

TEXAS *Birds*
ANNUAL

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TEXAS *Birds* ANNUAL

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Art submissions at the 5th Annual "Birds of the Brush" Laredo Birding Festival art contest. Article on page 42.

Front Cover: Belted Kingfisher, Art by Lynn Delvin

Editor's Introduction

Watching television, the other evening, I heard a “thud” coming from the front picture window. A dove had hit the glass. There are no bushes near the window and the feeder is in a nearby tree so I thought I had not created a risk situation for birds visiting the feeder. Apparently, I had to rethink the situation. According to a recent article published in the journal *The Condor: ornithological applications* between 100 million and 1 billion birds are killed annually as the result of collisions with windows. Contrary to what one might think 56% of this mortality is at low-rise buildings. Less than one percent was found at high rises. Next to low-rise buildings 44% of this mortality is at residences. Having just returned from a presentation by Peter P. Marra on the impact domestic cats have on wild birds I wasn't ready to think of yet another anthropogenic threat to birds. That “thud” was a wakeup call! In this issue, I'll explore which birds are impacted and what we can do to limit this mortality.

The remainder of the issue is on a more positive note! We start with David Sarcozi's predictions as to the next 10 new birds that will likely be added to the Texas list. This is followed by an article on the Texas Breeding Bird Survey trends by Brent Ortego, then articles by Fred Collins, Romey Swanson, James Ray, Jim Hailey, Shelia Hargis and Dan Jones. We wrap up the issue with Media reviews, and an introduction to the TOS Directors. I hope you find something of interest and as always I welcome your comments..

So, grab a glass of your favorite beverage, find a shady spot, and enjoy this year's issue of *Texas Birds Annual*.

P.S. The dove flew away. Perhaps with a headache but unharmed as far as I know.

Jack Clinton Eitnienar
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Cactus Wren. Art by John Cappadonna

President's Message.....

Welcome to another wonderful edition of *Texas Birds Annual*. If you are like me, this publication is always very informative and inspiring. And it usually adds several entries to my "places to go birding" list! For instance, thanks to Fred Collins and Kendra Kocab, I now have a trip planned to the Houston area to look for Red-vented Bulbuls. And I know exactly where to go. Bob Friedrich spelled out some of the top places I want to visit in Matagorda County. Now to find time to get there! Charles Alexander's article about his study of the Green Parakeets in McAllen was fascinating. I love to see a lot of birds but I also love to slow down and really study the birds I'm seeing. This was a great story about how to do that. These are just a few of the great articles in the 2016 edition. Thank you to all the authors who took the time to share their knowledge and experiences with us. Many of you have stories to tell and I encourage you to submit an article for the 2018 edition. You can send your articles to Jack Eitnienar at any time!

At the first Board meeting that I presided over as President, I shared what I want to focus on over the next year. Because these priorities are much bigger than me, I wanted the Board's buy-in. Because these priorities are much bigger than the Board, I want your buy-in too as a member of TOS. If we are to accomplish or make major progress on these projects, it will take us all working together to make them happen. I hope you will decide to volunteer to help us accomplish them.

The first priority is our sanctuaries. Dr. Byron Stone started refocusing the Board on our sanctuaries and it became clear that we have lots of work to do. During Byron's last term as President, we held our annual Board retreat in Victoria and visited Magic Ridge and Schroeder Island Sanctuary. Brent and Dora Ann Ortego joined us and educated us

on the history of these properties. Spending the weekend in this manner was enlightening and beneficial and fun too since we worked in some birding! As a follow-up to that, this year's Board retreat will be held in the High Island area so that we can do the same for Hooks Woods, Mary Crawford Sanctuary, and Sabine Woods.

Because our sanctuaries are a major project and require a significant time investment to manage properly, I, with the Board's blessing, created a Sanctuary Committee. We have had a Sanctuary Committee in the past I believe, so it is probably more appropriate to say that I re-established that committee. Glenn Olsen, Region 8 Director, has agreed to chair the committee. Glenn is knowledgeable in plants as well as birds and is a Past President of the Native Plant Society of Texas and of the Houston chapter. He is uniquely qualified to lead our efforts and I am happy that he agreed to chair the committee. He is great but he will not be able to accomplish everything we want to accomplish by himself. He will need members for the committee, members with a variety of skills, interests and muscles. So please contact me or Glenn if you are interested in being a part of the committee or talking more about how you can contribute. This is going to be exciting and rewarding! Don't be bashful. Call or email us!

Another of my priorities is marketing and membership. I believe we have an amazing opportunity to reach and engage Texans who are interested in birds. Some of them may never become members but if we can enhance their knowledge and joy of birds, we should totally do that! Given the spectacular birds that live in or pass through Texas, this should be easy once we get our delivery perfected. One of the projects that the Board has been working on recently is updating our logo. Our previous logo served us well for a long time but it was time to develop a new logo that looks fresh and meets the demands of the



New TOS logo

current marketing mediums such as Facebook and Twitter. Thanks to TOS member Cheryl Johnson, owner of Outburst Advertising in Victoria, we had professional help. Cheryl graciously donated her time and expertise and designed numerous logos for the Board to review. The best logos are simple designs that, with a quick glance, give the viewer a sense of what the organization is about, can be reproduced in a large format or a small format, and work in color or black and white. After several iterations, we ended up with one that incorporates a stylized version of our official bird, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, with our name. It meets the criteria and looks great on our new TOS brochure. Check it out at the top of my column.

Now I'm guessing some of you won't be happy with the new logo, and I'm sorry about that. Change is hard, but if we want to engage younger birders, and I strongly believe we do, we have to look like a modern organization and we have to have an exciting and captivating presence on social media. The new logo will help us do that. So, please give our new logo a chance.

Our membership data shows a decline in members over the last few years. Currently we have about 900 members. We should have many, many more than that! Again, there is an opportunity here for you as a TOS member to help us. I'm guessing you have some

birding friends who are not TOS members. Please share with them what you love about TOS, let them know why you are a member, and ask them to join TOS. TOS is a wonderful community and we would love to welcome your friends into our family. Over the next year, watch for other ways that we will work to increase our membership and feel free to contact me if you want to play a role in this endeavor. We will very soon have new TOS brochures that are available to distribute at your local Audubon meetings. Please let me know if you'd like some.

The last priority that I talked with the Board about has to do with our financial situation. The Board needs to get a better handle on our finances. Luckily, we have an amazing Treasurer, Catherine Winans, who is already working on several things to facilitate this. Mark Elwonger has watched over our investments for many years. Thank you Mark for doing this with little or no recognition. As we move forward, I envision a small group of members with financial experience and interest helping us improve our process in this regard. Oh, look! Another opportunity for members to get involved! If you have that experience and are interested in this, contact me.

Those were the priorities I discussed with the Board, but there are other priorities that impose themselves on you with little or no

advanced warning. One of those is the lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service filed on June 5, 2017 by the General Land Office of the State of Texas represented by attorneys at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. The lawsuit seeks to remove the Golden-cheeked Warbler from its endangered species status. The TOS Board agreed to join the lawsuit as a defense intervenor. We are joining Travis Audubon, the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife in this role. This means that we will have lawyers involved in the court battle who are there to make sure our interests are addressed. For more details on this issue, see the article later in this issue.

And as I sat down in mid-July to write this, I had just learned that the Trump administration is preparing to build a segment of

the border wall through Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. The story is just breaking so it is too soon to know exactly what is happening, but TOS needs to stay on top of this and do what we can to protect this spectacular refuge that provides critical habitat to birds and other wildlife in our state.

As you can see, there is much good and rewarding work to be done for our sanctuaries, for our organization, for birders in Texas, and for our birds. I hope to hear from you about how you want to step up and be a part of our efforts to make TOS even better than it is now.

Thank you. Now, sit back and enjoy reading about Texas birds and birders! It doesn't get much better than that.

Shelia Hargis
TOS President
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Get your TOS Yellow-throated Warbler Tee Shirt

Now you can get your Yellow-throated Warbler tee shirt by mail. The price is \$15 each (price includes tax of \$1.24). Add \$5 if ordering by mail for postage/handling. For ordering details contact Georgina Schwartz
Email: gbird@att.net or by telephone 210-342-2073



What's Next for Texas? Top 10 Predictions on Additions to the Texas List

By David Sarkozi

Texas has a lot of birds, as of May 19, 2017 648 species have been documented in Texas. There is room for more on the state list though. What should we be looking for? What birds are likely to show up in Texas soon?

I polled a panel of 35 persons and received responses from 18. The criteria were somewhat subjective to be on the panel. I selected persons who I thought had expertise and had likely given the question some thought. Species already on the Texas Bird Record Committee's Presumptive list were excluded.

The responses were amazingly varied, but for every bird I could see a good case for why that bird might show up in Texas. There were 52 species nominated. Thirty species had but a single nomination. I included 11 species for the top nominations. Seven are tropical species and five are temperate species. Notably only two pelagic species were nominated.

6 VOTES



Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture, *Cathartes burrovianus*. Resident on the coast of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico north to Tampico Mexico just 250 miles from Brownsville, this has been a favorite of many as a new species

for Texas for a long time. Formerly known as the Savannah Vulture the place to look for this bird is on the coastal plain around Brownsville and Laguna Atascosa NWR. Thought to be “somewhat migratory, at least nomadic (Howell) it may wander with Turkey Vultures in spring migration in to Texas.

What to look for: The yellow head would be diagnostic if seen well, but can be very difficult to discern on a bird in flight. In flight look for the white primary shafts that form a white panel that can almost suggest a Black Vulture on the *upper wing*. *Quotes from the panel:* “It occurs as far north as Tampico

(255 miles from Brownsville) and could easily be overlooked as a Turkey Vulture.” “while this species scores high on the occurrence scale, it scores somewhat lower on the detection scale since I don’t think many birders in Texas are either aware of the possibility or are looking through TVs in the coastal plain.”

American Three-toed Woodpecker, *Picoides dorsalis*. Resident in the Lincoln National Forest and the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico just 60 miles from the Guadalupe Mountains and El Paso this is a long-anticipated addition to the Texas list. The preferred habitat is disturbed forest and a fire in the Guadalupe Mountains could provide habitat for a colony. *What to look for:* similar in size and shape to Hairy Woodpecker that would be likely present with it in the Guadalupe Mountains at least. Yellow crown and barred flanks would be distinctive. Hairy Woodpecker has much more white on the head, neck and wings. *Quotes from the panel:* “This species range extends southward into central New Mexico just 60 miles northwest of the Guadalupe Mountains. Southward irruptions do occur on occasion and the species wanders greatly to newly burned areas.” “Although not much of a wanderer as a

species, but due to its close range to Texas it is conceivable that one could wander to Texas, this species has been on the expected list for the state for some time.” “one strayed to near the Kansas/OK border a few years ago, less than 50 miles from the TX border. In NM, they are also regular about 60 miles north of the border in west Texas and about ~80 miles from Dog Canyon. Seems like a good burned area might attract/keep one in the Bowl?” “I can’t believe we don’t have this in the Guads especially after the big fire in the Bowl etc. about 20 years ago. They are not that far from our border and a winter bird ought to come in” “reports from South-central NM mountains and perfect habitat in the Guadalupe with last year’s low-intensity fires.”

5 VOTES



Tawny-collared Nightjar, *Antrostomus salvini*. A Northeastern Mexico endemic this species occurs regularly in the mountains south of Monterrey and has occurred in the Sierra Pichachos just 50 miles from Falcon Lake State Park and 98 miles from Bentsen State Park. The habit is described as “arid to semihumid, brushy woodland, thorn forest, and dense scrub” (Howell) . Similar to Common Pauraque it has a tawny nuchal collar and rufous auriculars. The male pauraque has much more white in the tail. The Tawny-collared Nightjar calls and hunts from well-hidden perches in the trees and bushes. While its possible a site record could occur from a photograph of a Common Pauraque

roosting that turns out to be a Tawny-collared Nightjar, it’s much more likely a first documented record will be an astute birder hearing and recording the bird, perhaps at Salineo, Bentsen or Estero Llano Grande State Parks. *Quotes from the panel:* “I have seen this species several times in the Sierra Pichachos which are visible from Falcon Dam on a clear day. The problem with detecting this bird is like most other nightjars...it would have to be singing at night in April-June, I suspect, and it would have to be heard by someone who would recognize it. This one could easily show up in Texas and be totally missed. Some of the lower elevation areas in Mexico where this bird occurs are not too dissimilar from some areas of the LRGV.” “As close as this bird is to the border, south of Del Rio etc., I can’t help but suspect this has occurred.

Granted it is rough country for the nocturnal birder and likely is not gonna get better...I see somewhere like Quemado.”



Photo Ryan Phillips

Plumbeous Kite, *Ictinia plumbea*. A migratory kite that winters in South America and breeds February to August in southeastern Mexico as far north as southern Tamaulipas. There are records from the El Cielo Biosphere Reserve and even north of Ciudad Victoria less than 160 miles from McAllen. Many have speculated one could wander north with spring migrating Mississippi Kites which it winters with. *What to look for:* Similar in size to a Mississippi Kite it has a shorter tail and shorter outermost primary. Adult birds have conspicuous

rufous primaries and two white bands on the undertail, both lacking in adult Mississippi Kites. Juvenile birds have rufous bases to the primaries and bolder tail bands. *Quotes from the panel:* “Probably has already crossed to the north side of the Rio Bravo into Texas but the ID challenge is steep.” “They are strong flyers and occur not that far from the border.” “Has been reported within 150-200 or so miles of the Texas border. Highly migratory and a migratory overshoot into Texas could be possible. Could be problematic to pick out from migratory Mississippi Kites, though.” “Long distance migrant that reaches southern Tamaulipas. An overshoot could join in with Mississippi Kites and reach South Texas.”



Mangrove Swallow, *Tachycineta albilinea*. This small swallow occurs at least as far north as the mouth of the Rio Soto La Marina in Tamaulipas, 150 miles from the Texas Border. A coastal species it becomes less common as you move inland. Associated with water it can be found near rivers, lakes, ponds, marshes and coastal beaches. The lower Rio Grande, particularly the mouth at Boca Chica, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, and the Arroyo Colorado would be potential sites for a Mangrove Swallow. Any of the large resacas in Cameron County could host Mangrove Swallows. *What to look for:* A small swallow, smaller than a bank swallow it has a green back and a prominent white rump. Similar to a Violet-green swallow, a Mangrove Swallow has less white on the face and the rump is completely white unlike a Violet-green Swal-

low. *Quotes from the panel:* “Way overdue for the state, resident species not very far south from Texas. Most likely to occur in South Texas or along the Texas Coast.” “So close yet so far. I’m amazed no one has reported this species along the banks of the Rio Grande” “Occurs along the gulf coast as far north as southern Tamaulipas where I have seen it. It would be a stealth species and could easily be overlooked by many folks. Could occur at a pond/lake in the LRGV or along the Rio Grande or LRGV coastal areas.” “Several reports already from the state. A species that should move north especially post breeders.” “occurs on the central coast of Tamaulipas, and being a swallow it has no environmental barriers. If birders were to explore by boat the Texas shorelines of Lake Amistad and Falcon Lake they might even find them nesting...”

3 VOTES



Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula*. This Eurasian breeder is a casual visitor to both coasts of North America in migration. Records in North Carolina, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and Arkansas (150 miles from Texarkana), the potential for a Texas record is certainly high. While most similar in appearance to a Ring-necked Duck, it is more likely to hang out with scaup on sheltered ponds and bays than on the smaller often wooded ponds that Ring-necked Ducks often prefers. *What to look for:* A male in breeding plumage would be unmistakable with clean white sides and fancy head tuft. A female would have little or

no white on the face compared to a female scaup. The flanks would be light gray-brown and contrast with the back more so and with a sharper demarcation than a Lesser or Greater Scaup female. *Quotes from the panel:* “This distinctive duck has been found with regularity in the northern states—even mid-continent on the Great Lakes where I saw it twice before I moved to Texas 20 years ago. There are now records from AZ, CO, NB, and AR. It is only a matter of time until Texans find one.” “it just seems that this should show up somewhere in a flock of Ring-necked Ducks” “with records from nearby states, it is bound to be found and photographed in the near future ”



Bridled Titmouse, *Baeolophus wollweberi*. Many think of this as a Southeastern Arizona specialty but it is a widespread montane species in Mexico. It breeds in the Gila National Forest just 120 miles from El Paso and in the mountains, west of Chihuahua City just 200 miles from the Chisos Mountains in Big Bend. A bird of high elevation oak and pine oak woodlands a Bridled Titmouse could occur in a mixed flock in the Chisos Mountains perhaps in the winter, but to date

coverage of the Chisos by birders is very light to nonexistent in the winter. *What to look for:* Smaller than other titmice it moves through the trees much more like a chickadee than a titmouse. Any black-crested Titmice present would dwarf a Bridled Titmouse. The unique face pattern would stand out. *Quotes from the panel:* “I think this bird is way over due in Big Bend, The Guadalupe Mountains, The Davis Mountains, or the El Paso area. In the non-breeding season, I’ve seen it at Percha Dam in south central NM, not far from El Paso. I feel pretty certain this specie has already occurred in Texas, just never documented.” “at least one very reliable sighting I’m personally aware of, with a couple references in the Peterson-Zimmer Trans-Pecos book. In addition, a few questionable reports from the Big Bend National Park. I’ll bet there’s one up there right now.” “Breeds in Animas Creek, New Mexico just 80 or 90 miles due north of the Texas line. In good montane invasion years this species wanders over to Percha Dam along the Rio Grande on occasion—from there just a hop, skip and a jump to El Paso.”



Vaux’s Swift, *Chaetura vauxi*. Essentially almost identical to a Chimney Swift this species presents a huge ID issue for Texas birders. Winter records along the Gulf Coast in Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida have led many to conclude Vaux’s Swift must occur in Texas. Many have speculated any winter record of a Chaetura swift in Texas is likely a Vaux’s Swift. *What to look for:* Best identified by differences in call.

David Sibley has written on studies he's done on wing shape differences that provide some hope for distinguishing the two species by shape alone, but there is no tested method of field ID other than voice. *Quotes from the panel:* "Louisiana has some records..." "good, diagnostic photos and recordings are becoming common, only a matter of time before for this species."



Blue-Gray Tanager, *Thraupis episcopus*.

This widespread and very urban species occurs in Monterrey only 138 miles from McAllen. In its range it's found at forest edge, in second growth, along roads and rivers, and even urban parks. They are flexible in their diet and eat a variety of fruits and arthropods. *What to look for:* Unmistakable, adults are light blue-gray with brighter blue wings and tail. Juveniles are duller in color. *Quotes from the panel:* "Has been reported within 150-200 or so miles of the Texas border. This is a species that adapts well to human environments."



White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba*. A common Eurasian species with a small stable population in Western Alaska. There are more than

10 records east of the Mississippi including a Florida record and a New Mexico record. Favoring rocky places and sometimes gravel bars in rivers it could show up in migration on almost any rocky dam in Texas. A close relative of pipits it feeds much like them, forages by walking and picking up items. *What to look for:* Pipit like in posture, adult males have a black bib, white face and a large white shoulder patch. First winter birds have two white wingbars. Females and first winter birds have a light throat and black bib. In flight the black tail with white outer tail feathers should stand out. *Quotes from the panel:* "seems like both AZ and NM have a record or two of this one, and I know Louisiana has a Citrine Wagtail." "along with a proven record of occurrence just about anywhere in the continent, this has the 'stands out like a sore thumb' factor, so it could be found by just about anyone with an interest in birds. Look for it to pop up in an eBird list or "what's that bird?" Facebook group."



Melodious Blackbird, *Dives dives*. Recorded as close to Texas as Linares (125 miles) and resident in Ciudad Victoria (180 miles) this ubiquitous Central American species could easily show up in a flock of blackbirds in the Rio Grande Valley. It might go unnoticed with Red-winged Blackbirds or get misidentified as a Brewer's Blackbird. Its loud and unique "whee'choo" call would alert anyone familiar with the call to the bird's presence. It favors open and semi open areas and feeds mostly on the ground. *What to look for:* All dark glossy black with dark eyes and

legs. The bill is large and conical reminding one of a grackle. The tail is rounded compared to the square tail of Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbirds.

Quotes from the panel: "fine with disturbed habitat, and spreading north rapidly; definitely will occur, but detectability probably limited to those who would recognize its vocalizations."

2 VOTES

White-winged Tern, Bat Falcon, Spot-breasted Wren, Great Cormorant, Wood Sandpiper, Ivory Gull, Crescent-Chested Warbler, Blue Ground-Dove, Streaked Flycatcher, Little Stint, Plain-capped Starthroat.

1 VOTE

Gray Jay, Wedge-tailed Saberwing, Bendire's Thrasher, Great Black Hawk, Gray-collared Becard, Crowned Slaty Flycatcher, Lineated Woodpecker, Worthen's Sparrow,

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, Northern Fulmar, White-bellied Wren, Pacific Wren, Solitary Eagle, Pine Flycatcher, Squirrel Cuckoo, Elegant Euphonia, Sungrebe, Lesser Sand-Plover, Brown-backed Solitaire, Red-throated Pipit, Brown-chested Martin, Ross's Gull, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, White-crowned Pigeon, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Russet Nightingale-Thrush, Boat-billed Flycatcher, Azure-crowned Hummingbird, and Nazca Booby.

I'd like to thank those that contributed to this project: Keith Arnold, Tony Frank, Greg Lasley, Chuck Sexton, Eric Carpenter, Mark Lockwood, Ron Weeks, Michael Retter, Cin-Ty Lee, Martin Reid, Sheridan Coffey, Stephan Lorenz, Rich Kostecke, Brush Freeman, Tim Brush, Chris Runk, Willie Sekula, and Barry Zimmer

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Texas Bird Records Committee

A Standing Committee of the Texas Ornithological Society

TEXAS
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SOCIETY

Recent News



August 3, 2017: The State List has been adjusted as per the 58th AOS supplement and the 2017 Annual Meeting minutes have been added in the Annual Meeting section. Thayer's Gull (lumped with Iceland Gull) has been removed from the state list and per the Annual Meeting, both Brown Booby and Iceland Gull have been removed from the Review List.

May 19, 2017: The committee has officially added **Amethyst-throated Hummingbird** to the state list. The addition of this brings the State List to 648 species in good standing.

April 4, 2017: The committee has officially added **Variagated Flycatcher** to the state list. The addition of this brings the State List to 647 species in good standing.

Amethyst-throated Hummingbird - Web Cam

- o **March 4, 2017 :** The TBRC has officially added 2 new species to the state list. The state's first **White-tailed Tropicbird** was successfully rehabilitated after being found on the beach on Padre Island National Seashore (Kleberg County) on 3 July 2010 after Hurricane Alex. The other new species for the state was **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** which was a long-staying bird at Sabal Palm Sanctuary (Cameron County) from 6 November 2015 to 7 April 2016. A statement has been added to the website concerning the acceptance of this species based on audio recordings. The acceptance of these two species brings the State List to 646 species in good standing.

What's Killing our Birds?

By Jack Clinton Eitnear

Watching television, the other evening I heard a “thud” coming from the front picture window. A dove had hit the glass. There are no bushes near the window and the feeder is in a nearby tree so I thought I had not created a risk situation for birds visiting the feeder. Apparently, I had to rethink the design. But alas the bird flew away seemingly unharmed. Shortly thereafter the doorbell rang and in walked my daughter. “The strangest thing happened to me today. I was driving down the road and a bird hit the car!” In this case the bird was killed.

These were just recent examples of anthropogenic threats to our birds. We are all aware of the impact of habitat alteration. It's obvious that all the birds that once lived in the woods (now bulldozed for a subdivision) had to go somewhere. Some were likely nesting so young were killed. Living in the Valley in the 80s I remember ranchers “chaining” rangeland. Not only did this remove the cedar trees

and scrub oaks but also toppled the Harris's Hawk nests and killed their young. So, what's killing our birds? Under the best of conditions often less than half of their young ever reach one year of age. Storms blow down nests, eggs and young get eaten by squirrels (and other mammals), snakes, corvids and raptors. These are all natural mortalities.... then we have human caused mortality.

Domesticated cats... Growing up in the “north woods” our family always had a pet cat. We fed the cat so it was not on its own in the woods! Nevertheless, it was not uncommon for it to present us with a freshly killed critter. Often it was a bird. Estimates of annual US bird mortality from predation by all cats, including both owned and un-owned, are in the hundreds of millions*. It is pretty difficult to determine exactly how many birds are being killed by cats but the number has got to be substantial. If given the opportunity most cats will kill a bird. If only half of the

*The American Bird Conservancy estimates the 100 million pet cats in the USA annually kill 2.4 billion birds.



