

President's Message



Shelia Hargis TOS President.

Hi my TOS friends,
For those who missed the winter meeting, you missed a good one! Our hosts, Rio Brazos Audubon, put together great field trips and very interesting presentations. They even arranged for a Mountain Plover to put in an appearance at a sod farm. Given this was only the second county record for Burleson County, this was no small feat! Many folks got their life look at this very cooperative bird. I'm pretty

sure it was the most photographed bird of the meeting. I had to include one of my photos, but there are much better photos available on eBird. Many thanks to Sandy Dillard, Mark McDermott, and Nancy Thaden for putting everything together. We had a great time birding in your neck of the woods and appreciate your time and effort! And thank you to all who attended. Your participation in the meeting and your generous silent auction bids helped us raise money for both organizations, money that we can put toward our birding and conservation programs and projects. That's a good thing!

As you will see later in the newsletter, we have been busy on the spring meeting. We will be headquartered in Beaumont with opportunities to see migrating birds, breeding birds, and Louisiana birds. With field trips to 10 Texas counties and two Louisiana parishes, I expect you will visit locations that you haven't visited before and add birds to your county



Mountain Plover, Photographer: Shelia Hargis

lists. And maybe some of you will add new birds to your life list. It will be another fun and informative meeting. Please join us for our annual membership meeting on Friday night. I would like to thank Kendra Kocab for agreeing to host our meeting in her region. It is no small thing to put together a meeting. Kendra worked long and hard and did a great job. Thank you Kendra!

This is my last President's Column. The Board meeting on

April 29 will be my last Board meeting as your President. It has been such an honor to serve as your President for the last three years. There have been challenges here and there, but what stands out to me are the many fun experiences and the wonderful things we accomplished. I especially love the fact that I got to work with our meeting host groups and interact with so many of you at the six meetings we had during my Presidency. And working with the Board was rewarding and inspiring. You have an amazing Board that is actively moving TOS forward. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute to the mission of TOS. I will remain on the Board as Past President for the remainder of my term, two more years. I'm looking forward to resting for a little while, but I will still be involved with many TOS projects and committees. And I hope to lead a few Weekenders to various places around Austin. Feel free to join me on a committee or during a Weekender!

—Shelia Hargis, TOS President

TOS Winter Meeting

As I reminisce about this year's winter TOS meeting, the superlative that comes to mind is "GREAT"! Beginning with our Board's usual great job of organizing the event for the 162 registered members, followed by 5 interesting and thought-provoking presentations, right on through the 24 fun and exciting field trips! There were 37 presenters and field trip leaders, ALL volunteers. Kudos, Ladies and Gentlemen! The 24 field trips had a combined total of 119 participants. Although the weather couldn't have been considered great, we birders are a hardy lot and didn't let that deter us! For me, the most difficult part of each TOS meeting is deciding which trips to sign up for! This time around I went on the Milam and Waller Century trips and the Birding Brazos County trip. While the birding is always great on TOS trips, the very best thing about them is getting to see folks I haven't seen since the last meeting and the great camaraderie! It was foggy and misting rain for the start of Milam Century Trip but the birding started off with a bang as we had not

one but two Barred Owls. We ultimately had 6 for the day. Other highlights of the day were a Harris's Sparrow and a Fox Sparrow, both lifers for me! The weather continued to be dismal for the Waller Century on Saturday. The highlight of the day had to be running into Bob Honig at the KPC Indiangrass Preserve. Bob graciously offered to take us over to another KPC property not open to the public. This netted us Dunlins, LeConte's and Grasshopper Sparrows and some ducks we were missing. Sunday dawned clear and cold but very windy. The Birding Brazos County trip wasn't billed as a Century trip but could have been! We started the day with a group of Canada Geese flying into Finfeather Lake. Leonard Road turned out to be "Sparrow Avenue". We had 6 species in just a few yards. Although we missed on the Longspurs, we saw lots of other great birds and discovered some great birding spots to return to. Last but by far not least, many thanks to our hosts, Rio Brazos Audubon!

—Janey Woodley

Birding during the recent TOS meeting.

Photos by Lila Theis, Susan Foster, Shelia Hargis and Bert Frenz.



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TOS Spring Meeting 2020 – Beaumont, TX

Our spring meeting will be held in Beaumont. It has been over 20 years since we have held a meeting with Beaumont as our headquarters, so we are excited to return. The dates for the meeting are April 30 – May 3. We don't have a host organization, but we have put together a great meeting anyway! Our headquarters will be the MCM Eleganté Hotel and Conference Center. All of our indoor activities will take place there. **Field trips will leave from this location, and all participants must join their field trip group at the hotel.**

As you know, coastal Texas is always a good place to be during spring migration. When you think of the coast, you likely think of migrating warblers, tanagers, orioles, swallows, etc., but what about all the birds that have been back a while and are already on territory? We have strategically located our meeting to capitalize on both migrants and breeding birds, targeting some special species only found in east Texas. Think Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Bachman's Sparrow for starters. And we are spitting distance from Louisiana, so we have some trips to see their birds!

We will have trips to 10 Texas counties (Angelina, Chambers, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, and Tyler) and two Louisiana parishes (Calcasieu and Cameron). Several of the Texas counties are under-birded and are counties that are hard to bird due to lack of public birding hot spots. If you are playing the Texas Century Club game, you will have some help with these challenging counties. Field trips will provide opportunities to bird a variety of habitats. Unfortunately, we don't have access to private land, but I think you will still be pleased with your choices.

The presentations we have lined up for you are very exciting. If you want, you can attend a shorebird workshop. Is there anyone who doesn't need some help with this group of birds? The other presentations will educate you on the local birds and birding locations, Audubon Texas' conservation work across the state, and the research and conservation efforts of Gulf Coast Bird Observatory.

As usual some field trips involve a lot of driving to get to the location, so expect early departure times for those trips. Be prepared to carpool to minimize the number of vehicles and maximize the likelihood of spotting birds along the way. Bring walkie-talkies if you have them. Be prepared for hot weather, mosquitos, chiggers, and poison ivy. Bring extra water, sunscreen, hat, and insect repellent.

Online registration will open in mid-March. Watch for an email from us letting you know exactly when it will open. I highly recommend you register early since field trips are likely to fill up. The registration fee will increase on April 16, and registration will close on April 23. Don't wait!

Kendra Kocab, Region 8 Director, worked long and hard to put this meeting together for us. She worked on it during her birding trip to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Japan. She worked on it while suffering from pneumonia (seriously, she had pneumonia, not coronavirus, thank goodness). Join us in Beaumont and please be sure to tell Kendra thank you!

Shelia Hargis

Hotel Information

MCM Eleganté Hotel and Conference Center



The MCM Eleganté Hotel & Conference Center will be the headquarters for the spring meeting. All TOS events will be held at the hotel and field trips will depart from its parking areas. The hotel is located at 2355 IH-10 South, Beaumont, TX 77705. Every guest room includes a coffee maker, microwave and mini fridge. The property has a restaurant and lounge and is in easy driving distance to a wide variety of dining options.

The hotel is holding a block of 50 rooms for TOS guests. The TOS group rate is \$99. Reservations may be made by calling the hotel directly at 409-842-3600 and referencing the group name (Texas Ornithological Society). These rooms will be held only until April 15, 2020. Any cancellations must be made prior to 3:00 p.m. on April 28, 2020 to avoid a one-night room charge.

This rate includes up to two breakfast coupons per room for each morning. Breakfast will be served from 5:00 a.m. until 7:00 a.m. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Anyone staying at another location will be responsible for finding their own breakfast.

