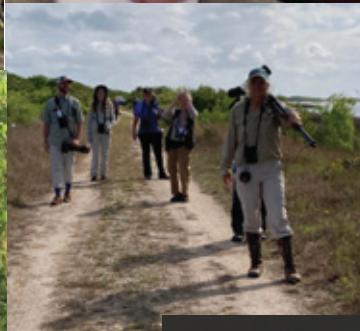


TEXAS *Birds*
ANNUAL



A Publication of the
TEXAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

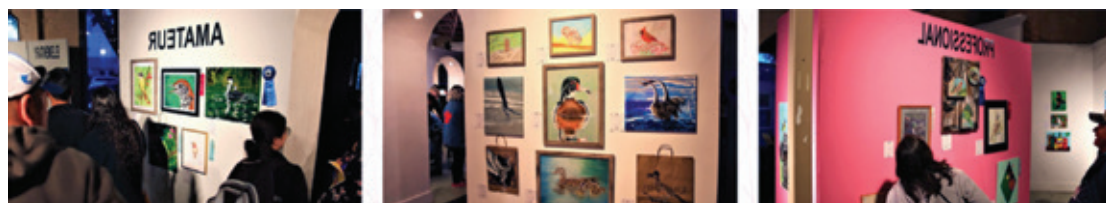
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TEXAS *Birds* ANNUAL

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“Birds of the Brush” 2nd Place Winners: Eastern Screech Owl by Belen Garza, 4th Grade; Indigo Bunting by Guilda Moreno 8th Grade; Crested Caracara by Jose Homero Gonzalez III, 11th Grade; Black Crested Titmouse by Anna Linda Davila, Amateur Program.

Front Cover: art by Andrew Birch

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

W

ith the worst of the pandemic in the rear-view mirror birders have started to get into the field. Unfortunately record heat and drought has set in limiting our desire! Fortunately, birding is generally a morning activity and the temperatures have been in the upper 70s during those hours.

Despite all there have been some exciting sightings. The year started with a very photogenic Bat Falcon at Santa Ana NWR only to be followed by several sightings of Limpkins, nesting Black-necked Stilts, Harlequin Ducks and recently a Snail Kite topped off the year!



The year got off to a great start with a photogenic Bat Falcon at San Ana NWR.

Photos Dennis Rabon

TOS also launched its newest tee shirt having selected a Green Kingfisher from a variety of paintings submitted by artist Lynn Delvin. To get your shirt go to www.texasbirds.org and select the More... option. You can then select "store" and order the shirt (and other TOS items). You can also purchase one the old fashion way through the postal service. Just follow instructions on the tee shirt ad (page 42) in this publication.

Birding festivals are also in full swing with both a successful Great Birding Classic and Laredo "Birds of the Brush" art contest as well as an enjoyable TOS meeting. Despite the ailing economy, including higher than usual gas prices, I hope you are able to

get out and enjoy nature. With all the stress in our lives we need some time outdoors to unwind!

Now get your favorite beverage and find a shady place so you can enjoy this year's *Texas Birds Annual*.

Jack Clinton Eitniew

Editor/*Texas Ornithological Society Publications*

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Limpkin sighted and photographed at Cattail Marsh, Beaumont, TX by Dana Nelson.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We Bird Texas

What is in a name? After all, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, right? During the just-completed TOS Board meeting and retreat in the Davis Mountains August 20 and 21, we realized that our organization may have a bit of an identify problem. Not an identification problem, but an identity problem. Those of us already involved with TOS love our meetings, field trips, classes, publications and sanctuaries. A recent member survey in fact shows that our members want more of the above, especially field trips and classes. The problem we seem to have is with birders (and to a lesser extent, ornithologists) who aren't already involved with TOS. To non-member birders, the name Texas Ornithological Society seems to indicate an organization for ornithologists, and if they aren't ornithologists, they need not apply. To those of us who have been involved a long time with TOS, this seems odd or even humorous, but it is a real thing. I had this realization a couple of years ago, and since then, whenever I do talks for other birding or conservation groups, I preface any mention of TOS with the disclaimer that we are "not just for ornithologists." I often ask for a show of hands of current TOS members, and then ask for them to put their hands down unless they are an ornithologist, and all or most of the hands go down. The ornithologists usually already know about TOS, and many are members, but some seem to think that TOS is "just for birders," even though we invite them to send publications to our editor. So, we have one problem with non-member birders, and the opposite problem with non-member ornithologists. And the word "Society" seems to imply to some that membership is by invitation only, so they need to wait for an invitation, which isn't true, although I invite most birders I encounter to join up.

None of us really want to change our name, but we think maybe we need a slogan or tag line. One popular suggestion was "TOS - Birding Texas." Another is "TOS - We Bird Texas." I like both of these, but it is a work in progress. Let us know if you have other suggestions.

By the time you read this, the tag line may well be incorporated into our much overdue website redesign. I'm very pleased with the look and feel of the new website, and I think you will be, too. Check it out soon at texasbirds.org

The board meeting was productive. We approved the formation of an exploratory committee to begin the process of hiring permanent staff for TOS. Most TOS past presidents I know, and many current and former board members believe it is imperative that we begin the transition from all-volunteer to staffed organization. But it seems a daunting task. How do we afford to hire someone; where will the revenue come from? We discussed these ideas and more at the board retreat, and all approved the formation of a committee to begin the process of identifying needs, potential resources, and a job description for the kind of person(s) we will need. I feel optimistic. TOS is a statewide organization dedicated to promoting the enjoyment, study and conservation of birds in the state of Texas. We have many resources, but also many responsibilities. If we are to grow and develop to meet the demands of the future, we need to figure out how to hire professional help to meet current and future demands.

Texas Birds Annual is something I look forward to reading cover to cover each year. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I think I will.

Good Birding Ya'll,
Byron Stone, *TOS President, 2022-2023*

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF TROPICAL AND COUCH'S KINGBIRDS

Cin-Ty Lee¹

Illustrated by Andrew Birch²

ABSTRACT

Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds have long been thought as indistinguishable without voice. While voice is still the most diagnostic method for identification, we show that the two species can often be separated in the field by a combination multiple field marks. Important field marks include length/size of bill, brightness of yellow on chest, wing panel contrast, relative length of primaries versus tertials, and shape of tail tip.

INTRODUCTION

Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds are so similar in appearance that they were only recognized as different species by the American Ornithologist's Union in 1983 based on lack of interbreeding in range of overlap (Traylor, 1979). The two species are thought to be virtually indistinguishable in the field without vocalizations. These two species have limited ranges within the United States: Tropical is a year-round resident in southern Texas and a summer resident in southeast Arizona while Couch's is resident in southern and coastal Texas. However, both species are known to wander. Tropical is a regular vagrant to the Pacific coast and to a lesser degree in the Eastern United States. Beyond Texas and the western Gulf Coast, Couch's is a far rarer vagrant, but with greater appreciation of how to separate these two species in the field, records of Couch's are growing. Non-vocal birds continue to pose challenges, making it difficult to fully understand the movements of these two species. Here, we synthesize new and existing knowledge of the field identification of these two difficult species.

RANGE AND SEASONAL STATUS

Tropical Kingbird

Tropical Kingbird has a much more extensive range than Couch's. It is a year-round resident throughout most of its range although it undergoes local movements (Figure 1). In its northern range, it breeds from southeastern Arizona south along the Pacific slope of western Mexico and from southernmost Texas (Rio Grande Valley) south along the Atlantic slope of Mexico to the Yucatan Peninsula and Central America. Its breeding range continues south through northern South America and across the Amazonian basin from the eastern slopes of the Andes to the Atlantic coast. Its breeding range continues south along the Atlantic slope in northern Argentina and Uruguay. On the Pacific side of South America, it breeds in coastal and interior lowlands of Colombia, Ecuador and northern Peru. Tropical is resident also on the islands fringing the northern coast of South America, including the Netherlands Antilles, Trinidad, Tobago, and Grenada.

Although taxonomic details remain debated, there are possibly four subspecies (Traylor, 1979; Phillips, 1994). *T. m. satrapa* is the subspecies of south Texas and eastern Mexico south through Central America, northern Colombia and most of northern Venezuela. *T. m. occidentalis* is the subspecies for western Mexico and southeast Arizona, although *satrapa* and *occidentalis* are often lumped. *T. m. despotes* is the subspecies of northeast Brazil. *T. m. melancholicus* ranges across most of South America excluding the regions occupied by *satrapa* and *despotes*. *T. m. satrapa*, *T. m. occidentalis*, and *T. m. melancholicus* are migratory.

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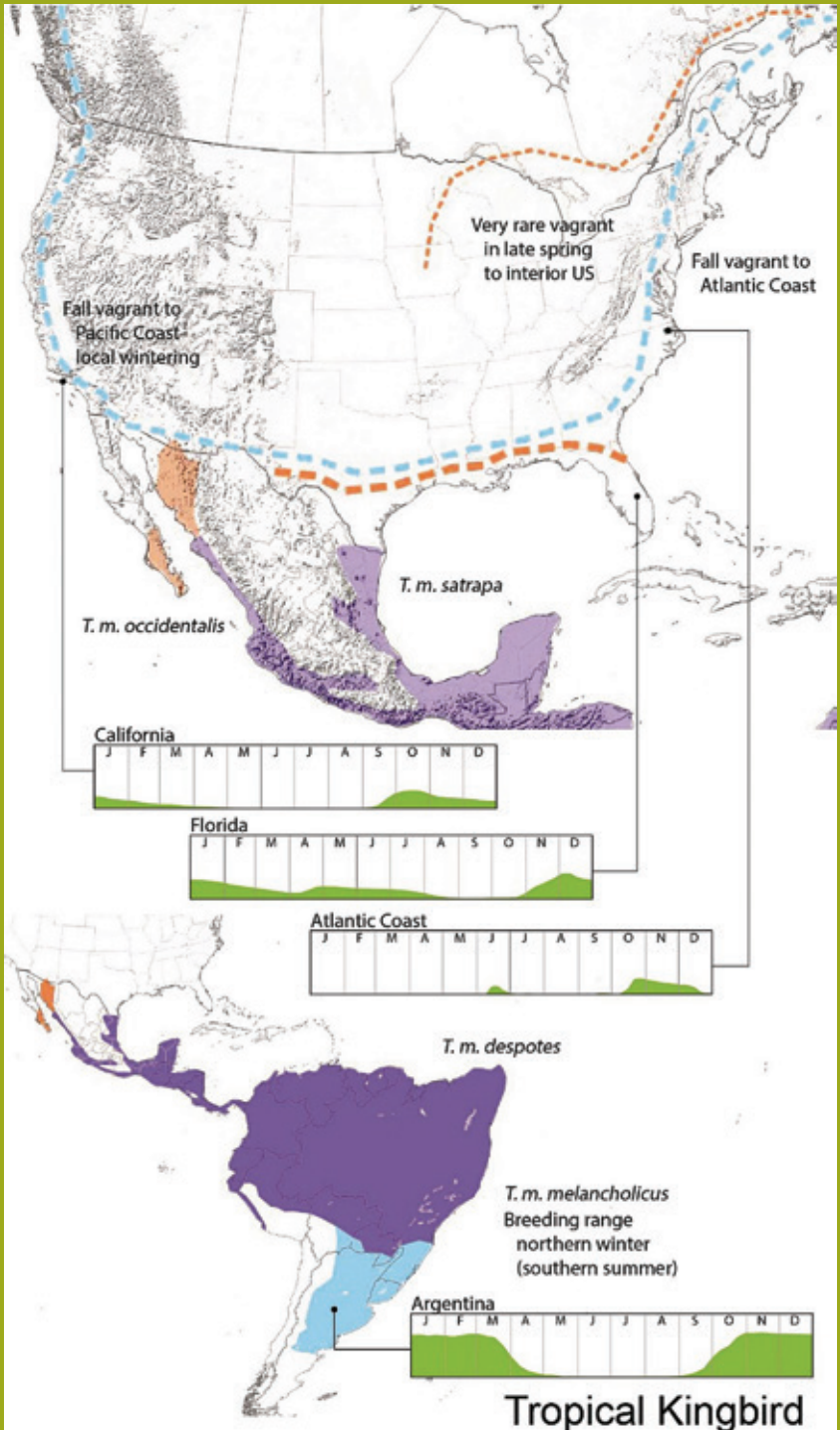


Figure 1. Range map for Tropical Kingbird. Purple = year-round resident, orange = northern summer range, blue = northern winter/southern summer range. Dashed blue line represents wandering range during the northern fall/winter. Thick dashed orange line represents wandering range during northern spring/summer. Thin dashed orange line represents vagrancy limit in spring. Bar charts (green) show seasonal distribution for select regions.

Plate by Cin-Ty Lee.

In the northwestern part of its range (*satrapa* and *occidentalis*), Tropical vacates its breeding grounds in southeastern Arizona and

northwestern Mexico by September, returning to breed in mid-April. South Texas birds are generally present year-round. In the southern

hemisphere, Tropicals (*melancholicus*) vacate their southern breeding grounds of northern Argentina and Uruguay by mid-April as birds move north into the Amazonian basin during the Austral winter. Southern hemisphere birds begin to move south during late August and by mid-October, they have spread across northern Argentina to breed during the Austral summer.

Although Tropical's breeding range in the United States is restricted to southeastern Arizona and south Texas, it is known to wander widely. It is a regular fall vagrant along the Pacific coast, especially along the immediate coast, ranging from Baja California north to Washington with occasional records as far north as southeast Alaska. It is also a fall vagrant to the east coast of the United States south to Florida and the eastern Gulf of Mexico, but numbers are lower than on the west coast. Fall vagrants in the interior United States are possible but rare. The great majority of fall vagrants are juveniles. On the Pacific coast, fall vagrants begin appearing mostly in September, peaking in October. On the Atlantic margin, fall vagrants begin appearing mostly in October. Many of these fall vagrants linger into late fall or even into early winter with many lingering until November or early December. A few remain beyond December, but some of these Atlantic margin birds remain along the Gulf Coast and Florida through the winter. On the Pacific coast, particularly in California, a number of Tropicals stay through the winter. These winter lingerers mostly vacate the region by March. For example, after March, Tropicals are exceedingly rare along the Pacific coast until the following September. Most of these fall vagrants are likely of the *satrapa* and *occidentalis* subspecies presumably because of their northern ranges.

In the spring, Tropical wanders again, but this phenomenon appears to occur only in eastern North America. These spring vagrants are mostly detected between May

and July during which they can be found in the interior United States as far north as the Great Lakes and along the Atlantic margin of North America as far north as the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, Canada. There is a record of a stray on 14 May, 1975 on Bermuda (eBird historical records) that fits this general pattern. It is unclear if these eastern strays pertain to the northern subspecies *satrapa* or the Austral migratory subspecies from South America *melancholica*.

Local movements of Tropicals within Texas are interesting. Although Tropical is primarily restricted to the Rio Grande Valley of southernmost Texas, in spring and summer, birds wander north to the Edwards Plateau and east to the upper Texas coast and Louisiana, breeding in some years. These birds probably represent *satrapa*.

Couch's Kingbird

Couch's Kingbird is mainly resident throughout most of its range (Figure 2). It occurs throughout south Texas from Val Verde County east through San Antonio to Victoria County along the mid-Texas coast and south into the Rio Grande Valley. Small numbers have expanded north in recent years with local resident populations occurring north to Austin and as far east as Houston, Texas. Its resident range continues south along the Atlantic slope of Mexico and throughout the Yucatan Peninsula including Belize and northern Guatemala. In Texas and northeastern Mexico, it tends to be rare on the barrier islands defining the immediate coast (Brush, 2020).

