



## President's Message



Byron "Doc" Stone,  
TOS President

Greetings TOS members, After another long, hot summer, cooler weather has finally arrived, which suits me fine. I am looking forward to another winter of sparrow study and Christmas Bird Counts.

I am also excited about our upcoming meeting in McKinney, Texas January 14 to 17,

2016, and I hope that many of you will attend.

The meeting will be co-hosted by Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society (PTAS) in McKinney, with the able guidance of Region 2 Director Gailon Brehm. The folks at PTAS have helped put together an outstanding array of field trips, evening speakers and other activities. Meeting and registration information is included in this newsletter. We should have great fun prowling the backroads, preserves, pastures and reservoirs for waterfowl, raptors, sparrows, longspurs and other winter specialty birds of the area.

Your TOS Board of Directors has been busy during summer and fall. The composition of the board has changed some since last spring. Catherine Winans from McKinney agreed to serve as Treasurer following the resignation in early September of Sandi Wheeler. Similarly, Jimma Byrd of San Saba agreed to serve as Region 2 Director following the resignation of Russell Nelson. I want to thank Sandi Wheeler and Russ Nelson for their years of service to TOS, and to also thank former Vice-President D.D. Currie, who also resigned in early September, for her service to TOS during her tenure on the board.

One of the main projects that the Board has been engaged in this year is a complete revision of the organization's bylaws and articles of incorporation. During the past few years, it has become clear to most board members that the existing articles and bylaws were in serious need of updating and revision, in order to bring the articles into compliance with statutory requirements, to resolve some inconsistencies and ambiguities in the current bylaws, and to improve the efficiency of the organization. The board convened by email and by phone during the summer and agreed to hire a consultant to help us with the bylaws revision. We met in person during a board retreat in early September and had the opportunity to discuss the needs of the organization, reconsider our goals, and review potential bylaws changes. The board has conferred by phone since then and is likely to approve the bylaws revisions soon. Once the board has approved these proposed bylaws changes, the content will be made available to the membership for review and discussion. In fact, we plan to hold a couple of discussion

sessions at the McKinney meeting to give general members a chance to discuss the proposed changes with current board members. Once the membership has had adequate opportunity to review the changes, the revised bylaws will be presented to the membership for approval.

If these bylaws revisions are approved, they will change the way TOS elections are conducted, and will change slightly the way the board is constituted. The bylaws revisions will call for contested elections for all positions when possible; they will retain positions for 8 Regional Directors but all members will be able to vote for all 8 Regional Director positions (a legal requirement of our type of organization). All members will also be able to vote for 4 At-Large board members. The number of board positions would be pared from 13 to 12, because the office of President-Elect will be eliminated, leaving only 4 officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, so the final board will consist of 8 Regional Directors and 4 At-Large Directors. The bylaws revisions would institute term-limits for board members, so that the maximum term that could be served is two consecutive 3-year terms. The final change to the electoral process is that the board would elect or re-elect the 4 officers annually; those 4 officers would come from the pool of 8 Regional and 4 At-Large Directors. This change would give the organization greater flexibility to meet changing organizational needs. So, the membership would elect all 12 directors, but the board would elect the 4 officers. Those 4 officers would then constitute an Executive Board, which would have authority to make day-to-day decisions for TOS, but would be answerable to the full board, and, of course, to the membership. This change should allow TOS to function more efficiently, and respond more quickly to pressing needs. But it will also necessitate more frequent board meetings, which is a change that has already taken place, as we are meeting at a frequency of about once every other month, either by phone conference or in person.

I know that some among you will wonder why any changes are necessary. "Hasn't this organization done just fine for years without changing things?" Actually, I think this organization has done some very fine things, but the way we have run the organization has not kept up with regulatory or statutory compliance, and we also need greater efficiency in order to accomplish the many goals and objectives that we all envision for the organization. TOS must change in order to contend effectively with current demands and to prepare for an even more complex future. These changes have not been considered lightly. The current board has had many lengthy discussions about these revisions. The changes will probably also mean that more will be expected from board members, officers, and probably from you, the membership of TOS. For TOS to grow and prosper and continue to provide opportunities for research and field study and bird conservation, we not only need bylaws changes, we need your help, too. It is my fervent belief that the changes which will result from the bylaws revisions will

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help TOS run more efficiently and effectively for many years to come. But don't be surprised if an officer or regional director or

committee member of TOS calls on you at some point to serve in some way. TOS needs you, and so do the birds.

See you in McKinney,

—Byron "Doc" Stone, TOS President

## Red-legged Honeycreeper added to the Texas List



On November 27th, 2014, Ruben Rangel ran across a bird at Estero Llano Grande State Park (Hidalgo County) in far south Texas that he couldn't identify. He brought this to the attention of a few others, including Mary Gustafson, who identified it as a Red-legged Honeycreeper. Word quickly spread about this bird and a fair number of birders altered their Thanksgiving plans in an effort to see it. Several folks were able to see and photograph it over the next couple of days. The last sighting of the honeycreeper in the park was on November 29th, 2014 despite extensive efforts to refind it on subsequent days.

The photos by themselves leave no doubt about the identification. Thus, the voting and decision on this record centered on the obvious question of provenance.

Red-legged Honeycreepers are migratory in the northern part of their range which extends to southeastern part of the Mexican state of San Luis Potosi, roughly 300 miles from Estero Llano Grande State Park. They are found there during the summer months and typically retreat a couple hundred miles or more to the southeast to southern parts of Mexico and central America to spend the rest of the year.

Red-legged Honeycreepers are also very colorful birds and can be found for sale by pet/bird breeders, vendors and likely by locals that capture them. Florida has had a couple records of this species reviewed by their records committee and, as of this writing, all have been NOT accepted due to questions about their provenance.

For this particular record, the photographs of it during its three day stay were analyzed by experts who independently concluded that the bird in question was a hatch-year bird (hatched either in the spring or summer of 2014), likely a female. The brown juvenal primary coverts and the thin/worn retrices are consistent with a bird of this age.

The TBRC was able to consider all these factors during their review of this record. The voting members independently

voted 9-0 to accept it to the Texas state list. Factoring heavily in the vote was the bird's age (hatch-year) and that it showed no signs of feather wear nor bill or feet abnormalities that might be associated with captivity. Hatch-year individuals of many migratory species are known to wander off course, particularly in the fall, and it is certainly conceivable that was the case with the Estero Llano Grande bird.

Though the TBRC does not claim to KNOW that this particular bird arrived at Estero Llano Grande of its own free will, the plausibility of this happening does not seem to be out of the question and the TBRC members unanimously deemed it more likely than an unnatural scenario where a captive held bird would appear under the same circumstances. We acknowledge that this was a judgement call where definite proof of provenance is unattainable and recognize that others may come to different conclusions. Indeed, the ABA Checklist Committee will be voting on this same record in the next few months to decide if they see the circumstances the same way as the TBRC.

—Eric Carpenter

Secretary, Texas Bird Records Committee, September 2015.

