

President's Message



Christine Turnbull TOS President.

This past spring I was able to do some birding along the upper coast, while both visiting and enjoying some of the TOS Sanctuaries. We enjoyed the throngs of thrushes and tanagers, the rookeries and sitting on bleachers with other visitors watching birds as they came into the water features. I was reminded how special these areas are for birds as they make landfall, seeking shelter food and water along their migration routes. And I want

to thank everyone for contributing in multiple ways to both creating and maintaining these sanctuaries.

I was also reminded how amazing it is to be out birding with fellow enthusiasts. We are looking forward to planning in-person meetings next year, so we can again bird together and explore new places together.

I want to thank you all for your support and remind you that this is your organization. You can help in many ways from helping with planning out our Winter and/or Spring meetings, to helping with our sanctuaries, to simply telling a friend about us and inviting them along when we are once again out in the field. Your input is always welcomed, so remember if you have an idea, a thought about TOS please send it along. We welcome your feedback.

—Christine Turnbull

TOS Announces new Occasional Publication

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEST TEXAS HUMMINGBIRDS, BASED ON BANDING AND OBSERVATIONAL DATA FROM 2007 TO 2019

Abstract.—From 2007 through 2019 a concerted effort was made to determine the exact seasonal status of hummingbirds in central portions of the Trans-Pecos Region of west Texas. Primary study sites were established at several locations in Jeff Davis and Brewster counties. Study sites in the central Jeff Davis County area represented the higher elevation habitats of the region situated in and around the Davis Mountains near Fort Davis. Study sites in southern Brewster County represented the lower elevation desert

habitats situated in and around the Christmas Mountains of Terlingua Ranch, and at times, at Lajitas on the Rio Grande. On occasion, locations were sampled in other portions of the region when opportunities presented themselves to add information on the status of less common species. Our primary research efforts resulted in the capture and banding of 21,525 birds of 15 different species. Herein we characterize the overall results by presenting the banding data for each species. These data provide new insight into the exact seasonal status of the 15 species encountered. Observational data enhanced banding data and seasonal information, adding 3 additional species, for a total of 18 out of the 19 species on the official Texas list. First documented Texas breeding records were established for two species and two species were added as first documented records to the regional list. One of the latter species, the Amethyst-throated Mountain-gem, provided a first record for Texas and the United States.

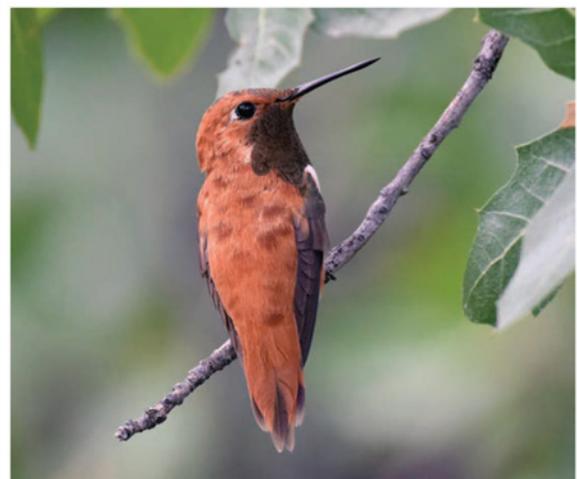
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TEXAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEST TEXAS HUMMINGBIRDS, BASED ON BANDING AND OBSERVATIONAL DATA FROM 2007 TO 2019

KELLY B. BRYAN, MARYANN EASTMAN, MARC EASTMAN,
CHARLES O. FLOYD AND NANCY FLOYD



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Regional Reports

Region 1—Panhandle

Per the US Drought Monitor, just one county of the 56 county region remains entirely in a state of severe drought, while a majority of the land area of 7 other counties are in moderate drought—an improvement over past periods.

With regards to ongoing irruptive events, the strong showing of both Cedar Waxwings and Pine Siskins continued throughout the period. Lastly, though plants are recovering from the severe winter event of February many insects, including bees, butterflies, and moths, are doing very poorly with record low numbers being reported by many observers.

Interesting April sightings (all courtesy of Anthony Hewetson except where indicated)

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING DUCK: 1 at various parks in (Lubbock) – FORMERLY ACCIDENTAL TO THE REGION; NOW AN ANNUAL VISITOR WITH SIGHTINGS MOVING EVER NORTHWARD INTO THE PANHANDLE ITSELF.

