

President's Message



Byron Stone TOS President.

Dear Birding Friends,
Bluebonnets are popping up everywhere. Golden-cheeks and other early breeders are on territory. Spring is in the air, and TOS is headed back to Abilene!

For the first time that I'm aware of, TOS has decided to hold two consecutive meetings in the same location. Many who participated in the Abilene meeting and who heard about this plan at that meeting responded positively

to the idea. We had a great selection of field trips, and we had a great time, so why not do it again in the spring?!! But some are asking why we would do this thing that we've never done before?

Well, let's start with the fact that no matter where you are in Texas, the birding will be different in spring than it will be in winter. In some places, it will be a little different, but in most places, it will be very different. The best variety of native sparrows in most places in Texas will occur in winter. The best variety of warblers is almost always in the spring. Breeding bird species are higher in spring. Winter visiting birds tend to be present in... winter. So, the same location can offer some very different birds in different seasons. Then there is all the work that our meeting planning committee put into that meeting, and all the time and effort that Jay and Amy Packer put into planning the field trip locations and itineraries for the Abilene meeting. Some of us started talking on one of the field trips about what birds we might see in a given location if we returned in the spring, imagining Painted Buntings and Summer Tanagers in place of Spotted Towhees and Mountain Bluebirds. Another consideration is that it has become very difficult to plan a spring meeting on the coast (which is where most Texas birders really want to be in late April) unless you are part of a birding festival. As birding has become increasingly popular over the past few decades, spring birding festivals have proliferated, and in Texas the time and place to get the most birds is late April on or near the coast. So, the board started thinking about how to respond to that, and one idea was to move our spring meeting slightly later, and away from the coast, because peak bird activity at many inland locations is more like the second week of May, versus that highly sought after last week of April on the coast.

Finally, the board is interested in using its most valuable resource (people) more efficiently. These meetings sure are fun, but they sure do take a lot of time and effort to plan and execute. If we can use our time more efficiently, we might be

able to devote more resources to other TOS projects like long-range planning, and sanctuary management. So, after some lively discussion, the board decided to give this plan a try, using the very successful framework of the January Abilene meeting to jumpstart the planning for the May meeting in Abilene.

So, I hope you will join us in Abilene May 4-7, 2023. If you were at the Abilene meeting in January as I was, let's go back to some of the same locations and see what we find in early May. Or if you went in January and finished off some of your County 100's, go back to a few different counties in May and finish off a few more. And if you weren't at Abilene in January, well now's your chance to go when the weather will be a bit warmer and see and hear a bunch of breeding birds and probably a few spring migrants too. Don't forget your hat, sunscreen and a refillable water bottle!

I hope to see you there

Good birding ya'll,

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

Highlights of the TOS Abilene Meeting



Trip to Lake Fort Phantom and Abilene WWTP. Led by Ken Hartman and Susan Foster

Continued on page 2



Trip to OH Ivie parks and spillway and Coleman City Park. Led by Chuck Davis and Susan Foster



We had a female Phainopepla at the Texas Ornithological Society winter meeting. Anchor Marina on Lake Stamford in Haskell County. Coordinates and location in the bird description. Someone tried to find it yesterday with no luck. Talk about a surprise bird!



Prof. Brant spoke on Friday evening about the natural history of the area



Hotel staff made the lovely sign



** Amy Packer was our keynote speaker, encouraging membership in the Century Club*



Chris Butler looking down the O.H. Ivie spillway

TOS Spring Meeting in Abilene: Tying it Up

TOS is pleased to announce we will return to Abilene for our Spring 2023 Meeting, taking place Thursday May 4 through Sunday May 7, 2023. We count on our meetings to replenish our treasury so that we can continue the important work at our sanctuaries, with our youth groups, and citizen science projects. This meeting is also our annual meeting where newly elected directors will be announced.

Offering a super assortment of field trips in the Abilene area, expect a variety of shorebirds (possibilities for Hudsonian Godwit and Buff-breasted Sandpiper), hawks, and other birds of spring. Nesting species include Great-crested Flycatcher and Yellow-throated Vireo. There are chances to see Black-capped Vireo and lots of Western species like Black-throated Sparrow and Scaled Quail. Field trips offer excellent birding on private ranches and state parks, with the opportunity to jump-start or tie up your Century Club lists in the counties surrounding Abilene.

Our meeting speakers will offer their presentations in person, presenting 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 event registration, plus a wrap-up banquet at our host hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn. Registration information appears below. **DEADLINE TO REGISTER AT THE HILTON IS APRIL 23, 2023.**

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/Planning Committee Chair

EVENT REGISTRATION: Online registration is required so that we can share instructions, resources, and details with you. Registration will open on our website on **March 23 at 6:00 a.m. and close on April 28, 2023 at 11:55 p.m.** You will receive a confirmation email once your payment is complete.

The fee for the event is \$100 per TOS member. It is \$135 for non-members, which covers their annual membership dues. Students may attend for free. There is a \$10 increase in price on April 25. **No cancellations can be made after May 1, 2023.**

BANQUET SELECTION: Meal options appear on the registration form and must be submitted by **April 16, 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 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 Ridgemont 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 APRIL 23, 2023.** Click [HERE](#) to reserve a room at the special group rate of \$139 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 called Market Street 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.) lemon pepper 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 APPEAR ON THE REGISTRATION FORM ONLINE, AND MUST BE SUBMITTED BY APRIL 16.**

Meeting Agenda

Thursday, May 4, 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: Spring Version

Friday, May 5

- All Day Birding
4:00-5:00 PM Event check-in at the Hilton Garden Inn
6:30-7:00 PM Announcements/Birding Reports
7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Anita Hoskins—*Grassland Bird Conservation in a Dynamic and Diverse State*

Saturday, May 6

- 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: Laura Keene *A Photographic Big Year*

Sunday, May 7

- All Day Birding and depart for home

Registration Information

The link to register for the meeting is on our **spiffy new website**, and will open on March 26, 2023 at 6:00 a.m. Please have ready 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** and click Member Login to view 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

Spring 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 April 27, 2023.

Meeting Presentations

Thursday Evening

7:00 PM

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

Presenter: Jay Packer

Description: As he did at our January meeting, Abilene native Jay Packer puts a spotlight on the area and what makes it a super place to go birding. He will touch on 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 spring birding in the Big Country!

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



Jay Packer

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: *Grassland Bird Conservation in a Dynamic and Diverse State*

Presenter: Anita Hoskins

Description: Texas is a state of stark contrasts influenced by a dizzying array of elevational, meteorological, and geological gradients, all of which support an incredible assortment of ecosystems which support one of the richest and most diverse assemblages of species within the US including endemic species found nowhere else in the world.

However, our population growth trends have resulted in more than 2.2 million acres of historical working lands lost between 1997 and 2017—a concerning trend that leads the nation. Grassland and rangeland ecosystems have been particularly hard hit as are those species that rely on them. Grassland obligate birds have experienced the most significant decline of any guild of birds—greater than 50%.

