

## President's Message



Byron Stone TOS President.

It is with great sadness that I must report to you on the recent untimely death of our friend and board member Gailon Brehm.

Gailon was not only a valued TOS board member, but he was a good friend. He and I birded together many times during TOS meetings, and at other times, too, sometimes in favored haunts in Collin County, and sometimes in far-flung places like Cuba in 2018 on a trip with Randy

Pinkston and my brother Don Stone. Gailon was dedicated, hard-working and generous. He was the de facto chair of the Nominations Committee, served on the ad hoc committee for exploring hiring permanent staff, and he also served on the Finance Committee, where he devoted himself to the organization of an archival repository of TOS financial and sanctuary holdings. Gailon was a thoughtful contributor to board meetings, and he gave wise council. Gailon also served on the board of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society in Collin County, he gave lectures about bird identification, taught classes for birders, and conducted regular birding walks open to the public on the grounds and along the trails of the Heard Museum. He was by all accounts a devoted spouse, father and grandfather, and he is already missed greatly by those of us who had the good fortune to know, work and bird with him.

Gailon died suddenly of natural causes after a brief illness in early October. TOS will find a way to honor his memory and his many contributions to birding and to conservation, perhaps at a future meeting.

Panama trip – The first TOS international trip, to Panama in late September, was a great success. A brief writeup by our volunteer leader, Tiffany Kirsten and a bird list and a few photos are included elsewhere. If there is demand, we would like to do a similar trip next year, and perhaps other TOS trips to other locations.

January Meeting – I'm looking forward to the meeting in Abilene. The Meeting Planning Committee is making arrangements for lots of great field trips. Pray for rain.

Spring meeting – we are still working to try to find a suitable location for a spring meeting. It seems to me that it has become increasingly difficult to find satisfactory dates, partly as a result of the growth of local / regional birding festivals which compete for space on the calendar (and other resources). This is a good thing for birders and birders in general, but makes it harder to plan a large TOS meeting in late April and early May. There has been some discussion

on the board about whether we should limit ourselves to one meeting per year, but for now we remain committed to having a spring meeting - somewhere.

See you in Abilene!

—Byron "Doc" Stone,  
TOS President, 2022-2023

## 2022 TBRC Annual Meeting

The 2022 Annual Meeting of the Texas Bird Records Committee (hereafter committee or TBRC) was held at 11:00 AM on 17 September 2022. Carpenter hosted the meeting at his house in Dripping Springs with Cook, Frank and Glover showing up in person; all other members were able to attend online via video conference (Zoom).

### Members/Attendees:

- Tony Frank, Chair
- Eric Carpenter, Secretary
- Keith Arnold, Academician
- Sheridan Coffey
- Greg Cook
- Mel Cooksey
- Steve Glover
- Mary Gustafson
- Arman Moreno
- Chris Runk
- Willie Sekula

The meeting was convened at 11:06 AM.

### Election of Members

Carpenter and Arnold were the only nominees respectively for the Secretary and Academician positions. Both were unanimously (re)elected to their respective position.

Cooksey had his first term expire at the meeting and was elected to serve a second term.

Runk had his second term expire at the Annual Meeting so there was 1 open Voting Member position. There were 3 nominees - Blaine Carnes (nominated by Runk), Jesse Huth (nominated by Gustafson), and John Muldrow (nominated by Sekula). The background/merits of each candidate were discussed with Huth being elected to the sole open position.

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Jesse Huth newly elected member of the TBRC.

Thus, effective at the end of the Annual Meeting, current membership and term of service are as follows:

- Tony Frank, Chair – term expires in 2023, can be re-elected
- Eric Carpenter, Secretary (not a Voting Member) – term expires in 2023, can be re-elected
- Keith Arnold, Academician (not a Voting Member) – term is as listed for Secretary, can be re-elected
- Jesse Huth – 1<sup>st</sup> term expires in 2025, can be re-elected
- Steve Glover – 1<sup>st</sup> term expires in 2024, can be re-elected
- Arman Moreno – 1<sup>st</sup> term expires in 2024, can be re-elected
- Sheridan Coffey – 1<sup>st</sup> term expires in 2023, can be re-elected
- Greg Cook – 1<sup>st</sup> term expires in 2023, can be re-elected
- Mel Cooksey – 2<sup>nd</sup> term expires in 2025
- Mary Gustafson – 2<sup>nd</sup> term expires in 2024
- Willie Sekula – 2<sup>nd</sup> term expires in 2024

The sequence (used primarily for order for oral/4<sup>th</sup> round records) of members for voting becomes:

Huth, Glover, Moreno, Coffey, Cook, Cooksey, Gustafson, Sekula, Frank

#### Fourth Round Records

Five fourth-round records were discussed and voted on:

- 2021-90 - Sooty Shearwater (1) 19 Aug 2021, 4 miles southeast of San Jose Is., Aransas County NOT ACCEPTED, 1-8

Follow up: All members felt like this record would be better dealt with as a “Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater” and an oral first-round vote was undertaken which went 7-2. This record will now be dealt with as “Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater” for a second round of voting as part of the normal voting process.

- 2021-75 - Leach’s Storm-Petrel (1) 27 Jun 2021, 18 miles southeast of San Jose Is., Aransas County NOT ACCEPTED, 6-3
- 2022-15 - Ruddy Ground Dove (2) 29 May 2021, El Paso, El Paso County NOT ACCEPTED, 5-4
- 2021-102 - Limpkin (1) 1 Oct 2021, North Padre Is., Kleberg County NOT ACCEPTED, 0-9
- 2021-68 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 11 Apr 2021, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Hidalgo County NOT ACCEPTED, 0-9



Limpkin photo. Nan Perkins/Facebook/texbirds

#### Removal of Limpkin from the review list (Carpenter)

Carpenter led the discussion to remove Limpkin from the review list. The first state record of Limpkin came only on May 6th, 2021 (at Brazos Bend where birds are still present) and there are already 10 ACCEPTED records as well as 19 additional records with identifiable photographs currently in review. Limpkins seem to be regular breeders at two locations (Brazos Bend State Park, Fort Bend County and Sheldon Reservoir, Harris County) and birds found at other Upper Texas Coast locations are perhaps dispersing birds from these areas. Sheldon Reservoir has at least 23 birds; Brazos Bend’s high count is 8 though perhaps a thorough census would reveal more. The species is expanding in Texas – several sightings in disparate locations including several in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and one as far north/west as the Panhandle. With this species seemingly here to stay, the TBRC voted unanimously to remove Limpkin from the review list.

#### Acceptance of outstanding Limpkin records (Carpenter)

Carpenter had prepared online folders/records of the currently outstanding 19 Limpkin records that are each supported by at least one photograph. With the TBRC Members having reviewed these records before hand and in conjunction with Limpkin being removed from the Review List, the TBRC agreed by acclamation to accept all 19 records.

