaska and the Yukon Territory where breeding occurs. Such a reunion might well involve a very difficult and unusual journey for our Surfbird visitor, whose traditional migratory route is up and down a narrow strip along the Pacific coast. For those on the usual migratory pathway, needed habitat, companion birds, and suitable food types would be close at hand. For our Surfbird, flight up the Texas coast would seem to have little advantage in getting to the Pacific migratory route, and, in any event, getting to that route might require navigating terrain and habitats radically different than the immediate Pacific coast. Remembering, though, that the Surfbird breeds on the tundra of high mountainous areas to the far northwest, the possible return journey seemed potentially less daunting. Given that fact, even if this Surfbird should have high mountains to cross, there might well be hope for its survival and success. There were, then, potentially novel dangers but, also, some reasons for hope, and this individual was healthy and of a species known as a capable migrant.

Yes, this Surfbird was not easy for me to leave. Turning about and struggling to pull myself away, I took a few steps back toward the beach, but felt impelled to turn about for one last, quick glance. I restrained myself. We had to get back to McAllen that evening. Under my breath I simply uttered, "Good luck, friend!" and walked away, saddened to leave it but very happy and grateful for the pleasure of having gotten to know it and for the memories of those special times it had given us in photographs. We knew, though, that we and the Surfbird would not meet again.

The Surfbird remained another five days, being last seen on April 1. Several who had visited it earlier and others who had not come soon enough, sought it after April 1, but to no avail. The Surfbird had gone. As far as I know, no one saw it leave, knows precisely when it left, or has seen it anywhere since. In remembering it, let us also remember that it left in its wake considerably more than simply good memories and photographs.

Because of its visit we all learned some things about that stretch of beach and superb jetties around Packery Channel. On account of birders' coming to visit the Surfbird there were two discoveries of dazzlingly rare birds while the Surfbird still remained: Late on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 28, Derek Muschalek and Mel Cooksey found a basic-plumaged Purple Sandpiper, accompanied by other shorebird species, in a sargassum-rich pool perhaps 100 yards south of the south jetty at Packery Channel. In another astonishing find, on April 1Greg R. Homel found and photographed a Red Phalarope, also in a sargassum area south of the Packery Channel. This Phalarope was seen by a number of other birders, who showed it to Mary Gustafson, who, in turn, kindly alerted additional birders (including via TEXBIRDS) about the Red Phalarope. Later, on her blog, she posted some of Greg's and some of her own photos of this remarkable shorebird that spends its winters on the open sea but otherwise is just a bit short of impossible to find except on its breeding territory on the Arctic coast.

Just before the Surfbird left, the birding consequences of its visit opened our eyes to a very high-potential area for shorebird rarities! What was the likelihood of finding two additional spectacular rarities in the same area while the Surfbird was there? Many might

have opined, in advance, "That is not possible!" Considering this, the presence of the Surfbird, along with its birding spin-offs, taught us always to recognize the possibility of the impossible, another of the many lessons that birds and birding can teach us.

Perhaps another educational benefit may accrue from the Surfbird's stay with us. Because of its rarity and confiding nature, many people, for the very first time, might have taken a close-up, careful, and attentive look at a relatively small shorebird and its lifestyle. (Probably everyone has admired American Oystercatcher, and some other big, eye-catching shorebirds.) We have every indication that this Surfbird was greatly and widely appreciated, garnering rave reviews as an attractive and interesting bird! If so, those closer looks may bear good fruit if, as a consequence, more people begin truly to look at, study, and thus appreciate shorebirds in general. Thereby they may desire the more to protect them, their migratory stopovers, and their places of wintering and breeding. Some have birded for years but have tended largely to ignore shorebirds as "too difficult," "too similar to sort out," "too drab and uninteresting," or simply "too distant." Experiences like those with this Surfbird thus potentially can be, at the same time, enjoyable, educational, and transformational. Eyes become opened to beauty not noticed before, and minds become receptive to a beckoning, newfound facet of birding. Shorebirds need all the help they can get.

We may be grateful that this much visited, much photographed, and much admired Surfbird stayed long enough to support birders' discovery of the astonishing shorebirding potential of the jetties and beach beside Packery Channel. We may be grateful, also, that it was rare enough and confiding enough to garner the attention of its visitors, potentially opening their eyes for the first time to the special kinds of beauty and fascinating—even wondrous—lifestyles that may be found among even the commonest of shorebirds. Having delighted and educated birders for longer than any previous Surfbird, it was time for it to go. Hopefully, it will reach its own kind and can help to create more of its kind to grace the rocky, wave-lashed shores of this hemisphere. Surely, it left us living that dream with every wingbeat.

Specific contributions of a variety of persons, including (but not limited to) the initial finder and photographer, already have been acknowledged by their appearance in the text of this document, so their roles as mentioned there will not be further acknowledged here. Thanks are due the many birders, too numerous for listing here, who publicly reported the presence and/or absence of this Surfbird, as well due those who published information helpful to potential visitors to the Surfbird, such as directions and other useful information. Many will be particularly grateful to Jon McIntyre and to Mel Cooksey for their very detailed, explicit directions via TEXBIRDS on how to get to the jetties. Thanks to the outstanding cooperativeness of this high-spirited and attractively breeding-plumaged Surfbird, many of its visitors might have come to regard it as something of a friend. Kindness begets affection, and the Surfbird had treated us very kindly.

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Yucatan and Houston Student Exchange Bird Conservation Project

By Stennie Meadours

Much like finding a long sought after life bird, the timing of events in the lives of many lined up just right in the fall of 2010. This alignment brought about the creation and implementation of "Student Exchange Project for the Conservation of Birds, Texas and Yucatan" during the 2010-11 school year. This project demonstrated that appreciation of birds leads naturally to conservation, and children of very different cultures have a similar instinctive interest in birds. The instructors' access to the internet made the project viable and enhanced the students' experience. The internet also made it possible for birds to bridge culture and language differences. Most importantly, this project demonstrated that youth's instinctive interest in birds exist, has great value to bird conservation, is contagious and should be sought , cultivated and given more opportunities to flourish.