### TOSNEWS Staff

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## New Committee Chair and Members of the TOS Board



**Byron Stone**  
President

**Susan Foster**  
Secretary



**Catherine Winans**  
Treasurer



**Linda Belssner**  
Region 3 Director



**Jimma Byrd**  
Region 5 Director



**Jane Tillman** Field Trip  
Chairperson



## Whooping Cranes Begin Fall Migration to Texas



AUSTIN— Endangered whooping cranes have begun their annual 2,400-mile fall migration from Canada to Texas, arriving early at San Jose Island this year.

*Whooping Crane. Photo Earl Nottingham/TPWD.*

The first bird was reported at the island over the week-

end, though most of the whooping crane population remains north of the state. Biologists expect them to join the early arrivals in late October or early November. The whoopers will embark on their journey back to Canada next March.

To track the movement of these endangered birds across the state, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department developed the Texas Whooper Watch program (<http://tpwd.texas.gov/whoopingcranes/>), a citizen science initiative that relies on volunteers to report whooping crane sightings. Because the growing flock has begun to explore other wintering areas away from traditional areas, the program helps the agency learn more about whooping cranes and their winter habitats across the state.

Since recovering from a low of 16 birds in the 1940s to 308 birds today, whooping cranes have wintered on the Texas coast in and around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Recently, however, several groups of whooping cranes have expanded their wintering grounds to include other coastal areas and some inland sites.

Whooping cranes, which are North America's tallest bird at nearly five feet tall, follow a migratory path through North and Central Texas that includes cities such as Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, Dallas, Waco, Austin and Victoria. During migration, they often pause overnight in wetlands for roosting and agricultural fields for feeding, but they seldom remain more than one night. The typical sighting—71 percent of all observations—is fewer than three birds, but last year Texas had multiple sightings of larger groups, including one of 19 birds. Whooping cranes can also be seen roosting and feeding with large flocks of smaller, darker sandhill cranes.

Citizens can help track whooping cranes by reporting sightings and preventing disturbance of cranes when they remain overnight at roosting and feeding locations. Sightings can be reported to [whoopingcranes@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.texas.gov) or 512-389-TXWW (8999). Observers should especially note whether the cranes have colored bands on their legs. Volunteers interested in attending training sessions to become "Whooper Watchers" may also contact TPWD at [whoopingcranes@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.texas.gov) or 512-389-TXWW (8999).

Additional information, including photos of whooping crane look-alike species, can be found at <http://tpwd.texas.gov/whoopingcranes/> and at <http://www.whoopingcrane.com/report-a-sighting/>.

# TOS Regional Reports

## Region 1—Panhandle

The Llano Estacado Audubon Society, presided over by Anthony Hewetson, continues to provide one field trip to a local hotspot per month and continues to provide public programs on a quarterly basis. The new newsletter editor, Ellen Hildebrandt, has vastly improved the newsletter by actively seeking out events for the calendar and ways for members to participate in conservation activities. The LEAS also provides limited support for the region's Breeding Bird Survey efforts, ensuring that all seven of the surveys in the LEAS region are completed annually. There are three Christmas Bird Counts coming up in the Lubbock region (Lubbock County, Muleshoe NWR, and White River Lake) and a handful of CBCs coming up in the Panhandle proper. The former are sponsored by LEAS and have been well-publicized on texbirds; the latter have yet to be announced. The area's strongest birders continue to make valuable contributions to eBird and to the ABA. The region is a great place to bird but is very poorly covered, with roughly ten active birders covering 44-58 counties (depending on which entity is doing the counting). The region is now best followed, from a birding perspective, by lurking on eBird as very few birders report their sighting to regional compilers.

If interested in participating in region CBCs, contact Anthony at [fatonybords@gmail.com](mailto:fatonybords@gmail.com)

—Anthony Hewetson  
[anthony.hewetson@ttuhsc.edu](mailto:anthony.hewetson@ttuhsc.edu)

## Region 2—North Central Texas

Early fall shorebird migration can be exciting in North Texas and, typically in August, large numbers of Arctic breeders pass through. These birds are highly dependent on the local availability of food as they stop in our area during their long migration routes. During 2015, however, high lake water levels made shoreline areas inaccessible or too brushy for good viewing. As a result, early August sightings were meager. By late August and during September, water levels, visibility, and sightings improved; so that Buff-breasted, Upland, Stilt, and Solitary Sandpipers were commonly seen as were a variety of other shorebird species. The reported sighting of a Red Phalarope at White Rock Lake was the most exciting of all.

Raptor migration begins in late summer as the Mississippi Kites sweep out of the region. Then during fall, migration of hawks and falcons peaks. Sightings are notable but spread out over the area since there are no natural geographic choke points. Small numbers of Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks continue to be seen until mid-October. Wintering Red-tailed Hawks will then flood the open grasslands and brushlands, and Bald Eagles will establish themselves at all the large lakes. Occasionally, solitary Peregrine Falcons cause excitement as they follow the southern migration of shorebirds and waterfowl and stay at a given location for a few days or weeks to feed. Flocks of shorebirds flying up to unexpectedly high altitudes often accompany a high-speed falcon flyby!

The highlight of upcoming North Texas Region activities is the TOS Winter Meeting in McKinney, January 14-17, 2016. Our co-sponsor, the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society, has worked tirelessly to prepare excellent field trips and speakers for

that meeting. To highlight local birdlife, winter specialties like waterfowl and sparrows will be emphasized. The headquarters hotel is the Hilton Garden Inn, just south of McKinney on US 75 and Bethany in Allen. Come join us!



—Gailon Brehm  
[g-brehm@msn.com](mailto:g-brehm@msn.com)

## Region 3—Piney Woods

On Saturday, Sept 26, 2015, a Hawk Watch was held at Tyler State Park. Few hawks were seen, but a good time was had by the hawk watchers.

The CBC season is fast approaching. As of now, the only CBC I know of is Tyler's on Jan. 2, 2016.

I joined a few members of Tyler Audubon Society at Richland Creek WMA in Freestone County on Saturday, Oct. 3, 2015, for a bird walk. We tallied around 47 species.

The Texas Freshwater Fishery, in Athens, has a bird walk the second Saturday of each month. Either James Booker or I lead the bird walk.

Tyler Audubon will be coming to the Fishery on Nov. 14th, 2015, for the bird walk. The walk will start at the Lake Athens Marina at 7:30 a.m. Come out and join us for a fun time and some great birding.

—Linda Belssner  
[lynngunbarrel@embarqmail.com](mailto:lynngunbarrel@embarqmail.com)

## Region 4—Trans-Pecos

In the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Region of Texas, our most active local birders regularly monitor and share their findings in areas including reservoirs to the east of El Paso, El Paso's Ascarate Park and the City's Rio Bosque Wetlands park.

Our State Urban Wildlife Biologist, Lois Balin and her Wildlife Technician, Melanie Hoffman (Region 4 Director) are researching artificial burrow entrance sizes in hopes to determine whether there is a certain diameter entrance that will exclude skunks, but still allow Burrowing Owls to enter and exit freely. This research was precipitated after a skunk was filmed entering one of the artificial burrows and predated on both adult and young Burrowing Owls in an artificial burrow constructed at the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park.