Couch's Kingbird shows seasonal movements at the local scale. In some winters, a proportion of the Couch's in south Texas appear to leave the region, but in other winters, numbers may increase in south Texas when small flocks can occasionally be seen. Couch's appears to disperse further north in Texas and east along the Gulf coast in winter, with small numbers reaching coastal Louisiana. In south Texas, mid-March through early April

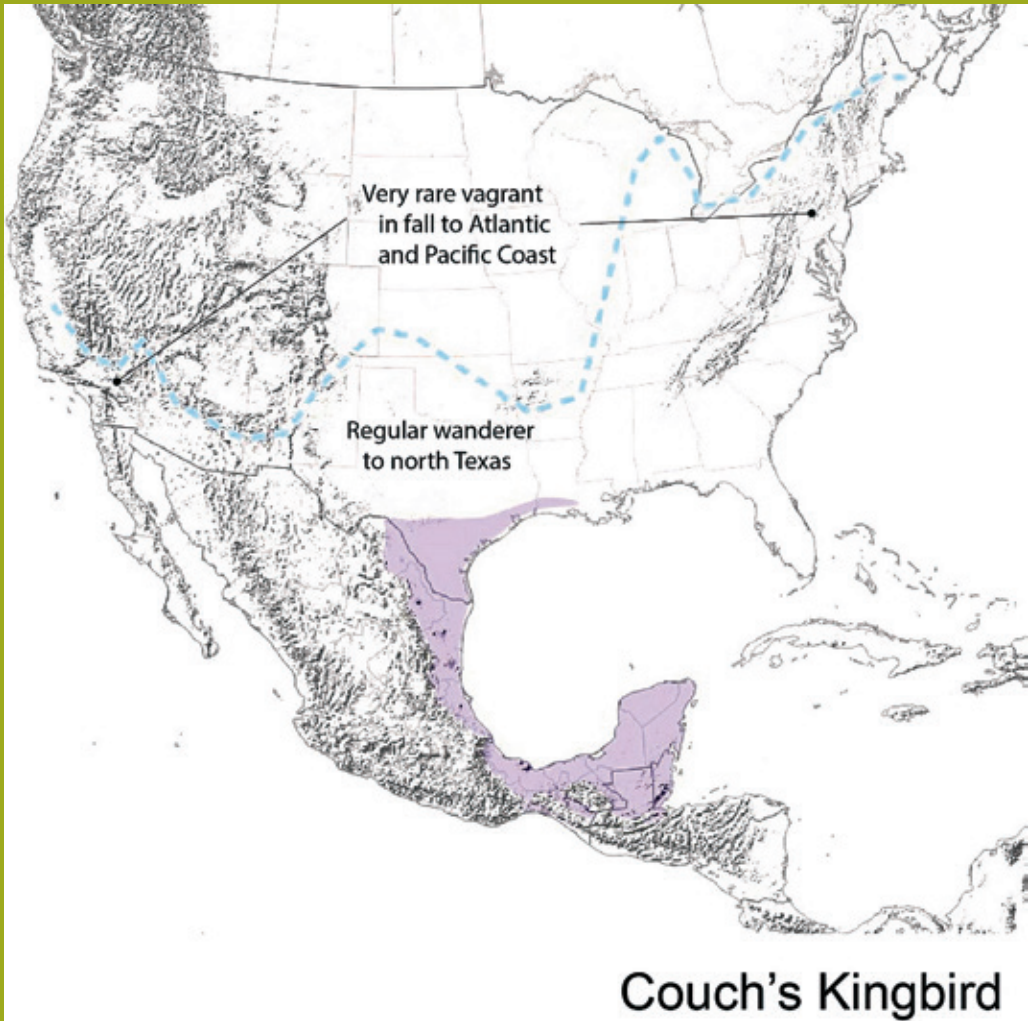


Figure 2. Range map for Couch's Kingbird. Purple = year-round resident. Dashed blue line represents wandering range during the northern fall/winter. Plate by Cin-Ty Lee.

sees noticeable increases in the numbers of Couch's Kingbirds as many return from their wintering grounds further south (Brush, 2020).

In the United States, it is very rare away from south Texas and the Texas-Louisiana coast. Vagrants have been recorded as far west as Arizona and California, north to Michigan, and east to New England and Maryland. Vagrancy appears to be confined to fall with most in late fall (November and December). In the western United States, these vagrants may winter through the end of January. Beyond Texas and Louisiana, vagrant Couch's are far outnumbered by vagrant Tropicals.

HABITAT

Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds have similar habitat preferences. Tropical prefers more open areas with scattered trees in lowlands and foothills, often found around water perched up high at the tops of trees. Tropical is commonly found perched on telephone wires in towns and along roadsides. Couch's is a lowland bird that also frequents semi-open habitats, but it tends to prefer more brushy woodlands than Tropical. Like Tropical, it can often be found near water.

FIELD IDENTIFICATION

The first step in identifying a Tropical/Couch's is to rule out similar looking West-

ern and Cassin's Kingbirds. Tropical/Couch's differ from Western/Cassin's by having a greenish back, more brightly colored yellow underparts, and slightly longer, often forked tails. In addition, the yellow undersides on Tropical/Couch's comes up to the top of the chest, whereas the chest on Western/Cassin's is gray with the gray extending down to the lower chest. Western/Cassin's typically have square-based tail tips and long primary projections. Western/Cassin's also have grayish backs, but Cassin's can show a slightly greenish back. However, the very dark gray head and cheek of Cassin's are diagnostic. Tropical/Couch's have slightly heavier or longer bills than Western. The ground color of Tropical/Couch's tails is dark brown as opposed to black in Western and Cassin's. Western has white outertail feathers, which when seen well is diagnostic as other kingbirds lack this feature. However, Tropical/Couch's may have pale fringes to all of the tail feathers, which can give the appearance of white outer tail feathers if the tail is backlit. Tropical/Couch's Kingbirds also tend to show a dark ear patch unlike Western but reminiscent of Cassin's.

Once a Tropical/Couch's Kingbird is suspected, efforts should be made to record

vocalizations, which are always diagnostic. When vocalizations are not heard, it is important to observe and document the bird from many angles to arrive at a visual identification. Key areas to focus on are the wing panel, bill, tail tip, and extent of yellow on the chest. Below we describe these features in more detail along with a discussion of more subtle structural differences between the two species. Our approach is to focus on features that can be seen in the field or from photographs, and for this reason, we generally avoid using wing formulas or measurements used by banders where measurements can be made of a bird in hand. A summary of field identification is presented into two plates (Figures 3 and 4).

Voice – Voice is the most accurate way to distinguish these two species (Figure 5). Tropical's calls and song are a high pitch, drawn-out twitter. The twitter can be also described as a high-pitched rapid staccato. Couch's emits a distinctive high-pitched, burry call *brREEeeeeer* characterized by an initial rise in pitch followed by long, drawn-out descending tail. Couch's burry call can be emitted singly or in short continuous successions. Couch's also gives short, isolated *pip* calls, which can also be given in association

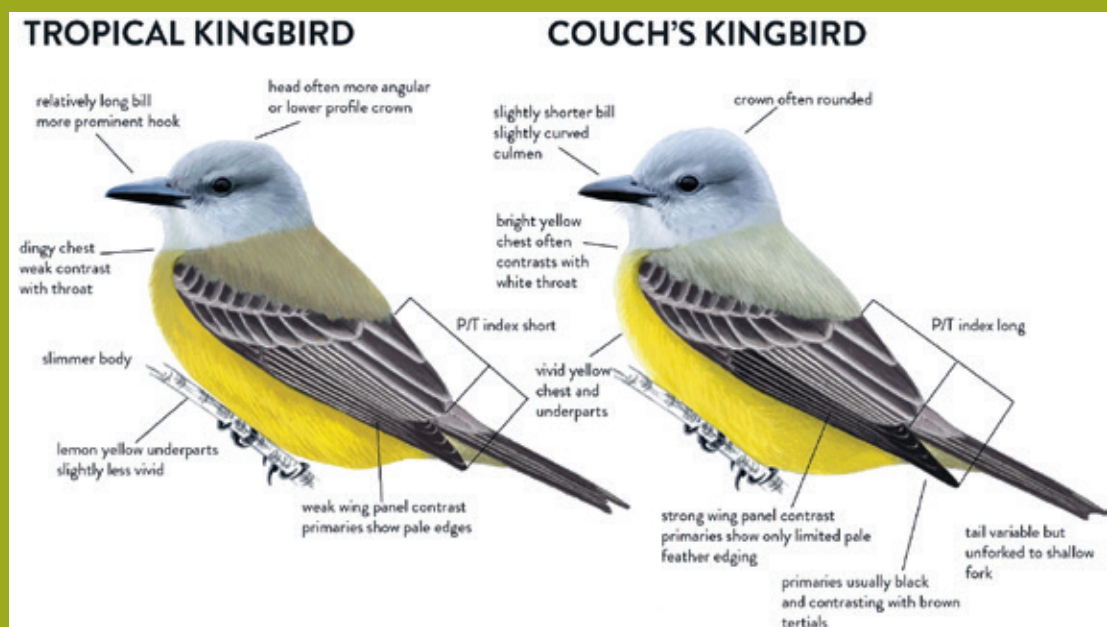


Figure 3. Profile comparisons of Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds. Plate by Andrew Birch.

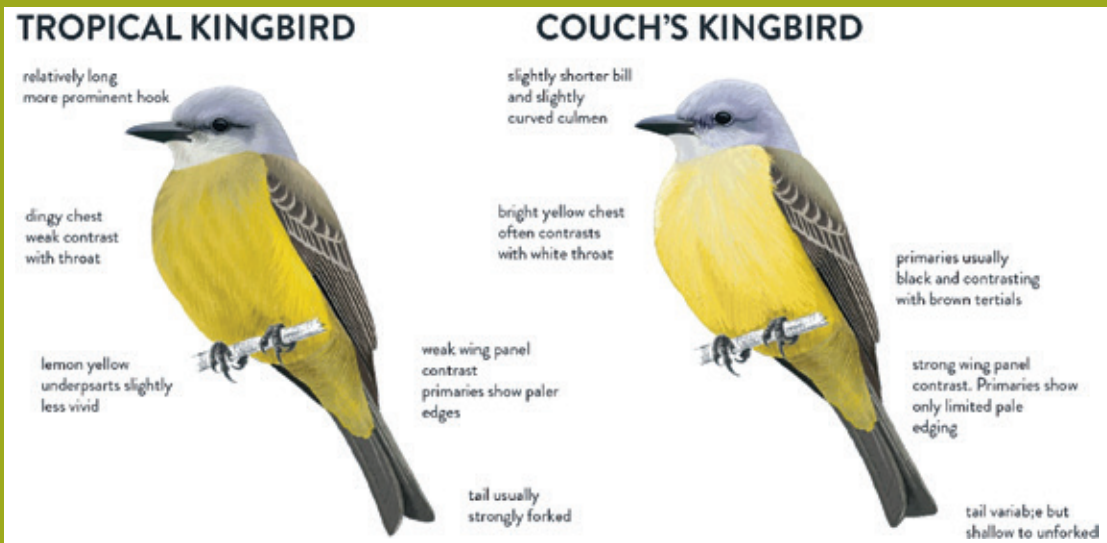


Figure 4. Underside comparisons of Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds. Plate by Andrew Birch.

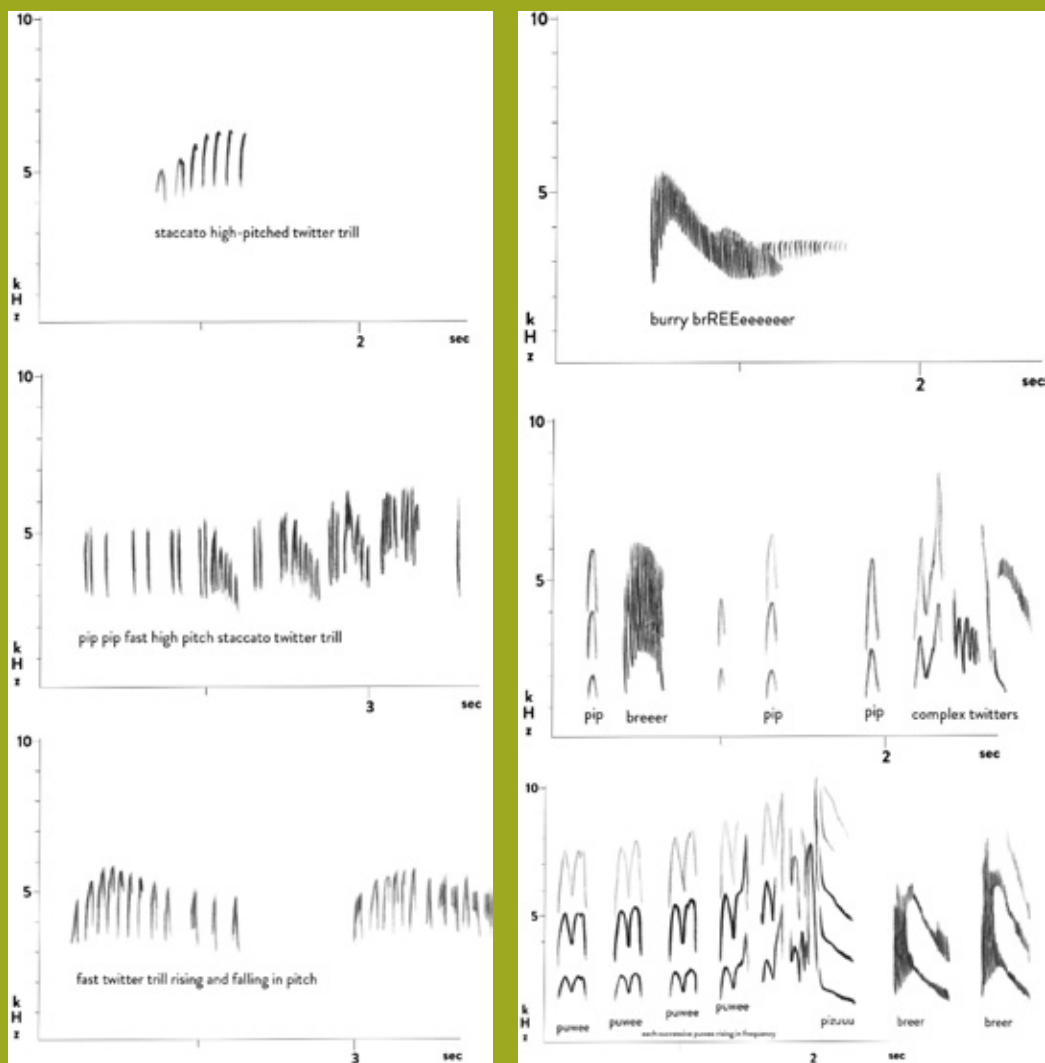


Figure 5. A-C. Tropical calls (A) and songs (B and C). D-F. Couch's burry *brREeeeeeeer* call (D). A variety of Couch's *pip* and short twitter calls (E). Couch's song (F).

with its longer burry call. Couch's *pip* is lower frequency than the Tropical's twitter. Couch's song consists of a series of 2-5 short *puwee* phrases preceding a rapid train of high-pitch *pips* and short twitters.

Wing panel contrast – On the folded wing, the flight feathers can be subdivided into “panels” (Figures 6 and 7). The top panel is made up of the secondaries (which includes the tertials). Beneath the secondary stack lies the primary stack or what we refer to as the lower panel. The primary stack continues be-

yond the end of the secondary stack to form the wingtips, which on the folded wing is often referred to as the primary extension. On both Tropical and Couch's, the outer edges of each secondary feather is white (lower edge on a folded wing), giving a boldly marked secondary stack. From a distance, these bold white secondary feather edges give the appearance of a white striped upper wing panel.