This presentation will aim to answer questions associated with the needs of Texas birds and critical ecosystems with particular emphasis on grassland songbirds. It will assist in characterizing chronic stressors and the many tools that are available to address them including Audubon's bird friend beef program.

Bio: Anita Hoskins is the Senior Coordinator of Private Lands overseeing the Southern Great Plains Region with Audubon Texas. She is experienced in helping landowners of all backgrounds find conservation solutions and is passionate about bridging the gap between agriculture and grassland



Anita Hoskins

bird conservation. Anita received her bachelors in Natural Resource Management from Angelo State University and her Masters of Natural Resource Development from Texas A&M University. Outside of work, Anita is sure to be found working on the family ranch, hunting, camping, or just being a student of nature.

Saturday Evening

7:00 PM

Title: *A Photographic Big Year*

Presenter: Laura Keene

Description: In 2016, Laura embarked upon a year-long journey with a goal of seeing and photographing as many species of birds in the ABA area as possible. During a year that got completely and utterly out of hand, she was one of four birders who broke Neil Hayward's 2013 ABA mark and set a new ABA standard, photographing 792 species. On a personal level, 2016 was a year of unparalleled joy and fulfillment. In this presentation Laura shares her motivations for doing a big year, and the adventures involved as she traveled to each corner of the ABA area, from the lush beauty of Hawaii to the vast wilderness of Alaska. She will share the joy of her journeys – the sights, the people, the wildlife – as she lived her Big Year dream, immersed in the healing power of birding.

Bio: Laura is an avid birder and photographer who resides in Mico, Texas. A clinical pharmacist by profession, her passion for birding and photography led her to follow her dream and do an ABA photographic Big Year. Laura is chair of the ABA Recording Standards and Ethics Committee, former photo editor of The Ohio Cardinal, and her wildlife photography has been published in multiple outlets.



Laura Keene

TOS Field Trips - Abilene, Spring 2023

Friday – 7 trips; Saturday – 9 trips; Sunday – 5 trips

NOTE: Participants must meet their field trip group at the Abilene Mall on Ridgemoor Dr. 15 minutes prior to start time. Due to logistical complications, it is not possible for individuals to meet the group at any other location. Please plan accordingly. Also, there will be entrance fees at some locations. Please have small bills available as well as bringing your state parks pass. Though snakes are rarely encountered, at this time of year boots or snake chaps would be a good idea.

NUMBER	FIELD TRIP AND DESCRIPTION	COUNTY	DIFFICULTY	DEPARTURE & HOTEL RETURN TIMES	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1	<p>MITCHELL COUNTY: Our first stop will be Lake Colorado City State Park 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, shorebirds, gulls and terns. Rarities are a real possibility.</p> <p>We'll visit Fisher Park on Champions Creek Reservoir to look for waterfowl, shorebirds, and spring passerines in the habitat surrounding the lake.</p> <p><i>Moderate to long distance walking, the most demanding of which will be at Fisher Park, walking around the lake. Anyone is free to abstain or take a break. Entry fee at the state park.</i></p>	MITCHELL	MODERATE	6:15 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	X		
2	<p>TAYLOR COUNTY: With over 250 species recorded, Kirby Lake 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 Hudsonian Godwit and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. We'll explore the edge habitat around the lake where shorebirds are often numerous.</p> <p>Up next is a quick trip to the ponds of the Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant. We'll look for shorebirds and focus on finding the fab five of the marsh: Virginia Rail, Sora, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren. On to County Road 131 where a large stand of oaks attracts migrating songbirds, and Red-bellied Woodpecker is sometimes found. If time permits we may stop at a field on private property where Sprague's Pipits and Upland Sandpiper are often found.</p> <p><i>All birding will be done with short walks from the car.</i></p>	TAYLOR	EASY	7:15 a.m.-3:00 p.m.		X	
3	<p>TAYLOR COUNTY: With over 250 species recorded, Kirby Lake 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 Hudsonian Godwit and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. We'll explore the edge habitat around the lake where shorebirds are often numerous.</p> <p>Up next is a quick trip to the ponds of the Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant. We'll look for shorebirds and focus on finding the fab five of the marsh: Virginia Rail, Sora, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Marsh Wren.</p> <p><i>All birding will be done with short walks from the car.</i></p>	TAYLOR	EASY	7:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.			X

4	<p>TAYLOR COUNTY – We’ll visit Cedar Creek’s riparian habitat, with big trees along the creek. The focus is on neotropical migrants, with some semi-regular (almost expected) species like Gray Catbird, Swainson’s Thrush, Painted Bunting, Great Crested Flycatcher, Wilson’s, Nashville, Northern Waterthrush and Black-throated Green. Rare but recent finds: large warbler list including Mourning, MacGillivray’s, Ovenbird, Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Hooded. Philadelphia Vireo.</p> <p><i>Lots of walking on flat ground.</i></p>	TAYLOR	MODERATE	7:00 am – 12:00 pm			X
5	<p>TAYLOR COUNTY: We’ll start the day with a visit to the ponds of the Hargesheimer Water Treatment Plant. We’ll look for shorebirds and focus on finding 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 Abilene State Park, 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. Breeders include Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Summer Tanager, and more. Likely migrants include Swainson’s Thrush, a variety warblers, and Lazuli and Indigo Bunting.</p> <p>After the state park on Friday only, we’ll cruise Mountain Pass Rd, an empty region of western Taylor County. Targets include Black-capped Vireo, Bushtit, Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay, Canyon Towhee, Rufous-crowned Sparrow and more.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	TAYLOR	EASY	7:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	X		X (until noon)
6	<p>SHACKELFORD COUNTY: For this special trip, we will visit the Chimney Creek Ranch, a private ranch 35 miles north of Abilene in Shackelford County. The ranch is a working cattle ranch with a rich history of cattle drives, stagecoach lines, and land conservation and restoration. Recipient of the Lone Star Land Steward Award in 2021, it has a variety of habitat types including native rangeland and restored riparian area. See all the details at www.chimneycreekranch.com.</p> <p>Target species include Mississippi Kite, Swainson’s Hawk, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Black-capped Vireo, Eastern Bluebird, Cassin’s Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Painted Bunting. In addition to building a cool list of species seen, we’ll also be on the lookout for interesting bird behavior.</p> <p>After a morning of exploring the ranch and lunch, on Friday and Saturday only we’ll visit the small town of Albany to get our “urban” birds for Shackelford County.</p> <p><i>Walking most of the day.</i></p>	SHACKELFORD	MODERATE	6:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.	X	X	X (until noon)
7	<p>JONES COUNTY: Basically Abilene but in a whole ‘nother county lies Lake Fort Phantom. 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 (ducks, shorebirds, and wading birds). Rarities often turn up.</p> <p>Next is the nearby Abilene Water Treatment Plant where a series of shallower ponds holds a mix of ducks and shorebirds. 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 and shorebirds has been estimated to be in the thousands.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	JONES	EASY TO MODERATE	7:00a.m.-2:00 p.m.	X	X	
8	<p>HASKELL AND KNOX COUNTIES: Judging from the species totals in eBird, Lake Stamford, 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 O’Brien and surrounding county roads in northern Haskell County in search of breeding birds, shorebirds, and anything else of interest that crosses our path.</p> <p>We’ll then make our way to Lake Benjamin and Truscott Brine Lake in Knox County, time permitting, where we’ll look for waterfowl, shorebirds, and grebes, along with the usual grassland and agricultural breeders. Knox County is also vastly underbirded so there’s a real potential to find a first county record.</p> <p><i>Lots of birding will be done with scopes and the walking distances will generally be short. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</i></p>	HASKELL AND KNOX	EASY	6:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.		X	