We are Birdwatchers Park: Yaxha Students Conservation Project

MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE BIRD CONSERVATION STUDENT EXCHANGE PROJECT

Ninos y Crias, (NyC) Merida, Mexico is a Non Governmental Entity established in 1999 for the purpose of bird conservation. NyC translates to "children and critters" with the motto of "learn to conserve nature". One of NyC's main priorities is bird conservation for the very young. NyC follows the Mayan practice of providing a young child with the tools they will use to support the community as adults. In keeping with Mayan practice, NyC has been giving weeklong birding workshops for children and providing the use of binoculars in Mayan communities since 2006. They also conducted a Teacher Bird Instructor Workshop in 2011. In this workshop, teachers attended a bird instructor workshop and agreed to give monthly bird identification, appreciation and bird watching opportunities to students in each of their communities. The goal of the monthly birding sessions was to convert the cultural practice of bird capture and use of slingshots to bird observation and identification and to create the possibility of the students becoming a birding guide.

Westbrook Principal, Teacher, and Students sending Christmas Greetings to the Yucatan Students

NyC is very active in other conservation activities including Flamingo banding, solid waste management, recycling plastics, water use education and a native plant nursery for restoration projects. NyC banding of Flamingos provided the information needed to determine the origin of the Texas/Louisiana Gulf Coast Flamingo vagrant, HDNT. For more information see their website, with an English version. (www.ninosycrias.org).

Houston Audubon Society, (HAS) joined other international organizations in sponsoring the 2002 bird guide training for adults in the Maya community of Chunyaxche and the fishing village of Punta Allen in the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. These guide training workshops were organized and taught by the resident bird expert, Barbara MacKinnon. HAS also helped support the NyC summer children's birding workshops conducted from 2006 to 2012, and the NyC summer 2011

Ninos y Crias staff and volunteers rounding up, banding, and releasing Pink Caribbean Flamingo chicks.

Teacher Bird Instructor Workshop. HAS and NyC not only share many of the same bird species, but they share conserving them as well. After departing the Yucatan, the HAS sanctuaries at High Island and Bolivar are the first "fast food stop" for millions, possibly a billion, of north bound migrants from Central and South America speeding to their nesting territories. Since 2002, there have been multiple HAS Board of Directors that have recognized the value of bird conservation in the Yucatan and have supported NyC bird conservation educational programs. With their support, HAS Board of Directors members have linked Texas and Yucatan communities into an international network for bird conservation.

Carlos Arana Mena School in Yaxha, Muna, Yucatan is the community two room elementary school that participated in the Student Exchange project. One classroom houses grades first through fourth and the other classroom fifth and sixth grades.

Westbrook Intermediate on Eldorado near I-H 45 South, Clear Creek Independent School District, Houston, is the Texas school that participated in the Student Exchange project. Westbrook consists of grades sixth through eighth with an enrollment of 1200, a band program that was selected as State Band and a program for gifted and talented students.

Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalist is a Texas organization that promotes volunteer conservation efforts and nature education for youth, and approved this project for my volunteer service.

INDIVIDUAL CHAMPIONS OF THE PROJECT

Ms. Maria Karina Olguin Puch is an experienced classroom and summer birding workshop teacher, doing graduate studies in Environmental Education in Merida, Mexico. Dr. Rodrigo Migoya is the founder and Executive Director of NyC. Dr. Laurie Broughton is Principal of Westbrook Intermediate and Ms. Tiffany Garcia is the 7th Grade Science Teacher that sponsored the birding class at Westbrook. Stennie Meadours is a former HAS Board member, Houston Audubon Member, Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalist Volunteer, and was the instructor of the Extreme Birding Minicourse and coordinator of the Student Exchange Project at Westbrook Intermediate.

THE STUDENT EXCHANGE PROJECT: AVIAN CONNECTIONS

During the summer of 2009, Dr. Migoya, Ms Olguin and other N&C staff and I, representing Houston Audubon, met to discuss youth bird conservation education, including a joint Yucatan and Texas or Louisiana student exchange project. We reviewed a draft

Ms Olguin, on right, teaching bird names in Spanish, English, Mayan, and Latin.

Yaxha students birding during the monthly Saturday meetings.

of a joint student exchange project and agreed to look for an opportunity to make it a reality.

In September of 2010, I was asked to serve as Environmental Chair of Westbrook Intermediate Parent Teacher Association (PTA) where one of my grandsons attended school. I agreed and met with the teacher contact, Ms. Tiffany Garcia. Ms Garcia immediately asked me to teach a birding minicourse and stated that she would provide administrative and classroom assistance. Minicourses are offered to academically advanced students, three times a week from 8:00am to 9:30am for nine weeks. I agreed and then sought and received approval from Dr. Laurie Broughton and Ms. Garcia of Westbrook Intermediate for a Yucatan Student Exchange Project as part of the Extreme Birding Minicourse. Next step was to contact Dr. Migoya about NyC participation and the possibility of the Yucatan/Texas student Exchange Project. Dr. Migoya replied that Ms Olguin was completing her masters in environmental education and she had received approval to use the student exchange project as part of her course work.

Ms Olguin then had the task of finding a community and school where this project could positively impact the ancient Mayan tradition of trapping and/or using slingshots on birds.

The community of Yaxha, Muna, Yucatan, near Uxmal, the Mayan archaeological site, was selected. The community, Carlos Arana Mena school, Mrs. Irma, principal, Mr. Carlos Ku, teacher, parents and students agreed to participate. Ms Olguin formalized the agreement with a contract that included the objectives of the project, a schedule of monthly Saturday meetings at the Carlos Arana Mena school and the commitment for the Yaxha and Westbrook students to communicate about birds via the internet. Mr. Carlos Ku would provide the internet connection in Muna with Ms Olguin and I conveying the students communications via the internet on a monthly basis.

The objectives of the student exchange project were.

- Restoration/conservation activities of natural areas
- Cultural exchange between Mayan and Texas communities
- Participate in bird identification and bird surveys.