It is in the lower panel, made up by the primaries, where Tropical often differs from Couch's. In Tropical, the outer (lower) edges

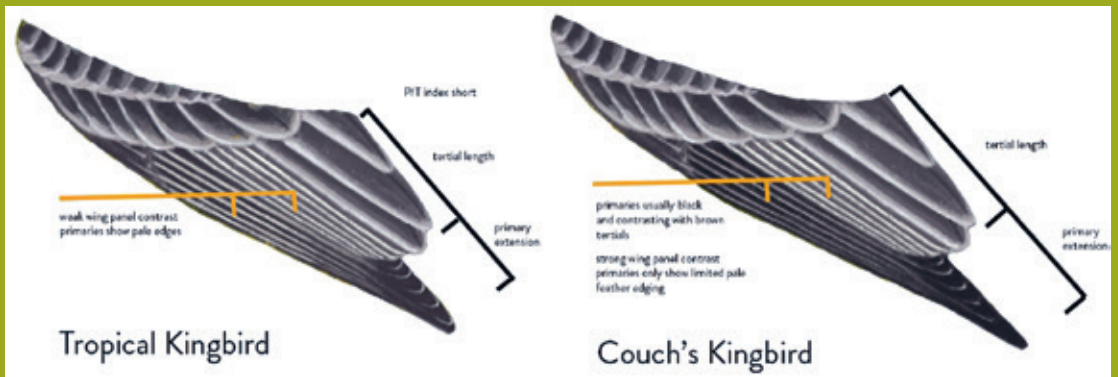


Figure 6. Schematic diagram showing differences in wing panel contrast and ratio of primary extension to tertial length (P/T ratio). Wing panel contrast is primarily controlled on the presence or absence of pale edges to primaries, which make up the lower wing panel stack. Note that in worn birds (summer), it may be very difficult to use the wing panel contrast as a field mark as worn feather edges on Couch's may give the impression of pale edges.



Figure 7. Tropical (top) and Couch's Kingbird (bottom). Note brighter yellow chest on Couch's compared to dingy olive chest of Tropical. P/T ratio of Tropical is shorter than that of Couch's. Note also the stronger wing panel contrast in Couch's compared to Tropical due lack of pale edges on primaries (lower wing panel) in Couch's. Tropical's primaries (lower wing panel) show pale edges, resulting in lower wing panel contrast. Body size difference is an artifact of different skin preparation styles. Specimens are from the TAMU Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections.

of the primary feathers are pale, much like the white-edged secondary feathers. In Couch's, the primary feathers lack the pale edging. From a distance, this results in Tropical showing low wing panel contrast, that is, the upper and lower wing panels both look striped or pale. In contrast, the lack of pale primary feather edges in Couch's, results in Couch's having a dark lower wing panel, which contrasts with a lighter upper wing panel. When seen well, this feature has proven to be remarkably robust.

Care must be taken, however, to observe or photograph the bird from many angles. Often, the primary stack is hidden beneath the folded secondaries stack, but the observer should wait patiently until the lower wing panel can be seen. Bad lighting conditions can also introduce artifacts. If the lower wing panel is shaded, it can give the impression of a dark lower wing panel, even if it has pale feather edges. Thus, in bad light, Tropical can appear to have a dark lower wing panel from a distance, but careful examination should reveal the pale feather edges in the lower wing panel. Similarly, in very bright direct sunlight, feather edges can reflect light even if they do not have pale fringes. Worn birds in summer should be treated with caution. In these worn birds, excessive wear on

wing feathers can erode the pale fringes of the primaries (making a Tropical wing look like a Couch's) or the worn edges of dark feathers might superficially give a pale-edged appearance (making a Couch's wing look like a Tropical). Except in worn birds, wing panel contrast, specifically the presence or absence of pale feather edges in the lower wing panel, is a very useful distinguishing field mark.

Primary/Tertial Index

Based on experience in the field, there is a subtle difference in the structure of the primaries between these two species. Of interest is the ratio between primary projection (P) and length of tertials (T) on the folded wing, which I refer to here as the P/T ratio (Figures 6 and 8). Primary projection is the distance from the tip of the primaries to the tip of the longest tertial *when the wing is folded*. Dividing the primary projection by the length of the tertials gives the P/T index. Because the P/T index is a ratio, this feature can be measured from any photograph without the need for an absolute scale.

To test these qualitative field observations, the P/T ratio for Couch's and Tropical Kingbirds was determined by analyzing photos from the Macaulay library (identified to species using the above criteria). Results are in Table 1. Couch's measurements per-

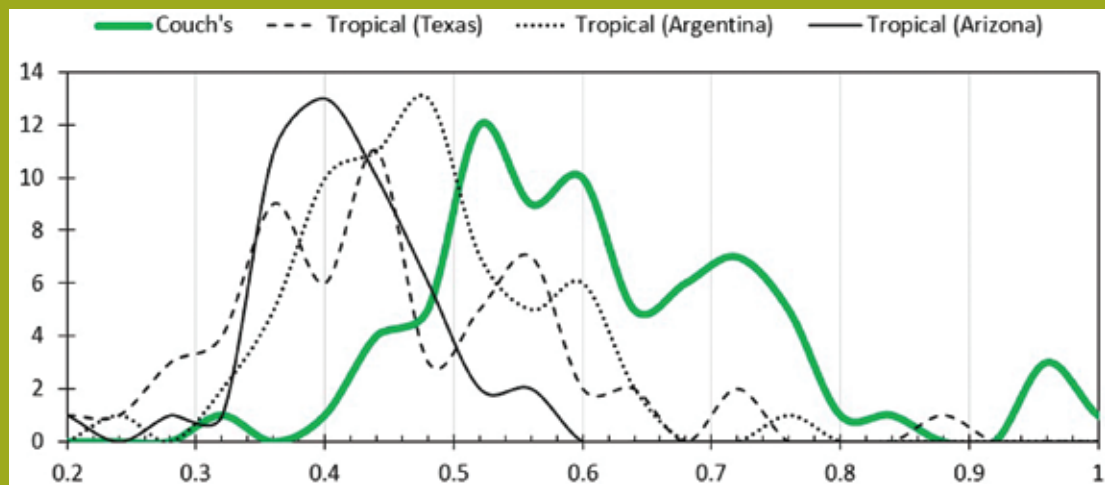


Figure 8. Histogram of the primary extension to tertial length (P/T) ratio in Couch's and Tropical Kingbirds. Tropicals from Texas (USA), Arizona (USA) and Argentina are shown separately. Note that there is a subtle difference in average P/T ratio but there is also considerable overlap.

tain to only birds from Texas. For Tropical, we treated those from Texas (presumably *T. m. satrapa*), Arizona (*T. m. occidentalis*), and Argentina (*T. m. melancholicus*) separately to assess geographic variation. Couch's has a P/T index of 0.6 ± 0.14 (1 σ , n = 71) while Texas Tropicals give 0.43 ± 0.12 (n = 57), Arizona Tropicals give 0.39 ± 0.08 (n = 47) and Argentina Tropicals give 0.46 ± 0.09 (n = 63) (Figure 9). Based on the standard deviations, there is considerable variability within a given species. There is also overlap in P/T between the two species, but the subtle differences observed in the field are confirmed. It is noteworthy that the more migratory subspecies represented by the Argentina birds have slightly larger P/T indices than both northern subspecies. This difference in Tropical subspecies is probably too subtle to be used to confidently identify a vagrant Tropical to subspecies, but it should be carefully documented when the opportunity arises.



Figure 9. Couch's (top) and Tropical Kingbirds (bottom). Note thicker and blunter bill of Couch's compared to the longer, straighter bill of Tropical.

While most vagrant Tropicals in the United States are likely of the northern subspecies, the possibility of the Austral subspecies (*T. m. melancholicus*) in vagrant populations, particularly in spring and summer, can cause confusion when using primary projection alone to distinguish between Couch's and Tropical far outside their normal range.

For completeness, we also mention the wingtip index of Traynor (1979). Traynor's wingtip index measures the lengths of p5 and p10 relative to the longest primary (usually p9



Figure 10. Couch's (left) versus Tropical Kingbird (right). Note the more brightly yellow underparts of Couch's compared to Tropical. Tropical shows a darker more olive wash across upper chest than Couch's. Note longer, thinner bill of Tropical. Body size difference is an artifact of different skin preparation styles. Specimens are from the TAMU Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections.



Figure 11. Couch's (left) and Tropical Kingbird (right) tails. Note more deeply forked tail of Tropical. Also, corners of Tropical outer tail feathers are more pointy compared to the more rounded corners on Couch's. Specimens are from the TAMU Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections.

or p8) and is expressed as (length of longest p – length of p5)/length of longest p – length of p10). Couch's has a longer wingtip index (0.5-1.3) than Tropical (0.3-0.8) although there is overlap. This wingtip index may be useful during banding, but is not useful in the field as p5 is never seen on a folded wing. However, good photos of birds in flight may reveal the wingtip index.

Bill – Although both species have heavier bills, subtle differences in size and shape of bill can be discerned with practice. Tropical's bill is slightly longer, narrow and thinner than that of Couch's. Tropical also tends to have a slightly straighter culmen than Couch's (as viewed from the side), resulting in a slightly pointier bill tip. In Couch's, the culmen is slightly convex outwards, resulting in a blunter bill tip. Tropical also has a proportionally narrower bill base than Couch's, which can be seen if viewed from below as is often the case for birds perched high. In summary, Tropical's bill has a longer, meaner appearance while

Couch's bill has a more conical and blunter appearance. Both species have a slight hook at the tip of the upper mandible, but Tropical can appear more hooked than Couch's, accentuating the meaner look of Tropical compared to Couch's.

Tail – The tails of Tropical and Couch's are similar in appearance and show considerable overlap. However, Tropical tends to show a deeper notch or fork to the tail than Couch's. The corners of the tail on Couch's tends to be slightly more rounded compared to the more angular corners in Tropical. Tropical's tail at times appears to flare outwards towards the tip. The depth of the fork in Tropical may vary geographically. The tail of the southern subspecies of Tropical (*T. m. melancholicus*) is the most forked and flared. According to Traynor (1979) the fork may be slightly more pronounced in *T. m. satrapa* compared to *T. m. occidentalis*, although this was not confirmed by my analyses of photos.

Extent of yellow on undersides – Both

Tropical and Couch's are bright yellow below. However, Couch's yellow coloration tends to be bolder compared to Tropical's slightly paler yellow. The bold yellow on Couch's continues to the upper chest and often contrasts strongly with the light gray throat and face. The yellow in Tropical also continues to the upper chest, but the upper chest often shows a dingy olive wash, reducing the contrast between the yellow chest and the gray face and throat. In Couch's, the chest is often solid yellow, lacking the dinginess of Tropical's chest. It important to note that there is overlap in the boldness of yellow undersides and chest, so this field mark should never be used alone.

Overall shape – Tropical tends to be a longer bird with a slightly longer, narrower and more forked tail. Couch's tends to be more compact with a slightly shorter, wider and less forked tail. Head shape overlaps between the two species, but subtle differences at the extremes exist. Tropical tends to have a flatter crown and shallower forehead, accentuating Tropical's meaner look. Couch's head is often more rounded with a slightly steeper forehead, giving it a slight dove-like appearance. Couch's often looks more pot-bellied or barrel-chested than the slimmer overall shape of Tropical.

MOLT AND AGING

Details of molt are described in Pyle (1997). Differences in molt between Couch's and Tropical need further research. The discussion here on molt is generalized and presented only to highlight potential pitfalls of identifying birds with worn feathers.

In Couch's, the prebasic molt occurs on summer grounds (Jul-Sep) and ranges from incomplete-complete in first year birds and mostly complete in adult birds. Prebasic molts include greater coverts, tertials, secondaries primaries and rectrices. Prealternate molt occurs between Feb-May and is rather limited.

In Tropical (*T. m. occidentalis*), the prebasic molt occurs on wintering grounds with first year birds molting between Sep-Nov

(incomplete) and adult birds between Jul-Nov (mostly complete). Prebasic molts include greater coverts, tertials, secondaries primaries and rectrices. Prealternate molt occurs in Feb-May and is rather limited. *T. m. satrapa*'s molt may be more similar to that of Couch's, but more study is needed.

Adults of both species can often look worn in summer (June-Aug) with the edges of flight feathers, covert feathers and rectrices appearing frayed. These worn feathers are replaced during the prebasic molt, which is usually complete by late fall after which the plumage will appear fresher, brighter and crispier. Birds in their first year go through an incomplete prebasic molt between September and November. The juvenal plumage of these first-year birds generally appears fresh with little wear.

In both species, the outermost primary (p10) can be useful in ageing and sexing both species. Juvenal p10 shows a blunt tip whereas adult p10s show more pointed tips with males showing a more tapered or lanceolate tips than females.



Tropical Kingbird (14 Aug 2021; Chalk Bluffs, Uvalde County, TX). Note long bill with straight culmen, shallow forehead, yellow chest with dingy olive wash, and forked tail. Photographed by Cin-Ty Lee.



Tropical Kingbird (21 Dec 2021, Brownsville, TX). Note bill is narrow when seen from below. Note also the slender appearance, which is typical of Tropical. Dingy olive wash across yellow chest reduces contrast between upper chest and white throat. Tail is less forked than typical Tropical. Photographed by Cin-Ty Lee.



Tropical Kingbird (27 Dec 2021, Brownsville, TX). Pale edges of primary feathers in the lower wing panel are evident. Note also the narrow based bill, dingy olive wash across yellow chest, shallow forehead and flat crown, forked tail, and more angular corners of tail tip. Photographed by Chris Bick.



Tropical Kingbird (19 Sep 2016, South Padre Island, TX). Diagnostic features are long, narrow bill with straight culmen, shallow sloping forehead and flattish crown, dingy olive wash across chest, pale fringes on primaries in lower wing panel, short P/T index and forked tail. This bird appears to be in the process of replacing some tail feathers. Lower wing panel here looks dark, but note existence of pale edges. Photographed by Letha Slagle.



Tropical Kingbird (28 Nov 2021, Brownsville, TX). Diagnostic features are deeply forked and flaring tail with pointed tail corners, pale feather edges to primaries in lower wing panel (weak wing panel contrast), dingy olive wash across chest, and narrow bill with straight culmen. Although difficult to see in this photo, P/T index is short. Photographed by Mark Kulstad.



Couch's Kingbird (12 Apr 2016, Mission County, TX). Note relatively short, conical bill, yellow chest, black lower wing panel, short and minimally forked tail, and long P/T index. Photographed by Bradley Hacker.



Couch's Kingbird (29 Dec 2021, Houston, TX). Broad base of bill typical of Couch's can be seen well from this underside view. Note bold yellow chest contrasting with white chin and lacking the dingy olive wash of Tropical. Side of bird is in the shade, but the solid black primaries (lower wing panel) is apparent, contrasting with the pale-edged secondaries stack. Note tail tip shows a very slight fork, much shallower than typical Tropical. Corners of tail tip are slightly rounded instead of angular as in Tropical. Photographed by Cin-Ty Lee.



Couch's Kingbird (14 Mar 2021, Kinney County, TX). Note broad-based of bill typical of Couch's. Bold yellow chest contrasts with white throat. Tail relatively short with shallow fork typical of Couch's. Note rounded corners of tail. Photographed by Cin-Ty Lee.