#### Additional discussions

Gustafson mentioned that she has been thinking about finding ways to get younger birders involved with the TBRC/record submission/record review process. One such method



would be an online (eg. zoom call) meeting where selected records (already reviewed by the TBRC) could be used as examples to show birders interested in documentation/ review the types/levels of documentation that are desired on some records as well as what level of review/decisioning is done by TBRC members based on this documentation. Other members thought that this was a great idea worth pursuing so Gustafson will take the lead on this.

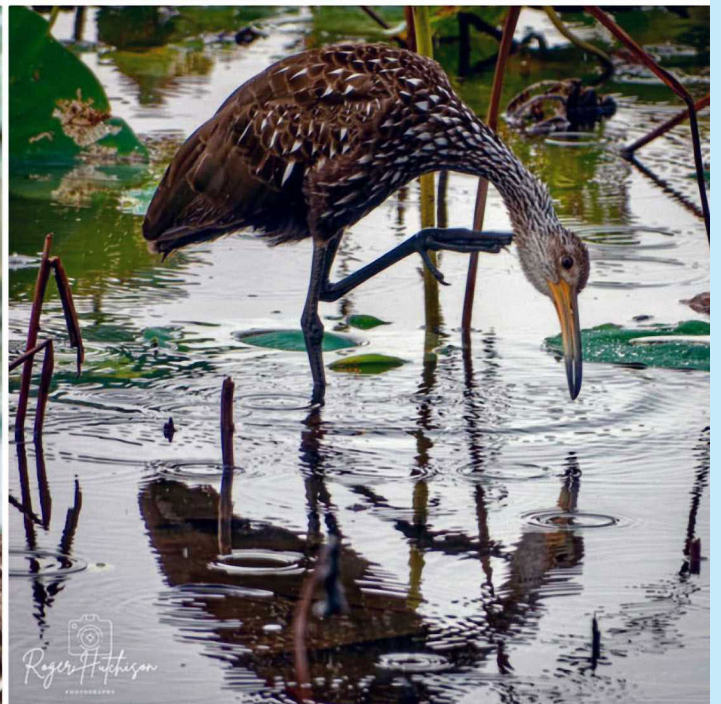
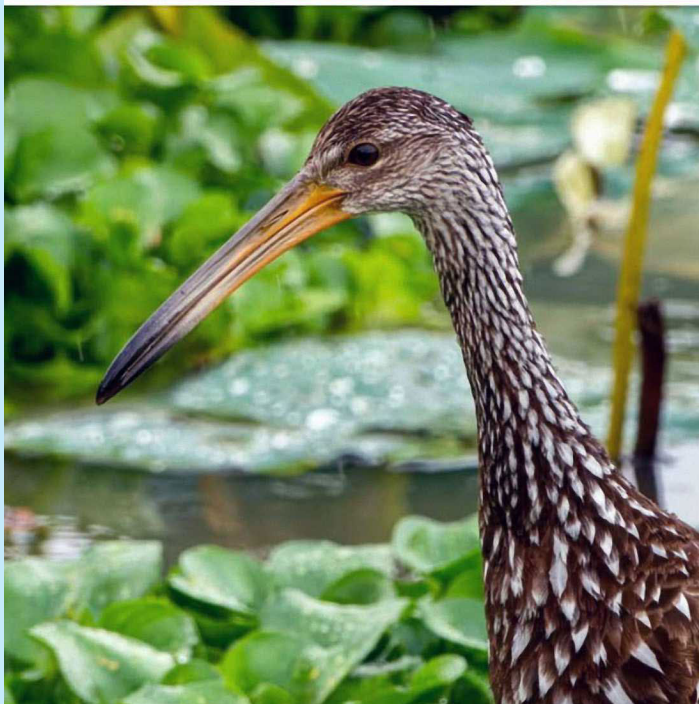
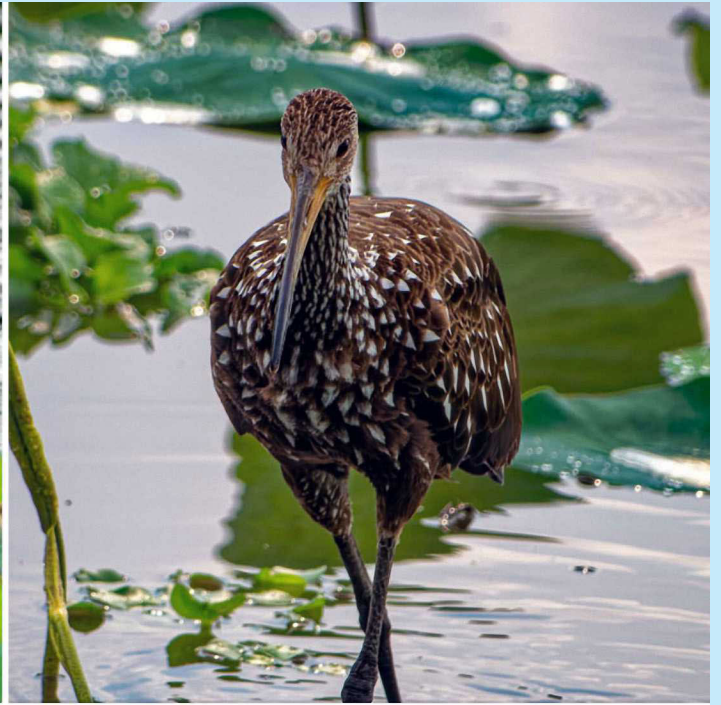
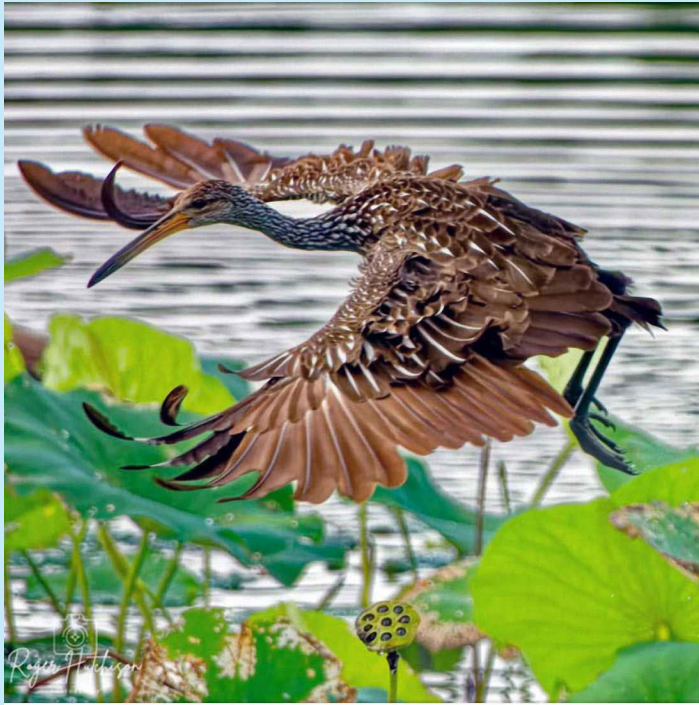
### Adjournment

With no other formal business on the agenda and no additional Any Other Business items raised, the meeting was adjourned at 12:05PM.

