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TEXAS Birds ANNUAL

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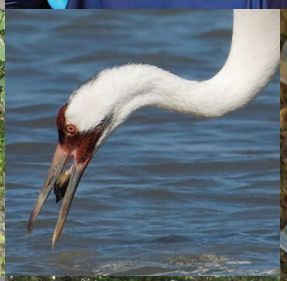

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TEXAS Birds
ANNUAL

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Front Cover: Plain Chachalaca (*Ortalis vetula*). Art by Lynn Delvin

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SHELTER IN PLACE AND WATCH THE BIRDS!

From the New York Times….

"Bird-watching is not always exhilarating—in fact, it can be largely mundane, a hobby of quiet precision and focus. Even common birds can sometimes be challenging to identify, especially for novices like me. (The sometimes subtle differences, for example, between female house sparrows and female house finches can still trip me up.) But the practice has sharpened my attention: Noticing compelling detail has become a feature of my daily life, even more so since I've begun to shelter in place. When I look out my window now, I notice details I wouldn't have before, like how herculean people seem, with looks of fixed determination as they haul home way more groceries than they'd normally carry, or how people walking their dogs will almost always slouch a little resignedly when they pause to let their dogs sniff around in something. Yesterday I was staring blankly out the window when I noticed the way the tops of the trees move in the wind looks almost as if they're silently gesturing to one another.

Birds have taught me to love what is small, what is delicate, what is elusive. I've learned that a truth is many details comprising what seems like a unified whole, and I'm more inclined now to immerse myself in the details for their own sake. In looking at common birds in my neighborhood, there's a refreshing variety in their sameness, a consistent challenge to discern what seems too normal to even notice after so many times noticing. Spotting rare and beautiful birds is thrilling, much like seeing elephant seals or whales. Yet common birds and their details can feel hard to see, because they're everywhere. Seeking these birds compels you to plumb your memory, to refine the past, to sift small details in service of the present. And those details anchor you, precluding temptations toward self-absorption, self-importance. Bird-watching, in short, is about taking in the most in the shortest span of time.

I've adapted my bird-watching practices too. I keep binoculars on the table of the front room of my third-floor apartment. Throughout my remote workday, I hear birds singing and calling, and I'll walk over to the windows to take a closer look. Recently, at dusk, a bird landed on a branch right outside one of the windows, peering in. It was hard to identify in the waning light, but it happened to just be a robin. Yet it stood there so still, so severe seeming, with its chest puffed out. It looked like a guardian of something vital in the gathering dark."

How Bird-Watching Prepared Me for Sheltering in Place. By Nicholas Cannariato https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/22/magazine/bird-watching-coronavirus.html

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.....

I was reading some TOS information this morning and came across our mission statement:

To promote discovery and dissemination of knowledge of birds; to encourage specifically the observation, study and conservation of birds in Texas; to encourage the formation of local birding clubs; and to stimulate cooperation among professional Ornithologists.

A lot of mission-oriented work has taken place in the last 50+ years TOS has been around. Local birding groups are established across the state, annual meetings and weekenders are well attended, a number of publications are produced, we sponsor the Texas Birds Records Committee, we fund bird research projects, support young birders in the Great Texas Birding Classic and we have multiple bird sanctuaries along the mid and upper coasts. TOS continues to be involved in conservation advocacy as well. It's great work!

I am lucky that boards before me have worked diligently improving our organization through improvements to our bylaws, articles of incorporation, improved accounting practices and systems, created strong committees to deal with sanctuaries, investments, meetings and trips and countless other tasks that improve this organization. They have left us with a system and a current Board that is able to transition to different meeting formats and open dialogues about how we will operate during this current pandemic.

Like so many groups during this challenging time, committees and boards are meeting remotely through conference calls and Zoom. This past spring, we made the decision to cancel the Spring Meeting in order to safeguard the health of all involved in working at and attending such a function. While the board has discussed the winter meeting, the Program Meeting Committee will be meeting soon to discuss the TOS Winter Meeting in these challenging times.

Spring migration was a very different experience for me this year—staying put and not seeing many people who I usually see during the migration season. But I definitely was more in touch with neighborhood birds and witnessed waves of fledglings throughout the season—the most recent being Great Crested Flycatchers and Western Kingbirds, whose loud calls and shiny yellow fronts were seen and heard throughout the neighborhood all this week.

I hope that everyone stays healthy and safe as we all navigate the challenges we are faced with. I look forward to the day when we can resume our lives and look forward to catching up with everyone once it is deemed safe to gather in groups. Until that time, we will have to be creative in our approaches to sharing information about birds and birding with each other.

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"Bird watching is now North America's second most popular outdoor activity (second only to gardening)." — Bernd Brunner

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THREE BIG DAYS—A TEXAS PHOTOGRAPHER AT HOOKS WOODS, HIGH ISLAND

Text and Photos by Dennis Moncla

Hooks Woods in High Island on the Bolivar Peninsula has always been popular with birders in southeast Texas, and it's certainly one of my favorite spots to photograph birds. There are many good birding spots in High Island, but something always draws me back to Hooks Woods.

Let me digress a little and tell you about myself. I am an experienced photographer, and I live in Beaumont about 45 miles away from High Island. I am a board member of the Beaumont Camera Club. Bird photography is my strongest passion, although I do love all types of photography.

In the springtime High Island is a mecca for me. The diversity of the unique migratory birds stopping in for a respite is amazing to see. Capturing their images is even more so. For years--and to the chagrin of my wife--I have upgraded and fine-tuned my equipment to get that one "all perfect" bird shot. I'll probably never be completely satisfied with my equipment, nor in thinking that I got that perfect bird image, but that doesn't keep me from trying!

As this Covid 19 epidemic has forced so many birders to stay at home, and with so many locations closed (including my own business in Beaumont), I finally found time to do what I've always wanted to do. This April I went to High Island with tripod and chair in hand to set up photographing the birds of Hooks Woods for three straight afternoons. I know weather conditions are an important factor at migration time, so I picked a Monday through Wednesday when there would be a north breeze blowing and the temperatures would be hovering in the low 70's. In other words, *perfection*. There is a newly installed water feature at Hooks Woods, so this was my target-- and what a wonderful feature it is. I knew as soon as I saw it on my first scouting trip earlier that

One of the most sought-after birds by many! The Painted Bunting.

Maybe the second most sought after buntings is the Indigo Bunting.

month that it would be awesome. It did not disappoint.

Monday was a good day and I saw many birds. I had my Sony A7iii and my 600mm lens in tow. The photo opportunities of the new water feature were as good as I had anticipated. It consists of a small rock waterfall and a stream that flows into a little pond and is flanked by large pieces of driftwood. I left that first evening happy and thinking "that was the best photographic day I've ever had in Hooks Woods".

Tuesday rolled around, and again I set up my tripod and chair on the west side of the water feature and waited. I was so surprised that even more birds flew in than the

The always beautiful Orchard Oriole.

Most probably the easiest bird to identify in the country. The Northern Cardinal

Quite possibly the mascot of Hooks Woods. The Hooded Warbler.

The not so blue Blue-winged Warbler.

Simply Stunning is The Kentucky Warbler.

The warbler that probably hates his name. The Worm-eating Warbler.

Such unique coloration on this Chestnut-sided Warbler.

I would have named him "Masked". The Common Yellowthroat.

Someone was not being very creative when they named this Black-and-white Warbler but look at those markings!

Not the fanciest of the Warblers but still cute! The Tennessee Warbler.

Beautiful in its simplicity is the Swanson's Thrush.

Does he like to talk a lot? The very aptly named Yellow-breasted Chat.

The ever so quick Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

An adult female Summer Tanager.

One of my personal favorite birds! The White-eyed Vireo.

The formal looking Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

The coloration might not be exciting, but his markings are great. The Carolina Wren.

Variations on monochrome on this Gray Catbird.

day before. It was a great day. First came the Warblers, then the Buntings and Vireos. I was enjoying the weather and scenery while the birds were enjoying the water feature. As evening fell, I left with the goal to come back for my third day thinking "It will never be better than today".

Wednesday came, and I set up again on the western side of the feature, and within minutes after sitting in my chair, the birds started a parade. I could not believe what I was being blessed with seeing--it was as if the birds sent invitations to their friends about the great new little stream and pond. One by one, the birds took turns setting up on the branches of the stump and driftwood nearby. They would carefully check their surroundings, then swoop in for a quick bath or to forage the grounds next to the stream. All the while my camera's shutter was click, click, clicking away. Grosbeaks, Chats, Tanagers and Orioles to name a few came by and paid a visit

The birds I was able to identify are as follows, and in no specific order: Blue-winged Warbler, Worm- eating Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Tennessee Warbler, Summer Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Orchard Oriole, Gray Catbird, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Painted Bunting, Indigo Bunting, Black-chinned Hummingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Carolina Wren, Black-and-white Warbler and Northern Cardinal.

All in all, I chronicled 20 different species at the new water feature in my 3 day photographic survey. I am looking forward to the next chance I get to photograph at Hooks Woods--which will probably always be my favorite birdingspot.

If you'd like to see more of my Hooks Woods bird photos, head to my website and visit the Hooks Woods Survey gallery: https://www.monclaphotography.com/Natureimages/Hooks-Woods-Survey

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A TEXAS TRAVELOGUE

By Jack Daynes

PROLOGUE

The Texas adventure I dreamed about for years, began in California, but passed through Arizona and New Mexico before reaching the promised land. Preparations for my journey began in early February by researching destinations, reaching out to Texas birders, and acquiring books and maps. Finally, on Friday February 21, I hit the road. I made stops along the way at the Salton Sea, several places

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*). Because of water from the well and wind pump at the site of the old Sam Nail Ranch homestead, it is a superb place to meet a variety of birds.

in Arizona and I spent an interesting week in Las Cruces, New Mexico, splitting my time between birding and RV repairs, before crossing into Texas on March 3rd.

Perhaps some of you have heard, Texas is a *BIG* place! Even if you hurry, it takes a long time to get from any *Point A* to *Point B*. But I was *not* in a hurry. In 1968 and 1972, I passed through Texas on visits to Louisiana. On each of these trips, I treated Texas as a place to get through, rather than a place to enjoy. Not this trip I vowed. This time I planned to savor the journey and enjoy the gifts she might share with me. I chose two lane roads whenever I could and avoided freeways like a plague.

Big Bend was an attractive destination while I conceived of places I wanted to see. In researching potential stops on the journey, those most knowledgeable about Texas Birding insisted March was too early for a Big Bend tour, and that May and June would be better. Still I could not bring myself to pass by this iconic location without taking at least a quick peak before continuing south and east to the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

BIRD ADVENTURES IN BIG BEND

Friday was a long day driving from Las Cruces, New Mexico into West Texas, and ended when I reached Alpine, Texas early that evening. I spent the night parked behind Penny's Diner, a 24 hour cafe housed in a shiny chrome art-deco streetcar. I set my alarm for 6 a.m. and ate an early breakfast, then I headed south into Big Bend National Park and set my sights on the Sam Nail Ranch, one of the earliest homesteads in Big Bend. I reached my destination at about 9 a.m. and it didn't take long to meet birds. Curve-billed Thrashers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Rock Wrens found me before I reached the renown water source up the trail.

I can make myself *small* in the field by sitting on a folding stool that I carry in a pouch slung over my shoulder. By *small*, I mean unobtrusive. And if I sit quietly on my stool, with the camera mounted low on my tripod facing a scene where birds frequent, my presence doesn't prevent them from gathering, as it would if I stood over them at my full height.

I gathered my gear and set out along the trail to the water source feeding an old grove of pecans, where birds gathered to drink. A windmill, left over from the time when this was an active homestead, still drew water from below ground. When the wind blew hard enough to give the metal vanes a rapid spin, the pump would lift the water to the surface. When it did, it would send a few pints of clear water from the outflow pipe into small puddles that the birds exploited for bathing and quenching their thirst.

I only spent a couple of hours here, and met lots of local bird-life during my stay. Dozens of mockingbirds dominated the little theater where the water played out on the surface, and when they swarmed in, the other birds gave ground. Besides the Northern Mockingbirds, there were plenty of Northern Cardinals, Pyrrhuloxia and White-crowned Sparrows. During my vigil I also met a Hermit Thrush, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, a Spotted Towhee and a Lincoln's Sparrow.

Later I learned that because of Spring Break, all camping spaces in the park were occupied, and all national parks forbid roadside overnight camping. Eager to reach southern Texas, I was already on the fence about extending my visit another day, but these two setbacks made the decision for me. Most attractions offered by Big Bend required driving several hours to reach, and without the option of staying overnight inside the park, it would be impossible. I drove north out of the park to Marathon, Texas. During my drive I stopped at a roadside pullout marked *Exhibit*, and took a break from the road and fixed myself a meal. While there, I noticed sparrows (Black-throated) and gnatcatchers (both Black-tailed and Blue-gray) next to the

White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*). Opportunities for up-close and personal views of birds such as this sparrow were provided because of the working well and wind pump at the old Sam Nail Ranch in Big Bend, Texas.

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). Mockingbirds dominated the other drinkers at the old Sam Nail Ranch waterhole. When they would arrive by the dozens, all the other birds gave ground.

Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*). After spending most of the day in Big Bend National Park, I drove to Marathon Texas, where I discovered these Inca Doves at the Gage Gardens near the town center.

road, so I collected a few harshly lit, mid-day images. When sunlight is strong and directly overhead, shadows and highlights diminish the details of the subject. Highlights washout to bright blobs and shadows block up to black holes, sacrificing most of the subtle beauty one would like to capture. A high thin layer of clouds can act as a light diffuser, but there were no clouds this day.

When I got to Marathon later that day, the light was good, so I checked the resource literature I brought with me, and found a reference to nearby Gage Gardens. Soon I found a well manicured park close to the town center, with trees, lawns, water features and …. BIRD FEEDERS! Initially I walked through the park with only my binoculars, but when I found Inca Doves, I went back to the RV for my camera gear. This was my first encounter with Inca Doves and I overdid it by taking too many images, though I won't apologize for my enthusiasm. Besides these new friends, there were White-winged Doves, House Sparrows, House Finches, White-crowned Sparrows, Dark-eyed (Gray-headed) Juncos and Vermilion Flycatchers.

To my delight, I learned the Oasis Cafe in Marathon was open for breakfast on Sunday, so I found a spot to stay the night on the side of the road north of town, and worked on the images collected during this long and wonderful day. The price I paid for my enthusiasm during the day was the time I had to spend sorting through all the images separating the wheat from the chaff. But that's why I set out on this expedition, so for me, it's all good.

A WHIRLWIND TOUR OF DEL RIO, TEXAS

I pulled away from Marathon early Sunday morning and headed towards Del Rio, Texas on US-90 under gray and cloudy skies. The valley that nestles Marathon is wide and flat, with hardly a bump on the landscape for dozens of miles in all directions. A century

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*). I rode my bike in town along the San Felipe Creek to find these birds. A hiking and biking trail runs through town, following the creek through Del Rio.

and a half of grazing has taken its toll on this land. From my view on the road, it seems little native flora have survived the blades of progress here.

After 16 miles of driving I reached my first ridge and for the remainder of the day I crossed through rocky canyons. Even though the constant climbing and descents were killing my fuel economy, I could not help but enjoy the beauty of this area. I imagined what it would have been like to travel this land before the modern luxury of highways and internal combustion chariots. But the gray skies began delivering on their implied threat of rain, and my windshield wipers got a workout for the rest of the drive.

Langtry, Texas is the town where the infamous and colorful Judge Roy Bean settled and declared himself the "Law West of the Pecos". I stopped there to satisfy my curiosity about the town I'd heard stories about for so many years. I'd read of a fine cactus garden behind the visitor center, where interesting birds might be met, but the rain and wind changed my mind about walking into the garden with my camera gear. Instead I used the time to work on images from the Big Bend expedition and drain some of the droning highway noise from my head.

Pecos High Bridge. Despite the rain, I had to stop to take a few bad pictures of this amazing place. This bridge spans 2,180 feet, 321 feet above the river.

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*). I met these birds in Del Rio, close to the Rio Grande in thorny mesquite thickets just outside of the city limits along Duck Pond Road.

Before hitting the road again, I found a dirt road leading south to the Rio Grande and followed it into the canyon where the Eagle's Nest Creek converged with the grand river. There were several historical marker signs describing events that transpired here, including a world championship prize fight that Roy Bean organized in 1896 that took place on a sandbar on the Mexican side of the border to avoid the ban of prize fighting in Texas at the time.

I continued my drive, leaving Langtry behind. Further south the highway crossed the Pecos River on a bridge spanning 2180 feet, 321 feet above the river. Here the canyon was remarkably beautiful and despite the rain, I had to stop for pictures. While the scene was spectacular, I wished the dreary gray sky had been populated with puffy clouds and blue or better, sunrise skies. Master landscape photographers sometimes wait days or weeks to find the perfect moment for a picture. I did not have the luxury of time to capture such a moment, so I channeled Clark Griswold and continued my journey.

After arriving in Del Rio, I resupplied my groceries and continued working on my Big Bend story while listening to the continuing rain on the van the rest of the night. At breakfast, when the sky got brighter and I could see my surroundings better, I could tell it would be another gray day with threats of sprinkles.

One of my goals when I set out on this journey was to meet the Whooping Cranes that winter along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Until now, I'd been pointing myself towards the Lower Rio Grande Valley as my next destination and following that stay with a visit to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and the cranes. When I learned that the cranes might leave Texas and fly to Canada between mid-March and mid-April, I changed my plans and headed to Corpus Christi and the Central Gulf Coast of Texas before my visit to *The Valley*, as folks here like to call it.

The *Texas Birding Trails* maps I brought with me mentioned an RV park along my route that featured nature trails and birding,

so I left Del Rio with the Triple R RV Resort near Crystal City as my next destination.

AFTER 3 DAYS AT THE TRIPLE R

My stay in Crystal City provided a three day reprieve from the rigors of highway travel, and the Triple R RV Resort gave me some nice bird encounters. I missed meeting several of the shyer members of the bird community there, but that's how it goes sometimes when you're in a new 'hood. Folks here call this place "An Oasis on the Nueces", which is a catchy phrase, yet so true. With 109 RV sites spread out over a mile along the Nueces River, I never felt cramped by neighbors. I found the staff friendly and helpful, and the price ($28 per night) very reasonable.

Driving to the Triple R from Del Rio, I stopped to look for birds at several places along my route. I found a roadside picnic stop south of Quemado where, among other birds, I met my first Carolina Wren and my first White-eyed Vireo. I'm certain these birds are familiar to local birders, but I get a special feeling of excitement when meeting a bird for the first time. These wrens, with their inquisitive demeanor, brown tones and bold eye-line, look and behave remarkably like the Bewick's Wrens I know so well from my southern California yard, though there is a richness to their brown tones I've not seen in the Bewick's Wren. Listening to these birds however, I found them quite different from the Bewick's. Their songs lacked the complexity of the Bewick's Wren, but they more than made up for this with volume. I couldn't believe that such a small bird could have so loud a voice. Even in camp at the Triple R, birds hundreds of feet across the compound sounded as if they were only a few feet away.