Meeting Agenda

Thursday, April 30

- 3:30-5:30 PM TOS Board Meeting
- 4:00-6:30 PM Registration Check-in & Silent Auction Opens
- 6:30-7:00 PM Welcome/ Introductions/ Announcements (Lots of useful information is given during this time, so please attend.)
- 7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Dana Nelson & Harland Stewart – Birding Hot Spots of Southeast Texas
- 8:15 PM-12:30 AM Rail Prowl Field Trip

Friday, May 1

- 4:45-7:00 AM Breakfast (only for MCM Eleganté guests)

4:45-7:00 AM	Box Lunch Pick-up
5:00 AM-5:00 PM	Field Trips
4:00-6:30 PM	Registration Check-in
4:00-5:00 PM	Speaker: Cin-Ty Lee—Making Shorebird Identification Accessible
6:15-7:00 PM	Announcements/Field Trip Reports/Annual Meeting
7:00-8:00 PM	Speaker: Romey Swanson—The Wonderful Wild of Texas: Birds
8:15 PM-12:30 AM	Rail Prowl Field Trip

(includes a one-year membership)
Free registration for students
\$20 late fee after April 16

Box lunches: \$15
Saturday Banquet: \$35

Box Lunches Available Friday, Saturday, and Sunday Mornings

Box lunch selections for each day:

- Turkey and Cheddar on a croissant, chips, fruit, cookie, condiments and bottled water
- Ham and Swiss on a croissant, chips, fruit, cookie, condiments and bottled water
- Pimento Cheese on a croissant, chips, fruit, cookie, condiments and bottled water

Saturday Cash Bar

There will be a cash bar available in the banquet room beginning at 5:00 PM on Saturday night. Guests will purchase their own drinks on an individual basis.

Saturday Banquet Menu

Buffet consisting of Cider-marinated Boneless Pork Chops with Sautéed Apples, Panko-Crusted Catfish with Corn & White Bean Ragout, Mixed Green Salad with Dressing, Fresh Fruit Salad, Twice-Baked Potatoes, Seasonal Vegetable Medley, Sautéed Squash, Fresh Rolls and Butter, Cheesecake, Lemon Meringue Pie, Apple Cobbler, Coffee and Iced Tea.

4:45-7:00 AM	Saturday, May 2 Breakfast (only for MCM Eleganté guests)
4:45-7:00 AM	Box Lunch Pick-up
5:00 AM-5:00 PM	Field Trips
4:00-5:00 PM	Speaker: Taylor Bennett—Beach Nesting Birds of the Texas Coast
5:00-6:00 PM	Social Time (cash bar will be available)
5:15 PM	Silent Auction Closes
6:00-7:00 PM	Banquet
7:00-7:30 PM	Announcements/Century Club Pin Presentation/Field Trip Reports
7:30-8:30 PM	Keynote Speaker: Martin Hagne—From a Partnership to a Major Conservation Organization—What GCBO is Doing Today

5:00-7:00 AM	Sunday, May 3 Breakfast (only for MCM Eleganté guests)
5:15-7:00 AM	Box Lunch Pick-up
5:30 AM-3:00 PM	Field Trips

Registration Information

Registration is online at the Texas Ornithological Society's website, www.texasbirds.org. Registration will open in mid-March. To receive an email with the exact date, be sure your email address is included in your TOS account information. Once registration opens, there will be directions on the website to assist you. If you do not have access to the internet, you may call Judy Kestner at 361-387-7329 or Frances Cerbins at 512-372-9039 for assistance with registration. If you don't get an answer, leave a message and Judy or Frances will call you back when they are available. If you find that a field trip that you really want is full, go ahead and register for your second choice, but then email Judy Kestner and request to be put on the wait list for your first choice. Judy's email is tosmember@yahoo.com. The registration fee will increase on April 16, and registration will close on April 23. (Refunds will be given if cancellation occurs before April 23 and no cost has been incurred by TOS. No refunds will be given if cancellation occurs on or after April 23. If you have to cancel your registration, contact Catherine Winans at catherinewinans@yahoo.com.)

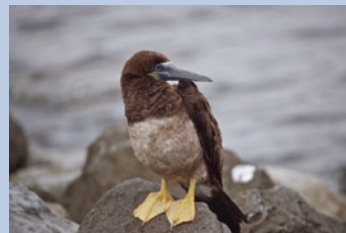
Registration Fee: \$90 for TOS members
\$125 for Non-TOS members

Speakers

Thursday Evening

Title: Birding Hot Spots of Southeast Texas

Presenter: Dana Nelson & Harland Stewart



Description:

Learn about the birds and birding locations of Southeast Texas from Dana Nelson and Harland Stewart. They will be talking about hot spots in the area and the birds you should see, along

with some you might see. The presentation will have many stunning photographs of birds from all the great locations in Southeast Texas, such as the Brown Boobies that have been frequenting the area of Pleasure Island's North Levee Road. The end of April is a great time for migrants and photographers in the Golden Triangle area.

Bio: Dana Nelson is a contractor who joined the Golden Triangle Audubon in 2007. He had a love for photographing wildlife which quickly turned to birds after joining GTAS. "I find bird photography the most challenging and the most rewarding." He just finished his term as GTAS president and hopes to retire soon so he can spend more time photographing birds.



Dana Nelson

photography and birding mixed symbiotically: Photography turned out to be a great way of learning about birds and birding turned out to be an excellent way to learn photography. His special interests in birding include his addiction to hummingbirds, which has led him to host eight species of hummingbirds since joining GTAS.

Friday Afternoon

Title: Making Shorebird Identification Accessible

Presenter: Cin-Ty Lee

Description: Brownish or grayish in coloration as well as typically just a bit too far to discern, shorebirds are often thought to be one of the most challenging ID problems. This talk will aim to simplify shorebird identification for the masses, focusing on structural features rather than detailed plumage differences. Learn how to pick out a Semipalmated Sandpiper from a large flock of Western Sandpipers. There will be something new for beginning and advanced birders.



Cin-Ty Lee

Bio: Cin-Ty Lee has been birding for more than 30 years with 17 of them in Texas. He has published numerous articles on difficult identification problems (dowitchers, pewees, pipits, orioles and loons). He is currently a professor of geology at Rice University but spends his spare time promoting local birding. Over the years, he and colleagues at Rice have attained a list of 228 species of birds for the campus.

Friday Evening

Title: The Wonderful Wild of Texas: Birds

Presenter: Romey Swanson, Director of Conservation Strategy, Audubon Texas

Description: This talk will cover the many characteristics that make Texas so biologically rich - through a bird's eye view. We'll explore Texas' bird diversity while detailing the seemingly disparate eco-regions that support them. We'll detail the many conservation challenges that

exist throughout Texas and how these challenges shape an uncertain future. We'll also explore conservation successes and the role of private landowners in Texas conservation. We'll review the science that drives Audubon Texas' strategic conservation planning and how we all have a stake in the health of bird populations. From Burrowing Owls on the shortgrass prairies, Black-capped Vireos along arid river basins, the breeding warbler diversity of East Texas forests, to the nesting haunts of coastal waterbirds - there should be something for all bird enthusiasts.

Bio: Romey Swanson works for Audubon Texas as the Director of Conservation Strategy. In this role, Romey works with state, national, and international partners to identify and advance important conservation strategies to benefit birds, wildlife, and people. Romey is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and President Elect of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society—Texas' largest professional society of wildlife managers. Additionally, Romey is an active leader within the Texas Land Trust Community serving on several organization's boards and committees. He received a Master's Degree from Texas State University studying the wildlife of Central Texas. Romey lives in Austin and enjoys spending time with his family hunting, camping, and studying nature—much like his favorite naturalist Teddy Roosevelt.

Saturday Afternoon

Title: Beach Nesting Birds of the Texas Coast

Presenter: Taylor Bennett, Coastal Biologist, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Description: This is a presentation on three of the main shorebird projects that Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) focuses on: non-breeding shorebird project, beach nesting bird project, and the Black Skimmer project.

From September through March, GCBO monitors Matagorda and Brazoria Counties for Piping Plover, Snowy Plover, Red Knot, Black Skimmer, and American Oystercatcher. The goal of this project is to gain information on survival, movement patterns, and site fidelity of individuals through color band/flag resights. From April-September, the focus switches over to beach nesting birds with the Wilson's Plover as the main focus. Through this project GCBO monitors breeding Wilson's Plovers, Least Terns, and Black Skimmers in Brazoria and Matagorda counties. The Black Skimmer project entails monitoring one of the largest skimmer colonies on the Texas coast located at the Dow Chemical Company plant in Freeport, TX. The goal of the beach nesting bird project is to maintain and/or grow these species populations through conservation activities on the ground. Both of the beach nesting projects are funded through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partnered with American Bird Conservancy, Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, and Houston Audubon.