Respectfully submitted,

—Eric Carpenter

Secretary, Texas Bird Records Committee



*Limpkin photos by Roger Hutchinson/Facebook/Texbirds*

## TOS Winter Meeting in Abilene: Take Two!

TOS is excited to announce our Winter Meeting, taking place Thursday January 12 through Sunday January 15, 2023. This is one of our main fundraisers of the year.

We are thrilled to offer a spectacular array of field trips in the Abilene area. Birds we will search for include winter sparrows and waterfowl, and there is an irruption of finches this year. There is also a possibility of a special trip to look for Short-eared Owls. Field trips will offer excellent birding on private ranches and state parks, with the opportunity to jump-start your Century Club lists in the eleven counties surrounding Abilene.

Our meeting speakers will offer their presentations in-person (no Zoom links this time), and they will present a variety of exciting and interesting topics so please make an effort to attend. Prior to each evening's speaker, we will share stories and interesting sightings from that day's birding efforts.

We will have in-person check-in, plus a wrap-up banquet at our host hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, and registration information appears below. **DEADLINE TO REGISTER AT THE HILTON IS DEC. 28, 2022.**

The Abilene area offers interesting birding opportunities. We eagerly look forward to seeing you during the meeting to pad your Big Country lists.

—Christine Turnbull, TOS Past-President

Online registration is required so that we can share instructions, resources, and details with you. **Online registration will open on our website on December 4 at 6:00 a.m. and close on January 7, 2023 at 11:55 p.m.** You will receive a confirmation email once your registration is complete.

**Banquet selections (see Meals below) appear on the registration form and must be submitted by Dec. 27, 2022**

The fee for the event will be \$100 per TOS member, and \$135 for non-members, which covers their annual membership dues. Students may attend for free. **No cancellations can be made after Jan. 7, 2023.**

Please note: The Abilene area has been in a severe drought which may affect the expected distribution of birds. There could, however, be some nice surprises too!

### COVID Safety During the 2023 Winter Meeting

For the health and safety of everyone, TOS asks that participants comply with guidelines set by private businesses and municipal entities.

#### Hotel and Breakfast

Our host hotel is the Hilton Garden Inn at 4449 Ridgmont Dr., Abilene, TX 79606. Their phone number is 325-690-6432. (Caravans to field trips will leave from the parking lot of the nearby Abilene Mall.)

You must make hotel reservations **BY DEC. 28, 2022.** Click [HERE](#) to reserve a room at the special group rate of \$124 per night. Breakfast is included in that price and will be available at 5:00 a.m. daily.

### Lunch and Banquet

No box lunches will be available at this event, but we will provide a list of nearby restaurants and shops where food can be purchased, and there is a 24-hour grocery store/deli next door to the hotel. Dinner is on your own on Thursday and Friday.

On the meeting registration form, you will see two Saturday banquet selections: 1.) herb roasted chicken breast with garden salad, roasted red-skin potatoes, seasonal vegetables, dessert and tea, coffee or water 2.) gluten-free pasta with marinara sauce, garden salad, mixed vegetables, dessert and tea, coffee or water. **THESE MUST BE SUBMITTED BY DEC. 27, 2022.**

### Meeting Agenda

#### Thursday, January 12, 2023

- 4:00-6:00 PM Event check-in at the Hilton Garden Inn
- 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: Jay Packer - *Welcome to the Big Country*

#### Friday, January 13

- All Day Birding
- 4:00-5:00 PM Event check-in at the Hilton Garden Inn
- 5:00-6:30 PM Tentative Short-eared Owl trip
- 6:30-7:00 PM Announcements/Birding Reports
- 7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Professor Joel Brant - *Abilene Area Flora and Fauna*

#### Saturday, January 14

- All Day Birding
- 5:00-6:00 PM Informal social hour in the hotel bar
- 6:00-7:00 PM Banquet/Announcements/Birding Reports
- 7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Amy Packer - *Why Everyone Should Join the Texas Century Club*

#### Sunday, January 15

- All Day Birding and depart for home

### Registration Information

The link to register for the meeting is on our website under Events and will open on Dec. 4, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. Please select a first and second choice of field trips, as some trips fill fast. If you would like to be on a waitlist for a trip, contact Judy Kestner at 361-701-1962. Be sure to mention the trip number, and how many spaces you'll need.

Please also be sure your email address and membership dues payments are up-to-date. (To confirm, just visit [www.texasbirds.org](http://www.texasbirds.org) and click Member Information to log in to



your account.) Once you make your event fee payment, you will receive a confirmation email showing the trips and banquet meal, if any, that you have selected.

For any questions, or if you do not have access to the internet, you may call Judy Kestner at 361-701-1962 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.

## Event Prices

### Winter Meeting Package

\$100 for TOS members

\$135 for Non-TOS members (includes a one-year membership)

FREE for all students

Registration cost will increase by \$10 on Dec. 31, 2022.

## Meeting Presentations

### Thursday Evening

7:00 PM

**Title:** *Welcome to the Big Country*

**Presenter:** Jay Packer

**Description:** In this introductory presentation, long-time Texas birder and Abilene native Jay Packer explains why the Big Country is a great place to go birding. You'll learn about the region's habitats, both in Taylor County where Abilene is located, and the surrounding counties. Jay will explain what makes the region special from a birding perspective, as well as cover some of the region's avian highlights over the years. Join us for Jay's talk and get excited about the birding at our winter meeting!



Jay Packer

**Bio:** Born and raised in Abilene, TX, Jay Packer started birding at the age of 12 after an extended family road trip to the great national parks of the Western U.S. He quickly began traveling across Texas, then the U.S. and, at 20 years old, took his first trip to the tropics in Costa Rica. Epic road trips to Mexico ensued, where he and friends subsisted on peanut butter and tortillas for days as they looked for Mexico's rarest birds, pulling the car into the woods to camp and getting a hotel once a week for the shower. More recently, Jay and his wife Amy have traveled for birds to Europe, then Ecuador, Australia, Brazil, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. Closer to home, Jay is passionate about the Texas Century Club (seeing over 100 species in each county of Texas) and finding new county records. Jay loves sharing and talking about his passion for birding and photography.

### Friday Evening

7:00 PM

**Title:** *Local Flora and Fauna*

**Presenter:** Joel Brant, Professor of Biology, McMurry University

**Description:** Lace Hedgehog Cactus, Hispid Cotton Rat, Blanchard's Cricket Frog - are they mammal, amphibian, vegetation, insect? Professor Brant will sort it all out for us so we can understand how each helps to sustain the other.