During my stay in camp I captured images of Green Jays, Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, and Great Kiskadees, but I found these birds elusive and shy, making it difficult to capture clear, well lit images. But I still enjoyed the attempt, and looking back, the shots I got of a Ladder-backed Woodpecker on my first afternoon in camp were some of the most sat-

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*). Exploring camp on my bike and chasing birds at the Triple R RV Resort, I got to better know these wrens at the Nueces River near Crystal City Texas.

Great Kiskadee (*Pitangus sulphuratus*). My attempts to photograph Kiskadees was challenged by their love of perching in high places, against a bright sky. I welcomed the opportunity to capture this bird's image while it perched on a low branch. The Nueces River near Crystal City Texas.

isfying images from my time at the Triple R.

Struggling to decipher the songs and calls that I heard in southern Texas, I hoped to improve my skills in recognizing these vocalizations before I finish my visit to this amazing part of the world, with birds found nowhere else in the USA. Some calls, like the kiskadee, are distinct and easy to learn. The Golden-fronted Woodpeckers looked and sounded like their cousins the Gila Woodpeckers, which are so common in Arizona. Other singers left me scratching my head. I met my first Black-crested Titmouse in camp, another big voice in a small package.

I ended my time in Crystal City on Friday morning, and my RV carried me on the three hour drive to Corpus Christi. I stopped to stretch my legs in the desert ranch lands along the two-lane farm road I traveled, and I met my old friend the Bewick's Wren. Texas is one of the few places where the ranges of the Carolina Wren in the east and Bewick's Wren in the west overlap.

I reached Corpus Christi on Friday afternoon and spent the remainder of the day processing pictures and shaping stories of the prior days. Before paying my respects to Aransas NWR, I planned to explore nearby areas on Saturday, to survey the attractions between Corpus Christi and the Aransas National Wildlife Reserve. I considered spending a few days in a nearby RV park, but I didn't find a place I liked. Whooping Cranes were at the top of my wish-list to meet here, but I suspected there would be surprises for me (and I was right!). Already I was entertained by the dozens of Laughing Gulls in the Walmart parking lot where I spent Friday night. It was very windy there, but these slender-winged, tern-like gulls knew

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)**.**

how to take advantage and execute their aerial choreography.

The species I captured during this period were Carolina Wren, Eastern Fox Squirrel, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Red-eared Slider, Sandhill Crane, White-eyed Vireo, Black Phoebe, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Northern Cardinal, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-crested Titmouse, Green Jay, Turkey Vulture, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

MY FIRST DAY AT ARANSAS NWR

I spent most of Friday the thirteenth driving from Crystal City to Corpus Christi, Texas. Saturday and most of Sunday I hunkered down to process the images and spin the yarns from my stay at the Triple R. Sunday afternoon I drove the 83 miles north from Corpus Christi to the Visitor Center at Aransas, and I stopped on the way at Rockport, to visit the shore at Fulton Beach. I didn't know it at the time, but I would come back three days later to board the Skimmer, a first rate birding tour boat. It was late in the day when I arrived at Aransas NWR, and I opted for a Clark Griswold visit that afternoon and drove out to look for a place to get gas and stay for the night. I ended up in Victoria Texas, 50 miles away. The drive gave me a chance to see a little more of this part of Texas.

Sunday I got up early and returned to Aransas. I drove through the reserve on what is called the Two Way Road, stopping to investigate each side road and pullout I could. The road ended at "Big Tree", where an impressive tower has been erected that provides commanding views of the surrounding area, and where sometimes you can see Whooping Cranes, but this was not my day to have a good meeting with the cranes.

Near to the visitor center is a location called Heron Flats, where I spent most of my time while at Aransas. It is a short walk from the parking area to a raised platform with a view of a wide lush marsh that stretches out a half mile

straight out to the seaway, and as far as the eye could see up and down the coast of Black-Jack Peninsula, where the reserve is located.

Next to the trail from the parking area was a quiet pond. Besides the resident alligators here, I found coots, gallinules, grebes, and Green Herons. Each of these made for interesting subjects for my camera, but the Green Heron for me, was the most compelling and cooperative. Out on the marsh, mostly too distant for image captures, were hundreds of Blue-winged Teal. The dozens of Yellowlegs I saw were mostly "Greater", but I believe I saw one in the distance with a bill length equal to its head width (which would make it a "Lesser").

I saw the ducks were courting and I enjoyed watching as a single hen with four suitors in tow, flew in and landed in front of me. The four males were attending the hen's every move, and when she moved, so moved the drakes.

Herons of all kinds could be seen in the distance. I saw Great Blue, Little Blue, and Tricolored Herons. The egrets I could see were Great, Reddish, and Snowy. Perhaps the biggest treat for me was a pair of juvenile Roseate Spoonbills that wandered close enough for reasonable images.

About a mile to my left, as I gazed over the marsh, and standing taller than the ten or so Great Egrets in their company, were two taller white birds I knew to be Whooping Cranes. Try as I might, I could not "will them" to fly in my direction. Pictures would be useless from here. In 20 million pixels, I might claim "See those six pixels? Those are cranes!" <sigh>

I left Aransas late in the day and drove to Austwell, just outside the reserve and found free parking provided by the city. This put me close enough to the reserve that I could get an early start the next morning and try my luck again with the cranes. (Spoiler Alert: I did better!)

I met a few other species this day, but the creatures I photographed here were Common Gallinule, Green Heron, Black Vulture, Gadwall, Redhead, American Alligator, Pied-billed Grebe, Roseate Spoonbill, Northern Harrier, Blue-winged Teal, White Ibis, Greater Yellowlegs, Red-winged Blackbird, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, White-tailed Deer, Couch's Kingbird, Great Egret, Song Sparrow.

ARANSAS NWR DAY 2

"Wow" hardly seems sufficient to describe my morning! My stay in Austwell Sunday night was only 12 miles from Aransas NWR and I was able to achieve an early launch time. I arrived at the reserve as it was still dark. I parked by the Heron Flats Trail and walked out to the platform hoping to see the outline of tall white birds nearby. I saw none, so I walked back to the RV to take a nap.

When the day brightened up I walked out to the platform to capture some scenery images, and I saw cranes working the grassy marsh not far away. So I walked back to the RV and gathered my long lens gear and hiked out on the marsh trail to get as close as possible. I was lucky the birds were walking in my direction. The 460 foot gap (measured with Google Maps) between me and the cranes would have been better at the 100 feet I'd have liked, but it was a damn sight better than the one mile view I experienced Sunday.

The cranes weren't my only treat this morning. I met Tricolored, Great Blue, and Little Blue Herons. There was also a delightful moment when a flock of White Ibis flew low over me, allowing a series of image captures of the flock. I signed up on a boat tour for Tuesday morning. Several people I spoke with recommended the *Skimmer* and her captain Tommy Moore, so I drove at midday to Rockport Texas where I planned to spend the rest of the day resting and processing pictures. *(You'll learn later that the universe had other plans for me and my time.)*

The subjects I captured at the reserve on this morning were American Coot, Neotropic

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*). This flock of White Ibis put a smile on my face when they flew overhead and dropped into the marsh beyond my view.

Cormorant, Double-crested Cormorant, Dowitchers, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Osprey, Pied-billed Grebe, Royal Tern, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, White-tailed Deer, and Whooping Crane.

I drove to the city of Rockport after leaving Aransas Monday, and prepared for the boat ride I'd signed up for, which would launch from nearby Fulton Beach Tuesday morning. I ate a late breakfast at JJ's Cafe near the Walmart where I was planning to spend the night, but I wasn't getting good cell reception (hence my internet) so I started looking around for a different place to stay.

In exploring Rockport, I found a roadway next to Little Bay with a wide pullout that looked like a splendid place to stay for the evening. I thought I was done taking pictures this day, but laughing gulls who I'd seen all around the area were perched on a split rail fence and posing nicely. I hadn't captured images of these birds yet, and I had to stop and try. Then I noticed that the trees behind the fence we're full of Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets building nests atop a grove of oak trees. My choice was obvious! More pictures had to be taken.

While photographing the nesting herons and egrets, a young lady pulled up and set up her camera and tripod nearby, and started taking pictures of the same subjects that I was focusing on. We had a conversation about our cameras and later she was able to tell me the story of the land where the rookery is. As she explained, the property was once owned by her grandfather and was handed down through several generations since he passed. Eventually it got sold to the city of Rockport and they made it into a reserve. This outcome apparently would have pleased her grandfather, as she explained, he was a very conservation oriented person. The young lady was Cissy Beasley.

ARANSAS BY SEA

I arrived at 215 North Fulton Beach Road in Fulton, Texas at 8:45am. Our departure aboard the Skimmer was scheduled for 9:30am, so I had some time to assemble

my gear and wander the wharf looking for interesting subjects. It didn't take long before I found Purple Martins gathering atop a tall spire on one boat tied to the docks. The pictures I took were dark colored birds silhouetted against a bright gray sky, and not the most ideal conditions for image captures, but I had fun with them anyway. Later, a close encounter with a Great Blue Heron walking by was nice. Ruddy Turnstones foraged along the sea washed concrete at the docks, and a Lesser Scaup hen floated in close to the turnstones looking for foraging opportunities. I hadn't yet boarded the Skimmer and already it was a wonderful day.

We launched on time with 16 passengers, or about half capacity. Fewer folks on board held the promise that everyone could have excellent views from the deck. We sailed about seven miles to reach Blackjack Peninsula, where Aransas National Wildlife Refuge hosts the winter home for all the wild Whooping Cranes that breed in Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada.

When summer ends, and the newborn birds can fly, the parents lead their families south 2600 miles to the Central Texas Gulf Coast at Aransas NWR. Crane successes have been connected to the abundance of Blue Crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*), which do well when there is ample fresh water supplied from local rivers. After feeding all winter on invertebrates and small fish, and spring arrives, the birds migrate back to Canada to begin the cycle again. The crane population crashed in the early 1940s to an all-time low of 15 birds. Today there are over 500 birds. This is still a far cry from the historical estimates of 10,000+ birds before Europeans arrived in North America.

We got under way and travelled nine miles over Aransas Bay, where we approached Blackjack Peninsula. We met terns, gulls and ducks on our crossing, but our hearts were set on cranes. For the next six miles, Captain Tommy Moore did his best to find cranes that weren't a quarter mile away, but we couldn't get the intimate encounters we'd hoped for. Finally we

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*). With a Coyote spotted nearby, this bird puts the neighborhood on notice.

turned back towards Rockport and the captain asked us all to use our powers to *will up* some cranes for the ride back. Something must have worked, because we found cranes much closer on our return trip. Two episodes were especially interesting. First while we were getting our first good views of the cranes, a coyote walked between us and the cranes, causing the nearest bird to sound its "whooping" alarm call. The coyote knew better than to approach the great birds, but the big crane put the entire neighborhood on notice anyway.

Our second close encounter was highlighted when one crane caught a Blue Crab and its companion (not likely its mate) showed too much interest in the prize. The owner of the crab postured and stomped its feet in the shallow water, splashing water ten feet in the air. It was quite a show. Once the crab meal was finally consumed, the two birds wandered off, pals once again.

When we returned to port and disembarked, we said our goodbyes to our skipper and the good ship Skimmer. I set my sights on finding a place to hunker down and resume processing the large inventory of images I'd been collecting. As you will soon learn, I wasn't done adding images to my collection this day. *(Are you sensing a pattern here?)*

The subjects I met this day were American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Brown Pelican, Bufflehead, Coyote, Crested Caracara, Double-crested Cormorant, Dowitcher Species, Forster's Tern, Great Blue Heron, Herring Gull, Laughing Gull, Lesser Scaup, Long-billed Curlew, Neotropic Cormorant, Purple Martin, Royal Tern, Ruddy Turnstone, Snowy Egret, Turkey Vulture, Whooping Crane, and Willet.

2020-03-17 TUESDAY AFTER THE BOAT RIDE

After an exciting morning full of highlights at Aransas NWR, I said my goodbyes to the Skimmer and her crew in Fulton Beach. I expected to settle in somewhere nearby and get down to processing my ever-growing image collection, and prepare them for sharing on my website. I found a "quiet" place in Rockport next to Little Bay and parked. As luck would have it, there was a gated pier near my chosen sanctuary and some interesting birds both on the dock and on the nearby water. *What harm could there be in taking a few more photos?* I opened the side door of the van, sat in the doorway and started taking pictures. An hour and a half passed and over 1000 times I pressed the shutter. I just couldn't stop myself while the light held and the subjects posed.

As I began photographing the pelicans, cormorants and gulls on the water, and the turnstones on the dock, I noticed that tall waders were fishing from a point on the shore a few yards to my left. There were some tense moments on the beach when more than one large bird landed near another one, and conflicts erupted. It seemed to me the Snowy Egret was especially intolerant of the Tricolored Heron who wanted a place to try his fishing skills. Eventually everyone got a turn.

The Texas wind raised a lot of chop on the water, and the Black Skimmers weren't able

American Oystercatcher (Haematopus palliatus). Oystercatcher on the oyster shoal. My third day of exploration of Aransas NWR was a memorable one. I boarded the tour boat the "Skimmer" and got schooled by Captian Tommy Moore on a three plus hour cruise of the back-bays and waterways beyond the view of the public from the tour roads on the reserve.

Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*). I met these gulls almost everywhere I visited in this region, but here in Rockport Texas they were especially fun to watch.

to glide over a glassy surface, executing those long graceful passes with their lower mandible slicing the surface. Yet they still worked through the choppy water, even if it meant crashing into a wave once in a while. Undeterred when a crash plucked them from their aerial regimen, they'd rise again and resume their patrol.

Tri-colored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*). This large bird was probably nesting only a short distance from this beach, at the Rockport Rookery. If so, the spoils of its foraging would be shared with its mate and progeny.

The birds I captured this late afternoon were American White Pelican, Black Skimmer, Double-crested Cormorant, Laughing Gull, Redhead, Ruddy Turnstone, Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, and Willet.

2020-03-19 ADIOS CORPUS CHRISTI

By Thursday I knew it was time to explore my way south into the Lower Rio Grande Valley. I'd had three days of explorations into Aransas NWR, and a couple of delightful afternoons in Rockport. The Central Texas Coast had been generous with her gifts, but every knowledgeable person I'd communicated with prior to embarking on this expedition told me that *The Valley* was the place to be if I wanted to see the best birding that Texas offers. So I set out for my trip south.

I'd been dry-camping in the RV and I needed groceries, fuel, propane, and freshwater. I also needed to clear my holding tanks. For this last step I found the Greyhound RV Park in Corpus Christi which provided me with the facilities to execute this final stage of preparation. When I pulled into the park I was intrigued as I saw dozens of Monk Parakeets grazing on a patch of lawn near the driveway. Monk Parakeets are native to South America, but were exported by the pet trade, and with escapes and releases here, they've managed to survive, and even thrive in a number of locations in the USA.

By the time I finished my RV chores these birds were no longer grazing in the grass. However, I could hear them in a nearby tree, so I got permission to get my camera gear out and chase them. At first I could only glimpse them on their high, shady perches, but eventually they came out into better views. As I studied them, I could see they were cutting new growth branches, perhaps ¼" in diameter and 12" to 18" long, then carrying them to fan palm trees across the road. I captured images as best I could when the birds came from behind the veil of leaves and branches, then I walked across the road to meet them under their nest trees. Curiosity brought them out to investigate me and I was able to catch them in a better light.

I later learned that Monk Parakeets are the only parrot to build communal stick nests, which allows these descendants of escaped pets to survive cold climates as far north as New York. By crowding their nest spaces into compact areas and close to each other, it is believed they can trap heat and stay warm even in cold winters.

When I said goodbye to the parakeets, I began my trek south with Brownsville and South Padre in my sights. Things changed rapidly after I departed from Corpus Christi, when COVID-19 measures became more restrictive. South Padre Island was no longer considered an option for my explorations, so I slogged my way south, with Brownsville as my target destination. Not being in a mad rush to get

Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*). I usually see Black Skimmers performing the aereal skills on smooth glassy water, because wavy, choppy water can be hazerdous. This day there were crashes.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). The Turnstones I met at Little Bay In Rockport seemed comfortable in my presence and freely foraged in close proximity to me.

Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*). Boistrous and always active, this mob was a lot of fun to photograph.

anywhere, I stopped at a couple of destinations on my drive south. *(Stay tuned neighbors!)*

2020-03-20 EXPLORING LAGUNA ATASCOSA

After I left Corpus Christi, the measures against the COVID-19 outbreak began tightening. Restaurants were only allowed to seat a limited number of customers and grocers were limiting the amount of products like milk a customer could buy. I'd called a couple or restaurants on South Padre Island before leaving Corpus Christi and learned

Monk Parakeet *(Myiopsitta monachus).* This bird has nearly finished chewing through the branch near his foot. These birds are the only parrot to build communal stick nests. I watched them collecting small branches and carrying them to the palm trees they use for nesting.

they were still doing business, but were on alert that stricter guidelines may be forthcoming. I wasn't sure where I would land, but I started having issues with my refrigerator and to get a mobile service to work on it, I needed to be in an RV Park. I looked online at several parks, without deciding on any one in particular, but Brownsville seemed to me where I wanted to end up. If there were sights to see between Corpus Christi and Brownsville, I wanted to take those in as I travelled south.

I drove south on US-77 and by the time I reached Kingsville I was ready to take a break. I spent the night in a Walmart parking lot, then resumed my journey early Friday morning. Before I made it very far down the road on this drive I met Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and a Cassin's Sparrow on a roadside fence north of Sarita. Just north of Harlingen, I headed east towards Rio Hondo. South Padre was still on my mind, but with the uncertainty surrounding that destination, the lure of Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge entered my consciousness. This refuge was on the route I was taking towards South Padre anyway, so I made the wise choice to make the turn into the reserve and explorer.

The three mile road entering the reserve was designed for 15 mile per hour travel. Regularly spaced speed bumps provided incentive for slow traveling. There weren't very many other vehicles on this road, so I was free to stop and listen while driving into the reserve. When I met my very first Altamira Oriole I knew I'd made the right decision, but that would not be the first meeting of a new species this afternoon. Before the day was done, I'd had first meetings with the Plain Chachalaca, and Long-billed Thrashers.

I got to better know the Crested Caracara when I found one perched near the road, and whose focus was not on me, but on something down the road ahead of me. I set my camera on a bean bag over the driver's window and began capturing portrait shots. I could see the bird was studying another vehicle up ahead, and showed increasing nervousness the nearer they approached, and when it finally took to the air, I was ready. I captured several good frames when it launched.