BLUE-WINGED x CINNAMON TEAL: 1 at the Pleasant Hill Gin Playa (Crosby) on 4/16/21 (ML) – A REGULAR, POSSIBLY OVERLOOKED, HYBRID FORM FOR THE REGION.

MEXICAN DUCK: 1 bird that seemed to be solid for Mexican Duck was reported from the Canyon Lake (Lubbock) on 4/15/21 with the presence of a hybrid Mallard x Mexican Duck along the lakes complicating the situation somewhat.

LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN: 4 reports of 9-12 near Morton (Cochran) – SHOWING THAT THE REGION STILL SUPPORTS AT LEAST ONE LEK.

INCA DOVE: Six reports of 1-2 birds at various sites in Lubbock (Lubbock) –BARELY HANGING ON.

CHIMNEY SWIFT: six reports received – RUNNING A LITTLE LATE THIS YEAR AND SLOW TO FILL IN – THIS MIGHT BE DUE TO THE AFOREMENTIONED LOW NUMBERS OF INSECTS.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD: 1-2 in a Lubbock yard on 4/21/21. VERY RARE AS A SPRING VISITOR; PHOTOGRAPHS CONFIRMED BY KELLY BRYAN.

LEAST & SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER, GREATER & LESSER YELLOWLEGS — POOR NUMBER OF REPORTS AND POOR NUMBERS for all 4 species in Lubbock region. Contrastingly more greater yellowlegs and least sandpipers reports than usual in furthest north panhandle (ebird).

FRANKLIN'S GULL:– GOOD NUMBER OF REPORTS AND GOOD NUMBERS; PART OF A LARGE MOVEMENT THROUGH THE PANHANDLE PROPER.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL: 1 adult bird at Lake Six/Mae Simmons Park (Lubbock) ACCIDENTAL TO THE REGION – ONE OF THE BEST BIRDS OF THE MONTH!

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT: 1-2 at various parks in (Lubbock) during the period (SA, JoC, AH, NN) – FORMERLY ACCIDENTAL IN THE REGION; NOW A LOW-DENSITY PERMANENT RESIDENT.

BLACK PHOEBE: 1 at Lubbock. FORMERLY ACCIDENTAL IN THE REGION; NOW ANNUAL AND CLOSING IN ON PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER: 1 female at Monument Lake (Bailey) on 4/3/21 (MB, DH, RS) - FORMERLY ACCIDENTAL TO THE REGION; NOW CASUAL CLOSING ON ANNUAL.

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW— LOW NUMBER OF REPORTS AND LOW NUMBERS.

ROCK & HOUSE WREN: – BOTH VERY LOW; WE USUALLY SEE A MIGRATORY PEAK IN APRIL.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET: VERY LOW NUMBERS. THE FEBRUARY WEATHER EVENT TANKED THIS SPECIES, REGIONALLY, AND IT IS SHOWING NO SIGNS OF A REBOUND.

HERMIT THRUSH: LOW NUMBERS; FEW BIRDS MADE IT THROUGH WINTER AND MIGRATION IS EITHER DELAYED OR NUMERICALLY POOR.

SAGE THRASHER:– GOOD NUMBER OF REPORTS AND NUMBERS, CONTINUING THE IRRUPTIVE EVENT EXPERIENCED DURING LATE FEBRUARY AND MARCH.

CEDAR WAXWING:– THE STRONGEST MOVEMENT OF THE SPECIES INTO THE 15 County Lubbock REGION THAT I CAN RECALL ACTUALLY INTENSIFIED DURING April.

EVENING GROSBEAK: 1 at White River Lake (Crosby)— ONE OF THE BIRDS OF THE MONTH.

PINE SISKIN: 79 Reports in the region (Crosby, Dickens, Floyd, Hale, Lamb, Lubbock) during the period– THE STRONGEST IRRUPTIVE EVENT OF THIS SPECIES THAT ANY LOCAL BIRDERS CAN RECALL –THESE TINY LITTLE WONDERS ALSO RATE A BIRDS OF THE MONTH AWARD!

LESSER GOLDFINCH: Twenty-five reports AN EXCELLENT NUMBER OF REPORTS AND DECENT NUMBERS;

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH: Fifteen reports VERY GOOD NUMBER OF REPORTS AND NUMBERS FOR THIS LATE IN THE SEASON; AN EPIPHENOMENON OF THE SISKIN IRRUPTION?