OUTLOOK

Whenever possible, vocalizations should be noted when identifying a Tropical or Couch's Kingbird. However, if carefully studied, visual identification is possible. Key to a successful visual identification is a holistic approach in which the combination of field marks is used rather than relying on one single field mark. The two species differ subtly in bill shape/size, wing panel contrast, primary/tertiary ratio, body shape, head shape, tail shape and brightness of yellow on chest. Wing panel contrast and primary/tertiary ratio are introduced here as new field marks. While all of the above features are variable, their combination allow identification to species in many instances. Some birds should of course be

left unidentified if most of the above features cannot be examined. This framework for visual identification of Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds allows re-examination of historical photographic records of this complex.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Gary Voelker and Heather Prestridge at Texas A&M's Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections for access to museum specimens. Discussions with John Berner, Letha Slagle, and Ron Weeks are appreciated. We also thank the Macauley Library and Xeno-canto for access to photographs and recordings. We thank Chris Bick, Bradley Hacker, Mark Kulstad, and Letha Slagle for photos.

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Cin-Ty Lee
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A DECADE OF BIRDWATCHING WITH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

By Martha McLeod

This year I completed my 30th year of teaching and my 12th year of sponsoring a youth birdwatching program. I was inspired to create a youth birding program many years ago after experiencing several fabulous spring migrations here in the Coastal Bend area in Rockport-Fulton. My young elementary students would notice the vibrant migrants visiting our campus gardens and would be eager to learn the identity of the birds seen at our flowers, feeders, and water features. TOS member Bron Rorex-Carrier made contact with me and the result was the creation of one of the most successful and enduring youth birdwatching program in Texas.

Fast forward to the spring of 2022. This year I had a records high number of 9 youth teams competing in the **Great Texas Birding Classic**. Many of my former elementary birding students returned to assist me as middle and high school-aged tutors for my younger beginning birder students. And these older students are still interested in competing in the Classic! I am incredibly grateful for the sponsorship by TOS for 4 of those 9 youth teams that entered this year. It is noteworthy to point out that 3 of the 4 TOS sponsored teams took 1st place in their respective categories (Roughwings, Gliders, and Human-powered).

The greatest honor for an educator is to see a child take the information shared with them, internalize it, and then use it to solve problems or make sense of the world around them. Watching my students evaluate habitats while on field trips to understand population numbers of birds in a specific area or use their knowledge to identify species of birds seen in a specific area is incredibly rewarding to me. Exciting birds the kids found and identified this past year included

Magnificent Frigatebirds, both Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Eastern Bluebirds, both Rose-breasted and Blue Grosbeaks, and both Indigo and Painted Buntings. The excitement on a child's face when they first observe any of those birds for the first time through a spotting scope or binoculars is absolutely awe-inspiring.

During the 2021 – 2022 school year, I took on the task of a birding team sponsor solo. Bron made the tough decision to retire as a co-sponsor of this fabulous program back when the pandemic hit us. However, the program continues to grow and prosper. I continued to have early morning practices with all of my students on Wednesday mornings before school. In these early morning practices, students learn the basic anatomy of birds, how to use a field guide, and basic identification skills including field marks, behavior (Reddish Egrets' behavior while foraging in a shallow bay for example), and bird calls. I then continued to take monthly field trips so that my students could put their identification skills to the test in real world settings. We took field trips to Hazel Bazemore in September to observe the Hawk Watch; we toured the Fennessey Ranch in October with Joan Garland and Sally Crofutt; December led us to our local Rockport Beach Park to observe shorebirds; January took us to Port Aransas so that the students could observe birds at the jetties, Charlie's Pasture, Paradise Pond, and the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center; we took trips to Goose Island State Park and Camp Aranzazu in February; and March concluded our regular field trips before the TPWD Birding Classic with a last practice field trip to Blucher Park in Corpus Christi.

The Rockport-Fulton area sponsors a HummerBird Celebration during the 3rd



3rd Grade group Picture



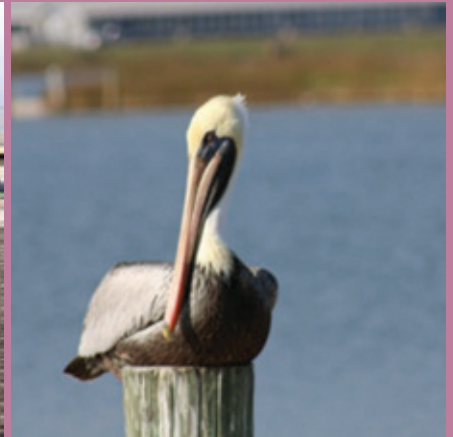
Ring-billed Gull



Blaine using the new camera to photograph a gull



Brianna using the camera for the first time



Brown Pelican resting on a post



Haidyn was great at photography today!



Brianna is proud of the way the White Pelican printed out

weekend of September so that visitors can observe and learn about the mass migration of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and other birds through the Coastal Bend area of Texas in the fall. Last year several of my birding team students joined me in leading a presentation about our youth birdwatching program. I will be presenting another Powerpoint speaker program again this fall at the *HummerBird Celebration* again if anyone would like to come see what my program looks like and get a few pointers on making birding experiences exciting for kids.

I took a huge leap of faith and expanded our program this past year by writing a grant back in May 2021 to the Aransas County Education Foundation so that we could purchase a high quality digital camera for the team. Students far exceeded my expectations at taking quality photographs with our new camera. I was incredibly impressed with the quality of pictures taken by the students. We printed some of the best pictures on to canvas and actually held a public gallery show at a local restaurant on May 15th. We were able to raise over \$1,000 with the sale of our prints and plan on using the funding generated to continue to print more pictures again next school year.

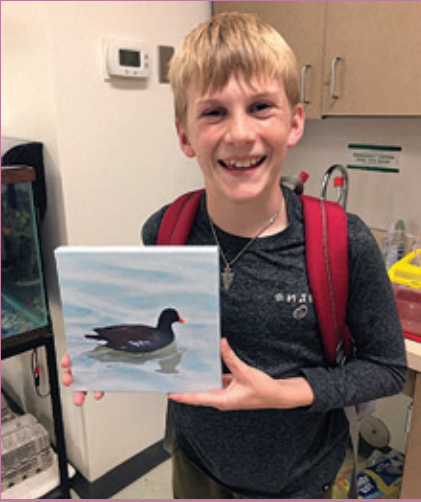
Another highlight of our year of birding was getting to attend a presentation by David Allen Sibley with several of my students. Sibley was the keynote speaker at the Birdiest Festival in America in Corpus Christi back on April 22nd. With donor funding, I was able to pay for a bus to transport a group of about 40 students and their parents over to the presentation on a Friday after school. Several of my students brought their Sibley field guides with them to the presentation hoping that Sibley might have time to autograph their books. Much to their delight Sibley not only autographed all of their books, but he also made a sketch inside the cover of the book of each student's favorite bird. Sibley's presentation focused on the release of his newest book

What It's Like To Be A Bird. After several days of the students telling friends and family members about this amazing book, a local resident and friend of ours (Lerrin Johnson) purchased a class set of the books so that each of my birding team students could have their own copy.

As the instructor and sponsor of a youth birding team, I have tried to squeeze in time to advance my own knowledge of avian life in addition to having been a full-time elementary science lab instructor. I was excited to attend to the *Del Rio Birding the Border festival* in April of 2021, the *Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration* in August of 2021, and the *Laredo Birding Festival* in February of 2022. When encountering new species of birds at these various locations in the state, I am reminded of the thrill that my students must feel when learning about local birds seen in our area and encountering them for the first time.

In May of 2022 I semi-retired as a public school teacher after 30 years in education as a science teacher. However, I presented an idea to the superintendent and school board that would allow me to return part-time to continue leading new group of students into the fabulous world of birding each year while working only 1 day per week. I was excited and grateful to learn that my passion and devotion to teaching birding to the students of Aransas County ISD was fully supported by the school district. I am looking forward to another exciting year of birdwatching with students in 2022 – 2023!

Thank you TOS for enabling me to enter so many teams of students in the Great Texas Birding Classic! These students are interested in enjoying the avian life of the Coastal Bend and your sponsorship insures their opportunity to accomplish that and put their skills to the test. This is a big win-win for the kids and the birdlife of our great state.



Everett took a picture of a Common Gallinule



Hollis is proud of the Brown Pelican picture ready for display



Ryland holds his Brown Pelican photo



Sara holds a picture of a Great Blue Heron ready for Sunday

The ACISD birding teams took another practice field trip yesterday to Port Aransas. I had the R-F Middle School students assisting as mentors on this trip and they were paired up with younger FLC students. Thank you Mrs. Tran and Mrs. Frazier for allowing me to set the trip up this way. I was beaming with PRIDE!!!! Tourists and Winter Texans were in awe of the excitement and knowledge that our students had while at the Leona Turnbull Birding Center in Port Aransas. I also had the new cameras with us and the middle schoolers made sure all of the younger

students had opportunities to photograph birds. I have only downloaded just a few of their photos and WOW WOW WOW!!! Great pictures!!! I will be adding more to this shared folder in the days to come. Be sure to also check out all of the videos I made of the kids while there. We will be printing some of the better photos and printing them onto canvas and metal later in the year for a public gallery show.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11pmU1wSodANMQzI84IUjiCxIyLqs8D4e?usp=sharing>

I am happy to report that both groups of students found and identified a total of 47 species of birds. Great job in the overcast, chilly weather!

Students were accompanied by their ACISD school sponsor Martha McLeod.

R-F Middle School mentors assisting on the trip included (shining examples of some of more outstanding middle schoolers):

Kam Alston, Ty Blankenship, Ryan Brewington, Adyson Burton, Noble Chapman, Cruz Dominguez, Juliet Flores, Elsie Hale, Chase Waggoner, Riley Waggoner, and Logann Wood.

**JANUARY 27TH MORNING GROUP
7:30 – 11:00**

Braden Almond
Mamic Alston

Ella Buckley
Pas Dominguez
Cade Engel
Kennedy Engel
Everett Gambill
Haidyn Garcia
Benji Hale
Brianna Hill
Liam Hunt
Samuel Lynch
Mackey Westlake
Ryland Wood

AFTERNOON GROUP 11:15 – 2:00

Bradford Brundrett
Blaine Chapman
Sara Goode
Paris Guthrie
Kennedi Johnson
Hollis Weems



Paris identifies birds seen at Port A



Port A group 1



Port A Group 2



TOS Competitive Coastal Coots



TOS Pedaling Plovers



TOS Pedaling Plovers



TOS Teenage Tanagers and a couple of older Orioles

I am pleased to announce the formation of birding teams for the 2021 - 2022 school year at Fulton Learning Center. Students are ready to get to work learning about the migratory and resident species of birds of the Coastal Bend area of Texas. Students will be practicing every Wednesday morning at 7:00AM to learn to identify bird species by their field marks, their behavior, and by the sounds that they make. Our first practice session was last Wednesday morning where students learned the basic anatomy of birds and how to use a field guide. Within the field guides, students analyzed the range maps to determine if species would be found here in Texas in a specific season.

The FLC birding program has been the top youth birding program in the state of Texas for several years in a row as evidenced by the first place finishes in the Great Texas Birding Classic each year sponsored by Texas

Parks & Wildlife Dept. The success of our program is due in part from the support from ACISD staff, administrators, parents, community members, school board members, and support from various birding organizations. We have had tremendous collaboration and support from several community members and organizations such as the Aransas Bird & Nature Club, Texas Ornithological Society, Fennessey Ranch, and Captain Tommy Moore's Rockport Birding and Kayak Adventures, Wings Rescue Center, Hawk Watch volunteers, and TPWD.

The first field trip of the year will be to the Hawk Watch at Hazel Bazemore Park in Calallen on Friday, September 24th.

Team members shown in the group photo above are:

3rd grade: Benji Hale, Brianna Hill, Liam Hunt (not pictured Mamie Alston and Lane Garrett)

4th grade: Ella Buckley, Pasquale Dominguez, Bryant Manning, Hollis Weems, and alternate Kennedy Johnson (not shown Braden Almond and alternate Haidyn Garcia)



Birders complete their “bird anatomy” drawings

5th grade: Blaine Chapman, Everett Gambill, Kennedy Vonhartmann-Engel, Mackey Westlake (Not shown Paris Guthrie and alternate Samuel Lynch)

ACISD school sponsor Martha McLeod



FLC 2021-2022 birding team

Kudos to the FLC and RFMS students that volunteered their time on Friday and Saturday to assist me with public presentations at HummerBird. These students were outstanding as they served as goodwill ambassadors between ACISD and the tourists visiting our community for the amazing fall migration of the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. These students were just AWESOME helping me to pass out handouts, seed packets, and fudge.

Thank you to:

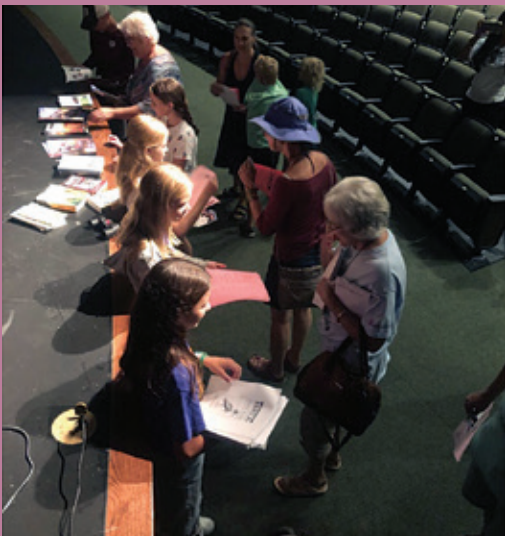
3rd graders Brianna Hill and Benji Hale and Ryland Wood

4th grader Braden Almond

6th graders Kinslee Burton, Riley Waggoner, and Logann Wood

7th graders Elsie Hale and Lauren Holden

8th graders Chase Waggoner and Noble Chapman who contributed an explanatory slide on using a birding app for the public



ACISD students as goodwill ambassadors



Friday assistants

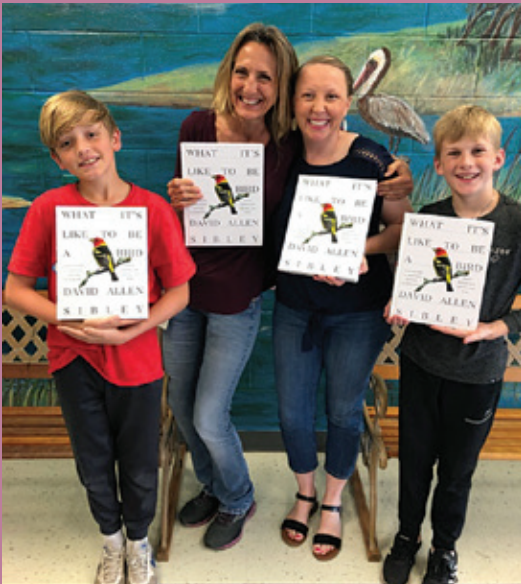


Saturday assistants

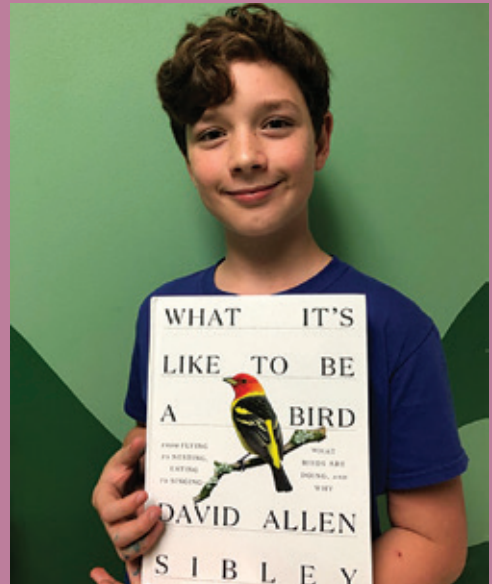
Lerrin and Asher Johnson just now donated the latest copy of the David Allen Sibley book entitled “What It’s Like To Be A Bird” to our precious students that attended a presentation by Sibley last week. So awesome to have the books hand delivered into the hands

of our birding kiddos. Everett Gambill, Benji Hale, and Blaine Chapman were excited to receive this donation and immediately began perusing the book!