The other creatures I photographed here were Greater Roadrunner, Green Jay, Harris's Hawk, Killdeer, Northern Mockingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Tricolored Heron, Turkey Vulture, Verdin, Caspian Tern, White-eyed Vireo and White Ibis. As a bonus, I got to watch a mini drama play out when the roadrunner and a Mexican Ground Squirrel played a cat and mouse game near the visitor center parking.

EPILOGUE

I had to curtail my plans for bird explorations in Texas because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. I found a place in

Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*). This bird has harvested the branch and begins his journey back to the nest tree.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*). At Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, the Scissor-Tailied Flycatchers. I met allowed me closer encounters than my previous meetings.

Altamira Oriole (*Icterus gularis*). Portrait. While driving into the refuge on the three mile road to the visitor center, I met for the first time, the Altamira Oriole.

Crested Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*). Until this meeting, I'd been frustrated trying to capture images of Caracaras. This bird posed for me until another vehicle approached when it launched into flight, at the Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

Brownsville to lay low for a while. Managers of birding's crown jewel destinations in the region had closed off access as a measure to contain the spread of this evil virus. It seemed such a shame that in the peak time of migration, the opportunity to witness these spectacles was denied us. But putting things in perspective, lives were at stake. At that point in time we weren't sure how bad things would get. The rule of caution seemed the best course to follow in this crisis.

Texas provided me with many gifts, and for that I am grateful. I am thankful for the whistling night song of the Common Pauraque, the antics of Laughing Gulls, those Kiskadee calls, the whooping of her cranes, the colorful and comedic Green Jays, the grace and beauty of her tall waders, the surprising loud calls of her wrens and titmice, and so much more. The people I've met here have raised my spirits, as have the Western and Central Texas landscapes. Her wetlands, her windswept oaks, her tangled and thorny thickets sheltering a richness of wildlife; all these have amazed and inspired me. Circumstances may have prevented me from all the meetings I'd hoped for, but I am looking forward to visiting again, when unencumbered by the restrictions imposed by a global pandemic.

Jack Daynes
E-mail: JackDaynes@gmail.com

Green Jay (*Cyanocorax yncas*). Green Jays, until this meeting, had teased me with distant and poorly lit images. This group at Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge on the South Texas Coast was more cooperative.

LAREDO CELEBRATES 8TH ANNUAL BIRDS OF THE BRUSH ART CONTEST

Congratulations to all of the winners in our 8th *Birds of the Brush* art contest, a feature of the 8th Laredo Birding Festival. We had more than 300 pieces in 6 categories + photography submitted by students, amateurs and professionals.

BEST OF SHOW: Leticia Reyes (Gen. Pub.—Amateur)

ELEMENTARY: Janai Salazar (1st), Sasha Bernal De Leon (2nd), Emiliano Rodriguez (3rd), Danielle Lara and Ali Cardenas (Hon. Mention)

MIDDLE: Ruby Dominguez (1st), Carolina Puig (2nd), Natalie Gonzalez (3rd), Alexandra Arriaga and Marielle Alvarado Escobedo (Hon. Mention)

HIGH: Devanie Contreras (1st), Karen Zapata (2nd), Abraham Moreno (3rd), Valerie Guajardo and Izabella Salinas (Hon. Mention)

COLLEGE: Catalina Berry (1st), Gabriela Guerrero (2nd), Melissa Garza (3rd)

GEN PUBLIC–AMATEUR: Gina Olivares (1st), Patricia Najera y Valdes (2nd), Melissa Rendon (3rd), Desiree Mejia and Bianca Pena (Hon. Mention).

GEN PUBLIC– PROFESSIONAL: Nancy Poinsot (1st), Paty Orduna (2nd), Ana Torres (3rd), Laura Lynn Johnson and Alvaro Cortez Rosales (Hon. Mention).

Thank you to our judges: Janet Krueger, Tony Briones, Raul de Laredo, Francisco Ortega and Janet Miller!

Thank you to all of the participants, their art instructors, and their families and loved ones for supporting their work and talent.

Thank you to the *Laredo Job Corps Center Culinary Arts program* for catering the event.

Thank you to our sponsors.

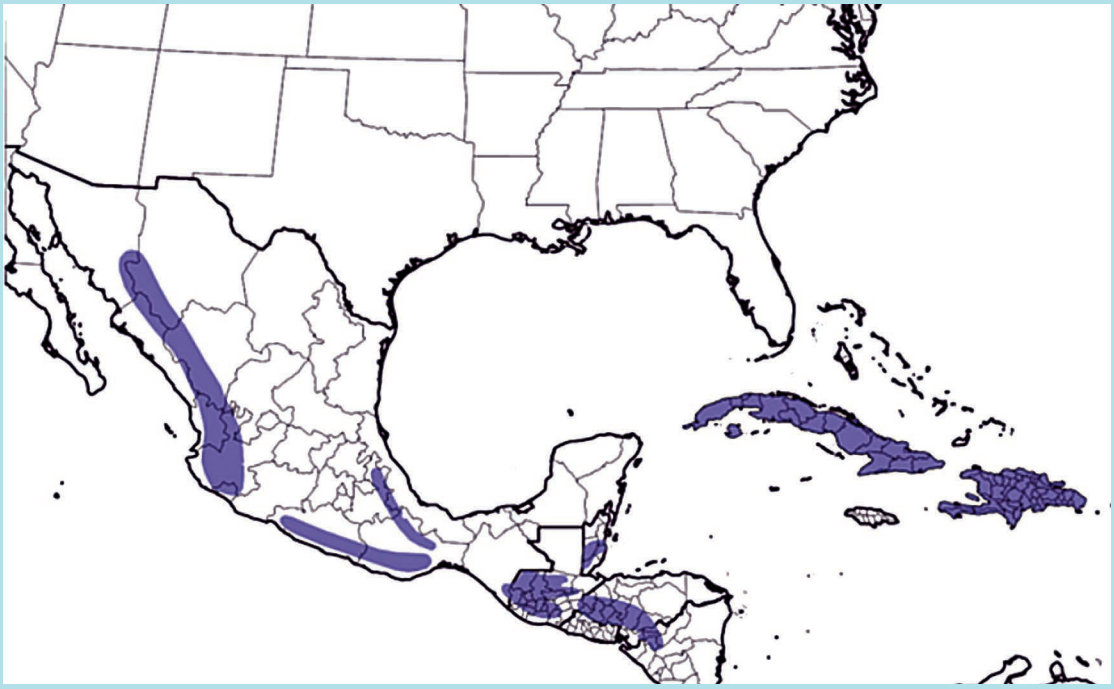
Thank you to CM Mercurio Martinez III for his opening remarks and city proclamation.

And last but not least, a HUGE TY to Coco Rosie and her hard-working staff at the *Laredo Center for the Arts* for always being such gracious and excellent hosts.

SPECIES PROFILE.....
STYGIAN OWL

A Stygian Owl *Asio stygius* has not been recorded in Texas since December of 1996[1] but this Mexico and Central American owl has been recorded in Gómez Farías, Tamaulipas, Mexico as recently as July of 2019. Gómez Farías is 265 miles south of the Texas border so it's no wonder that they seldom show up in Texas. Here's what veteran birder John Arvin said about our last sighting in 1996.

Stygian Owl. Photographed in Belize, Central America by Roni Martinez.



Normal Range of Stygian Owl in Mexico and Central America.
From https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/styowl1/cur/introduction.

"Congratulations on a truly outstanding record. Stygian Owl is a species that no one would have predicted would ever occur in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Chisos Mts. of Big Bend would have been a much more likely site. You are correct in your assumption that Stygian Owl is very poorly known in life. I am familiar with most of the ornithological literature from Mexico south (I am almost an exclusively "south of the border" birder, except for southern Texas of course), and there is little besides the (known) distributional records in the various regional works. As far as I know there are no papers dealing exclusively with any aspect of Stygian Owl biology.

The species has a huge, if seemingly discontinuous, range from north central Mexico to northern Argentina. Across this vast area the bird occurs in a great variety of habitats and elevations. In Mexico it seems to be primarily a montane forest species except for a population of unknown size on Cozumel Island off the Yucatan Peninsula. This population is probably of Greater Antillian affinities as are a number of other Cozumel species that are found only there in Mexico (Stripe-headed Tanager, the local endemic race of Bananaquit, Smooth-billed Ani, Caribbean Elaenia, Caribbean Dove, etc.). David Wolf, a friend and former associate, found a recently dead specimen there back in the early 80's and it has been seen there since by others (but not by me although I have searched for it at night there on several occasions). I can find out what race the specimen represents if it has been so identified.

For what it is worth (probably not much given the very low density in which the species seems to occur throughout its range) the closest point Stygian Owl occurs to Texas is southwestern Chihuahua (Barrance de Cobre area). Here as elsewhere in Mexico the habitat is mountain pine, oak, and fir forest. The range of the species in Mexico north of the isthmus is probably continuous from southern Chihuahua south in the Sierra Madre Occidental to the region where the two chains of the Sierra Madre essentially join in the transverse volcanic range south of Mexico City. The disjunct range shown by Howell

and Webb in western Veracruz is where the Sierra Madre Oriental joins the transverse range. The range is probably continuous across the latter range. There is no evidence that Stygian Owl occurs northward in the Sierra Madre Oriental, which lies adjacent to the Texas border, except the verbal comment of Frank Harrison, founder of Rancho del Cielo (presently a biological station) in the humid cloud forest in southwestern Tamaulipas that there was a "big black owl" there that he was never able to collect. This area is still extensively forested and is very rugged and inaccessible so a cryptic species like Stygian Owl could easily escape detection by the few ornithologists who have collected in the area. I have spent a great deal of time there myself without any hint of the species[1].

The vast range of Stygian Owl, including several of the Greater Antilles (mainly Cuba and Hispanola), indicates that it is an exceptionally good disperser. Away from Mexico it is found in a great variety of habitats, from humid montane forest in the Andes to the hot, semiarid scrub of the Chaco (very like the brushlands of South Texas) in Paraguay and northern Argentina. I have seen it in tropical dry gallery forest in the low lying llanos of Venezuela (a new locality for it just 4 years ago). According to Sick it also occurs in Amazonian rainforest in Brazil. This seems not to be the case in western Amazonia (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia) where I have spent much time and which is perhaps better known than much of South America.

I have mostly seen the bird in eastern Sinaloa/western Durango. I did a number of trips to the area in the first half of the 80's and we always made a major effort to see Stygian Owl as it was one of the few more or less reliable sites for it. I made a few observations that give tiny glimpses into its natural history. For one thing it seems to prey largely on flying prey. We first found Stygian Owls when one flew in in response to me playing a tape of Whiskered Owl in an effort to see that species. As this happened more than once it seems that the Stygian was attracted to the call of a smaller owl to prey on it. Hilty and Brown (citing Carlos Lehmann) report a remarkable 8 collected in the main plaza of Popayan, Colombia, as they flew in to feed on roosting Eared Doves. Popayan is at the head of the Cauca valley between the central and the western Andes. A native collector in Chihuahua noted "persigue murcielagos" (catches bats), which requires quite a bit of aerial dexterity.

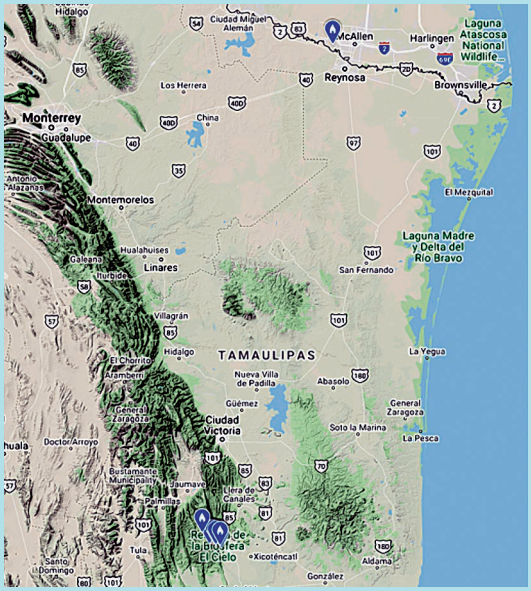
Another habit we noted (after we were able to tape record its voice-there was no tape at the time) was a loud, sharp crack like a .22 shot just overhead when the bird flew in in response to playback. Apparently the birds make this noise by bring the wing tips sharply together on the downstroke. This noise was heard virtually every time we tried to call the owls in over a period of several years.

I know little about the geographic variation in Stygian Owl. None of the sources I have consulted give any criteria for separating the species racially, and I don't expect that any geographical variation would be detectable from photos regardless of how good. De Schauensee doesn't give any racial variation information for the South American races which I take to mean that there isn't any detectable in the field. I do know that the race in Sinaloa/Durango/Chihuahua is *lambi* and that from southern Mexico south through northern Central America, including those from the "mountain pine ridge" (not really mountainous) of Belize where we have been finding them at Hidden Valley for a few years, and in the Andes at least in Colombia (all the Andes?) are *robustus*. I would expect the lowland population in South America to be racially distinct from the Andean one and the Antilles to have endemic races on the various islands, but this is just guessing."

It may be doubtful that we'll see another

[1]First record article https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/nab/v051n05/p00950-p00952.pdf.

Stygian Owl anytime soon in Texas but considering that the Ruby-throated Hummingbird during migration, embarks on a nonstop 900-mile journey across the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean from Panama or Mexico to the eastern United States anything is possible!



Ebird includes several records, with photos, of Stygian Owls in El Cielo Biosphere Reserve, Gómez Farías, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

Originally tentatively ID'd as a "weird" Long-eared Owl. Later determined to be Stygian Owl
Photo Mel Cooksey 9 December 1994 Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park (Mission).

MIGRANT AND RESIDENT LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE HABITAT AFFILIATIONS IN TEXAS

By Susan Heath[1] and Jennifer Wilson[2]

The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) and the Texas Midcoast National Wildlife Refuge Complex have initiated a project on the upper Texas coast to determine the difference in habitat usage by resident and migrant Loggerhead Shrikes. Although Loggerhead Shrikes are still common in Texas, this species epitomizes the dire conservation status of many grassland bird species as it has undergone one of the most persistent and drastic population declines of any North American passerine. Over the life of the Breeding Bird Survey, Loggerhead Shrike populations have declined 79% and thus it is listed as endangered, threatened or as a species of concern across a large portion of its range. This decline is largely attributed to habitat degradation and loss as shrikes

Bob Whitmarsh and Jennifer Wilson scanning for shrikes.
Photo by Paula Hanson

[1] Gulf Coast Bird Observatory
[2] Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Kaitie Braddock with a banded shrike.
Photo by Susan Heath

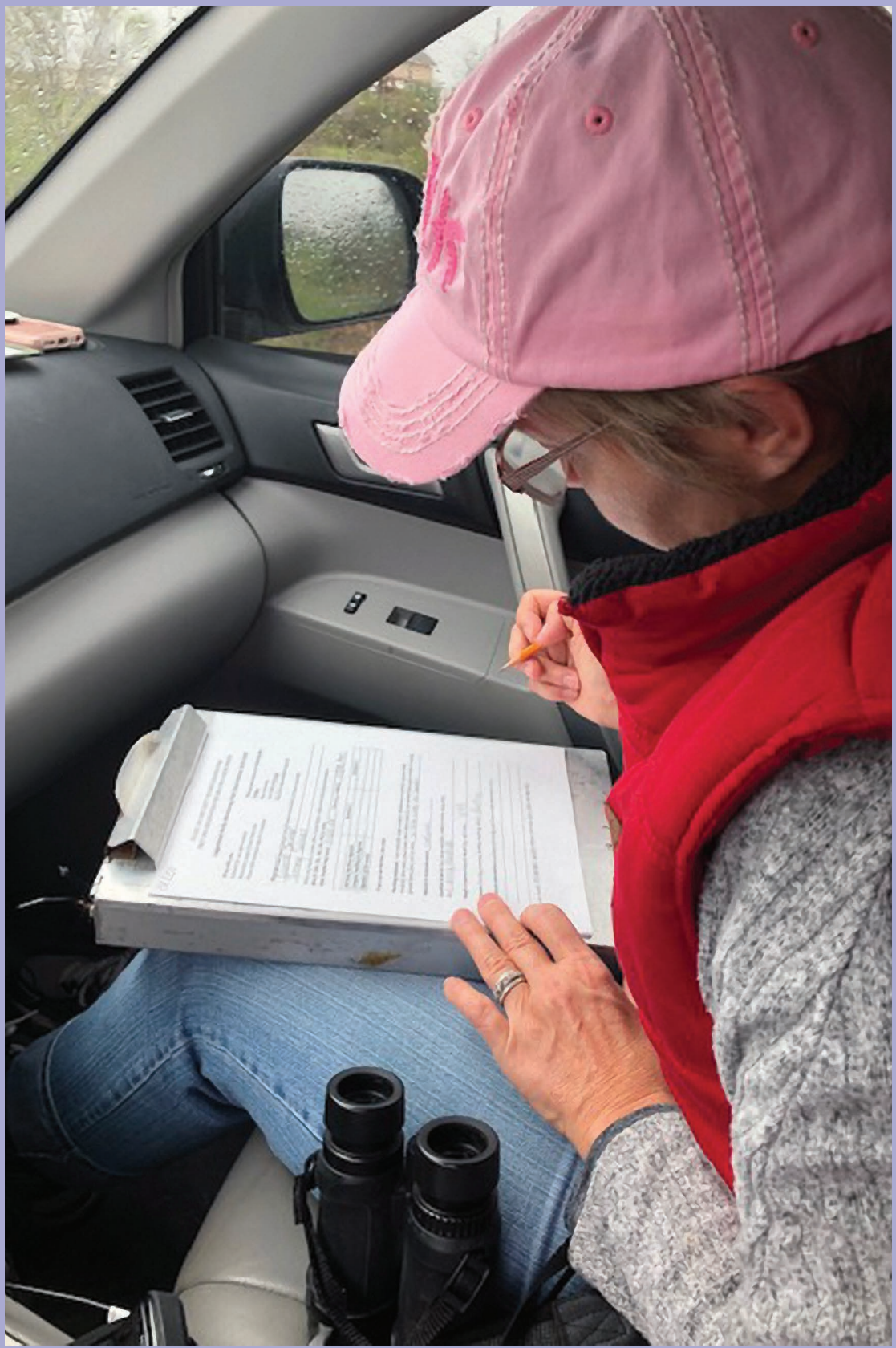
prefer open country with scattered bushes. Much of this has been transformed into large monocultures of alfalfa and corn, and the use of pesticides in agriculture has been linked to the decline.