Especially in urban areas domestic cats are major predators of birds.

Photo Tufts University



A recent study estimated that at least 200 million birds are killed on roadways every year.

Photo by author

American Veterinary Medical Association's estimate of 74 million pet cats and the Humane Society's estimate of 60 million feral cats do so a lot of birds are being killed !

Highway Collisions... I've seen a few road killed birds in my day. During one trip from San Antonio to McAllen I counted 60 dead Barn Owls along the roadside. Apparently, the owls were hunting rodents in the grassy areas

along the side of the road. Getting an accurate number of such mortalities is problematic as smaller birds could easily get killed without anyone noticing them on the roadside. Despite this, a recent study resulted in a median annual mortality estimate of 199.6 million birds being killed along our highways. Among the species documented in studies meeting inclusion criteria, the Barn Owl had the high-



395 migratory birds killed due to window collisions from a single night at one Galveston Building.
Photo Josh Henderson/Houston Audubon



Window with ABC birdtape. See www.abcbirds.org for details

est average proportional representation across studies, averaging 32.4% of total counts. Four other species, including 3 in the Corvidae family, had average representation of at least 5% including: Common Raven (6.3%), Gray Jay (6.0%), Black-billed Magpie (5.0%), and European Starling (5.0%). Perhaps it is the behavior of feeding on carrion (roadkill) that is resulting in the high mortality of corvids. Why starlings are being disproportionately hit by autos is unknown.

Window Collisions... According to a recent article published in the journal **The Condor: ornithological applications** between 100 million and 1 billion birds are killed annually as the result of collisions with windows*. Contrary to what one might think 56% of this mortality is at low-rise buildings with less than one percent found at high rises. Next to low-rise buildings 44% of this mortality is at residences. Mortality during fall migration appears to be consistently greater than during spring migration; this pattern could be related to larger populations of birds in the fall due to the presence of young-of-the-year. Four species that are vulnerable to collisions at more than one building class (including the Golden-winged Warbler, Painted Bunting, Kentucky Warbler, and Canada Warbler), collision mortality appears substantial and may contribute to or exacerbate population declines.

Finally, several species exhibit disproportionately high vulnerability to collisions regardless of building type, including Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Brown Creeper, Ovenbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Gray Catbird, and Black-and-White Warbler. Seven species that are disproportionately vulnerable to building collisions are national *Birds of Conservation Concern* and 10 are included on various regional lists of “at risk” birds.

*Houston alone has over 3,966 buildings! The number of windows are unknown.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

For window collisions at residences, mitigation techniques could include moving feeders further away from windows, reducing vegetation near windows, angling windows to reduce reflection, and installing netting, closely spaced decals, or UV light-reflecting glass. For low-rises and high-rises, mortality can be reduced by minimizing light emission at night.

The American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirds.org) provides some additional suggestions. A few of them include:

- Keep your cats indoors or on a leash and consider constructing a cat-condo!
- Consider using birdtape** on picture windows. Research has shown that birds generally avoid flying through vertical lines 4” apart or less, and horizontal lines 2” apart or less.
- Use bird friendly building designs. See <https://abcbirds.org/program/glass-collisions/bird-friendly-design/>

Current studies indicate a rough estimate of 10–20 billion total birds in North America. Considering this 1 billion die from window collisions, 200 million from road collisions, and perhaps another 2 billion from domestic cats (plus add in wind turbines, communication towers, power lines, etc.). This cumulative (a 3.25 billion) results in a significant threat; especially if it’s disproportionately impacting certain species. While we should be concerned about wintering habitat (in Latin America) we should not forget *the birds have to survive these threats in order to get there!* If we all do our part we can save thousands of birds!

If not now, when? If not you, who?

Jack Clinton Eitnrear
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**<http://www.collidescape.org/abc-birdtape>



QUIGLEY RE-INTRODUCES BIPARTISAN, COST-NEUTRAL BILL TO SAVE THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF BIRDS

May 18, 2017 | Press Release

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (IL-05), who serves as Vice Chair of the Sustainable Energy & Environment Coalition (SEEC), joined Rep. Morgan Griffith (VA-09) in re-introducing the *Federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act* to help prevent the deaths of millions of birds by ensuring federal buildings incorporate the latest bird-safe technologies. Rep. Quigley first introduced similar legislation as a Cook County Commissioner in 2008, and has introduced this bill in every session of Congress since 2010.

"By pursuing cost-neutral, responsible, and realistic solutions we can play an important role in preserving the intrinsic, cultural, and ecological value birds bring to our society," said Rep. Quigley. "This bill will put an emphasis on constructing buildings with bird-safe materials and design features, which in turn will help eradicate unnecessary bird deaths caused by collisions with glass."

In addition to the moral and ethical responsibility we have to protect wildlife from the potentially harmful impacts of our society and built environment, America's bird population also has a direct impact on our economy. According to the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), Americans spend about \$36 billion in pursuit of birding activities. One in five Americans, 48 million people, engage in bird watching, and about 42 percent travel away from home to go birding. Birding activities generate about \$4.4 billion in federal tax revenues and about \$6.2 billion in state tax revenues, support about 670,000 jobs, and provide \$38 billion in employment income.

Most birds' first encounter with glass is fatal, when they try to fly to trees, sky or other objects seen through glass or reflected on its surface. However, low- or no-cost techniques can be used in new construction projects, as well as existing buildings, to mitigate bird collisions and deaths. The *Federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act* will save the lives of millions of birds by calling for each public building constructed, acquired, or significantly altered by the General Services Administration (GSA) to incorporate, to the maximum extent possible, bird-safe building materials and design features. Many buildings constructed by GSA are already, in fact, bird-friendly. The legislation would require GSA to take similar actions on existing buildings, where practicable.

The *Federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act of 2017* is co-sponsored by Lee Zeldin (R-NY), Michael E. Capuano (D-MA), Jared Huffman (D-CA), David Cicilline (D-RI), Jackie Speier (D-CA), Matt Cartwright (D-PA), James P. McGovern (D-MA), Rueben Gallego (D-AZ), Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), Jerry McNerney (D-CA), Steve Cohen (D-TN), Donald Beyer (D-VA), Suzane DeBene (D-WA), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), and Jim Langevin (D-RI). The following organizations have also endorsed the bill: The Humane Society of the United States, American Bird Conservancy, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Prendergast Laurel Architects.

Rep. Quigley is a stalwart supporter of our wildlife and the environment. As a member of the bipartisan Animal Protection Caucus, Rep. Quigley has maintained a 100 percent policy rating with the Humane Society of the United States, and was recently rewarded with the Legislative Leader Award. Since assuming his role as the only Illinois member of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Quigley has fought for increased funding for animal protections, including in the Animal Welfare in Agricultural Research Endeavors (AWARE) Act and the Horse Protection Act. Last year, Rep. Quigley spoke to Loyola University Chicago about his efforts to promote bird-safe measures.

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Texas Breeding Bird Survey (1967–2015)

By Brent Ortego



The U.S. Geological Survey Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the National Survey that was developed to monitor breeding bird populations along public roads across the country. It is the primary source for breeding bird population trends in the Nation. This survey has about 3000 randomly located routes across the United States which include 195 in Texas. An example of one route which I have conducted is Campbellton.

Campbellton, Atascosa County, Breeding Bird Survey. 5/14/2017—3 a.m. wake up. Dora Ann and I get up, grab a cup of coffee, and go. We have 100 miles to drive to Campbellton and then another 5 miles on FM 791 to get to our starting point. Drive this morning is uneventful. Highways along the way skirt the edge of the Eagle Ford Shale development. Industrial type traffic in this field can be busy at all hours of the

day. Recent down turn in the local oil field has reduced traffic dramatically. We turn off I-37 at Campbellton at 5:30 a.m. and drive through the “sleepy little town”. Despite a major coal mine and oil field nearby Campbellton still has one fuel station and no early morning breakfast facilities. We arrive at the starting point at 5:45. This gives me time to acclimate to the bird calls. Pre-dawn is one of the most enjoyable parts of the day for me. Owls, pauraques, and nighthawks call with regularity along with waterbirds from nearby tanks. A gradual succession of diurnal birds join the calling as dawn approaches. Starting time is 6:13 and I am hoping the nocturnal birds will still be calling when the count starts.

Standard BBS rules are start 30 minutes before sunrise. Count all birds heard, and all birds seen within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile at each stop. Space

stops at ½ mile and conduct 50. Each stop last 3 minutes. Route should be completed within 5 hours.

Our starting point is a major gate which allows us to park far enough off the highway to minimize risk of being run over by tanker trucks which pass by every minute. Clock is ticking and starting time is near, Pauraques and waterbirds from nearby tanks are still calling. I cannot see the tank, but bird vocalizations from it are loud. Cloudy skies and light winds. Conditions are looking good for my 18th year conducting this route.

Stop 1. Recorded Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Roseate Spoonbill, Common Pauraque, Lesser Nighthawk plus 21 individuals of 8 other species. One of the challenging identifications of this trip is to distinguish Northern Cardinal and Pyrrhuloxia vocalizations. At this stop I had 5 Cardinal/Pyrrhuloxia and 1 seen Pyrrhuloxia. Three minutes are up. Time to go to the next stop.

Stop 2. The ½ mile spacing from Stop 1 puts us at a large dog kennel. Barking from the dogs drowns out bird calls. BBS rules allow adjusting a stop location up to 0.1 mile to avoid safety hazards, noisy locations, or to position a stop site where it will be conspicuous and easily found. In this situation, we back away from the dogs for 0.1 mile and park on the steep shoulder while watching for early morning vehicle traffic. No more pauraques. One more Lesser Nighthawk and a Common Gallinule plus 20 individuals of 9 species. Mottled Duck, Common Nighthawk and Red-winged Blackbird were new for the day. Three minutes are up and we continue route.

Highway is a two-lane road with no shoulder and traffic passes by at 70 mph during most stops. Intervals between stops are modified frequently within the rules to find a safe pull-off at gates when available.

Stop 10. We stop at the bridge at Metate Creek and run into another identification dilemma. Dozens of swallows fly out from

under the bridge. Both Cave and Cliff Swallows breed under bridges in this area and frequently use the same one. I ID them as best as I can within allotted time and record the rest as Cave/Cliff Swallow. I hear my 1st White-tipped Dove and 2nd Audubon's Oriole. Ten species for this stop and 39 species for the route so far. Conditions are looking good with partly cloudy skies and light winds.

Stop 17. Spacing places me on a busy section of Hwy 281. I back off 0.1 miles onto FM 791 at a gate where it is safe and not as noisy. Add my 1st E. Bluebirds for the day in this pasture setting. Detect a Little Blue Heron fly over from the nearby Atascosa River. Added my 4th Audubon's Oriole and we are up to 43 species.

Stop 20. This is my 3rd stop in Campbellton. The community contains residential habitat that is mostly occupied by urban doves, swallows, grackles, and House Sparrows. Small towns typically provide opportunities for additional species like Chimney Swift, Purple Martin, and a variety of doves which are hard to find in ranch settings. Not today. I did add Black-chinned Hummingbird, Common Grackle, and Bullock's Oriole for the day. Large numbers of Black-chins can be attracted to residences nearby with focused management. Made note of 8 vehicles passing by during stops in town.

Drove under the interstate and headed east on FM 1099 into the Eagle Ford Shale oil field where relatively new wells are densely spaced across the landscape. Stop 27 is at a stone wall on top of a hill. Behind the wall is a large mowed entrance way with scattered bull mesquite. I glass the area for my traditional Vermillion Flycatcher and locate one. I also saw a Great Kiskadee which was new for the day. We are up to 49 species. At this point, I almost do not need a clock. After 27 3-minute segments, I can determine within a few seconds when 3 minutes are up.

Stop 32. Very well-manicured residence with irrigation that is typically a magnet

for residential species that might have been missed in town. I position vehicle just past residence to not be too intrusive to the owners. Expected species Purple Martin, Eur. Starling, and House Finch were present. Added my 2nd Swainson's Hawk for the day. It is getting warmer and I am starting to scan the sky more intently for soaring raptors within ¼ mile.

Stop 39. Point is at a compressor station. I drive past it for 0.1 mile to reduce the noise heard from the engines. Did not help much. Five individuals of 4 species for stop. I make note of noise on my survey form.

Stop 43. Route breaks out of primarily thorn-scrub habitat to open ag fields. Interesting having House Finches and House Sparrows at a stop where there are no houses.

Stop 46. Large borrow pit on the side of the road is the main feature with birds. Observe my first Fulvous Whistling-Ducks and Common Gallinule. Scan nearby motte of trees and note another Bullock's Oriole.

Stop 48. Large shallow pond is the major wetland on this route that is visible from the road. Most other ponds are out of sight behind trees. Today an oil rig is within 100 yards of it. Despite this activity, I located 8 species of waterbirds on it. Stops like this give you something in which to look forward as the day heats up, and bird activity slows down.

Stop 50. Drove 100 yards past residence so that I am not parking in driveway. I normally see Common Grackles in the motte of trees at the house. Not this year. Survey is over at 11:03. It is 85 degrees, modest breeze and partly cloudy. It was a good survey ending on time with 82 species which included 3 obvious migrants.

This is a diverse route. It contains mostly thorn-scrub on the western side that grades into agriculture to the east. The Atascosa River flanks the route for several miles providing some riparian woodland habitat. Water tanks along the route provide for some waterbird

usage. There is a major coal mine within one mile of the route that has not had any obvious effects to the route outside of increased vehicle traffic. The Eagle Ford Shale development on the eastern side is saturated with oil wells and a fair amount of disturbance occurs from traffic and drilling activities.

BBS routes are not about Big Days. However, being a Birder, you cannot help but look at the species number. Today, I logged 82 species. Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Least Grebe and Roseate Spoonbill were new for this route. Missed Green Heron, Barred and Great Horned Owl, Inca Dove, White-winged Dove, and White-eyed Vireo. It is challenging to notice every species at 3-minute stops. White-tipped Dove and Great Kiskadee have been observed most years since 2008, and Audubon's Oriole since 2000.

The high diversity on this BBS route is an exception. BBS routes throughout the country were randomly located to sample average bird populations to monitor their trends. They were not located to survey the best sites.

I get great pleasure doing repeated surveys at the same site. It allows me to see how the landscape changes through time. I and many volunteers like me will continue running the BBS routes to track change created by people, climate, and other factors. As we amass data, researchers will be able to use the information to determine impacts by the many developments across the country.

U. S. G. S. BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

The U.S. Geological Survey BBS is the National Survey that was developed to monitor bird populations along public roads across the country. It is the primary source for breeding bird population trends in the nation. This survey has about 3000 randomly located routes across the United States and 195 in Texas. Each route is 24.5 miles long with 50 stops spaced 0.5 miles apart. At each stop during a 3-minute period, the observer

tallies all birds seen within ¼ mile and all birds heard. The route lasts from 30 minutes before sunrise until it is finished which is normally about 11 a.m. Each route is run **once** each year during the months of May or June; exact dates vary with each route.

National and local conservation organizations regularly use BBS data (see www.stateofthebirds.org/2016/) in their analyses. They focus very strongly on breeding bird population trends, and also use bird density data extensively. **Partners In Flight** has developed models to estimate breeding density and distribution for all species they are tracking with BBS data. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has used the data when they developed a statewide conservation plan for birds (see <http://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/tcap/>). Conservation “Joint Ventures” across the nation regularly use BBS data as they implement their “All Birds” management goals. It has been very satisfying seeing the product of

our works being used to influence national and local decisions on avian conservation.

TEXAS BBS HISTORY. The BBS started in Texas during 1967 with 100 standard routes. An additional 95 routes were added in 1994. Non-standard routes are added periodically for various projects.

Warren Pulich, Sr. was the primary coordinator through 1992 and I took over in 1993. Warren was assisted in recruiting birders in West Texas for a number of years by Francis Williams. I received help in recruiting West Texas from Jeremy Clark, Bonnie McKinney, and Brad Simpson at various times.

Thirty-five people volunteered during the first year with 43% serving 5 or more years. Since 1967, three-hundred-one volunteered for 1-5 years, seventy-four 6-10 years, sixty-five 11-15 years, twenty-eight 16-20 years, twenty-nine 21-25 years, eight 26-30 years, five 31-35 years, two 36-40 years and one (Ken Seiffert) 42 years.

1967 TEXAS BREEDING BIRD SURVEY VOLUNTEERS

Service Years	Birder	Service Years	Birder
22	Richard Albert	24	Ernest McDaniel
2	J Anding	1	D McKey
3	C Bender	1	J Miller
1	L Berner Jr	1	M Mullins
6	O Bone	27	Andrew O’Neil
1	E Dillon	7	M Parker
25	Phyllis Dorzier	21	Warren Pulich Sr.
2	Victor Emanuel	2	M Robinson
4	L Homan	42	Ken Seyffert
9	R Johnson	1	W Shepler
1	M Keefer	1	D Smith
9	J Kent	6	C Sprangler
6	C Kiblinger	20	Allen Vallentine
6	E Kinsey	24	Roland Wauer
2	A Koon	1	J White
3	Ann Lesassier	20	Francis Williams
15	John Logan Jr	8	T Word
1	B Mack		

I would like to especially recognize the birders who completed at least 25 BBS routes

thru 2016. This is a major contribution which 69 people have achieved.

VOLUNTEERS COMPLETING AT LEAST 25 ROUTES

Birder			Routes Completed		
Birder		Routes Completed	Birder		Routes Completed
Kenneth	Seyffert	190	Richard	Kinney	34
Brent	Ortego	130	Benjamin	Archer	34
Mary	Gustafson	98	Ernest	McDaniel	34
Frances	Williams	75	Greg	Lasley	34
Bob	Rasa	69	Timothy	Gollob	34
James	Middleton	65	Leanna	Smith	33
Richard	Albert	63	Peggy	Beckham	33
Anthony	Hewetson	62	Dick	Heller	31
Mark	Flippo	60	Darrell	Vollert	31
Clifford	Shackelford	60	James	Sipiora	31
Charles	Crabtree Jr	59	Warren	Pulich	31
Peggy	Acord	59	Curtis	Jordan	31
Kenneth	Nanney	58	Lorraine	Bartlett	31
Wayne	Meyer	54	Vera	Ralston	30
Andrew	Oneil	54	Julie	Crouch	30
Roger	Rose	51	Joye	Johnson	30
Charles	Debetaz	50	Homer	Klonis	29
Bill	Reiner Jr.	49	Marion	Cleveland	29
Sylvestre	Sorola	48	Clarence	Wiedenfeld	29
Josh	Burns	48	Cecilia	Riley	29
James	Renfro	48	Shelia	Hargis	28
Mark	Elwonger	46	Marilyn	Turnage	28
Byron	Stone	45	Bonnie	McKinney	28
Edward	Fair	43	Mark	Conway	28
Joellen	Miller	42	John	Whittle	28
Ronald	Braun	41	Dell	Little	27
John	Gee	39	James	Williamson	27
Susie	Lower	39	Rosemary	English	27
Charles	Fisher	38	Lamont	Brown	26
John	Maresh	38	John	Kelly	26
David	Powell	37	Linda	Riner	26
Sue	Wiedenfeld	37	Jed	Ramsey	25
Jean	Frankenburger	36	Phyllis	Dozier	25
Roland	Wauer	36	Mary	Bush	25
Cliff	Stogner	35			

POPULATION TRENDS

One hundred seventy-six species occurred with enough frequency on BBS routes within Texas thru 2015 that warranted analyzing population trends. Forty-seven of these had significant increases and 43 had significant

declines. Significant increases were primarily with herons/egrets, raptors, doves, flycatchers, and swallows. Significant declines were mostly with woodpeckers, flycatchers, sparrows, and icterids.

SPECIES WITH SIGNIFICANT POPULATION INCREASES ON TEXAS BBS ROUTES

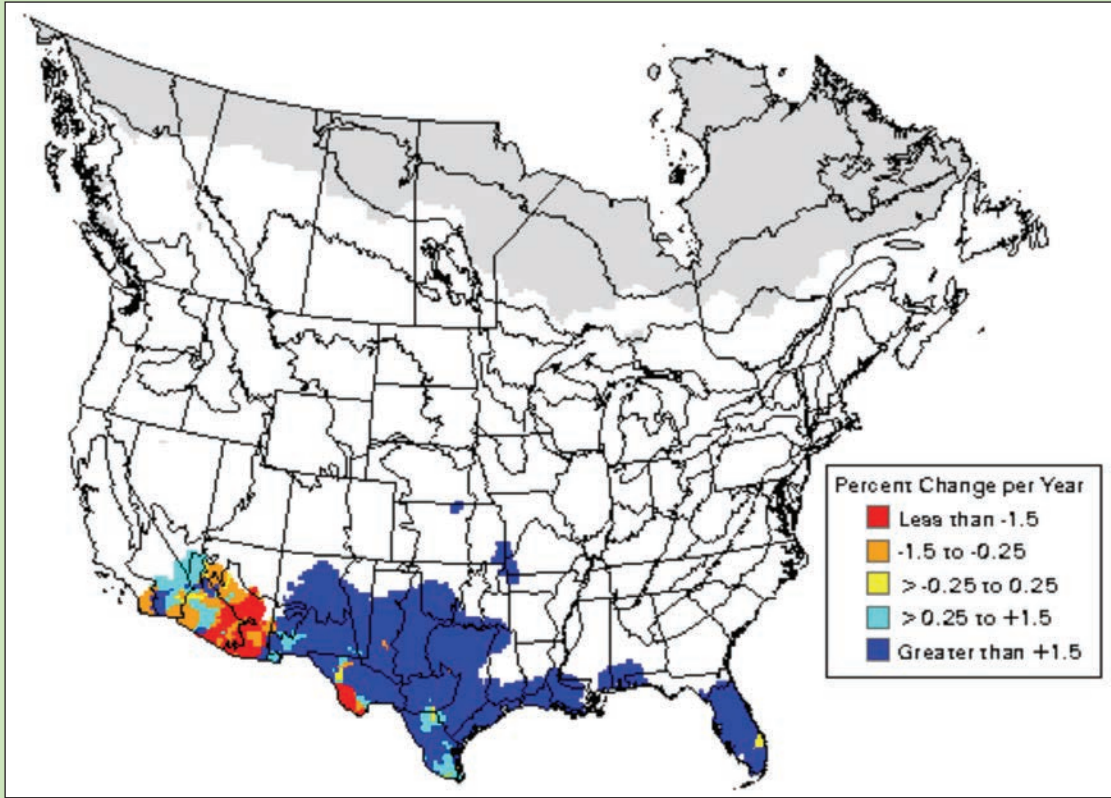
Species	Percent Increase	Species	Percent Increase
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	4.5	Brown-crested Flycatcher	3.5
Wild Turkey	3.6	Couch's Kingbird	9.0
Double-crested Cormorant	3.6	Western Kingbird	2.2
Great Blue Heron	0.9	White-eyed Vireo	1.5
Great Egret	2.5	Yellow-throated Vireo	1.4
Snowy Egret	2.3	Green Jay	5.8
Black-crowned Night-Heron	3.5	Common Raven	1.9
White Ibis	3.5	Barn Swallow	3.0
Roseate Spoonbill	2.9	Cliff Swallow	3.7
Black Vulture	6.5	Cave Swallow	14.2
Turkey Vulture	1.1	White-breasted Nuthatch	2.9
Mississippi Kite	1.8	Carolina Wren	0.7
Cooper's Hawk	5.0	Eastern Bluebird	2.5
Red-shouldered Hawk	2.6	Long-billed Thrasher	5.7
Swainson's Hawk	0.8	European Starling	1.0
Red-tailed Hawk	1.5	Yellow-breasted Chat	1.5
Black-necked Stilt	3.2	Olive Sparrow	2.0
Eurasian Collared-Dove	24.6	Summer Tanager	0.8
Inca Dove	2.2	Northern Cardinal	0.6
White-winged Dove	4.4	Blue Grosbeak	1.5
Greater Roadrunner	1.3	Dickcissel	2.0
Crested Caracara	5.7	Great-tailed Grackle	1.5
Eastern Phoebe	2.3	Hooded Oriole	3.8
Ash-throated Flycatcher	1.6		