Joel Brant

**Bio:** Joel Brant began his professional journey as a naturalist while studying at Abilene Christian University. After graduating in 1998, Joel pursued a Masters' degree at Angelo State University followed by a PhD from Texas Tech University. While interested in all aspects of the natural world, Dr. Brant specializes in small mammal ecology. He has published 15 journal articles and directed several undergraduate research projects. His research interests are primarily concerned with the natural history of mammals, particularly in the Southern Rolling Plains and Chihuahuan Desert of Texas.

Working with his undergraduate students, Dr. Brant is currently conducting an inventory of the vertebrates of Firebase Libby, a 160-acre research property owned by McMurry University in central Callahan County, Texas. Most weekends you can find him and his students on the property catching mice, chasing lizards, attempting to catch frogs, or photographing birds. Joel is a member of the Big Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists and an officer for the Texas Society of Mammalogists. While not a very good birder, Joel is learning and getting better. You can follow him on iNaturalist (joelbrant).

## Saturday Evening

7:00 PM

**Title:** *Why Everyone Should Join the Texas Century Club*

**Presenter:** Amy Packer

**Description:** The Texas Century Club is an attempt to find 100 species in 100 or more counties in Texas. What started as a game to increase the regional coverage of birding in Texas has blossomed over the last decade into a way of birding and a community of friends that share a special bond.



Amy Packer

In her presentation, Amy will share why you should pursue the Texas Century Club, how it will impact your

birding for the better, and the unexpected ways in which it will enrich your life. She'll also share a few stories along the way that range from the sublime to the absurd.

Whether you're a current CC'er looking for tips or a skeptical holdout wondering what all the fuss is about, be sure to join Amy's talk to learn why county birding is all the rage in Texas.

**Bio:** Amy Packer has been birding for 17 years and has been fortunate to travel the world (and some of the U.S.) in search of all things feathered and beautiful. Closer to home, Amy is passionate about the Texas Century Club – finding

100 species in every county of Texas, which she and her husband have greatly enjoyed over the last 10 years.

In the summer of 2020, during the pandemic doldrums, she logged her 100th county with more than 100 birds. This fall, she visited Dimmit County, the last of the 254 counties in Texas to visit. Amy has been an elementary educator for 16 years, both as a classroom teacher and an administrator. She holds a Bachelor's of Science in Education from Abilene Christian University and a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction from Angelo State University.

## TOS Field Trips - Abilene, Winter 2023

**NOTE:** Participants must meet their field trip group at the Hilton Garden Inn, 4449 Ridgemont Dr. 15 minutes prior to start time. Due to logistical complications, it is not possible to meet the group at any other location. Please plan accordingly. Also, there will be **entrance fees** at some locations. Exact amounts are being determined and will be communicated before you arrive. Please have small bills available as well as bringing your state parks pass.

NUMBER	FIELD TRIP AND DESCRIPTION	COUNTY	DIFFICULTY	DEPARTURE & HOTEL RETURN TIMES	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1	<p><b>MITCHELL COUNTY:</b> Our first stop will be <b>Lake Colorado City State Park</b> where the habitat is notably arid and desert species are more common. Expect Pyrrhuloxia, Scaled Quail, Black-throated Sparrow, Cactus Wren, etc. The lake is also a great spot for waterfowl, wading birds, and gulls/terns. Rarities are a real possibility. We'll then make our way to <b>Maddin Prairie</b>. Owned and managed by the Native Prairies Association of Texas, Maddin Prairie boasts remnant and restored native prairie. Because of the focus on conservation, access is limited to special events and scientific research. The bird list is impressive and rarities like LeConte's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, and Short-eared Owl have been recorded. Expect a rich diversity of winter sparrows, as well as the potential for interesting riparian birds along the tributary of Champion Creek.</p> <p>After Maddin Prairie, we'll visit <b>Fisher Park</b> on Champions Creek Reservoir to look for waterfowl and wintering passerines in the habitat surrounding the lake. Finally, throughout the day as we travel from place to place, we'll stop in <b>towns and back roads</b> to build our county lists with birds like Sandhill Cranes, raptors, and possibly longspurs.</p> <p><i>Several miles of walking, the most demanding of which will be walking the prairie for grassland birds, from which anyone is free to abstain or take a break. Entry fee at the state park.</i></p>	MITCHELL	EASY TO MODERATE	6:15 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	X		
2	<p><b>TAYLOR COUNTY:</b> With over 250 species recorded, <b>Kirby Lake</b> is the top hotspot for the whole region. We'll look for waterfowl, gulls, and terns, and it's one of our best chances at uncommon species like Common Goldeneye and Common or Red-breasted Merganser. We'll explore the brushy habitat around the lake margins where winter passerines are numerous.</p> <p>From Kirby, we'll drive south to the <b>Rocking-A Ranch</b>, an 800 acre private ranch in the limestone mesas of the Callahan Divide. In this rich and rocky oak/juniper woodland we have our best chance of finding regional rarities such as Townsend's Solitaire and Western Bluebird, and local species such as Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon Towhee, Bushtit, and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay.</p> <p>Up next is a quick trip to the ponds of the <b>Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant</b>. While ducks are always a possibility – and Taylor County is long overdue for its first record of Long-tailed Duck – our focus is the fab five of the marsh: Virginia Rail, Sora, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren.</p> <p>Kirby and the water treatment plant are easy. The private ranch will involve walking on uneven roads, including some elevation gain that may be tiring. Signed release forms will also be required to visit private property.</p>	TAYLOR	EASY TO MODERATE	7:15 a.m.-3:30 p.m.		X	