Noteworthy birds in the El Paso/Trans-Pecos Region include a female Blue-throated Hummingbird that was banded during a TOS field trip at John Kiseda's home earlier this spring. She returned on September 1st after leaving April 1st, 2015.

—Melanie Hoffman  
[Hoffman@glinx.com](mailto:Hoffman@glinx.com)

## Region 5

See New Committee Chair and Members of the Board for introduction to Jimma Byrd.

—byrdjimma13@gmail.com

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## Region 6—Central Praries

—Betty Vermeire  
bavermeire@suddenlink.net

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## Region 7— Brushlands

Region 7 has had a presence at both the September HummerBird Celebration in Rockport and the November Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in Harlingen recently. Our presence at both festivals was with a TOS vendor booth where we sold our TOS tee shirts, caps, pins, second edition of TOS Handbook and memberships and membership renewals. Stop by and visit with us next time you see us at a birding event. We love to see our members. See photos of our member visits in this newsletter.

Upcoming in our region early next year will be the Laredo Birding Festival on February 3-6, 2016 and the Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas February 25-28, 2016.

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You will find an informational update in this newsletter by Joan Holt covering recent changes at our beloved birding hotspot, Paradise Pond, which was named for her and her husband Scott Holt.

—Bron Rorex  
Region 7 Director  
bron@rorexusa.com

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## Region 8—Coastal Prairies

At the TOS Board Retreat held at the Nature Conservancy's Independence Creek Preserve, the Board authorized Dave Dolan and Chuck Davis to get proposals from contractors for a water feature at Hooks Woods Sanctuary that will be a memorial to past TOS President Steve Gross. They are currently securing proposals to present to the board for approval. It is the intention of the Board that this memorial be completed in time for spring migration. When the water feature is completed, there will be a ceremony at Hooks Woods to dedicate this memorial.

—Chuck Davis  
chuck@rolloverpass.org

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# Past and Present Perspectives on the Joan and Scott Holt Paradise Pond

Scott and I have a special interest in and love for this valuable oasis. It has long been an important resting and feeding site for migratory birds because it is a rare freshwater wetland, surrounded by large Black Willow trees and a diversity of understory plants in an area otherwise lacking in woodlands.

We began birding there in the mid to late 1980's before there were many houses on Channel Vista Drive. We entered under the powerline right of way through willows that surrounded the pond. Scott, Cecilia Riley and I went there often during spring migration and one year found a Glossy Ibis which is unusual for our area. We shared the finding with a few birding colleagues and thus the Pond was discovered. Several birders began coming to what we called Paradise Pond (because it was behind the Paradise Motel). After the houses were built on Channel Vista behind Paradise Pond we no longer had access there and began entering through the Aransas Harbors Condominium side. Many birders used this entrance, including Joe Frandolig who lived in Aransas Harbors. He became the birder in residence and kept careful watch over Paradise Pond. Annual bird counts there during the late 1990's reached 130 species including Swainson's, Golden-winged, Chestnut-sided, Worm-eating and Cerulean Warblers as well as waterthrushes, cuckoos, tanagers and night-herons.

The popularity of the pond drew the attention of Ann Vaughan CEO of the Chamber of Commerce-Tourist Bureau. During a Great Texas Birding Classic event sponsored by the Chamber we showed the "magic spot" to Mayor Glenn Martin and the city became interested and actively involved. A proposal was submitted by the Gulf Coast Birding Observatory, Audubon Outdoor Club, and the City of Port Aransas, to the Great Texas Birding Classic for a Conservation Grant and was chosen to receive the grant in 1999. The grant money was used to secure challenge funds through the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries

Program. Paradise Pond was dedicated in 2002 as a community effort supported by foundation funds, the city of Port Aransas and teamwork.

As a wooded oasis in the middle of development, Paradise Pond is a natural attraction for migrating birds. It was originally surrounded by Black Willows and a variety of native understory plants and native prairie. Over the past 10 years or so the woodlands surrounding the pond and the upland prairie have become dominated by Brazilian Peppertrees. These trees are not only non-native to the US they are highly invasive. The trees that were recently removed on the west side of Paradise Pond, first by AEP (under their power line right of way immediately adjacent to the water) and beyond that, by the developer of the housing project, were invasive Brazilian Peppertrees that have taken over and killed most of the willow trees and the native prairie that once were west of the Pond.

Our goal is to turn this devastation into an opportunity to bring back the Paradise Pond that we first knew. Scott is working on a plan with the City of Port Aransas, the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program and the developer Nick Lorette, to plant willows and other South Texas native vegetation to recover the back side of Paradise Pond. Funds have been donated by the developer and by AEP to hire a landscaper to plant the trees and other vegetation and a contract is about to be signed. We are working with AEP to plant low growing native vegetation under the power line to avoid future cuttings. There is a silver lining, we have an opportunity to purchase several of the lots slated for development immediately behind Paradise Pond if we can find the funds. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory has already made a commitment of future funds and we are hopeful that other groups will join in the effort.

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It will be a long and expensive process to grow the trees (without the peppertrees taking over) and will require substantial community support and involvement. But I can report that nearctic-neotropical migratory birds continue to use the larger vegetated areas of the pond and Blue-winged and green-winged Teal, Common Snipe, White Ibis, and several herons and egrets are taking advantage of the open water. If all goes well we could end up with a bigger and better Paradise Pond for all the birds.

—Joan Holt



Winter 2015 (you can clearly see the takeover of the area by peppertrees over that time span). Photo by Scott Holt.



Fall 2009 (Thanksgiving 2009). Photo by Scott Holt.



The area after the clearing. Photo by Scott Holt.

## Accepted Records from the 2014 TBRC Report

### ACROSS

- 6 Hummingbird seen at Terlingua
- 9 Duck often sighted at Sabal Palm Sanctuary
- 10 Shorebird seen at McNary Reservoir
- 13 Rare flycatcher observed on w. Galveston Island
- 14 Small passerine seen at Frontera Audubon Thicket
- 15 Member of genus Puffinus seen 1 mile offshore from Port Aransas

### DOWN

- 1 Buteo seen at Chisos Mountains
- 2 Member of Chloroceryle observed at Los Ebanos Preserve
- 3 Swan seen at Bristol and Lubbock
- 4 Another noteworthy gull seen at Lake Casa Blanca in Webb county
- 5 Tanager seen at Boot Spring, Big Bend NP
- 7 Thrush observed in El Paso
- 8 Noteworthy gull at San Luis Pass
- 11 Jay seen in El Paso County
- 12 Calidris seen at Anahuac NWR

**Answers on page 10.**

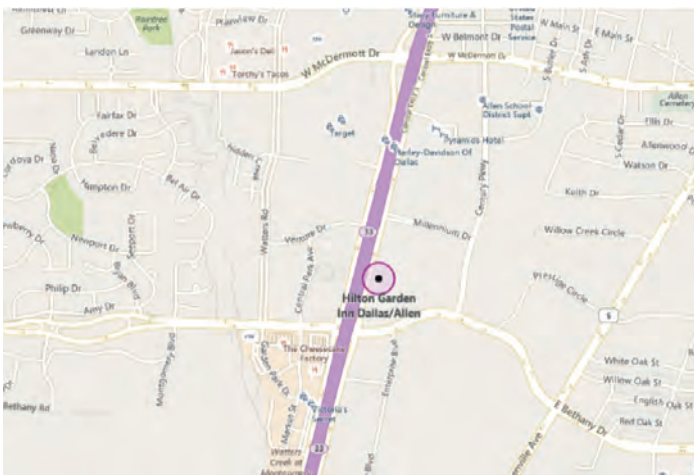
# Winter TOS Meeting in McKinney

## January 14–17, 2016

### Greetings TOS Members,

The winter 2016 TOS meeting will take place in McKinney, Texas from Thursday January 14 through Sunday January 17, 2016.