SPECIES WITH SIGNIFICANT POPULATION DECLINES ON TEXAS BBS ROUTES

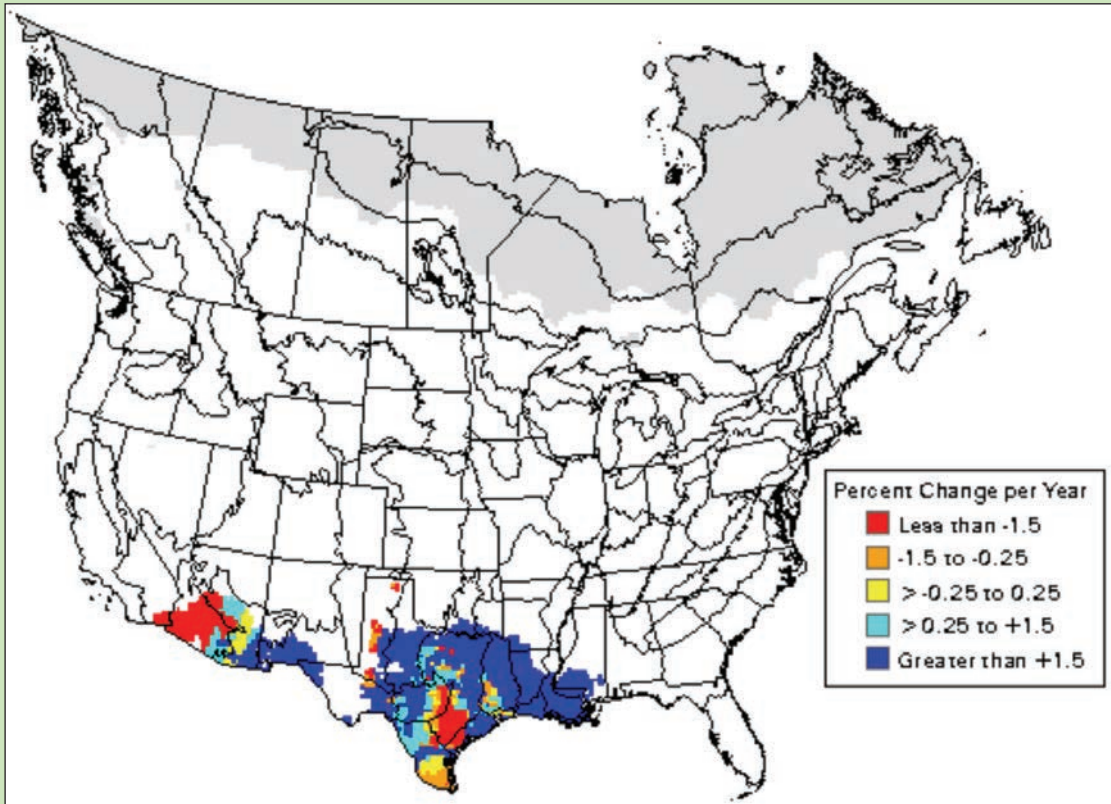
Species	Percent Decline	Species	Percent Decline
Mottled Duck	-4.6	Bewick's Wren	-1.2
Northern Bobwhite	-1.8	Cactus Wren	-2.4
Green Heron	-1.5	Wood Thrush	-1.5
Harris's Hawk	-2.1	Curve-billed Thrasher	-2.4
Killdeer	-1.0	Northern Mockingbird	-0.5
Mourning Dove	-0.7	Black-and-white Warbler	-2.3
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	-1.7	Kentucky Warbler	-3.9
Common Nighthawk	-1.6	Field Sparrow	-2.7
Chuck-will's-widow	-1.9	Black-throated Sparrow	-2.1
Chimney Swift	-3.1	Lark Sparrow	-2.0
Belted Kingfisher	-2.9	Rufous-crowned Sparrow	-1.7
Red-headed Woodpecker	-1.5	Red-winged Blackbird	-2.2
Golden-fronted Woodpecker	-0.8	Pyrrhuloxia	-1.7
Northern Flicker	-2.7	Indigo Bunting	-0.9
Eastern Wood-Pewee	-4.5	Painted Bunting	-0.7
Acadian Flycatcher	-3.2	Western Meadowlark	-1.5
Great Crested Flycatcher	-1.4	Eastern Meadowlark	-3.3
Eastern Kingbird	-2.0	Brown-headed Cowbird	-2.0
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	-0.9	Orchard Oriole	-3.4
Loggerhead Shrike	-3.1	Bullock's Oriole	-1.3
Red-eyed Vireo	-0.9	House Sparrow	-3.1
Horned Lark	-2.4		

Trends for a species are typically not uniform across its range. Many local factors affect populations. The BBS office transforms the data into various maps to visually show population status which can be more useful to planners. A few examples of increas-

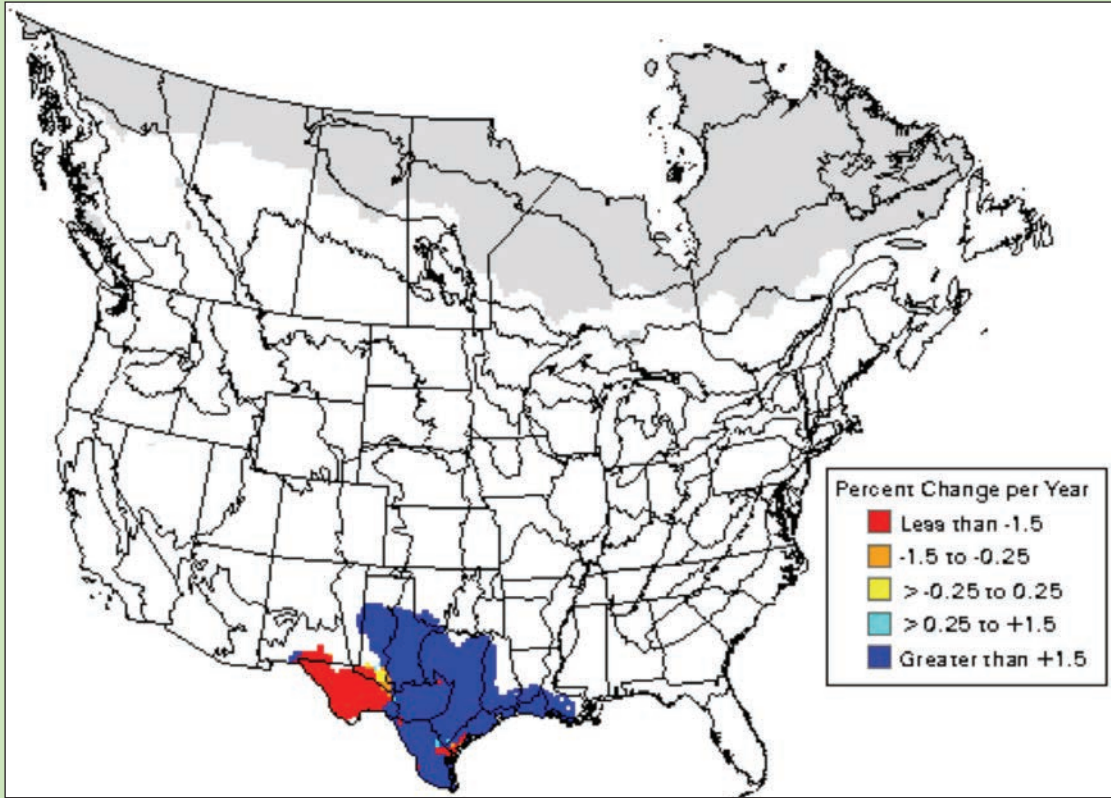
ing and decreasing populations are displayed below in "thunderstorm" maps which identify geographical changes in populations. This information was obtained from the BBS link https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/tr2015/trend2015_v3.html.



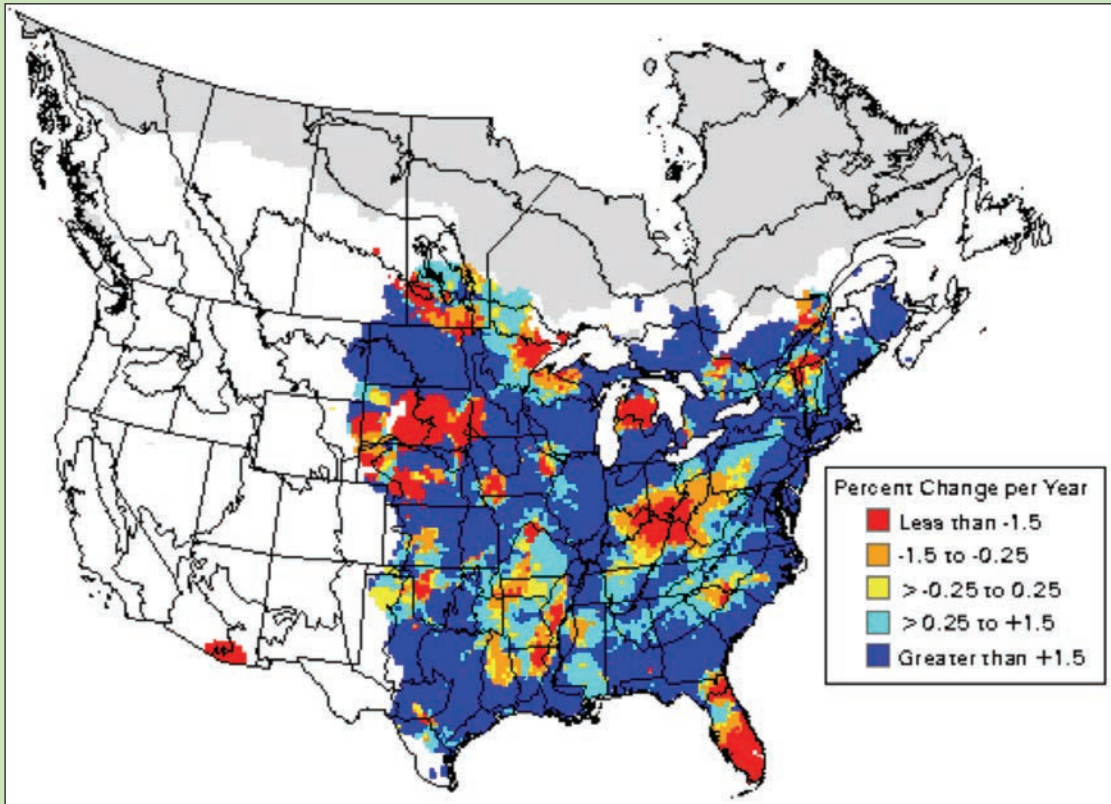
WHITE-WINGED DOVE +4.4% IN TEXAS



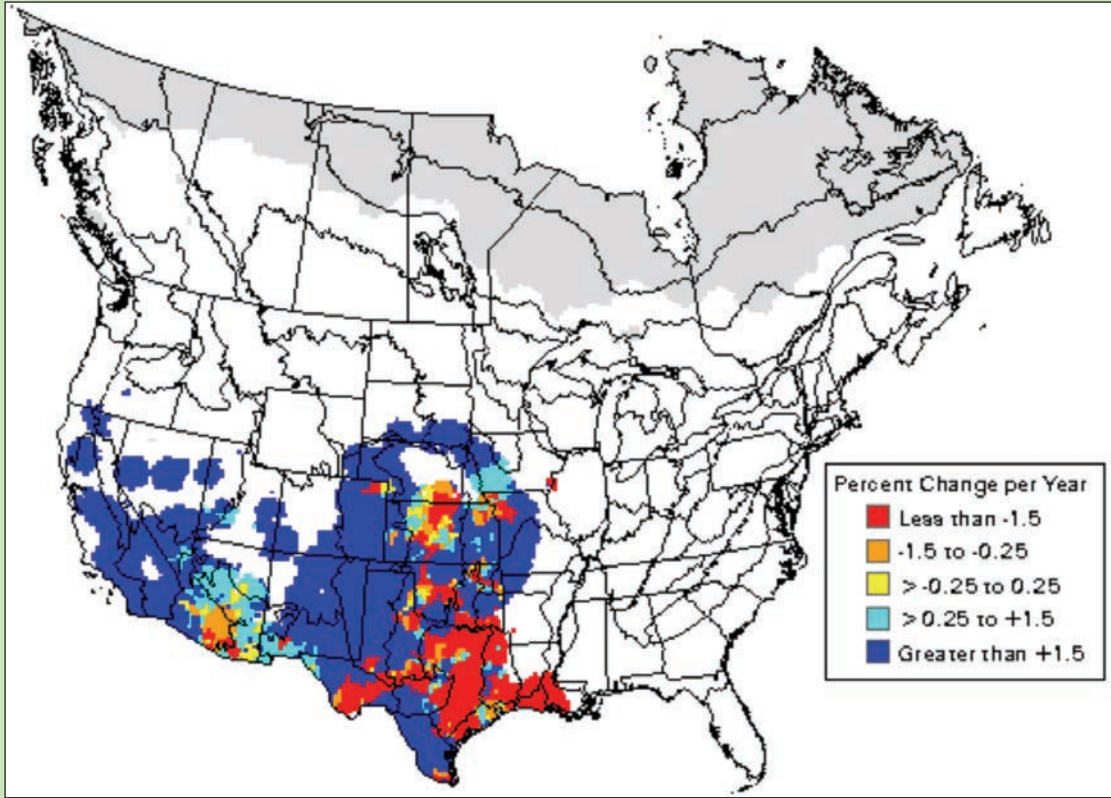
INCA DOVE +2.2% IN TEXAS



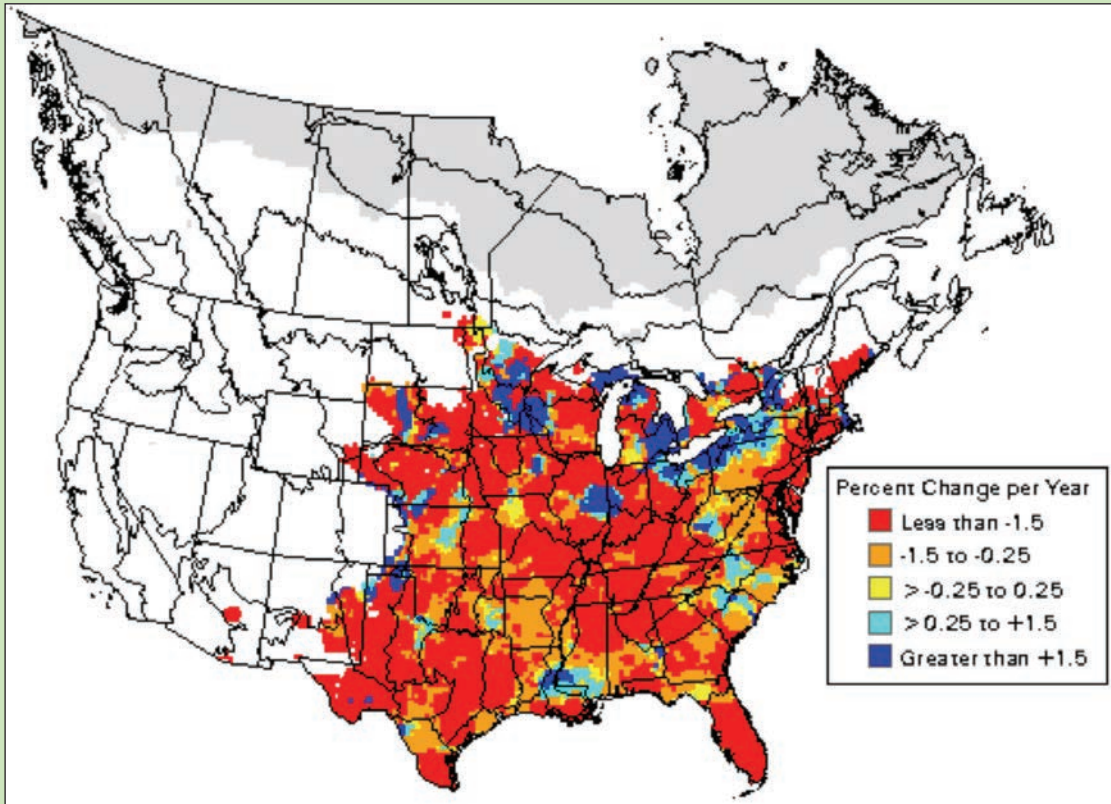
CAVE SWALLOW +14.2% IN TEXAS



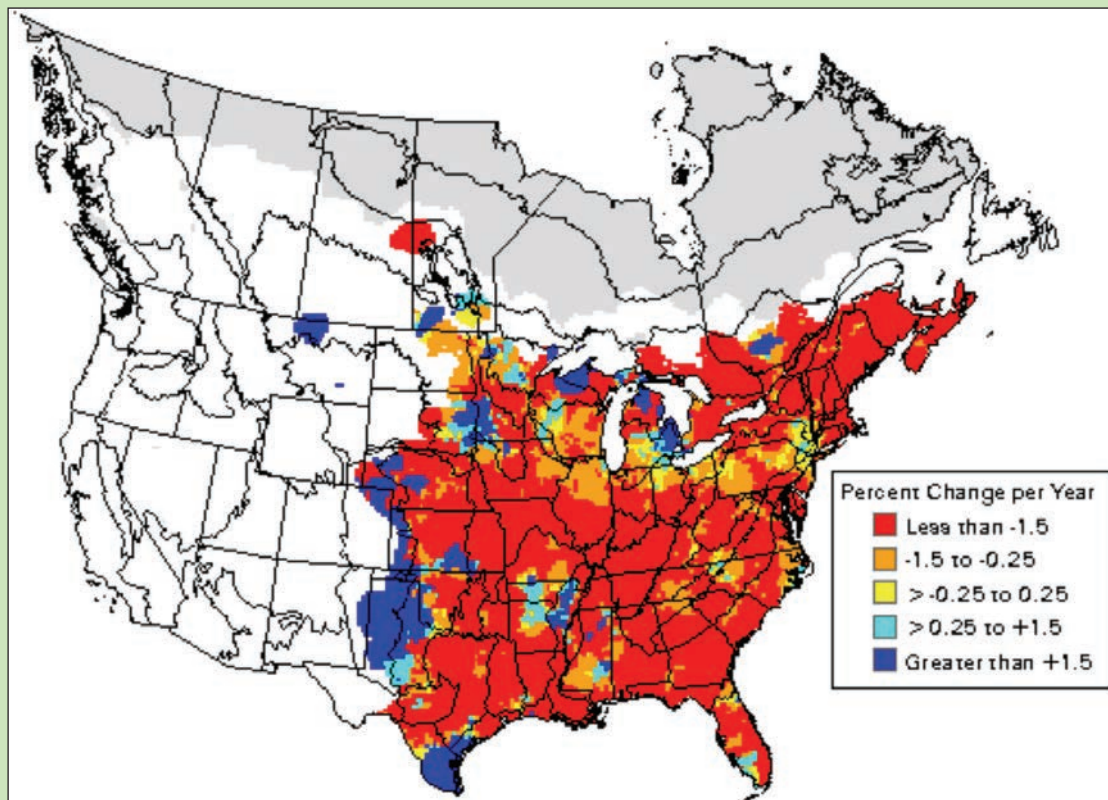
EASTERN BLUEBIRD +2.5% IN TEXAS



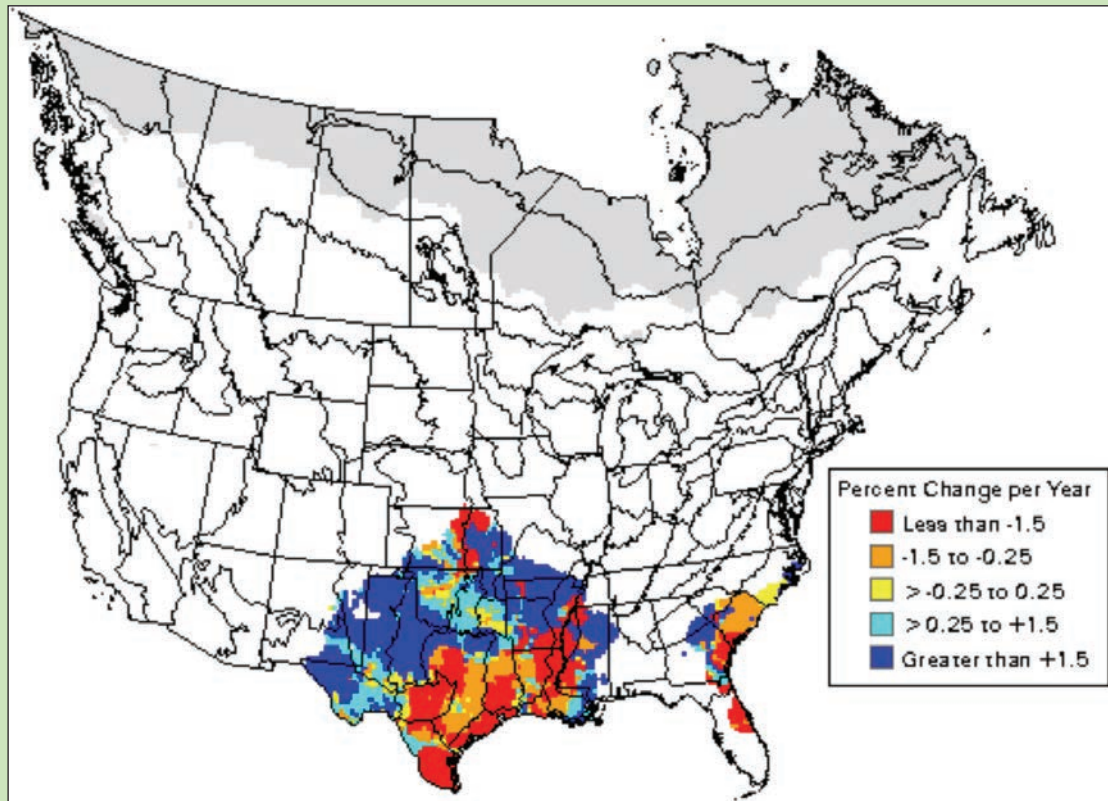
GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE +1.5% IN TEXAS



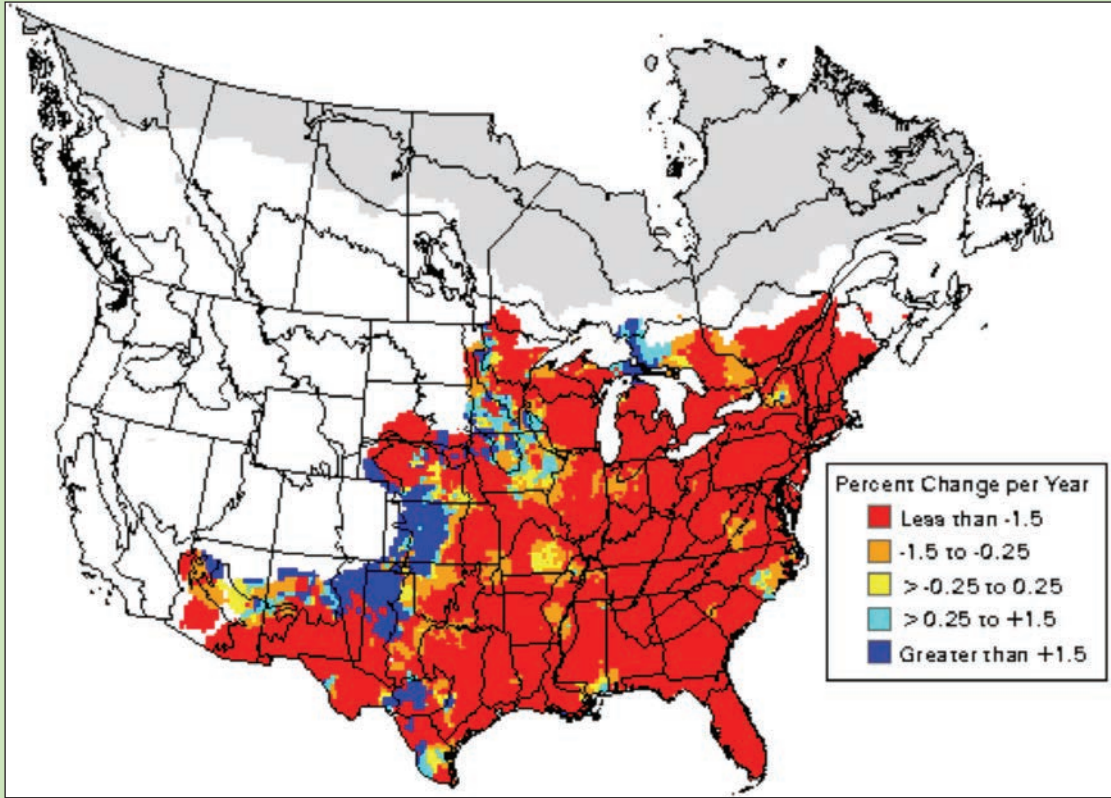
YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO -1.7% IN TEXAS



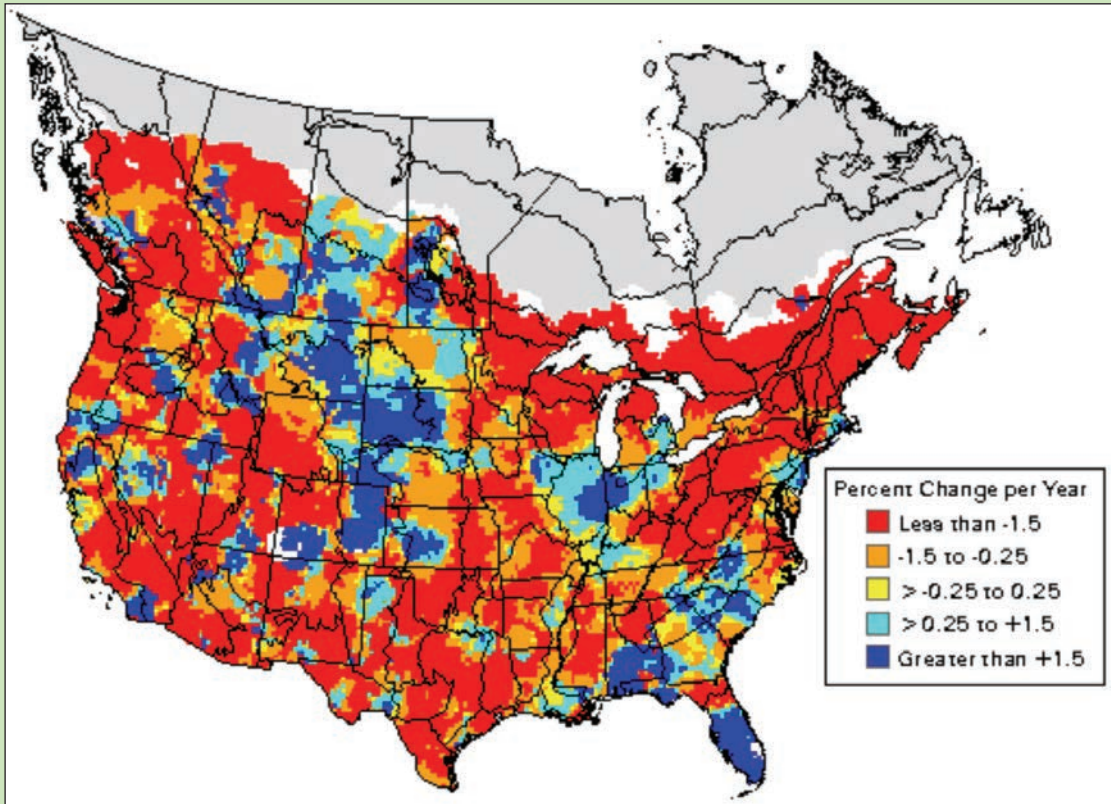
CHIMNEY SWIFT -1.7% IN TEXAS



PAINTED BUNTING -0.7% IN TEXAS



EASTERN MEADOWLARK -3% IN TEXAS



BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD -2% IN TEXAS

HOW TO VOLUNTEER

About 20 routes are vacant each breeding bird survey season in Texas. Vacant routes are posted at <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS/RouteMap/Map.cfm> as the National Office, and I am notified by the volunteer they will no longer be conducting the route. Notifications typically occur at the end of the survey season when birders report data during summer, and when survey packets are mailed in April for the upcoming season. The National Office also removes volunteers for lack of performance. This normally is for not running a route for 2 consecutive years.