Martha McLeod
E-mail: mmcleod@acid.org



Lerrin Johnson donates Sibley books to birding program



Sam was excited to get his own copy of the newest Sibley book

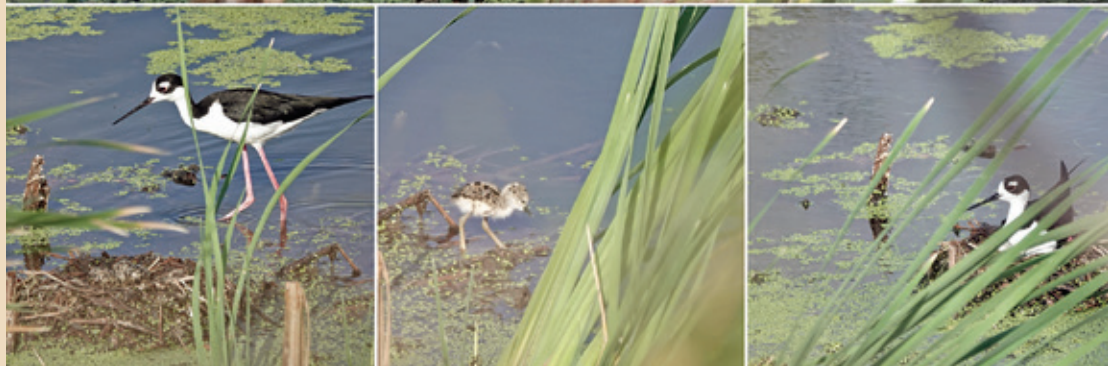
Blaine - 5th grade team member Blaine Chapman got some great photos of Northern Shovelers which were later used in our gallery show.

Haidyn – 4th grader Haidyn Garcia took excellent quality pictures of Brown Pelicans along the railings in our local beach park.

Brianna – 3rd grader Brianna Hill (long straight dark hair in picture) mastered the use of a new digital camera while taking pictures at Rockport Beach Park.

NESTING BLACK-NECKED STILTS AT MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON CENTER

Sheridan Chattin Coffey



Black-necked Stilts are nesting in large numbers at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center in San Antonio. There was a nest near the road with several eggs and a young chick.

Sheridan Chattin Coffey
E-mail: sngcanary@yahoo.com

MAGNIFICENT FLYERS

As the sun goes down,
they fly in low circles over the lake and forest.
Then, one-by-one, they slowly glide down
and land in a large leafless tree,
with many bare branches,
to roost for the night.



The next day they are in the air once again,
now soaring on thermals
in much greater and higher circles,
with little or no flapping of wings,
looking and sniffing for something to eat.
On detecting some food, they coast slowly downward;
their black and grey under-wing colors
more prominently visible now.
They possess marvelous natural aerodynamics
and are magnificent flyers,
some of the best in Avian Kingdom.
On the ground...beautiful they are not;
most say they are quite ugly.
But, these Turkey Buzzards serve a valuable function
to help keep fields, roads, and forests clean.
And they do it very well.

Jack Gibson
E-mail: w4svh@aol.com

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR BETWEEN BLACKBIRD AND COWBIRD

Petra Hockey

... A couple of days ago my friend Tira Overstreet and I were sitting in the shady observation shelter at the bird feeding/watering station of bird park host Michael Emenaker at Falcon State Park when we noticed an odd behavior of a male Brown-headed Cowbird. I followed one of the many Red-winged Blackbirds around that were moving through the undergrowth near the seed feeder. Every time the redwing stopped, the cowbird positioned itself in front of the blackbird, bending its head slightly sideways and down as if to offer the nape to the redwing. Every time the redwing re-positioned itself, the cowbird fol-

lowed and assumed the same stance, offering its fluffed up neck feathers to the redwing.

It was so obvious that we could only interpret this behavior in a single way. "Please preen my neck feathers". The redwing mostly ignored the cowbird, turned away from it and seemed almost a little annoyed. But a couple of time it actually acquiesced and preened the forehead and neck feathers a little.

It is uncommon but not unheard of that two different species preen each other but in this case we were left wondering if maybe the cowbird got raised in this redwing's nest and was still soliciting favors from its "parent".

Petra Hockey

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HARLEQUIN DUCKS AT PORT ARANSAS

Sheridan Chattin Coffey



Here are some better photos of the Harlequin Ducks in Port Aransas Texas today. If you are not a birder this won't mean much, but it meant a lot to Martin and me. We were amazingly lucky! There are only two previous accepted records of Harlequin Duck for Texas. They are normally found on the east and west coast. I saw my first ones in New Jersey over 20 years ago. This was not a bird I ever expected to see in Texas.

We were in Port Aransas this afternoon and were heading to the beach when our friend Tripp Davenport called Martin. I answered his phone since he was driving. Tripp told me he had found two Harlequin Ducks at the jetty. I literally screamed “_____ DRIVE TO **THE** JETTY, MARTIN!” without even telling him what Tripp had told me. I hung

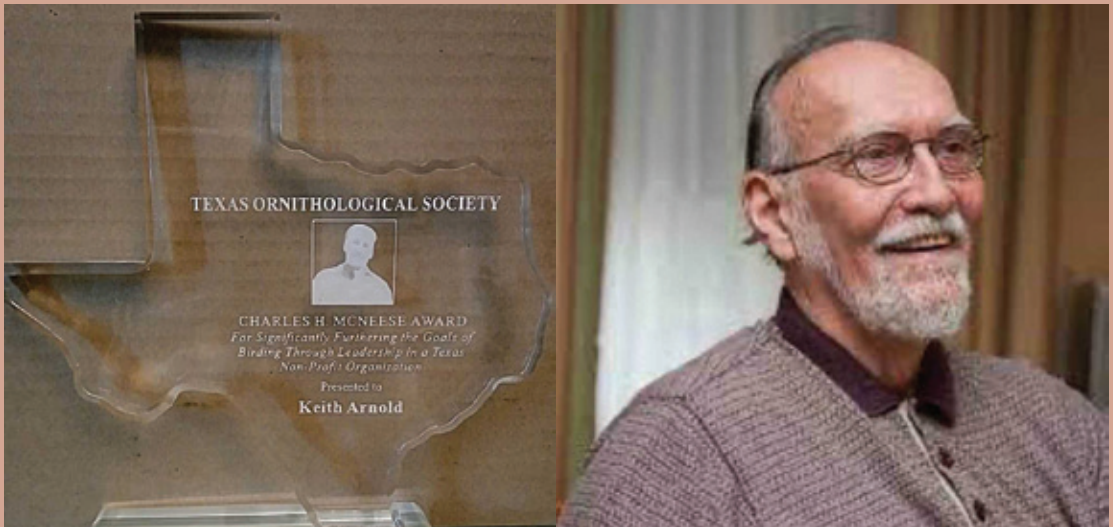
up and gasped “Harlequin Ducks!” We got behind two very slow snowbirds, who Martin passed, probably illegally.

We got to the jetty and jumped out. I tried to run, but my knees won't let me anymore. I could see Tripp, along with two other birders taking photos. Luckily, they were not too far down, still in the area with the concrete walkway. I got there and started snapping photos. The birds were literally under our feet. After about 15 minutes they flew across the ship channel to the San Jose Island side, which is in Aransas County. Martin tried to find them in the scope, but couldn't. As you can probably tell, this was a big deal to us!

Sheridan Chattin Coffey
E-mail: sngcanary@yahoo.com

TOS ANNOUNCES 2022 KINCAID AND MCNEESE AWARD RECIPIENTS

KEITH ARNOLD



CHARLES MCNEESE AWARD

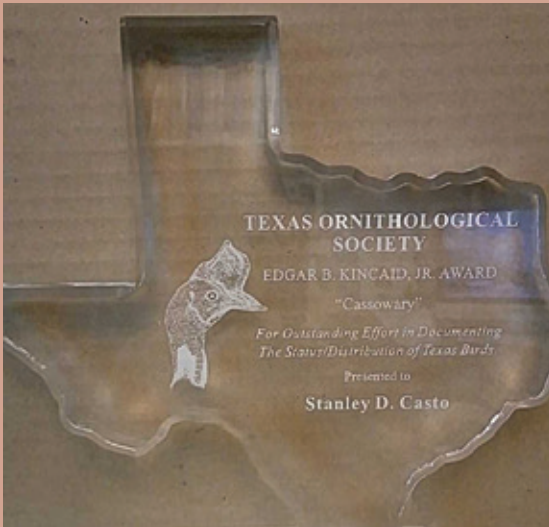
In 1952, Charles McNeese contacted a few friends and placed an “advertisement” in *The Spoonbill* of the Ornithology Group, Houston Outdoor Nature Club. On February 14, 1953, McNeese and a group that responded to his ad met in Austin and formed the Texas Ornithological Society. McNeese and his efforts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

This year's award was bestowed on Keith Arnold. Keith's affiliation with the Texas Ornithological Society (TOS hereafter) began in 1967 when Jerry Strickling asked him to help with the spring meeting in College Station that year. His involvement grew and he eventually served as president from 1982 to 1985. He further served as treasurer of the organization from 1987 to 1995. In 1999, the TOS honored him with a lifetime membership, an honor only bestowed on nine previous recipients since the organization's founding in 1953. The presentation read, in part, “[Keith

Arnold] has served TOS in many offices, many capacities and many ways. Throughout his distinguished professional carrier, Keith has been one of the loudest spokespersons on behalf of the contributions an ordinary bird watcher can make to the science of the study of birds.” In 2001, Keith demonstrated that ideal by initiating the *Texas Breeding Bird Atlas* project using information derived from the state's birdwatching community between 1987-92.

Keith's lasting legacy on Texas ornithology is far greater than the records he made, papers he published or programs he initiated. Though these were important and their impact will continue far beyond his lifetime, his greatest legacy is the training and inspiration he passed on to his students and to the birding community members he came into contact with. They share an enthusiasm and dedication to furthering our understanding of the birdlife of Texas, and will continue to pass that along to future generations. As internet data becomes so great and widely available from diverse sources, it is unlikely that any future Texas ornithologist will have such a impact and prominence in the Texas birding

community again.



STANLEY D. CASTO

EDGAR B. KINCAID, JR. AWARD

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

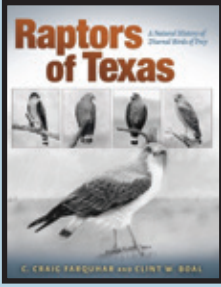
Stanley D. Casto is this year's honoree. Stanley is currently Wells Research Professor, Department of Biology, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Belton, Texas. He was formerly professor and chairman of the department of biology at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and retired from full-time teaching in 2000.

He has been a devoted contributor to TOS Publications since 1969 including Occasional Publications, Texas Birds, Texas Birds Annual, The Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society and *TOSNEWS*. Stan has profiled several species now extinct in Texas including the California Condor and Passenger Pigeon. His numerous historical articles on Oologists/Ornithologists in Texas has painted a picture of the early ornithologists forming a foundation for the future.

"I received your letter regarding the Kincaid Award. I am greatly honored to be acknowledged for having done so little field work regarding the distribution and natural history of birds. There are many who are much more deserving of this award than I am.

"My main contributions to ornithology are perhaps in the rescue of some of the early history of ornithological work in Texas, as well as the natural history and occurrence of quill mites of the House Sparrow and other species of birds in southern Texas. This work has been recognized in the genus *Castosyringophilus* (Bochov & Perez 2002) from the Mexican Parrotlet."

MEDIA REVIEWS



Raptors of Texas: A Natural History of Diurnal Birds of Prey

C. Craig Farquhar & Clint W. Boal

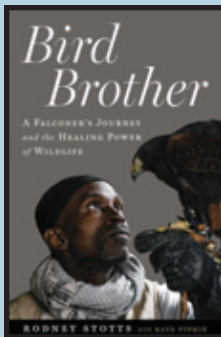
Texas A&M University Press, 2022

It was a long wait, but well worth it. I preordered a copy of *Raptors of Texas: A Natural History of Diurnal Birds of Prey* and received it in early May 2022. Craig Farquhar is an avian ecologist who retired from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and currently teaches at Texas State University; Clint Boal is a research wildlife biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Texas Cooperative Research Unit and teaches at Texas Tech University. Both authors are long-time raptor researchers with a wealth of knowledge and experience. They drew upon their expertise to bring together available information about diurnal raptor species occurring in Texas, a state with more raptor diversity than any other within the U.S.

Initial chapters provide information on raptor specimens that were collected in Texas; conservation issues; shared morphological and physiological characteristics; the ecology, behavior, and migration of raptors; raptor evolution and taxonomy; and a description of the 12 ecoregions in Texas. The majority of the book is dedicated to the eighth chapter, which provides detailed information for the 29 species of regularly occurring diurnal raptors. The final chapter contains condensed information for nine vagrant species whose occurrence within the state has been documented and verified. Three appendices provide a list of museums housing specimens of diurnal raptors collected in Texas, common and scientific names of plants and animals mentioned in the text, and a comprehensive list of all 38 diurnal raptors occurring in Texas.

The authors did an excellent job combing through scientific literature to pool information not only specific to raptors in Texas but, where possible, from studies focused on raptors occurring in Texas. This helps the reader by providing information applicable to raptor populations occurring within the state where habitat types, behavior, etc., may be very different from populations of the same species occurring in other areas. While not a field guide focused on identification, the book includes color photographs, black-and-white drawings, and color range maps for all regularly occurring species and most of the vagrants. My only critique is not having an index of the included tables and figures.

For anyone interested in diurnal raptors this book will make an excellent addition to your library, especially if your focus is raptors occurring in Texas. The authors set out to fill a gap in the existing literature and they certainly hit the mark with this book. *Michael T. Stewart*



Bird Brother: A Falconer's Journey and the Healing Power of Wildlife

Rodney Stotts

ISBN: 9781642831740, Publisher: Island Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 224, Shipping Weight: 1.50 lb

To escape the tough streets of Southeast Washington, D.C. in the late 1980s, young Rodney Stotts would ride the metro to the Smithsonian National Zoo. There, the bald eagles and other birds of prey captured his imagination for the first time. In *Bird Brother*, Rodney shares his unlikely journey to becoming a conservationist and one of America's few Black master falconers.

Rodney grew up during the crack epidemic, with guns, drugs, and the threat of incarceration an accepted part of daily life for nearly everyone he knew. To rent his own apartment, he needed a paycheck—something the money from dealing drugs didn't provide. For that, he took a position in 1992 with a new nonprofit, the Earth Conservation Corps. Gradually, Rodney fell in love with the work to restore and conserve the polluted Anacostia River that flows through D.C. As conditions along the river improved, he helped to reintroduce bald eagles to the region and befriended an injured Eurasian Eagle Owl named Mr. Hoots, the first of many birds whose respect he would work hard to earn.

Bird Brother is a story about pursuing dreams against all odds, and the importance of second chances. Rodney's life was nearly upended when he was arrested on drug charges in 2002. The jail sentence sharpened his resolve to get out of the hustling life. With the fierceness of the raptors he had admired for so long, he began to train to become a master falconer and to develop his own raptor education program

and sanctuary. Rodney's son Mike, a D.C. firefighter, has also begun his journey to being a master falconer, with his own kids cheering him along the way.