A sampling of the student exchange activities included, Google Earth links to aerial views of the Westbrook and Carlos Arana Mena school grounds and habitat, pen pal letters, school campus bird sighting list, photos and Christmas greeting banners exchanges. Both sets of students remarked in their pen pal letters that they were very happy to learn that other children in other countries watched birds also.

With Ms. Olguin's guidance the Yaxha community and school accomplished a huge bonus! They solicited the assistance of a local Boy Scout Troop and converted a vacant property into a park and named the park "We are birdwatchers", declaring their newly developed appreciation of observing birds rather than caging them. Then to document the experience and show their new appreciation of birds, they produced a Youtube video of their project. The five minute video clearly tells their story, showing one student releasing his caged bird. The video is an excellent cultural and bird conservation education tool, and can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbQV_qDDRFM or search for "Los ninos y las aves. Proyecto Yaxha".

The Westbrook students learned to conduct bird surveys by participating in a twice a week bird count on the school grounds, identifying 53 species including American Pipits. They also participated in the Houston CBC, Great Texas Birding Classic, the Backyard Bird Count, and Houston Audubon Birdathon. The Westbrook students used eBird and internet resources to learn bird identification and bird calls. The Westbrook students watched the hour long NyC DVD titled "TOH," the Mayan name for the Blue-crowned Motmot, to learn about the life history of the TOH and the Mayan culture.

INSIGHTS FOR BIRD CONSERVATION

One of the NyC Teacher Bird Instructors reported that one of her students released fifty caged birds because he said "they look prettier free and flying in the trees."

At the beginning of the Westbrook birding course one of the 7th grade students wrote "I wish to know all the birds, and to know them well, to understand them. I want to hear their unique sounds, and patterns of flight. I also want to see the beauty of the birds, and to push the limits to see nature's beauty. I also want to go to dangerous places, to see birds, and take pictures of them, come near them, and know their dangers."

Since the Westbrook/Yaxha Student Exchange Project and birding class, I have given one time birding experiences to Galveston Bay Area youth at approximately 50 events. At each of these events there were many students that showed the same interest as expressed by the Westbrook students, the same appreciation of bird beauty that the Mayan youth did upon releasing his birds. It breaks my heart that there is no infrastructure in Texas, arguably the birdiest state in the country, to give interested youth a continuing birding experience.

Hopefully, we, the Texas birding community, and organizations like TOS will take a lesson from our Mexican Mayan neighbors and will find more ways to tap into and continue our youths' inborn interest in birds and bird conservation. If we don't, much of our youth's natural interest in birds and bird conservation will wither away, and will be replaced with other more available interests.

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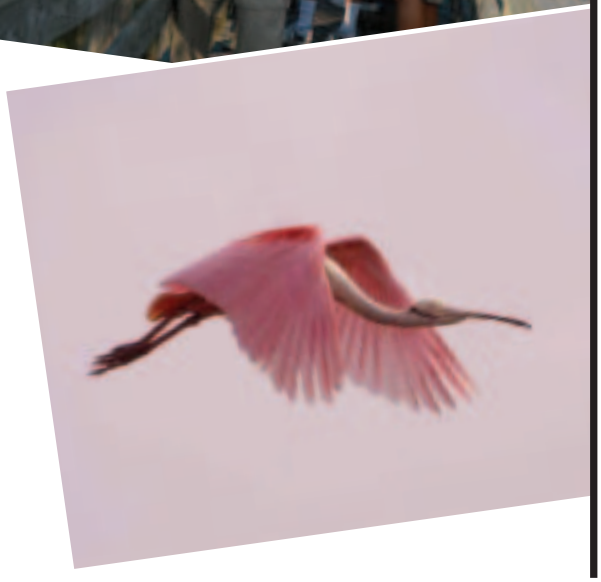

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And The Winner Is....

By Bron Rorex

We were very pleased to have received seventeen original art entries in our latest T.O.S. Texas bird art tee shirt contest by the deadline date. Photos of all entries can be seen in this issue of our magazine.

The art entries were all mounted for display in order that attendees of the Amarillo T.O.S. meeting could visualize them well prior to casting their ballots for their choice of the seventeen. Names of the artists were not evident.

Imagine the surprise of the general meeting when President Steve Gross announced that the winner of the vote was the Golden-cheeked Warbler which had been painted by none other than our immediately Past-President Lynn Barber!

Lynn Barber was born in Wisconsin and has lived in Alaska, Oregon, North Carolina and Texas before moving with her husband in June 2011 to South Dakota. She has a B.A. in Zoology and a M.S. and Ph.D. in bacteriology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She also has a J.D. From Duke University Law School and is presently a very active registered patent attorney in private practice.

In addition to birding, Lynn's avocations include nature photography, church volunteer activities, playing the hammered dulcimer and baking cookies.

She began watching birds at the age of seven. In fact it was her love of birds resulted in her majoring in zoology in college. In 2003 she made her first attempt at a Texas Big Year and in 2005 she repeated the effort, that time breaking the previous record for number of bird species seen in Texas in one year with 522 species. In 2008 she tallied 723 bird species in the ABA Birding Area. Her book, *Extreme Birding: One Woman's Big Year* was published in 2011 which recounted her daily struggle during her ABA Big Year.

In 2009, Lynn activated a dormant past interest in bird painting and since then has painted about 70 acrylic paintings of birds, some of which are illustrated in her book.

Congratulations Lynn for all you have accomplished for the birds!

Lynn's Golden-cheeked Warbler art work is emblazoned upon the cover of this magazine and upon the front of our current T.O.S. T-shirt. The tee may be purchased at any of the T.O.S. meetings, by mail order (see Page 23 for ordering information), or at any of the birding festivals where T.O.S. has a vendor booth.

Bron Rorex
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Legend for Paintings on Page 79.