I typically start recruiting volunteers in February by posting notices to the “texbirds” listserv. Volunteers should send their name, mailing address, email, telephone numbers, information on their birding skills and name of route they would like to conduct to brentortego@hotmail.com.

* * * * *

BREEDING BIRD SURVEY WEBPAGE [HTTPS://WWW.PWRC.USGS.GOV/BBS/](https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS/)

The BBS webpage is designed to provide information on the BBS program, vacant routes, a portal for data entry, access to data (raw, summarized and analyzed), and bird identification training.

The **LEARNING TOOLS** link [<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/learning/>] provides training on BBS methodology and bird identification.

The **VACANT ROUTES** link [<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS/RouteMap/Map.cfm>] provides a map of both active and vacant routes by state, and data from previous surveys of each route.

The **USGS RESULTS AND ANALYSIS** link [<https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/bbs.html>] provides raw and analyzed data. This section is divided into subsections. Data are provided by individual route, state and bird conservation region. Data are displayed as numbers, trend graphs and maps, and population density maps. This link is divided

into **SURVEY RESULTS** and **ANALYTICAL TOOLS** sections

SURVEY RESULTS section is broken up into **Species Group Summaries, Trend Estimates (by species), Trend Estimates (by region), Distribution Maps, and Trend Maps.**

Species Group Summaries [<https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/trend/guild15.html>] group species by migration status and habitat use. This allows comparisons of population trends by species in each category.

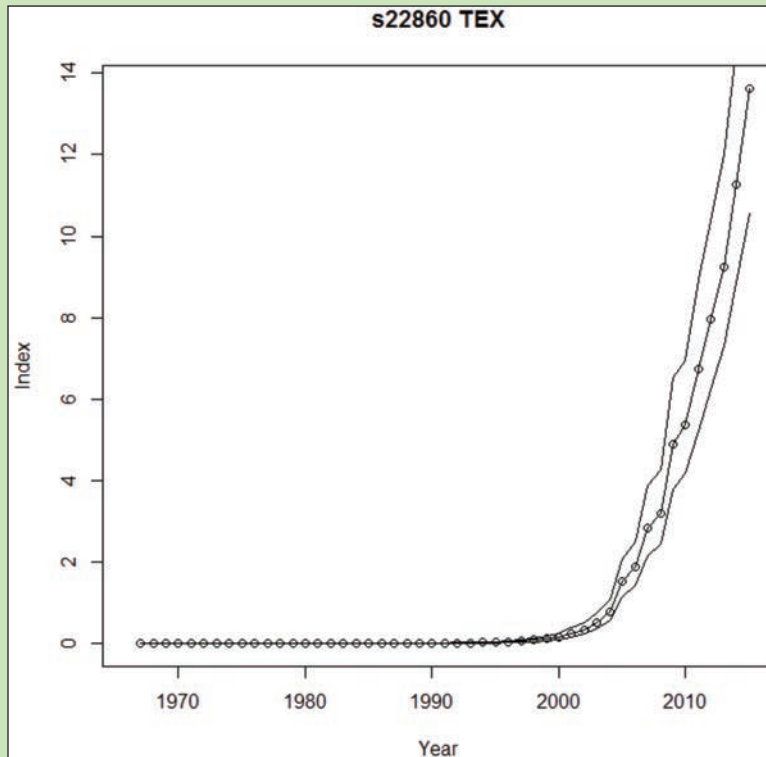
Trend Estimates (by species) [<https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/spec15.html>] provides trend estimates by species across North America. The data displayed will be species specific tabular data divided into two time periods for each region in North America. Reliability of the data will be ranked for each species. If you chose **Eurasian Collared-Dove** to review, the trend in the table would be a 24.6% increase per year for Texas. By clicking on Texas, the site will generate 3 line graphs (data = middle line and confidence limits = outer lines) displaying the trend within the chosen state which is displayed below.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE POPULATION TREND IN TEXAS

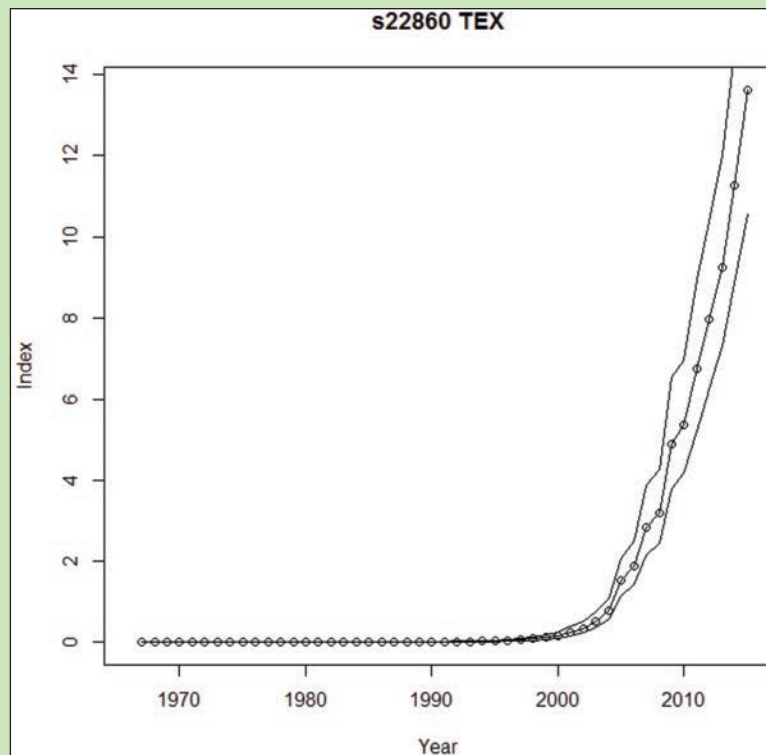
Trend Estimates (by region) [<https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/reglist15.html>] provides trend estimates by species across states, bird conservation regions, and other geographic areas in North America. The data displayed will be tabular data divided into two time periods and reliability of the data will be ranked for each species. By clicking on the species name (**Crested Caracara** in this example), 3 line graphs will be provided displaying the population trend (+5.7% per year) and the confidence limits of the data.

CRESTED CARACARA POPULATION TREND IN TEXAS

Distribution Maps [https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/ra2015/ra2015_red_



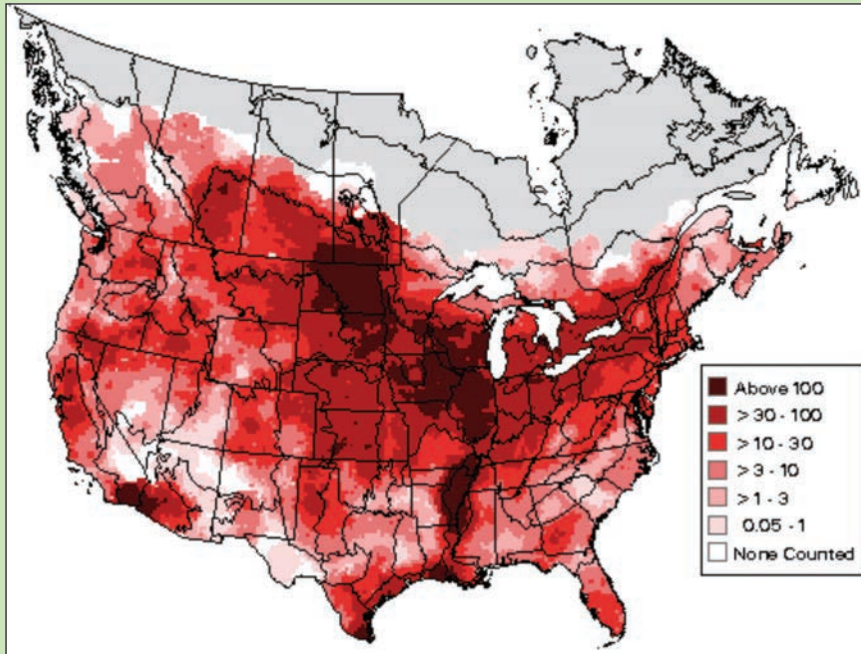
Eurasian Collared-Dove Population Trend in Texas



Crested Caracara Population Trend in Texas

v3.html] provides relative abundance maps for each species across North America. The distribution map for the **Red-winged Black-**

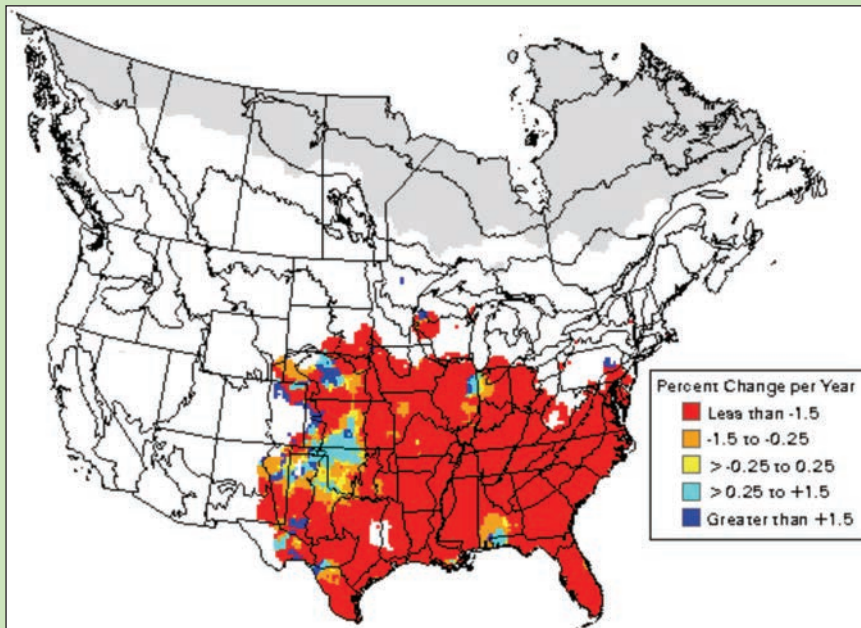
bird is provided as an example displaying # of birds per route. The Central Flyway is the major breeding grounds for this species.



RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD POPULATION DISTRIBUTION MAP

Trend Maps [https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/tr2015/trend2015_v3.html] provides trend maps of each species across North America. The trend (-1.8% per year) map for

Northern Bobwhite is provided below as an example. The map shows percent change per year by route. BBS data indicate that the species is declining through much of its range.



NORTHERN BOBWHITE POPULATION TREND MAP

ANALYTICAL TOOLS section provides access to several links from which to analyze data. The most useful for me is the **Interactive Route Data** [https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/trend/rtehtm15a_nlcd.html].

This link provides population trends by species for the route and region, and habitat characteristics of each route.

Brent Ortego
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The Whole Kitten-Caboodle

By James D. Ray

The domestic House Cat and I have always had a love-hate relationship. On one hand, who can really resist smiling or letting out an “awwwwe.....” when baby or “toddler-aged” kittens are involved? And who doesn’t love to hear a cat purr, the ultimate in reflection of a cat feeling content.

Feral cats are domestic cats that have reverted to a wild state. Populations primarily begin from abandoned cats, or dispersers from neighboring areas, and populations can rapidly increase in new areas provided there is significant structure to allow escape from predators. Pet cats that are allowed to range freely outdoors behave vary similarly to feral cats when on the loose.

In 2008, I shocked my family and co-workers by acquiring a Pixie Bob, which is a breed of domestic cat that is bred to look like our native bobcats. At work, I had teamed up with West Texas A&M University on a project where we were tracking bobcats and I thought that having a “look-a-like” at home would be a cool thing. Rule number one: Lynxie would never be allowed outdoors. This decision was probably good for her well-being, and I knew all too well that it was good for our neighborhood horned lizards, birds, and other wildlife.

The House Cat is an amazing hunting machine, well-armed with curiosity, fantastic eye-sight, hearing, stealth, and “hand”-eye coordination. Lynxie arrived on the scene and provided me with a lot of insight on the hunting instincts of this species. Hungry or not, if movement catches her eye, the prey is pursued. A house fly zipping through the living room at speeds that I couldn’t follow—no problem! She is on it and her catch rate is near 100%; sometimes the chase ends with a one-“handed” snatch at the top end of a leap. Suddenly, no more worries about the occasional wolf spider or the moth that slipped through the door as someone entered or departed. A maiming is almost assured.

When in the hunting mode, Lynxie can walk across the room in stealth mode, moving slowly and quietly. Use of shadows, and peeking quietly around objects and corners are part of the cat’s hunting repertoire. They can climb, and they can slip through the tiniest of holes and spaces. Lynxie’s favorite past-time as an indoor cat? “Bird TV.” This is simply gazing at or stalking of birds in the yard—specifically, my large colony of Purple Martins (*Progne subis*)—but with a pane of glass providing protective separation of predator from prey.

The Ancient Egyptians domesticated the House Cat about 7,000 years ago to control pests that were plaguing their stores of food. Thought to have evolved from the African wild cat (*Felis silvestris lybica*), its effectiveness as a hunter was apparent, and the Egyptians held them to status as gods and goddesses. Kill a cat back then and in that culture and you got the death penalty! Cats were so revered in that culture that when they died, their bodies were mummified before being buried.

Domestication of cats next appeared across the Mediterranean in Italy, and then slowly spread around Europe. Eventually, they arrived on the shores of the New World with the Pilgrims. The shorthaired domestic cat spread across the world from Egypt while longhaired cats came later from Turkey and Iran. By the eighteenth century cats had become popular household pets worldwide, and most homes today that keep pets have at least one cat in residence. An estimated 60-90 million cats are owned in the U.S., while it is believed that there are 70-100 million feral cats roaming our streets and wilds. There are 36 recognized breeds of pedigree cats around the world with the Siamese cat being the most popular.

But history of cats and fascination with my indoor cat, aside, free-ranging and feral house cats are a serious threat to wildlife in North America and across the globe. A look through the literature is very revealing and, understandably given the behavior of your own cat, very

relatable. Just like Lynx and other indoor cats, free-ranging pet or feral cats eat small portions or meals throughout the day. Ten to twenty meals is not uncommon. If a house cat sees or hears an opportunity, they will stop eating what they have already killed to make another kill. This is an act of optimizing food availability, a strategy that fares well for a cat trying to survive in the outdoors. Particularly in the case of free-ranging pet cats, playing with or killing prey, doesn't necessarily mean that it will be consumed. In many cases, playing with a victim leads to its maiming or eventual death.

Small rodents comprise between 20-70% of the feral house cat's diet, with small rabbits, insects, frogs, and birds making up the remainder. This composition varies with local and seasonal availability of prey. Birds can comprise more than 20% of their diet. Concerning pet cats, one study monitored a man's four pets, and in an 11-month period the cats had killed 104 individuals of 21 species, including six species of birds. Another study monitored two pets for four months, and those cats killed 15 species of wildlife. One study found that pet cats equipped with video cameras did not return home with 23% of their kills, thus giving the impression that cats kill less than they do.

The issue of house cats certainly has the attention of the wildlife management community. The Wildlife Society Council, leaders of North America's professional organization for wildlife biologists, adopted a position statement on "Feral and Free-ranging Domestic Cats," in 2001. This statement identified the domestic cat, including feral and pets allowed access to the outdoors, as a detriment to native ecosystems, and calls for campaigns to reduce populations of this exotic species. Fourteen other organizations—animal control, animal rights, conservation, health, veterinary, and military—have publicly opposed feral cat populations and trap/alter/release programs, and a University of Florida review, commissioned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, concluded that such programs are likely a violation of the Migratory

Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act. Based on estimated populations of feral cats just in rural settings of the United States, estimates for numbers of birds consumed each year by cats reaches into the 100s of millions.

House cats may also carry diseases that may be transmitted to humans, although opportunity for close contact between humans and feral cats is not great unless people feed or try to pet these cats. These diseases include histoplasmosis, toxoplasmosis, pasteurella, cat scratch disease, leptospirosis, mumps, plague, tularemia, ringworm, salmonellosis, and rabies. Rabies exposure from cats is definitely more of a risk to humans than from native wildlife, because people want to feed and try to pet house cats.

Besides some risk of transmission of rabies and feline diseases to the bobcat and other native felines, current research is linking disease and parasites in several endangered bird species and even in marine animals to domestic cats. They have been found to be the carrier of a parasitic disease that is infecting white-tailed deer in a growing number of states from Iowa and Pennsylvania to Mississippi.

House cats can inhabit all types of landscapes provided there is structure to serve as escape cover and shelter. Pets return to human habitation after foraging, while feral cats use abandoned buildings, culverts, hedgerows, trees, shrubs, farm outbuildings, brush piles, rock outcrops, and junked cars and the like, as resting areas. Wildlife studies in even the remotest areas of the state frequently capture house cats while attempting to trap and tag native fur-bearing animals such as gray fox.

I once followed a feral cat to see where it was hanging out. I was a considerable distance away, and in open country. In 30 minutes time, the cat had traveled 1.5 miles and entered an area where I could no longer see it. Home ranges of cats are variable depending on habitat quality and whether or not they are receiving supplemental food, but those of pet cats have been reported to be around 5 acres and those of feral cats average around 1.5 square miles.

Feral cats are prolific breeders and females can raise two to five litters per year, each containing two to 10 kittens. Litters may be moved among several den sites and families break up when kittens reach seven months of age. Depending somewhat on nutrition, cats are able to breed beginning as early as five months of age.

One statement that I hear a lot concerning outdoor House Cats is that, “they are only doing what is natural.” Actually, there is nothing natural about my Lynxie or any other house cat living in the wilds of North America. There are multitudes of examples across the globe of exotic species that have become established and then causing a wave of problems for native species. Worldwide, cats may have been involved in the extinction of more bird species (>30%) than any other cause including habitat destruction.

Once, a lady asked me why I could be supportive of bobcats being in the area, yet trapped and removed feral cats at every opportunity. Her claim was that there was not a difference. My answer? Bobcats and native birds have interacted for millennia, with birds having adapted strategies to persist despite bobcats, and the bobcats themselves tend to focus on mice, rats and rabbits, and diet partitioning even occurs between male bobcats and females with kittens. Additionally, while feral cats are semi-colonial and have small home ranges, the bobcat is very solitary and hunts over a much larger home range.

It takes millennia for there to be some level of equilibrium between predator and prey, and within that equilibrium it is normally the population levels of the prey species that “control” the population levels of the predators. In other words, under high prey availability, predators flourish until prey levels drop, and then there will be a corresponding drop in the population levels of predators. Obviously, precipitation and habitat quality are also a factor, in that they impact population densities, predation rates, and reproduction success.

I find it interesting that there is a “culture”

difference involving management of dogs versus cats in regard to humans allowing pet cats access to the outdoors in the United States. Why do we open the door for cats to come and go, while we make an effort to contain dogs? Lynxie does just fine in the confines of our home, and if she didn’t—I don’t reckon we need a cat. Feral cat issues/education are always “timely,” and relatable, right down to the person who’s only connection to birds is feeding them in their backyard. Sooner or later a feral cat is going to impact that basic birder.

Management of feral cat populations is always controversial and stage proponents of trap-neuter-return programs against trap-euthanize programs. Scientific research has never shown that trap-neuter-return programs are effective in stabilizing feral cat populations. Conversely, trap-euthanize programs have been shown to be effective at reducing cat populations and mitigating adverse effects on wildlife. Neutered/spayed cats released through these programs have been shown to divert energy away from fighting, breeding, roaming, etc., and towards an increase in hunting activities. This and higher survivorship experienced by these cats makes it hard on local wildlife. Lastly, cats are quick learners and once trapped most are difficult and some impossible to trap again. Thus, keeping feral cats caught up on annual or biannual rabies vaccinations becomes impossible.

Back in the safety of my house Lynxie stretches and hops down off the back of the couch. Departing from the latest episode of “Bird TV,” she strolls across the core area of her domain—which we call our living room. She jumps onto, and curls up in my lap. No dispute from me—cats make great pets. Lynxie’s loud purring is telling, as if saying “all is right in my world.” Lynxie is a house cat, she’s appreciated, and she’s safe. There is no reason why all future pet cats can’t bring joy to their owner, without ever stepping foot in the great outdoors.

James Ray
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Combing Rails and an Eagle with a Bus

By Fred Collins

I have been watching rice farmers for more than 40 years in southeast Texas, primarily on the Katy Prairie. When I was in high school I wanted to own a rice field. The wildlife diversity they displayed fascinated me; perhaps to the point of obsession. I however, was relegated to sit on the roadside and watch from afar the teaming fields of rice. With a great deal of patience and some good luck from time to time I was able to learn the parade of wildlife with each season. I first set foot in a rice field as a goose hunter and discovered that Lapland Longspurs liked the rice fields of Waller County as much as the geese did. In the early 1970s, I learned that flooding rice fields in late March and April were loaded with shorebirds. The beautiful Fulvous Whistling-duck would show up with the shorebirds but would stay the summer to nest. I learned rail watching from Jerry and

Nancy Strickling. Their technique, I believe learned from George Lowry and John O'Neill of LSU, was to watch rice being harvested. The harvest combines flush rails and other field denizens and allow them to be seen and the rails counted. At that time, Yellow and Black Rails had been seen by very few bird watchers and were almost mythical birds. As it turned out, Yellow Rails were plentiful and easy to see in a good field and I even saw a few Black Rails over the years. Sometimes the views are marginal but occasionally they are dramatic close encounters.