3	<p><b>TAYLOR COUNTY:</b> With over 250 species recorded, <b>Kirby Lake</b> is the top hotspot for the whole region. We'll look for waterfowl, gulls, and terns, and it's one of our best chances at uncommon species like Common Goldeneye and Common or Red-breasted Merganser. We'll explore the brushy habitat around the lake margins where winter passerines are numerous.</p> <p>Up next is a quick trip to the ponds of the <b>Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant</b>. While ducks are always a possibility – and Taylor County is long overdue for its first record of Long-tailed Duck – our focus is the fab five of the marsh: Virginia Rail, Sora, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren.</p> <p>On to <b>County Road 131</b> where a large stand of oaks attracts wintering songbirds, and Red-bellied Woodpecker is often found. If time permits we may stop at a field on private property where Sprague's Pipits are often found.</p> <p>All birding will be done with short walks from the car.</p>	EASY	MODERATE	7:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.			X
4	<p><b>TAYLOR COUNTY:</b> For this special trip, we will visit the <b>Brown Ranch</b>, a 3,200-acre private ranch in northern Taylor County. Target species include winter sparrows (including Lark Bunting and Black-throated Sparrow), raptors (Prairie Falcon and Merlin have been seen before and we're just waiting for a Golden Eagle to show up on the ranch one day), and the star of the show if they're around, Green-tailed Towhee – the only semi-reliable spot in the county for this species. If it's a good winter and they're here, the ranch is an excellent place to find Mountain Bluebird. Rock Wren and Canyon Towhee are also possible. The ranch also has several ponds (good for waterfowl) with wetlands around the margins.</p> <p><b>Important note:</b> <i>Visiting the Brown Ranch will require a vehicle with a little higher clearance and a willingness to drive on rougher roads. Pickups, SUVs, and Subarus should be fine. The road conditions will be evaluated shortly before the trip and this location may be canceled or substituted for another, if necessary.</i></p> <p>The private ranch will involve walking on uneven roads. Signed release forms will also required to visit private property.</p>	TAYLOR	TAYLOR	7:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.			X
5	<p><b>TAYLOR COUNTY:</b> We'll start the day with a visit to the ponds of the <b>Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant</b> where we expect to find a variety of ducks and the "fab five" of the marsh – Virginia Rail, Sora, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren.</p> <p>Next we'll visit the main section of the <b>Abilene State Park</b>, featuring some of the best riparian woodland in Taylor County with tall cottonwood trees and trails that follow Elm Creek. Species that are common in the Eastern US – which are by and large scarce in our region – can be found here. Birds like White-throated Sparrow, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Brown Thrasher, and more. Winter rarities in past years have included Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch, and Pine Warbler.</p> <p>After the lake, we'll cruise <i>Mountain Pass Rd</i>, an empty region of western Taylor County. Targets include Bushtit, both Western and Mountain Bluebird, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Canyon Towhee, and raptors.</p> <p>There will be short walks on trails at the state park, and scanning the lake with scopes. Mountain Pass Rd will be done from the car, with short walks after pulling over.</p>	TAYLOR	EASY	7:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	X	X	X
6	<p><b>TAYLOR COUNTY OWLING:</b> Do you love standing in the cold as night falls for the thrilling ecstasy of seeing – or the crushing defeat of missing – owls? A <b>600-acre CRP grassland</b> on private property is one of the only known places in Taylor County with Short-eared Owls in the winter. Barn Owls also frequently come out to hunt the grasslands, and Great Horned Owls sometimes appear on distant telephone poles.</p> <p>Unlike other field trips, this trip can accommodate up to 40 people since we'll just be spaced out along the edge of a very large field. <b>CARPPOOLING IS A MUST to keep the number of vehicles to 10 or fewer.</b></p> <p><i>This trip is subject to cancelation if the owls are not present or reliable this winter.</i></p>	TAYLOR	EASY	5:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m.	X		
7	<p><b>JONES, SHACKELFORD AND CALLAHAN COUNTIES:</b> Basically Abilene but in a whole 'nother county lies <b>Lake Fort Phantom</b>. We'll start at Seabee Park along the lake and then work our way to the north side where the dam produces deeper water. Expect lots of water birds and if we're lucky, more uncommon fowl such as Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Common Loon, or Western Grebe. A rare gull could turn up.</p> <p>Next is the nearby <b>Abilene Water Treatment Plant</b> where a series of shallower ponds holds a different mix of ducks including Ruddy Ducks. The "fab five" of the marsh can also be found at this location: Virginia Rail, Sora, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren. On a good day, the number of waterfowl has been estimated to be in the thousands.</p> <p>We'll close out the day by birding <b>county roads</b> in Shackelford and Callahan Counties. We should be able to find a good diversity of winter sparrows and we can check for bluebirds, raptors, and agricultural riff-raff like longspurs and Horned Larks. This should give a nice assortment of winter species to birders working on the Century Club.</p> <p>Most of the walks will be short and there will be lots of time working with scopes to scan bodies of water. We might do a little more walking at the water treatment plant, depending on what birds we're looking for.</p>	JONES, SHACKELFORD, CALLAHAN	EASY TO MODERATE	7:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	X	X	

8	<p><b>HASKELL AND KNOX COUNTIES:</b> Judging from the species totals in eBird, <b>Lake Stamford</b>, a large lake in Haskell County, is vastly under-birded. That is to say, the lower species totals compared to other large lakes reveals a serious lack of birding. Your trip will contribute to our knowledge of the region and no doubt yield an assortment of waterfowl and wintering passerines. Maybe you'll even find a new county record!</p> <p>After Lake Stamford, we'll visit the small town of <b>O'Brien</b> and surrounding county roads in northern Haskell County in search of geese, which strangely seem to become more common here and then mysteriously become scarce as they trickle further south. We'll also stop for winter sparrows and hope to run into species like longspurs and Horned Larks that favor agricultural areas.</p> <p>We'll then make our way to <b>Lake Benjamin and Truscott Brine Lake</b> in Knox County, time permitting, where we'll look for waterfowl and grebes, along with the usual grassland and agricultural birds. A Prairie Falcon or Ferruginous Hawk wouldn't be out of the question. Knox County is also vastly underbirded so there's a real potential to find a first county record.</p> <p>Lots of birding will be done with scopes and the walking distances will generally be short. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</p>	HASKELL AND KNOX	EASY	6:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.		X	
9	<p><b>COKE COUNTY:</b> At <b>Oak Creek Reservoir</b>, just outside the Taylor County line in Coke County, we'll scan the lake for waterfowl and hope for a rare gull. One of our main targets here is Carolina Chickadee, a species that seems to become harder to find outside the oak woodlands of far northeast Coke County.</p> <p>From there we'll carry on to <b>EV Spence Reservoir</b>. This large body of water in an arid county seems to be the most reliable spot for Western Grebe and, when lucky, Clark's Grebe too. The margins of the lake have lately proven to be reliable for Green-tailed Towhee. Expect a high species diversity of both water birds and passerines around the lake, as well as a real potential to find a rarity at this under-birded hotspot.</p> <p>Next up, we'll cruise the <b>Sanco and Silver Loops</b>, two county roads that traverse arid scrub habitat. Here the potential for desert species is high including Black-throated Sparrow, Scaled Quail, Cactus Wren, Vermilion Flycatcher, Brewer's Sparrow, and more. Rufous-crowned Sparrow and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay are also possible.</p> <p>All the birding will be done with short walks from the car. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</p>	COKE	EASY	6:45 a.m.-4:00 p.m.		X	
10	<p><b>RUNNELS COUNTY:</b> One of the region's best hotspots is <b>Lake Ballinger</b>. Its mixture of freshwater, large deciduous forest and arid mesquite scrub yield a high level of species diversity. The lake is often covered in ducks and geese more than at other hotspots in the region. The woods attract "eastern" species like Winter Wren, Brown Thrasher, Fox Sparrow and more. It's not uncommon to get more than 50 species in a morning of birding around the lake.</p> <p>At <b>Ballinger City Park</b>, we'll look for wintering woodland birds that we might have missed at the lake. The park seems to be especially good for woodpeckers and sapsuckers, and one winter, an obvious hybrid Downy/Ladder-backed Woodpecker was photographed, one of only three hybrids ever recorded in eBird. Fox Sparrows are also often found in the vegetation along Elm Creek.</p> <p>On the way back, we'll stop along <b>county roads</b> where Horned Larks and all three of the region's longspurs have been sighted – Chestnut-collared, Thick-billed, and Lapland – as well as recent sightings of Mountain Plover.</p> <p>We'll be scanning lakes and fields with scopes and any walking will be limited to short trips from the car. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</p>	RUNNELS	EASY	6:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.	X	X	X
11	<p><b>COLEMAN AND CONCHO COUNTIES:</b> We'll begin our day at <b>Coleman City Park</b> with its large trees where "eastern" forest species are possible including Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and more.</p> <p>Our next destination is the real star of the day. Lying along the Colorado River between Coleman and Concho Counties is the region's largest body of water, <b>O.H. Ivie Reservoir</b>. Visiting this destination is a natural way to visit two counties in the same day. Ivie has produced a number of rarities including a Eurasian Wigeon, Glaucous Gull, Pacific Loon, and Western Grebe. The previous winter a Chestnut-sided Warbler was found in a mixed flock along the shore, and shockingly, a Gray Vireo turned up in December. If more birders visited, the lake would probably have the highest species count for the entire region.</p> <p>We'll be scanning lakes with scopes and walking will be limited to short distances along the lake and brief trips from the car. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</p>	COLEMAN & CONCHO	EASY	6:15 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	X	X	