1. Three spoonbills in tree. artist: Karen Bradley
2. Scissortail in tree. artist: Karen Bradley
3. Mallard. artist: Sabina Haase, age 10
4. Three Terns. artist: Dennis Shepler
5. Violet-crowned Hummingbird. artist: Dennis Shepler
6. Band-rumped Storm-Petrel artist: Dennis Shepler
7. Oriole. artist: Dennis Shepler
8. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron artist: Edward T. Muse
9. Purple Gallinule artist: Edward T. Muse
10. Green Kingfisher. artist: Edward T. Muse
11. Brown Pelican. artist: Edward T. Muse
12. Juvenile Whooping Cranes. artist: Edward T. Muse
13. Anhinga. artist: Edward T. Muse
14. Egret. artist: Edward T. Muse
15. Scissortail perched. artist: Lynn Barber
16. Golden-cheeked Warbler artist: Lynn Barber
17. Long-eared Owl artist: Lynn Delvin


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West Texas Avian Research, Inc.

By Charles O. Floyd and Kelly B. Bryan

It is not unusual for major conservation efforts dealing with birds to incorporate "non-profit." All across the United States, a significant segment of the population supports such organizations on an annual basis. In Texas, a prime example is the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory whose mission is to "protect birds and their habitats around the Gulf of Mexico." Other national examples are the Hummer/Bird Study Group of Alabama, dedicated to the study and preservation of hummingbirds and other Neo-tropical migrants (songbirds) in the south; and the Southeast Arizona Bird Observatory in Bisbee, Arizona, whose mission is to support the conservation of the birds of southeastern Arizona, their habitats, and the diversity of species that share those habitats. Interested conservationists are willing to support worthy causes through volunteerism and donations, and it is the non-profit status that opens the door for increased monetary support. Without that support, these efforts are unable to expand in scope and rarely succeed. Expansion and success in conservation and research are the goals of the newly formed West Texas Avian Research, Inc.

For the past several years, two groups of resident volunteers, led by Kelly Bryan of Fort Davis and Charles Floyd of San Angelo, have conducted bird-banding research in the area commonly known as west Texas. They have volunteered their time, purchased their own equipment, and paid their own expenses for the conservation and monitoring activities they have conducted. They have also donated time, equipment, and funds toward providing educational programs for school groups and adult interest groups. These formerly separate efforts have now joined together to form West Texas Avian Research Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation established for the sole purpose of supporting bird research, bird banding research, and educational outreach in west Texas. While the research activities and educational efforts conducted by each group are significant, it is the hope that the establishment of WTAR will increase efficiency, increase available resources, and broaden the scope of research efforts in the region. Through cooperation, they hope to expand educational efforts designed to increase public appreciation and public interest, and ultimately, the conservation of bird life throughout the region.

The research efforts being pursued by Kelly Bryan and his group of Trans-Pecos volunteers are currently focused on the status and distribution of hummingbirds in that region. The specific distribution, population status, and habits of the common and not-so-common hummingbirds that live there were not well known before this project was started. Since 2007, more than 9,500 hummingbirds representing fourteen species have been banded as part of this project. It has documented breeding in two species (Broad-billed Hummingbird and White-eared Hummingbird) that were only suspected to breed in Texas in the past. One target species, the Lucifer Hummingbird, has proven to be far more common than previously thought, as almost 400 individuals have been captured and banded. The information gleaned from that database and the return of previously banded birds to study sites have completely altered our perception of this "uncommon" borderland species. Several significant recaptures from this study have added to our knowledge of the movements of these western birds within the region as well as their movements across the southwest and the mountain west. Hummingbirds that were originally banded from as far away as British Columbia and the mountain west have been recorded as a part of this study.

The research efforts being pursued by Charles Floyd and his group of San Angelo area volunteers have been centered at the Hummer House near Christoval. That group currently has four projects at the site where they maintain the South

Charles banding for the Christoval ISD camp discovery. Photo by Nancy Floyd.

Concho River MAPS Station. This **M**onitoring **A**vian **P**roductivity and **S**urvivability station is operated in cooperation with the Institute of Bird Populations of Point Reyes, California. The data collected at this station follows the strict protocols of that organization and surveys the breeding bird populations and breeding success within this station area. They also have ongoing research involving Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Painted Buntings, and migrating birds, especially Neo-tropical migrants. Banding has taken place at the Hummer House for many years. This ranch supports large populations of both Black-chinned Hummingbirds and Painted Buntings. Through current and past efforts by several persons, the existing database for Black-chinned Hummingbirds exceeds more than 12,000 records including more than 1,100 records of Black-chinned Hummingbirds that have migrated and returned to that site in one or more subsequent years. In addition, more than 5,000 Painted Buntings have been banded at the Hummer House, a number which includes more than 500 individuals of this species that have been recaptured after one or more migration cycles. National longevity records for both species have been recorded there. Current projects are centered on the site fidelity of Black-chinned Hummingbirds and the effects of cowbird control on the Painted Bunting populations across the ranch. The South Concho River corridor is a natural flyway for a large number of passerine and near passerine species that migrate through the region. The ranch is a rich resource for understanding the migration patterns for the birds of west-central Texas.

While all of these research efforts are significant, none of this would be possible without access to the unique and special habitats found within the greater west Texas region. This access has come about through the partnerships created by the two research groups with the owners of these special places. During each year, Kelly Bryan bands weekly at six to eight different sites scattered from the Davis Mountains to the Big Bend. Most of his banding sites cover habitats that are not found elsewhere in Texas. The special birds of this study would not be nearly as well understood without the cooperation of landowners who are deeply concerned about bird conservation. The same can be said of the projects undertaken at the Hummer House and other sites in west-central Texas. The South Concho River corridor serves as a migration pathway for many passerine species and is perfect habitat for many summer residents. Because it is located in an area where many western and eastern migrants overlap, many important banding records for the region have been established at that site. Both the Trans-Pecos and west-central areas of west Texas offer a mostly untapped wealth of opportunity for bird research in the unique habitats found there.

Kelly banding hummingbirds for the CDRI critter camp.
Photo by Carolyn Ohl-Johnson.