BREWER'S SPARROW: Many reports— SO CONTINUED THE STRONGEST MOVEMENT OF THIS SPECIES I HAVE EVER SEEN IN THE REGION; CONSISTENT WITH ITS PUSH WELL INTO CENTRAL TEXAS DURING THE WINTER.

Regional Reports (continued)

DARK-EYED JUNCO and WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW: BOTH SPECIES DECLINED PRECIPITOUSLY IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY WEATHER EVENT, AND REBOUNDED CONSIDERABLY IN APRIL, SUGGESTING REPLENISHMENT OF WINTERING BIRDS BY MIGRATORY BIRDS FROM THE SOUTH.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER: (ebird). Unchanged number in northmost 15 counties but interestingly peaking 9 days later than 2019-20.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT: Four reports of single birds in the region (Lubbock, Yoakum) during the period – EXTRAORDINARILY LOW.

YELLOW WARBLER: (Ebird) Fewer than in April-May 2019-2020 in the northernmost 15 counties of Texas

DICKCISSEL: (ebird). Many fewer than 2020 but same as 2019 in 15 northmost counties.

John Berner with major assist from Anthony Hewetson

—John Berner

Region 2—North Central Texas

Spring migration birding in North Central Texas seemed spotty and a little disappointing this year. Weather was a negative factor, for sure. Early spring rains had raised water levels; so good shorebird spots were very few, and strong winds limited the number of ideal times for passerines to touch down. Nevertheless, despite having fewer great days for observations, most observers would say that species diversity was normal, and a few standouts were noted, i.e., reports of multiple Cape May and Hooded Warblers.

Now with migration well past, each morning we welcome the songs of breeding birds like Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal, Great-crested Flycatcher, plus Painted and Indigo Buntings. But thinking back to the “deep freeze” that our area experienced in February with snow cover and temperatures at 15 F or below for more than a week, we are tempted to look for lasting impacts on our breeding bird populations. At this point, allow me to be a bit non-scientific and speculative based on personal observation. One bird that I hear much less often now compared to past years is the Eastern Phoebe. In many spots I observed them before the freeze but not at all since. This seems significant. On the other hand, after the February freeze, there were many reports of dead Eastern Bluebirds being found, and there was much speculation of significant population loss. However, nest box surveys during June seem to show normal breeding rates. I suppose time and more careful data will shed light on these concerns.



Grasshopper Sparrow, North Texas Breeder?

Another bird of personal interest to me is the Grasshopper Sparrow. In our area it is hard to find appropriate habitat for this bird given urbanization and over grazing, but each April or May a few birds are reported in Collin County and other north Texas areas. Most likely these are pass-through migrants, but is it possible that some stay in the area and breed? Again, one would like to see more data.

Thanks for reading and good birding,

—Galon Brehm

Region 3—East Texas Timberlands (Pineywoods)

—Laura Wilson

Region 4—Trans-Pecos

—DD Currie

Region 5—Edwards Plateau Report

There are many great hotspots throughout Region 5, so I thought we'd take a moment and describe 2 of them. The first is the Hill Country SNA (State Natural Area) located primarily in Bandera County. It comprises almost 5400 acres of rugged Hill Country terrain, with almost 40 miles of trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding, offers primitive camping and the intermittent West Verde Creek runs through some of the property. 186 species of birds have been observed at this site, including Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireos. One of the nice things about this site, is you can hike and bird (example West Peak Overlook Trail – where a Varied Bunting has been observed recently singing) or you can drive and bird throughout the SNA and still see and hear a wide variety of birds.

In stark contrast is a small city hotspot in San Antonio. Brackenridge Park (Ave A) is a .6 mile road along the San Antonio River, with tall trees flanking both sides of the bank and 257 species of birds recorded over the years. It is a reliable location for nesting Barred Owls, Wood Ducks as well as others local birds. At times it can be quite a migrant magnet, and this past spring in mid-May, local birders collectively observed 23 species of warblers, 4 species of Orioles, as well as a plethora of other migrants. It was an exciting day for local birders. It is worth a stop, if you are visiting San Antonio – but like many inland sites, it can be hit or miss at times.

—Christine Turnbull

Regional Reports (continued)

Region 6—Central Prairie

Greetings TOS members, particularly those in Region 6. My name is Randy Pinkston and I recently became your regional director when Daniel Hodges stepped aside at the virtual May meeting. I reside in Temple (Bell County) and split most of my birding time between here and my alternate residence in Jeff Davis County. Spur-of-the-moment road trips to chase state rarities is also a lifelong passion. I guess what I'm saying is that I do little or no birding in Region 6 outside of Bell County, so please feel free to forward noteworthy bird observations from your local patch so future reports can be all-inclusive (drpinkston@sbcglobal.net). The time frame for this report is Feb-May 2021 and my next report will cover June through mid-October.