9	<p>COKE COUNTY: At Oak Creek Reservoir, 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. From there we'll carry on to EV Spence Reservoir. 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 lake shore often has good shorebirds. 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 Sanco and Silver Loops, 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><i>All the birding will be done with short walks from the car. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</i></p>	COKE	EASY	6:45 a.m.-4:00 p.m.		X	
10	<p>RUNNELS COUNTY: One of the region's best hotspots is Lake Ballinger. 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 migrants like Wilson's and Nashville Warblers, Yellow-breasted chat, and more. The previous spring, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Hudsonian Godwit were first county records. It's not uncommon to get more than 60 or 70 species in a morning of birding around the lake.</p> <p>At Ballinger City Park, we'll look for migrants that we might have missed at the lake. The park has large trees which can attract warblers and breeding birds like Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Summer Tanager.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	RUNNELS	EASY	6:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	X	X	X (until noon)
11	<p>COLEMAN AND CONCHO COUNTIES: We'll begin our day at Coleman City Park with its large trees where "eastern" forest species are possible including Red-bellied Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, 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, O.H. Ivie Reservoir. Visiting this destination is a natural way to visit two counties in the same day. Ivie has produced a number of and if more birders visited, the lake would probably have the highest species count for the entire region.</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	COLEMAN & CONCHO	EASY	6:15 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	X	X	
12	<p>NOLAN COUNTY: This trip will explore the hotspots and backroads of Nolan County, to the west of Abilene. We'll start our day at Lake Sweetwater, the largest body of water in this arid county. Not only is the lake good for waterfowl, shorebirds, loons, and grebes, it has large forest with classic eastern species and neotropical migrants. Marsh around its edges that sometimes hold Virginia Rail and Sora.</p> <p>At the end of the day, we'll explore county roads 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><i>Our time will be spent scoping bodies of water and short walks anticipated along county roads.</i></p>	NOLAN	MODERATE	6:45 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	X	X	
13	<p>CALLAHAN COUNTY: Our first stop in this county to the east of Abilene is Clyde Lake. In addition to boasting a large list of waterfowl and shorebirds, the scrub habitat around the lake has often produced Vermilion Flycatcher and Curve-billed Thrasher.</p> <p>A short drive farther east, T & P Lake is more forested around the edges. Expect a different mix of breeding woodland species like Downy Woodpecker, Summer Tanager, and migrants like warblers and vireos.</p> <p>Next is a hidden gem known as Spring Gap Road. 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. If a Golden-cheeked Warbler were ever to show up in the region, this is the spot for it. It's a beautiful place that's barely had its potential scratched as a birding hotspot.</p> <p><i>Time will be spent scoping bodies of water with short walks anticipated along county roads. There may be entry fees at some facilities.</i></p>	CALLAHAN	EASY	7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.			X

14	<p>FISHER COUNTY CENTURY CLUB: 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 Century Club 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 land-owners 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, shorebirds (if there's any water), spring migrants, breeding species, "eastern" forest birds, "hill country" birds like Rock Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and any rarities we can find along the way.</p> <p><i>More time will be spent walking than on some other trips. There will also be longer periods of time driving between birding locations.</i></p>	FISHER	MODERATE	6:45 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	X	X
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New Century Club Members



Century Club pin recipients. Our Abilene meeting hosts, Jay and Amy Packer, earned their 100 county pins. (Left to right) Fred Collins, Bob Friedrichs, Gary Yoder, Annika Lindqvist, Catherine Winans, Dina Perry, Angela Bailey, Chris Bailey, Nina Rach, Jay Packer, Amy Packer.

TOSNEWS Staff

Jack Eitnrear

Editor

Judy Kestner

Proofreader

Susan Foster

Proofreader

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Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) Report

Below is a summary of the records that the Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) has reviewed and come to a decision on since August 26th, 2022. The MAJOR highlight of this batch is the first state records/addition of WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER (photo by Justin LeClaire), bringing the state list to 664. Also noteworthy was the removal of Limpkin from the review list due to their rapid expansion into Texas; the Limpkin records noted below were all the outstanding records prior to removal from the list.

Accepted (40):

2022-81 - Mexican Violetear (1) 6-7 Jul 2022, southwest of Concan, Uvalde County

2022-53 - Limpkin (1) 23 May - 2 Sep 2022, Cullinan Park, Sugarland, Fort Bend County

2022-47 - Limpkin (1) 24 May - 25 Aug 2022, Barton Creek, Travis County

2022-39 - Limpkin (1) 5-6 Jun 2022, Village Creek Drying Beds, Arlington, Tarrant County

2022-51 - Limpkin (1-2) 8 Jun - 20 Aug 2022, San Bernard NWR, Brazoria County

2022-54 - Limpkin (1) 17 Jun - 6 Aug 2022, Richland Creek WMA, Navarro/Freestone County

2022-56 - Limpkin (1) 20 Jun - 8 Jul 2022, Village Creek Historical, Arlington, Tarrant County

2022-60 - Limpkin (1) 21-27 Jun 2022, Lake McClellan, Gray County

2022-62 - Limpkin (1-2) 22 Jun - 3 Aug 2022, Caddo Lake, Harrison County

2022-70 - Limpkin (1) 9 Jul 2022, El Franco Lee Park, Houston, Harris County

2022-71 - Limpkin (1) 23 Jul - 27 Aug 2022, Ft Worth Nature Center, Tarrant County

2022-72 - Limpkin (1) 30 Jul - 12 Aug 2022, northeast of Village Creek, Arlington, Tarrant County

2022-73 - Limpkin (1) 1-27 Aug 2022, south of College Station, Brazos County

2022-74 - Limpkin (1) 5-12 Aug 2022, Joe Pool Lake, Tarrant County

2022-75 - Limpkin (1) 8 Aug 2022, Armand Bayou, Harris County

2022-76 - Limpkin (1-2) 14-24 Aug 2022, southeast of College Station, Brazos County