WTAR is a fledgling organization that desires to expand its scope and outreach at some point in the future. Currently, WTAR is focused on supporting project-oriented research taking place in this area of Texas. Through project demonstrations and the presentation of programs throughout the region and across Texas, its educational outreach efforts will eventually reach thousands of interested individuals and groups. With increased monetary support, research efforts can be expanded to include other significant project-specific efforts and, hopefully, regional-based graduate student projects on a selected basis. Currently, available funding is restricted to supplies, materials, and travel expenses. To learn more about WTAR go to: www.westtexasavianresearch.org. To follow the research and monitoring efforts in progress go to: www.conchovalleybirds.com for projects at Hummer House and the west-central Texas area and www.westtexashummingbirds.com for projects in the Trans-Pecos area of Texas. For specific information on WTAR you can email us at westtexasavianresearch@gmail.com.

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Vagrants And Rare Sightings

By Eric Carpenter

For those birders seeking to fill in some of the tough gaps in their Texas lists, 2011 provided more than ample opportunities to do so, from beginning to end. Over a dozen TBRC review-species were already in place when the new year commenced and almost that same amount would be uncovered during the first month of the year. Starting with February, there were a few rarities found each month and that trend would last through the winter & spring, slow down a little by early fall, and finish with a frenzy of birds again delighting birders in November and December.

Blue Bunting—photo by Erik Breden, 18 November 2011. As many as 9 Blue Buntings put in appearances in Texas in 2011, exceeding any previous year's totals. One of the more photogenic individuals was this male at Casa Santa Ana in Hidalgo County 17 – 22 November.

The number of records of review species seen in 2011 was in fact near 100, at almost a two-per-week clip. Species on the review list are supposed to be hard to come by though someone looking at what 2011 offered may question that for a handful of species. **Masked Ducks** were well represented with 5 records of 8 individuals, with the most interesting of these being a striking male, well away from the coast and the L.R.G.V., near Brenham in Washington County 16 August through 3 September. There were also 5 different records of **Black-legged Kittiwake** that were eclipsed by an overwhelming number of **Little Gulls** – 9 individuals reported from 7 locations! Topping that were the 10 different **Crimson-collared Grosbeaks** reported from 9 locations, including one photographed in Laredo on 16 December, away from usual L.R.G.V. haunts. **Blue Buntings** also made a good showing, with 9 birds at 9 locations;

Masked Duck—photo by Hemant Kulkarni, 28 August 2011. Masked Ducks made a strong showing in 2011 though none were more unexpected than this stunning male near Brenham in Washington County 16 August to 3 September.

Yellow-faced Grassquit – photo by Robert Epstein, 16 February 2011. Perhaps the most viewed of all the rarities in 2011 was this Yellow-faced Grassquit which took up residence at Goose Island State Park from 30 January to 20 March. Only the 4th record for Texas, it was the first in almost eight years and also the first away from the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

the most unexpected of these was a male in Corpus Christi 19 – 31 March.

And so 2011 started, with a few of these "common" rarities showing well. The first real attention-getters wouldn't come until the end of January, starting with a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** at Galveston Island State Park that was enjoyed by many during its 5-day stay 29 January to 2 February. More surprising was a **Yellow-faced Grassquit** found at Goose Island State Park on 30 January. Only the 4th record for the state and the first away from the L.R.G.V., this very cooperative bird was seen by hundreds through 20 March. February would add a **Trumpeter Swan** that spent four days in Midland 18 – 21 February as well as **Rufous-backed Robin** at Ft. Inge in Uvalde on 19 February.

Spring would start off with a window-killed **Flame-colored Tanager** discovered in McAllen on 3 March, providing the first specimen for the state. A **White-throated Thrush** on the Norias Division of the King Ranch on 22-23 March was a bit of a surprise as were two **Ruddy Ground-Doves** seen on 7 April along Canyon Grande Creek in little-birded Maverick County. A **Slate-throated Redstart** at Boot Springs in Big Bend N.P. on 16 April fit the pattern for this species with its infrequent spring appearances in that location. A **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher** pleased the masses during its 4 day-stay at High Island's Boy Scout Woods from 25 – 28 April. For the second spring in a row, a **Black-vented Oriole** appeared on South Padre Island where it lingered from 28 April to 6 May. A **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** was a one-day wonder at Pollywog Ponds on 30 April, providing a first record for heavily birded Nueces County. Migration would wind down in May with a **Short-tailed Hawk** at Rio Grande Village in Big Bend N.P. on 7 May and the Trans-Pecos's first documented **Connecticut Warbler** seen in nearby Terlingua on 8 May. A **Varied Thrush** on 10 May at Lake Palo Duro was a nice find for the Panhandle.

Double-toothed Kite—photo by Dave Hanson, 4 May 2011. Completely unexpected was this Texas's first Double-toothed Kite at Boy Scout Woods in High Island on 4 May.

The real highlight of the spring season, and indeed the year, would not be realized until after the fact. In late June, David Hanson was reviewing his photos of a raptor he had seen at High Island's Boy Scout Woods on 4 May when he sent the pictures to a few other folks to help him identify. The identification was soon unanimous – the bird in the photos was clearly a **Double-toothed Kite** (*Harpagus bidentatus*). Double-toothed Kites are birds of evergreen forests and can be found in parts of South America and Central America, and range only as close as southern Mexico (south-central Veracruz). Per the current literature, they are not a species that is prone to vagrancy and the obvious question of provenance was certainly the central issue when the TBRC voted on this record since the identification was not in question. The TBRC sought input from various expert birders with Double-toothed Kite experience over this species' range in an effort to arrive at a more informed decision. Though none could offer a detailed scenario of how or why this particular Double-toothed Kite ended up on

Red-necked Stint—photo by Kerry Taylor, 26 June 2011. Only the 2nd record for Texas, a Red-necked Stint in the Bolivar Flats area from 26 June to 8 July was a much sought-after bird though it proved elusive and hard to find during its short stay.

Snow Bunting—photo by Terry Ferguson, 13 June 2011. How or why this Snow Bunting made it's way to Sea Rim State Park on 13 June is anyone's guess. It was only the 8th record for the state and the first for the Upper Texas Coast.