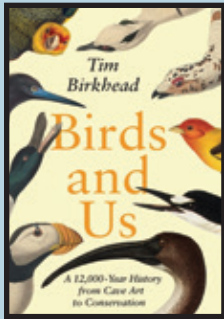
Eye-opening, witty, and moving, *Bird Brother* is a love letter to the raptors and humans who transformed what Rodney thought his life could be. It is an unflinching look at the uphill battle Black children face in pursuing stable, fulfilling lives, a testament to the healing power of nature, and a reminder that no matter how much heartbreak we've endured, we still have the capacity to give back to our communities and follow our wildest dreams.

Reviews

'Stott's gift for storytelling, as an educator and public speaker, is on full display in this remarkable memoir; it's thought-provoking, moving, and inspiring,'—starred review

'My overwhelming refrain to Rodney Stotts is thank you.' His story, and the pictures he paints as he tells it, are the most incredible demonstration of the substance of hope. He beautifully captures the complex, and often visceral, nature of finding life within death through the liberation that comes with 'looking up.'—Corina Newsome, ornithologist and environmental activist

'Rodney Stotts' story is a tremendously moving tribute to the power of birds to transform a life. Searingly honest, *Bird Brother* is a love letter to the avian world from a fiercely dedicated master falconer and tireless conservationist who not only does the work—no matter how unglamorous—but also inspires others to see the beauty of nature and find their place within it.'—Julia Zarankin, author of *Field Notes from an Unintentional Birder*



Birds and Us

Tim Birkhead

ISBN: 9780691239927, Publisher: Princeton University Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 496, Shipping Weight: 3.25 lb

From award-winning author and ornithologist Tim Birkhead, a sweeping history of the long and close relationship between birds and humans.

Since the dawn of human history, birds have stirred our imagination, inspiring and challenging our ideas about science, faith, art, and philosophy. We have worshipped birds as gods, hunted them for sustenance, adorned ourselves with their feathers, studied their wings to engineer flight, and, more recently, attempted to protect them. In *Birds and Us*, award-winning writer and ornithologist Tim Birkhead takes

us on a dazzling epic journey through our mutual history with birds, from the ibises mummified and deified by Ancient Egyptians to the Renaissance fascination with woodpecker anatomy—and from the Victorian obsession with egg collecting to today's fight to save endangered species and restore their habitats.

Spanning continents and millennia, *Birds and Us* chronicles the beginnings of a written history of birds in ancient Greece and Rome, the obsession with falconry in the Middle Ages, and the development of ornithological science. Moving to the twentieth century, the book tells the story of the emergence of birdwatching and the field study of birds, and how they triggered an extraordinary flowering of knowledge and empathy for birds, eventually leading to today's massive worldwide interest in birds—and the realization of the urgent need to save them.

Weaving in stories from Birkhead's life as scientist, including far-flung expeditions to wondrous Neolithic caves in Spain and the bustling guillemot colonies of the Faroe Islands, this rich and fascinating book is an unforgettable account of how birds have shaped us, and how we have shaped them.



Hummingbirds: A Celebration of Nature's Jewels

Glenn Bartley and Andy Swash

ISBN: 9780691182124, Publisher: WildGuides, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 288, Shipping Weight: 4.30 lb

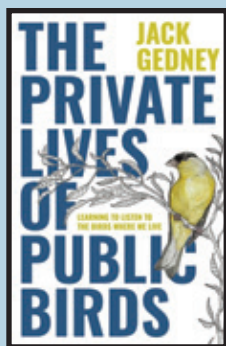
A stunningly illustrated guide to the wonderful world of hummingbirds.

With their dazzling colors, glittering iridescent feathers, fantastic adornments, astonishing powers of flight, and many other unique characteristics, hummingbirds are among the world's most extraordinary birds—true jewels of nature. This beautifully designed book offers a celebration of all aspects of hummingbirds and

their world, presenting the latest scientific information in an accessible style and featuring hundreds of the most spectacular photographs of hummingbirds ever taken, all enhanced by wonderful artwork.

A familiar sight across much of the Americas, hummingbirds have long captured the imagination and played an important part in myths, legends, and other aspects of human culture. Today, hummingbirds are some of the most popular of all birds, sought after by serious and casual birders alike. They are birds that inspire questions in anyone lucky enough to see them. How can they fly like that? Why are they so colorful? How many are there? And where and how do they live? This book answers these and many other questions, offering an enlightening and enjoyable guide to hummingbirds that only deepens their wonder.

A definitive yet accessible account of all aspects of hummingbird life; More than 500 spectacular color photographs; Specially commissioned illustrations; Facts and figures on status, population, distribution, and conservation designations of all the world's hummingbirds.



The Private Lives of Public Birds: Learning to Listen to the Birds Where They Live

Jack Gedney

ISBN: 9781597145749, Publisher: Heyday, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 224, Shipping Weight: 1.50 lb

Jack Gedney's studies of birds provide resonant, affirming answers to the questions: Who is this bird? In what way is it beautiful? Why does it matter? Masterfully linking an abundance of poetic references with up-to-date biological science, Gedney shares his devotion to everyday Western birds in fifteen essays. Each essay illuminates the life of a single species and its relationship to humans, and how these species can help us understand birds in general. A dedicated birdwatcher

and teacher, Gedney finds wonder not only in the speed and glistening beauty of the Anna's hummingbird, but also in her nest building. He acclaims the turkey vulture's and red-tailed hawk's roles in our ecosystem, and he venerates the inimitable California scrub jay's work planting acorns. Knowing that we hear birds much more often than we see them, Gedney offers his expert's ear to help us not only identify bird songs and calls but also understand what the birds are saying. The crowd at the suet feeder will never look quite the same again. Join Gedney in the enchanted world of these not-so-ordinary birds, each enlivened by a hand-drawn portrait by artist Anna Kus Park.



Backyard Birding for Kids: An Introduction to Ornithology

Erika Zambello

ISBN: 9781647552237, Publisher: Adventure Publications, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 136, Shipping Weight: 1.00 lb

With bird facts, an identification guide, and how-to instructions, this is a perfect children's introduction to bird-watching.

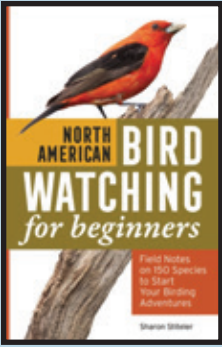
You've seen birds in your backyard or at the local park. Now become a young ornithologist. Learn all about the scientific study of birds. Author, birder, and outdoors researcher Erika Zambello presents a kids' introduction to birding. The children's book, ideal for early and middle-grade readers, conveys fascinating information for

beginners. Kids gain an understanding of such topics as bird anatomy, life cycles, and habitat.

From there, readers are introduced to 60 different species of important birds to know. With chickadees, hummingbirds, owls, woodpeckers, and more, the field guide section serves as an identification aid and offers information about when to look, where to look, and what to look for.

A how-to section provides advice to help children get started birding—with practical tips on attracting birds to their yards. There are also fun activities for the entire family to enjoy, a wonderful way to turn birding into a shared hobby. The activities range from simple, like leaving out nesting materials, to advanced, such as planting a bird- and pollinator-friendly garden.

Inside You'll Find: How-to section, including details on getting started, The basics of ornithology, Identification guide to common and important birds to know, Bird-related activities that the entire family can enjoy.



North American Bird Watching for Beginners: Field Notes on 150 Species to Start Your Birding Adventures

Sharon Stiteler

ISBN: 9781638783480, Publisher: Rockridge Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 176, Shipping Weight: 1.50 lb

Learn how to identify 150 North American birds. From the tiny ruby-throated hummingbird to the powerful bald eagle, there's a fascinating variety of unique and beautiful birds that call North America home. This compact field guide is the perfect introduction to birding. You'll find essential information about 150 North American species and expert advice on how to get started on your bird-watching journey.

What sets this book apart from other bird books: The basics of bird watching—Learn important birding terminology, what equipment to have on hand, and how to log and submit your bird sightings. Complete bird profiles—Discover full-color photos and need-to-know details about each species' appearance, behavior, and population range. Easy-to-find information—This book's simple organization makes it the ideal companion for your bird watching adventures, with clearly marked sections for common backyard birds, songbirds, shorebirds and waterbirds, and raptors.

Get to know your feathered neighbors with this field guide to the birds of North America.



This is a Book for People Who Love Birds

Danielle Belleny

ISBN: 9780762475971, Publisher: Running Press Adult, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 152, Shipping Weight: 1.00 lb

Full of bird watching basics, fun facts, and illustrated species profiles, This Is a Book for People Who Love Birds is a joyful celebration of our feathered friends!

For seasoned spotters and backyard hobbyists alike, this charming guide offers an accessible look at the irresistible world of birding. Wildlife biologist and co-founder of Black Birders Week Danielle Belleny walks readers through the essentials of bird watching, from equipment to locations, offering new ideas for finding avian friends wherever you may be. Engaging profiles of North American bird species, from cardinals and blue jays to raptors and sea birds, are accompanied by whimsical illustrations sure to spark the imaginations of birders from coast to coast. Deeply researched and accessible to enthusiasts of all levels of experience, This Is a Book for People Who Love Birds is an essential addition to every bird lover's field library.



The Backyard Bird Sanctuary: A Beginner's Guide to Creating a Wild Bird Habitat at Home

Alan Baczkiewicz

ISBN: 9781507217269, Publisher: Adams Media, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 128, Shipping Weight: 2.00 lb

Identify beautiful birds right in the comfort of your backyard with this illustrated, easy-to-use introductory guide to birding.

Ever wonder how to attract beautiful birds right to your backyard? Now you can create a bird-watching paradise with this accessible guidebook that teaches you everything you need to know about welcoming your new feathered friends and how to care for them while they're visiting.

Backyard Bird Sanctuary helps you attract fifty of the most common and sought-after birds in the United States. With beautiful, full-color illustrations of both the male and female of each species, you'll have no trouble identifying your new companions. Inside you'll find everything you need to know about welcoming these birds into your yard including: Preferred types of food and feeder; Nesting and brooding habits; Range and migratory patterns; Effective techniques for attracting birds; Ways to provide shelter; And so much more!

With tips and advice for any sized yard—even a small patio or balcony—you can enjoy the beauty of wild birds wherever you live. Now you can surround your home with cheerful bird songs and beautiful plumage all year long!



The Bird Watcher's Journal

ISBN: 9781681888651, Publisher: Weldon Owen, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 168, Shipping Weight: 1.50 lb

A durable, lightweight journal for bird watchers to record sightings and organize notes.

Welcome to your bird watching journal, a comprehensive place to record your sightings and experiences, and to keep notes for the future. Birding Logs include guided prompts to track key information such as each bird's name, colors and markings, habitat, and behavior, as well as your current location and weather. Blank pages provide space for sketches, lists, and additional notes. The final section, Birding Checklists, gives you a place to track backyard birds local to you, a wish list of birds you hope to spot one day, and destinations you want to travel to for bird watching.

DELUXE JOURNAL Rounded corners, ribbon bookmark, elastic-band closure, elastic pen loop, inside pocket for convenient storage, and high-quality paper that ink won't bleed through.

SPECIALIZED PAGES This guided journal gives the writer places to record their bird sightings, with specialized details including weather; season, habitat, behavior; colors and markings, as well as space for sketches and other notes.

LIGHTWEIGHT AND PORTABLE: Fits easily into a backpack or glove box, allowing for quick access for notes on the go. Birding Log Book; Birding Field Diary.



Halcyon Journey: In Search of the Belted Kingfisher

Marina Richie

ISBN: 9780870712036, Publisher: Oregon State University Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 251, Shipping Weight: 2.00 lbs

More than one hundred species of kingfishers brighten every continent but Antarctica. Not all are fishing birds. They range in size from the African dwarf kingfisher to the laughing kookaburra of Australia. This first book to feature North America's belted kingfisher is a lyrical story of observation, revelation, and curiosity in the presence of flowing waters.

The kingfisher—also known as the halcyon bird—is linked to the mythic origin of halcyon days, a state of happiness that Marina Richie hopes to find outside her back door in Missoula, Montana. Epiphanies and a citizen science discovery punctuate days tracking a bird that outwits at every turn. The female is more colorful than the male (unusual and puzzling) and the birds' earthen nest holes are difficult to locate.

While the heart of the drama takes place on Rattlesnake Creek in Missoula, the author's adventures in search of kingfisher kin on the lower Rio Grande, in South Africa, and in London illuminate her relationships with the birds of Montana. In the quiet of winter, she explores tribal stories of the kingfisher as messenger and helper; pivotal qualities for her quest. For all who love birds or simply seek solace in nature, Halcyon Journey is an inviting introduction to the mythic and mysterious belted kingfisher.



Bird Migration: A New Understanding

John Rappole

ISBN: 9781421442389, Publisher: Johns Hopkins University Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 344, Shipping Weight: 2.50 lb

A fascinating and nuanced exploration of why, how, and which birds migrate.

Bird migration captivates the human imagination, yet for most of us, key aspects of the phenomenon remain a mystery. How do birds sense the ideal moment to take wing, and once the epic journey has begun, how do they find their distant destinations? Fresh insights about avian movements are still constantly emerging, powered by new tools like molecular genetics and transmitter miniaturization.

In this book, renowned ornithologist and author John H. Rappole reveals intriguing results of recent scientific studies on migration, explaining their importance for birders, nature lovers, and researchers alike. Debunking misconceptions about the lives of birds that have persisted for thousands of years, Rappole explores unexpected causes and previously misunderstood aspects of the

annual migration cycle. From the role of migrating birds in zoonotic disease transmission to climate change's impact on migration patterns, Rappole tackles crucial questions and ensures that readers come away with a new understanding of why and how birds migrate.



All About Birds: Southwest

ISBN: 9780691990040, Publisher: Princeton University Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 284, Shipping Weight: 2.50 lb

These definitive books provide the most up-to-date resources and expert coverage on bird species throughout North America.

This dynamic guide is the perfect companion for anyone interested in the birds of the southwestern United States. The guide offers fascinating details about the birds around you, useful bird ID tips, and handy bird-watching information. It presents full accounts of the 203 species most commonly seen in the Southwest; beautiful photographs of male, female, and immature birds, as well as morphs, and breeding and nonbreeding plumage (so you can ID birds all year long); current range maps; and so much more. The southwestern edition of All About Birds is easy to use and easy to share.

This volume features the following states: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah.

Descriptions of 203 bird species, including four photos for each bird chosen specifically for better ID and sourced from the Macaulay Library (a collection of bird photos from citizen scientists); Quick and easy index with illustrations on cover flaps, with complete index at the back; Information on Cornell Lab citizen-science programs and how to participate; Bonus content includes identification best practices and tips on photography, birdscaping, food and feeding, and more.



All About Birds: Texas & Oklahoma

ISBN: 9780691990064, Publisher: Princeton University Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 320, Shipping Weight: 2.50 lb

These definitive books provide the most up-to-date resources and expert coverage on bird species throughout North America.

This dynamic guide is the perfect companion for anyone interested in the birds of Texas and Oklahoma. The guide features fascinating details about the birds around you, useful bird ID tips, and handy bird-watching information. It presents full accounts of the 238 species most commonly seen in these two states; beautiful photographs of male, female, and immature birds, as well as morphs, and breeding and nonbreeding plumage (so you can ID birds all year long); current range maps; and so much more. The Texas and Oklahoma edition of All About Birds is easy to use and easy to share.