Bio: Taylor grew up in Virginia Beach, Virginia, but is currently living in Richwood, TX. She has a Bachelor of Science in Biology (focus on Marine Biology) from Old Dominion University. She is very passionate about all biology especially wildlife. In the past, she interned for various organizations mostly through the Student Conservation



Romey Swanson

Association. She worked with the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and non-profit organizations such as Audubon Texas. Her main focus has been conservation, especially for endangered and threatened species. She has worked with various organisms of all types and sizes from microscopic invertebrates such as the

Roswell spring snail to mammals as big as the Mexican gray wolf. Most of her internships also involved surveying birds, but she preferred working with shorebirds the most, especially with plovers and oystercatchers. At GCBO, Taylor is working on Nonbreeding Shorebirds and Beach Nesting Birds projects.

Saturday Night Keynote

Title: From a Partnership to a Major Conservation Organization – What GCBO is Doing Today

Presenter: Martin Hagne, Executive Director, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Description: The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) has been involved with dozens of bird research projects for the 23 years of its existence, helping solve important conservation issues with real-time data. From a nine year study of how our American Oystercatchers are doing, tracking migrants using new Motus technology, counting raptors including in Cuba, and conserving lands both in the US and Latin America in

over 10 countries... the GCBO has become recognized as an innovative conservation organization, designing and conducting a significant number of large conservation projects, including migration studies, habitat enhancement, land acquisition, regional habitat mapping, and many others. Enjoy hearing about the latest research projects and what they are finding out... like really, where are our Texas eastern



Martin Hagne

Willetts wintering?!

Bio: Martin Hagne was born and raised on the Swedish west coast, where his grandfather instilled a love for nature at an early age. He moved to the United States, and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, in 1979 and turned his focus towards wildlife viewing and conservation concerns. Martin serves as

the Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson, TX. Previously he served as the Executive Director of the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco, Texas, a non-profit environmental education facility, for 13 years. He has also worked as a Field Biologist doing baseline studies for many years, including avian, reptile and amphibian, mammal, threatened and endangered species, and habitat studies. Martin has served on several national, state, regional and local environmental appointments, committees, and boards. He also leads birding field trips both in the U.S. and foreign locations. Birding, nature viewing, native plants, conservation issues and environmental education are great passions for Martin.

NOTE: Participants must meet their field trip group at the MCM Elegante 15 minutes before the departure time. Due to logistical complications, it is not possible to meet the group at any other location. Please plan accordingly.

Number	Field Trip & Description	County	Difficulty	Start/End Times	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	Shadow Birds —A night time audio safari at Anahuac NWR by special use permit. Our target will be the Shadow Birds, rails and other birds of the marsh at Anahuac NWR. Clapper, King, Virginia, Sora, and the enigmatic Black Rail will be our targets. We are also likely to hear a Least Bittern, Great Horned Owl, and Barn Owl. If conditions are good we may be treated to a chorus of night migrant calls along with a variety of “day time” birds that sing at night. This is a listening only trip and do not expect to see birds but to hear them. No playback or spotlights will be used on this field trip and we will make a number of stops to listen for rails and other birds. We will carpool from stop to stop and get out and listen. Expect extreme mosquito conditions, a bug net and light gloves are recommended. All listening stops will be on gravel or paved roads. Expect to return between 12 and 12:30 am.	Chambers	Easy	8:15 PM–12:30 AM	x	x		
2	High Island —This area is one of the most popular bird sites for spring migration in North America. The trip will include Houston Audubon’s Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks as well as TOS’s Hooks Woods. We will be looking for migrants and breeding passerines along the many trails and at the water features and visit the breeding rookeries to see nesting herons, egrets, and spoonbills. Possible species include 12 flycatchers, 8 vireos, and 33 warblers! *There is a cost of \$8 for a day pass or \$30 for an annual pass (cash is faster). Participants may pay the fee directly upon arrival. Ordering your annual pass beforehand will free you up to start looking for birds a few minutes earlier.	Galveston	Easy	6:15 AM–3:00 PM		x	x	x

Field Trips

3	<p>Anahuac NWR—The 37,000-acre coastal refuge contains vast expanses of brackish and fresh water marsh, flooded soil units and prairie bordering the bay – welcoming habitat to a wide range of migratory and resident coastal specialty birds. We will enjoy the excellent viewing available on refuge roads, trails and boardwalks. Potential sightings include Seaside Sparrow, Sedge and Marsh Wrens, Least Bittern, Northern Harrier, White-tailed Kite, Osprey, Crested Caracara, Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Blue-winged Teal and other lingering ducks, both cormorants, Boat-tailed Grackle, a variety of rails, herons and egrets, Glossy Ibis, and migrating warblers, grosbeaks, buntings, flycatchers, etc. There is good access to restrooms and minimal walking as most of the birding will be at multiple stops along refuge roads and in the small migrant traps.</p>	Chambers	Easy	5:30 AM–2:30 PM		x	x	x
4	<p>Sabine Woods & Sea Rim State Park—Sabine Woods is a TOS Sanctuary that is nicely maintained by Golden Triangle Audubon. Due to its location farther east than the other migrants traps, this is one of the better places in Texas to get eastern migrants like Black-throated Blue Warbler and Black-whiskered Vireo. Many other migrant flycatchers, vireos, warblers, buntings, grosbeaks, tanagers, nightjars, and more can be found in the sanctuary. This trip will also visit Sea Rim State Park, where you can add gulls, terns, shorebirds, rails, and other waterbirds to the day's tally.</p>	Jefferson	Easy	6:15 AM–2:00 PM		x	x	x
5	<p>Birding around Beaumont—In the morning we will head out to West Jefferson County to check out the rice fields, pastures, and possibly the turf farm for a fun scavenger hunt of migratory birds. Possible species include Hudsonian Godwit, Upland Sandpiper, Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and Whimbrel, to name a few. Birds we should find along the fencerows include: sparrows, wrens, Dickcissels, and Eastern Meadowlarks with flyovers of swallows and lingering hawks. We'll be driving back roads with frequent stops and possible short walks. We will end the outing at Cattail Marsh to see what is happening along the boardwalk.</p>	Jefferson	Easy	7:00 AM–1:00 PM		x	x	x
6	<p>Angelina National Forest—This trip targets breeding sites for Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Prairie Warbler. We will visit the Boykin Springs area of the Angelina National Forest and adjacent sites. Travel time to Boykin Springs is just under 2 hours. An early start time and direct travel to Boykin Springs should allow us to arrive in time for the dawn songs of Bachman's Sparrows. These birds are resident, but can be very difficult to find without hearing them sing during breeding season. Please note this trip will have some walking on uneven ground.</p>	Jasper/Angelina	Moderate	5:00 AM–3:00 PM		x		
7	<p>Explore One of East Texas' Wildest Places - Big Thicket National Preserve—This trip is guided by Romey Swanson who has spent the past four years working with the National Park Service to document the unique bird and wildlife diversity of the rich woodland eco-systems of the Turkey Creek Unit. Participants should expect one moderate hike (~3 miles) over flat to gentle terrain with one or two additional short hikes. This trip will focus on the 10+ species of breeding warblers found within Big Thicket and additionally target Brown-headed Nuthatch, Indigo Bunting, Pileated and Red-headed Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Wood Thrush and much more.</p>	Hardin	Moderate	6:30 AM–3:00 PM		x		
8	<p>Shangri La and More in Orange County—This trip will visit several sites in Orange County including the famous Shangri La Botanical Gardens. This 252-acre site includes upland forests, cypress/tupelo swamps, and Adams Bayou, a lush riparian area. Enjoy the heronry, where 15 species of birds nest communally, and search the formal gardens for migrants that may be passing through. Once we have had our fill of the gardens, we will visit other sites including the Lower Neches WMA, Bailey's Fish Camp, and Tony Houseman WMA. These sites mostly contain coastal marsh, so we will also visit Caliborne West Park to add some woodland species to the day's list.</p>	Orange	Easy	7:00 AM–2:00 PM		x		
9	<p>Jefferson County Big Day—We will start at Cattail Marsh at dawn for resident passerines and freshwater birds. We will then work our way to the coast, stopping at Pleasure Island, Pilot Station Road, Sabine Woods, and Sea Rim State Park. Expect to see 100+ species. Possible species include Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Duck, some lingering ducks, Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoo, rails, a variety of shorebirds, gulls and terns, Least Bittern, Mississippi Kite, migrant flycatchers, vireos, warblers, grosbeaks, buntings, and more.</p>	Jefferson	Moderate	6:15 AM-3:30 PM		x		
10	<p>Coastal Louisiana—Enjoy a rare chance to visit a neighboring state during a TOS meeting and add species to your Louisiana list! This trip will visit three coastal locations. The Sabine NWR Wetland Walkway, a 1.5 mile walk over impounded freshwater marsh, is a great place to see gators as well as herons, egrets, spoonbills, swallows, Marsh Wrens, and migrating songbirds. At Holly Beach, we could see 15 species of shorebirds as well as gulls, terns, and a variety of herons and egrets. We will also visit Peveto Woods Audubon Sanctuary, an important site for migrating songbirds. Each year, as many as 2 million birds utilize the habitat, which is dominated by coastal woods known as <i>cheniers</i>. This will be our best chance to see warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, cuckoos, and more.</p>	Cameron, LA	Easy	6:00 AM–4:00 PM		x	x	