Field trips are planned to 16 different locations/routes including Century Club trips covering 5 counties. Itineraries include Hagerman NWR, Lake Tawakoni, Lake Lewisville, the Heard Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary, Lake Lavon and several other area reservoirs. Winter birding in this portion of the blackland-prairie and cross-timbers regions around Dallas offers excellent opportunities for the study of waterfowl, gulls, raptors, sparrows and woodland birds. Winter specialty birds include Hairy and Red-headed Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and 15 species of sparrows including LeConte's and Harris's, and outside chances at Little Gull, Prairie Falcon and Smith's Longspur. We have entertaining speakers for three evenings, afternoon workshops, a raffle, and a silent auction. We have a group room rate at the Hilton Garden Inn hotel with convenient access and all amenities. This meeting will be co-hosted by the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society in McKinney. Members of PTAS have been hard at work planning an exciting meeting for attendees. Registration will be available online, but we will have volunteers available to assist by telephone if needed. Register now and make your lodging reservations as you won't want to miss this meeting.—*Byron Stone, President*



Meeting headquarters will be at the Hilton Garden Inn, 705 Central Expressway S (US 75), Allen, TX 75013, (214) 547-1700, ([hiltongardeninn1.hilton.com](http://hiltongardeninn1.hilton.com)). From Dallas: US 75 north, exit 33/Bethany. All activities will be at this location and field trips will leave from here. Special TOS room rates are \$95 King with Breakfast and \$99 Two Queens with Breakfast, rate code TOS. Registration for the meeting \$50 for TOS members, \$75 nonmembers, with a \$10 late fee after January 1.

### Meeting Schedule

#### Thursday, January 14

Registration 4:00-7:00 PM at the Hilton

Welcome—Speaker—Wayne Meyer 7:00-9:00 PM at the Hilton

#### Friday, January 15

Field Trip Departures 6:00-7:00 AM from the Hilton

Workshops 3:00 and 4:00 PM at the Hilton

Discussion of TOS Bylaws revision 4:00 PM at the Hilton

Registration 4:00-7:00 PM at the Hilton

Trip reports—Speaker—Erich Neupert 7:00-9:00 PM at the Hilton

#### Saturday, January 16

Field Trip Departures 6:00-7:00 AM from the Hilton

Workshops 3:00 and 4:00 PM at the Hilton

Discussion of TOS Bylaws revision 4:00 PM at the Hilton

Reception / cash bar 6:00 at the Hilton

Trip reports and raffle 6:30-7:00 PM

Banquet 7:00-8:00 PM at the Hilton

Speaker—Brent Ortego 8:00-9:00 PM at the Hilton

Final announcements 9:00-10:00

#### Sunday, January 17

Field Trip Departures & travel home 6:00-7:00 AM from the Hilton

### Speakers



Dr. Wayne Meyer began birding at the age of 13 in Connecticut and has been at it ever since. He has birded extensively on both coasts of North America and in Texas and Oklahoma. He has been a member of the Austin College biology department for 20 years. He received his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. at the University of California at Davis.

His research interests include song learning in the Painted Bunting and grassland breeding birds. Both projects have utilized Hagerman NWR as well as other nearby properties. Wayne will be speaking on sparrows.



Erich Neupert has been the Executive Director of the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center (BPRC), in Lucas, Texas since 2006. Prior to joining BPRC, Erich was the manager and rehabilitator for a North Texas raptor center that received more than 500 patients a year. Erich is a Texas Master Naturalist and Audubon member who teaches classes

on a variety of birding topics. He is an avid birder who enjoys working with organizations to further the mission of environmental education. Erich will be speaking on raptors.



Dr. Brent Ortego is the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Wildlife Division Non-Game Biologist for South Texas. He has worked for TPWD for 32 years and has conducted Christmas Bird Counts since 1974. He has initiated new CBCs at 4 sites and coordinates two of the best of the nation: Matagorda County/Mad Island Marsh and Guadalupe River Delta/McFaddin Family Ranches. He is the current Texas CBC director. Dr. Ortego received his Master's Degree in Wildlife and Wildlands Science and Management from Louisiana State University and his PhD in Wildlife Ecology/Fisheries from Auburn University. At TPWD, Dr. Ortego has various responsibilities that keep his fingers on the pulse of bird life in Texas. In addition to conservation planning, technical assistance to landowners, and public education and outreach, he has been a member of the Atwater's Greater

Prairie Chicken Recovery Team, the Bald Eagle Survey Coordinator, the Colonial Waterbird Survey Coordinator and the USGS Texas Breeding Bird Survey Coordinator. Dr. Ortego is a familiar face at the annual HummerBird Celebration in Rockport where he speaks on Texas hummingbirds and his experiences managing habitat for them at his home in Victoria, Texas. Brent will be speaking on Christmas Bird Counts.

Afternoon workshop speakers will be as follows: Dr. Tania Homayoun, Urban Conservation Program Manager with Audubon Texas, talking about climate change and birds; Jim Bednarz, currently teaching at the University of North Texas and Collin College, discussing his research on Red-shouldered Hawks; Chris Runk, North Texas eBird Reviewer, talking about gull identification; and Gary Akin, graduate student at Southeast Oklahoma State University, talking about his research on Lark Sparrows.

## McKinney TOS Field Trips—January 15, 16, 17, 2015

### General Considerations:

- North Texas can be cold; so wear appropriate layers and warm boots. Wear a hat and bring sunscreen.
- Wet, muddy ground is possible; so consider waterproof boots or wellies that will protect your feet.
- Bring water and snacks/lunch.
- Stops for gas, food or restrooms will be kept short in order to maximize time spent birding.
- Bring walkie-talkies if you have them, preferably set to channel 11-22. They are indispensable for communicating between vehicles in a car caravan.
- Several of the Sunday trips have been designed with “leaving town” in mind.
- Keep in mind that trip leaders are volunteering their time and talents to help you see birds—please treat them cordially.