Drama is provided by the danger and impending disaster for the rails. Rails weigh a few ounces and are about to be run over by a loud diesel machine weighing many tons. Top that off with blades scissoring just above your head and moving forward relentlessly destroying your home. Rails are birds that would rather sneak away on foot through muddy

West Harris County October 13, 1975

At approximately 5:00 pm Kevin and I went in search of geese and ducks also we might discover. It was a typical October light day - bright, dry, cool, no wind. We had seen little of interest when we reached Holly-Hockley road and Lone Creek. I noticed three combines working a beautiful eye-yellow rice field. I decided to stop and see if they flushed any rails.

The combine activity had attracted several hundred cattle egret and numerous white-bellied ibis. The area being combined was probably 200-300 acres and probably 1/2 completed. Any cattle egret were just being hit and were following the combine like gulls follow a shrimp boat. I picked my spot for the best light. This was a position because the field is on the west side of the field and the sun was already fairly low. I was at best 100 yards from the front point the combine passed but the light was very good along two legs of the diminishing rectangle the combine cut. I was quickly reminded for watching by several other flushed other the combine - I asked they were all even? Finally on the third combine to pass the area by in good light I positively identified a yellow rail. In about 30 minutes of careful watching from the end I identified four yellow rails, white-bellied ibis, 1 Kingbird, 1 Great Egret and 1 Virginia.


Nancy and Jerry Strickling joined us and we continued the watch. The combine stop of rice was the usual process and with one pass of the combine on the long leg I counted 45 white-bellied ibis. We decided to walk out for a closer look as they cut the final strips. We were rewarded with excellent views of several acres and five yellow-rails.

The picture was very dry, the soil field was sandy!

cloudy day. Unseen like it has been the I've ever seen. And is actually no-mistake in West Harris County.

All Weather Ranch we watched the new rice and Nancy called our attention to a white swollen hollow. In 15 minutes we realized the hollow was a plant. We put the scopes on it and discovered it was a plant. We could make out the faint rings and three rooms. What a sight. The plant was about a quarter mile south of the area at 7:15 pm Oct 13, 1975.

☉



Journal and photo by Fred Collins



Photo by BeaAnn Kelly

grassy terrain and fly only as a last resort. Cattle Egret often follow the combine closely and a small rail like a Yellow or Black has to watch out so as not to be eaten along with fleeing grasshopper, mice, frogs and snakes. When rails take to the air they sometimes find other dangers, like harriers and other birds of prey.

The experience is memorable and one of the easiest ways to see large numbers of rails. However, don't think you can just jump in your car and go into the countryside and see this phenomena. You have to do a good bit of scouting to finally hit the right day, right water, right light, right view, and right time to be rewarded with rails much less several hundred in a single day.

Step 1. Find out where rice is planted.

These fields are usually planted in late March. Prior to planting they will be bare, leveled, and leveed. Rice is planted and then the field is flooded with about an inch of water and then goes dry again. The rice sprouts and

grows to about six inches high at which time the field is permanently flooded. At this point and especially during the actual flooding, the fields are great for shorebirds.

Step 2. Keep a close enough watch on the field to know when it gets harvested in August.

The August cut can be interesting especially in late August. That cut will only have summer residents like Least Bittern and King Rail, but in very late August might have a Sora Rail or two. Mark your calendar because the second cut should be about six weeks later.

Step 3. The second and final cut of the year will usually be mid to late October but I have observed them recently as late as the first week of December. This cut will produce a good variety of rails if water conditions are right. If the field completely dries, then instead

of rails you will get rats and raptors. That can be more dramatic and animated than the rails but since you will likely only get vultures, Red-tail, Swainson's, White-tail, Harrier and Caracara, the lack of an unusual bird makes it a bit less rewarding.

3a. You are keeping an eye on the field and you see the rice turns a beautiful golden yellow, water has been or is being drained. Harvest is imminent, the harvest day now becomes weather dependent.

3b. Rice kernels need to be as dry as possible when harvested. Days of low humidity favor harvest. Morning fog or dew will delay harvest until afternoon when the rice becomes dry. Only after a cold front that brings low humidity and winds overnight would there be a morning harvest. You now know what time to be there for the cut.

3c. Most harvests occur in the afternoon. The farmers often stage equipment at the field or outside their barns. There will be a combine, a hopper pulled by a tractor and probably at least one 18-wheeler with a grain trailer, often there are multiples of this mix. The farmer may start as early as 10 a.m. Seeing the machinery enter the field is important. The first pass around the perimeter will flush resident King Rails and roosting American Bitterns. They do not stick around for the closer encounters. These birds will often leave the field entirely and more than once a King Rail has flown out of the field into a roadside ditch that allowed me nice views. If the field is to your east it will afford you good looks throughout the afternoon with the sun at your back. A field to your west will have you looking into the

setting sun in the final passes of the day when the Black Rail is more likely to be seen. Not good to only get a black silhouette looking straight into the sun. Views are important. Invite a friend with a pick-up truck so you can stand in the back of the bed at roadside to watch the action and not have your view obscured by tall weeds and grass at the edge of the field.

3d. Water levels and diversity of water levels is important. Unfortunately most rice fields today are laser leveled and when they dry they can be totally dry. Not rail habitat. In such dry field you will likely only get sparrows, rats and attending hawks. Fields with very few levees indicate very flat terrain and little water diversity. Therefore, when looking for potential fields, lots of curved levees are hints that a field will be good for rail watching come fall.

If you have scouted well, you have found a field being harvested. And it has enough water to hold rails and you are positioned so you have good light to identify the birds as they fly away from the combine. You will get lucky in those circumstances for at least a few of the birds will flush from the combine and land relatively close to you. Many times I have had them fly right by me within 20 feet and less. Once I had a Virginia Rail fly out of a field right by me and land across the road in a mowed lawn and sit down in the shadow of a post near midday. It stayed there for at least ten minutes in full view. And I had no camera with me!

Trying to arrange a field trip to see this with a bus load of seniors is not recommended. I did manage to pull it off but with a great deal of luck. Buses have to be reserved months in advance. I reserved one for the last Friday in October based on past experience with rice harvest near Houston. There is still a good bit of rice grown in the area but it is at three compass points from Houston; east



Photo by BeaAnn Kelly

in Chambers County, west in Waller County and southwest in Colorado and Jackson Counties. For a planned and scheduled trip with a noon start time and a 9:00 PM end time I could only choose one direction. Waller County has the fewest total acres but is close, only an hour drive. Chambers has the best potential fields but drive time is double and the fields are large and often not on public roads. Colorado is about as far as Chambers but easier to get to from our starting point but like Chambers the fields are large and often not on public roads. These fields are also all laser leveled and scouting showed them to be bone dry and dusty. They were not even attracting many raptors indicating low rodent populations as well.

Our back-up plan was an afternoon of birding in a coastal location if no rice was being harvested. The morning of the scheduled trip I checked the fields in Waller County and surprisingly they were going to harvest in spite of a bit more water than they wanted and in spite of the rice being a bit on the

green side in some of the wetter areas. I just got very lucky.

We were at the rice field watching it being harvested at one o'clock. Immediately we saw Sora rails flush occasionally but just one here and another there. The field was so large that we could not see what happened on the far side, only the two corners closest to us provided action.

Farmers cut from the outside in and with each lap around the field the birds that avoided the machinery by going to the center find themselves separated from the edge by an increasingly greater swath of mowed rice stubble that is not nearly as protective as was the full grown unharvested rice. This soon makes all the rails move to the center concentrating the entire field population temporarily into an ever shrinking patch of habitat. Combine cutters are 30 feet across and rails and other wildlife move out in front of them but as the cutter reaches the corner the birds finding no cover ahead and unable to move across the advancing cutter quickly enough

fly out across the stubble looking for cover. That's when the bird watchers have a field day. By the time the field is about a quarter uncut, each corner pass flushes rails, first just one or two but on this day as many as six or eight would flush from a corner. Many of the Sora and the one Virginia we saw flew more than fifty yards to the field edge. Some would turn and fly a different direction often flying a hundred yards. Many would put down in the stubble but only after flying across a good portion of it looking for a suitable hiding place. On this day we counted 63 Sora, 1 Virginia, 3 Yellow Rail and I glimpsed 1 Black. There were hundreds of Sparrows, mostly Savannah. Very few raptors were in attendance. We saw a passing Red-tail, a White-tailed Hawk and a Caracara.

Like all the episodes watching this phe-

nomena I again saw something unique. A Bald Eagle was working the combine. It had been sitting on a nearby utility pole during much of the harvest. But when the rails began to come out by the half dozen the eagle soared out and began working the combine. While it is possible it was after rats, it appeared to more than once be chasing Sora rails. It grabbed something small in one talon but kept after the rails with the empty talon. Its presence caused the rails to dive into the stubble only a few yards from the combine instead of flying across the open field. The eagle certainly changed their behavior. I wonder too if the eagle's presence is why there were no cattle egret attending this harvest which they commonly do.

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Photo By Julius Klehm



Mouse or rail in the talon?

Photo By Julius Klehm

5TH ANNUAL BIRDS OF THE BRUSH ART CONTEST A SUCCESS!

By Tricia Cortez

Since 2013, the Rio Grande International Study Center (as part of the Laredo Birding Festival) has organized the annual *Birds of the Brush* art contest. We do this in partnership with the Monte Mucho Audubon Society, Laredo Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Laredo Center for the Arts. It's designed to create greater awareness among local artists, teachers, and the youth about how our vibrant Rio Grande eco-system attracts hundreds of species of dazzling birds, some of which migrate from as far away as Canada and the Central American tropics. We have about 3-4 judges each year. They tend to be former art teachers, professional artists, art gallery owners, and birders. Judges have included: famed sculptor Armando Hinojosa, former art teacher Frank Ortega, Gallery 201 owner Gayle Aker Rodriguez, birder Raul Delgado, birder Kathryn Gilson, and wildlife artist Joe Olivares. Prizes tend to be plaques, birding books, movie passes, canvases, restau-

rant gift cards. Artists also have the opportunity to sell their work at this event. This art contest has grown tremendously and we now receive nearly 400 art submissions. We are working to involve every single campus – private, public, charter – as well as every private art studio, and as many solo artists as possible. We still need to do more outreach to the community college and university and will be working on that this year, too. We have 5 categories: Elementary, Middle School, High School, General Public – Amateur, General Public – Professional. Winning places are: Best in Show, as well as 1st-3rd place winners, and two Honorable Mention winners, per category for a total of 26 winning places. The opening exhibit of this art contest coincides with the opening mixer of our Laredo Birding Festival and it now draws anywhere from 400-600 on opening night.

Tricia Cortez
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Best of Show: Arturo Rodriguez



The 2017 Laredo Birding Festival presents:

The 5th annual

Birds of the Brush Art Contest

Wednesday, February 8, 2017, 6-8 pm

Award ceremony: 7 pm

Nearly
400
artworks!

Refreshments: LCC Culinary Arts Program and Culinary Art Club.

Bird photos: Carlos M. Escamilla.

Best in Show: Arturo Rodriguez

ELEMENTARY:

- 1ST- Emilia Davila
- 2ND- Isabella Kirkpatrick
- 3RD- Alicia Gonzalez
- 4TH- Chelsy Cortez
- 5TH- Alina Zhou

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

- 1ST- Alexia Rodriguez
- 2ND- Alexandra Fragoso
- 3RD- Mariel Trejo
- 4TH- Galilea Guerrero
- 5TH- Andrea Rocha

HIGH SCHOOL:

- 1ST- Leslie DeLeon
- 2ND- Shakira Vasquez
- 3RD- Melissa Valdez
- 4TH- Sebastian Rodriguez
- 5TH- Joel Hernandez

COMMUNITY - Amateur:

- 1ST- Andrea Montalvo
- 2ND- Patricia Najera
- 3RD- Elisa "Licha" Gutierrez
- 4TH- Samuel Bowers
- 5TH- Margarita Ramirez

COMMUNITY - Professional:

- 1ST- The Ghost
- 2ND- Graciela Valdez
- 3RD- Ericka Ordonez
- 4TH- Maru Portillo
- 5TH- Betty Cantu

Thank you to our Sponsors:
Rio Grande International Study Center,
Monte Mucho Audubon Society,
Laredo Convention & Visitors
Bureau, Laredo Center for the Arts,
South Texas Outreach Foundation,
Sam's Liquor, Jim's Discount Liquor,
Southern Distributing.

Altamira Oriole
by Carlos M. Escamilla







High School



Amature

Bomb Factory Bird Conservation

By James D. Ray

I grinned as a Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) glided in from my right and alighted on a fencepost in front of me. Even better, a quick view through my binoculars revealed a silver legband on one leg, and a red one on the other; evidence of a previous encounter with this particular individual—my smile broadened.

This was no ordinary birding outing. In fact, while I peered through my binoculars at this feathered subject, I was the subject within the binocular-view of several security personnel—oh, the semblance!

I was actually conducting a portion of my duties as the wildlife biologist for the U. S. Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration's (USDOE/NNSA) Pantex Plant, the primary facility for the maintenance and disassembly of the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal. And the banded Burrowing Owl was living testimony to a developing body of work that the Pantex Plant is producing in the arena of migratory bird conservation.

Pantex has a long history of concern for wildlife, but in recent years its program has been “ramped-up” to a level that is playing a more significant role in conservation of migratory birds. This has occurred to the point, in fact, that it is gaining the attention of not only the local media, and region, but also the USDOE/NNSA headquarters (Washington, D.C.), and even the professional wildlife management and research community.

The Pantex Plant sits atop the Southern High Plains of Texas (SHP), about 17 miles northeast of Amarillo, in Carson County. The facility, including the associated Texas Tech Research Farm, encompasses 18,000 acres and a diversity of habitat is found on the site. This includes six playa wetlands and shortgrass prairie, which are the principal native wildlife habitats in this portion of the SHP.

Habitat and wildlife diversity is enhanced by more than 400 acres occupied by black-tailed prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), and these are distributed among five colonies. The majority of the facility's acreage is in grassland, although some of this has been altered. For example, there are developed areas that are kept neatly mowed, areas influenced by past soil disturbances, and areas on leased land that were, unfortunately, seeded to an exotic monoculture of Old World bluestem (*Bothriochloa* spp.) under the United States Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program.

Due to impressive strides made in migratory bird conservation, the Pantex Plant's migratory bird program has received the USDOE/NNSA's sole-allotted nomination for the prestigious **Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award** in five of the seven years since creation of the award (2011), including during five of the last six years (2012-2014, and 2016-2017). This award is given annually by the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds to honor a single project or action conducted by or in partnership with a federal agency that meets the intent and spirit of Executive Order 13186, *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*. The award is based on activities occurring since 2002, and although Pantex (and its collaborators) have not received the award, their consistent nominations speak volumes. Currently, Pantex is awaiting word on the 2017 award as a top 3 finalist.

BIRD WORK AT PANTEX PRIOR TO 2002

Dating back at least a couple of decades and continuing through the present time, natural resources staff and subcontractors at Pantex have built a bird list that now totals 202 species! This was accomplished through opportunistic sightings, general birding, systematic point counts, contractor data, and

even trailcam photographs. Although new species have been added just about every year, the most recent additions to the Pantex bird list were the Northern Oriole (*Icterus galbula bullocki*) and Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) in 2013.

Grazing practices in shortgrass prairie areas on the site improved greatly in the mid- late-1990s, and then in 1999 these were revised into today's prescription used in a subset of pastures on the Plant. The plan benefits a variety of wildlife species through a rotation that includes a short-duration spring/summer moderate graze (50%), a heavier graze (50-80%), and a calendar-year rest. Thus, in a given year, there are pastures available with each of these "treatments." Other areas receive moderate grazing, with varying timing and intensities, thus contributing to diversity across the site. Results have impressed Plant employees, neighbors, and personnel from natural resource agencies alike.

Mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act, all projects at Pantex are reviewed by an assortment of subject matter experts, and considerations for migratory birds are part of the process. Potential impacts and mitigations are identified, where applicable. Protection of birds at Pantex had long centered on protection of active bird nests, including significant steps to protect western Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*) in certain operational areas where prairie dogs cannot be allowed to expand. The developed strategies were coordinated with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Pantex feels that they have been extremely successful in avoiding harm to the owls in the operational areas where prairie dogs are controlled. Black-tailed prairie dogs are considered an important component of the shortgrass prairie ecosystem and Pantex agrees 100%, allowing prairie dogs to prosper in its out-lying grassland areas.

Outreach is considered a very important activity at Pantex. As part of a compre-

hensive program of providing outreach to fifth-grade students in Amarillo called *Voyage of the Mimi*, the Pantex Agronomist, Monty Schoenhals, who has developed habitat for birds at his residence, has given many presentations on the subject of "Backyard Wildlife." These presentations have not been limited to just the targeted fifth grade students.

BIRD WORK AT PANTEX SINCE 2002

Signed by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and USDOE/NNSA in 2001 and again in 2013, a Memorandum of Understanding pertaining to Executive Order 13186, *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*, has provided drivers that include habitat management, outreach, research, and collaborations. It was at this point that Pantex really took off in terms of contributions to migratory bird conservation and this involved its own studies, as well as that of collaborating with others.

Western Burrowing Owls And Other Birds That Use Prairie Dog Colonies: Black-tailed prairie dogs are a welcomed wildlife species at Pantex, and due to their burrows and habitat manipulations are considered a "keystone" species in the shortgrass prairie. Associated with them is the Western Burrowing Owl, of which most nesting and production of this subspecies is in prairie dog colonies. The Western Burrowing Owl is a *species of regional conservation priority* and a *species of international conservation concern*.

To better understand the needs of this species, Pantex contracted with Texas Tech University^{1,2,3} during 2003-2005 for collaborative research on this species at Pantex, as well as a few other sites across the Southern High Plains of Texas. The work included basic ecology of Burrowing Owls (abundance,

¹Department of Natural Resources Management: Mark C. Wallace and students

²Department of Biological Sciences: Nancy E. McIntyre and students

³U. S. Geological Survey's Texas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit/Texas Tech University: Clint W. Boal and students

productivity, nest-site selection, numbers of resident vs. migrant owls, behavior differences between rural owls and those in proximity to human development), as well as examined whether telemetry necklaces had any negative effects on Burrowing Owls. Additional work looked at use of prairie dog colonies among all avian species. The results of these studies were shared in four M.S. theses, four publications in the scientific literature (*Journal of Wildlife Management*, *Journal of Raptor Research* [2], *Great Plains Research*), two popular-style articles (*Bird Watchers Digest*, *Wildlife Professional*), and eight presentations to major professional groups (*Raptor Research Foundation*, *Southwestern Association of Naturalists*, *Texas Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Working Group*, *Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society* [4], and *Texas Ornithological Society*).

Purple Martins: A Pantex staff member is a *Master Personal Bander*, licensed to band Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) which is a species in decline. East of the Rocky Mountains, this species nests almost entirely in man-made bird housing, and the imported English House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) will likely prevent any return to its ancestral ways of nesting in tree cavities and other natural cavity situations (like cliff faces).

In 2002, Pantex began supporting the bander and another staff member with time, travel and supplies, and the project was elevated to a *Purple Martin Banding and Outreach Program*. The study area spread in coverage to include a larger area in northwest Texas and also into the Woodward area of western Oklahoma. Color-bands are utilized in addition to the traditional federal band, and the characters on these bands identify the state and the individual bird. The colors also are specific to the state: red for Texas and yellow/gold for Oklahoma.

To date, the program has resulted in the banding of more than 12,000 nestling Purple Martins, and outreach has been provided to

>70 martin-hosting citizens/neighborhoods per year. The program has been featured on local television, in newspapers, and in special interests' newsletters. It was also the subject of an episode of *Outdoor Oklahoma Television*.

Pantex has since joined York University and the University of Manitoba (both of Canada) and the Purple Martin Conservation Association's efforts to study this species' migratory and wintering ecology through the use of tiny data-logging devices that are attached to the birds and then removed upon recapture the following year. Pantex's participation allows birds from the far western edge of the eastern subspecies' range of distribution to be included in the range-wide study. During 2014-2017, 113 Texas birds were equipped with geolocators (~35 km accuracy) or GPS (<10 m accuracy) data-logging units and returning units were retrieved and analyzed the following year. In total, Pantex work on Purple Martins has been shared in four publications in the scientific literature (*Avian Biology*, *Journal of Ornithology*, *American Naturalist*, *Animal Migration*), seven popular-style articles (*Purple Martin Update* [4], *Texas Parks and Wildlife Bulletin Series* [3]), and seven presentations to major professional groups (Purple Martin Conservation Association; *Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society* [4], *Texas Ornithological Society*, *Travis Audubon Society*). Additionally, a Pantex staff member has contributed an additional 15 publications in journals and magazines (*Purple Martin Update* [14], *Texas Wildlife*) on the species and gives frequent presentations around the region.

Raptor Protection on Utility Poles: Pantex's most notable accomplishment under the National Environmental Policy Act review process involved the installation of raptor protection on new utility poles. Literature reveals mortality levels involving electrocution of birds-of-prey on power poles can exceed 1 raptor/90 poles/year. In 2008, protective devices were installed on approximately 500

History and Mission of the Pantex Plant

By Monica Graham, Former Pantex Historian

In 1942, the U.S. Army Ordnance Department chose the site for construction of a bomb-loading facility. The Pantex Ordnance Plant, designed and constructed in only 9 months, sprang up in the middle of a traditional rural farming and ranching community, bringing with it great social and demographic change. It covered 16,000 acres at the time.

With the end of World War II in August 1945, the Plant ceased operation even more abruptly than it had begun. However, this inactivity ended in 1951, when the newly created Atomic Energy Commission reclaimed more than half of the original site as a high explosives fabrication and nuclear weapons assembly facility. From 1951 to 1991, a period defined by the large-scale production of nuclear weapons, the Pantex Plant's mission and activities fluctuated according to the cycles of the Cold War, remaining always at the very core of the nation's Cold War nuclear weapons complex. In fact, beginning with the ceasing of nuclear weapons assembly operations at DOE's Burlington Iowa Plant in 1975, the Pantex Plant has been the nation's primary nuclear weapons assembly/disassembly facility. After 1991, the Plant's primary mission shifted to the disassembly of nuclear weapons, and remains so today. Today, deeded and leased land encompasses almost 18,000 acres. This complex is now under the U. S. Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration.

Funding for this work was provided by the U. S. Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration in cooperation with Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC. Neither the U.S. Government, Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC, nor the employees, warrants, or assumes any legal liability for the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of, the information contained herein.



This juvenile is one of dozens of juvenile and adult Swainson's Hawks being studied with the use of PTT/satellite transmitters by Pantex and the U.S. Geological Survey's Texas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Texas Tech.

Photo courtesy of Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC.



Students from West Texas A&M University conducting systematic searches for bird and bat carcasses as part of collaborative research sponsored by the Pantex Plant.

Photo courtesy of Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC.



Jim Ray has served as the Wildlife Biologist/Scientist at the Pantex Plant since 1999, following a nine-year stint with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Photo courtesy of Susan Ray.



The Purple Martin banding program sponsored by Pantex not only exposes Pantex wildlife programs to citizens, it also has resulted in the banding of more than 12,000 Purple Martins.

Photo courtesy of Susan Ray.

new poles, and an additional supply was purchased and stockpiled by Plant Maintenance for use on any existing poles that are identified or suspected of causing electrocution of birds in the future. The devices are made of plastic and provide protective insulation on one of two closely situated electric lines on the new poles. Approximately 20 miles of lines now have these protective devices. Xcel Energy, a public utility that supplies electricity to the Texas Panhandle, recognized Pantex for this accomplishment in a news release in 2010 as part of National Raptor Month. Since that project, power lines within a small, five-wind turbine wind farm have been installed underground and then outside the turbine field lines, although above ground, all are equipped with raptor protection devices.

Bird Protection on Open-Topped Corner and Gate Posts: Literature reveals that mortality in open-topped posts can reach 200 birds/post, and this includes songbirds and even small raptors such as small owls

and falcons. In 2016, Pantex discussed this problem with the neighboring Texas Tech Research Farm, who then set out and capped open posts across 18,000 acres of Pantex and Texas Tech properties. This action eliminated the risks of entrapment of small birds.