Descriptions of 238 bird species, including four photos for each bird chosen specifically for better ID and sourced from the Macaulay Library (a collection of bird photos from citizen scientists); Quick and easy index with illustrations on cover flaps, with complete index at the back; Information on Cornell Lab citizen-science programs and how to participate; Bonus content includes identification best practices and tips on photography, birdscaping, food and feeding, and more



Vagrancy in Birds

Alexander Lees & James Gilroy

ISBN: 9780691224886, Publisher: Princeton University Press, Year of Publication: 2022, Page Count: 400, Shipping Weight: 5.00 lb

An exploration of the causes and patterns of avian vagrancy.

Avian vagrancy—the appearance of birds outside of their expected habitat—is a phenomenon that has fascinated natural historians for centuries, from Victorian collectors willing to spend fortunes on a rare specimen to today's bird-chasing 'twitchers.' Yet despite the obsessions of countless ornithologists, what do we actually know about the enigma of vagrancy? In *Vagrancy in Birds*, Alexander Lees and James Gilroy explore the causes, patterns, and processes behind the occurrences of these

unique birds.

Lees and Gilroy draw on recent research to answer fundamental questions: What causes avian vagrancy? Why do some places attract so many vagrant birds? Why are some species more predisposed to long-range vagrancy than others? The authors present readers with everything known about the subject, and bring together different lines of evidence to make the case for vagrancy as a biological phenomenon with important implications for avian ecology and evolution.

Filled with a wealth of photographs, *Vagrancy in Birds* will fascinate avian enthusiasts everywhere.

After the book reviews insert, TOS members receive a 30% discount from A&M University Press and Princeton University Press. The code is found in their membership renewal email, or they can contact tosmember@yahoo.com.



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SWALLOW-TAILED KITE AT GANADO, TEXAS

Tira Overstreet



Today on the way home I stopped by Ganado TX to see the Swallow-tailed Kite chick that Petra said she had seen. I got there just at feeding time. What a treat. Usually I get to see chicks sleeping or panting in the heat.

Tira Overstreet
E-mail: oddbird47@comcast.net

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BIRDS OF THE BRUSH HIGHLIGHTS REGIONAL ART

LBF ART CONTEST CONTINUES AFTER PANDEMIC

The *Laredo Center for the Arts* celebrated the artwork and winners of the 10th Birds of the Brush art contest for our *Laredo Birding Festival*.

2022 Birds of the Brush Art Contest						
Winners						
	Elementary	Middle	High	Amateur	Professional	Photography
1st Place	Madeline Boswell	Paloma Vazquez	Jacob Cardenas	Joanna De Leon	Nancy Poinset	Enrique Saucedo
2nd Place	Sofia Hernandez	Regina Loa	Andrea Solis	Fidel & Connie Guerra	Hilda Zavala	Cesar Gabriel Gomez
3rd Place	Sabrina Perez	Mariana Rodriguez	Angelica Pesina	Hector Huerta	Amando Chapa	Luis Ramirez
Honorable Mention	Almaida Garcia	Camila Marroquin	Abisal Garcia	Anna Linda Davila	Melissa Rendon	
Honorable Mention	Daniella Guerrero	Kai-Lin Barba	Amor Aguilar	Gina Olivarez	Paty C. Orduna	
BEST OF SHOW	Anastasia Galvan					







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Make Me Smile Award

- The Nine Inch Rails
- Goose Springsteen & the Geese Street Band
- Unladen Swallows
- Star Warblers (May the Focus be with You)
- TOS Millennium Falcons
- TOS Fire-Quackers
- Trill Seekers



Most Valuable Birder

9 Teams!

Martha
McLeod



Roughwings – Central Coast

- 3rd Place: 57 species
- **TOS Purple Peregrines**, Texas Ornithological Society
- 2nd Place: 76 species
- **Mile 533 Marine Ways Pirate Pintails**, 533 Marine Ways



Roughwings – Central Coast

- 1st Place: TIE!
- 102 species
- **TOS Competitive Coastal Coots**, Texas Ornithological Society
- **Lynch Maritime Fabulous Fulton Falcons**, Lynch Maritime



Roughwings – Lower Coast

- 3rd Place: 41 species
- **TOS Millennium Falcons**, Texas Ornithological Society
- 2nd Place: 43 species
- **TOS Juvenile Cooing Cuckoo Birds**, Texas Ornithological Society
- 3rd Place: 48 species
- **TOS Jays**, Texas Ornithological Society



Roughwings – Upper Coast

- 1st Place: 67 species
- **TOS Happy Hawks Roughwings**, Texas Ornithological Society



Gliders – Central Texas Coast

- 2nd Place: 92 species
- **Brown Water Marine Maritime Mergansers**, Brown Water Marine
- 1st Place: 102 species
- **TOS Seaworthy Senior Soras**, Texas Ornithological Society



Gliders – Heart of Texas East

- 3rd Place: 19 species
- **TOS Cuckoos and Allies**, Texas Ornithological Society
- 2nd Place: 51 species
- **Linam's Legacy**
- 1st Place: 97 species
- **TOS "R" Us!**, Texas Ornithological Society



Human-Powered Tournament

- 2nd Place: 42 species
- **Algerita Roadrunners**
- 1st Place: 80 species
- **TOS Pirate Plovers,**
Texas Ornithological Society



Texas Birds Annual Staff

Jack Clinton Eitnienar Editor
Susan Foster, Judy Kestner, Bron Rorex,
and Kent Rylander.....Copy Readers

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LEUCISTIC BIRDS IN TEXAS....



Leucistic Red-tailed Hawk. Photographed by Thom Rachael Creel in Tarrant, County.



Leucistic Great-tailed Grackle. Photographed by Susan Schliep Kosoris in Surfside, Brazoria County.



Leucistic Piping Plover this afternoon right at the 25 mile marker of Padre Island National Seashore (Kenedy county).



Leucistic Buff Bellied Hummingbird - John Yochum alerted us to this beauty.



Our backyard leucistic Golden-fronted woodpecker in Kingsville, Texas. Photo Carter Crouch.

Lytle Houston Blankenship

MARCH 1, 1927 – MAY 24, 2022



Photo by Susan Schaezler

Lytle H. Blankenship passed away peacefully at home on May 24, 2022. He was born on March 1, 1927 in Campbellton, Texas to Sidney and Amanda Blankenship. He was predeceased by his parents, 15 brothers and sisters, and one son Kerry Jon Blankenship.

He is survived by his wife Margaret (Luecke) Blankenship and children, Terry Blankenship and his wife Ann, of Sinton, Jerry Alan Blankenship and wife Etta, of Ingram, and Sheri Ann Steward and husband Brett, of Denton; 8 grandchildren, Benjamin Blankenship, Matthew Blankenship, Jacob Blankenship, Lindsey Monroe, Katie Blankenship, Jeremy Steward, Micaela Steward, and Jared Steward.

Lytle graduated from Pleasanton High School, Pleasanton, Texas and joined the Navy at the end of World War II. Upon receiving an honorable discharge, he returned to Campbellton and then hitchhiked to College Station with a brother and friend. He graduated from

Texas A&M College in 1950 with a B.S. in Wildlife Management. He received a Master of Science from University of Minnesota and then went to Michigan State University to complete his Ph.D. in Wildlife Management.

Lytle was fortunate to have traveled around the world to North America, South America, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa. He received an opportunity to work in Kenya in 1969 and moved the family to Nairobi, Kenya. He worked there for 3 years and indicated in his book that those were some of the most rewarding years of wildlife research.

He was a member of The Wildlife Society and served as a Section Representative and President from 1986-1988. He was an avid birder and served as the Region V Director for the Texas Ornithological Society. He was also a member of the Lions Club International and served as District Governor in 1981 and was instrumental in establishing the Lions Sight and Research Foundation.

BIRDERS GOT THE BLUES. THAT'S A GOOD THING

By Robert "Bob" Becker

Artists have long used the color blue to create a mood in song and celebrate beauty in paintings. Their inspiration derives from nature, and it is this blue in nature's profusion of birds that provides similar inspiration for us. Get ready to enjoy the show, as they will soon arrive on the island in the spring migration.

"The Blue Danube," Johann Strauss's famous waltz, celebrates the "Danube so blue, so bright and blue," that "merries the heart." Okay, we don't have that famous river, but our Gulf of Mexico shimmers a deep blue when the sun and wind are just right. It also channels to our coast thousands of migrating songbirds. One is the crowd-pleasing Blue



Blue Grosbeak

Grosbeak. Its vibrant, rich blue is highlighted by chocolate brown wingbars, and its song merries the heart with a cascade of musical notes. Look for them atop small trees and shrubs in April and May at Corps Woods and Dos Vacas Muertos nature preserves in Galveston.

Pablo Picasso's famous Blue Period paintings conveyed his pain on the loss of people he loved. One of his favorite tones resembles lapis lazuli, a semiprecious deep blue gemstone. The Lazuli Bunting is named after this



Lazuli Bunting

color. It has a bright, sweet-sounding twittering song. The head and wings are blue, the breast is a rich rusty color, and the belly is pure white. This beauty occasionally passes through here in spring and fall to and from its breeding grounds in the North and West. This bird is occasionally spotted at Lafitte's Cove and at High Island.

A different shade was referenced by Duke Ellington in his 1930 swing classic "Mood Indigo." It goes: "You ain't never been blue, till you've had that mood indigo." We've got our Indigo Bunting, a small, inquisitive songbird whose distinctive plumage falls somewhere between blue and purple on the spectrum. With all due regard to the Duke, I don't think



Indigo Bunting

anyone seeing an Indigo Bunting would feel blue. These merry songbirds lift our spirits. They are now trickling into the Texas coast and we will see them in weedy and shrubby fields everywhere in April and May.

John Coltrane recorded his hard bop album “Blue Train” in 1958. Coltrane’s jumpy saxophone lines remind me of the Black-throated Blue Warbler, a songbird that



Black-throated Blue Warbler

flits and bops quickly through the trees like the notes spilling from Coltrane’s horn. This warbler has a black face and midnight blue head and back and favors shady, dark forest understory. It has a soft, pleasant four-note song. This handsome warbler makes a guest appearance here and there at High Island, Lafitte’s Cove and Sabine Woods in the spring and fall migration. It takes persistence and vigilance to see one, but it is well worth

the effort. They are superstars, and every reported sighting is sure to set off a birders’ stampede.

I never get tired of seeing all of these blue songbirds. But my favorite of them all is the Cerulean Warbler. It’s usually described as deep sky-blue, but I like to think of it think



Cerulean Warbler

of it as Electric Blue, a mood expressed in the David Bowie song “Sound and Vision.” Bowie wrote the song at a low point personally and professionally, but when I hear that song I don’t feel sad. I envision the color of a Cerulean Warbler, and it makes me smile. Look for them in April in the upper canopy in the woods at Lafitte’s Cove and at Smith Oaks at High Island. They will make you smile too.

Robert “Bob” Becker

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AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (AOS) SPLITS EASTERN MEADOWLARK

TEXAS STATE LIST INCREASES BY ONE TO 661.

Chihuahuan Meadowlark

Sturnella lilianae lilianae and *Sturnella lilianae auropectoralis*

Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)

This split has been anticipated for a while now, and the NACC actually voted down this action a few years ago. As it turns out, Eastern Meadowlark (*sensu stricto*) is more closely related to Western Meadowlark than it is to Chihuahuan Meadowlark, which birders have long known as “Lilian’s Meadowlark”.

Chihuahuan Meadowlark consists of two subspecies. The nominate breeds in high-elevation desert grasslands of the southwestern U.S. and northwestern Mexico; many retreat from the northerly portion of the breeding range in winter. The second subspecies of Chihuahuan Meadowlark, *auropectoralis*, breeds in coastal western Mexico from Sinaloa south to Michoacán. It is unknown if the

two subspecies overlap in range in winter, and exactly where *auropectoralis* reaches the eastern edge of its range is unknown. There are other populations of meadowlark (e.g., in interior and coastal Oaxaca) whose affiliations are not immediately apparent. Compared to nearby Eastern Meadowlarks, Chihuahuan Meadowlark has more extensive white in the tail, is paler overall, and is more golden yellow below. Its song is like Eastern’s but averages lower in pitch and may differ in having the highest note more consistently at the beginning of the song (rather than just before the end in Eastern). Chihuahuan’s song has been rendered as *tortilla con chile*.



Breeding adult (Chihuahuan / Lilian’s)

Eastern Meadowlarks (Chihuahuan /Lilian’s) in the Southwest have more white in the tail, grayer upperparts, and more contrastingly white cheeks than other Eastern Meadowlarks.

Photo Bradley Hacker/Macaulay Library

A MESSAGE FROM THE TOS MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

We hope you will enjoy this first newsletter from your TOS membership committee.

HAPPENINGS AT HOOKS WOODS

**By Shelia Hargis, Past President,
TOS Director At-large**

Our efforts to improve Hooks Woods for birds and birders continue. I am happy to report that a memorial to Steve Gross, past president of TOS, is finally underway at Hooks! It is long overdue, but a very nice bird blind is being built as I write this. It is going in at the end of the last boardwalk and will

have multiple viewing positions with multiple small drips and a small pond at the end of it. Steve's memorial is modeled after the bird blind at Estero Llano Grande State Park and if you've visited there you'll have an idea of what the finished product will look like. It is going to be a wonderful addition to Hooks Woods. A huge thanks goes to Dave Dolan who has been the driving force behind this!



Major supports in place with concrete drying. Photo credit: Dave Dolan

If you would like to donate to the memorial in honor of Steve, or even if you didn't know Steve but would like to donate to the latest cool project at Hooks, it is not too late. You can donate online using the Donate button on our website, www.texasbirds.org or mail us a check. Our address is 11101-9 Leopard Square, PMB 1039, Corpus Christi, TX 78410. Please let us know that your donation is for Steve's memorial. Thank you!

In addition to checking out the progress of the blind, we also continue to improve the habitat by adding new plants. The planting session on January 29 involved putting in 12 wax myrtles behind the meadow pond. Dur-



The January 29th work party surveying the progress and conferring with Dave. (If you look closely, you will see the infamous bench that faces the wrong way. Sadly, the bench will be removed and replaced with multiple benches that face in the correct direction!)

Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

ing spring migration last year, we discovered that people walking on the boardwalk behind the pond spooked the birds at the pond. The woods between the boardwalk and pond didn't have enough understory to block the bird's view, so we have added the wax myrtles to add a food source as well as a natural screen to block the bird's view of movement on the boardwalk. We also planted a couple of American beautyberry plants, another good wildlife plant.



From left to right: David Hanson, James Giroux, Jan Hanson, and Laura Wilson planting wax myrtles.

Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

We spread seeds (rosinweed, compass plant, Texas coneflower, basket flower, rattlesnake master, lance-leaf blanket flower, liatris, western ironweed, blue mistflower, and Indian plantain) in the prairie area - thanks to David and Jan Hanson for the seed supply!



Chuck Davis and David Hanson sowing seeds. Photo credit: Shelia Hargis



Board members Kendra Kocab and Laura Wilson have their own approach to sowing seeds! Photo credit: Shelia Hargis

As we improve Hooks Woods, we need to keep a closer eye on things. The Hooks Woods Management Team is looking for someone who would be willing to visit Hooks every couple of weeks to make sure everything is in order. If you are interested in volunteering in this way or finding out more about this, please contact Shelia, Shelia.hargis@gmail.com. Thank you!

WHAT ARE OUR GOALS?

By Laura Wilson, Director of TOS Region 3

I'm thinking this morning about what "goals" are. One definition is, "The object of a person's ambition or effort; an aim or desired result." Yep, that's what I'm currently working toward!

First, I've sponsored seven college students in Region 3, and have three more to go. All are keen on birds and birding.