### Friday

**1. Fannin County Century Club**—Fannin County is primarily Blackland Prairie bordered on the north by The Red River. The trip will cover most sections of the county, so expect about 100 driving miles. We will visit Bonham State Park, scoping the lake for ducks and searching for woodland birds and sparrows. Our route takes us through the city of Bonham, where we will watch for town birds. Lake Bonham has two public boat ramps where we will look for gulls, terns, and ducks. Bald Eagle is a possibility. There will be three stops in the Caddo National Grassland; Lake Crockett, Coffee Mill Lake, and Bois D'Arc Trail Head. These three locations should allow us to complete the list of expected water, woodland, and field birds. Hairy Woodpecker is possible anywhere in the Caddo National Grassland. We may stop along our route to examine a few small farm ponds. There will be some easy walking at the State Park and The Grasslands. There is an entrance fee of \$4 at Bonham State Park. We should see about 75 species. ~1 hour driving time to Fannin County. *Depart 6:15 am, Return 4:00 pm.* Take lunch.

**2. Cooke County Century Club**—The first stops after entering Cooke county will be at the FM 922 crossings of Lake Ray Roberts (both e-Bird hotspots) and then moves up to Gainesville for city birds, across Highway 82 and up CR 1201 to Hubert Moss Lake (another e-Bird hotspot) with stops along CR 1201 for grassland and/or woodland birds. We cover both ramps at Hubert Moss Lake and then come back via CR 1201, and FM 902. The slower portions of this route should allow us to clean up on grassland and woodlot birds. We return to McKinney by way of FM 90 and Highway 380. Stops will involve some brief walking, mostly along roadways. As indicated, a fair amount of driving is involved - 75 miles or so in Cooke County itself. Expect to see between 80 and 100 species. ~45 minutes driving time to Cooke County. *Depart 6:00 am, Return 5:00 pm.* Take lunch.

### Friday, Saturday, & Sunday

**3. Heard Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary**—This sanctuary, surrounded by a sea of urban development, is a 289 acres island of woodlands, wetlands and open meadows. Participants will walk the trails including areas normally closed to the general public. If time permits, some country roads outside the preserve will be explored to uncover additional sightings. Although elusive, Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks, and Hairy and Red-headed Woodpeckers reside here. In addition, a mix of winter sparrows and woodland passerines are expected, including White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Plan on a significant amount of walking on level and possibly wet trails. Entry fee \$5 per person. Depart 7:00 am, return 3:00 pm. Take lunch.



**4. Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge**—Hagerman, located on the south side of Lake Texoma, boasts a checklist of 316 species. It was established in 1946, after the dam on the Red River was built, as a refuge for wintering geese that were devouring the grain on local farm fields. The refuge is 12,000 acres of diverse habitat, much of which is planted with grain and other plants suitable for waterfowl to eat. This trip will be mainly driving and stopping to bird and scope areas. There will be two areas of short walking. Regular winter highlights have been Snow and Ross's Geese along with Red-headed Woodpeckers, Le Conte's, and Harris Sparrows. Species count for the day should be around 75. ~1 hour driving time to Hagerman. *Depart 6:15 Return 4:00 pm.* Take lunch.

**5. Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area**—This is a 2000 acre gated area owned by the Army Corp of Engineers and managed by a collaboration of University of North Texas, Lewisville ISD, and the City of Lewisville. It has hardwood bottomlands, wetlands, prairie, and a fish hatchery. It and is located below the dam of Lake Lewisville. Because of this combination of habitat and diversity of species, LLELA is used for many environmental studies. One current study involves banding grassland sparrows to determine site fidelity. The trip will start with walking the fields at dawn to flush Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers. The majority of the day will be walking 5+ miles on dirt trails with driving from one area to another. LLELA has an e-bird check list of 284 species. On this winter day we expect 60+ species. ~45 minutes driving time to Lewisville. *Depart 6:00 am, Return 3:00 pm, \$5.00 per car entry fee.* Take lunch.

**6. Lake Tawakoni**—Lake Tawakoni features many good birding spots that will be visited. Highlights - the Public Marina in Van Zandt County, various ponds and small marinas for waterfowl, Cedar Cove Marina, and West Tawakoni City Park. Walking should be about 3 miles on well-maintained, level trails. Common Loons are likely with a possibility of Red-throated and Pacific Loons. Horned Grebe, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Bald Eagles are expected. If we get lucky, we might stumble on Cave Swallow or Winter Wren. A big effort will be made to find the Smith's Longspurs as they are found here most winters. ~1 hour, 15 minutes driving time to Tawakoni. *Depart 6:00 am. Return 3:00 pm.* Take lunch.

**7. Village Creek Drying Beds**—This has long been a hot spot for birding in the DFW area. It is the old Ft Worth water treatment plant but is no longer filled by them and depends on rainfall. With ample rainfall this year the ponds are full of water and waterfowl. The trip will involve slowly walking flat dirt/gravel paths and, 2-3 miles maximum. Last year it was quite easy to find 12-13 species of ducks. Also, there should be good numbers of sparrows, and raptors. We have had several flocks of Rusty Blackbird in past winters. For those who would just like to sit on the levee and watch from above, I'd suggest they bring a chair and scope. After we finish the beds we will have lunch and do a 1-2 mile walk through River Legacy Park for some woodland species. ~1 hour driving time to Village Creek. *Depart 6:30 am, Return 2:00 pm.* Take lunch.

#### Friday & Saturday

**8. Lake Lavon**—This field trip will focus on Lavon Lake and adjacent hot spots in Collin County. Wintering sparrows, gulls, ducks and other waterfowl will be the primary targets around the lake while we visit areas such as the Collin Park Marina, East Fork Park, and Lavonia Park. We will also visit some agricultural fields east of the lake to search for Longspurs (primarily Lapland). The exact areas we visit will depend on weather conditions and, of course, the birds. Most of the birding will be done at parks relatively close to our cars with walking on even surfaces or the lake shore, but some walking through knee-to-waist high grass on un-even terrain will be necessary to find species such as LeConte's Sparrow. Two of the parks we may visit charge an entry fee; please budget \$6/person. *Depart at 7:00 am, Return by 3 pm.* Take lunch.

#### Saturday

**9. Dallas Hot Spots**—Plan on walking dirt trails in some locations. Driving will cover approximately 120-150 miles per round trip. Possible locations include Southside Wastewater Treatment Plant, Sod Farm at Wolf Springs Road, Joppa Preserve, Trinity River Audubon Center entry, Cedar Hill State Park, and Joe Pool Lake Dam. Other possible locations will be determined based on bird sightings at the time of the meeting. Expected species include shorebirds, wintering sparrows, woodpeckers, raptors, loons, gulls, ducks, and passerines. Expect 75+ species. ~45 minutes driving time to the first location. *Depart 6:30 am, return about 4:00 pm.* Entry fees - Trinity River Audubon \$6.00, Cedar Hill St Park \$7.00 PP (free with TXSP pass). Take lunch.

**10. Denton County Century Club**—The morning we will cover Lake Lewisville; then drive north to Lake Ray Roberts for the afternoon. Both areas are rich environmental habitats. There will be a 3-4 mile walk on dirt trails at Lake Lewisville and short trails at Ray Roberts. Expect to tally 90+ species. ~45 minutes driving time to Denton County. *Depart 6:00 am, Return 4:00-5:00 pm.* Take Lunch.