This species has both migratory and non-migratory (resident) populations with the wintering grounds of migratory populations encompassed almost entirely within the range of the resident populations. Some studies have indicated that constraints associated with winter habitat are limiting the migratory populations of this species. The Texas Gulf coastal prairie contains both migrant and resi-

A Loggerhead Shrike with a transmitter at Sargent Beach.
Photo by Susan Heath

dent shrikes during the non-breeding season from November through February. This leads to the question of how migratory and resident populations coexist during the winter here in Texas. Some feel that residents out compete migrants due to a competitive advantage from prior occupancy, site-tenacity, and familiarity with the area thus relegating the migrants to lesser quality habitat and studies have demonstrated that poor winter habitat quality affects breeding success in the following spring. Others have suggested that there are differing requirements between migrant and resident shrikes which alleviates competition for wintering territories. Along the Gulf coast relatively little is known about the population dynamics of migrant versus resident shrikes due in part to the difficulties associated with distinguishing them from one another.

Techniques are now available using stable-hydrogen isotopes in combination with genetic markers found in feathers to identify migrant from resident shrikes which provides us with an opportunity to better understand the dynamics between migrant and resident shrikes wintering on the Gulf Coast. By collecting feathers to determine whether a shrike is a migrant or a resident and tracking the birds manually and through our Motus Network, we can determine winter habitat affiliations for individuals and obtain valuable information on differences in habitat quality for migrant and resident shrikes.



Luanne Salinas takes data on a shrike sighting.
Photo by Jimmy Salinas

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is an international collaborative research network coordinated by Bird Studies Canada that uses a coordinated automated radio telemetry array to track the movement and behavior of small birds and other organisms affixed with digitally-encoded radio transmitters (nanotags) that broadcast signals several times each minute. These signals are detected by automated radio telemetry stations that scan for signals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. When results from many stations are combined, the array can track animals across a diversity of landscapes covering thousands of miles. There are currently 891 Motus receiver stations in 31 countries around the world.

GCBO and the Texas Midcoast National Wildlife Refuge Complex established a network of Motus Towers along the Texas coast from Liberty south to Rockport that includes 15 Motus towers creating a "fence" which migrating birds pass through during spring and fall migration. Since inception, our towers detected 28 species of birds, Eastern Small-footed Bat, and Monarch Butterfly. Although many of these birds were tagged on their breeding grounds near the Arctic Circle or wintering grounds in South America and were detected as they migrated across the Texas coast in spring or fall, the Motus Network can also be used to track the movements of Nearctic migrants such as the Loggerhead Shrike. In addition to the data gained through our Motus towers on the wintering grounds, we may be able to determine where our migrant shrikes go to breed if a tower farther north picks up one of our nanotags as the birds migrate back to their breeding grounds.

The Texas Ornithological Society and the Arthur A. Seeligson Conservation Fund funded a pilot season on six Loggerhead Shrikes from November 2019 to February 2020 to refine techniques for this project. In November 2019, we trapped six Loggerhead Shrikes and outfitted them with a USGS aluminum band and three color bands to distinguish individuals and a Motus nanotag using a harness. We collected feathers from each bird for stable isotope and genetic analysis. We also took measurements on all birds so we can determine if there are morphometric differences between migrant and resident shrikes. The Covid-19 outbreak has hampered our ability to have the feathers analyzed so we are still awaiting the results of those analyses. Several shrikes remained in the area and bred however so we know that at least a few are residents. A team of 20 Master Naturalists spent over 700 hours in the field manually tracking the birds on a daily basis to gain fine scale locations that are not available via Motus. During this pilot season we were able to develop a process that we will expand upon for training volunteers in the use of telemetry equipment; identified actions to simplify data collection and data processing; and safely applied harnesses to Loggerhead Shrikes for the first time. In addition, this season permitted us to answer the question of whether color bands alone or in conjunction with a nanotag are needed to track Loggerhead Shrikes. We were also able to use local Motus network data to search for birds no longer detected within their winter territories.

A larger more formal project funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will begin in November 2020 and will last for three winters. Utilizing this pilot season's data and that collected by the Motus towers we are currently refining our technique for determining territory size, shape, persistence, and habitat characteristics for each bird. Our pilot season has given us the opportunity to refine and improve our research project as it moves forward. We are very grateful to Texas Ornithological Society for supporting this effort.

Susan Heath
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Jennifer Wilson

INFORMATION NEEDED ON WINTER-BREEDING LOGGERHEAD SHRIKES IN TEXAS

Loggerhead Shrike. Photo Terry Ross/commons.wikimedia.org

Working as a Loggerhead Shrike bander for over 25 years, I've spent the majority of my time on Colorado's south-central plains, just east of the Rockies. I've also spent time chasing shrikes in Florida, Texas, New Mexico and parts of the midwest.

In mid-winter (late December/January) of 1997 and 1998, I spent 2 or 3 weeks in Texas, catching and banding wintering shrikes. I returned in 2000 and again in 2011 and 2012 to collect more data. During these forays, I was surprised to capture a few very young shrikes. I asked some of my Texas friends about this, but they replied that resident Texas shrikes begin breeding rather early, so I accepted that explanation.

Meanwhile, during banding efforts in March and April each year in Colorado, I would catch young shrikes; a few were so young that bills, wings and tails were not completely grown; all feathers were fresh juvenal feathers. These birds were not hatched in Colorado. Then I finally made the connection one March morning in Colorado while holding a young bird with some retained juvenal body plumage. It was a "eureka" moment! I was so stunned, I dropped the bird before measuring and banding. This bird could well be one of those young Texas birds I'd encountered during my winter trips to Texas! I further reasoned that, if these were the young of early-breeding Texas shrikes, what were they doing migrating through Colorado in the spring?

So—I need help from Texas birders. If you've found/seen/heard nestling or fledgling shrikes during the winter, I need to know. Photos would be especially helpful. Winter breeding in Loggerhead Shrikes would be a unique discovery, about which I plan to publish a paper. Appropriate credit will be given for field observations, locations and photos.

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NORTHERN CARDINAL—A SECOND LOOK

By Brent Ortego and Bron Rorex

Sweet-Sweet-Sweet Purty-Purty-Purty. This was typically the first sounds heard each morning at the banding station in Victoria County. Although banding hummingbirds was the focus of our efforts, we caught many other birds in the mist-nets set for hummingbirds. Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) was the most abundant year-round passerine.

We are writing a series of reports on the banding project in Victoria County now that we have completed research on hummingbirds. Ortego & Rorex 2016, and Ortego et. al. 2018 were both published in this magazine to provide the results of our hummingbird research. The Northern Cardinal (NOCA) will be the first passerine whose banding data will be summarized.

The NOCA is one of the most common resident forest birds in the Central Coast of Texas and its presence is taken for granted by many birders (including us) because of its widespread abundance. Check it off once during the day and then ignore it for the remainder of the trip is a fairly common practice for Texas birders.

The NOCA is one of the more colorful birds of Texas (Dawson 1955) and can be placed with the likes of Vermilion Flycatcher

Male Northern Cardinal, Redbird, My Bird has many names and is a delight to see.

(*Pyrocephalus rubinus*), Painted Bunting (*Passerina cirus*) and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) for sheer beauty. It appears to be more appreciated in the Ohio River Valley than in the South. It is the "State Bird" for 7 states (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia), the most for any species in the Nation. The popular Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) which is the State Bird of Texas represents 5 states.

How many birders study this species? Perhaps only a few? It is an attractive, widespread resident which does not appear to migrate. Its size, vocalization, striking colors, and curiosity make it easy to find. Conversations with non-birders indicate there is considerable interest in the species because of its beauty, tolerance of people, and attraction to food/water.

Brent has developed a much greater appreciation for the NOCA now that he is no longer banding them. His birds appear to recognize us. They vocalize with excitement as we approach to feed them and quickly fly in for the feast. They seem to like bird baths as much as they do bird seed during dry seasons.

But, they had a different attitude when we were mist-netting 3 times per week. We banded 2738 and recaptured 1073. To us each capture was viewed as a possible injury in waiting. Not, *Wow! What a great bird!* The NOCA did NOT like being caught. They have a hard bite and were quick with the beak. If they bit the flesh at the junction of

Female Northern Cardinal. Both Sexes have a large beak which is capable of cracking seeds and the hand which feeds it.

the fingers, you would remember it for days. The best way to extract a NOCA from a net was to do it quickly; usually reaching into the net and grabbing the back in a full body grip when removing it. If you hesitated in grabbing the bird, you likely were bitten.

STUDY

Examine NOCA banding data from our hummingbird banding project in Victoria County and from mist-netting activities on the Guadalupe Delta Wildlife Management Area in Calhoun County to describe the presence, production, survival, and distribution of Northern Cardinals.

As a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Biologist during this study, Brent was assigned the task of learning more about the birds using the coastal wildlife management areas: Guadalupe Delta WMA (Calhoun, Refugio & Victoria Counties), Justin Hurst WMA (Brazoria County) and Mad Island WMA (Matagorda County). Mist-netting (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mist_net) and banding birds was a technique used frequently to identify status of passerines using the wildlife management areas. Birds captured were banded under the federal permit issued to Dr. Ross Dawkins from San Angelo.

NOCA data gathered from banding at the Victoria County Study Area and Guadalupe Delta Wildlife Management Area were used to discuss the life history of the NOCA on the Texas Central Coast.

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Study Area 1 is Dora Ann and Brent's home. It was situated in the 90-acre Coleto Bend West Subdivision bordering Coleto Creek one mile below the Coleto Creek Reservoir in western Victoria County. The woodlands of the subdivision are part of a 5,000-acre forest block that was the unreached destination during the Battle of Coleto Creek in 1836. The subdivision was comprised of about 30 landholdings, which supported primarily live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) forest in the uplands and riparian forest bordering drains. The occupied lots were mostly mowed while the undeveloped ones had dense brush understories. The subdivision was a forested island bordering a creek surrounded mostly by brushy rangeland.

The bird catching area was comprised of three adjoining 2-acre lots, all bordering a resaca of Coleto Creek. About ¼ of the area of the lots were outside of the floodplain. Elevation changed 25 feet from the top of the property with the house to the lowest elevation at the resaca. The lot with the house contained mostly open-park like settings with scattered trees, flower beds bordering the house and at the base of many of the trees, and 1-acre of lawn with one grain feeder maintained at the house. The two undeveloped lots contained 1.5 acres of dense brush and 2.5 acres of dense woodlands. The habitats at net sites were identified during the 2006-2007 winter banding season to investigate if there was any hummingbird species habitat selection (Ortego et al. 2018). Habitat availability was mostly dense brush <9 ft in height followed in availability by live oak, mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), and black willow (*Salix nigra*) which were mostly taller than 20 ft. Net sites with trees tended to be open underneath.

Study Area 2 is located on the western most mile of Hog Bayou Road on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Guadalupe Delta Wildlife Management Area in Calhoun County. The road parallels Hog Bayou near its southern shore and runs 2 miles within the

riparian forests from Hwy. 35 on the west and Mission Lake on the east. The riparian forest bordering the bayou is about 70 yards wide on each side and is primarily comprised of hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*), cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*), green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), and sweet pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) in the canopy, and swamp privet (*Forestiera acuminate*), swamp dogwood (*Cornus racemose*), deciduous holly (*Ilex decidua*), giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*), Turk's-cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus*) and spiny aster (*Leucosyris spinosa*) in the understory. The riparian forest is bordered by spiny aster flats and freshwater marshes.

CAPTURE TECHNIQUES

Mist-nets (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mist_net) were used for most captures starting in the fall of 1999 at Study Area 1. Mist-netting was conducted in the Victoria Study Area 3 days per week from 2001 – 2010 from March through May and August through October when many birds were migrating. Netting effort shifted to once every 2-weeks from June – July, and November – February when little migration was occurring.

Mist-nets were deployed in senderos that were about 2 yards wide and 10 yards apart in a grid pattern in dense brush. They were also placed along woodland edges. Within the senderos, hummingbird feeders were spaced at about 5-yard intervals. The brush was comprised of local riparian species: cedar elm, green ash, hackberry, mesquite, roughleaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), sweet pecan, and various vines. Nectar producing flowers from Turk's-cap, red sage (*Salvia coccinea)* and morning-glory (*Ipomoea spp.*) were common from May through October. Brush was maintained at a height less than 9 feet to minimize the number of birds that would fly over the nets.

Mist-netting was done opportunistically at the Calhoun County Study Area 130 times from 1994 – 2004. Each month was sampled at least 8 times except for June, July and September. Net sites were spaced 0.1 miles apart and each site contained 2-3 mist-nets deployed along the road shoulder.

BANDING RESULTS

A total of 2738 NOCA were banded and 1073 were recaptured (39%) in Victoria County in the 12 years of the study. The infrequency of recapture was a surprise to us. We initially viewed the NOCA as a species that moved little and believed we would be recapturing most of the NOCA in the area multiple times per year because of the short height of the (<10 ft.) of the vegetation in proximity of the nets.

In contrast, 520 were banded and 53 recaptured at the Calhoun County Study Area where tree height was > 40 ft. The lower 10% recapture rate was a result of fewer netting attempts and height of the vegetation.

REPRODUCTION

Oberholser (1974) reported the NOCA nested 2-3 times per year, and Halkin and Linville (2020) indicate 3 eggs per nesting attempt was the norm. Most females produce at least one young per year. Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Barred Owl (*Strix varia*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) and various snakes are known avian predators. House cats (*Felis catus*) are common in the neighborhood, but not on our Victoria Study Area.

NOCA Territorial displays at the Victoria County Area started in February. Nesting was observed from April thru September. A total of 1502 (**21 per acre per year**) young of the year cardinals were banded with the sex ratio essentially being 1:1 (728 males and 774 females). About 1% of the young cardinals were captured in May when they first started leaving the nests. An additional 8% were caught in June. Peak capture of 34% occurred in July when the most fledgling were observed at the study area (Note: 40% of the captures of young birds occurred when there were only 4 netting attempts in

June/July each year). Capture of new young started declining in August when 19% were caught. We caught 16% in September and 10% in October. We reported 11% of the young NOCA were banded in November and December when we only netted 5 times. There likely was a higher percentage of young at that time since NOCA hatched early in the nesting season are difficult to distinguish from adults during these months.

LIFE TABLE

Banding data was used to develop a Life Table for the cardinals. All recaptures were pooled to show how many birds were still alive in the area during each month time period (<1, 6) of the 1st year, then 1 year, 1.5 years, 2 years and then annually thereafter. Every recapture was back dated to show it was still alive in each of the previous time periods. Thus, if the final recapture was 9 years after banding, then each of the 8 years, the 1 half year and the 12 months would be credited with its presence.

Fifty percent of young males and 47% young females were recaptured within one month after banding. Twenty-five percent of the males and 16% of the females were recaptured at least 6 months after initial banding, 12% of the males and 9% of the females were recaptured at least 1 year after banding. We were only able to recapture at least 3% of each sex 3 years after banding at this Victoria Study Area and also at the much lighter netted Calhoun County Study Area. Few studies have been published on recapture rates (Halkin & Linville 2020). The highest reported has been as much as 18% surviving to be 3 years old by Laskey (1944) in Tennessee.

To look at this mortality/dispersing off area/net avoidance in more detail, recapture rate by month of banding was examined. Young males were recaptured/present at least 50% of time within the first month after banding if they were initially banded from June through September. Only 41% of banded in October were ever recaptured, 29% in November and 26% in December. Young females had similar trends but only 47% banded from June thru September were recaptured, 38% banded from October, 33% from November, and 25% from December. Lower % recaptures after October likely represents some birds moving out of the study area.

Recapturing adults was more difficult than the young. Thirty-one percent of 556 adult males were recaptured at least once and 27% of 680 adult females. Males were more prone to be recaptured if they were banded from July thru January (31-45%). They were only recaptured 17% of the time if banded in February, 22% in March and **4-9%** of the time if banded **from April-June (opportunistic males traveling through looking for mate and space for territory probably did not linger long if they were not successful).**

Adult female highest site fidelity/recapture was in June when 48% banded during that month were recaptured. The recapture rates varied from 19-25% when initially banded from Dec-May, and 26-38% when initially banded from July-November. All months were consolidated for each age group and listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Percent recaptures of banded NOCA in Victoria County.

	Number Banded	% <1 mo	% 6 mo	% 1 yr	% 1.5 yr	% 2 yr	% 3 yr	% 4 yr	% 5 yr	% 6 yr	% 7 yr	% 8 yr	% 9 yr
Adult Male	556	31	12	9	6	5	3	2	2	1	1	<1	<1
Young Male	728	50	25	12	10	6	4	3	2	1	1		
Adult Female	680	27	12	9	7	5	4	2	1	1	1	<1	
Young Female	774	47	16	9	8	6	4	2	1	<1	<1		

During the 12 of years of netting in the 6-acre Victoria County Study Area, 2738 (**38 per acre per year**) were banded and 1073 (39%) were recaptured. Sixty one percent avoided the nets, moved out of the area or died after original capture. Roughly **4% of banded** were recaptured in Victoria County **after 3 years** and 3% in Calhoun County which was netted much less frequently.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN

NOCA were abundant and very mobile as demonstrated by catching an average of 38 per acre per year at the Victoria Study Area. Adults were much better than young at avoiding nets after original capture. Less than 30% of adults were recaptured versus about 50% of young. We were surprised by the low level of recapture in that the habitat being netted in Victoria County was generally shorter than the nets and most of the NOCA flying in the net zone were lower than the highest net tier.

With the Victoria County Study Area being just 6-acres, it is impossible to determine the proportion of the population not captured was related to moving off of this small Study Area. So, we examined the data from Hog Bayou Road in Calhoun County to provide information on dispersal since the habitat there was very linear and over one mile in length. Capture data were logged by net site allowing us to measure distance of dispersal. Of the recaptured birds, 41% of the male and 44% of the females were only recaptured at the same location as banded. An additional 50% of the males and 43% of the females recaptured were caught at least 0.2 miles from banding (about 1 city block and would have been far enough to be off of the Victoria Study Area); and 29% of males and 12% of females traveled as far as 0.5 miles from the original banding site. Furthest distance recorded from original banding was 1.3 miles by 3 birds. If this dispersal was the same for a large forest block rather than a narrow riparian forest, 90% of the birds could be contained within an area as large as 500 acres. This is roughly the size of the forested block on the east side of the creek which the Victoria Study Area is located. It also means that about 60% of the NOCA banded at the Victoria County Study Area likely spent time off of the area.

While traveling 0.5 mile is not far by most bird standards, it is much farther than the typical homeowner perceives. We have been told by many people that a particular NOCA or hummingbird was their bird, and it was there annually. With the oldest NOCA at both study areas living to at least 8 years (<1%) and 40% of NOCA being caught at the same location, there might be some merit to an individual being present for years, but we were only able to recapture 10% of the NOCA after 1 year of banding, 6% after 2, 4% after 3, and 2% after 4. Halkin and Linville (2020) reported one study of marked birds (they did not have to recapture them after being marked) indicated 80% survival of fledging to 1 month and 21% survived to next year. The marked birds in that one study were obviously much easier to locate than recapturing the birds in ours.