Snail Kite—photo by Stephan Lorenz, 17 June 2011. One of the more unexpected finds in 2011 was this Snail Kite, which was video-taped at Houston's El Franco Lee Park on 17 June. It was just the 4th record for the state and unfortunately, was a one-day wonder.

perhaps the most exciting month for rarities; the most exciting of these were not birds you would not associate with the combination of "Texas" and "June". For starters, how about a **Snow Bunting** along the Upper Texas Coast at Sea Rim S.P. on 13 June? Or, what about a video-taped **Snail Kite** in south Houston at El Franco Lee Park on 17 June? Unfortunately, both of these were one-day wonders to the chagrin of salivating listers. But there would be more, starting with Texas's 2nd **Red-necked Stint** in the Bolivar Flats area from 26 June to 8 July; present for some time but frustratingly difficult to find by many who chased it. Also frustrating was the most chaseable **Mangrove Cuckoo** in recent years, an individual that was unfortunately mostly heard-only by only a portion of those that tried for it during its stay at Sabal Palm Sanctuary 26-30 June.

The red-hot birding would slow down in July as the on-going drought made conditions rather bleak. Still, a **Red-billed Tropicbird** would delight participants on the pelagic trip out of South Padre Island on 16 July and the month would end with a **Flame-colored Tanager** making a brief appearance on the Davis Mountains Preserve on 30 July. Only one **White-eared Hummingbird** would be reported, an individual coming to a feeder in the Davis Mountains from 10-15 August. September would add a **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher** photographed at Sabine Woods on the 15th and a **Rose-throated Becard** that lingered at Santa Ana N.W.R. from 16-21 September. The return of a **Black-vented Oriole** for the second year to the Bentsen State Park area on 13 October would delight birders through the rest of the year. A **Ruff** uncovered at Houston's El Franco Lee Park on Halloween would end up being one of the most viewed Texas records of this cryptic species as it proved to be a regular at that location through 16 December.

November marks a transition to the winter season and one of the year's most unexpected finds came early with a **White-winged Crossbill** photographed at a backyard feeder northwest of Tarpley in Bandera County on 4-5 November, further south than any other Texas record of this species. A second **Rose-throated Becard** found on 9 November at Estero Llano Grande S.P. during the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival would become

Brown Jay—photo by Darlene Moore, 8 December 2011. Brown Jays have declined in Texas to the point where any sighting is notable. So it is no surprise that two birds that frequented Salineno & Chapeno starting on 3 December, with one remaining well into 2012 would receive a lot of attention from birders.

Violet-crowned Hummingbird—photo by Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, 1 Dec 2011. Once exceedingly unusual, Violet-crowned Hummingbirds have now appeared in Texas every year since 2007. A lone bird in the Christmas Mountains 1 – 6 December kept that streak going one more year.

a mainstay, remaining there well into 2012. Birding became red-hot again in the last half of the month with a **Golden-crowned Warbler** at the National Butterfly Center near Bentsen S.P. from 20 November through 22 December and a well documented **Mew Gull** gracing Mae Simmons Park in Lubbock on 22 November.

December was also a great month for chasing rare birds starting with a striking **Violet-crowned Hummingbird** that visited Carolyn Ohl-Johnson's oasis in the Christmas Mountains from 1-6 December. Up to 2 **Brown Jays** were first detected on 3 December at Salineno where at least one would remain into April 2012, including a brief series of sightings at nearby Chapeno. A second **Golden-crowned Warbler** would be detected at Frontera Audubon Thicket on 17 December, where it would be seen by hundreds through early March 2012. The highlight of the Christmas Bird Counts would be a carefully studied **Manx Shearwater** off the pier at Matagorda Bay Nature Park on 19 December, one of very few free-flying, non-hurricane related Texas records of this species.

The year would end on a great note when a group of birders led by Brandon Percival and David Bradford discovered a **Nutting's Flycatcher** on New Year's Eve in the parking lot at Big Bend's Santa Elena Canyon. A tough species to identify by plumage field-marks alone, ample recordings of the bird's vocalization proved to be conclusive to add this first state record to the Texas list! This bird would prove difficult to find, though it did linger long enough so that many were able to see it through 11 January 2012

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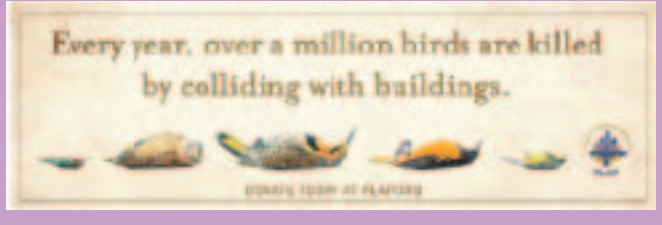

THE KIDS WRITE ABOUT THEIR BIG DAY

I was really excited about doing a Big Day. I have never gotten up at 5 a.m. before to go birding. My favorite thing of all was the fact that we got to see a juvenile Great Horned Owl. That is one bird I had always wanted to see and we almost passed by it without seeing it. It was hiding in the dead leaves. (Ed: The credit for finding this camouflaged owl went to Brian)

I liked the fact that it was still dark when we left and we saw Pauraques sitting on the side of the road and heard the coots and bullfrogs in the marsh.

It was exciting to know that each species we identified was going to raise some money for the T.O.S. I was very happy at the end of the day when we realized that we actually got to see 142 species of birds and that later on that night we found out that we raised $3,000. I was very proud of myself because I love birding and I now can say that I helped to raise money to take care of some of those birds. I was really tired at the end of the day, but I learned a lot and I hope I get to do it again next year.

Brian Rabroker (4th grade)

Participating in the "Big Day" was an honor for me. I started identifying birds at the age of 3 when I would go to the deer lease with my dad. We would talk about their beaks, wings, and voices. This helped me learn how to identify the birds by myself. Then in the fifth grade I was chosen to be on the school birding team. Dr. Edwards and Bron Rorex spent a lot of time teaching and showing us how to better identify the birds. The more I learned the more I grew to love "birding."