Insuring True Native Prairie Restoration: In 2008, grass seeding procedures at Pantex were examined and altered to achieve true native prairie restoration. When grasses are planted, native prairie restoration by soil type is consistent with the spirit of the *Playa Lakes Joint Venture* and Executive Order 13186, *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*. Climax native habitat varies by soil type and slope, thus contributing to native diversity across the landscape. This inherent diversity provides benefits to regional species of concern and other endemic wildlife, which select respective plant species diversity and structure among available habitat.

Monitoring of Migratory Birds Before and After Wind Energy Development: Wind

energy development is growing at an amazing speed in the Southern Great Plains region that includes Pantex. There are concerns on direct mortality of birds at turbine sites, but also that turbine fields will contribute further to habitat fragmentation, which is already on a grand scale in the area due to cultivation and to invasion of honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) and Old World Bluestem (*Bothriochloa caucasica/bladhiilischaeumum*).

To evaluate the effects of wind energy development on migratory birds, Pantex contracted with West Texas A&M University⁴ beginning in 2010, and this resulted in the development of a comprehensive literature review on the impacts of wind energy on wildlife and the initiation of pre- and post-turbine monitoring of migratory birds. This project involves monitoring for mortality under the wind turbines as well as surveys of plots for raptors during winter and migration, surveys of birds in plots in different habitat types and at varying distances from the turbines during the breeding season, and satellite-assisted monitoring of Swainson's hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*) in relation to wind energy development during their annual life cycle while in North, Central and South America. The Swainson's hawk work was transitioned to the U.S. Geological Survey's Texas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit⁵ at Texas Tech University and has expanded in scope. Already, eight presentations have been made to professional groups (Raptor Research Foundation, Texas Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Working

⁴Department of Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences: Raymond S. Matlack and students.

⁵U. S. Geological Survey's Texas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit/Texas Tech University: Clint W. Boal and students

⁶*Spiza americana*

Group, Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society [6]) on these projects.

Migratory Bird Publications and Outreach: Pantex's migratory bird work has achieved considerable success in providing important and interesting communication to various groups on and off the Plant site, including presentations, publications, driving tours, and interviews. Technical guidance is commonly provided to Pantex employees who have questions pertaining to migratory birds on-site or at home. Presentations have been provided to groups off-site including church, civic, conservation, industry, professional, school, and study groups. Pantex has produced an impressive number of publications on migratory birds and counting those already mentioned, the number since 2002 that have appeared in magazines and journals now stands at 41.

Back to my encounter with the banded Burrowing Owl.....the morning air was warming and I decided to head back to the work truck. Today was not a day that I would be able to add a new species to the Pantex bird list. However, I had seen enough to know that all is well in the wilds at Pantex.

A vehicle with Security Police Officers pulled up, and instead of checking my badge as they could have, they eagerly asked me what was most unique thing that I saw today. I smiled again. Outreach, even to your own fellow employees—goes a long way, even to the point of having a happier workforce. And we at Pantex are proud that we have taken the step to take Migratory Bird Conservation to a much larger scale. Then I politely answered—"A Dickcissel;⁶ one of my favorite prairie birds."

Happy birding.....

James D. Ray
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Austin's Purple Martin Roost and Parties

By Shelia Hargis

In June of 2010, I made my first trek to the Highland Mall area of north central Austin to see the Purple Martin roost. My birding friends, Julia and Andy Balinsky, had been trying for years to get me up there to see the show, but I kept procrastinating, mainly because the show started at about the same time as my bedtime. Yes, I am fortunate to be a morning person! I have no problem getting up very early in the morning but getting me to stay up late into the night is another issue! Finally, I went to see the roost, and then I couldn't imagine why I had waited so long! I was blown away by the spectacular show the thousands of birds put on before landing in the trees for the night. I was mesmerized and awed. It was totally worth staying up late to see! Since then, I have been going back multiple times every summer to see the show. It is different every night and never gets old. It changed my life in the best way.

Here's how it works. Arriving about an hour before sunset, there will likely be a few birds circling around very high in the sky. A few of them will vocalize occasionally. As time progresses, more and more birds arrive from the surrounding area and join others who are swirling overhead. Sometimes you can see a group of birds coming in way off in the distance. Before you know it, you look up



A few of the birds at the 2012 roost in the Wells Fargo trees. 150,478 birds by my count. Just kidding!



The 2014 roost area early in the evening, after a rain shower.

and there are birds everywhere! Layer upon layer of birds. As it starts to get darker, some of the birds start circling much lower and you can hear them vocalizing. As time progresses, some perch briefly in the roost trees before taking off again, making another swirl in the sky. Just a teaser maybe. Finally, some land and stay put or move slightly to jockey for position with other birds. The many birds still in the air continue to swirl this way and that, and then some start plummeting down from high in the sky to the trees below. They look like bullets as they plummet toward the earth. Occasionally one scores a direct hit on an observer below. Some observers exclaim loudly about being pooped on, others suffer in silence and quietly look for something to use to wipe off the dropping without drawing too much attention to themselves. The finale is thousands of birds plummeting from the sky into the trees and stacking up shoulder to shoulder. The vocalizing continues and it is pretty loud with thousands of birds all



The 2014 roost trees later in the evening, after a rain shower.

speaking at once. It is a wonderful cacophony of sound. This amazing spectacle of nature is something that must be seen and heard in person. Words, photos and video do not do it justice!

By 2012, I was an experienced roost watcher and was still mesmerized by the birds. I am a Houston Audubon member (gotta support all the wonderful work they are doing to protect habitat!), and I had seen in the newsletter that they were hosting Purple Martin parties at their roosts in Houston. I am not above borrowing their great ideas and implementing them in Austin, so I suggested



2014 Travis Audubon Purple Martin Party. The birds roosted in a few trees just north of the Jack in the Box restaurant.

to my birding buddies that we should host Purple Martin parties at OUR roost. The birders had known about the roost for many years and had been going out every summer to see it, but very few non-birders knew about it. It was so spectacular that I was sure everyone, even non-birders, would want to come see it. It didn't take much convincing to get my friends on board, and Travis Audubon agreed to host the parties. We held our first party on July 20,

2012. We did a pretty good job of getting the word out via press releases and social media and had a pretty good turnout over three weekends. We had a homemade display board with information about the birds and were



2014 party goes along with an Austin American Statesman videographer. We had great press coverage that year.

actively talking with people, educating them on the birds and sharing in their excitement. Two really cool things happened. One was that the residents of the surrounding area told us things like, "I have lived in this neighborhood for thirty years and didn't know this was happening in my backyard!" And the second was, "This is cooler than the bats!" It was so much fun watching people experience these amazing birds!

Since then, the birds have moved their roost around, mainly to keep us on our toes I think, but the parties have continued and the crowds have grown. We have also upgraded our operation. We have a professionally designed display, we have numerous volunteers



Closeness is a virtue with these birds! This is a few of them packed into one of the 2014 roost trees.



The birds packed into one of the 2016 roost trees.

staffing the display and walking among the observers answering questions and educating, we have Purple Martin merchandise for sale, we have Travis Audubon merchandise and memberships for sale, and we have a canopy and a Travis Audubon flag. It's pretty impressive all around if I say so myself! And it is very inspiring. People are hungry to know more about the Purple Martins and hopefully for some, this will be the experience that turns them into birders. Even if they don't become birders, hopefully they will think about birds

and their conservation and be advocates for the birds when we need them to step up.

As I said before, words and photos don't do it justice, so *you must come to a party and see it for yourself!* You will be so glad you did. I promise! Our parties are Friday and Saturday nights in July. Check the Travis Audubon website, travisaudubon.org, in mid-June to find out the location and the exact dates and



2016 Travis Audubon Purple Martin Party goes with the birds dropping from the sky, right overhead.



2017 Travis Audubon Purple Martin Party goes along with Travis Audubon staff and volunteers.

times of the parties. The number of birds at the roost typically grows from mid-June through late July and then starts decreasing. It is impossible to really know how many birds are there, but we have estimated as many as half a million birds at the peak. Did I say it was spectacular!?

If for some reason you can't come see the best roost in Texas (the Austin roost of course!), our friends at Purple Martin Conservation Association, PMCA, have a great interactive map showing roost locations across the nation. It is available at <https://>



July 22, 2017 Travis Audubon Purple Martin Party goes – about 200 people came out to see the show!



2017 Travis Audubon Purple Martin Party. The birds roosted in a few trees just west of the Texas Land & Cattle Restaurant and one tree further north.

www.purplemartin.org/research/19/project-martinroost/. On the map you will see confirmed and suspected roost locations. If you're close to one of them, check it out.

If you want to learn more, PMCA has lots of other very interesting and useful information on their website, <https://www.purplemartin.org/>. If you are a landlord or are interested

in becoming a landlord, you definitely need to visit PMCA's website. Also Texas Parks and Wildlife put together a cool video of the life history of Purple Martins, including information on the roost. It is available on YouTube, search for Managing the Purple Martins. You might see some people you recognize on the video.

I'm only slightly kidding about Austin's roost being the best in Texas. But to be totally transparent, it's the only one I've visited, so possibly I should gather



A few more of the birds at the 2017 roost in the Texas Land & Cattle Restaurant trees.

more data before making such a big claim! If you have a roost in your area, I would love to hear from you about it. And if you have a local Audubon chapter, I highly encourage you to explore the idea of hosting parties at



Our first display, homemade, but it got the job done! Victor Emanuel, Laurie Foss and Barry Lyons—Travis Audubon volunteers.



In 2013, the martins won the *Austin Chronicle's* Best Nightly Air Show! George Kerr, Kat Ross, and Denise Dailey—Travis Audubon volunteers.



Under the 2016 roost. Just because you can get your MINI Cooper in between the cones doesn't mean it is a good idea to do that!



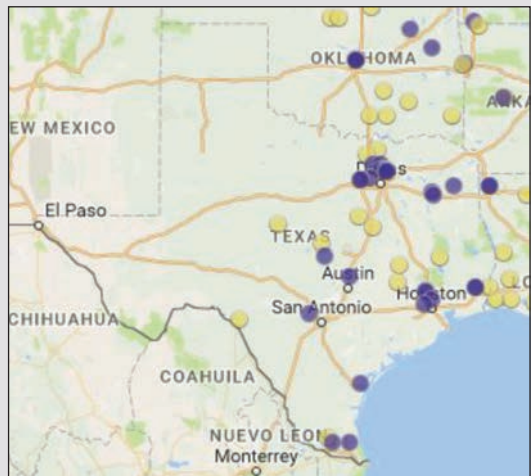
Our professionally designed display! Julia Balinsky, Denise Dailey and Andy Balinsky—Travis Audubon volunteers and Purple Martin landlords.



2017 Purple Martin roost chasers. These guys and gals joined me to try to determine where the roost was this year. We went out in mid-June, and the birds led us on a wild martin chase before some of them returned to the trees at Embassy Suites where they roosted in 2016. Later they moved to the Texas Land & Cattle trees and one tree further north. Julia Heskett, Denise Dailey, Wendy Harte, Andy Balinsky, and Julia Balinsky - Travis Audubon volunteers and Purple Martin landlords.



Travis Audubon staff and volunteers setting up before the 2017 shows. Pretty impressive, huh?



Purple Martin Conservation Association's Purple Martin Roost Map, zoomed in to show Texas. From the website, you can zoom in further and then click on a location to find out more about it. Purple circles are confirmed roosts. Yellow circles are unconfirmed roosts, based on radar images.



Purple Martin Parties

2017 Dates: July 7-8, July 14-15, July 21-22, July 28-29

Friday and Saturday nights, 8:00 – 9:30 pm, FREE

Travis Audubon scouts have identified the 2017 roost site. This year, hundreds of thousands of birds will be at **Texas Land & Cattle** at the junction of I-35/290 around sunset. Please park on Clayton Lane and not the restaurant's parking lot.

Travis Audubon's Purple Martin Party web page. Check our website in June 2018 to find out where the roost is and then come party with us!

the roost. It is a great way to connect with people (birders and non-birders) and get some exposure for your chapter. If you are interested, I'm happy to talk with you about how we made our Purple Martin Parties a success. Call or email me.

I hope to see you at the Austin roost in July 2018!

Shelia Hargis
Shelia.hargis@gmail.com

Laredo Birding Festival



The Birds of Pantex

Nuclear Weapons Facility Provides Habitat for Birds

By James D. Ray,¹ Monty G. Schoenhals, and John M. Keck

Our silver pickup bounced its way along a dusty caliche road, stirring up dust in its wake. It came to a stop next to an old abandoned railroad, and we stepped out, both pausing to strap on a side pack that contained a notebook, thermometer, wind meter, and a bird book. For the next several hours, we would conduct point counts for observed and heard birds at marked 300-meter intervals along a line that transversed shortgrass prairie habitat. Meanwhile, another team member was conducting surveys along a similar transect in another area of the facility.

An early encounter with a prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis viridis*) reminded us to watch our step as we walked between points. Birding, here, can require dual tasking—our eyes were “peeled” for birds, but we also routinely scanned the ground for rattlesnakes. The combination of our experience and snake-leggings lent us confidence as we moved carefully along through this pasture that is, particularly, known for its rattlesnakes. This day’s transect would yield the normal summer-resident bird species.

Point counts are just one of many means of inventory that has collectively helped the Pantex Plant build a bird list that contains 202 species (Table 1.) Pantex is the primary facility for the disassembly of the nation’s aging nuclear weapons arsenal. Other efforts to inventory birds have included research projects on western Burrowing Owls (*Athene cucularia*), species associated with prairie dog colonies, and impacts of wind energy development on birds; as well as sightings from trail cams and those incidental to nuisance animal responses and other work activities.

Pantex is a U. S. Department of Energy/ National Nuclear Security Administration

facility, and is managed by our employer, Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC. The Plant is an important component of the nation’s national security posture, and thus is not open to the public. However, the public should rest assured that the welfare of wildlife and their habitats are an important component of the operations of the Pantex Plant.

The Pantex Plant sits atop the northern reaches of the Southern High Plains of the Texas Panhandle. Spanning some 18,000 acres, much of the Plant consists of shortgrass prairie, and these areas also contain playa wetlands and colonies of black-tailed prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicanus*). Even the Plant’s cropland areas add to diversity, providing food and cover for certain species of wildlife, at certain times of the year.

Trees and brush are sparse, and are largely limited to specific plantings installed in the past by Pantex. None found on the site are natural in regard to the soil type, precipitation regime, or past processes such as wildland fires. Nonetheless, two small tree-plantings provide the bulk of forest or forest-edge type birds (~40 species) that have been recorded at Pantex.

The afternoon would find one of us routing paperwork for signatures among offices in several different buildings. Hey - no time to relax as far as observing and recording birds. Scurrying around the Plant revealed American Kestrels (*Falco sparverius*), Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), Curve-billed Thrashers (*Toxostoma curvirostre*), Northern Mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*), Say’s Phoebes (*Sayornis saya*), and Western Kingbirds (*Tyrannus verticalis*). The kestrels nest in cavities in the buildings, while the others nest on buildings, fences or signs. The swallows are somewhat messy, but normally even those nests located in what some describe as nuisance situations (over doors, windows

¹Certified Wildlife Biologist (TWS)

and walkways), are allowed to fledge their young.

On a typical summer day, Pantex workers can observe a vast array of wildlife, including birds, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and even bobcats. Among birds, those commonly observed during the breeding season in and around the facility's grasslands include Burrowing Owls, Cassin's Sparrows (*Aimophila cassinii*), Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*), Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), Lark Sparrows (*Chondestes grammacus*), Mourning Doves (*Zenaida macroura*), Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), Western Kingbirds, Western Meadowlarks (*Sturnella neglecta*), and Swainson's Hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*). In some years Lark Buntings (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) and Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) can be numerous.

In winter time, Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Ferruginous Hawks (*Buteo regalis*) and waterfowl join the ranks of the commonly observed. And waterfowl make their twice daily trek across the skies as they fly between their roosts and their food resources.

Playa wetlands are considered primary among habitats for wildlife in the Southern High Plains. Five of them occur at Pantex, providing wetland habitat when wet, and important cover and diversity when dry. Sixty-two species of water-associated bird species have been observed on Pantex playas. This includes cranes, ducks, geese, swans and shorebirds. Several duck species, but primarily Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*), can be observed raising broods during the nesting season, but most are recorded during the migration and winter seasons.

Agricultural cropfields provide food during migration and wintertime for Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) and waterfowl. Horned Larks are common on freshly plowed ground, crop stubble, and on winter wheat before it gets too tall. Migrating Long-billed Curlews (*Numenius americanus*) and Mountain

Plovers (*Charadrius montanus*) have also been observed in Pantex croplands. One March (2006), 11 Mountain Plovers spent a couple of days on a Pantex prairie dog colony. It was a neat feeling to host this species of concern for several days, and for the second time in just a couple of years.

So, what is the real story on this place and its implications on avian life? First of all, its 18,000 acres includes a variety of habitat, thus meeting the needs of a variety of nesting, wintering, and migrating birds. Its grasslands are managed with a rotation that results in a mosaic of habitat that has implications for habitat structure as well as food resources. For example, about half of the pastures are grazed moderately—some annually, and some rarely if at all. The other half are managed on a carefully coordinated rotation where, in the summer of a given year, some are grazed moderately, some are grazed a little more heavily, and some pastures receive a calendar year rest. A prescribed fire rotation is in its infancy, but has yet to be utilized due to drought conditions.

Pantex takes land and wildlife stewardship, seriously and, in the case of migratory birds, this became even more pronounced in 2002 with the implementation of Executive Order 13186, *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*. This provided a strong incentive for *habitat management* at the Pantex Plant. In fact, days-end brings us to a pasture where cattle have taken the vegetation down to the prescribed 50 percent biomass removal. The grassland is green and ready to explode with regrowth and diversity following recent rains. Tomorrow will find the cattle and accompanying Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) in another pasture, but a myriad of grassland species found at Pantex will benefit from the resulting manipulations now and for future years. Most assuredly, the birds of Pantex have a nice place to call home.

James D. Ray
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Table 1. All-time Bird List for Pantex.

American avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	Cassin's kingbird	<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>
American bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	Cassin's sparrow	<i>Aimophila cassinii</i>
American coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
American crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	Cedar waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>
American goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>	Chihuahuan raven	<i>Corvus cryptoleucus</i>
American green-winged teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Chimney swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>
American kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	Chipping sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>
American pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	Cinnamon teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>
American robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	Clay-colored sparrow	<i>Spizella pallida</i>
American white pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	Cliff swallow	<i>Hirundo pyrrhonota</i>
American wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>	Common goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Ash-throated flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	Common grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>
Baird's sandpiper	<i>Calidris bairdii</i>	Common merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Bank swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Common nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Bewick's wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Common yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
Black rail	<i>Larus jamaicensis</i>	Cooper's hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>
Black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Curve-billed thrasher	<i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>
Black-and-white warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	Dark-eyed junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>
Black-chinned hummingbird	<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>	Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>
Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Double-crested cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>
Black-necked stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	Eared grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Black-throated green warbler	<i>Dendroica virens</i>	Eastern kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>
Blue grosbeak	<i>Guiraca caerulea</i>	Eastern meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Blue jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	Eastern wood-pewee	<i>Contopus virens</i>
Blue-gray gnatcatcher	<i>Poliptila nigriceps</i>	Empidonax flycatcher	<i>Empidonax spp.</i>
Blue-winged teal	<i>Anas discors</i>	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	European starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Brewer's blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	Rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Brewer's sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	Ferruginous hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>
Brown towhee	<i>Pipilo fuscus</i>	Field sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>
Broad-tailed hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus platycercus</i>	Fox sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>
Brown thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	Franklin's gull	<i>Larus pipixan</i>
Brown-headed cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	Fulvus whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Bullock's oriole	<i>Icterus bullockii</i>	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Gold-fronted woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes aurifrons</i>
Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Grasshopper sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>
Canvasback	<i>Aythya valisineria</i>	Great blue heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
Gray catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Great egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	Olive-sided flycatcher	<i>Contopus borealis</i>

Great horned owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>	Orange-crowned warbler	<i>Vermivora celata</i>
Greater roadrunner	<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Greater scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>
Greater white-fronted goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	Painted bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>
Greater yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Great-tailed grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	Pied-billed grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>
Harris hawk	<i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i>	Pine siskin	<i>Carduelis pinus</i>
Hermit thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>	Prairie falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>
Hooded merganser	<i>Lopodytes cucullatus</i>	Purple martin	<i>Progne subis</i>
Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>
House finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	Red-headed woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Red-tailed hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
House wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	Red-winged blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
Inca dove	<i>Columbina inca</i>	Ring-billed gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	Ring-necked duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>
Ladder-backed woodpecker	<i>Picooides scalaris</i>	Ring-necked pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Lark bunting	<i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>	Rock wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>
Lark sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	Rose-breasted grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>
Least sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	Ross' goose	<i>Chen rossii</i>
Lesser golden plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>	Rough-legged hawk	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>
Lesser scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	Ruby-crowned kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>
Lesser yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	Ruddy duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>
Lincoln sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	Rufous-crowned sparrow	<i>Aimophila ruficeps</i>
Little blue heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	Rusty blackbird	<i>Euphagus carolinus</i>
Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Sabine's gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Sage thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>
Long-billed dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	Sandhill crane	<i>Grus canadensis</i>
Long-eared owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	Savannah sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>
MacGillivray's warbler	<i>Oporonis tolmiei</i>	Say's phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Scaled quail	<i>Callipepla squamata</i>
Marbled godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	Scissor-tailed flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>
McCown's longspur	<i>Calcarius mccownii</i>	Scott's oriole	<i>Icterus parisorum</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Scrub jay	<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>
Mountain bluebird	<i>Sialia currucoides</i>	Semipalmated plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>
Mountain plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>	Semipalmated sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>
Mourning dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Sharp-shinned hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>
Nashville warbler	<i>Vermivora ruficapilla</i>	Sharp-tailed sparrow	<i>Ammodramus caudacutus</i>
Northern bobwhite	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>	Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>
Northern cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	Snow goose	<i>Chen caerulescens</i>
Northern flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	Snowy egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Northern harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Solitary sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
Northern mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Song sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>
Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>

Northern rough-winged swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	Spotted sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>
Spotted towhee	<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	White-crowned sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>
Swainson's hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	White-faced ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>
Tree swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	White-throated sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>
Tundra swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	White-winged dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>
Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	Whooping crane	<i>Grus americana</i>
Turkey vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Willet	<i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i>
Upland sandpiper	<i>Bartramia longicauda</i>	Willow flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii</i>
Vesper sparrow	<i>Poocetes gramineus</i>	Wilson warbler	<i>Wilsonia pusilla</i>
Virginia rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>	Wilson's phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>
Warbling vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>	Wood duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>
Western kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Yellow warbler	<i>Dendroica petecia</i>
Western meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	Yellow-billed cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>
Western sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	Yellow-headed blackbird	<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>
Western tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>	Yellow-rumped warbler	<i>Dendroica coronate</i>



White-faced Ibis foraging on the USDOE Pantex Plant.

Photo courtesy of Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC.



A Common Nighthawk at rest on the USDOE Pantex Plant.

Photo courtesy of Mathew Monroc.



Western Burrowing Owls are abundant and well-studied on the USDOE Pantex Plant.

Photo courtesy of Norman Wade.

Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, Texas Artist, Birder's Treasure

By Fred Collins

Probably most people who read this magazine know about Carolyn and her famous birding spot, Christmas Mountains Oasis. If

you have not been there and met her, you are missing an opportunity of a lifetime.

Her oasis in the desert has hosted some rare and unusual birds, but it is her annual



Carolyn's Christmas Mountain Oasis as photographed by Mac Womack in the summer of 2017



This is Carolyn's favorite Lucifer Hummingbird image, which she says captures their essence better than any other she has taken.



This is a photo Carolyn took with professional equipment: Paul Denman's camera and Larry Ditto's setup. The list of visiting photographers who have come to the oasis to photograph this species reads like a Who's Who of bird photographers.

spring-summer-fall resident Lucifer Hummingbirds that garner most birders' attention. Lucifer Hummingbirds have one of the

most restricted ranges of any U.S. bird. They nest in the desert around Carolyn's oasis, and there is probably no one more familiar with



Very few nests of this species have been found. A nest was not discovered in the United States until 1962, when Warren Pulich Sr. and Jr. discovered two nests about 6.5 miles northwest of Terlingua in the Big Bend Country. Carolyn has found several nest in an area she refers to as her nursery up on her mountain below the oaks. All the nests she has found have been in cholla cactus as is the one in the photograph. The above photo was taken by Carolyn in Big Bend National Park.