11	Inland Louisiana —Enjoy an unusual chance to visit a neighboring state during a TOS meeting, bird with a local expert, and add species to your Louisiana list! We will bird West Calcasieu Parish: particularly Ged Lake, the Vinton WWTP, a local farm (private property), Niblett’s Bluff Park, potentially Sam Houston Jones State Park, and possible wet fields if any shorebirds have been seen recently. Locations will depend on scouting results prior to the day in the field. Habitat coverage will be pine woods, roadside scrub, weedy fields, small lakes and hopefully some mud flats. Trip leader is David Booth, a local from Lake Charles, LA.	Calcasieu, LA	Easy	7:00 AM–3:00 PM				x	
12	Hardin Hotspots —Get to know Hardin with the county’s top eBirder, John Mariani! Starting north of Silsbee, other likely stops include Firetower Rd and Gore Store Rd, Village Creek State Park (entrance fee or annual permit required), Old Sour Lake Road, and stops at small ponds along county roads. Breeding woodpeckers, vireos and warblers are likely to be the stars. Other possibilities include Greater Roadrunner and Eastern Towhee.	Hardin	Easy	6:00 AM–3:00 PM				x	
13	Shorebird ID with Cin-Ty Lee —The upper coast of Texas is one of the best shorebirding areas in North America and early May is prime time to observe migrant and breeding shorebirds. Join Cin-Ty Lee to get a crash course in shorebird identification. This field trip will try to maximize the number of species seen along with learning how to identify them. We will spend time along the immediate coast as well as inland areas. Expect to see 20+ species of shorebirds. Cin-Ty Lee’s Friday afternoon presentation on shorebird identification is the perfect combo for this trip!	Chambers / Galveston	Easy	7:00 AM–3:00 PM				x	
14	Birds & Blooms of the Big Thicket —Visit one of the most biologically diverse places on Earth! The Big Thicket is home to over 1,300 species of plants, 60 mammals, 86 reptiles & amphibians, 1,800 Lepidoptera (butterflies,moths, skippers), 97 fish, and at least 300 birds. On this trip, you will learn about some of the unique plants found in the Big Thicket while enjoying the birds. We will visit a few of the trails in this vast preserve to look for birds like Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed Vireos, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-breasted Chat, Prothonotary, Swainson’s, Kentucky, Hooded, and Yellow-throated Warblers, Northern Parula, and Summer Tanager. While March and April are the best time to see flowers in the Big Thicket, we will still enjoy a variety of plants including carnivorous plants and orchids. Please note most of the day will include walking on unpaved trails and boardwalks.	Hardin / Tyler	Moderate	6:30 AM–3:00 PM				x	
15	Hooks Woods & the Bolivar Peninsula —From woods to beaches to marshland, this trip has it all! We will start the day at TOS’s Hooks Woods Sanctuary to look for migrating warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and more. Then it is on to Bolivar. This well-known Peninsula features various habitats including sand flats, coastal prairies, jetties, tidal sloughs and wooded lots. In addition to hotspots like Horseshoe Marsh, Tuna Rd, and Yacht Basin Road, we will visit the famous Bolivar Flats. This Globally Important Bird Area is known as one of the finest migratory locations in North America for shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Expect to see 100+ species on this trip.	Galveston	Easy	6:15 AM–3:00 PM				x	x
16	Roy E. Larson Sandyland Sanctuary —The 5,654-acre TNC sanctuary harbors a variety of plant communities, including one of the last remaining longleaf pine communities in Texas. A rare combination of swamp, open-floor forest and southern pinelands create a preserve with remarkable diversity, sustaining 582 plant species and 234 animal species. We will spend the morning walking the trails through a couple of different habitats and then have lunch under the pavilion. After lunch, we will add some diversity to our species list by birding Cattail Marsh in Beaumont.	Hardin	Moderate	6:30 AM–3:00 PM				x	x
17	Birds & Texas History —This unique trip will follow a route that has great birding as well as sites of historical significance. Stops will include historical markers, Fort Anahuac, where William B. Travis nearly started a Texas Revolution in 1832, the San Jacinto Monument, and the Lynchburg Ferry, an important site for the runaway scrape. The bird stops will include small migrant traps, rookeries, and rice fields. Whooping Cranes were seen along this route last year, so we may get lucky! The trip will end with lunch at the Monument Inn (participants buy their own lunch at the restaurant).	Jefferson/Chambers/Harris	Easy	7:00 AM–1:00 PM					x
18	Trinity River Waterbirds and Woodlands —This trip will visit three locations with riparian, woodland and parkland habitats—Trinity River Waterbird Rookery, Trinity River Island Recreation Area, and White Memorial Park. The focus will be on the breeding birds of the area but hopefully we will encounter some migrants too. Species we may see include Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, a variety of herons and egrets, Swallow-tailed Kite, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Chat, Prothonotary Wabler, Northern Parula, and Summer Tanager. After a 45 minute drive to our first location, most of the remaining time will be spent walking slowly on level ground.	Chambers	Easy	6:15 AM–1:00 PM					x