#### Saturday and Sunday

**11. White Rock Lake, Dallas**—This excursion is mainly about viewing gulls. We plan to meet at 7:00 am at the parking lot located at the north corner of Garland Road and Winsted Dr. to observe gulls on the spillway. Depending on the situation, we may spend about an hour birding in the nearby woods or cruising the east side of the lake for uncooperative gulls. We will then drive to two areas on Lake Ray Hubbard, which have had gulls in previous years. This time of year we have the possibility for good views of the Little Gull and maybe 1/2 dozen or so gull species in all. Walking will be at a minimum (perhaps a mile) but you may want to fight the mud at one of the locations on Lake Ray Hubbard at the end of the trip to get closer looks. We'll finish by lunch on this trip. ~45 minutes driving time to White Rock Lake. *Depart at 6:00 am, Return 1:00 pm.* Take water and snacks.

**12. Collin County Century Club**—This trip will visit all the best hotspots in the county, including the Heard Sanctuary and Lavon Lake, in an effort to find 100 species in a day. We expect to find 80-90 species, but if the weather and the birds cooperate, 100 is possible. Expect a small amount of walking over the course of the day, no more than a few miles, but in general this will be a fast-paced driving-heavy trip through many habitats and locations. Depart at 6:30 am, Return late afternoon. Take lunch.

**13. Rockwall County Century Club**—This trip will mainly involve driving but the county is small so it won't be a great distance between stops. Very little walking. Highlight stops will be environs along the east side of Lake Ray Hubbard and some agricultural fields and ponds. Plan for over 50 species, maybe up to 75, but hope for 100 if we are extremely lucky. ~45 minutes driving time to Rockwall County. *Depart 6:00 am, Return 3:30 pm.* Take Lunch.

**Sunday**

**14. Clymer Meadow**—Clymer Meadow is a Nature Conservancy gated property located 30 miles to the northeast, in the northwest corner of Hunt County. It is one of the remaining few remnants of unplowed blackland prairie that has been carefully preserved with efforts to restore adjacent areas. Open prairie grassland birds and raptors are expected along with some waterfowl and woodland edge species. We are planning an early departure hoping to see Short-eared Owls. A combination of walking and driving is expected. We will be visiting other sites along the way where winter sparrows and more may be seen. ~1 hour driving time to Clymer. *Depart 6:00 am, Return 3:00 pm.* Take lunch.

**15. Lake Benbrook and Winscott-Plover Rd**—Driving will cover approximately 180 miles round trip. Some walking on dirt trails. Locations include various points around Benbrook Lake (entry fee required) including Clear Fork Park (formerly Memorial Oak Park), Longhorn Park, Dutch Branch Park, Holiday Park, and Mustang Point. We will also travel to Winscott Plover Road and Goforth Road. Expected species include wintering sparrows, woodpeckers, raptors, loons, grebes, ducks, and passerines. Expect 75+ species. ~1 hour driving time to Lake Benbrook. *Depart 6:00 am, Return 2:00 pm.* Take lunch.

**16. Photography Trip**—We will visit a location with accessible birds (most likely Sunset Bay at White Rock Lake) to focus on improving your bird photography skills. We should be able to photograph wintering ducks, cormorants, pelicans, gulls, and other waterfowl. The instruction will be geared towards intermediate users of digital SLR cameras, but it will benefit any photography student. Enrollment will be limited to 6 to provide more individual attention. *Depart 6:30 am, Return 12:00 pm.*

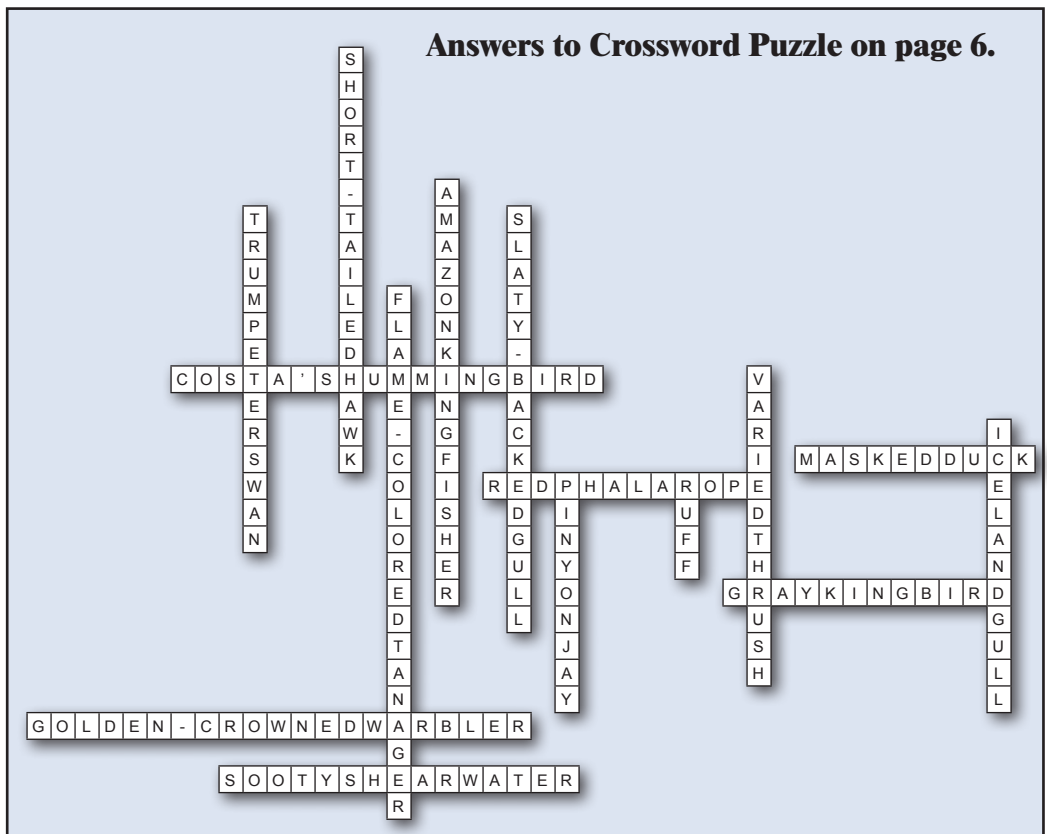
**REGISTRATION INFORMATION**

This meeting's registration is online only. For those with internet access, go to the meeting page on TOS website, <http://texasbirds.org> and follow the directions there. If you receive registration materials only via hard copy and DO NOT have access to the internet, you may call Judy Kestner 361-387-7329, Melanie Hoffman (801) 558-4134, or Frances Cerbins (512) 372-9039 for assistance with registration. "If you don't get an answer leave a message with your name and phone number and you will get a call back when someone is available".

**SPECIAL REQUEST FOR DONATION OF PHOTOS OR RAFFLE ITEMS**

If you have bird photos or anything else of value that you would like to donate for the Silent Auction /Raffle, please contact Jan Gorja at [janeee18@tx.rr.com](mailto:janeee18@tx.rr.com). Thank You.