ANNUAL CYCLE

A monthly summary of population status and activities are provided below for the Victoria County study area.

May – lowest population level of year. Adults are paired, have established territories and are nesting. Young start to hatch. A few young have fledged and are being fed by adults. Few young are caught during May.

June – nesting continues, and more young are fledging. They follow foraging adults and are starting to be caught in numbers.

July – nesting is wrapping up. Many young are being caught and are becoming independent of adults. This month supports the highest population of the year.

August – adults are starting to molt; most young are independent. Population starts to decline/disperse.

August might be called the ugly month. Sun exposure results in skin becoming dark if too many feathers are shed at once.

September – activity at bird feeder declines as birds switch to native foods such as giant rag weed, rough-leaf dogwood and grape (*Vitis mustangensis*) as their primary food. Territories are breaking as individuals form non-breeding foraging groups.

October – birds dispersing via foraging groups and reach highest number for fall at feeder.

November – settled on winter area. Population starts declining/dispersing.

December – winter population continues

Would you like me more if I was this color?

to decline. Birds are frequent feeder visitors.

January – mid winter. Feeder is busy, and brush is mostly used for cover rather than foraging.

February – lowest population level in winter. Much calling occurs during sunny days as territories start to form.

March – birds dispersing and setting up territories

April – many adults are nesting.

SUMMARY

Take another look at the Northern Cardinal. It is a very attractive bird. Individuals can live 3 years with regularity but most do not celebrate a birthday. They have a diverse life establishing and defending territories, raising multiple broods, and searching for food in a broad area. They respond positively to shrub planting and welcome handouts in the form of bird seed and water.

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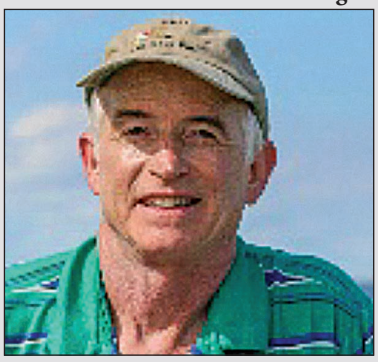

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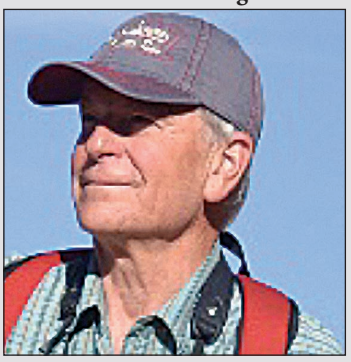

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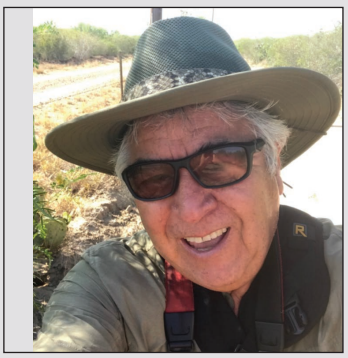


Raul Delgado, Region 7

A PRIMER ON BIRD BEHAVIOR*.....

By Kent Rylander

Many students of animal behavior find it convenient to classify behaviors as either innate or learned.

"Innate" refers to behaviors that have a strong genetic basis, behaviors that are influenced very little by experience. Fighting, copulation, and parental behavior seem to fit into this category.

Perhaps none of the numerous definitions of "learning" fits all behavior that we refer to as learned behavior. However, the definition of a learned behavior as "a behavior that has been changed by experience" will suffice for our purposes here.

The middle of the twentieth century witnessed lively debates between classical ethologists, who stressed the importance of innate behaviors, and behaviorists, who argued that only learned behaviors are scientifically valid or even worthy of scientific attention. Currently, most students of animal behavior feel comfortable interpreting most behaviors as products that result from the interaction of genes and environment.

For example, the basic movements of food-begging in newly hatched sparrows are certainly innate, since hatchlings could hardly have had time to learn these movements by trial and error. On the other hand, food-begging becomes more effective with experience, indicating that this essentially innate behavior clearly changes with experience. It is difficult to imagine an innate behavior that cannot be changed in some way by experience, but it is equally difficult to visualize a behavior totally uninfluenced by innately programmed movements.

SOME MAJOR CATEGORIES OF BIRD BEHAVIOR

All attempts to define and organize behaviors are to some degree arbitrary, but the following categories are useful when dealing with most behaviors.

REFLEXES

Reflexes are innate (genetically programmed) muscular contractions that are elicited by a stimulus. The most obvious reflexes are responses to mechanical, visual, and auditory stimuli, and to sudden movements of the body. Reflexes are easily overlooked because they are usually quick and subtle.

A hawk gliding to a perch makes numerous, small reflexive wing movements to counter the effects of shifting winds. Upon landing, the hawk regains its balance with reflexive movements in the leg, wing, and body, much like we do when we regain our balance after slipping on ice. These small reflexes are of the same type as when one taps the tendon beneath the knee and the lower leg automatically kicks forward.

The innate character of reflexes is evident in newly hatched birds, which, like older birds, blink in response to blowing dust or crouch when they hear a sudden noise.

The direction and extent of a limb movement is normally beyond our control during a reflex--a fact that is obvious when we touch a hot surface and watch our arm take its own course. On the other hand, all reflexes are probably modified to some extent by experience. With training, most animals can learn to increase or decrease the intensity of a reflex and, in some cases, to abolish it.

In one common reflex, exposure to cold causes microscopic muscles at the base of the feathers to contract so that the feathers fluff up and insulate the bird. However, a different stimulus, for example, the appearance of a bird's mate, can also cause feathers to fluff up, especially the feathers on the top of the head that form the crest. In this case feather erection has nothing to do with temperature but instead most likely functions as a signal.

Some reflexes are hidden from view, permitting us to see only their effects. In gulls, when fledglings peck at their parents' bills, the parents involuntarily regurgitate partially

Example of a common reflex. European Robin puffs up in response to cold.

digested food that the young birds eat. Another hidden reflex is the contraction of the muscles that surround the salivary glands in ant-eating birds such as flickers. The stimulus for this reflex is the formic acid found in ants, and the response is the secretion of saliva that neutralizes the formic acid.

FIXED ACTION PATTERNS

Perhaps the most widely studied innate behavior in animals is the fixed action pattern (FAP). A particularly instructive example of a FAP is egg retrieval in geese: an incubating goose extends her head and neck and with her bill pulls back an egg that has rolled out in front of the nest. Even geese raised in isolation do this.

Several features characterize FAPs. Besides being innate, they are stereotyped in that they are relatively invariable (i.e., geese never retrieve eggs except in this manner). FAPs also have an obvious steering component. When the egg rolls off course because of irregularities in the substrate, the goose adjusts to the egg's changing locations by modifying her head and neck movements.

Examples of a fixed action pattern in feeding pigeons. The pigeon is rewarded when it pecks and the seed is the releaser.

The stimulus that triggers a FAP is called a releaser. An egg is a visual releaser, but releasers can also be auditory, tactile, or olfactory. Moreover, releasers are effective only in specific contexts. For example, a goose will respond to an egg placed in front of her as long as she is sitting on her nest (the appropriate context), but she is unresponsive when she is away from the nest.

FAPs differ from learned behaviors because they are innate, and they differ from reflexes because reflexes have no steering component. Interestingly, if the stimulus (the displaced egg) is removed while the FAP is in progress, the FAP continues until it reaches completion; for example, the goose continues making egg-retrieving movements even though the egg is now in the hand of the experimenter. Although theoretically all FAPs continue to completion when the stimulus is suddenly withdrawn, it is very difficult or even impossible to demonstrate this characteristic except in special cases like egg retrieval.

FAPs are always short in duration (usually only a few seconds) because the series of muscular contractions that make up a FAP must follow a particular sequence. It is not possible for the brain to hard-wire instructions for a sequence of muscular contractions that lasts more than a few seconds.

Common FAPs in birds include pecking at a seed, reaching out for prey with the talons, tearing a piece of flesh from a carcass, drinking, bill-wiping, preening, inserting food into a nestling's mouth, and copulating. All of these FAPs are triggered by an appropriate releaser. Another behavior that is possibly a FAP (or at least has components that are FAPs) is anting, during which birds stroke their wings, bodies, and tails with ants that they hold in their bills.

Although some investigators question the usefulness as well as the validity of the FAP as a scientific concept, FAPs as classically defined here are useful for understanding more complex behaviors like those described below.

INNATE BEHAVIORS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

As a rule, birds respond to threats with innate rather than learned behaviors. For example, when a threatened goose reaches out and bites an attacker, it uses basically the same hard-wired program for muscular contractions as it does for pulling at submerged vegetation (i.e., it utilizes a FAP). One reason FAPs, rather than learned movements, are the usual building blocks of defense behavior is that birds cannot afford to err during the trial-and-error process of learning a crucial defense tactic. Learning requires repetition, and the bird can't afford to make a mistake when it is first attacked.

Moreover, there is always the risk that the bird might forget a learned response at a critical moment. The same line of reasoning explains why attack behaviors are essentially innate.

When birds are threatened by predators but seem unable to choose between attacking or fleeing, they sometimes respond by attacking--but by attacking an object other than the predator. Thus, they *redirect* their attack to a substitute object, hence the term "redirection" for this type of behavior. For example, if a turkey is threatened by a mountain lion that is standing close enough to produce anxiety but not close enough to incite fleeing, the turkey may resolve the conflict by pecking a smaller turkey nearby or even an inanimate object.

Frequently, threatened animals exhibit FAPs that appear, at least to human observers, to be irrelevant or inappropriate responses to a threat. Incubating terns face a dilemma when a person slowly approaches the nest: they could risk injury to themselves by fighting, or risk injury to their eggs by fleeing. Curiously, terns often preen vigorously under these circumstances. The act of preening in this context appears to us as irrelevant or inappropriate.

Such irrelevant or inappropriate responses to threats are called displacement behaviors.

Preening, eating, bill-wiping, stretching, and drinking movements are common displacement behaviors when they are responses to threats. Bill-wiping as a displacement behavior is commonly observed in flushed birds immediately after they alight on a perch.

Intention movements are very common responses to threats. Birds begin an attack or a fleeing response, then abruptly halt the movement.

DISPLAYS AND RITUALIZATION

Displays are innate (genetically programmed) stereotyped movements that have a communicatory or signal function. In terms of their function, they may be compared to *culturally acquired* human gestures, which are also stereotyped movements used to communicate. In both displays and gestures, ambiguity is reduced by exaggerating the movements as well as by performing them in a more stereotyped manner. For example, the bathing movements in a gander's precopulatory display appear to be an exaggerated and more stereotyped version of movements he uses when he actually bathes. (Likewise, the gesture of saluting in humans--although culturally acquired rather than inherited--appears to be an exaggerated and more stereotyped version of a noncommunicatory behavior, perhaps raising one's hand to shade the eyes.)

Many displays are unique to the species and are determined to some degree by the bird's anatomical and behavioral characteristics. Thus, prairie chickens would be expected to evolve terrestrial displays and Common Nighthawks, aerial displays.

Courtship displays often differ markedly among species that are closely related, since a bird that confuses its own display with that of a similar species might waste time and energy courting and inseminating the wrong species. Territorial displays tend to be more general and accordingly are recognizable by other species that could potentially invade the bird's territory.

The evolutionary origin of displays intrigued early ethologists, who reasoned that it is more efficient for a display to evolve from existing FAPs, reflexes, or intention move-

Courtship display in pigeons. Components of a display may be derived from a reflex (puffing up of feathers); from a FAP (bowing); or from an intention movement (moving toward other bird).
Photo homeforaday.org

Ducks have become habituated to the dog and no longer respond to the dog as a threat.

ments than if they evolved de novo. The term "ritualization" is applied to this evolutionary process. For example, erecting the feathers--originally a reflex in response to cold--might acquire, through evolution, a signal or communicatory function to become part of a territorial display in which the bird raises its crest. Likewise, the FAP for drinking (lowering the head for water and then pointing the bill toward the sky) could evolve into a courtship display that employs the same basic movements.

Not all components of a display are ritualized reflexes, FAPs, or intention movements. The inflated neck pouch in the prairie chicken's display probably evolved uniquely for that purpose.

Habituation

Obviously a bird has a greater chance of surviving if it responds appropriately to stimuli that indicate danger. Thus, a towhee feeding on the forest floor should flee when it hears a sudden rustling of leaves that might signal an approaching predator. On the other hand, the bird will waste valuable time and energy if it flies away each time the wind noisily blows leaves across the forest floor. Clearly the towhee must learn to distinguish between harmful and innocuous stimuli.

Birds learn to ignore harmless, repeated stimuli by responding less and less to the stimulus each time it is presented. Eventually they do not respond at all. A diminished response to a harmless, or innocuous, stimulus is termed habituation. In the above example we would say that the towhee habituated to the repeated rustling of leaves caused by the wind, or, in everyday language, that it *tuned out* the rustling sounds.

Birds are constantly habituating to the ocean of innocuous stimuli they encounter each day. For example, early in the morning, House Sparrows feeding near a highway take flight when the first automobile passes by, but

as traffic continues to flow with no harmful effects, their uneasiness diminishes, and soon they have habituated to the noise and are virtually unresponsive.

Dishabituation is a disruption of the state of habituation. An animal that habituates to a noise or other stimulus will again become aware of that stimulus if a different stimulus is presented to it. Sparrows that are habituated to a constant sound like an idling automobile could once again respond to this sound and flee if there is a sudden gust of wind.

SENSITIZATION

Sensitization refers to a process whereby an animal, immediately after responding to one stimulus (for example, food), now responds to a neutral stimulus, one to which it is normally unresponsive. One of the first sensitization experiments dealt with octopuses. Octopuses normally ignore a glass rod (a neutral stimulus) that is inserted into their aquarium. However, if the glass rod is placed into the aquarium immediately after the octopuses have been fed, they will attack the rod. Thus, they become sensitized by the process of feeding and as a consequence respond to a neutral stimulus (in this case, a glass rod).

Generally, the consequences of sensitization in the wild can only be inferred, but surely sensitization must be a common occurrence. Perhaps birds that have just been frightened by a hawk are more readily disturbed by a neutral stimulus, such as a jay flying over to which they are normally unresponsive.

Classical Conditioning and Operant Conditioning

Conditioning was first studied in detail by the eminent Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov took advantage of the fact that dogs naturally salivate when presented with a piece of meat or some meat powder. Just before presenting the meat to the dog he presented a second stimulus (for example, the sound of a buzzer) to which dogs normally do not respond. Thus, he paired the buzzer (called the conditioned stimulus) with meat (called the unconditioned stimulus). Soon the dog was salivating every time he heard the buzzer, which was never more than a second or two before the meat appeared. The innate response (salivation) to the unconditioned stimulus (meat) is called the unconditioned response, and the learned response (also salivation) to the conditioned stimulus (the buzzer) is called the conditioned response.

We rarely witness classical conditioning while it is occurring in the wild; more often we only infer that it has occurred. For example, the first time a person drives up to a lake and throws grain to a duck, the duck responds by becoming excited. The excitement, which is a response to the grain (not to the appearance of the person), can be compared to salivation in dogs that are presented meat.

After a few days, the duck associates the approach of the person with the appearance of the grain, in the same way that the dog associates the buzzer with the appearance of

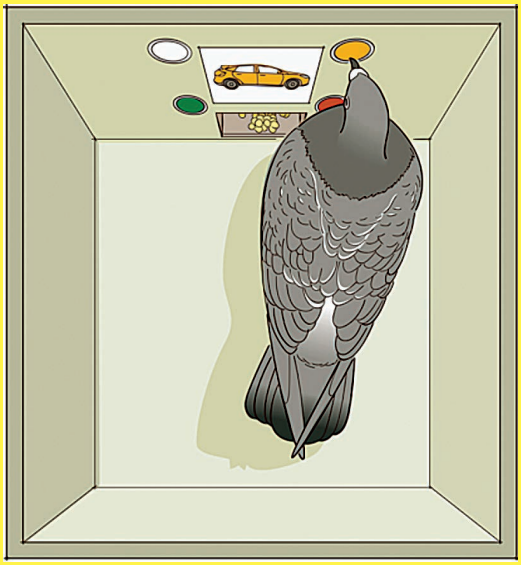
Example of classical conditioning. Pigeons respond to the boy's hand (the conditioned stimulus, corresponding to the bell in Pavlov's experiment with dogs) after previously receiving grain (the unconditioned stimulus, corresponding to the meat in Pavlov's experiment). Thus, a contingency is established between the unconditioned and the conditioned stimulus.

the meat. Predictably, the duck becomes excited, indicating that it has become classically conditioned to the approach of the person. The stimuli and responses can be compared to those in the classically conditioned dog. The unconditioned stimulus is the grain, which corresponds to the meat. Likewise, the unconditioned response (corresponding to salivation in the dog) is the duck's excitement upon first being presented with the grain. The conditioned stimulus (the buzzer in the experiment with the dog) is the approach of the person. Finally, the conditioned response (salivation in the dog), like the unconditioned response, is the duck's excitement.

Like classical conditioning, operant conditioning (also called instrumental conditioning or trial-and-error learning) is perhaps more easily understood by example than by definition. When a pigeon is placed in a cage containing a lever that dispenses food, it pecks randomly because it is unaware of the significance of the lever. When it accidentally pecks the lever and food drops into the cage, a contingency (a connection or relationship) is set up between pecking the lever and receiving food. At this point we say that the pigeon is operantly conditioned to peck the lever whenever it wants food. In a variant of this experiment, the pigeon is not rewarded with food when it presses the lever; instead, it is punished with a shock from the electrified floor of the cage. In this case the pigeon has been conditioned to avoid pressing the lever.

In both experiments the act of pecking the lever is called the operant. It is important to emphasize that an operant--usually a body movement--is required for operant conditioning to take place: the animal must do something to initiate conditioning. In classical conditioning it is the conditioned stimulus rather than the animal's behavior that initiates the conditioning process; to be conditioned, the animal need do nothing but respond.

Numerous behaviors in birds are no doubt the products of operant conditioning. Turkey



Example of operant conditioning. The pigeon is rewarded when the pigeon pecks at the correct spot after the photo of the automobile appears. Pecking at the spot is called the "operant."

Vultures that wander randomly over the countryside looking for carrion can be compared to pigeons that peck randomly in their cage. By chance the vultures may fly over a highway, just as by chance the pigeon pecks at the lever. Since flying to the highway and pecking the lever are rewarded (in both cases with food), then both behaviors are operants. After a few trials, both the pigeon and the vulture are conditioned to repeat their respective behaviors when they want food.

Innate behaviors, like FAPs, are commonly shaped or modified by operant conditioning. Consider a chick a few minutes after hatching. Almost immediately it engages in an innate feeding behavior, specifically, the FAP for pecking indiscriminately at any small object that is in front of it. The releaser for this FAP could be a tiny pebble, seed, or other small object. Soon the chick picks up only the seeds and ignores the pebbles. Thus, feeding behavior has been modified by operant conditioning: the chick was obviously rewarded for picking up seeds.