19	<p>Boats, Bayous and Birds—This trip will start with a two-hour boat ride on the Neches River. The Neches River has been called the last wild river in east Texas. The Ivory Bill River Boat is a comfortable, open boat that provides great views of the surrounding dense bottomland forests of hardwood and pine trees. The area is home to more than 200 tree species, 47 mammals, 300 birds and many reptiles and amphibians. We will watch for birds while learning about the unique ecosystems along the river. The tour is a program of the Big Thicket Association, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization committed to expanding, enhancing and protecting the Big Thicket National Preserve. After the boat trip, we will head further east and spend the rest of the day birding the famous Shangri La Botanical Gardens. This 252-acre site includes upland forests, cypress/tupelo swamps, and Adams Bayou, a lush riparian area. Enjoy the heronry, where 15 species of birds nest communally, and search the formal gardens for migrants that may be passing through. This trip costs \$20/person to cover the cost of the boat trip.</p>	Jefferson/Orange	Easy	7:00 AM–2:00 PM					x
20	<p>Leader's Choice—This trip will go wherever the leader believes conditions are optimal to view rarities, specialties or good numbers of birds. During spring migration, conditions can change daily, and can vary widely from one location to another. This trip could travel to one or more coastal migrant traps, or head to the beach for gulls and shorebirds, or go to a location for specialty breeding birds or a recently-discovered rarity. Flexibility of expectations and itinerary will be key.</p>	To Be Determined		7:00 AM–2:00 PM					x
21	<p>Newton County Century Club—Century Club trips are fast paced outings with the goal of maximizing the number of species see/heard within the county. There is very little time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites and roadside birding are the norm. The tour will feature as wide a variety of habitats as available. It is very safe to say that Newton County is an under-birded county. The top eBirder for the county has 115 species, and only seven birders have 100 or more species. eBird has nine hotspots listed. This field trip will definitely add to the understanding of birds in the area and hopefully add to the list of good birding locations. Herons and egrets, raptors, woodpeckers, blackbirds and warblers are some of the family groups likely to be seen.</p>	Newton	Easy	6:00 AM–5:00 PM			x		
22	<p>Tyler County Century Club—Century Club trips are fast paced outings with the goal of maximizing the number of species seen/heard within the county. There is very little time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites and roadside birding are the norm. The tour will feature as wide a variety of habitats as available. Although not quite as challenging as Newton County, Tyler County could still be considered an under-birded county. The top eBirder for the county has 158 species, with 15 birders having 100 or more species in eBird. eBird has 10 hotspots listed. This field trip will add to the understanding of birds in the area and hopefully add to the list of good birding locations. Herons and egrets, raptors, woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and warblers (both migrants and breeding birds) are some of the species/family groups likely to be seen.</p>	Tyler	Easy	5:45 AM–5:00 PM			x		
23	<p>Jasper County Century Club—Century Club trips are fast paced outings with the goal of maximizing the number of species seen/heard within the county. There is very little time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites and roadside birding are the norm. The tour will feature as wide a variety of habitats as available. Jasper County is birded more frequently, so it's not quite as hard to find species as some of the other counties that we'll be visiting during this meeting. The top eBirder for the county has 209 species, and 27 birders have 100 or more species. eBird has 15 hotspots listed. With 219 species listed in eBird for April and May, this should be a very birdy trip with both migrating and breeding birds.</p>	Jasper	Easy	5:00 AM–5:00 PM				x	
24	<p>Orange County Century Club—Century Club trips are fast paced outings with the goal of maximizing the number of species seen/heard within the county. There is very little time for lingering looks so prepare to move briskly from spot to spot. Extensive driving to/from sites and roadside birding are the norm. The tour will feature as wide a variety of habitats as available. It is safe to say that this is an under-birded county. The top eBirder for the county has 191 species, and 22 birders have 100 or more species. eBird has 12 hotspots listed. With 205 species listed in eBird for April and May, this should be a very birdy trip with both migrating and breeding birds.</p>	Orange	Easy	6:15 AM–5:00 PM				x	

Nature Up Close: Whooping Cranes are Finally Making a Comeback

CBS News/2 December 2019



A whooping crane in flight. Perilously close to extinction decades ago, tremendous efforts by naturalists have resulted in the saving of a magnificent bird.

By “*Sunday Morning*” contributing videographer Judy Lehmborg.

In the summer of 1998, while driving along the Slough Creek Road in Yellowstone National Park, my husband and I spotted two whooping cranes. Wait! Whooping cranes don't live in Yellowstone; they spend their winters in Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, and their summers in Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada, over 2,000 miles north of Yellowstone. Once we established that they were indeed whooping cranes, we enjoyed watching bird watchers scratching their heads as they combed through their bird guides wondering what could a very tall, mostly-white bird be, besides a whooping crane?

Remember the movie “Fly Away Home,” in which a little girl trains a family of Canada geese to migrate by following her ultralight plane? The movie is inspired by the work of two men, Bill Lishman and William Sladen, who successfully trained Canada geese to migrate following an ultralight. In the 1980s researchers first trained sandhill cranes to follow an ultralight, and then whooping cranes. Dubbed Operation Migration, it had mixed success. The cranes repeatedly got too close to humans, so they were moved to a more remote area of Yellowstone. In the end, it failed. But biologists, thankfully, did not give up.

The stately, majestic whooping crane has never been a common bird in North America. Their population is estimated to have been between 10,000 to 20,000 birds before European settlers arrived in the New World. By the 1870s their population was down to around 1,350 birds. In 1938 that number was 15 in one single migratory flock that wintered along the Texas coast (in what is now Aransas National Wildlife Refuge), and bred in some unknown location in Canada. There were also 15 in a non-migratory flock in Louisiana, but a 1940 hurricane killed half of them and scattered the rest.

Their decline was due to over-hunting, low reproductive rates, and, primarily, loss of habitat. As more and more of the American prairie (and most importantly the pot holes left behind by the last glaciers) were tilled for farming, the birds continued to lose habitat essential for their migration



A whooping crane with a clam.

refueling stops. Their low reproductive rates are due to a combination of being slow to reach sexual maturity and laying two eggs, only one of which normally survives.

One of the Louisiana survivors, a female, was taken into custody at the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans, and was later joined by two injured males from the migratory population. Josephine, as the female became known, lived another 25 years but only produced four chicks that survived to maturity. During that same time the wild migratory population increased by only ten birds. Things were looking dire for the species.

Luckily, after much searching, the migratory population's breeding grounds were accidentally found in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park in 1954. Whooping crane conservationists finally had a source of fertile whooping crane eggs. They could remove one from a nesting pair without any adverse effects on the wild population.

In the intervening years much had been learned about how to get captive whooping cranes to successfully reproduce. In 1976 the wild population only had 60 birds and had only increased their population by 10. Ornithologist George Archibald, who was the co-founder of the International Crane Foundation, began training a female whooping crane, Tex, to come into breeding condition. It took him three years to succeed, during which time he walked, danced and called like a whooping crane to get her ready for mating. He pioneered much of the methods still used to encourage mating in captive birds as well as rearing their chicks with the use of hand puppets that look like whooping cranes. She, most unfortunately, died after successfully hatching her first chick.

By that time Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, in Laurel, Md., had also “cracked the code” on whooping crane captive breeding. In just under 40 years, one of their male cranes sired, grandsired or great-grandsired 186 captive bred chicks. Unfortunately, the Patuxent center closed after

51 years of breeding and training whooping cranes for release into the wild following budget cuts by the Trump Administration in 2017. Because the Patuxent birds could not all be moved to the same location, its closure has had extremely negative effects on the captive breeding program.

Over the years several reintroduction programs have been attempted with varying success. In the 1970s eggs taken from whooping crane nests were placed in sandhill crane nests at Gray's Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho. It seemed to work. The sandhill cranes accepted the whooping crane eggs, raised the chicks and taught them to migrate to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. After a few years however, it became obvious the plan was flawed. There were only a few whooping cranes – and thousands of sandhills. When the whooping cranes matured, they picked sandhills for their mates, producing hybrid offspring, so the program was discontinued.



Sandhill cranes (on the left) and whooping cranes.

That's when the ultralight planes flown through Operation Migration came into use. Some migratory birds know where to go without being taught by their parents, but not whooping cranes. Their parents teach them the route. Fifty years ago there was only one wild migrating population, the Aransas-Wood Buffalo group (which is also the largest population). For years biologists worried it would only take a late-season hurricane or an oil spill to crash the Aransas wintering cranes.

In August 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit Aransas National Wildlife Refuge not once, but twice, wiping out 20 feet of coastline, killing 300+-year-old oak trees, and forcing saltwater into what had been prime freshwater whooping crane habitat. (And dumping 53 inches of rain on our house.)

But nature is resilient, and the cranes came down that year and appeared to do okay.

In the last few years a longtime goal of whooping crane biologists has finally been realized by the establishment of a second migratory flock that moves between Florida and Wisconsin. After several tries, and failures, a non-migratory population is now holding its own in Louisiana as well. Those two groups, along with the original Aransas-Wood Buffalo population and captive whoopers, brings their total population to just over 800. After almost 80 years, thousands and thousands of man hours and untold millions of dollars, we have 800 whooping cranes. It is difficult to say that is a total success, but it is impossible to imagine a world without whooping cranes.