Another goal is to visit with people about TOS, to dispel lots of misconceptions and remedy a lack of information. I call it my Comedy Half-hour Presentation, but it's more than that. It's connecting with people and supplying information. Before year end I have six presentations to do at an assortment of birding organizations and colleges. The first one was conducted in mid-January, and I'm looking forward to the biggest one on Earth Day April 23.

TOS MEETINGS AND COVID

By Frances Cerbins, TOS Director-at-Large

We so regret that the January TOS winter meeting had to be cancelled due to the COVID spread. We were all eagerly looking forward to some cautious in-person birding in Abilene.

The TOS board is planning our spring meeting, with fingers crossed. It will be hosted by the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson and promises great spring birding on the gulf coast, plus it will give us an opportunity to honor late TOS member Dennis Shepler and his contributions to the organization and to Texas birding. Dates are April 28 -May 1; watch for announcements in March.

Thanks to the meeting committee members for the hard work in planning for the January meeting. We will utilize all the arrangements at a future meeting.

WE BELONG

By Judy Kestner, TOS Membership Secretary

Back in the early days of bird watching (you remember of course) it was grown-ups who pursued the avocation. Eventually, as the older birders - whose hair has gone silver and whose hearing has... well... gone - approach the age when birding becomes difficult, a need arises to infuse the birding community with younger participants. Thus your TOS Membership Committee is in pursuit of sharp eyes and ears, and youthful brains that are filled not with the detritus of many years of living but with field marks and range maps.



At the same time, we also aim to encourage retention of our experienced members who can guide and mentor the younger set.

In the articles above, you'll see how Laura Wilson's efforts with college students and Texas birding groups are yielding exciting results. Shelia Hargis' account of our Hooks Woods Sanctuary will stir the blood to volunteer your time, or take a hike and enjoy a day of excellent birding. Frances Cerbins' explanation of the cancellation of our 2022 winter meeting in Abilene illustrates the care and consideration TOS has for its members.

As your membership secretary, I was delighted to join this committee, since my job hinges on having members! Please remember that I am here at 361-701-1962 or tosmember@yahoo.com to assist with any questions you have about maintaining your account or dues payments.

Take a look at some TOS membership figures:

- On Jan. 1, 2017 we had 926 members. On Jan. 1, 2022 we had 866, a loss of 6.5%. The numbers have risen and fallen over the years but in essence, we have hit a plateau.
- Region 8 which includes Harris County has the highest number of members - 244.
- Region 1, the Panhandle area, has the lowest number of members - 14.
- About 25% of those whose memberships have lapsed for more than six months will gladly renew when reminded.

Exciting things are in the wind for TOS, so I encourage you to keep your eyes open for a new look, more communications, and a return of in-person birding opportunities in Texas.

TEXAS BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

The TBRC is excited to add both SMALL-BILLED ELAENIA and TRINDADE PETREL to the state list, bringing it to 663 species!

The elaenia was seen in May 2021 on Mustang Island (Nueces Co) by Andrew Orgill and Rylee Gonzales; it was identified at the time as an empidonax. A few months later, in August 2021, photos of the bird in iNaturalist were looked at by a few folks who thought it was not an Empid but rather an Elaenia, with Dan Lane and then others realizing it was a Small-billed Elaenia. The TBRC thanks Alvaro Jaramillo for his critical review of this record and also thanks Fabricio Gorleri for his review along with his

excellent paper/research on the identification of this species. Photo by Andrew Orgill.

The Trindade Petrel was seen in late Feb 2022 from the Port Aransas jetty (Nueces Co) by Skip Cantrell. Initially IDed as a booby, the photos were only brought to the attention of others a couple weeks later when it was flagged in eBird by Caleb Helsel. The overall shape/jizz of the bird in the few photos of it show it to be a Pterodroma, with many experienced seabirders quickly landing on Trindade Petrel as the correct species ID. The TBRC thanks Todd McGrath for his critical review of this record. Photo by Skip Cantrell.



Trinade Petrel Photo Skip Cantrell.



Small-billed Elaenia. Photo by Andrew Orgill.

Below is a summary of the records that the Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) has reviewed and come to a decision on since May 1st, 2022. The MAJOR highlight of this batch is the first state records/addition of Small-billed Elaenia and Trindade Petrel, which along with the split/addition of Chihuahuan Meadowlark, brings the state list to 663.

ACCEPTED (35):

- 2021-113 - Brant (1) 21 Nov - 8 Dec 2021, Plainview, Hale County
- 2022-18 - Brant (1) 11 Jan - 3 Feb 2022, Plainview, Hale County
- 2022-23 - Brant (1) 21 Jan - 9 Feb 2022, Lubbock, Lubbock County
- 2022-19 - Trumpeter Swan (1) 20 Jan 2022, southwest of Stinnett, Hutchinson County
- 2021-115 - Eurasian Wigeon (1) 14 Nov 2021 - 27 Jan 2022, Balmorhea Lake, Reeves County
- 2022-32 - Eurasian Wigeon (1) 13-17 Apr 2022, west El Paso, El Paso County
- 2022-24 - Harlequin Duck (1) 19 Feb - 23 Mar 2022, Port Aransas jetty, Nueces County
- 2022-50 - Mexican Violetear (1) 2-4 Jun 2022, west Austin, Travis County
- 2022-45 - Limpkin (1) 28-29 Apr 2022, Bear Creek Park, Harris County
- 2022-41 - Limpkin (1) 17-24 May 2022, Lewisville, Denton County
- 2022-52 - Limpkin (1) 12 Jun 2022, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont, Jefferson County
- 2022-17 - Purple Sandpiper (1) 18 Jan - 17 Mar 2022, South Padre Is. jetty, Cameron County
- 2021-116 - Short-billed Gull (1) 5 Dec 2021 - 2 Jan 2022, Keystone Heritage Park, El Paso, El Paso County
- 2022-33 - Kelp Gull (1) 20-21 Apr 2022, Brownsville Landfill, Cameron County
- 2022-37 - Brown Noddy (1) 21 May 2022, Port Aransas jetty, Nueces County
- 2022-28 - Trindade Petrel (1) 22 Feb 2022, Port Aransas jetty, Nueces County
- 2022-30 - Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater (1) 14 Mar 2022, Matagorda Nature Park jetty, Matagorda County
- 2022-46 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 15 May 2022, South Llano River SP, Kimble County
- 2022-48 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 3 Jun 2022, east of Pipe Creek, Bandera County
- 2022-38 - Northern Saw-whet Owl (1) 25 May 2022, Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis County
- 2022-22 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 7 Feb 2022, Salineno, Starr County
- 2021-122 - Small-billed Elaenia (1) 17 May 2021, Mustang Is., Nueces County
- 2022-03 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (Lawrence's) (1) 21 Dec 2021 - 19 Jan 2022, Laguna Atascosa NWR, Cameron County
- 2022-43 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (Lawrence's) (1) 13 Mar 2022, south of Olmito, Cameron County
- 2022-35 - Gray Kingbird (1) 7 May 2022, South Padre Is., Cameron County
- 2022-01 - Fork-tailed Flycatcher (1) 31 Dec 2021 - 2 Feb 2022, Friendship Park, Granger Lake, Williamson County
- 2021-107 - Greater Pewee (1) 20 Oct 2021 - 30 Jan 2022, Bear Creek Park, Harris County
- 2022-31 - Pacific-slope Flycatcher (1) 12-26 Mar 2022, Cullinan Park, Sugarland, Fort Bend County
- 2022-16 - Common Redpoll (1) 17 Jan - 21 Feb 2022, Lake Granbury, Hood County
- 2022-29 - Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 3 Mar - 26 Apr 2022, Pine Springs, GMNP, Culberson County
- 2022-44 - Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 28-29 Apr 2022, Chisos Basin, BBNP, Brewster County
- 2021-109 - Golden-crowned Warbler (1) 11 Nov 2021 - 31 Mar 2022, Valley Nature Center, Weslaco, Hidalgo County
- 2022-04 - Flame-colored Tanager (1) 17 Dec 2021 - 8 Jan 2022, San Antonio, Bexar County

2022-05 - Crimson-collared Grosbeak (1) 12
Nov 2021 - 29 Jan 2022, Quinta Mazatlan,
Hidalgo County

2022-34 - Blue Bunting (1) 17-21 Apr 2022,
Estero Llano Grande SP, Hidalgo County

NOT ACCEPTED (1):

2022-20 - Mute Swan, exotic - requesting
to be added as established

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

A number of factors may contribute to a record being denied acceptance. It is quite uncommon for a record to not be accepted due to a bird being obviously misidentified. More commonly, a record is not accepted because the material submitted was incomplete, insufficient, superficial, or just too vague to properly document the reported occurrence while eliminating all other similar species. Also, written documentation or descriptions prepared entirely from memory weeks, months,

or years after a sighting are seldom voted on favorably. It is important that the simple act of not accepting a particular record should by no means indicate that the TBRC or any of its members feel the record did not occur as reported. The non-acceptance of any record simply reflects the opinion of the TBRC that the documentation, as submitted, did not meet the rigorous standards appropriate for adding data to the formal historical record.

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

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

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



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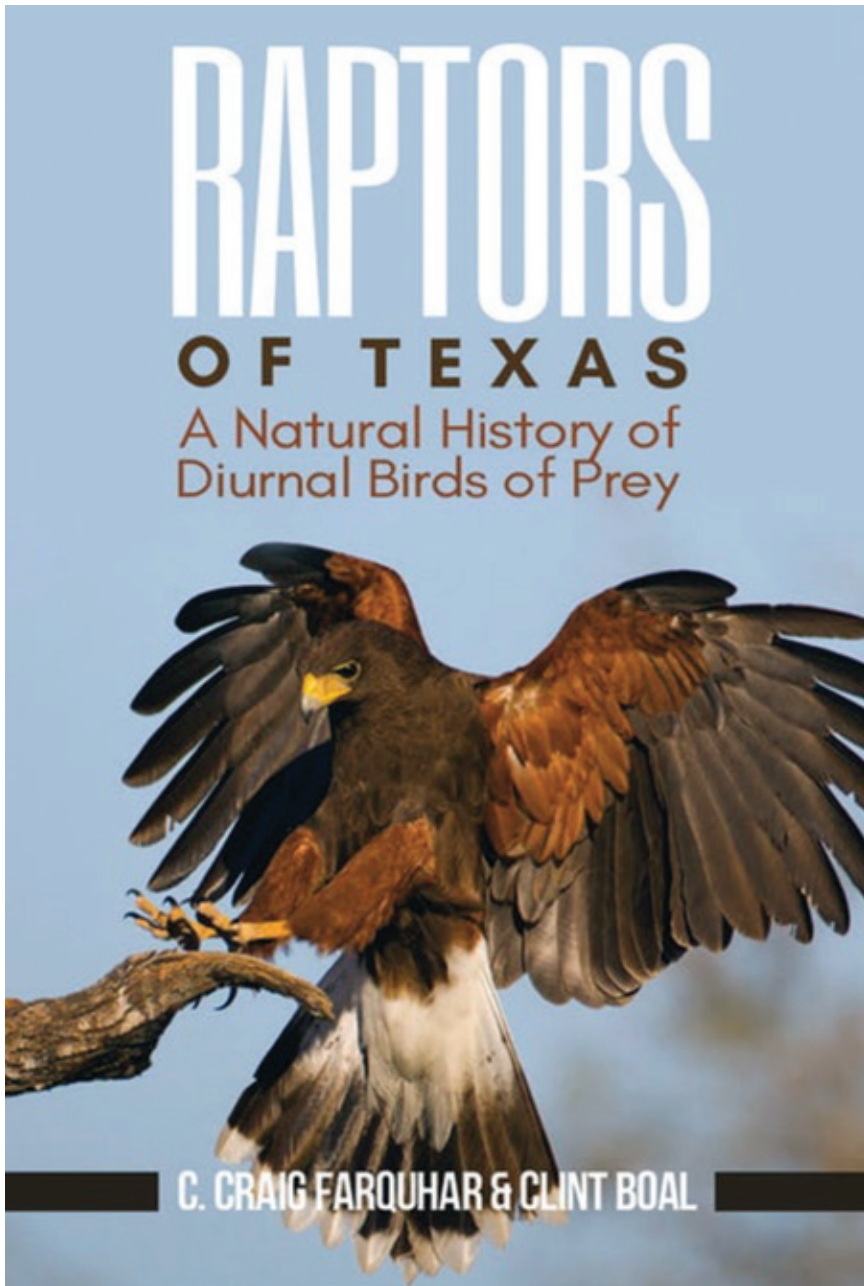
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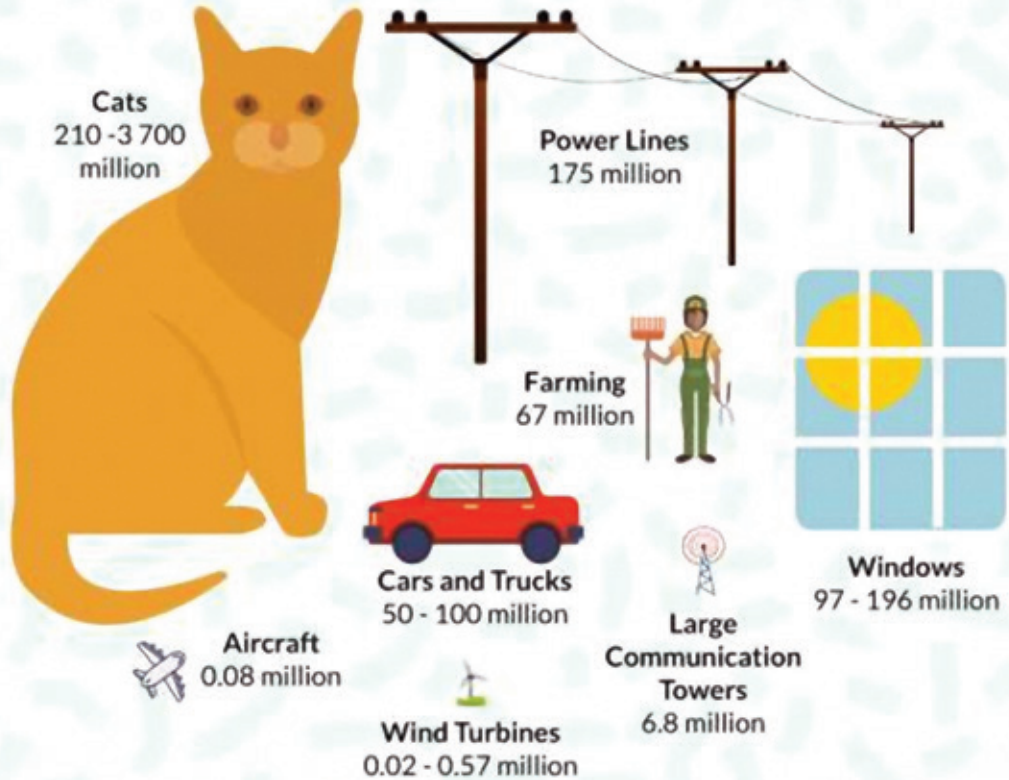
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what kills birds?



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Photo Bruce Mactavish -

Finally some Newfoundland birders caught up with the Steller's Sea Eagle that has been present in the province since May but sighted only a few times by non-birders or out of province visitors at widely separated locations. It seems the bird has been present in the south of the community of Trinity since about 20 July. Whale tour boats were reporting it off and on and there were photos to back up their sightings. After more than ten days of silence a boat tour operator reported it again yesterday and today a special eagle dedicated tour boat was launch with 7 birders and we found it. It was in Spaniard's Cove about 8 km south of Trinity.

For additional information consult
History of the Steller Sea Eagle in the USA.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fX0W1he-ZI>

TEXAS BIRDS ANNUAL

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