Body movements in virtually all behaviors are modified by operant conditioning. For example, young birds inherit the ability to make

An example of imprinting. The ducklings have imprinted on the hen. They would have imprinted on a surrogate mother, for example, a person, had the mother not been present during the critical period.
Photo Paula M Wolter

basic flying movements with their wings, but those movements alone do not enable the bird to fly. Young birds must learn, through operant conditioning, how to modify their movements so as to achieve flight.

Animals conditioned to a particular stimulus also respond (though less intensely) to a second stimulus, as long as the second stimulus is more or less like the first one. This phenomenon is termed generalization because the animals seem to be generalizing that similar stimuli produce the same rewards and punishments. For example, pigeons conditioned to peck round levers will also peck oval levers, and vultures that have been rewarded for foraging along highways will also forage along smaller farm roads.

Extinction of a learned response occurs when the reinforcer is withdrawn. For example, pigeons trained to peck a lever for food eventually cease pecking the lever if food is not delivered. Extinction differs from forgetting. An Acorn Woodpecker might forget the location of a nut it has hidden, but this would have nothing to do with whether a reinforcer is withdrawn.

Imprinting

In imprinting, an animal, usually a very young one, establishes a bond with an animal or inanimate object that it faithfully follows for the next few weeks or months. Young animals normally imprint on their parents, but in the absence of their real parent, they will imprint on a surrogate mother, which can be another animal, including humans, or an inanimate object. Birds imprint during a brief critical period after hatching, a window that normally lasts a few hours or days.

Imprinting is characteristic of precocial birds, those that move about and feed almost immediately after birth or hatching. Waterfowl and quail are common examples of precocial birds. The close bond established by imprinting helps insure that young birds follow their parents during this vulnerable period of life. Imprinting is essentially absent in altricial species (in particular, songbirds), which hatch in a helpless condition. Because altricial birds have no opportunities to stray from parental care, they have no need to bind so closely with their parents.

A male (European) Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) singing.
Photo Malene Thyssen

Learning and the Development of Songs

The enormous literature dealing with song development in birds can hardly be summarized here, but generally, passerines acquire their songs by learning how to sequence innately produced sounds, termed the subsong, correctly. This process has been compared with language acquisition in humans, during which a baby correctly sequences innate sounds (babbling) into speech (although learned sounds are of course also incorporated into speech). Thus, song development, like human language acquisition, can be considered the result of both innate and learned processes.

Usually a young bird learns the correct sequence by listening to an adult bird. When a juvenile male hears an adult male sing the notes in the correct sequence, he learns this sequence and correctly arranges the elements of his subsong to produce the song that we hear. Learned songs also may vary geographically, giving rise to dialects. Dialects could be adaptive because when a female chooses a male with a familiar dialect, she might be selecting a male adapted for surviving in the region where her offspring will live. That dialects can influence mating is demonstrated by the observation that female White-crowned Sparrows often assume the precopulatory position when they hear the dialect of their own region, but rarely do so when they hear other dialects.

Learning is not important for song development in all species. In general, nonpasserines, such as ducks and quail, do not require exposure to the adult song in order to vocalize correctly.

Another type of learning, latent learning, is so designated because the knowledge that is acquired presumably remains latent until it is needed at a later time. Latent learning can be demonstrated in a well-known experiment with mice. A satiated mouse is allowed to explore a maze containing food pellets that are concealed in a particular part of the maze. Eventually the mouse discovers the pellets but ignores them because it is not hungry. Later,

after being deprived of food, the mouse is allowed to reenter the maze. At this time it locates the food quickly, much more quickly than a mouse that has never been in the maze. Evidently the mouse learned the location of the food when it first entered the maze but did not use the knowledge until later.

Latent learning is probably impossible to demonstrate in the field. However, satiated birds may occasionally learn the location of a food source that they do not exploit at the moment, only to return to it later when they are hungry.

Insight learning is the most difficult type of learning to demonstrate in animals. Humans employ insight learning when they solve a problem—a mathematical problem or logical puzzle—in a novel way, when the solution comes suddenly as an insight. This type of learning is sometimes referred to as "Aha!" learning.

Decades ago, insight learning was proposed to explain how chimpanzees managed to rearrange tables and put together sticks to reach a banana suspended from the ceiling. It was argued that the chimps had a sudden insight as to how to reach the banana, in effect, that they figured out a novel solution to a problem they had not previously encountered. Neither classical nor operant conditioning seemed adequate for explaining this feat.

On the other hand, it has also been argued that chimps, being playful animals, accidentally solve the problem through their normal playful antics and never really require an insight to arrange the tables and sticks appropriately. Indeed, chimps experienced in play solve the problem more quickly than inexperienced chimps.

Whether birds experience such insights is debatable, but an experiment using Common Ravens certainly provokes thought along these lines. A bird standing on the top of a table was shown a string that was attached to the tabletop and hung over the side. Tied to the other end of the string and suspended about halfway down was a peanut. Most of the birds that were tested looked down at the peanut and seemed incapable of figuring out how to retrieve it. A Common Raven, however, stood on one foot, reached down with its bill, grabbed the string, pulled it up part of the way, held that part of the string with its foot, then repeated the process until the peanut was within reach.

***Kent Rylander, *The Behavior of Texas Birds*, Corrie Herring Hooks Series (Book 53) 443 pages Publisher: University of Texas Press; 1 edition (August 15, 2002)**

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ESTABLISHING A NESTING POPULATING OF PURPLE MARTINS (*PROGNE SUBIS*) AT LAREDO COLLEGE, LAREDO, TEXAS

By Juliana Kelley and Maribel Herrera

Purple Martins, *Progne subis*, are aerial birds that are common to South Texas (Ray 1995: 2001:2015). The Monte Mucho Audubon Society (MMAS) has established Purple Martin birdhouses (gourds and plastic birdhouses) in Laredo, Texas at the Laredo Water Museum and at a location off Mines Road. While there are some birdhouses established around the Laredo city area, there is limited data at these locations. Laredo College (LC) is located along the Rio Grande and was chosen as a site for this research because of its accessibility and proximity to the river. Around the LC Campus, five plastic birdhouses were built with 16 compartments/cavities to allow for adequate nesting. They were placed at different locations: site A and B (softball field), site C (track field), site D and E (dorms), and site F (President's house). From January 2020 – March 19, 2020, undergraduate research students from the Laredo College Learning, Excellence, and Academic Preparedness in STEM (LEAPS) program checked birdhouses using binoculars and a scope. During this time, there was no bird activity recorded at any of the sites. There was an interruption in data collection following this time period due to the closure

Estimated age at time, 12–13 days old. Hatch day–May 14, 2020 (20–32 days)




MMAS to the rescue. Dario Gutierrez, John Kelly, and Danny Perales.

of the LC Campus because of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Another issue arose on May 21, 2020, as a major storm hit the campus and two of the Purple Martin birdhouses at sight E were knocked over. The birdhouses were repaired on May 25 by members of the Monte Mucho Audubon Society. As the birdhouses were being repaired, five Purple Martin chicks were discovered at site E and in compartment 9. The composition of the nest consisted of twigs, leaves, and mud. The clutch size is unknown. Birds were counted, assessed for any parasites, and the lengths were measured. The estimated age of the young is 12 – 13 days old. The average size of the birds: 4.0 inches (40 mm). Using the Purple Martin Conservation Association Prognosticator, the expected fledging date was June 8 – June 14, 2020. There was minimal nesting material in compartment 8 with a few leaves and twigs. Sparrow species nests were found in compartment 11 and 12. One single sparrow species egg was found in compartment 12. The egg was removed and compartment 11 and 12 were cleared. This is the first record of nesting by Purple Martins at Laredo College; however, more research is needed. On other site, Mines Road, did have activity. Multiple nests and multiple fledging were recorded. Although we are still not permitted to visit the campus, we expect that as soon as things return to normal our research will continue.

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Maribel Herrera

SWALLOW-TAILED KITES AT DEVERS CREEK PARK, GANADO

By Petra Hockey

Yesterday (23 March) , on our way home we made a short mid afternoon stop at Devers Creek Park and were immediately rewarded with the presence of 4-5 Swallow-tailed Kites. Two of them were engaged in some fancy synchronized flight display similar to what I see regularly from terns during courtship time. A little later the same two (I believe) were observed carrying sticks and Spanish moss to a tree where they had already begun building a nest from scratch. The Mississippi Kites that nested last year in the same general area had not yet arrived but Northern Parulas were singing from the mossy oaks.

Update: a week later and the nest has grown considerably (see last photo). Before long, when the tree is fully leaved out, it will be much less visible.

Petra Hockey
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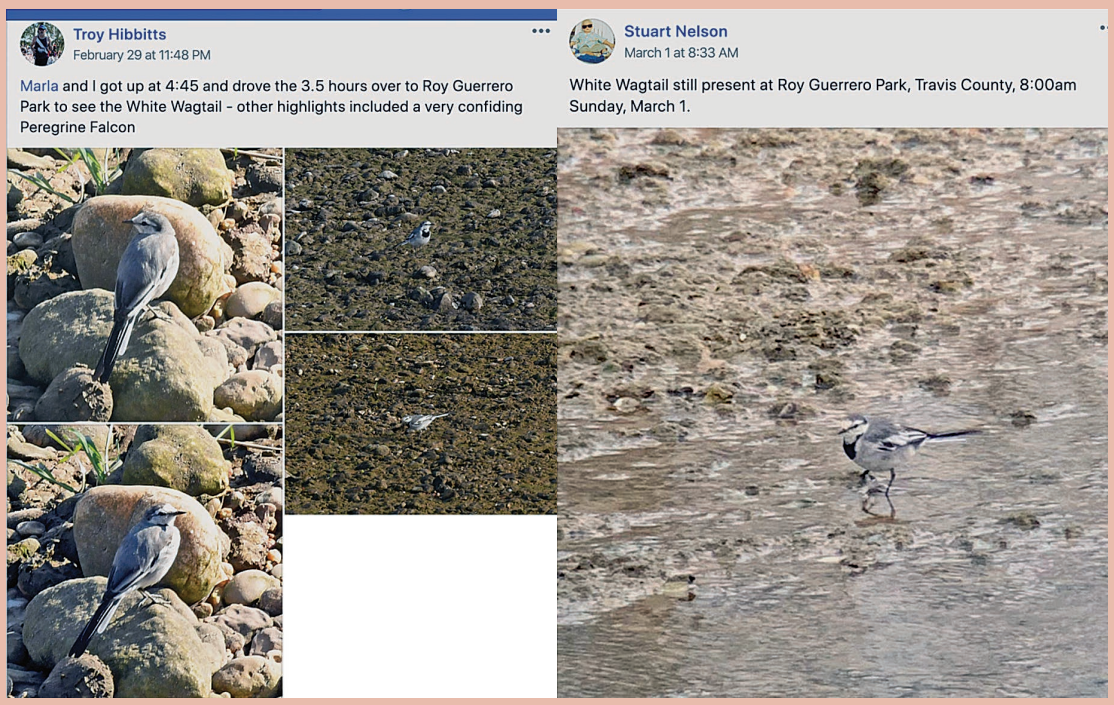
Both adults on a nest from 04-15-2020. One of them was incubating and one brought food.

Shot from 06-23-2020 of the last nestling about to fledge. Both parents were circling overhead and calling it, presumable to entice it to take flight.



White Wagtail was 8 Feb–5 Apr 2020 below Longhorn Dam on the east side of Austin (Travis County). This is a first state record!

Mew Gull – 12 Jan–6 April 2020, Port Aransas, Nueces county. Over 40 records for the state but the first photo-documented Mew Gull along the coastPhotos Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center by Vincent O'Brien

(male) Garganey – 11–21 April 2020 at Aransas NWR, Aransas and Calhoun Counties. Only the 5th state record and 1st one since 2001. Photos by Bob Friedrich

TEXAS STATE LIST NOW AT 654 SPECIES

The TBRC is excited to share that White Wagtail has been added to the state list. Janet Davis and Jeff Osborne (photo here is by Jeff) discovered one downstream from Longhorn Dam in Austin (Travis County) on the afternoon of February 8th, 2020. At least a 100 other birders were able to see the bird the following day but no such luck in the days immediately following that. Fortunately, the bird was again (re)discovered in the same area on February 28th and was mostly reliable from that day until it was last seen on April 5th. It is likely that well over 500 birders came and saw this bird at some point! The addition of White Wagtail brings the state list to 653 species. The recent change in Mexican Duck taxonomy makes it 654.

TEXAS BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT

The 61st Supplement to the AOS Checklist has been published which results in one new species for the Texas list. Mexican Duck was formerly considered a subspecies but is now a full species (*Anas diazi*). This species has been documented as resident along much of the Rio Grande corridor so it brings the state list to **654**.

Other changes are more minor, involving scientific name changes and also some re-ordering of groups/species.

These changes have all been made to the Texas State List which can be found on our website at: https://www.texasbirdrecordscommittee.org/texas-state-list

A quick summary of the AOS changes as they affect the Texas list:

** Mexican Duck (*Anas diazi*) added as a full species after Mallard.

** Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies) family has been re-ordered. The new order on the Texas list:

Wild Turkey
Greater Prairie-Chicken
Lesser Prairie-Chicken
Ring-necked Pheasant

** Selasphorus hummingbird order has been changed. The new order on the Texas list:

Calliope Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
Allen's Hummingbird
Broad-tailed Hummingbird

** Other hummingbird re-ordering, new/updated genus. The 4 hummingbirds following Broad-billed have a changed order with 3 of them moving to a different genus. The new order and updated genus:

White-eared Hummingbird (now *Basilinna leucotis*; was *Hylocharis leucotis*)
Violet-crowned Hummingbird (now *Leucolia violiceps*; was *Amazilia violiceps*)
Berylline Hummingbird (now *Saucerottia beryllina*; was *Amazilia beryllina*)
Buff-bellied Hummingbird

** Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots) has been re-ordered. The new order is:

Paint-billed Crake
Spotted Rail
Clapper Rail
King Rail
Virginia Rail
Sora
Common Gallinule
American Coot
Purple Gallinule
Yellow Rail
Black Rail

** Anhingidae (Anhingas) was moved in front of Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags) and within the cormorants, the order was changed. Thus, the new order of the species in these 2 families is:

Anhinga
Double-crested Cormorant
Neotropic Cormorant

The following is the official list of bird species accepted for Texas by the Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) of the Texas Ornithological Society. This list totals 654 species as of June 30, 2020 and includes taxonomic and nomenclatural changes outlined in the 61st supplement (Auk, Vol. 137, pp....

Below is a summary of the records that the Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) has reviewed and come to a decision on since June 5th, 2020. The MAJOR HIGHLIGHT of this batch is the addition of White Wagtail to the state list, which now stands at 653.

Accepted Records (10):

2020-36–Garganey (1) 11-21 Apr 2020, Aransas N.W.R., Calhoun/Aransas County
2020-11–Mew Gull (1) 12 Jan - 6 Apr 2020, Port Aransas, Nueces County
2020-34–Short-tailed Hawk (1) 17 Mar 2020, 5 miles east of Mico, Medina County
2020-12–Fork-tailed Flycatcher (1) 12 Jan - 5 Feb 2020, west of Santa Rosa, Hidalgo County
2020-30–Fork-tailed Flycatcher (1) 17 Mar 2020, southeast of San Manuel-Linn, Hidalgo County
2020-37–Black-whiskered Vireo (1) 24 Apr 2020, Sabine Woods, Jefferson County
2020-22–White Wagtail (1) 8 Feb - 5 Apr 2020, Roy Guerrero Park, east Austin, Travis County
2020-28–Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 5 Mar 2020, Bill Rogers Arroyo Park, El Paso, El Paso County
2019-89–Crimson-collared Grosbeak (1) 9

Dec 2019, Bentsen-Rio Grande S.P., Hidalgo County

2019-93–Crimson-collared Grosbeak (1) 22 Dec 2019 - 13 Jan 2020, Santa Ana N.W.R., Hidalgo County

Not Accepted (4):

2020-33–Arctic Tern (1) 15 Jun 2018, Red Bluff Lake, Reeves County

2020-29–Northern Pygmy-Owl (1) 14 Mar 2020, The Bowl, Guadalupe Mountains N.P., Culberson County

2020-23–Eurasian Tree Sparrow (1) 9 Feb 2020, ~8 miles east-northeast of Lake Jackson, Brazoria County

2019-83–Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 23 Mar 2019, Lake McClellan, Gray County

[[Note: The number in parenthesis following the species name is the number of individuals of that species involved in the record.]]

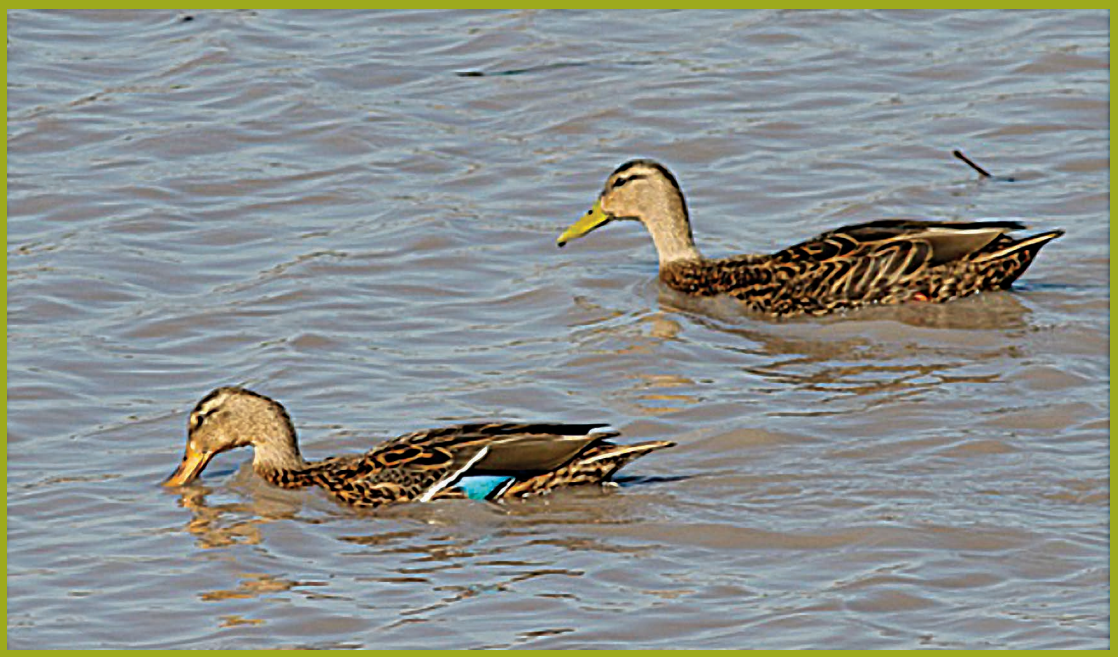
A number of factors may contribute to a record being denied acceptance. It is quite uncommon for a record to not be accepted due to a bird being obviously misidentified. More commonly, a record is not accepted because the material submitted was incomplete, insufficient, superficial, or just too vague to properly document the reported occurrence while eliminating all other similar species. Also, written documentation or descriptions prepared entirely from memory weeks, months, or years after a sighting are seldom voted on favorably. It is important that the simple act of not accepting a particular record should by no means indicate that the TBRC or any of its members feel the record did not occur as reported. The non-acceptance of any record simply reflects the opinion of the TBRC that the documentation, as submitted, did not meet the rigorous standards appropriate for adding data to the formal historical record.