The "Big Day" started early in the morning and ended around seven in the evening. The most unusual bird was a juvenile Great Horned Owl. I had never seen one of those before in my life. We saw the most Barn Swallows that I have ever seen in my life. The bird that we saw in the most unusual location was the Greater Scaup which was in a pond. It is usually seen in the ocean. It was just so awesome to be able to be in a competition identifying birds that raised money for such a great cause.

The "Big Day" was the most amazing day of my life. I look forward to the next "Big Day"!!!!!!!!

Kyler Friebele (6th grade)

On my big day, my team of three 10 to 12 year olds, went birding to help raise monies for bird sanctuaries in Texas. We saw 142 different species of birds in one day. I saw some birds I have never seen before. These included the female Painted Bunting, and every time we left after waiting to see the male as well, he would come out. That day we also saw an Eastern Screech-Owl, which I have never seen before, and a Great Horned Owl during daylight hours.

We went to a lot of different places in Lamar, Rockport, Aransas Pass, Corpus Christi and Port Aransas. Some of these places are Blucher Park, Paradise Pond, and the Birding Center of Port Aransas. I am so fortunate that I live in an area abundant in so many bird species. I am also fortunate that I have found the birding experts, Mrs. Bron Rorex and Dr. Edwards. I also appreciate that I have a great team to bird who includes Kyler, Brian and myself.

Britney Goodwin (6th grade)

Steve Gross
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A Really Big Day: Youth In The Field During Our Spring Meeting

By Steve Gross

Photos by Matha McLeod.

My professional background is in psychology and education, not public relations. However, one of my jobs as TOS president is increasing awareness of TOS and its programs. Money is involved, as well, since fund raising is necessary for the various programs we run.

So, it happened that in January of 2012, I was on a bird chase, with plenty of time to think about generating buzz about our Spring, 2012 meeting in Port Aransas. The birds are the big draw, as anyone who has birded the area in the spring can attest. However, I wanted a way for people to join in then fun, even if they weren't going to attend the meeting.

It occurred to me that there was a group of young birders in Rockport. Our ever-young and spry Regional Director, Bron Rorex, had been working with them for several years. The 4th, 5th, and 6th graders had proven to be apt and enthusiastic pupils. This particular year, however, the kids would not have had an official opportunity to show what they were made of, due to the suspension of the Great Texas Birding Classic. Perhaps there was a way to get them involved in the meeting.

These were the pieces that came together to become our Young Birders Big Day. I contacted Bron and was quickly told that the kids and their teacher, Martha McLeod, would be very interested, but only if I came with them. NOTE: This is a great example of the old maxim about being careful what you ask for. I certainly got it.

Bron and the kids did a great job of scouting birds in the Rockport area. I got the word out about our fund-raising effort. We would take pledges per bird or in set amounts, with the TOS Sanctuary Fund as the beneficiary of the donations.

Left to Right: Brian Rabroker, Kyler Friebele, Britney Goodwin.

As the days ticked away in advance of the meeting, the pledges mounted, and we had a potential of well over $2000, contingent upon our tally of species during the Day.

Eventually, the weekend of the meeting arrived. I did some scouting on the Friday before the Saturday Big Day and was able to stake out a few birds. I had to be presidential Friday night

Front to Rear: Brian Rabroker, Kyler Friebele, Britney Goodwin, Bron Rorex, Steve Gross.

during the Bird Quiz, but my thoughts soon turned back to the long day ahead.

Saturday dawned early, and we assembled at Bron's house in Rockport. The first few hours kept us in the immediate area, and we watched the sun come up near Goose Island State Park. Slowly but surely, we began to tick birds. Red-shouldered Hawk, Fulvous Whistling-duck, Redhead, etc. came our way as we moved south through Rockport.

Soon enough, we were headed toward Calallen, but not without stops at Tule Lake and Pollywog Ponds. Hazel Bazemore Park netted us a few shorebirds we'd missed thus far, plus Canada Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, and the usual suspects.

Moving into Corpus proper, we hit the migrant traps at Rosehill Cemetery and Blucher Park, each of which was light on birds, but a few new species were added. Next, we got to enjoy a screech-owl in its nest

Left to Right: Kyler Friebele, Brian Rabroker, Britney Goodwin.

Left to Right: Kyler Friebele, Bron Rorex, Britney Goodwin.

box in Flour Bluff. Hans Suter Park then offered up a few shorebirds, despite a growling wind.

We progressed east toward the Gulf, but the birds came more slowly. We were able to nab a perched White-tailed Hawk as we headed north on Mustang Island. Next came the birding sites of Port Aransas, and their potential for great numbers of migrants. We were rewarded with a nice spate of songbird migrants, including a beautiful male Western Tanager.

I then had to get back to the hotel in order to prepare for the banquet. While I was gone, the kids saw two more species. Our day had started at 5:30 a.m., and it ended at 6:30 p.m. As the banquet began, Bron added up our numbers. The kids reunited with their very supportive parents and siblings, who had arrived at the Civic Center to help in the celebration of the kids' achievement.

142 species was our total. Amazing! Kyler, Britney, and Brian had worked amazingly hard, prior to and during the Big Day. They were the ones who had pushed for an early start, and they wouldn't have stopped if the adults hadn't ended things to go to a boring banquet.

Each of our brave and daring youngsters received a TOS certificate of appreciation from Keith Arnold, professor emeritus at Texas A&M. Pictures were taken and hugs were exchanged.

In the end, the kids raised over $3000 for the TOS Sanctuary Fund. Initial estimates were based on a total of 100 species, but the kids really showed what they could do. The adults who were lucky enough to tag along got a great glimpse of the future of birding. It was an honor to be part of this effort. How many of you have seen 142 species in one day?

Left to Right: Brian Rabroker, Kyler Friebele, Britney Goodwin, Steve Gross.

Left to Right: Steve Gross, Keith Arnold, Kyler Friebele, Britney Goodwin, Brian Rabroker, Martha McLeod, Bron Rorex.