12	<p><b>NOLAN COUNTY:</b> This trip will explore the hotspots and backroads of Nolan County, to the west of Abilene. We'll start our day at <b>Lake Sweetwater</b>, the largest body of water in this arid county. Not only is the lake good for waterfowl, loons, and grebes, it has large forest with classic eastern species and marsh around its edges that sometimes hold Virginia Rail and Sora.</p> <p>After the lake, we'll make our way to the 1,900+ acre <b>Hoskins Family Ranch</b> where a regenerative beef operation is utilized to maintain and improve rangeland habitat for the benefit of birds and other grassland dependent wildlife. The ranch is working towards a bird-friendly land certification through the Audubon Conservation Ranching initiative. We will bird along <b>Hoodoo Draw</b> searching for sparrows and raptors while checking in at springs, seeps, and wooded areas for resident and wintering passerines. Field trip attendees will have the opportunity to learn about regenerative agriculture from the owners and guide while enjoying a rare opportunity to bird on private working lands.</p> <p>If there's time left at the end of the day, we'll explore <b>county roads</b> in search of all three bluebirds, winter sparrows, and "hill country" species like Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay in the mesas. While scarce, Townsend's Solitaire is always a possibility in this habitat.</p> <p>Our time will be spent scoping bodies of water and short walks anticipated along county roads.</p>	NOLAN	MODERATE	6:45 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	X	X	
13	<p><b>CALLAHAN COUNTY:</b> Our first stop in this county to the east of Abilene is Clyde Lake. In addition to boasting a large list of waterfowl, the scrub habitat around the lake has often produced Vermilion Flycatcher and Curve-billed Thrasher.</p> <p>A short drive farther east, <b>T &amp; P Lake</b> is more forested around the edges. Expect waterfowl and a different mix of woodland species like Downy Woodpecker, Hermit Thrush, and White-throated and Fox Sparrows.</p> <p>Next is a hidden gem known as <b>Spring Gap Road</b>. If you were transported here, you might swear you were in the Hill Country and indeed, there are breeding species like Black-capped Vireo and Black-and-white Warblers in the summer. During this time of year, you'll look for Western Bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaire, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Bushtit, and more. It's a beautiful place that's barely had its potential scratched as a birding hotspot.</p> <p>On the way home, we'll take the back roads to look for duck ponds, winter sparrows, and Red-bellied Woodpecker, which seems to be about on the western edge of its range in Callahan County.</p> <p>Time will be spent scoping bodies of water with short walks anticipated along county roads. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</p>	CALLAHAN	EASY	7:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.			X
14	<p><b>FISHER COUNTY CENTURY CLUB:</b> Are you disappointed by the list of field trips above with their promises of good birding and high species diversity? Do you feel like we've been holding out on you, the hardcore <b>Century Club</b> birder craving something a little more off the beaten path? Do you love driving long distances only to learn that the pond you're visiting is actually devoid of all bird life? Then we have just the trip for you, led by the very best. Welcome to the Wild, Wild West of Fisher County.</p> <p>The thing that makes Fisher County so difficult is that much of the county is agricultural fields planted in cotton. Even the agricultural scraps aren't much good for wildlife. But over the last decade, a series of intrepid birders from Abilene and beyond have scoured the county in search of birds. This has led to knowledge of which little ponds are likely to turn up ducks, which county roads have amazing canyons and vistas that get into the mesas, and which landowners have granted access to their slice of Fisher County heaven.</p> <p>While we can't promise huge bird lists, we can promise a very strong start (or finish) to your goal of finding 100 species in this county, one of the most challenging in the region. We'll target waterfowl, winter sparrows, "eastern" forest birds, "hill country" birds like Rock Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and bluebirds, and any rarities we can find along the way.</p> <p>More time will be spent walking than on some other trips. There will also be longer periods of time driving between birding locations.</p>	FISHER	MODERATE	6:45 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	X	X	

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## Birding Community Mourns the Loss of Mary Gustafson



Photo Teresa Cigarroa



Photo Fred Collins/ Facebook post



“I am very sad this evening to hear of the death of my friend Mary Gustafson. I first met Mary on a South Padre Island Texas Pelagic trip in the early 2000’s when she was one of the leaders and I was a very frequent participant. We became better friends when I took over organizing the trips in 2015. She was the best leader I’ve worked with, very knowledgeable about pelagic birds and with superb identification skills. I valued her opinion very highly and especially appreciated when she would get on the P/A system and talk about the life history of just about any pelagic bird or marine mammal. She was one of leaders I could most depend on to be on almost every trip I ran even when she wasn’t feeling too good in the last couple of years as she battle this dreadful cancer. Mary’s last trip with me on a Texas Pelagic was this past June on a 48 hour trip. She had a lot of fortitude to go in her condition and I admired her strength.