2022-77 - Limpkin (1) 15-19 Aug 2022, The Woodlands, Montgomery County

2022-78 - Limpkin (1) 18-20 Aug 2022, Lake Madison, Madison County

2022-79 - Limpkin (1) 23 Aug 2022, Kickerillo-Mischer Preserve, Harris County

2022-80 - Limpkin (1) 6-16 Sep 2022, White Rock Creek, Dallas County

2022-79 - Northern Jacana (1) 19 Sep 2022, Laughlin AFB, Val Verde County

2022-80 - Brown Noddy (1) 17 Jul 2022, ~7 miles offshore from Matagorda Is., Matagorda County

2022-49 - Arctic Tern (1) 4 Jun 2022, Twin Buttes Reservoir, Tom Green County

2022-42 - Elegant Tern (1) 3 Jun 2022, Twin Buttes Reservoir, Tom Green County

2022-59 - Leach's Storm-Petrel (1) 2 Jun 2022, ~140 miles southeast of Galveston Is., Galveston County

2022-55 - Wedge-tailed Shearwater (1) 15 Jun 2022, Cox/Lavaca Bay, Calhoun County

2022-61 - Sooty Shearwater (1) 14 Jun 2022, San Jose Island, Aransas County

2022-71 - Great Shearwater (1) 10 Sep 2022, ~60 miles southeast of Port Aransas, Nueces County

2022-72 - Great Shearwater (1) 24 Sep 2022, South Padre Is., Cameron County

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Lesser Prairie Chicken Listed

By Chris Smith

On November 24, 2022 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published a final rule adding the Lesser Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) (LPC) to the list of threatened and endangered species. The Service listed the Southern DPS which ranges in west Texas and New Mexico as endangered and the Northern DPS which ranges in northern Texas, western Oklahoma and Kansas, and southeastern Colorado as threatened. The listings are

based on the Service's determination that conservation efforts led by wildlife agencies in the LPC range states will not be sufficient to offset the ongoing loss and fragmentation of large, connected blocks of suitable grassland habitat due to causes that include, but are not limited to, energy development, conversion of grasslands to cropland, and woody vegetation encroachment into the species' native grassland habitat.

Regional Reports

Region 1—Panhandle

—John Berner

Region 2—North Central Texas

—Open

Region 3—East Texas Timberlands (Pineywoods)

—Laura Wilson

Region 4—Trans-Pecos

—DD Currie

Region 5—Edwards Plateau Report

—Christine Turnbull

Region 6—Central Prairie

—Randy Pinkston

Region 7—Rio Grande Brushlands

FESTIVALS, FESTIVALS, AND MORE FESTIVALS!

I had the pleasure of leading trips at the 11th annual Laredo Birding Festival last week. This festival is unique in that area ranches open up their beautiful lands, many with vistas of the Rio Grande, to participants. The festival is kept small with approximately 150 attending and sold out early this year. The dates for next year are February 7-10, 2024. I highly recommend it!



A wonderful tribute to the incomparable Mary Gustafson was held during one of the kayak trips on the Rio Grande at the Laredo Birding Festival. Trip leader, Tom Miller, spoke kind words about Mary and also Santa Gutierrez, a longtime volunteer at the festival, and floated flower arrangements down the river in memory of both.



Regional Reports (continued)

The 26th annual Whooping Crane Festival was held February 23-26, 2023, headquartered at the Port Aransas Civic Center, and featured speakers, birding trips, boating trips, nature tours, photography workshops, a trade show, and much more. You might have seen me and my scope at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center.



Also coming up on the Coastal Bend is the equally amazing Birdiest Festival in America, which will be held April 26-30, 2023. Headquarters is at the Botanical Gardens of Corpus Christi. I look forward to leading van trips to the hotspots of Rockport and also the 706 acre Barnhart Q5 Ranch in Goliad County. This working ranch is dedicated to wildlife habitat and the art of “winding down” with photo blinds and watering holes situated around the ranch. If you haven’t yet heard keynote speaker Tiffany Kersten’s excellent presentation of her 2021 Big Year, now is your chance.



—Susan Foster, Director

Region 8—Central Prairie

—Kendra Kocab, Director

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US Proposes Removing Wood Stork from Endangered Species List



FILE - A wood stork calls out from treetop on Oct. 29, 2019, near Fort Myers, Fla. The ungainly yet graceful wood stork, which was on the brink of extinction in 1984, has recovered sufficiently in Florida and other Southern states that U.S. wildlife officials on Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023, proposed removing the wading bird from the endangered species list. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty, File) (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP)—The ungainly yet graceful wood stork, which was on the brink of extinction in 1984, has recovered sufficiently in Florida and other Southern states that U.S. wildlife officials on Tuesday proposed removing the wading bird from the endangered species list.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said in a news release that restoration of the wood stork's habitat, especially in the Florida Everglades and adjacent Big Cypress National Preserve, led to a sharp increase in breeding pairs. Those numbers had shrunk to just 5,000 pairs in 1984, whereas there are more than 10,000 pairs today.

"This iconic species has rebounded because dedicated partners in the southeast have worked tirelessly to restore ecosystems, such as the Everglades, that support it," said Shannon Estenoz, assistant Interior secretary for fish, wildlife and parks.

In addition, the wood stork has increased its range in coastal areas of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas, officials said. The birds have adapted to new nesting areas in those states, tripling the number of colonies across their range from 29 to 99 in recent years.

Credit goes mainly to the wildlife protections provided by the Endangered Species Act, which marks its 50th anniversary this year, said Stephanie Kurose, a senior policy specialist at environmental group the Center for Biological Diversity. The act can impose restrictions on a variety of activities in areas where such species are located, such as development, mining and oil drilling.

"The act saved the wood stork and it helped preserve and rebuild vital habitats throughout the southeast, which has improved water quality and benefited countless other species who call the area home," Kurose said by email.

Wood storks have a distinctive scaly, featherless gray head and a bright white feathered body with long skinny legs. They are fairly large, standing up to four feet (1.2 meters) tall and with a wingspan of up to 5 feet (1.5 meters).

The nesting pairs lay three to five eggs per year, although the eggs are frequently targeted by predators such as raccoons and other birds.

Their bald heads give wood storks an almost prehistoric appearance, leading to nicknames such as "stonehead" and "flinthead." Wood storks feed in shallow waters on fish, insects, frogs and crabs depending on whether it's wet or dry season. They are the only stork native to North America.

In Florida, federal and state governments are spending tens of billions of dollars for ongoing projects to restore natural water flows in the Everglades and Big Cypress and reduce harmful nutrients from fertilizer runoff and other sources that promote unhealthy plant growth.

The Endangered Species Act has saved 99% of the species that have been on the list since 1973, with 100 types of plants and animals delisted because they have recovered or are at least stable, according to the Interior Department.

"The proposed delisting of the wood stork is a significant milestone and a testament to the hard work by federal agencies, state and local governments, tribes, conservation organizations, and private citizens in protecting and restoring our most at-risk species," Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will take comments on the proposal through April 17 from other government agencies, scientists, environmental groups and anyone else interested in the welfare of the wood stork. After that, the service will publish a final decision on whether to remove the bird from the endangered species list.