If you work with youth birders and would like to assist TOS in its efforts, please contact a Board member. We want to do everything possible to increase the number of youth birders. As I stated, they are the future of birding. Each of our wonderful young birders has shared a few significant memories of the Big Day (Below). It looks like we may have started a trend. Enjoy!

Wandering Into Warbler World

By Shyamala Rao

Poems are often obscure to the young and I was in that category as I tried to read and understand Ovenbird by Robert Frost. I read this poem forty or more years ago and couldn't make head or tail of it. I had no idea what an Ovenbird was. This was before Google, if anyone recalls those days of obscurity. "There is a singer everyone has heard, Loud a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird," are the lines that have stayed with me.

Fast forward to 2012 and I am now in my second year of nature walks and bird watching. The month of April 2012 has been surreal to this latecomer to the field of bird watching. I happened upon an ad for a guided hike at Government Canyon on April 1 to look for Golden-cheeked Warblers. I saw a pair of these brilliant black, yellow and white song birds that winter in Central America and nest and breed in Hill Country of Texas. I, actually, saw two of these endangered birds! The hike attracted folks from all over Texas including a Photographer Greg Page from Houston. He sent me his fabulous pictures and also told me about High Island where a lot of migratory birds go through in the Spring and in the Fall.

On April 14 there was a wedding in Beaumont in East Texas and this was the daughter of dear friends and of course Chino and I had to attend the event. So we did and on the way back I stayed in High Island at the Gulfway Motel where a sign stated "bird watchers are welcome for breakfast and lunch daily." It is situated on Highway 87 and within a stone's throw of the Boy Scout's Woods. This bird sanctuary is maintained by the Houston Audubon Society and arranges guided tours to look for Migratory birds from mid March through May. So I did just that and saw a myriad of colorful birds, buntings, grosbeaks, tanagers and warblers. The birds were in breeding plumage and were rich in color and saturated in hue, just eye poppingly beautiful. I had never seen an Indigo Bunting or a Scarlet Tanager, or a Rose-breasted Grosbeak or a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. I was enchanted and felt the fullness and the warmth that comes from new experiences. I was looking at the magic, the miracle, the marvel and the mystery of these feathered fellow residents of our planet. I was overjoyed and delighted. My cup was full, but apparently going to Boy Scouts Woods is to look for warblers. I was ok with that but now my cup would be running over.

I dutifully peered and searched the canopies and the fluttering leaves looking for tiny song birds. I heard all sorts of facts about warblers, there are more than fifty types of warblers apparently, small birds usually about 4 to 4 ½ inches long, quick moving, active, charged up with the task of feeding fast and furiously to begin the next leg of the long journey to the north. These little insect-eating birds go to Central and South America in the late fall and journey back to North America in the early spring. The journey is long, treacherous and many don't make it. It must take so much energy so much courage so much faith and so much optimism to do this year after year. How do they do it? Where do they get their motivation and their determination? If we humans had to do this we would be extinct. Without a doubt! Remember that bunch trying to return to Jerusalem

Ovenbird at Warbler Woods Sanctuary.
Photo Warbler Woods.

from Egypt and what did they do? They spent 40 years and got lost and felt challenged every step of the way. Luckily that once was all that was required of us humans. An annual trek covering ten times the distance would defeat us and have us crying uncle in no time flat! While these thoughts and other such irrelevancies were flooding my mind the guides were pointing out different types of warblers.

Saw all sorts of tiny birds, had no idea what they were, names like Prothonotary, Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided, Black and-White and Blackburnian were being tossed around by the guides and the birders were nodding in agreement. To me it was like a handful of confetti being thrown up in the air. I just tried to grab at a few names, failed miserably and gave up. I decided to enjoy the experience. The woods, the bugs, the bites and the birders were all part of the scene and I tried to accept it unconditionally. I sat at a water feature with an experienced birder from Houston, John. He suggested I go to Warbler Woods close to San Antonio and he told me it is a mecca for migratory warblers.

It seemed that fate was determined that I learn about warblers so I made note of the email address and looked it up when I returned to San Antonio. Warbler Woods is a bird sanctuary in Cibolo, close to Canyon Lake. I emailed Susan and she responded promptly and enthusiastically which was encouraging. I went to Warbler Woods on April 29 and went on a walk through the trails and then settled at the water feature. I sat for several hours as different birds popped by to get a quick bath, Susan and the other birders knew the specific species even as they approached the bird bath. I sat stunned and totally awed. I had no idea identification included listening to the song and the call, looking at flight patterns and then looking at the bird itself. Who knew?

As I sat thinking about this and that, when Susan said "I hear an Ovenbird" My ears perked up. There was such a bird? I thought any fowl stuck in an oven to cook was a bird in the oven but apparently there was a bird called the Ovenbird? Soon enough a tiny little bird with a loud four note song " teacher teacher teacher teacher" could be heard, Susan helped identify the song. I was sure there would be a flurry of fiery colors. No, it was designed for camouflage, a plump olive brown bird with a dull orange stripe on its head and brown and white stripes all down the chest and belly. The bird hopped on to the water feature took a quick bath and fled into the undergrowth. It appeared and was gone in thirty seconds. I had set eyes on Robert Frost's Ovenbird. This bird would soon be migrating to the north by mid-May or so. It would find a mate and have a clutch of offspring in mid-summer. It's song would sound out loud and clear in the woods there. Who knew, this very bird could inspire a creative mind and send it soaring into realms of thought and imagination to astound the rest of us. Surely that is not a "diminished thing".

As I write this in the first week of May, I am in a different space and in a different phase of being a bird watcher. I now know that I need to be totally in the moment, with all my senses on alert and focus completely on the task. Listen, look and perhaps one day I too will be able to identify some of these dainty delicate melodious flying miracles. It will be fun just trying to get there. It's all about the journey. Theirs and mine.

Shyamala Rao
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Long-eared Owl. Artist Lynn Delvin (Third place winner in the recent TOS art contest)

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Vermillion Flycatcher photographed at South Llano State Park. Photo by Sue Fisher.