Mary was one of my ‘go to’ people to ask for recommendations about who in the Texas birding community would make a good pelagic leader. She had a good eye for young and talented birders. Mary was recognized as one of the best pelagic leaders in North America. She was a leader on trips on the California Coast for Debi Shearwater and the East Coast for Paul Guris. And probably others that I am unaware of. I remember she told me once that a trip organizer

publicly announced on a pelagic trip that she was as good a pelagic leader as any man. So that struck me as a little off and I couldn’t tell if she was proud of that or more than a little miffed that a woman leader must strive to be as good as a man? I think it was probably some of both. But I think there are a lot of men leaders that should strive to be as good a pelagic leader as Mary, I certainly do!

The birding community has lost a true leader. Mary truly lived-for-birds. I hope now Mary that you are free to fly like a bird. Bless your soul and rest in peace”.

—Garett ‘Gary’ Hodne

“Just as Thanksgiving 2014 was the “Thanksgiving of the Red-legged Honeycreeper,” and Thanksgiving 2016 was the “Thanksgiving of the Perching Elaenia,” and Thanksgiving 2020 was the “Thanksgiving of the Elegant Trogon,” Thanksgiving 2022 has unfortunately become the Thanksgiving we lost Mary Gustafson, not only a Birding Giant, not only our area eBird reviewer, not only the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival’s field trip organizer, a great bird guide, and legendary teacher, but also a wonderful friend of Estero from the very beginning. We’ll miss you forever. May you rest in peace.” **Estero Llano Grande State Park**



## First State Record Smooth-Billed Ani

A first state record Smooth-billed Ani along with a Groove-billed Ani have been present for at least the past two days at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center.



Photo DanHun Jones

I do not even know where to begin with explaining our day. A few days ago I saw an eBird report of Groove-billed Anis on South Padre Island at the birding center. Anis are a type of cuckoo for those who are not birders, who I assume have already quit reading this post. There are two species found in the United States, Groove-billed, which is found in south Texas, more commonly in summer, and Smooth-billed which is found in south Florida, though pretty rare even there. To make a long story short, one of the two anis on South Padre Island was actually a Smooth-billed, a first for Texas. It was hanging out with a Grooved-billed.

We have seen numerous Smooth-billed in Central and South America, but never in the United States. We tried when we were in Florida several years ago, but couldn't find one. Yesterday we talked about going down to see it, but the weather was supposed to be horrific, with literally gale force winds and much colder temperatures. We decided to not go today, thinking it would probably move south with the front. We talked about maybe going down Sunday. It is a five hour drive, so we can do it in a day.

So this morning the bird was seen again. We decided to jump in the car and go. We grabbed an extra pair of undies in case we needed to spend the night. We left home at 10AM and got to the birding center just before 3PM. We heard the bird was seen several times, but it was still nerve-racking. We got there and paid our admission fee and did a LONG walk on the boardwalk to the area where they had been. There was a group of about 30 people there looking through binoculars, a very good sign. We walked up and there were the birds, sitting out in the open! We were incredibly lucky.

Just a few minutes later they flew down into the reeds and grasses and were much harder to see.

We were thrilled to say the least, and because the Rio Grande bird festival is going on we got to see a number of people we haven't seen in ages. We discussed staying the night, but decided we would just go home. We made a stop at the festival trade show and saw a few more friends, which was great! I think of myself as being anti-social sometimes, but I really enjoyed seeing people. We got home right before 10PM, almost exactly 12 hours from when we left.

—Sheridan Chattin Coffey



Smooth-billed Ani, a Texas first, on the left. A Groove-billed Ani on the right. South Padre Island.



Collage by Mike Twilly/Facebook/TeXbirds



## Regional Reports

### Region 1—Panhandle

We are still working the loss because of the 260,000 acre New Mexico fire. Personally doing lots of volunteer hours in-between.

Stay, tuned your District 3 Director has ideas for the Winter meeting! Here's hoping you'll attend this January in Abilene! Would enjoy more people participating in the Christmas bird counts!

—John Berner

### Region 2—North Central Texas

—Open

### Region 3—East Texas Timberlands (Pineywoods)

What would you like to see you District Director help/ attend with? Give me a call or text, shoot me an email. (903)521-8292

Until January y'all!

—Laura Wilson

### Region 4—Trans-Pecos

—DD Currie

### Region 5—Edwards Plateau Report

—Christine Turnbull

### Region 6—Central Prairie

I'll begin by making another plea for TOS members in Region 6 to send noteworthy bird sightings (or other regional news) to me at drpinkston@sbcglobal.net. My personal birding seldom extends beyond Bell County and other counties along the I-35 corridor, so I'm particularly interested in birding news from elsewhere in Region 6 that you'd like to see included in the newsletter.

Continuing rarities from the spring included the Lake Georgetown Brown Booby through October 10 (at least) and the Barton Creek Limpkin through August 25 (at least).



Lake Georgetown Brown Booby, photo by Tim Fennell

A singing Black-throated Sparrow was a one-day wonder on June 2 at Fort Hood, representing only a second Bell record and the first fully documented.



Fort Hood Black-throated Sparrow, June 2, photo by Charlie Plimpton

A well-described pair of Swallow-tailed Kites in Temple on June 23, followed by a singleton near Stillhouse Hollow Lake on July 6, were complete surprises and puzzling to explain—possibly birds wandering inland after failed nesting attempts due to extreme heat and drought?? We normally consider Prairie Falcon a rare winter visitor on the central prairies, yet one was well-documented near Granger Lake from mid-July through early August. Only recently considered a rare vagrant as far north as Bell County, Couch's Kingbirds exploded in Belton this summer with confirmed nesting at one location, and probable nesting at two others. Another (4<sup>th</sup>) location was identified in Temple in September-October. I'm told that small numbers of Hutton's Vireos nesting on west Fort Hood (Bell County) represent the farthest northeast outpost within the species' known range.



Fort Hood Hutton's Vireo, June 26, photo by Randy Pinkston

A Mottled Duck at Union Grove WMA (Bell County) from July 9 through August 27 was locally rare and enjoyed by multiple observers. An apparent adult Least Tern in



## Regional Reports (continued)

east Bell County on July 16 was interesting. Perhaps the highlight of the summer was a juvenile Snail Kite at Lake Somerville State Park (Lee County) from July 24 through August 3. The kite was enjoyed by countless observers despite a long hike in sweltering heat, and kind state park personnel assisted some folks by shuttling them to the kite's location at Flag Pond.



*Lee County Snail Kite, July 26, photos by Randy Pinkston*

As in the spring, continued drought and low lake levels provided habitat for great shorebirding in both Bell & Williamson counties. Among the highlights were numbers of Black-bellied Plovers, American Golden-Plovers, Buff-breasted Sandpipers, and Short-billed Dowitchers.