**Answers to Crossword Puzzle on page 6.**



## TOS Urges Rigorous Environmental Review of Gas Pipeline Planned for Big Bend Region



*Trans-Pecos Pipeline. Photo The Daily Planet 02 June 2015  
<http://alpinedailyplanet.typepad.com/alpine-daily-planet/>*

Earlier this year, it came to the attention of the Texas Ornithological Society (TOS) that a natural gas pipeline was slated to be constructed through some of the most beloved wilderness in West Texas. The Big Bend region is one visited frequently by our members for its diversity of bird species and outdoor opportunities so we felt compelled to educate ourselves on the pipeline and learn how we might contribute to the preservation of ecosystems potentially affected by its construction. What we learned is that this controversial pipeline would be the first of its kind to be constructed south of the Permian Basin and what we decided was to unite with land owners, environmentalists, ranchers and lovers of the West-Texas landscape to ask the Federal Government for more scrutiny on the development of the pipeline.

To illustrate the scope of the little-known Trans-Pecos Pipeline; the 42" pipeline to be constructed is larger in diameter than the recently rejected Keystone (Phase IV) pipeline and threatens to permanently alter 143 miles of the Big Bend region including private property to be acquired via eminent domain and pristine Chihuahuan Desert habitats important to birds and other wildlife.

Originating in Coynosa, TX (near Fort Stockton) and terminating near Presidio, TX, the pipeline would be constructed within feet of the town of Alpine, where an explosion could threaten an airport, a medevac station or the region's only hospital. It is an endeavor of a consortium of companies, whose major players are Carso Energy (Mexico) and Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) (United States). The sole customer of the natural gas would be Mexico.

Originally it appeared that ETP/Carso would be allowed to proceed with construction of the pipeline with very little oversight by the federal government because of jurisdictional considerations; only a 1,093 foot stretch of the Rio Grande falls under the jurisdiction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for consideration of environmental impacts. The remaining 143 miles falls under the jurisdiction of the State's Texas Railroad Commission, who does not require permitting prior to the construction of a pipeline.

With the pipeline planned to span Presidio, Brewster and Jeff Davis counties, concerned locals joined forces in an attempt

to slow the progress of, and bring attention to, the seemingly unregulated development. Forming the Big Bend Conservation Alliance (BBCA) in March of 2014, the grassroots, non-profit organization consists of residents, ranchers and romantics. Their goal is to preserve the pristine qualities of one of the last areas in Texas not yet occupied by oil pumps, pipelines and the smell of methane. They have successfully organized meetings, both public and on-line, to educate supporters of their cause and have already enjoyed some success in the early stages of the fight against the pipeline.

Earlier this year, as TOS became aware of the controversial pipeline, interest in its potential impacts became a concern. Conservation of bird habitats is a major objective of the TOS so President, Byron Stone suggested we reach out to the BBCA and see how we might support the BBCA's efforts to illuminate any threats to this popular birding area of the State.

Upon reaching out, we connected with Coyne Gibson, a member, volunteer, and steering committee representative with the BBCA. He responded that the BBCA was seeking nationwide support in the second phase of opposition of the pipeline via comments to FERC. [The initial public comment phase of the BBCA's mission was successful in that the entire stretch of the pipeline became subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).] Gibson stated that the objective of the second phase (Environmental Assessment/Scoping Phase) was,

"... to identify every legitimate environmental and cultural impact including habitat destruction or disruption."

Essentially, any comments from any experts on the environment or cultural value of the area would be helpful. The ultimate goal being to have an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) required for the entire stretch of pipeline.

After discussing TOS participation with the Board, President, Byron Stone carefully formulated a contribution for the commenting period which read,

"The Texas Ornithological Society, a statewide organization with over 1,000 members, has significant concerns about the potential adverse environmental impact of the proposed Trans-Pecos Pipeline. The pipeline route traverses a unique, sensitive and biologically significant area of Texas. It is vital that the entire pipeline route be subject to rigorous initial and ongoing environmental review and safeguards in order to minimize the potential significant adverse impacts which may be associated with construction, operation and maintenance of the project."

FERC has since reviewed 633 comments on the Trans-Pecos Pipeline, more comments than any other FERC-regulated gas pipeline this year. Of those comments, all but six were in opposition of the pipeline.

In response to the comments received, FERC requested that ETP/Carso respond to approximately 30 of the concerns raised.

In our most recent update from the BBCA, Gibson states that, “The early success in this has been the delay of the permit issuance past the consortium’s requested deadline (Nov. 2015) and the forcing of the company to disclose certain information.” In other words, the BBCA has effectively slowed the development of the pipeline. The earliest ETP/Carso could hope for a permit at this point would be mid-April 2016.

However, Gibson reminds us, “There is still significant effort required, and opportunity, to create further delay, and perhaps halt this process with the FERC, and the Big Bend Conservation Alliance continues to participate in that effort.”

It is our hope that the BBCA is afforded the consideration they deserve and that all potential impacts of the Trans-Pecos Pipeline in the Big Bend region will be minimized. The Big Bend region of Texas is truly unique, rich in opportunities for enjoying birds and an amazing spectacle to be cherished.

Follow the Texas Ornithological Society on Facebook, TexBirds posts and future newsletter articles for updates on the pipeline and opportunities for members to support the BBCA in their endeavors.

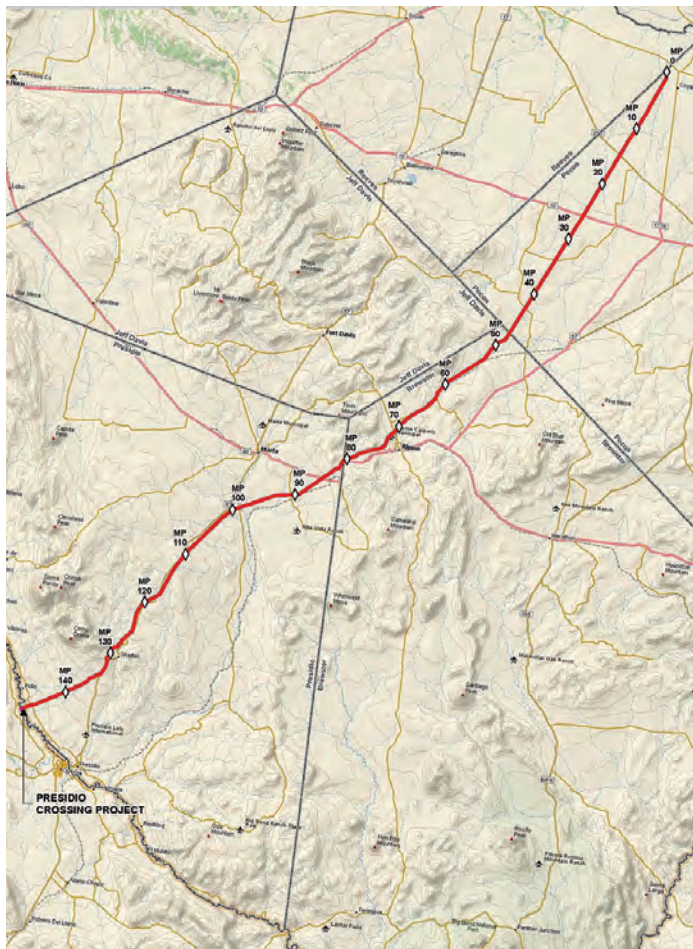
**More information is available at these websites:**

<http://www.bigbendconservationalliance.org> (organization’s website)

<https://www.facebook.com/Notinourbigbend> (campaign website)

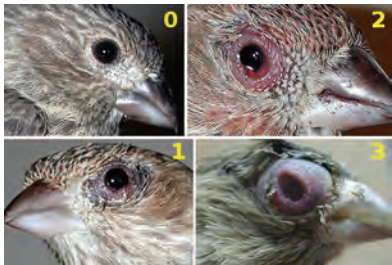
—Melanie Hoffman

Director, Trans-Pecos/West Texas (Region 4)



Map of Trans-Pecos Pipeline route.