If the wood stork is delisted, officials said it would remain protected by other laws including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Clean Water Act. A monitoring plan would be put in place for at least five years to ensure the stork population remains stable.

By CURT ANDERSON

The Road not *Normally* Taken

Abilene Texas might not be the first location a birder would think to take a birding trip. It might not even rank in the top 50 for most Texas birders. But, why do we bird in the first place? Ask ten birders that question, and you will get ten different sets of answers. For most of us, it boils down to the following reasons: 1) birds are just fun to watch 2) finding a rarity is thrilling 3) birding takes you places you might not otherwise go 4) you meet a lot of interesting people, and 5) you begin to appreciate the word “habitat” and what that word means on a large scale; it leads to, and sustains a desire to preserve and conserve. Abilene checked all those boxes for me.

But there’s one more box that I want to mention - the Texas Century Club. For those that haven’t heard, it’s a fairly simple game that goes like this; find 100 bird species in 100 Texas counties. Post your bird lists to eBird, and eBird keeps track of your county count. I have been aware of eBird and the Century Club for many years, but I am a photographer, and don’t have time for such nonsense. Or, so I have thought for the last 17 years. Going into the Abilene trip, I was beginning to at least consider sticking my toe in the Century water. After all, these counties are not exactly on the beaten path, which makes them hard to complete.

Day one of the trip produced a rarity. The Mitchell County field trip found a Red-throated Loon, proving once again that if you plop down 100 birders in a concentrated area, someone is likely to find something special. The evening was capped off with an excellent presentation on birding in the Abilene area by Jay Packer. Jay and his wife Amy are the local experts, and have ticked over 300 species in Taylor County. Jay demonstrated that the surrounding counties of Abilene are a crossroads of North and South, and East and West species. In other words, rarities from any direction might show up. He proved it with some of his excellent photos. Hmmm, I thought. This guy is an excellent photographer, AND an excellent lister. Maybe I should start listing.

Throughout the trip, most birders were treated to Mountain bluebirds, Western bluebirds, Horned Larks, and Townsend’s Solitaires, just to name a few of the highlights. Many, including myself, discovered that Abilene is not just a flat treeless agricultural and ranching area. There are some nice mesas, stands of large oaks and several reservoirs in the area.

The speaker on day two, professor Joel Brant, talked about the natural history of the area. The key take-away from the meeting was this: We know that mammals evolved from lobed “fishes” that came out of the sea. But what was the path from lobed fish to mammal? The fossil record is still incomplete, but the counties surrounding Abilene provide the best fossil record - in the world - to unravel that path. Who knew?

Finally on night three, Amy Packer did a presentation on... “Why everyone should join the Texas Century Club”. I knew it would be dangerous for me to attend the talk, but I did it anyway. Amy highlighted many of the reasons to join, which happen to align with why most of us bird in the first place. Finding birds is fun, it takes you places, you meet interesting people and it’s exciting to watch your eBird Texas county map go from white to all the different shades that indicate where you have been, but more importantly - where you need to go.

So..., the Abilene trip finally pushed me over the edge; sucked me into the vortex; stretched me until I snapped. I have started down the Century Club road. After the Sunday field trip concluded, I headed south with Jim Hoverson to pick up a few species in Runnels and Concho Counties. When it was time to head home to Austin, I decided to avoid the main highways - take the road less traveled - and I was glad I did.

Thanks to all the Abilene planners, speakers and bird guides that made this a special trip. I’ve still got my “bird buzz”.

—James Giroux

TOS Trip to Panama a Success

The TOS Panama trip was a trip to remember. The Canopy family took care of every detail from great accommodations to all of the transportation to going above-and-beyond in accommodating my long list of food allergies. Carlos and his team even welcomed me back for an additional night at the Tower when my flight was cancelled, including arranging transportation from and back to the airport a second time and a extra couple of allergy-free meals. The staff at the Lodge and Tower were friendly and attentive and the guides were very knowledgeable and patient—even when I needed a little extra time to get

the perfect shot or when I had questions about lizards or butterflies. It goes without saying that finding over 300 species of birds in a 10-day trip was mind-blowing!

The thing that I will remember most about the trip was the compatibility and camaraderie of the group. From sunrise at the Canopy feeders or Tower observation deck to laughing at stories at dinner and everything in between, we got along as if we were all old friends. I am thrilled to have made new birding friends from other states and look forward to birding with them in the future.

— Heidi Belinsky

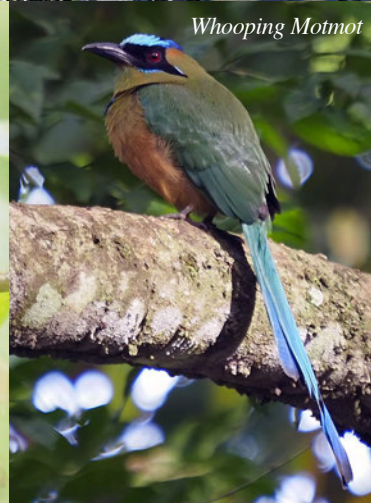
Panama Photo Collage



Bi-colored Antbird



Crowned Woodnymph



Whooping Motmot



Blue Dacnis



Barred Antshrike

Here's to Ray Little



Many of you know Ray Little from his years as Wildlife and Whooping Crane Narrator aboard the Wharf Cat out of Rockport who is turning 100 years old this year. Though facing physical challenges, Ray's mind is still sharp. Ray lives at Caraday Healthcare located at 202 Fortune Drive, Room 406, Corpus Christi, 78405 and would be happy to discuss birds with anyone wishing to visit him. The following is from the Aransas First Land Trust Facebook page:

Dr. Earl Matthew, President of Aransas First, made a \$5000 donation in honor of his dear friend Ray Little.

Statement from Dr. Earl:

I am pleased to make this donation to Aransas First's fund-raising campaign to acquire additional valuable habitat in the Live Oak and Lamar peninsulas in honor of Ray Little.

Ray Little; born September 24, 1923. He started birding when he was four years old. He learned to read the Arm & Hammer Baking Powder bird cards which described colored pictures of many birds. During his childhood, Ray lived close to a biology teacher who took him on many nature trips to the nearby woods and creek to study birds and wildlife.

He went to Texas A&M-College Station in 1940; to major in Fish & Game, but World War II interrupted his studies. He became a Navy Medic while in the Marines. He was on the initial invasion of Okinawa. After serving his time in the Pacific; he returned to A&M and the name of his major had been changed to Wildlife Management. His working career was a salesperson for a hospital laboratory supply company. He strategically visited locations; esp. in South and Coastal Texas, during the best birding, fishing, or hunting seasons.