Carolyn recently took this photo of the dramatic Lucifer Hummingbird display. The male flies side to side directly in front of the female with his gorget flared. The sound is reminiscent of the shuffling of a deck of cards. If she deems him worthy, she will allow him to mate with her. Bird photographers all over the world would love to capture this image. This photo also shows the male's long, forked tail, which is characteristic of the sheartail hummingbird group of the tropics. The Lucifer Hummingbird is the only sheartail to occur in the US.

this species than she is. She knows them as a mother knows her children.

I had communicated with Carolyn for several years on TexBirds and through personal emails before I finally made the trip to her oasis. She was a self-described “old lady,” but it was hard to believe she was the 70 plus years she claimed from her accounts of her activities. I felt like I knew her fairly well through email, so I was more than a little taken aback when we finally met in person. She was as wise and active and aged as her emails had led me to believe, but what surprised me was that she was so young, so vibrant, and so full of the same love of life and adventure she possessed as a young, 18-year-old artist.

Carolyn has had a full life with many peaks and valleys, and as is so typical of artists, has always looked to stretch her creativity. She purchased her property in 1977 and began the long labor of building her stone house into the hillside. She first built two little rock



Carolyn's self-portrait, drawn when she was 18. (Photo by Fred Collins) The minute I laid eyes on this picture, I saw Carolyn, and whenever I look at her today, I see this person. I feel sure that she still feels the way this young girl did more than 50 years ago.



This is a painting Carolyn made of her home above the arroyo that would become the oasis. She painted it in the early 80's

cabins for workers to stay in, but none ever did. Then she took six months to build the guesthouse while she lived in a tent. Once

the guesthouse was complete, she lived there while working on her larger house. In 1979, the house was far enough along that she lived



Carolyn -1980 during her rock house building period in the courtyard of her recently completed home. (Photo courtesy of Carolyn).

in it while still working on it. Later she built a large stone house with an enclosed courtyard for her sister, tucked away on another part of the property. She designed all the structures to blend in to the landscape, yet their straight lines set them apart and highlighted them in her beautiful thousand-acre Chihuahuan desert property.

She built her own house with a central courtyard. Soon Canyon Wrens took it for home, and have stayed ever since. It is frequented by hummingbirds as well. Anna's Hummingbirds find it particularly cozy in winter. One side of the courtyard is two storied. When you enter that portion of the house the rock walls soar a full two stories from an atrium area. A long staircase leads up to a balcony outside her bedroom suite. The staircase wall and balcony are adorned with large, beautiful paintings of charming women. Each one was painted by Carolyn. They are fit for any gallery; all are simple, yet stunning.

Carolyn's stone buildings are works of art, so elegant and beautiful they alone make her an accomplished artist. Yet she needed a new

form of artistic expression, and from 1980 through 1995 she concentrated on painting. She painted mostly in oil, producing the gallery in her staircase along with many more pieces that adorn the property. She had shows in galleries and sold some paintings, but has given away most of them to family and friends. She once entered an art competition and won first place and best of show.

About 1995, Carolyn decided to build a tank and diversion dam to harvest runoff for her vegetable garden. Along the way she developed a renewed interest in plants and wildflowers. Along with her late husband, Sherwood, they built several diversion dams in an arroyo to force runoff into several below grade tanks whenever there was a big enough flash flood. She soon abandoned her vegetable garden to focus on a desert oasis, which included many water-thirsty trees. The oasis grew to more than an acre, perhaps two. One big flash flood would fill the tanks and provide a year's supply of water to keep the mostly native trees healthy and growing.

There is the old adage, "If you build it, they will come." Sure enough, the birds and



Carolyn in 2017 surrounded by a selection of her oil paintings completed in the 1980s or early 1990s. (Photo by Mac Womack).



Two examples of Carolyn's oil painting from the 1980s or early 1990s. (Photo by Mac Womack).



These two paintings grace the guesthouse. Both are enchanting and engaging, just like Carolyn. (Photo by Mac Womack).

insects soon found the new oasis and made it their home. Carolyn turned her attention to birds and began to document the many birds that visited. She joined the birding community, and birders soon took note of the many

unusual and difficult to find species which she reported daily. She continued to shape and mold the oasis, increasing the number of native plant species. Birds increased as well, and her oasis was soon a must visit site

for any serious Trans-Pecos birder. When viewed from her entrance road, the oasis catches the eye and is the focal point of her canvas, while her rock house remains hidden into the side of an adjacent hill. The view draws one in, and apparently has the same effect on wildlife. The oasis has had some far flung visiting birders from across the United States, England, Africa, China and Japan. The typical Chihuahuan desert avifauna has been drawn in as well, along with such rare visitors as Violet-crowned Hummingbird from the Sierra Madres of Mexico, a Buff-bellied Hummingbird from South Texas or Mexico, several Costa's Hummingbirds from the Southwest, a Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher from Mexico, and a Varied Thrush from the Pacific Northwest.

In the process of learning plants, birds, butterflies and dragonflies, Carolyn also discovered blogging. She posts almost daily on her thoughts, sightings and experiences in the Trans-Pecos region from Alpine to Big Bend, but mostly from her Christmas Mountain Oasis. Her Christmas Mountain Oasis Blog, <https://cmoasis.blogspot.com/>, illustrates boundless creativity. With an artist's eye and a self-deprecating critique of each entry, it is always interesting, occasionally funny and more often than not educational. It displays her endless pursuit of life and is an inspiration to this senior citizen.

Carolyn's recent blogs have reported on her newest pursuits. Realizing that she physically could no longer climb her treacherous mountain, she determined to build a trail up it to better enjoy the flowers, butterflies, and Lucifer nests that the mountaintop harbors. So this past year and into 2017, at age 76, she decided to build a trail up to the saddle and pour off of a mountain on her property. It is a formidable climb much less a construction area. With the help of her sister, she has succeeded in that effort and from high up on that mountain she can now have a fresh perspective of her greatest canvas, her Christmas Mountain Oasis. Recently she was rewarded with seeing two new species of butterflies on the mountain that she would not otherwise have been able to see.

During the horrible drought of 2011 Carolyn bought and hauled water for an entire year in a desperate attempt to keep her oasis alive. The crude roads she had to traverse destroyed several vehicles and countless springs and tires. She knows that if another drastic drought occurs that will spell the end of the oasis. Hauling water is no longer feasible for several reasons. But she intends to keep the oasis going for as long as she can, and like she says, "It's too wonderful not to share."

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Birding Classic Reports

By Bron Rorex



The 21st annual Great Texas Birding Classic registered 129 teams during the 2017 spring migration birding competition. This year the Texas Ornithological Society Board of Directors increased our event sponsorship level in the Texas birding classic itself and also increased funding in support of TOS sponsored youth birding teams.

The mission of this event is to increase appreciation, understanding, and conservation of birds through education, recreation, nature tourism and conservation fundraising. Since the Great Texas Birding Classic started in April 1997, team registration fees and sponsorship dollars have contributed \$819,500 directly to avian habitat conservation on the Texas coast. Going statewide in 2013 opened up the Birding Classic by offering more opportunities to participate, by involving more teams, and making conservation grants available throughout the entire State of Texas.

Below are the TOS sponsored youth team reports of how each team's birding competition day unfolded for them this year.



Most Valuable Birders 5 Teams!



Bron Rorex and
Steve Reisinger



Gliders – Upper Texas Coast

- 1st Place: 87 species
- TOS Great Horned Owlets, Texas Ornithological Society



TOS Great Horned Owlets-April 29, 2017 Galveston County, Texas

This year the Great Horned Owlets set flight with the help of our sponsor, the Texas Ornithological Society. The team consisted of Emeline Howrey (14), Cypress Schubert (11), Colby Clift (9) and Violet Schubert, putting the team in the Gliders category for the first time. Overall, we identified 87 birds, including a glossy ibis and the fulvous whistling duck, both life birds for most of the team. To start the competition, we identified easy to get species in downtown Galveston such as doves, grackles and songbirds. We first headed to Sangerfest Park where we got more key species such as the eastern wood peewee. We had hoped to locate hawks and falcons that usually hunt in town, such as a peregrine falcon that often perches on the Anica Building in Downtown Galveston, but the wind was very high that day. We ended up only finding

two raptors. After we finished on the east end of the island, we headed west.

On our way west, we stopped at various ponds and lakes and picked up an array of cormorants, ducks and a surprising amount of shorebirds. The tides were blown all the way in, so the shorebirds congregated wherever they could in huge amounts, looking for food. This resulted in semi-palmated plovers, American golden plovers, spotted sandpipers, black-necked stilts, dowitchers, whimbrels, long-billed curlews, and many more shorebirds being identified. We then visited the Settegast Road Cultural Heritage Preserve and saw two fulvous whistling ducks, a lifer for chaperone Leslie Clift as well as the team members. After that, we went to Lafitte's Cove, a regular birding area for us. Here we saw ducks and the glossy ibis, which was a life bird for the team.

Great Texas Birding Classic 2017

TOS-SAYBC JUNIOR CHICKADEES



Back Row Left to Right: Eric Buhler, Pilar Valdez (morning), Patsy Inglet (Adult Leader), Craig Davis (Captain), Ella Baldwin (afternoon). Front row Left to Right: Elias and Andres Flores.

Thanks to Christie Davis, Miriam Buhler, and Michelle Flores, for their help and photographs and to Dr. Rodolfo Valdez and Robin Baldwin for their support.

PATSY INGLET (ADULT LEADER)

This year it took six young birders to make up the team of five. Pilar Valdez had to leave at noon, so Ella Baldwin, our alternate, stepped in to take her place on the team in the afternoon. The team was exceptionally good at both finding and identifying birds. Elias and Andres had really practiced their bird songs and calls the week before the competition, and they did a great job at identifying and/or finding birds by their sounds. We will work on birding by ear and bird location communication skills next year in the club to help everyone improve for the classic next year.

CRAIG DAVIS (JUNIOR TEAM CAPTAIN)

At the Great Texas Birding Classic, I learned more than I've learned anywhere else. At the other events, our leaders, Mr. Tom and



Captain Craig Davis and the Junior Chickadees home in on another species.



Official GTBC Artwork by Bill Hassell

Mrs. Patsy, always spotted most of the birds we see. At this event, they were not allowed to do that, which made it much more difficult to find birds. Because of this, the calls were very important. This was my first year attending this event, so calls definitely are my weak point. Luckily, there are two team members who have great ears for bird calls. I'll work on my calls for next year. This event drove me to study, listen and spend more time with birds. I would not be a birder if it was not for the San Antonio Young Birders Club and events like this one.

Each member of the team brought different qualities to the experience. Some were better at listening to calls, some at locating birds, yet my strength was thoughtfully identifying the birds.

The Great Texas Birding Classic was incredible, giving me a new life bird, the **Yellow-Headed Blackbird**. During the trip, I learned the differences between Long-Billed Thrasher and a Mockingbird call, a Dickcissel call, and the differences of a Great-Crested, a Brown-Crested, and an Ash-Throated Flycatcher. I was very glad to see and hear seven Painted Buntings, my favorite bird. Overall, my experience was marvelous. Thank you for letting me participate.



Elias Flores sights in the birds for the Team.

ELIAS FLORES

Stratonimbus. Stratonimbus. I couldn't believe it had finally come: The Great Texas Birding Classic; and the only thing I could think of was stratonimbus. Stratonimbus was the only thing I could think of because stratonimbus clouds were covering the sky, casting a dark, ominous shadow covering the country road, accompanied by several pulled over cars, including our GMC Yukon. Next to the road on both sides were thickets. And it was that very place Mr. Tom, our extremely advanced birding teacher said in his mischievously subtle way, "There is an interesting sound coming from that thicket." When Mr. Tom says something is interesting, I'm on to it. So I listened from across the road and I started to hear a Wild Turkey. Now, a Wild Turkey is not an extremely rare bird, but the thing that is so ironic, is that last year we were hunting for about 45 minutes to find that bird. I was feeling extremely excited! I was sure that was a foreshadowing that all those difficult birds would come easily. It was a

great way to start off the Classic! I was full of hope until I walked through the dried grass up to our other birding teacher, Ms Patsy, Mr. Tom's wife, only to hear her say, "You know we haven't started officially yet, right?" And that was one of the memorable things that happened at our wonderful, exciting, sometimes painful Great Texas Birding Classic. Needless to say, we did find some awesome birds despite the stratonimbus clouds, the Wild Turkey being one of them after the Texas Birding Classic started for us.

ANDRES FLORES

I loved participating in the Texas Birding Classic. I had a lot of fun seeing some old favorites and new interesting birds. At the beginning of our time I saw a Pyrrhuloxia, just sitting on a line, right there out in the open, but I thought it was a Northern Cardinal. Wow! What a find! Then, after walking down one of the paths at Mitchell Lake, we saw a group of Yellow-headed Blackbirds sitting in a tree. We almost thought they were Red-winged Blackbirds because we had been



Andres uses his sharp eyes to find the field marks through the scope.

hearing them the whole time we were there. That was a life bird for me! Overall, I had a great time seeing a variety of birds and getting to know my team better.

ERIC BUHLER

The Great Texas Birding classic was fun. My favorite bird was the Painted Bunting. It's very colorful and I had never seen it. We saw hundreds of egrets nesting. It was so cool! I knew we were going to see the scissor-tailed flycatcher. And we saw them. It was a hot day. But we saw many birds. We saw a white-faced ibis and a white ibis. Its beak was long and curved. We saw a dickcissel and I think that is a funny name. It rhymes with "whistle".

I love birds.



Eric shows off his special style of spotting the birds low in the bushes.

ELLA BALDWIN

I enjoyed the birding club for three reasons.

One, I was able to see more than *TEN* birds that I had never seen in my life, including the Orchard Oriole, the Snowy Egret, the Cattle Egret, and the little Green Heron!! We also saw a snake which I identified as the Diamond-backed Water snake, which

thankfully, unlike the Rattlesnake, is non-venomous. Everything I saw AMAZED me and inspired me.

Second, I truly enjoyed walking with my team, who were all very kind to me. Mrs. Patsy was an amazing teacher and helped me learn many new things. I now know how to tell a Mockingbird from another bird, how to tell a Black Vulture from a Turkey Vulture by looking at its wings, and much more!

Third, and most importantly, the birding club inspired me. As we walked on and saw more and more, I became more anxious to learn, see, and hear more!! So when the day ended, I knew that I would strive to learn everything I could about birds. My goal is to learn the bird songs by heart, and to know thousands of birds!!



Ella Baldwin, left, waits her turn at the scope with Andres and Craig while Elias finds the bird.

PILAR VALDEZ

NOTE: Because of a family situation, Pilar was only able to bird with the team in the morning at LHI. Team Alternate Ella Baldwin (see her essay above) stepped in to complete the team of 5.

Birding with the young birders club is an amazing experience, especially when you are in a nice peaceful environment where you can hear the birds clearly. What got me interested in birding was when I would go on road trips and I would see birds that you don't normally see in Texas. One day my dad told me about a birding club at the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center and he wondered if I wanted to join, I gladly accepted the offer which deepened my fascination in birds.

Going birding has its ups and downs. For instance, when we went to the Land Heritage

Center I had so much fun spotting and identifying birds, but the soles of my hiking boots came off. Even though it was rough I still had fun. Another reason I like birding is my Dad also comes along. This gives us a great dad and daughter experience, allowing us to bond over the fact that we still are amateurs in birding. I hope in the future that we will improve in our skills while still having fun.

Note 2: Pilar's Dad Rodolfo repaired her hiking boots with that wonderful fix-all Duct Tape! Not very pretty, but functional.

Corpus Christi Elementary School Bird Club

"It's a Purple Gallinule!" "It's beautiful." The Terns Over Spoonbills moved forward onto the boardwalk at Leona Turnbull In Port Aransas. The Tenacious Osprey Seekers were walking the marsh habitat of picnic area. They were whispering among themselves, they had spotted a Red-eyed Vireo. My heart swelled with pride. It is an incredible moment for a teacher. I could see it actually all come together for them.

We have 14 members in our 4th grade afterschool bird club. Ten were able to participate. We divided into two teams. Next, we began practicing working together as a team to spot birds. The hardest part, after learning how to use field guides, is explaining to everyone else on the team how to spot the same bird. We worked hard and spent much of our lunch time quizzing each other with flashcards on Quizlet.

Bron Rorex
bron@rorexusa.com



Bird Club members: Sydney Gutierrez, Tyler, Mullican, James Balusek, Evan Hannabass, Caedmon Stapper, Connor Williams, Madison Simon, Maris Browning, Addison Rodriguez Adam Yousef, and Chaperone Blyth Swartsfager (Leona Turnbull Birding Center)

Furby the Owlet

By Larry Johnson



Images of Barred Owl owlet "Furby" venturing outside it's cavity at the Colleyville Nature Center
Photos by Larry Johnson

Birding the Devil's River Corridor

By Romey Swanson

Val Verde is a large county hugging the western edge of the Edwards Plateau and forming a portion of Texas' southwestern border. It includes a few notable birding hot spots such as Seminole Canyon State Park and Lake Amistad, among an expanse of Chihuahuan Desert. However, none of these hot spots, in my opinion, are as interesting as the Devils River corridor and the eclectic assemblage of birdlife it supports. I'd like to share a couple of recent experiences that support my opinion.

During this year's Great Texas Birding Classic, my birding team (The Dirty Swainson's) competed in the Heart of Texas West Regional Big Day category. We chose this category for three reasons:

1. It is an under-birded region that has a lot of potential for Big Day diversity.
2. It includes Devils River State Natural Area (SNA), one of two publicly accessible areas along the river.
3. There wasn't an established blueprint to Big Day success.

It would be easy to get into a long narrative concerning the entire Big Day but I'll limit the commentary to a few highlights before digging deeper into the Devils River region.

- We tallied 137 species on the day
- We began at Devils River SNA with Yellow-breasted Chat at 12:01 AM and

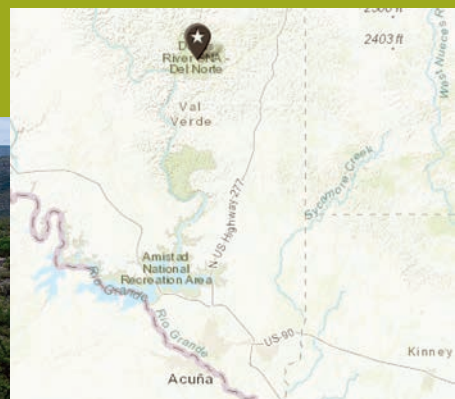
ended at Cook's Slough in Uvalde with Yellow-crowned Night-heron at around 8:00 PM

- Western Grebe at Lake Amistad
- Singing White-collared Seedeater along San Felipe Creek in Del Rio
- Barred Owl also along San Felipe Creek in Del Rio **this observation is the first eBird record for Val Verde County and eBird's western-most record for Texas although I know of a few non-eBirded records to the west**

On the Big Day, we birded Devils River SNA from midnight through noon. In that time, we amassed 86 species representing as dynamic an assortment of birds as you'll find anywhere in the state.

We began with targeting night birds, which we all know can be tricky without scouting. Elf Owl was a fairly easy pick up at the headquarters complex. The night birding was highlighted at one point along Dolan Creek where we picked out two Western Screech-owls, one Eastern Screech-owl, and a Great-horned Owl, all calling simultaneously.

After night birding, we hiked down to the river for the big dawn chorus. It turned out to be an overwhelming cacophony of East meets West meets South; Carolina Wren, Canyon Wren, Couch's Kingbird, Eastern Woodpeewee, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Great Kiskadee songs filled every empty space as



Devil's River SNA. N. 29° 56' 22.84" W. 100° 58' 13.18" Photo TPWD

the advancing sun cast away darkness to the recesses beyond. Unfamiliar dichotomies continued to present themselves throughout the morning. I watched as a bright male Yellow-throated Warbler sang territorially while lit upon a stalk of ocotillo, a spiny cactus-like shrub indigenous to the Chihuahuan Desert.

We pushed further up stream along the river trail skirting around or winding through thin galleries of woodland. Tropical Parulas trilled from the canopy all along our route. The songs of Olive Sparrow and White-tipped Dove belied their typical skulking behavior within the tangle of understory brush. Cassin's Vireo made a surprising appearance. It was around this time that we started to contemplate rarities. Why not? Species accumulation had slowed significantly and we had ticked off almost all of our targeted birds (except Kingfishers, we painfully dipped on all three). Considering the habitat structure along the river and our own small understanding of the species natural history, we opined that Rufous-capped Warbler was the most hopeful rarity we could expect. And, after exploring good habitat around Finnegan's Spring, we found no sign of our presumptive quarry. However, the discussion and search planted seeds that would later bare fruit.

We finished out our visit by searching for birds that would complement our morning's quarry. Although completely different, the desert uplands continue to support high amounts of plant and animal diversity. The primary difference is that everything in the desert wants to poke, stab, sting, and bite you. Whether for glory or duty, our group persevered despite these menacing qualities. Black-capped Vireo was a quick addition (they are fairly common at the SNA, easy to hear but difficult to see). We also added a Varied Bunting, a bird that isn't difficult to find after mid-April as long as you can pick out its song which is not completely unlike a Painted Bunting. Cassin's Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, and Canyon Towhee were noted around the head-

quarter building. Northern Bobwhite and Scaled Quail are usually calling from around HQ but we dipped on both. The last bird we picked up at the SNA was Western Kingbird. See this link for a list of birds observed after night birding (<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S36236477>).

A couple of weeks after the Big Day, I helped out with Black-capped Vireo and Songbird surveys at The Nature Conservancy's Dolan Falls Preserve. This nearly 5,000 acre privately owned preserve borders Devils River SNA to the south and includes a healthy amount of river, creek, and dry canyon habitat to go with typical Chihuahuan Desert shrubland and grasslands. The Preserve is set aside to support a number of imperiled species and ecosystems. For this reason, it is important to note that the preserve is not publicly accessible (please do not trespass).

While working at the Preserve, I was able to observe a handful of species I missed during the Big Day including several migrants: Chuck-wills-widow, MacGillivray's Warbler, Yellow Warbler, and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Working over the course of three mornings, we amassed another robust list of birds (see my checklist here: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S36710825>). My friend and TNC Ornithologist, Rich Kostecke, took me to a portion of the Preserve that holds Gray Vireo where we had good looks at a singing male in the fading evening light.

More excitement occurred on the second morning of surveys. Stephen Ramirez, another good friend, worked with me to survey a section of streamside points along a sheer cliff-face. During the survey, I noted an odd warbler song that had a little similarity to the Rufous-capped Warbler recordings I had studied a couple weeks before but not obviously similar. I wasn't comfortable confirming the ID off of the song but, very fortunately, Stephen managed to locate the bird visually. Stephen said, "Rufous-capped Warbler" and a frenzy of events took place. First, I wanted

to see it!; Secondly, study it and take notes; third, photograph it. We were able to achieve all three and while doing so, realized that there were two of them. The second, non-vocal bird was slightly less bright and less bold than the singing male. The two interacted by flitting together throughout the dense underbrush. Stephan and I exchanged high fives and congratulations. Yes, it's exciting and rewarding to find a rare bird, particularly in

an amazing place, but I think the experience is enriched when you can share it with close friends.

After sharing the discovery with the remainder of the survey team, we set off to re-find the birds. The male was singing territorially right where I had left it that morning and good looks were had by all.

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Gray Vireo



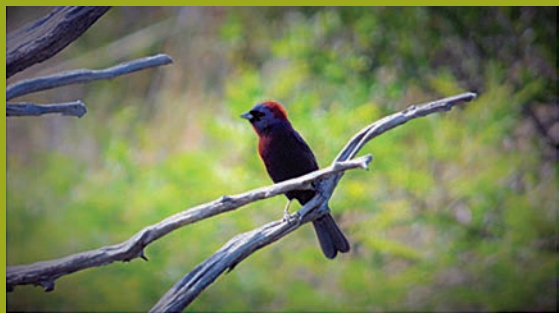
White-collared Seedeater



Yellow-throated Warbler



Black Phoebe



Varied Bunting



Rufous-capped Warbler

TOS Alaska 2017

By Jim Hailey



TOS Alaska group

This past summer I enjoyed my eleventh and final trip leading Texas Ornithological Society trips to the amazing state of Alaska. While it may be my last trip there as a TOS leader, it will certainly not be my last visit to Alaska. In fact, I plan on driving there again next summer for the fifth time. This year I was joined by two other Past Presidents of TOS—Byron Stone who co-led this trip and Brent Ortego. In addition, I had the chance to bird with Randy Pinkston for two weeks, and let me say he is an amazing birder. The rest of the crew included Bill Sain, Shelia Shallcross, Jim Hully, Mariann Golden, Dora Ortego, Amy Hardy, Carol La Breche, Harry Delaune and Malise Prieto.