One of the first courses I took in graduate school was "Evolution." Our professor, mostly to try to start a discussion, said whooping cranes were functionally extinct. He meant that not only were their numbers very low (around 60 at the time), but their gene pool was very small. It is still small today. There is not complete consensus as to how many individuals constitute a viable population of vertebrates, but 5,000 is probably the most commonly-agreed-on number, although some argue at least 7,000 are necessary to ensure long-term survival. At a little over 800 individuals, whooping cranes haven't fully recovered, but I find it very satisfying to know that during my lifetime they have gone from literally the brink of extinction to, if not a super-healthy population, at least one that is far from the danger of extinction and will most likely have 1,000 birds within the next few years. With new habitat added around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and finally an established second migratory population, the chances of their survival continue to improve.

Your best chances of seeing whooping cranes are from several commercial boats that go out from Rockport, Texas to the bay side of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. A couple of choices are: Rockport Adventures, which specializes in whooping crane tours; they are relatively inexpensive and take out over 40 people at a time. If you are a photographer or would just like a small group size, Aransas Bay Adventures may be more to your liking. We've done both, the former when we took out large student groups, and the latter when we wanted to photograph whooping cranes.

Judy Lehmborg is a former college biology teacher who now shoots nature videos.

—Judy Lehmborg

Rio Grande Birding Festival Art Contest Highlights



We Scored With Our Silent Auction Trip to San Saba with Jimma Byrd



Wendy, Cheryl and Jimma (Photographer: Shelia Hargis)

At our first stop, it was immediately evident that Jimma knew the way to a visiting birder's heart: a wastewater treatment plant. Sandwiched between a golf course, a recycling plant and a terrazzo stone facility, sat four duck ponds. Our group of four binocular-clad birders was only allowed in on a Saturday because Jimma knows the ropes—and the right people.

On the ponds we saw Northern Pintails, Ruddy Ducks, Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Ducks and a Redhead. This was a pleasant surprise, given the relative dearth of ducks in the Austin area lately.

It also pleased us that sitting high upon utility lines above were the requisite Shrike, Kestrel and Red-tailed Hawk—the holy trinity that seems to guide so many good Central Texas winter birding adventures.



Shelia, Jimma and Cheryl (Photographer: Wendy Harte)

for now they're kind of rare in San Saba.

Near the site where the famous 1847 Unbroken Peace Treaty was signed between German Settlers and the Comanches, we saw a Belted Kingfisher and a Great Egret casually looking for fish, completely unfazed by Texas history.

Onward we went to Jimma's pecan ranch, where White-crowned Sparrows, Pine Siskins and American Goldfinch

At last winter's TOS meeting, Cheryl McGrath, Shelia Hargis and I were the lucky winners of a silent auction prize: a day of birding in San Saba County with ex-board member Jimma Byrd.

A year later, on January 25, at the crack of dawn, we set out from Austin for "the Pecan Capital of the World" to claim our day of birding with Jimma, an infamous San Saba native.

After who knows how long, we made our way out of the facility and stumbled upon two Egyptian Geese, one walking the golf course like it was looking for a lost ball, the other surveying the land from a nearby tree. One day these geese may be as common as Muscovy ducks, but

were visiting feeders near the house. From the car you could hear the squeaky whistles of Cedar Waxwings before you noticed them crowded in the trees above.



(Photographer: Wendy Harte)

As a blustery wind picked up, an adult Bald Eagle flew above. Near the house we caught sight of a Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and even more Cedar Waxwings to round out the morning.

After lunch, we birded three big hills in back of Jimma's house. Hoping for more sparrows, we managed to locate Rufous-crowned, Black-throated, Lincoln's Sparrows—along with Carolina Chickadees, Northern Cardinals and Black-crested Titmice, a Roadrunner and a pretty Verdin.

Just as we were marveling at the magical land, what we thought was a distant Raven suddenly appeared, getting bigger and bigger until finally it transformed itself into a young Bald Eagle with just a hint of white under its wings. Things like that seem to happen in San Saba. A lot.

The large Soil Conservation Reservoir Site Eight was loaded with Green-winged Teal, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Pintails, Greater Yellowlegs, 14 Wilson's Snipe and many others. Harris's Sparrows and Carolina Wrens hid in brush by the edge of the road. Spiffy looking Red-winged Blackbirds crowded in nearby trees as Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadees, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers chipped at us from the trees right above us.



(Photographer: Wendy Harte)

sight in some impossibly dense foliage. We've all learned to trust Cheryl's hunches. After the long "tree bark, foliage or bird" debate, Shelia announced that the impossibly hidden thing, camouflaged by rusty leaves, was indeed a living creature and definitely not a Red-shouldered Hawk. It was yet another magical San Saba birding moment, when what was feared to be Sycamore leaves morphed into something else all together: a gorgeous Great-horned Owl. Armed once again with her trusty scope, Shelia proved to us all she can conjure birds out of a Where's Waldo scenario.

Setting off for a riparian habitat along the San Saba River, we were like Pied Pipers, with a long line of Jimma's chickens following behind us. Dark-eyed Juncos, Carolina Wrens, Lesser Goldfinches, Savannah, Lark, Field, and Song Sparrows kept us busy.

As the day wound down, our group visited two well-known San Saba hotspots: Mills Pond Park and Risien Park. At Risien Park, we heard a Red-shouldered Hawk but we couldn't locate it. Eagle-eyed Cheryl thought she spotted it down the river, landing out of



(Photographer: Shelia Hargis)

Right then and there we decided to end the day on a high note. With the light fading, we were certain we'd never beat that find. Our birding day ended with 82 species.

It's difficult to put all the fun, and laughs into a succinct synopsis. Having a terrific San Saba birding native as our guide made it an all the more pleasurable

birding adventure. We all sincerely thank Jimma Byrd for showing us around—and TOS for offering the trip—we can't wait to make a return visit, to complete our San Saba County lists.

—Wendy Harte

Birding Results from the Winter 2020 TOS Meeting, in College Station.

This is, as promised, the checkerboard report from our winter meeting in College Station. The field trip organizers did a fantastic job, generating some of the smoothest rollouts (I think it was the hats for the field trip leaders) I have ever seen at a birding meeting. By focusing our efforts on areas away from the well-birded Gulf Coast itself, we made a solid contribution to eBird, hitting some of the least-birded counties in the region.

Before I get into our results I want to explain how the checkerboard was built this time around. I used eBird to generate a list of every species that had been seen during the last ten Januaries in every county we were to explore (Austin, Brazos, Burleson, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Madison, Milam, Montgomery, Robertson, Walker, Waller, Washington). This yielded a list of 238 species. From this list I removed species that the ABA does not consider countable such as Mute Swan (though I retained Egyptian Goose as eBird is tracking the species' progress in this portion of Texas). I then removed those that had been reported to eBird only three times or less from the period surveyed. This left me with a list of 197 species and field trip participants with the task of competing with every eBirder who had spent time, during January, in those counties from 2010 through 2019.

How did we do?

We saw, as a group, 161 species of the 197 that made the list. That works out to about 82%—a respectable showing against ten years of birder efforts. We also had four write-ins—all species that had not been reported to eBird, from the counties surveyed, more than three times during the last ten Januaries: Mountain Plover, Common Loon, Say's Phoebe, Indigo Bunting. If you add these in, as bonus species, we could call it 84%!

Birders are a competitive bunch so a few highlights are in order and, as would be expected—given the protocol followed—the TCC trips excelled. The Milam County TCC group prevailed on Friday with 81 species, the Waller County TCC group prevailed on Saturday with 78 species, and the Gibbons Creek Reservoir group prevailed on Sunday with 75 species.