He married Margie in 1947 and has two sons; Terry and Dell, both avid birders from a very early age. He has led field trips for many groups and organizations. He served on the founding committee of the Frontera Audubon Society in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the Coastal Bend Audubon Society in Corpus Christi. He has served all positions:

including President, on many birding organizations Board of Directors. He has continued his studies in ornithology and lectured throughout his lifetime.

Ray is a member of Coastal Bend Audubon Society, Audubon Outdoor Club of Corpus Christi, Aransas Bird & Nature Club of Rockport, Texas Ornithological Society, American Birding Association, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Aransas First Land Trust, and many others. He helped develop Rockport Demonstration Bird & Butterfly Garden at Tule East, and Aransas Woods--Texas Coastal Birding Trail Sites #50 & #47. He was on the Founding Committee and Developer of Fred Jones Nature Sanctuary near Portland, Friends of Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary in Rockport, the Friends of Goose Island State Park, and Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island NWR. He is very proud of the "Awareness Award" which was bestowed upon him by the Kingsville Bird & Wildlife Club in 2003.

His special interest was in Whooping Cranes. He visited Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in 1941 and helped begin the crusade to save Whooping Cranes. He worked closely as a volunteer with the ANWR biologists for over 30 years. He served as Wildlife and Whooping Crane Narrator on the Wharf Cat from Port Aransas and Rockport for 22 years and "retired" from a formal role at age 89.

He is a life-time member of Texas Master Naturalist and was in the first graduating class of the Mid-Coast Chapter in 2000. He encouraged the formation of Aransas First Land Trust finalized in 2002.

The above is the "short list" of activities for someone who has given tirelessly of himself for the benefit of the Texas Coastal Bend.

I met him in 2004; while he was doing most of the maintenance for Aransas Woods and Tule East Marsh and Demo Garden, a part of the Aransas First Land Trust properties. Ray also worked on the Connie Hagar Sanctuary in Rockport. He was my co-planner for the 2008 restoration of Tule East Marsh by Aransas First Land Trust. He was a great birder; but a true naturalist, knowing what habitat was needed for sustaining our unique place on the Texas Coastal Bend.

Aransas First Land Trust; as an organization, Ray Little (for lifetime achievement) and I were honored; in 2016, with the Stewards of Nature Award for conservation in Aransas County.

A great deal of my success came through him.

Yours Truly,

Earl Matthew M.D.

President-Aransas First Land Trust

Note from Susan Foster: The Aransas First Land Trust would be happy to receive any and all donations to acquire additional valuable habitat in the Live Oak and Lamar peninsulas.

Book Review “On the Wings of the Condor” by Bill Toone 2022

A Rare Glimpse into a World of Zoos and Conservation

By Ron Johnson



On the Wings of the Condor is superbly written, relating sometimes humorous and sometimes frustrating circumstances, but above all, an awe-inspiring tale of a bird curator in the making, the evolving of a dedicated conservation advocate, and of becoming a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Throw in love, fatherhood, the intrigue of a Mexican divorce, finding your soulmate, sprinkled with conservation politics and drama - you now have the ingredients for a best seller.

Follow Bill Toone’s boyhood dream: first learning the biological concept of edge habitats in his rural California back yard, where watered lawn meets dry desert – a place

inhabited by pill bugs and snakes—then working at, and becoming Curator of Birds at the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Bill becomes the key person to develop captive management techniques for the highly endangered California Condor and a member of the California Condor Recovery Team. Along the way enjoy his humor, devotion, missteps, and celebrations. You’ll get an insiders look at how close the California Condor came to extinction because of politics, how courting Sunni, his wife to be, had Bill change direction to field work with the Monarch Butterfly, and how Emilien, a young Madagascar boy, changed his views on how wildlife conservation should function. The last three chapters will give you insight as why Bill left his dream job of Curator of Birds at the San Diego Wildlife Park after 32 years, and founded a new global, community-based conservation organization to “improve lives and conserve habitats”.

As a retired Bird Curator myself, I enjoyed the subtlety and nuances of Bill walking the tightrope between what’s right for the species, public perceptions, conservation politics, and budgetary restraints.

Bill Toone, thank you for your openness and willingness to share a rare glimpse into a world most only see from the glamor of the outside view.

Available from Amazon at: https://www.amazon.com/Wings-Condor-Bill-Toone/dp/173313011X/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2RM6S63G33PLG&keywords=On+the+Wings+of+the+condor&qid=1666706778&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjQ1IiwicXNhljoiMC41NyIsInFzciCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&s=books&sprefix=on+the+wings+of+the+condor%2Cstripbooks%2C86&sr=1-1

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The Surprising Health Benefits of Bird-Watching

Spending time outdoors with a pair of binoculars is good for your body and soul. The upcoming Audubon Christmas Bird Count is the perfect excuse to start.

Tristan Spinski and Erik Vance for The New York Times

Tammah Watts remembers the exact moment she became a bird-watcher.

It was April of 2007. She was stuck in her house, struggling with chronic pain resulting from complications after a surgery. The pain had become so debilitating that Ms. Watts, formerly an avid biker and hiker, couldn't hold a pencil or pick up a cup at times. It had forced her to leave her job as a therapist and confined her to her home, where she had sunk into a deep depression.

Then one day, she looked out her kitchen window.

"There's a tree that has a branch that tends to grow down. And there was this bright yellow bird there," she said.

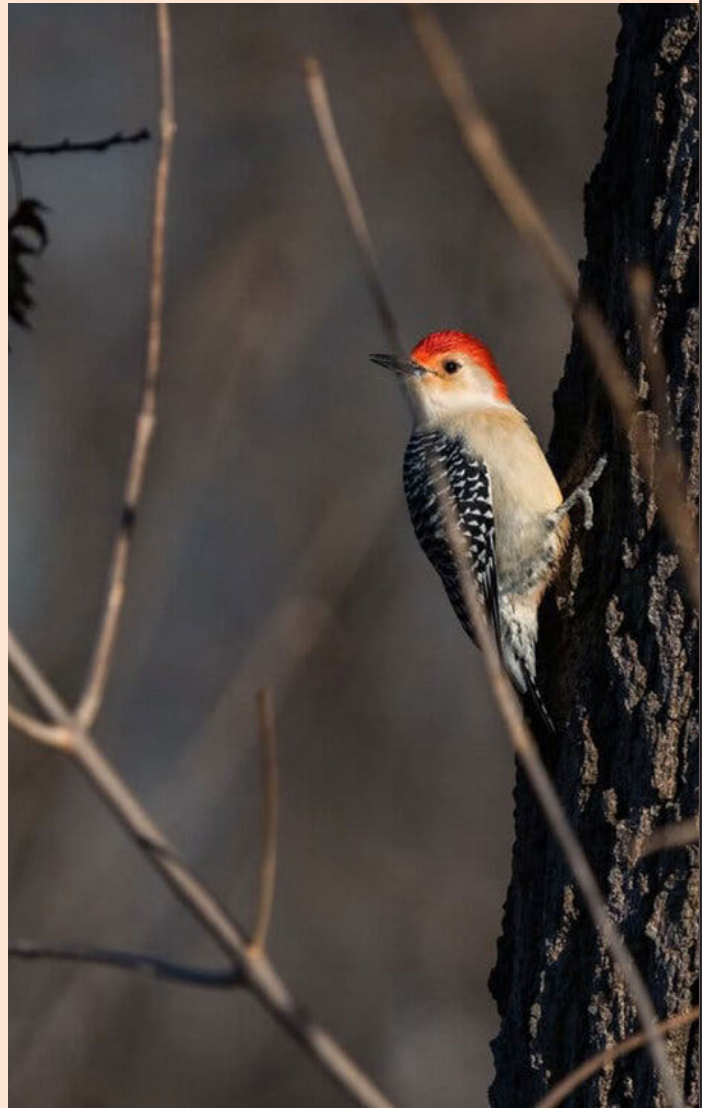
She didn't know that it was called a yellow warbler, or really anything about birds at all, but she was entranced. Every day she watched it jump from branch to branch, barely discernible from the yellow blossoms of the tipu tree. And over time, this bird led her to others in her yard and brought Ms. Watts out of her pain and sadness and back into the world.