The TBRC makes every effort to be as fair and objective as possible regarding each record. If the committee is unsure about any particular record, it prefers to err on the conservative side and not accept a good record rather than validate a bad one. All records whether accepted or not, remain on file and can be re-submitted to the committee if additional substantive material is presented.

If you have any questions on any of these results, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to submit documentation to the TBRC—it is very much appreciated.

RECENT ADDITION TO THE TEXAS LIST..... MEXICAN DUCK (*ANAS DIAZI*)



A pair of Mexican Ducks. Photo taken at El Charco de Ingenio, San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico. *Note white in wing.* Photo Gary L. Clark

PROFILE

Mexican Ducks[1] of both sexes are very similar to female Mallard. Mexican Ducks best distinguished by smaller size (about 10% smaller than typical Mallard) and by distinctly darker and more uniform body coloration. Additional distinctions include dark grayish-brown tail (very little or no whitish on outer 3 rectrices), iridescent greenish speculum with only narrow whitish border to trailing edge of secondaries (rarely a narrow whitish or whitish-brown line at leading edge of speculum, perhaps absent on "pure" Mexican Duck), upperwing greater coverts with more white on outer webs, relatively uniform dark belly and undertail coverts, darker and less boldly patterned flanks, small underwing coverts at proximal end of ulna boldly barred (whereas indistinctly marked on Mallard). Male bill of Mexican Duck clear olive-green (sometimes more yellow than green, rarely dusky olive drab); female bill similar to that of Mallard but typically more uniform in appearance. Hybrids and backcrosses with typical Mallard show varying degree of intermediate characters; these occur mostly in northern part of Mexican Duck range in southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico.

From the time of its "discovery" and naming, the Mexican Duck was recognized as one of three "black ducks" of North America, the group comprised of the Mexican Duck, the Mottled Duck (including the "Florida Duck"), and the American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*), and these three, in turn, have been recognized as part of a broader complex including the Mallard. In his 1886 description of *Anas diazi*, from two specimens collected

[1]Drilling, N., S. O. Williams III, R. D. Titman, and F. McKinney (2020). Mexican Duck (*Anas diazi*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (P. G. Rodewald and B. K. Keeney, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.mexduc.01.

in the states of Tlaxcala and Puebla under the auspices of Augustin Diaz, Robert Ridgway noted the new species was most similar to the Mottled Duck; recent molecular studies have demonstrated that the Mexican Duck is indeed most closely related to the Mottled Duck, and that those two, in turn, are closest to the American Black Duck.

Mexican Ducks. Photographed at Balmorhea SP.
Photo Mark Lockwood

Additional "Mallard Group" Members.

Hen Mallard.
Photo Mark Lockwood.

American Black Duck.
Photo Mark Lockwood

Mottled Duck.
Photo Mark Lockwood

The status of the following species in North America is being reassessed by Birdlife IInternational for the 2020 Red List update. For additional information consult www.birdlife.org

Gunnison Sage-Grouse.
Photo USFWS

Gunnison Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) is endemic to sagebrush habitats in western USA. Its historical range presumably included large areas in Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Kansas, but following intense habitat loss due to land-use change as well as hunting it is now confined to only 8% of its original range. The population is estimated to number 4,800 mature individuals (Partners in Flight 2019). 85-90% of the population, i.e. 4,080-4,320 mature individuals, occur in one site in the Gunnison Basin, with a further seven small populations in the vicinity. After severe declines in the past, the species now shows signs of recovery, with the population in the Gunnison Basin assumed to be stable since the late 1990s.

Gunnison Grouse is currently listed as Endangered. However, new information regarding the population size and trend and a review of the available data on the distribution range suggest that the species may warrant a change in Red List status.

Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) occurs mainly in the western montane region of North America, with smaller numbers in eastern Canada and Iceland. While some populations (e.g. in Iceland) are sedentary, others migrate in winter to estuaries and salt water along the Pacific coast of North America. Barrow's Goldeneye breeds on interior freshwater lakes and rivers in open or wooded country. Nests are placed in tree-holes or natural crevices, but also in artificial

Barrow's Goldeneye
Photo USFWS

nest boxes. In summer, it feeds mainly on insects and plant material, while the winter diet consists mainly of molluscs and crustaceans.

Across its range, the species is hunted; harvesting rates are assumed to be sustainable, but might affect populations locally. Moreover, old-growth forest with large or dead trees is converted for agro-industry plantations. The subsequent loss of available nesting sites may have caused increased chick mortality due to greater distances separating nest holes from water. Further threats include oil spills and exposure to pollutants in wintering grounds, which overlap with industrialised seaways such as the Gulf of St. Lawrence or Vancouver.

Barrow's Goldeneye is currently listed as Least Concern, with the population assumed to be increasing over the last few decades. Following the recent reassessment of North American birds by Partners in Flight (PiF), we have reviewed the new information, particularly regarding population trends. This has allowed us to reassess Barrow's Goldeneye against IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. As the PiF data are long-term trends (1970-2014), we have also used data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey to assess more recent trends over the period relevant to the Red List. Having completed this review, Barrow's Goldeneye appears to warrant a change in Red List status.

VAUX'S SWIFT (*CHAETURA VAUXI*)

Following a taxonomic reassessment, Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) has been split into Vaux's Swift (*C. vauxi*) and Andre's Swift (*C. andrei*). The newly-split Vaux's Swift is a partial migrant with a resident population in Central America and a population breeding in western North America. Andre's Swift is endemic to northern Venezuela. The habitat requirements of the newly-split Andre's Swift have not been investigated, but it is likely that, similarly to Vaux's Swift, it occupies primary and secondary forests in lowland and montane areas. Both of the newly recognised taxa appear to be under threat from forest loss, as they depend on old-growth forest for nest and roost sites.

Vaux's Swift.
Photo by Curt Young

The pre-split taxon was estimated to number 870,000 mature individuals (Partners in Flight 2019). The population size of the newly-split Andre's Swift has not been estimated directly. However, based on the recorded population density of a congener (Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicaudus*: 1 mature individual/km^2 in French Guiana and the area of the species's mapped range (81,400 km^2), and assuming that around 10% of the range is occupied, the population of Andre's Swift may number c.8,000 mature individuals. This estimate is highly preliminary and may be corrected if more detailed data becomes available. To account for uncertainty in the estimate, the population size of Andre's Swift is here placed in the band 2,500-9,999 mature individuals. From this, it follows that the population of the newly-split Vaux's Swift may number roughly 860,000 mature individuals.

The pre-split species was listed as Least Concern. However following the taxonomic split, new estimates of population sizes suggest that both species warrant a thorough assessment.

ANDRE'S SWIFT (*CHAETURA ANDREI*)

Following a taxonomic reassessment, Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) has been split into Vaux's Swift (*C. vauxi*) and Andre's Swift (*C. andrei*). The newly-split Vaux's Swift is a partial migrant with a resident population in Central America and a population breeding in western North America. Andre's Swift is endemic to northern Venezuela. The habitat requirements of the newly-split Andre's Swift have not been investigated, but it is likely that, similarly to Vaux's Swift, it occupies primary and secondary forests in lowland and montane areas . Both of the newly recognised taxa appear to be under threat from forest loss, as they depend on old-growth forest for nest and roost sites.

The pre-split taxon was estimated to number 870,000 mature individuals. The population size of the newly-split Andre's Swift has not been estimated directly. However, based on the recorded population density of a congener (Band-rumped Swift *Chaetura spinicaudus*: 1 mature individual/km^2 in French Guiana [Santini *et al.* 2018]) and the area of the species's mapped range (81,400 km^2), and assuming that around 10% of the range is occupied, the population of Andre's Swift may number c.8,000 mature individuals. This estimate is highly preliminary and may be corrected if more detailed data becomes available. To account for uncertainty in the estimate, the population size of Andre's Swift is here placed in the band 2,500-9,999 mature individuals. From this, it follows that the population of the newly-split Vaux's Swift may number roughly 860,000 mature individuals.

The pre-split species was listed as Least Concern. However following the taxonomic split, new estimates of population sizes suggest that both species warrant a thorough assessment.

GREAT BLUE HERON (*ARDEA HERODIAS*) GREAT WHITE HERON (*ARDEA OCCIDENTALIS*)

Following a taxonomic reassessment, Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) has been split into Great Blue Heron (*A. herodias*) and Great White Heron (*A. occidentalis*) due to morphological, genetic and behavioural differentiation. **This split while accepted by Birdlife Internadtional/IUCN has not been recognized by the American Ornithological Society (AOS formerly AOU).** Great White Heron partly overlaps with Great Blue Heron in what has been described as a 'secondary contact zone': Great White Heron occurs from southern Florida (Florida Bay and southern Biscayne Bay) and the Florida Keys through Cuba. There may be additional breeding populations on islands off the coast of Venezuela, the US and British Virgin Islands, in coastal Yucatán (Mexico) and possibly on other Caribbean islands. It is how-

Great Blue Heron.
Photo © Frank Schulenburg

ever unclear whether these are indeed Great White Herons or whether they are breeding individuals or merely vagrant. The largest part of the population is breeding in Florida.

Great White Heron
Photo William H. Majoros

Piping Plover. Photo
Wikimedia Commons

The population size of Great Blue Heron is estimated at 500,000-4,999,999 mature individuals (Partners in Flight 2019). The population of Great White Heron appears to be much smaller. In southern Florida, surveys detected 175 nests, equating to 350 mature individuals, in 2018. Up to 200 nests, equating to 400 mature individuals, are reported from the Florida Keys, and a further 30-50 nests, equating to 60-100 mature individuals, from the southern Biscayne Bay. The population in Cuba has not been quantified, but is reported to be small, with the majority of the population breeding in Florida. The global population of Great White Heron is therefore tenetatively placed in the band 1,000-2,499 mature individuals, though the true population size may be closer to the lower end of the estimate.

Both species are wading birds and inhabit coastal marine and freshwater wetlands. Threats to them include loss and degradation of habitat through wetland drainage, infrastructural developments and agricultural expansion, as well as decreasing food supply due to the depletion of fish stocks. The newly-split Great White Heron is further threatened by climate change impacts like increased hurricane frequency and storm surges, and by introduced predators like the Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*) in Florida. While Great Blue Heron shows a high level of resilience to these threats with increasing population trends, Great White Heron appears to be in steep decline.

The pre-split species was listed as Least Concern. However, following the taxonomic split, new estimates of the population trends suggest that both species warrant a thorough reassessment.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is a shorebird breeding along the Atlantic coast

of North America and further inland along rivers and wetlands. During the non-breeding season, it migrates south to winter on the beaches and mudflats between south-eastern USA and Yucatan, and occasionally on islands in the Caribbean. The population is estimated to number 8,400 mature individuals, equating to roughly 12,000-13,000 individuals.

Major threats to the species include habitat loss and degradation due to droughts, inappropriate water and beach management, dredging, developments and shoreline stabilisation, coastal flooding caused by climate change, and also nest predation by avian and mammalian predators. Piping Plover has been undergoing a decline over the last five decades, but there is some uncertainty regarding the rate of decline and short-term population trends. There is evidence that following intense conservation action, the population increased at least locally by up to 70% since 1991.

Piping Plover is currently listed as Near Threatened, approaching the threshold for listing as threatened. However, new information regarding population trend suggests that the species may warrant a change in Red List status.

Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) is a shorebird breeding in the tundra of Alaska. In late summer, it migrates south to Oceania, where it winters mainly on Micronesian and Polynesian islands. The population is estimated to number 10,000 mature individual.

The species is facing a variety of threats, which caused population declines in the past. On its breeding grounds in Alaska, the species suffers from predation by native and

Bristle-thighed Curlew.
Photo: Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org

Wood Thrush.
Photo USFWS

introduced predators and habitat loss, and it may be vulnerable to climate change impacts like migratory mismatches or range shifts. Predation and habitat deterioration caused by introduced species is a potential threat on the non-breeding grounds in Oceania as well. Direct harvesting by humans used to threaten the population on the non-breeding grounds, but this practice has already been abandoned in the past.

The species has been considered Vulnerable. However, new information regarding the population size and uncertainty surrounding the population trend suggest that the species may warrant a change in Red List status

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) is a widespread breeding visitor to the eastern USA and south-eastern Canada, wintering in Central America from southern Mexico to Panama. It breeds in the interior and along

the edges of deciduous and mixed forest communities. In its non-breeding range, it is found mainly in humid to semi-humid evergreen and deciduous forests or palm stands, but also in secondary growth, thickets and plantations.

The population is estimated to number 12,000,000 mature individuals. The species has undergone rapid declines in the past, with an estimated 15,000,000 mature individuals lost since 2017. Wood Thrush is threatened by the loss and fragmentation of its forest habitat both within the breeding and non-breeding ranges. In fragmented habitats, breeding pairs suffer from lower reproductive success and higher prevalence of cowbird parasitism. Further threats include contamination by acid rain, disturbance at nest sites, pollution and window collisions.

Wood Thrush is currently listed as Near Threatened, approaching the threshold for listing as threatened. However, rates of population decline seem to have slowed down in recent years, suggesting that the species may warrant a change in Red List status.

INFORMATION ON CARACARAS REQUESTED

Northern Crested Caracara at Brevard Zoo. Photo by MAULI @ Flicker

I am an Assistant Professor at The University of Texas at San Antonio and an avian ecologist by training. Some of my students and I are currently conducting research to evaluate changes in distributions of Crested Caracaras throughout their range over time. My collaborator, Dr James Dwyer, and I have been thinking about doing this research for a long time - we both ran research projects on CRCAs in Florida between 2006-2012 and much of our research focused on understanding their basic ecology. Following our research, and following conversations with a lot of (e.g., ranchers and birders) it became apparent that the distribution of CRCAs has changed a lot over time. Our research aims to evaluate how and why their distribution has changed over time.

To facilitate our research, we are collating point occurrence data from multiple sources (e.g., USFWS in Florida, GBIF, Ebird, iNat, NatureServe, BBS). We are trying to get as much coverage as possible, both in terms of time and geography and are exploring all potential options. One thought I had was that the birding community of Texas may have lots of sighting data which hasn't been converted into an electronic format yet, and that that would be useful for our project if they were willing to share. Do you think your membership would be interested in contributing data to our project? We would, of course, acknowledge all datasets appropriately and adhere to data sharing rules,

Any help would be much appreciated,

Thanks in advance,

Jen Smith

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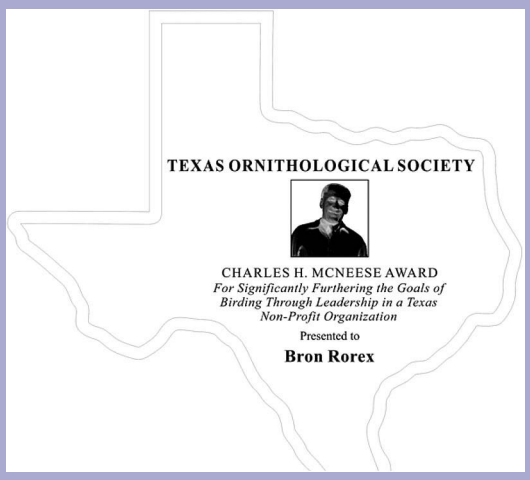
TOS PRESENTS 2020 KINCAID AND McNEESE AWARDS

This year marks the second year TOS has awarded the Kincaid and McNeese Awards. The CHARLES McNEESE AWARD goes to someone who has significantly furthered the goals of birding through leadership in a Texas non-profit organization. Serving on the TOS board for many years and organizing the Rockport *HummerBird Celebration* Bron Rorex is more than deserving of this award. The EDGAR B. KINCAID, JR. AWARD is awarded annually to someone that that has made a significate contribution to the documentation, and conserve birdlife in Texas. No one is more qualified for this award than Greg Lasley. In 1983, Chuck Sexton and Greg Lasley took over the editorship of the Texas Region for *American Birds*, later known as *Field Notes*, and now known as *North American Birds*, a publication of the American Birding Association. Greg continued to be the Texas co-editor of that publication through the year 2000 and was the Secretary of the Texas Bird Records Committee of the Texas Ornithological Society from 1986 until 2000. Greg also served on the Bird Records Committee of the American Birding Association for two terms, ending in 2005. In these various capacities he became heavily involved with rarity records in Texas and the rest of North America. His contribution to the documentation of Texas birds is incalculable.



Bron Rorex

CHARLES McNEESE AWARD

In 1952, Charles McNeese contacted a few friends and placed an "advertisement" in The Spoonbill of the Ornithology Group, Houston Outdoor Nature Club. On February 14, 1953, McNeese and a group that responded to his ad met in Austin and formed the Texas Ornithological Society. McNeese and his efforts established TOS so it seems fitting that we name our new award after him "For significantly furthering the goals of birding through leadership in a Texas non-profit organization".

TOS is proud to present the second Charles McNeese Award to Bron Rorex.

During her formative years Bron's father shared his love of nature, especially birds, with her. Following retirement and move to Rockport, their backyard Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks re-sparked her interest. According to Bron …After settling into our retirement home I enrolled in Gene Black-

lock's bird identification class. After cycling through his course twice I assisted him with birding classes and field trips. He then introduced me to birding surveys including Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys. Next I became secretary to the Texas Colonial Waterbird Society, which he then chaired.

For years I enjoyed learning ever more about birds through the Texas Colonial Waterbird Society professionals. Brent Ortego introduced me to the scientific importance of bird and hummingbird banding which became an additional passion of mine. Brent urged me to join Texas Ornithological Society; he was serving as TOS President at that time. Happily all of those activities were included in my busy birding calendar yet I squeezed in many birding trips to Central and South America, and the 50 United States. Spain and Norway were interesting European birding trips.