*Granger Lake American Golden-Plover, July 15, photo by Tim Fennell*

Up to 6 Wood Storks made appearances near Temple on August 5 and 27 for a locally rare treat. The Brazos River drainages seem to mark the western limit of the storks' post-

breeding dispersal, and only as far inland as Williamson County it seems on a regular basis. They've wandered into Bell County fewer than five years out of the past 30 that I've been watching closely. And it's a difficult species to miss if they're around! Inland-wandering Roseate Spoonbills also appeared in above-average numbers in Bell County from August through early October. As expected, all were juveniles.



*Bell County Wood Stork, August 27, photo by Gil Eckrich*

Two white morph Reddish Egrets were at Granger Lake August-September and a white morph was at Lake Georgetown September 18 through at least October 10.



*Williamson County Reddish Egret, photo by Tim Fennell*

Oddly, in urban Temple, a Zone-tailed Hawk was sighted twice in early September. Most birders first learn of Zone-tailed Hawk as a specialty of remote mountains and



## Regional Reports (continued)

canyons of the arid southwest, yet they are sighted almost annually now in Bell and adjacent counties to the west.



Temple Zone-tailed Hawk, September 15, photo by Randy Pinkston

An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull over Granger Lake on September 30 was an unexpected surprise. A male Scarlet Tanager, rare in central Texas even in the spring, made multiple appearances at a private water feature near Belton Lake on October 2.



Belton Scarlet Tanager, October 2, photo by Scott Snyder

—Randy Pinkston

### Region 7—Rio Grande Brushlands

The 34th annual Rockport-Fulton Hummingbird Festival was hot, humid, and very successful. I had the pleasure of accompanying keynote speaker, Richard Crossley, around town. Sue Heath always does a fabulous job as the private

banding site bander. As a bus guide, I can attest to the fact that everyone had a wonderful experience and learned a lot from Sue. Kelly Bryan banded at the public banding site.

—Susan Foster, Director

### Region 8—Central Prairie

In the heat of the summer, many people pack away their binoculars, cameras, and spotting scopes and wait for cooler temperatures to return. However, those who dare to brave the sun and mosquitos can happen upon some unexpected sightings. In June, a **Broad-billed Hummingbird** was found in Fort Bend Co. In July, two rare birds were found in Galveston Co. A **Sooty Tern** was seen on the Bolivar ferry, and a **Yellow-green Vireo** was recorded calling at High Island.

Now that fall has kicked in, a migrants are passing through and with them come some rarities. El Jardin Park had the 4th eBird record for **Red Knot** in Harris County. **Groove-billed Anis** have been reported in four Region 8 locations (3 in Harris Co., 1 in Brazoria Co.). **Limpkins** have been reported at a whopping FIVE new locations in Harris Co. and one new location in Brazoria Co. In August, all three jaeger species were found in our region, including an inland **Long-tailed Jaeger** in west Harris Co. **Cassin's Kingbird** and **Say's Phoebe** were reported on the same road at Smith Point (Chambers Co.) within one week of each other. While **Fork-tailed Flycatchers** are considered rare, one is generally expected to turn up somewhere in the state in late fall or winter. However, the one found in Brazoria Co. this year was one of a very few August records for this species in Texas. Rice University (Harris Co.) has had two sightings of **Bell's Vireo** plus a **Red-naped Sapsucker** this fall. At one point, the vireo and sapsucker were seen together in the same area! Finally, while fall migration is not known to be a spectacle of colorful passerines on the coast like we have in spring, there are still many beautiful birds passing through. In September and early October, 33 species of warblers were reported in our area! So, dust off those binoculars, get outside, and find those birds!



Red Knot. Photo by Andrew Hamlette

—Kendra Kocob, Director



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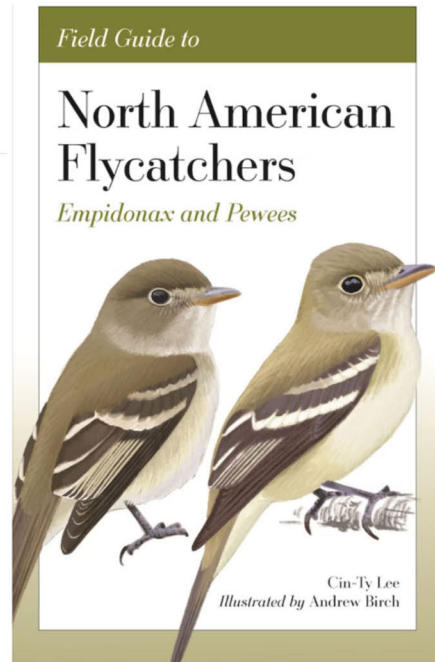
**TOS members came through big time. In response to the first Giving Tuesday campaign we have held, donations topped \$4,800, which will be dedicated to the landscaping at Hooks Woods Sanctuary. We are grateful for every dollar contributed - thank you to all who gave!**

Princeton Nature

# Field Guide to North American Flycatchers: *Empidonax and Pewees*

Cin-Ty Lee and Andrew Birch

A richly illustrated, portable field guide to flycatcher  
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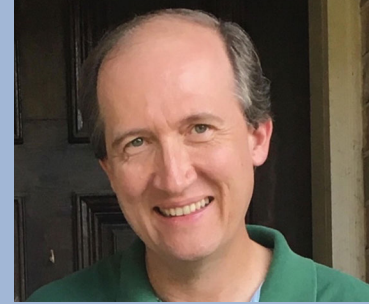
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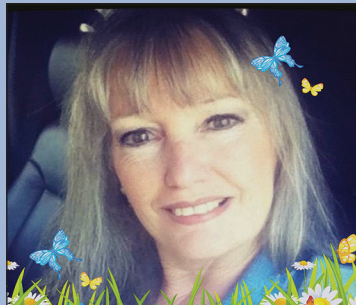
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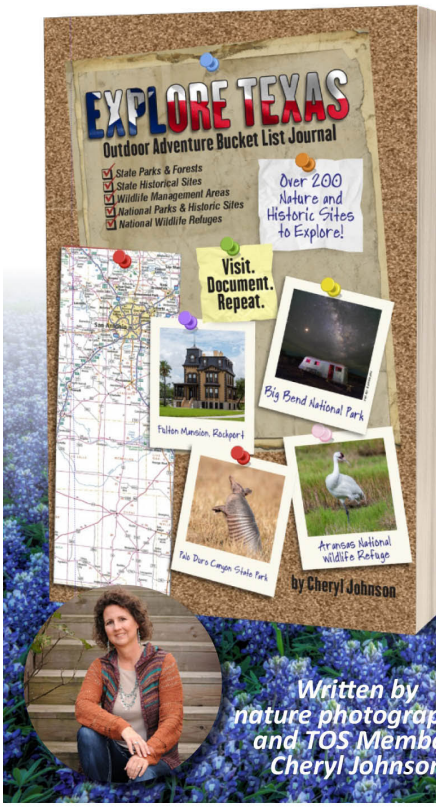
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Written by nature photographer and TOS Member, Cheryl Johnson



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