She started keeping track of the birds she saw, joined a local Audubon Society chapter and traveled the state looking for new birds. She now sits on the Audubon California board of directors. In short, she said, birding changed her life.

"It's contagious. It's addicting," said Ms. Watts, who is writing a book called "Keep Looking Up: Your Guide to the Powerful Healing of Birdwatching." "Birding really does cross over into so many areas of wellness, health and fitness."



Kim Ehn, front center, president of the Dunes Calumet Audubon Society, leading a group of winter bird-watchers on the shores of Lake Michigan at the Indiana Dunes National Park in Portage, Ind. Credit...Tristan Spinski for The New York Times



A red-bellied woodpecker perching on a tree in Willow Springs, Ill. This species is rarely seen any time of year, but it is easier to spot in the winter. Credit...Tristan Spinski for The New York Times

Starting on Dec. 14, bird-watchers across the country will begin the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, a 123-year-old tradition where people gather and help to catalog species in their area. Novices and serious birders alike walk through parks, forests and fields, looking for birds and listening for bird song; someone shouts "another yellow one!" and somebody else writes down "goldfinch."

Why bird-watch?

It's no secret that spending time in nature is good for your mind. Studies show that even a stroll through a city park decreases stress, sharpens concentration and improves long-term mental health outcomes.



The 'Twin Peaks' Theme Isn't Just a Song. It's a Portal.

A few studies suggest there might be something especially healthy about birds in particular. One, published in October, found that just being near bird song improved mental well-being.

Birds are “accessible and equitable, because they’re everywhere in every habitat,” said Holly Merker, a guide for the National Audubon Society and co-author of the book, “Ornithotherapy.” Even dense cityscapes offer rock doves (often incorrectly called pigeons), sparrows, hawks and falcons.

There is less research on the physical benefits of birding specifically, but evidence does suggest that walking regularly can help you live longer. And as any bird-watcher will tell you, the lure of the next bird inspires you to walk farther than you normally would.

“You find yourself out there for what should have been 45 minutes, making a two-hour birding foray in the woods or around a loop trail at a wetlands,” Ms. Merker said.



A dark-eyed junco perching near the edge of Lake Michigan in Indiana Dunes National Park. Often called “snowbirds,” juncos are relatively easy for beginner bird-watchers to spot in winter. Credit...Tristan Spinski for The New York Times

No one knows this better than Ted Floyd, the editor of *Birding* magazine. According to his count, he has gone bird-watching for more than 5,800 days in a row—that’s about 16 years. Some days, he said, he might take a 10-minute walk around his neighborhood. Other excursions can last 24 hours or involve 27 miles of hiking. He’s even signed up for 10-kilometer running races because they go through good bird habitats.

“If it weren’t for bird-watching, I’d be awfully sedentary,” Mr. Floyd said.

He added that he often goes more than once a day, because he might see different birds midday than he does in the morning. Breaking up your day with short exercise “snacks” has been shown to meaningfully improve health.

Like Mr. Floyd, Ms. Watts often walks for miles, over all kinds of terrain, to see a certain hard-to-find bird.

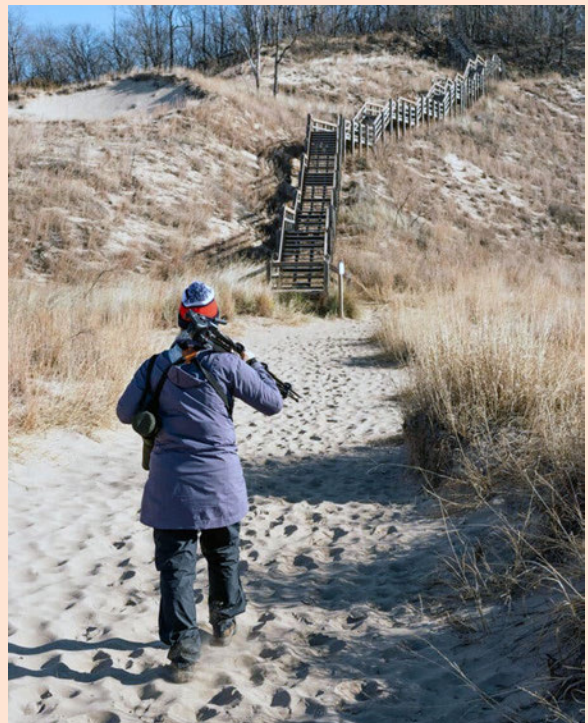
“For me, that is my fitness—the birding,” she said. “You’re definitely getting a little bit of a boost, even for folks who maybe can’t do a whole lot.”