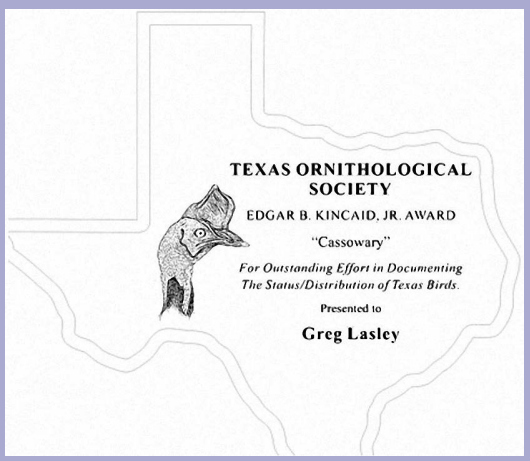
As a resident of Rockport one is automatically involved in their annual *HummerBird* Celebration. I began by guiding hummingbird bus tours and shortly was Assistant Chairman, then Chairman of the event for 6 years. You can still find me guiding hummer bus tours during the event.

One summer afternoon I received a call from Martha McLeod, an extremely motivated science teacher, who introduced me to the joys of sharing my birding knowledge with her 3rd, 4th and 5th graders on a weekly basis. Monthly field trips augmented the bird classes and led to our birding youth competing in the Great Texas Birding Classic. The popularity of our birding program has grown during the 11 years it has been offered. This year we registered 9 birding teams to compete in the GTBC in various tournament classifications. Some teams were composed of our middle and high school birding "graduates". Many thanks to TOS for sponsoring so many of our GTBC birding teams.

Over the years Bron has been recognized by Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Goose Island State Park, Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce, and the Daughters of the American Revolution for conservation and ecological work.

According to Bron "being named the recipient of the Charles McNeese Award has been a totally overwhelming experience for me. My 12 years of service as a TOS Regional Director and work with Jack Eitniear and TOS publications have continued to augment my love and knowledge of birds and birding. My thanks to all of you wonderful members of the Texas Ornithological Society!"

Greg Lasley



EDGAR B. KINCAID, JR. AWARD

Without Kincaid's herculean effort editing Oberholser's *The Bird Life of Texas* the tome would never had seen the light of day. Edgar kept meticulous records of species expansions and retractions and continually expressed concern over the future of this feathered friends. Birds were so much of this native Texan's life he often gave his friends "bird names". As an early editor of the TOS Newsletter and Bird life of Texas it is only fitting that we honor Edgar by naming an award after him. Given to individuals or organizations that document, and/or act to conserve birdlife in Texas.

It is with great pleasure that TOS presents the second Edgar B Kincaid, Jr Award to Greg Lasley.

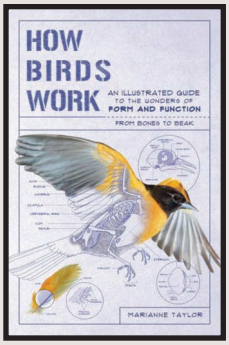
From Greg's webpage…

Greg first pointed a camera at a bird in 1971, a Horned Lark at Great Salt Lake, Utah, while he was in the U.S. Air Force. By 1976, as a novice, but enthusiastic bird-watcher, he became interested in documenting appearances of rare birds by photographing and tape-recording them. From the late 1970s until the late 1980s, most of Greg's wildlife photography focused on documenting rarities and obtaining slides of birds to illustrate his lectures for Audubon Societies or other nature-oriented groups. For more information about rare birds in Texas, please visit the Texas Bird Records Committee website where information about that organization can be found. In 1983, Chuck Sexton and Greg took over the editorship of the Texas Region for *American Birds,* later known as *Field Notes,* and now known as *North American Birds,* a publication of the American Birding Association. Greg continued to be the Texas co-editor of that publication through the year 2000 and was the Secretary of the Texas Bird Records Committee of the Texas Ornithological Society from 1986 until 2000. Greg also served on the Bird Records Committee of the American Birding Association for two terms, ending in 2005. In these various capacities he became more involved with rarity records in Texas and the rest of North America. In 1988, Greg took some photos of the Golden-cheeked Warbler, an endangered species which nests only in Texas. One of these photos was published on the cover of a birding guide-book, which led to other requests to publish Greg's bird photos. In the next several years many of Greg's photos were published in *Texas Highways Magazine, Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine, American Birds, Wildlife Conservation,* and a few of other publications. After these initial publication successes, Greg became more serious about his photography. Over the next few years he continually upgraded his camera equipment, developed the skills necessary to become a good wildlife photographer, and traveled the state of Texas and much of the United States photographing birds. Through the 1990s, hundreds of his photos found their way into various publications.

In 2000, Greg, along with Larry Ditto of McAllen, Texas, a fellow photographer and friend, entered the Valley. Land Fund Wildlife Photo Contest as partners. The contest was a six-month-long wildlife photo competition in far south Texas. Participants included more than 100 other accomplished photographers from around the country. Greg and Larry spent long hours on a single piece of land, working to capture wildlife images in 50 different categories. This contest forced Greg out of his "photographic comfort zone" of birds and into the world of spiders, dragonflies, mammals, and other types of wildlife. Greg and Larry won first place in this prestigious contest in 2000 and finished third in 2002. Since then Greg has continued to branch out with his photography, finding new subjects at which to aim a lens. Dragonflies and damselflies have been a favorite subject for him in recent years, however birds are still a prime focus as well. Butterflies, mammals, and other wildlife are photographed as well. Greg's photo credits now exceed 2000 published images in more than 100 different books and magazines. Please see Greg's photo image use page for a listing of these publication credits.

Greg spent 25 years in law enforcement, retiring from the Austin Police Department in 1997 as a lieutenant. From 1997 through early 2005 he divided his time between photographing wildlife and leading bird-watching trips over much of the western hemisphere for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He had also led trips for VENT part-time from 1985 to 1997. In March, 2005, Greg decided to take a sabbatical from regular tour leading and now concentrates on photography and other wildlife pursuits. He still leads occasional trips for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). His photos appear regularly in a variety of nature and wildlife-oriented books and magazines. He and his wife, Cheryl Johnson, reside in Dripping Springs, Texas.

From the editor's bookshelf…Book reviews



How Birds Work: An Illustrated Guide to the Wonders of Form and Function—from Bones to Beak

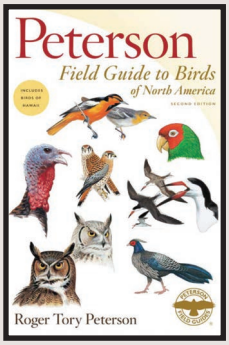
by Taylor, Marianne

ISBN: 9781615196470, Publisher: Experiment, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 224

Engineered by evolution to thrive in the wild. A tiny textbook to learn on your own,

How Birds Work goes beyond the typical field guide to show us not only what birds look like but why. Why do many owls have asymmetrical ear openings? (Hint: It helps them pinpoint prey; see page 40.) And why does the Grey Heron rest on one leg at a time? (Hint: Not because it's tired; see page 66!) Birds boast a spectacular array of adaptations suited to their incredibly diverse diets and habitats. In this in-depth handbook, discover the ways they are even more astounding than you know—inside and out. Detailed analysis and illustrations illuminate:

Skeleton, Muscles, Circulation, Digestion, Respiration, Reproduction, Feathers, Colors and Patterns, And much, much more!



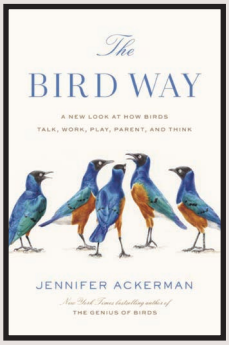
Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America, Second edition

by Peterson, Roger Tory

ISBN: 9781328771445, Publisher: Houghton Mifflin, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 520, Series: Peterson Field Guides

A new edition of the best-selling field guide with 25 all-new plates covering the birds of Hawaii.

For decades, the Peterson Field Guide to Birds has been a popular and trusted guide for birders of all levels, thanks to its famous system of identification and unparalleled illustrations. Now that the American Birding Association has expanded its species Checklist to include Hawaii, the Peterson Guide is the first edition to include the wonderful and exotic species of our fiftieth state. In addition, the text and range maps have been updated, and much of the art has been touched up to reflect current knowledge.



The Bird Way: A New Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent, and Think

by Ackerman, Jennifer

Publisher: Penguin Press, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 368

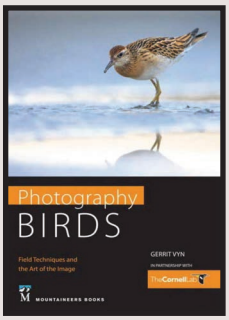
From the New York Times bestselling author of The Genius of Birds, a radical investigation into the bird way of being, and the recent scientific research that is dramatically shifting our understanding of birds—how they live and how they think.

'There is the mammal way and there is the bird way.' This is one scientist's pithy distinction between mammal brains and bird brains: two ways to make a highly intelligent mind. But the bird way is much more than a unique pattern of brain wiring, and lately, scientists have taken a new look at bird behaviors they have, for years, dismissed as anomalies or mysteries. What they are finding is upending the traditional view of how birds conduct their lives, how they communicate, forage, court, breed, survive. They're also revealing the remarkable intelligence underlying these activities, abilities we once considered uniquely our own--deception, manipulation, cheating, kidnapping, infanticide, but also, ingenious communication between species, cooperation, collaboration, altruism, culture, and play.

Some of these extraordinary behaviors are biological conundrums that seem to push the edges of--well--birdness: A mother bird that kills her own infant sons, and another that selflessly tends to the young of other birds as if they were her own. Young birds that devote themselves to feeding their siblings and others so competitive they'll stab their nestmates to death. Birds that give gifts and birds that steal, birds that dance or drum, that paint their creations or paint themselves, birds that build walls of sound to keep out intruders

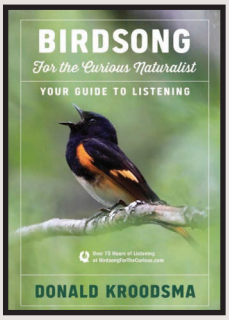
and birds that summon playmates with a special call--and may hold the secret to our own penchant for playfulness and the evolution of laughter.

Drawing on personal observations, the latest science, and her bird-related travel around the world, from the tropical rainforests of eastern Australia and the remote woodlands of northern Japan, to the rolling hills of lower Austria and the islands of Alaska's Kachemak Bay, Ackerman shows there is clearly no single bird way of being. In every respect, in plumage, form, song, flight, lifestyle, niche, and behavior, birds vary. It's what we love about them. As E.O Wilson once said, when you have seen one bird, you have not seen them all.



Photography: Birds. Field Techniques and the Art of the Image
by Vyn, Gerrit
ISBN: 9781680510997, Publisher: Mountaineers Books, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 256

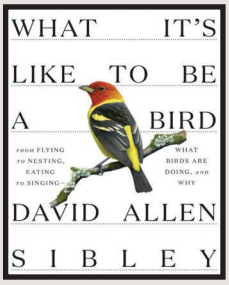
Published in partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Gerrit Vyn, an award-winning bird photographer, videographer, and sound recorder, has become renowned for his ability to capture birds, especially for the prestigious Cornell Lab of Ornithology. In this new guide, he reveals his methods and shares how to photograph birds based on location, behavior, identification, and storytelling. Vyn details the range of technical considerations, giving clear instruction and advice, as well as the creative decisions a photographer must make on lighting, framing, timing, and motion. He also discusses situations unique to bird photographers: dealing with habituated or tame birds, approaching feeders, utilizing blinds, and more. Once captured, digital images can be digitally refined, so Vyn delves into the procedures that elevate an image from mundane to striking, using Adobe Lightroom. Throughout, Vyn emphasizes an ethical approach to observing and interacting with the birds around us.



Birdsong for the Curious Naturalist: Your Guide to Listening
by Kroodsma, Donald
ISBN: 9781328919113, Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 198

Birdsong made easy to understand, lavishly illustrated with color photos, and accompanied by more than 700 online recordings.

From a leading expert, Birdsong for the Curious Naturalist is a basic, how-to guide that teaches anyone - from beginner to advanced birder—how to listen. In understandable and appealing language, Kroodsma explains why and how birds sing, what various calls mean, and what to listen for from the birds around us. The descriptions are accompanied by color photos of the birds, as well as QR codes that link to an online collection of more than 700 recordings. With these resources, readers are prepared to recognize bird sounds and the birds that make them. Kroodsma encourages readers to find the joy of birdsong and curiosity—to observe, listen intently, be curious, ask questions, and realize that many unanswered questions about birdsong don't have to rely on scientists for answers but can be answered by any curious naturalist



What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating to Singing-What Birds Are Doing, and Why
by Sibley, David Allen
ISBN: 9780307957894, Publisher: Knopf, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 240

The bird book for birders and nonbirders alike that will excite and inspire by providing a new and deeper understanding of what common, mostly backyard, birds are doing--and why

'Can birds smell?' 'Is this the same cardinal that was at my feeder last year?' 'Do robins 'hear' worms?' In What It's Like to Be a Bird, David Sibley answers the most frequently asked questions about the birds we see most often. This special, large-format volume is geared as much to nonbirders as it is to the out-and-out obsessed, covering more than two hundred species and including more than 330 new illustrations by the author. While its focus is on familiar backyard birds--blue jays, nuthatches, chickadees--it also examines certain species that can be fairly easily observed, such as

the seashore-dwelling Atlantic puffin. David Sibley's exacting artwork and wide-ranging expertise bring observed behaviors vividly to life. (For most species, the primary illustration is reproduced life-sized.) And while the text is aimed at adults--including fascinating new scientific research on the myriad ways birds have adapted to environmental changes--it is nontechnical, making it the perfect occasion for parents and grandparents to share their love of birds with young children, who will delight in the big, full-color illustrations of birds in action. Unlike any other book he has written, What It's Like to Be a Bird is poised to bring a whole new audience to David Sibley's world of birds.

Backyard Birds Flash Cards: Eastern & Central North America
by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
ISBN: 9780691194707, Publisher: Princeton University Press, Year of Publication: 2020

Backyard Birds Flash Cards, designed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, makes bird watching even more fun! This lavish boxed set focuses on the birds in eastern and central North America, helping you to maximize your chances of identifying species particular to your region, neighborhood, and backyard. The cards come with detailed information for 110 species, including useful range maps, photos of female birds when plumage differs, and QR codes (compatible with the free downloadable Bird QR app) that link to birdsong vocalizations. All identification information is organized by the following keys: size and shape, color pattern, behavior, and habitat. Based on vetted ornithological content from a trusted and leading authority, Backyard Birds Flash Cards is an exciting, handy tool for bird watchers of all ages.

Identification information for 110 bird species in western North America; QR codes that access birdsong samples; Range maps; Gorgeous photos of male and female species (if plumage is different)

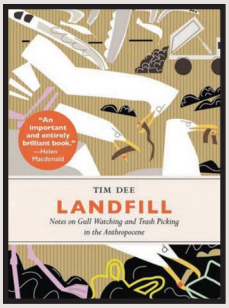
Bird Love: The Family Life of Birds
by Tong, Wenfei
ISBN: 9780691188843, Publisher: Princeton University Press, Year of Publication: 2020, Page Count: 192

A stunningly illustrated look at the mating and parenting lives of the world's birds. Bird Love looks at the extraordinary range of mating systems in the avian world, exploring all the stages from courtship and nest-building to protecting eggs and raising chicks. It delves into the reasons why some species, such as the wattled jacana, rely on males to do all the childcare, while others, such as cuckoos and honeyguides, dump their eggs in the nests of others to raise. For some birds, reciprocal promiscuity pays off: both male and female dunnocks will rear the most chicks by mating with as many partners as possible. For others, long-term monogamy is the only way to ensure their offspring survive.

The book explores the wide variety of ways birds make sure they find a mate in the first place, including how many male birds employ elaborate tactics to show how sexy they are. Gathering in leks to display to females, they dance, pose, or parade to sell their suitability as a mate. Other birds attract a partner with their building skills: female bowerbirds rate brains above beauty, so males construct elaborate bowers with twig avenues and cleared courtyards to impress them.

Looking at the differing levels of parenting skills across species around the world, we see why a tenth of bird species, including the fairy-wrens of Australia, have helpers at the nest who forgo their own reproduction to assist the breeding pair; how brood parasites and their hosts have engaged in evolutionary arms races; and how monogamous pairs share-or relinquish-their responsibilities.

Illustrated throughout with beautiful photographs, Bird Love is a celebration of the global diversity of avian reproductive strategies.



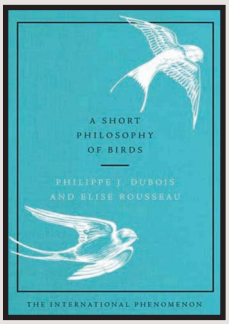
Landfill: Notes on Gull Watching and Trash Picking in the Anthropocene

by Dee, Tim

ISBN: 9781603589093, Publisher: Chelsea Green Publishing, Year of Publication: 2019, Page Count: 240

Over the past hundred years, gulls have been brought ashore by modernity. They now live not only on the coasts but in our slipstream following trawlers, barges, and garbage trucks. They are more our contemporaries than most birds, living their wild lives among us in towns and cities. In many ways they live as we do, walking the built-up world and grabbing a bite where they can. Yet this disturbs us. We've started fearing gulls for getting good at being among us. We see them as scavengers, not entrepreneurs; ocean-going aliens, not refugees. They are too big for the world they have entered. Their story is our story too.

Landfill is the original and compelling story of how in the Anthropocene we have learned about the natural world, named and catalogued it, and then colonized it, planted it, or filled it with our junk. While most other birds have gone in the opposite direction, hiding away from us, some vanishing forever, gulls continue to tell us how the wild can share our world. For these reasons Landfill is the nature book for our times, groundbreaking and genre-bending. Without nostalgia or eulogy, it kicks beneath the littered surface of the things to discover stranger truths.



A Short Philosophy of Birds

by DuBois, Philippe J and Elise Rousseau

ISBN: 9780062945679, Publisher: Dey Street Books, Year of Publication: 2019, Page Count: 176

A French ornithologist and philosopher teaches us to pause, look to the sky, and reconnect with the natural world, in twenty-two short lessons inspired by the secret lives of birds.

There is a lot we can learn from birds if we pay attention. This elegant volume invites us to take a step back from our busy lives, to reconnect with nature, and to listen to the tiny philosophers of the sky.

From the delicate sparrow to the majestic eagle, birds are among the most fascinating species on earth. These seemingly delicate creatures, who routinely weather the fiercest storms and travel thousands of miles each year migrating with the changing seasons are paragons of beauty and grace. There is much to be gleaned from their serene approach to life if we're willing to take the time to notice, including:

Independence: what it means to be 'pushed out of the nest.'

Vulnerability: what the mallard teaches us about giving up our old feathers for new ones in order to fly.

Gender equality: what happens when a papa Turtledove sits on the nest.

Hierarchy and power: what the raven and the vulture know about the pecking order.

Filled with elegant illustrations of bird species, A Short Philosophy of Birds is a celebration of our friends in the sky, reminding us to embrace the rhythms of the natural world all around us.

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All photographic submissions should be addressed to: texasbirdimages@gmail.com

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