Numerous teams contributed species uniquely to the list (write-ins get included in this section in **bold**): the Madison

County Birding team found Greater White-fronted Goose on Saturday; the Navasota River Bottoms team found Egyptian goose on Saturday; the Gibbons Creek Reservoir team found Cinnamon Teal on Sunday; the Waller County TCC team found Mottled Duck on Saturday; the Gibbons Creek Reservoir team found Canvasback on Sunday; the Duck Identification team found (natch) Greater Scaup on Friday; the Washington on the Brazos team found Greater Roadrunner on Friday; the Gibbons Creek Reservoir team found Virginia Rail on Sunday; the Gibbons Creek Reservoir team found Common Gallinule on Friday; the Horizon Turf Farms team found **Mountain Plover** on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (yes, other groups went to see the bird but this team deserves the credit); the Waller County TCC team found Long-billed Curlew on Saturday; the Waller County TCC team found Dunlin on Saturday; the Waller County TCC team found Western Sandpiper on Saturday; the Leon County TCC team and the Sam Houston National Forest team found **Common Loon** on Friday; the Gibbons Creek Reservoir team found Anhinga on Friday and Sunday; the Waller County TCC team found White Ibis on Saturday; the Waller County TCC team found White-faced Ibis on Saturday; the Sam Houston National Forest team found Roseate Spoonbill on Saturday; the Washington on the Brazos team found Barn Owl on Sunday; the Washington on the Brazos team found Eastern Screech Owl on Friday; the Rangeland Ecology Site team found Great Horned Owl on Saturday; the Austin County TCC team found Ladder-backed Woodpecker on Saturday; the Sam Houston National Forest team found Red-cockaded Woodpecker on Friday and Saturday; the Brazos County Birding team and Brazos County Turf Farms team found **Say's Phoebe** on Saturday and Sunday; the Sam Houston National Forest team found Red-breasted Nuthatch on Saturday; the Sam Houston National Forest team found Brown Thrasher on Saturday; the Sam Houston National Forest team found Pine Siskin on Friday; the Brazos County Turf Farms team found McCown's Longspur on Sunday; the Rangeland Ecology Site team found Eastern Towhee on Saturday; the Horizon Turf Farms team found Rusty Blackbird on Friday and Sunday; the Madison County Birding team found Black-and-white Warbler on Saturday; the Madison County Birding team found Wilson's Warbler on Saturday; the Austin County TCC

team found Pyrrhuloxia on Saturday; the Washington on the Brazos team found **Indigo Bunting** on Sunday.

For what it's worth we, as a finely-gear'd and well-oiled birding machine, racked up 135 species on Friday, 145 species on Saturday, and 123 species on Sunday—it is always nice to see effort pay off consistently across all three days.

Most of you have seen more than a few lists from me over the years ... so here comes another one. Without further ado, the list from the Winter TOS meeting in College Station, Texas: Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Egyptian Goose, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Mottled Duck, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Eared Grebe, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared Dove, Inca Dove, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Virginia Rail, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Bonaparte's Gull, Laughing Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Forster's Tern, Common Loon, Anhinga, Neotropic Cormorant, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, White Ibis, White-faced Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, White-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Barn Owl Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Red-

headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Crested Caracara, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Couch's Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Vermilion Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Cave Swallow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Winter Wren, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Carolina Wren, Bewick's Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, House Sparrow, American Pipit, Sprague's Pipit, House Finch, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Lapland Longspur, McCown's Longspur, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Eastern Towhee, Eastern Meadowlark, Western Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Rusty Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Common Grackle, Great-tailed Grackle, Black-and-white Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Palm Warbler, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Pyrrhuloxia, and Indigo Bunting.

—Anthony Hewetson

Regional Reports

Region 1—Panhandle

—Vacant

Region 2—North Central

Birding this winter in North Texas is exciting, as usual. We see Harris's Sparrows and marvel at the knowledge that we live at the approximate center of the area where the entire population of that species spends the winter. And by mid-summer, that entire population will be located in north central Canada. We birders and naturalists enjoy observing and pondering such things about our every-day birds as much as we enjoy a beautiful vagrant—like the male Black-throated Blue Warbler visiting feeders near a city park in Dallas. That species likewise has a limited breeding range in northeastern North America, a limited winter range in the Caribbean, and is vagrant here. In fact, both these species show a wide range of vagrancy in North America.

So, we go out birding and see both the usual and the unusual. Then, we get into a discussion of climate change and perhaps try to make some connections. To me, things then get confused and unsatisfying. I have to fall back on data, and when I look at bird distribution data, either from scholarly sources or from my own meager observations, the conclusion is that there is always a tremendous amount of

variation. I have to fight myself not to try to over-smooth that data and in doing so, make erroneous generalizations.

My main reason for taking you down this path is to highlight the importance of data and of doing our part by reporting the data that we collect. Every public report we make adds knowledge that is useful to the world's scientists: biologists and others. I'm personally a strong advocate of reporting bird population data to eBird. I'm also a strong advocate of reporting individual species sightings to iNaturalist. If you are not familiar with both of these on-line systems, I encourage you to explore them. For each, you can explore information about a species and the distribution of that species without being a member or logging in. As you see the quantity and precision of data being collected by amateurs, you will understand the impact that we "citizen scientists" can make. In iNaturalist, you will find as well, an up-to-date taxonomy of all the species of plants, animals, and fungi in the world! Again, one can learn so much by just exploring the two websites. To start recording personal observations in either system, you would establish a user account and learn their methodology. EBird is tailored to log the number of birds of each species seen in a limited area during a limited time, and that recording is done rapidly. Adding photos or audio recordings is optional. iNaturalist is

Regional Reports (continued)

tailored differently to carefully log one individual of each species with a photo or audio recording and a precise location. As you see, these tools record different kinds of data and are complementary. For TOS birders moving quickly on a field trip, eBird is the tool of choice. I encourage each of you to make use of these tools.

Hey, thanks for reading, and good birding,

—*Gailon Brehm, Director*

Region 3—Piney Woods

Being the newest District Director I'm sure I've been asking a lot of questions! Plus trolling their websites and Facebook!

Here's what I recently found out!

February 15, 2020

SFASU, Pineywoods Audubon, SFA Gardens with the University student chapter of the National Assn. for Interpretation are sponsoring the Annual Outdoor Bird Bonanza from 8-12 @ the Pineywoods Native Plant Center, located 2900 Raquet St. Nacogdoches. For more info call (936) 468-1863 or sfagardens@SFASU.edu.

Future: Tuesday, March 10th

Junior Audubon Event 1:00–2:00 pm

Huntsville Public Library—1219 13th Street Speaker Mary Anne Weber of Houston Audubon spearheaded by Sharyn Pezant. For more information contact Sharyn at: 936-662-5925 Saturday-March 21—Two field trip leaders (Doug Ghrist/Tyler Audubon and David Bell/Pineywoods Audubon) met at the Winter TOS meeting collaborating on a field trip to the recently opened Neches NWR. It's been set for March 21, with an invitation to all.

Stay tuned, I believe great things are going to be happening in East Texas!

—*Laura Wilson, Director*

Region 4—Trans Pecos

This winter season, bird numbers and species seemed noticeably lower and different than last year. Not sure what is different from last year to this year since we have only lived in the region for one year, but it has definitely been drier and colder than this same time last year. Species of interest for this season include: Eurasian Wigeon - Balmorhea Lake (Randy Pinkston - December), Lesser Black-backed Gull - Balmorhea Lake (CBC December), White-tailed Kite - Balmorhea Lake (CBC December), Red-breasted Sapsucker - Chisos Basin (CBC December), Aplomado Falcon - Ranch adjacent to Sandia Wetlands (Cecilia Riley and Mike Gray - CBC December), Barn Swallow - Davis Mtns Resort private residence (Lorrie Lowrie, Bill Lowrie - CBC December) and Bishop Wetlands Presido County (D. D. Currie and Dell Little - December), Brown Thrasher - Limpia Crossing, Fort Davis private residence (Linda Hedges, et al December - January), Botteri's Sparrow - Hwy 505 (D. D. Currie and Dell Little), numerous sightings of Sagebrush Sparrows - Jeff Davis and Reeves counties, Harris's Sparrow - Davis Mtn Resort private residence (Lorrie Lowrie, Bill Lowrie - January) and another

sighting at Point of Rocks off of Hwy 166 (January), Western Tanager - Limpia Crossing, Fort Davis private residence (D. D. Currie and Dell Little - January).