How to get started

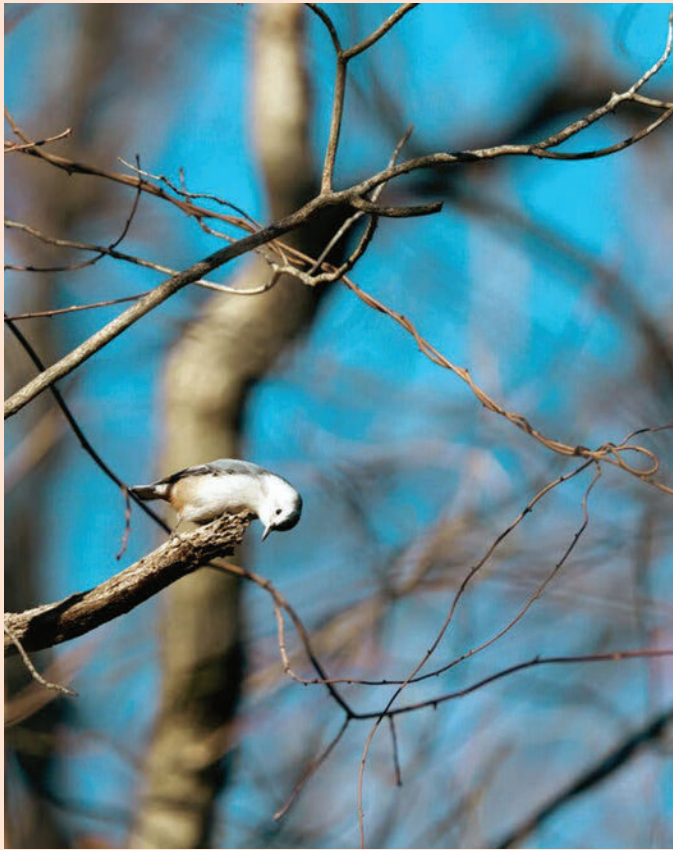
Equipment

Bird-watching is simple: All you really need is a quiet place and a single bird. But for most people, it’s more fun with two simple tools—a field guide and binoculars—and a rough idea of where to go.

First, there is the field guide. Mr. Floyd said to look for one with maps, detailed written descriptions, photos or drawings, and arrows pointing to important markings on the birds.



Mona Clayton walking through the dunes to set up her spotting scope. Scopes magnify much more than binoculars but require a tripod to use. At the time this photograph was taken, she was two birds away from achieving a “big year”—having spotted and identified 300 bird species in 12 months. Credit...Tristan Spinski for The New York Times



A white-breasted nuthatch perching near the edge of a bog. Ponds and other water features are great places to spot birds, and nuthatches, which generally don't migrate far, are common sights during the winter. Credit... Tristan Spinski for The New York Times

Most people use either National Geographic's "Field Guide to the Birds of North America" or a Sibley Guide specific to their region of the country. The drawings in both are meticulously done to reflect what the markings on the birds look like in the field. Increasingly, birders are also turning to apps like Merlin Bird ID, created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. That app contains an exhaustive catalog of photos and maps and allows you to record and identify bird songs as you go.

As for binoculars, serious birders can easily spend more than \$500 on a pair made by Leica or another premium brand. But for beginners, a \$100 set from REI will suffice. Binoculars are classified by their magnification and lens size. Start with something offering eight times magnification, which will allow you to easily scan your gaze across a tree without getting lost and won't zoom in so close that the image gets shaky. A 25-30 mm lens will be small enough to slip into a backpack pouch, but a bigger 40 mm one will allow more

light on a cloudy evening. Mr. Floyd recommended a small pair of binoculars to start; if you decide to get a bigger pair later, you can still use the spare set to bird-watch from the car (be sure to pull over first).

When to go

The peak time to bird-watch in most of America is sunrise in early May, during the height of the spring migration. But this is not the best time to learn. Sorting through dozens of species—singing and bickering over food or territory, hidden high in a lush canopy of leaves—will just frustrate you.

The best time to start birding is during the winter, when the leaves are gone, the food is lower to the ground and only a few select species are still around. Get to know the juncos, chickadees, cardinals and jays. Learn to recognize them the way you might a new friend, through how they look, their mannerisms and what they like to do.

Where to go

Expert birders all agree that it's best to start birding close to home. "I encourage people to find a local patch, whether that be their own backyard or a neighborhood park that they're already familiar with," Ms. Merker said.

Once you can identify a few birds, consider joining a birding group for a walk. Participating in the Christmas Bird Count locally is a fun, timely option. While it's serious business for some (the results are used by scientists to track nationwide trends), all abilities are welcome and there are always participants willing to teach newcomers.

If you'd rather learn on your own, find a nearby trail where you think there might be a lot of food for birds. Paths around wetlands, streams and lakes are a good start, Ms. Merker said. Areas with berry bushes or forests with lots of decaying logs are also smart bets. Birds are generally most active around dawn or dusk, but if you look closely, you can spot some any time of day.

Tammah Watts has developed a very sharp eye in the years since she spotted that warbler out her window. She has gone bird-watching in Cuba, spotted eagles high in the Colorado Rockies and seen tufted puffins in Oregon, at one of the few places on Earth they come to shore. But after that first magical spring, she never saw another bright yellow warbler in her backyard.

"For me, they have brought healing through the way they are," she said, adding that birds can be funny, quarrelsome, serene and profoundly human. Watching birds "really invites us to experience the natural world in special ways. They're like, to me, little winged gifts."

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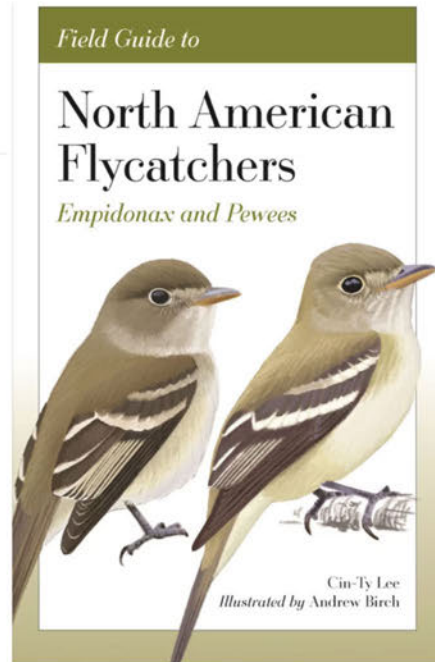
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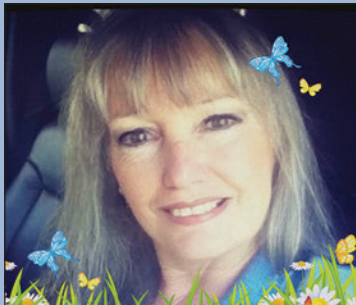
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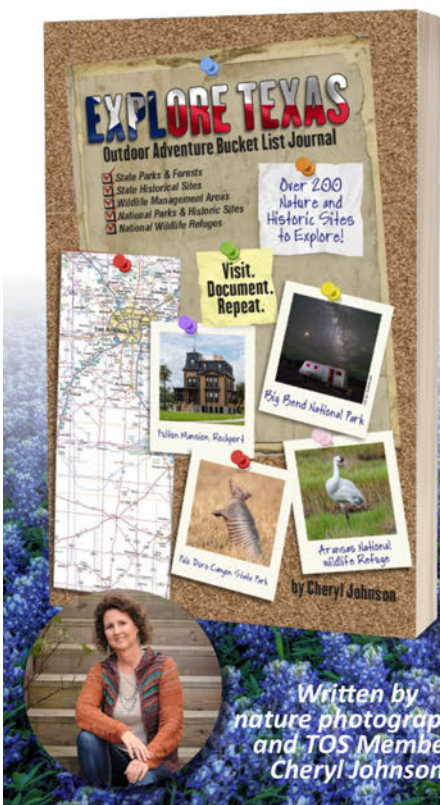
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