The group arrived in Anchorage on June 3 before joining me in Nome on the fourth. We spent four days birding the roads leading out of Nome. We got both must see birds for Nome—Bluethroat and Bristle-thighed

Curlew—and some nice addition. Those additions included Slaty-backed and Sabine's Gull, Aleutian and Caspian Tern, Sanderling, Red Knot (a species I had not seen in Nome before), Northern Wheatear and both American Golden and Pacific Golden Plover. Another unusual species seen on this trip was the Black Guillemot, one I have only found once on the eleven trips there.

From Nome it was back to Anchorage before heading to Barrow in search of all the eiders and we were not disappointed. We did find Common, Spectacled, King and Steller's Eider while in Barrow, but missed another target bird—Yellow-billed Loon. I think two of the birds that the group liked best while in Barrow were Snow Bunting and Red Phalarope. However, I think my favorites were the Long-tailed Ducks in full breeding plumage. In addition, we saw Snowy Owl, both Pomarine and Parasitic Jaeger.



Kittlitz's Murrelet

The Anchorage area produced the usual species for the most part. We had Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-throated Loon, Hudsonian Godwit and Red-necked Grebe. When visiting the Eagle River Nature preserve we were treated to a brief glimpse of Three-toed Woodpecker, Western Wood Pewee, Varied Thrush, Gray Jay, and a momma bear and her three cubs that put a momentary pause in our progress up the trail. We also headed up Arctic Valley and were treated to another Black Bear sighting before reaching the top. Along the drive up Arctic Valley we found Alder Flycatcher, several warbler species, a very cooperative Golden-crowned Warbler for photographers, and lots of Lincoln Sparrows.

From Anchorage we travelled to Seward for our pelagic portion of the trip and no one was disappointed. We found Red-faced Cormorant, Ancient Auklet, Common and Kittlitz's Murrelet, Tufted and Horned Puffin, Black-legged Kittiwake, and several displays of Humpback Whales. Other mammals we encountered included my favorite—Sea Otter—Steller Sea Lion, and Harbor Seal. The only misses for this trip was Parakeet Auklet,

and we searched hard for them, and Orca Whales, otherwise it was a very successful trip which was as usual the highlight of the trip for our group. The following morning we searched for and found some other specialties of this area—Rufous Hummingbird, Pine Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, Trumpeter Swan (there are a nesting pair here with four cygnets), Steller's Jay and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Then we returned to Anchorage and prepared for our final trip to the Old Denali Highway.

On our way to the Denali Highway we spent a great deal of time searching for Black-backed Woodpecker reportedly found in a burned area near Houston, Alaska. I'm happy to report we were successful, but only because we were persistent. We did dip on a good view of Denali Mountain. As usual this massive mountain makes its own weather and was shrouded in clouds both as we drove to and from the old highway. However, this trip across the 130 miles of dirt road did produce a very exciting find for me especially. On the previous 15 trips across the Old Denali Highway, I had never before seen a Northern Hawk Owl, but this year we did. Unfortu-

nately, we were not as successful in finding the elusive Smith's Longspur which I haven't seen in the last five years. The old reliable location at Mile 13 just didn't produce. However, the group did get to have very close looks at another specialty of the highway—Arctic Warbler. And even if there were no birds to see along this road, the absolute beauty of the Alaska Range that can be seen off in the distance is worth the trip.

The trip ended on our return to Anchorage. We had a great group of birders and all enjoyed each other's company. Additionally, this trip set a new record for TOS trips to

Alaska—174. The long standing record of 173 was finally broken.

I want to add that I have enjoyed the opportunity to lead these trips to Alaska for the past 11 years. Over the years I have had the opportunity to meet and spend a great deal of time with more than 150 of you. As a result I have made many great friends that I remain in contact with today. Thanks to all of you who have joined me visiting this amazing place, Alaska. I hope to see you all again soon.

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Leucistic Black-Bellied Whistling-Duck at Progreso Lakes

By Daniel Jones



On January 25, 2017 while scoping over the large flock of wintering Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks on Moon Lake behind our house at Progreso Lakes, Hidalgo County, I found a striking leucistic individual. The head, rump and tail were immaculate white with the bill, legs and feet being the expected deep rosy pink. The back and under parts were mostly white with scattered partially black feathers. The wings were mostly black below while above the coverts were mostly white and the flight feathers were white on the basal half and black on the distal half. This essentially created a black speculum appearance. I saw the leucistic black-belly numerous times during the next couple of months and took the above photos on Feb. 21, 2017.

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The Chronicle of the Golden-Cheeked Warbler Delisting Petition

By Clifton Ladd



Birders across Texas have been shaking their heads in shock and disbelief this spring and summer, dismayed by the atrocious political actions of Land Commissioner George P. Bush. The Texas General Land Office, with the assistance of the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF), filed suit against the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCW) from the Endangered Species List. This legal challenge comes even though the Service has twice reviewed the bird's status and twice concluded the warbler still needs the protection of the endangered designation. *The Texas Ornithological Society* is working with other organizations to defeat the lawsuit.

As many readers know, the GCW was listed as endangered in 1990. Many local governments then worked through the complicated process to prepare and implement habitat conservation plans (HCPs) for their jurisdictions, beginning with the City of Austin and Travis County and the Balcones

Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP), approved in 1996. The success of the BCCP and the preserve system it established are widely regarded as major factors contributing to the high quality of life in the Austin area. Other local jurisdictions adopted their own HCPs, including Williamson, Hays, Comal, and Bexar counties. The Service created the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. These and other actions have greatly benefited the GCW, though it isn't out of the woods yet.

The Service completed a five-year review of the status of the species in August 2014, and concluded that the warbler should remain in the category of endangered. The Service based this conclusion on the best available science, including the most comprehensive population and habitat data available. Then, in late June 2015, the Service received a petition to delist the species from the Marzulla Law Firm and the TPPF, who believed that the Service had not fully considered certain information.

As required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Service reviewed all the information submitted with the petition and prepared a 90-day finding on the petition. An announcement of the 90-day finding was published in the Federal Register on June 3, 2016. The Service's finding document restates that it had previously considered the information submitted with the petition when they completed the five-year review. In the 90-day finding, the Service rejected the petition because they found it did not present substantial scientific or commercial information showing delisting may be warranted,

and again found that the species merits the endangered status.

Not satisfied with this 90-day finding, the TPPF is now representing the General Land Office in a lawsuit against Interior and the Service to delist the species. The lawsuit was filed in US District Court in June 2017, and contends that the Service erred in not designating critical habitat for the warbler, that endangered status for the bird negatively affects property values for state-owned land, and that the Service did not meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act when it declared the warbler to be endangered.

To defend the warbler, the *Texas Ornithological Society*, *Travis Audubon Society*, *Center for Biological Diversity*, and the *Defenders of Wildlife* jointly filed a motion to intervene in the case on August 1, 2017, and will continue to oppose the effort to delist the Golden-cheeked warbler. The ESA has been effective in preventing the extinction of this species, and that protection should continue until the bird is clearly recovered.



Golden-cheeked Warbler originally published in the *Endangered Species Technical Bulletin* in the late 1980's in an article about the candidate species listing. Photo by Don Bleitz, courtesy of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology

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Highlights of the TOS Florida Tour

By Jim Hailey



Mangrove Cuckoo.

Photo Terry and Janet Knesek.

The Texas Ornithological Society teamed up with Kim Risen of NatureScape Tours to offer a birding trip to south Florida. Kim, as always, did an amazing job of getting us to the right places. While we missed some of the rarities present this spring in the Miami area (Bahama Mockingbird, Western Spindalis etc.), we enjoyed success in getting most of the Florida specialties. For example, we found Snail Kite, Florida Scrub Jay, Mitred, Yellow-chevroned and Red-faced Parakeet, Mangrove Cuckoo, Masked and Brown Booby, Purple Swamphen, Spot-breasted Oriole, Antillean Nighthawk and Limpkin, to name just a few. So those who joined the group went home happy. The only negative of this trip was our vehicle being broken into and the theft of camera equipment, a spotting scope, one pair of binoculars and a complete suitcase.



Gray-headed Swamphen.

Photo Terry and Janet Knesek.

We started in the Merritt Island sanctuary but were prohibited from birding there due to a large fire. South Florida has been in a drought and there were numerous fires burning in the area. From there we headed south to our base of operation in Homestead, Florida. From Homestead, we visited some of the upper Keys hotspots and made two trips to Key Biscayne looking for five reported rarities there. This was my least favorite part of our trip. I thought Austin traffic and drivers were bad until I had to drive through Miami to Key Biscayne. After that experience I will never complain again! I am glad to have survived those two trips.

The trip out to the Dry Tortugas takes two and half hours on the National Parks ferry but was well worth the effort. We had the opportunity to spend most of the day on the island. We did get both the Brown and Masked Booby and watched many

Magnificent Frigate birds soaring above us. A surprise, at least to me, was a small water feature inside the fort that attracted many migrating species. Sitting there we observed Blue Grosbeak, Summer and Scarlet Tanager, Palm, Cape May, Blue-throated, and Mourning Warblers among other passerines. We also had nice looks at a Bobolink and several thrushes. Late in that afternoon we visited the Key West old fort where we had great

looks at Black-whiskered Vireo and Gray Flycatchers. Our last night there several of us drove back up the Keys searching for the Antillean Nighthawk. Outside of the fierce mosquito attack experienced, we were successful in locating the bird. And we also had a chance to visit the Everglades. This trip will most likely be offered again in the near future.

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Florida Scrub-Jay.
Photo Terry and Janet Kneseck.

Artwork by Lynn Delvin



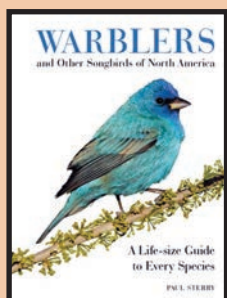
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Book Reviews



Warblers and Other Songbirds of North America

by *Sterry, Paul*

ISBN: 9780062446817; Publisher: Harper Design; Year of Publication: 2017; Page Count: 352; Shipping Weight: 2.50

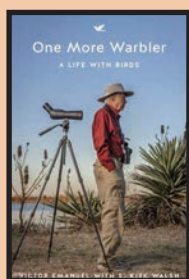
A stunning full-color photographic field guide of 285 species of North American songbirds and warblers, captured in glorious life-sized detail and featuring concise descriptions, location maps, and useful facts for both experienced birdwatchers and armchair ornithologists alike.

Birds such as the Acadian Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Indigo Bunting, Northern Mockingbird, Pyrrhuloxia, Rock Wren, Song Sparrow, Tree Swallow, and the Yellow Throated Warbler are known for their elaborate songs produced by their highly developed vocal organs. Warblers and Other Songbirds of North America is a breathtaking collection of 285 species of these beautiful, melodious creatures, the largest number of species in a single field guide about North American songbirds.

Arranged by region and taxonomic order, every songbird is depicted life-sized; each photograph is accompanied by a short description with essential information on identification and the particular species, habits, and behavior. Every species entry also includes a map showing where the species can be found, as well as a fact grid listing key details such as common and scientific name, length, food, habitat, status, and voice. Inside you'll find fun facts, including:

- Songbirds are members of the order Passeriformes, the most varied group of birds both in terms of numbers of species and diversity of appearance and habit preferences.
- Songbirds have feet that allow them to perch with ease, with three toes pointing forward and one facing back.
- Songbirds are extremely vocal; some male species are among the finest songsters in the bird world.

Every photograph is gloriously detailed and chosen to show each species' unique identification features and typical postures. Packed in a convenient portable size, *Warblers and Other Songbirds of North America* is ideal for the experienced birdwatcher, the aspiring naturalist, and every bird lover.



One More Warbler

by *Emanuel, Victor; S. Kirk Walsh*

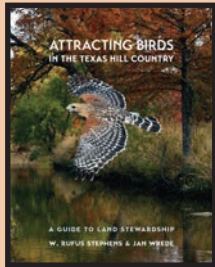
ISBN: 9781477312384; Publisher: University of Texas Press; Year of Publication: 2017; Page Count: 273; Shipping Weight: 2.25

With stories of sighting rare birds ranging from an Eskimo Curlew to the cranes of Asia, one of America's foremost birders recalls a lifetime of birding adventures, including friendships with luminaries Roger Tory Peterson, Peter Matthiessen, and George Plimpton.

Victor Emanuel is widely considered one of America's leading birders. He has observed more than six thousand species during travels that have taken him to every continent. He founded the largest company in the world specializing in birding tours and one of the most respected ones in ecotourism. Emanuel has received some of birding's highest honors, including the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He also started the first birding camps for young people, which he considers one of his greatest achievements.

In *One More Warbler*, Emanuel recalls a lifetime of birding adventures—from his childhood sighting of a male Cardinal that ignited his passion for birds to a once-in-a-lifetime journey to Asia to observe all eight species of cranes of that continent. He tells fascinating stories of meeting his mentors who taught him about birds, nature, and conservation, and later, his close circle of friends—Ted Parker, Peter Matthiessen, George Plimpton, Roger Tory Peterson, and others—who he frequently birded and traveled with around the world. Emanuel writes about the sighting of an Eskimo Curlew, thought to be extinct, on Galveston Island; setting an all-time national record during the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count; attempting to see the

Imperial Woodpecker in northwestern Mexico; and birding on the far-flung island of Attu on the Aleutian chain. Over the years, Emanuel became a dedicated mentor himself, teaching hundreds of young people the joys and enrichment of birding. 'Birds changed my life,' says Emanuel, and his stories make clear how a deep connection to the natural world can change everyone's life. Illustrated with 9 color and 9 black and white photographs.



Attracting Birds in the Texas Hill Country: A Guide to Land Stewardship

by *W. Rufus Stephens; Jan Wrede*

ISBN: 9781623494407; Publisher: Texas A&M University; Year of Publication: 2017; Page Count: 498; Shipping Weight: 3.75

Attracting Birds in the Texas Hill Country is first and foremost a habitat management tool. However, being well suited to those that own and manage land for wildlife benefits, this book will also interest those readers concerned with the intersection of birding, natural history, and landscape ecology. This isn't to say that it is a heavy tome that dives deeply into complex paradigms and theories but it does introduce the concepts of holistic habitat thinking and the connectedness of life. All readers, from seasoned wildlife biologist to new landowners to the casual backyard birder, will come away from this book with an improved understanding of the challenges to declining and imperiled Hill Country birds. Readers will develop a deeper appreciation for today's wonderful land stewards (of which there are many) and how the Hill Country's man-made problems often require man-made solutions.

The book is organized thusly; an introduction, 9 chapters, an appendix composed of 5 appendices, glossary, bibliography, and index. The chapters explore the specific challenges to habitat and avian species found within the Hill Country of Texas. The first six chapters are formatted to provide an overview of specific habitat types with treatments to assist in identifying healthy versus degraded versions. The remaining three chapters tackle specific challenges; predators, deer management, and cedar control. Each habitat chapter (chapters 1-6) explores several problems regularly observed within each of the habitat types treated, the likely causes of these problems, and management strategies to recover or restore the habitat to a more productive form. Since some of the problems (i.e. overgrazing) often occur within multiple habitat types, some chapters explore the problem with more depth than others. The authors are thoughtful about this and make it a practice to cite which chapters the reader can find more thorough treatments of problems.

Stephens and Wrede do a great job of connecting specific Hill Country birds to the habitat with which they are most closely associated. They often remind the reader that species specific management is irrevocably tied to a habitat's ability to provide food, water, and shelter for the species. Further, the authors stress that, as wildlife managers, we should focus our activities on improving or stabilizing these critical components. At the conclusion of each of the first six chapters, the authors switch the focus from habitat management to species specific accounts and management activities, cumulatively providing a treatment of nearly all regularly occurring bird species found within the Hill Country.

I do have a few criticisms or suggestions to offer but none should substantially take away from the value of this book. I'll preface these comments by stressing that these are my opinions and based in a matter of personal preference. First, although Stephens and Wrede include an abundance of photographs providing real examples of birds, habitat, and management activities, the layout is not impressive. A bold statement perhaps. However, this isn't to say that the layout isn't effective, it just lacks the graphically appealing appearance I'm becoming more and more used to seeing in semi-technical and popular publications. Second, I would prefer to see more diagram examples (like that associated with rotational grazing in chapter 2) to complement the management techniques explained within the text. I believe that this would benefit many readers lacking land and wildlife management backgrounds (like my mother whom loves birds but has a difficult time visualizing land/habitat management). Lastly, the organization of the book can be tricky to navigate. Since problems like overgrazing and high deer densities can affect multiple habitat types, they are addressed in multiple chapters with one chapter usually exploring the issue more thoroughly than the others. This requires the reader to regularly thumb through different chapters to access the full scope of the problem-specific content available. Whereas the authors usually reference the chapter with which this content is located, providing specific page numbers and/or a chapter by chapter table of content would reduce the necessity of skimming through pages of material in search of the referenced content.

In conclusion, *Attracting Birds in the Texas Hill Country* is a wonderfully valuable tool for bird lovers, wildlife biologists, and land stewards. Stephens and Wrede have captured a depth of knowledge and experience of the Hill Country that will benefit a variety of readers; it is a welcomed addition to both the professional's and enthusiast's library.

Romey Swanson, Dripping Springs, TX, 21 July 2017



The Purple Martin: How Citizen Scientists and Colony Landlords Are Saving a Favorite American Bird

by Robin Doughty; Rob Fergus

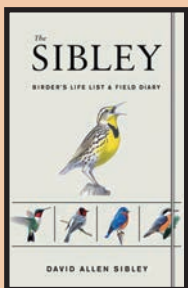
ISBN: 9781935778325; Publisher: McDonald & Woodward Publishing Co.; Year of Publication: 2016; Page Count: 174; Shipping Weight: 1.50

This book explores the unique relationship humans have established with the Purple Martin whereby people have provided nest cavities for martins during the bird's summer stay in North America. The narrative describes and discusses efforts to conserve birds by improving nesting success, especially in regard to competition from

alien species and native predators.

Recent efforts to increase populations, notably along the edge of the martin's range, include individuals and organizations, that exchange information about caring for the birds. This renewed interest has resulted in innovations about feeding birds during inclement weather; seeking out roost sites in order to protect migrating birds, gathering information about where birds go in South America during the non-breeding season, and identifying what dangers they face in their winter quarters.

The book describes the number of martin species and their basic biology, and it investigates the history of human interaction with the bird, especially how people have gathered information that so-called landlords draw upon in order to manage their bird colonies. Increasing numbers of devotees gather data on nesting and fledging rates in order to track bird numbers. These citizen scientists not only furnish data for ornithologists to incorporate into regional programs to protect migratory birds, but also have improved methods for managing nesting birds, building up numbers in backyard colonies, and advising colleagues how best to help conserve the species.



The Sibley Birder's Life List and Field Diary

by Sibley, David Allen

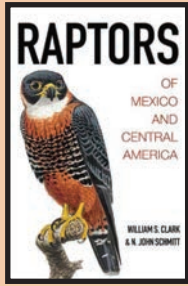
ISBN: 9780451497451; Publisher: Clarkson Potter; Year of Publication: 2017; Page Count: 304; Shipping Weight: 1.50

An essential write-in field companion for all levels of birders.

This indispensable birder's companion includes both ample space for on-site notes and a life list to be filled in by the legions of passionate birders who have bought Sibley's bestselling guides. Included are entries for the 923 species found in the United States and Canada, with space for recording where and when a bird was seen and for notes or memories about the sighting. At the back is a complete checklist of all the

birds for building the life list.

Our Opinion: Yes, finally someone got it right! This is the Life List & Diary that we have been waiting for since the Cornell Lab's version went out of print over a decade ago. This book includes three important sections: Species Listing and Entries, Checklist, and Write-in Life List. The Species Listing includes the English species name, with status code, space for Date, Location, and Notes. The Checklist includes six columns to use as you wish, alongside English species names with status code. The Write-in Life List is a blank numbered list with space for 1,024 species. Get to work! The book also includes the ABA Code of Ethics and an index of English names. The book is spiral bound, with a heavy 'waterproof' cover and an attached elastic to hold the book closed. Now you can stuff all your maps, directions and notes in the book and keep it shut! The waterproof cover won't protect the book in a downpour, but water should bead off the cover itself. And all this wonderful information comes packed in a field-pocket-size: 7 3/4 x 5 1/4 x 1 inch. We're hooked, it's true. We highly recommend this book as your new permanent life list!



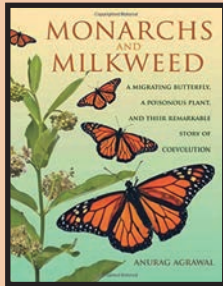
Raptors of Mexico and Central America

by Clark, William S.; N. John Schmitt

ISBN: 9780691116495; Publisher: Princeton University Press; Year of Publication: 2017; Page Count: 304; Shipping Weight: 3.00

Raptors are among the most challenging birds to identify in the field due to their bewildering variability of plumage, flight silhouettes, and behavior. *Raptors of Mexico and Central America* is the first illustrated guide to the region's 69 species of raptors, including vagrants. It features 32 stunning color plates and 213 color photos, and a distribution map for each regularly occurring species. Detailed species accounts describe key identification features, age-related plumages, status and distribution, subspecies, molt, habitats, behaviors, potential confusion species, and more. *Raptors of Mexico and Central America* is the essential field guide to this difficult bird group and the ideal travel companion for anyone visiting this region of the world.

The first section is a field guide format with color plates opposite concise text, with multiple illustrations showing variations of sex, age, color morph, and attitude. The remainder of the book consists of complete species accounts with an identification summary, taxonomic and geographic variation, similar species, status and distribution, habitat, behavior, molt, description, fine points, unusual plumages, hybrids, etymology, and references. The accounts include Latin names, common English and Spanish names, measurements, color photos and range maps. The book also includes a glossary, index, and references.



Monarchs and Milkweed: A Migrating Butterfly, a Poisonous Plant and Remarkable Story of Coevolution

by Agrawal, Anurag

ISBN: 9780691166353; Publisher: Princeton University Press; Year of Publication: 2017; Page Count: 283; Shipping Weight: 2.75

Monarch butterflies are one of nature's most recognizable creatures, known for their bright colors and epic annual migration from the United States and Canada to Mexico. Yet there is much more to the monarch than its distinctive presence and mythic journeying. In *Monarchs and Milkweed*, Anurag Agrawal presents a vivid investigation into how the monarch butterfly has evolved closely alongside the milkweed, a toxic plant named for the sticky white substance emitted when its leaves are damaged, and how this inextricable and intimate relationship has been like an arms race over the millennia, a battle of exploitation and defense between two fascinating species. Lavishly illustrated with more than eighty color photos and images, *Monarchs and Milkweed* takes readers on an unforgettable exploration of one of nature's most important and sophisticated evolutionary relationships.

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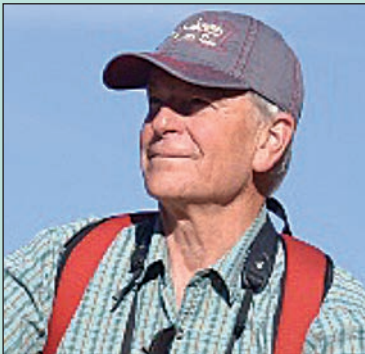
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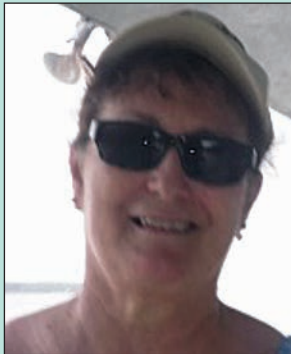
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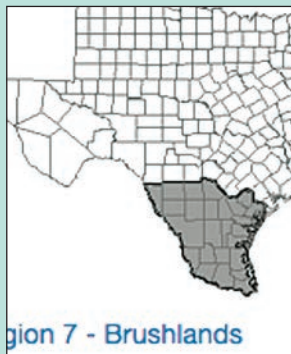
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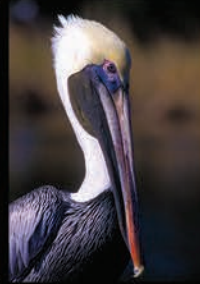
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White-crowned Pigeon photographed on the Florida Keys during a TOS Florida Tour.

Photo Jim Halley

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