The Borderlands Research Institute at Sul Ross State University is continuing their Grasslands Bird Study at the Dixon Water Foundation, Mimms Unit in Marfa, TX. This is a great opportunity to be a field biologist for the day and see Baird's Sparrows in Texas. Volunteers work with students to flush the birds into mist nets. Various data are collected about the birds. The birds are then banded and released. The next dates for the study are March 6 - 11, 2020. Contact Alejandro Chavez at alezchavezt@gmail.com or 512-919-9297 if you would like to volunteer. Plan for 1/2 - 3/4 of a day with varying temperatures and walking on level, but rough ground. Bring hat, sunscreen, water, lunch. Bathroom in the field.

Other regional activities include planning Great Texas Birding Classic events for the region.

—*D. D. Currie, Director*

Region 5—Edwards Plateau

—*Christine Turnbull, Director*

Region 6 Report

While doing the various Christmas bird counts in the region this season, I was often asked, "Where are the birds?" It seems many of our winter residents were slow in arriving this year. However, the numbers have increased as the winter months went on. Our sparrows, while a bit late, have filled in nicely, with Chipping, Field, Song, Lincoln's, White-crowned, White-throated, Harris's, and Fox Sparrows, and Dark-eyed Juncos being observed in the proper habitats. The ducks are not as widely dispersed as in some years, but they are here on selected bodies of water. Our winter warblers and woodpeckers are here, too, so we are ready for spring migration.

The biggest happening in Region 6 recently was the winter TOS membership meeting held in Bryan/College Station. Many thanks to our host organization, the Rio Brazos Audubon Society, for all their hard work in making this meeting a success. Check out the details of this meeting elsewhere in this newsletter.

Jimma Byrd and I hosted a Lampasas/San Saba Counties TOS weekender that drew great interest and participation. We had twice as many applicants as we had spots available. We found 75 species in Lampasas County and 59 in San Saba County (in only half a day). Look for details in the next TOS newsletter.

—*Daniel Hodges, Director*

Region 7—Brushlands

Monte Mucho Audubon Society's current project is installing Purple Martin gourds and houses at the Laredo Water Museum, one of only a few in Texas. The opportunity to offer these birding projects as a learning tool and an

Regional Reports (continued)

introduction to all things relating to birding to Young Birder Clubs within the City of Laredo school districts and Zapata County will be our goal in 2020.

We have seen fewer Morelet's Seedeaters due to the U.S. Border Patrol carrizo cane eradication program. This is evident at nearly every section where the invasive cane was growing. There are still many sections along the river that are undisturbed and still ideal for birding for seedeaters.

The Laredo Birding Festival, February 5-8, 2020, will result in another sell out year with most field trips at maximum capacity and closed. Next year's dates are February 10-13, 2021. Register early.

—Raul Delgado, Director

Region 8— Coastal Prairie

New Nature Center

On February 14 John Paul Landing Environmental Education Center will be open to the public. This Harris County Pct 3 facility adjoins John Paul Landing Park in

northwest Harris County. The park has large lakes with walking trails, benches, and pavilions. And it already has a rare bird on the checklist: a Brown Booby was seen there on September 29. The Environmental Education Center will have regularly scheduled bird, plant, and nature walks. There will also be educational displays, nature programs for kids, and other nature-related events. Visit www.pct3.com for more information.

Spring Meeting in Beaumont

Our region is hosting another TOS meeting! The spring meeting will be in Beaumont from April 29 to May 3. I hope many of you plan to attend. We have several great field trips and presentations planned. These meetings are a great way to meet other birders, explore new hotspots, and learn more about the birds in the area. Please email kenner7683@gmail.com if you are interested in lending a helping hand during the meeting.

—Kendra Kocab, Director



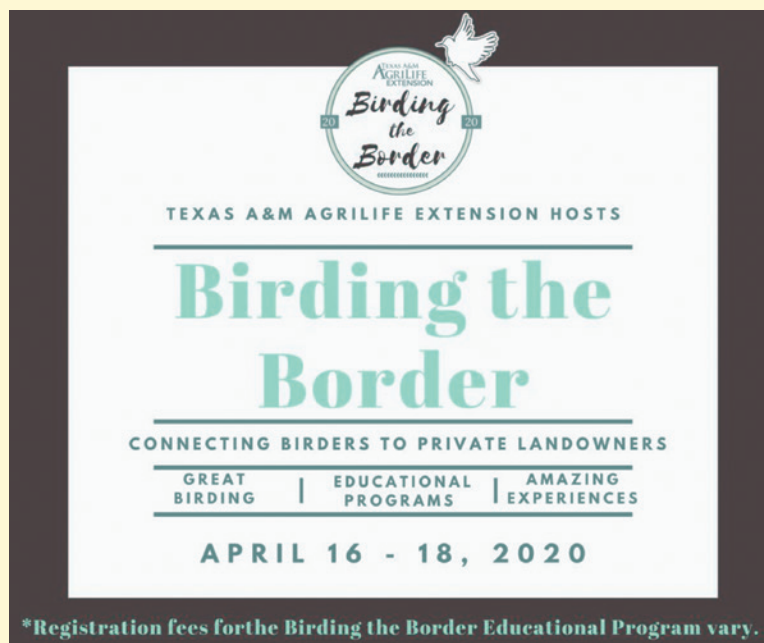
Gray Hawk Research

Researchers at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley are conducting a study focused on two aspects of Gray Hawk biology: juvenile dispersal and breeding biology of adults, including territory establishment and determination of nesting success. Your help is needed in locating Gray Hawk nests in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, as well as reporting sightings of color-marked individuals.

If you find a nest, please do not disturb the hawks' nesting activities; the location from where the nest was observed will be adequate. Please e-mail this information, DO NOT post on social media.

Please report the location and description of any nest sites, including GPS coordinates, and any sightings of color-marked Gray Hawks (with band color and two-character code if possible) to: michael.stewart01@utrgv.edu, timothy.brush@utrgv.edu, and raptours@earthlink.net.

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Board Update

New Region 3 Director

Due to health issues, Linda Belssner resigned from the TOS Board in December. Linda has served as Region 3 Director since 2015. She played an instrumental role in our Nacogdoches 2018 winter meeting. Our thoughts are with you Linda. Take care and get well!

Replacing Linda is Laura Wilson. See Laura's bio below. If you live in Region 3, please reach out to Laura to introduce yourself and thank her for stepping up to be your regional director.

Annual Membership Meeting

Our annual membership meeting will be held on May 1, during the evening presentation at the Beaumont meeting. Please join us as we recognize retiring and new Board members, celebrate our accomplishments of the past year and look forward to what the upcoming year holds.

TOS's New Region 3 Director



My name is Laura Wilson and I live in Bullard, Texas (25 miles south of Tyler and 56 miles from Nacogdoches). I've lived and worked here since 1978, retiring in 2016. Many moons ago I was the casual birder, feeding them as long as I can remember. In April 2016 with a nudge from my friend (Janet Cook) who was in my 2011 graduating Tyler Master Naturalist class, my journey of learning about birds truly began. My loves before that were Archeology and Geology. They took a back seat for this hobby that would stir my heart and create a symphony in my ears, pairing with my travel obsession. Oh, I still travel for enjoyment, but my bins and camera are always with me. Through osmosis my husband is learning birds.....how exciting is that!

I've helped with Tyler and Nacogdoches Christmas Bird Counts, and you might have seen me at the Nacogdoches TOS meeting co-leading a trip to Kurth Lake. I've met many people along the way, on trips, and have organized a few trips out of the country. It's my desire to make sure every birder I come in contact with knows about TOS. I look forward to serving the 40 counties in Region 3.

Century Club Pin Recipients



Byron Stone, newest Texas Century Club member

Hooks Woods Water Feature

This pond was built by the TOS High Island Sanctuary Management Team. It was designed by team member James Giroux. Special thanks to Houston Audubon for bringing the tractor over to dig the initial hole in the ground! Photos by Kendra Kocab and Dave Dolan.



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(25 October 2019 to 19 February 2020)

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