## Many bird species exposed to ‘eye disease,’ new study finds



“This organism, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, is much more widespread than anyone thought,” Dhondt explains, “although in most species there are no signs of conjunctivitis.”

Species testing positive for exposure to the bacteria include feeder favorites such as Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and American Goldfinches. But exposure was also detected in forest species, such as the Wood Thrush.

“That was another surprise,” says Dhondt. “How on earth do Wood Thrushes get infected with mycoplasma? They’re not a feeder bird at all. Everyone has always assumed that feeders play a major role in the transmission of the disease and this study shows that’s not necessarily so.”

Dhondt’s team trapped and tested nearly 2,000 individual birds from 53 species, looking for evidence of current infections (bacterial DNA) or past infections (antibodies) by *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*. The birds were trapped in and around Ithaca, New York, between January 2007 and June 2010. The diagnostic tests revealed that 27 species of birds were infected by this bacterium. The actual number of species exposed to the bacteria could be even higher than suggested by this study because the

test for antibodies is known to produce false negatives.

House Finch eye disease first appeared in North America in 1994 when people watching backyard feeders started seeing birds with swollen, runny eyes. Dhondt says that a strain of the bacteria, usually found in poultry, was able to grow successfully in House Finches. The House Finch lineage of the bacteria has been mutating since it was first detected.

“The organism could mutate into a form that is much more virulent among other bird species and create a new epidemic,” noted Dhondt, who added that while we know that many species of songbirds are exposed to *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, west songbirds are identical to that living in House Finches in the same area.

While many species of songbirds can be infected by this bacterium, only House Finches regularly exhibit swollen eyes as a result of infections, and citizen-science participants in the Cornell Lab’s Project FeederWatch are still tracking the occurrence of disease in these finches. The take-home message for people who feed backyard birds remains the same: keep the feeders clean. If you see sick birds, leave them alone, take down the feeders and clean them, being sure to wash your hands thoroughly afterward.

**Story Source:**

The above post is reprinted from materials provided by Cornell University. Note: Materials may be edited for content and length.

# TOS MEMBERS PROMOTE SOCIETY AT HUMMERBIRD AND HARLINGEN BIRDING FESTIVALS

Photos Sandi Wheeler and Bron Rorex



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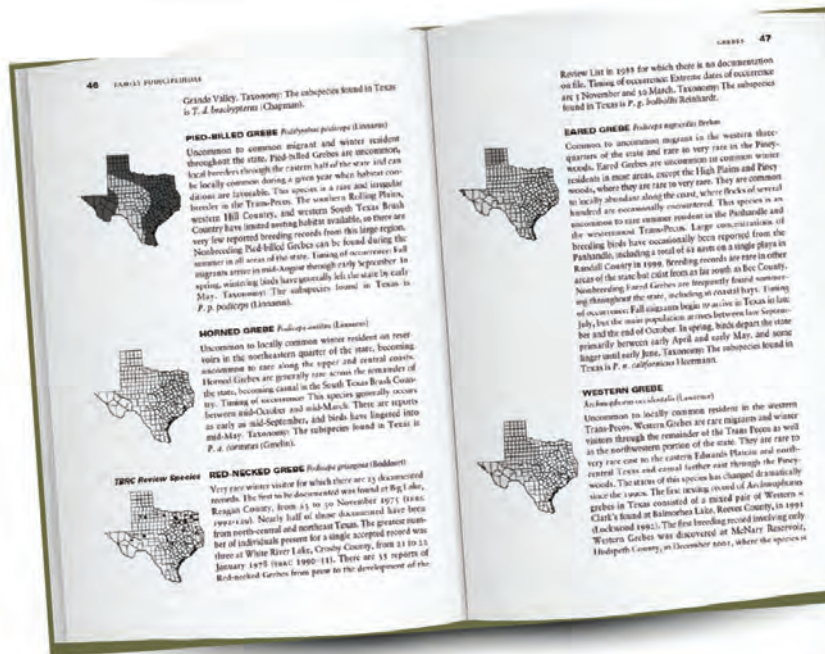
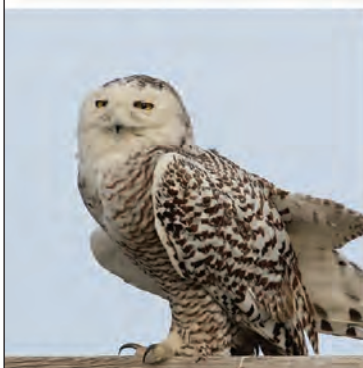
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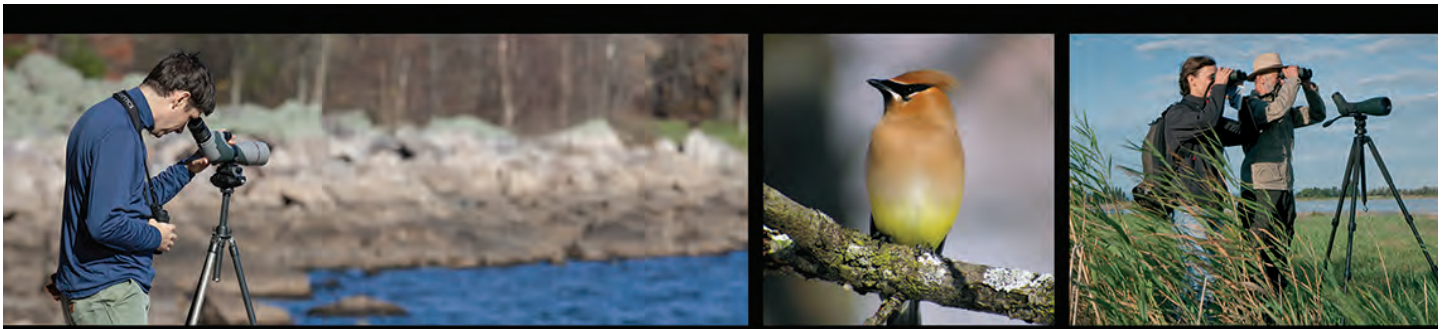
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