Covid pandemic gloom continued but was less restrictive on social gatherings than a year ago, largely due to folks getting vaccinated. But more gloom for people and birds arrived suddenly around Valentine's Day with an unprecedented freeze event that brought widespread snowfall and plummeting temperatures to single digits, with widespread and random power outages, failed water supplies, broken pipes, and both human and avian death tolls. Seed feeders throughout the region were suddenly inundated with desperate visitors, especially winter finches like siskins and goldfinches. It was a banner month for Purple Finches at my home in Temple. Reports of avian absenteeism became routine after the freeze event, particularly among Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Phoebe, and oddly Killdeer. I would add Orange-crowned Warbler to that list, as well. Presumably these birds moved southward or perished, or likely some of both. Last winter's unprecedented frugivore irruption (Mountain & Western Bluebirds, Sage Thrasher, and to a lesser degree Townsend's Solitaire) ended abruptly with the mid-Feb freeze event.

A stunning male Scott's Oriole photographed 17-19 March on private property near Moffat provided a first record for Bell. Nest-building by a pair of Couch's Kingbirds in Belton was noteworthy, and a Common Raven nest on private property south of Killeen represented a county first, both observed on 25 April. Successful nesting by a Hutton's Vireo pair was documented again on Ft Hood in mid-May near the Bell western periphery.



Photo by Gil Eckrich.

I would judge spring migration 2021 in Bell County as "good" for shorebirds and "good but rather average" for songbirds. Depending on the day in April and May, our best shorebird hotspots turned up all 3 small plovers, lots

of Sanderlings, Whimbrels, and 2 turnstones. There were multiple sightings of Caspian Terns. Byron Stone reports similar shorebird excellence at Windy Point on Lake Travis.

A Groove-billed Ani on 6 May at Georgetown's Berry Springs Park provided a first recent record for Williamson County. An adult male Black-headed Grosbeak magnetized to a fruiting mulberry at Temple Lions Park was enjoyed by many on 7 May. The spring season warbler list in Bell was highlighted by a Cerulean on 13 May. A lingering Blackpoll Warbler was nice in Travis County. Cedar Waxwings lingered through 30 May which is about 2 weeks later than normal.



Photo by Randy Pinkston.

Again, please send noteworthy birding news from your corner of the Central Prairie region to me at drpinkston@sbcglobal.net.

— Randy Pinkston

Region 7—Rio Grande Brushlands

As your new Region 7 Director, I would like to welcome new members to TOS and invite all members to share bird and habitat news. In the western section of our region, Webb County's Laredo has established the Riverbend as the city's first Nature Preserve while Las Palmas Nature Trail becomes its first Birding Sanctuary. The move was made to protect the Rio Grande and conserve its environment. This area has been the site of the Amazon Kingfisher as well as many other amazing species which spill into the U.S. from Mexico.

In Coastal Bend news, Rockport's 33rd Annual HummerBird Celebration returns to being in-person this year with speaker programs, shopping, birding trips, hummer home bus tours and more. The dates are September 16-19. Many events are free and open to the public. Other event prices range from \$5 (speaker programs) to \$100 (brunch and boat birding trip) Visit www.rockporthummingbird.com for details.

Both the Coastal Bend and the Lower Rio Grande Valley are working to protect important bird areas. In the LRGV, Cameron County is considering leasing the Andy Bowie Park Flats, a public park consisting of approximately 40 acres of tidal flats, to a private business for development, which will destroy habitat for shore and wading birds, such as Piping Plovers, Wilson's Plovers, and Red Knots. In Nueces County, The Audubon Outdoor Club which has managed Blucher Park for over thirty years, is fighting the construction of an apartment building bordering the park, which threatens to negatively impact that important wildscape and bird sanctuary.

Regional Reports (continued)

The Gray Kingbird was an extremely rare find at the South Padre Island Birding Nature and Alligator Sanctuary on May 21, where it stayed for several days. The kingbird's usual range is in the Caribbean and coastal Florida with only one prior record in the RGV dating back to May, 2002. .

—Susan Foster



Spring migration turned into its usual enjoyment of baby birds all over the region, including these darling Green Herons at the SPI Birding Sanctuary.



Finally, Rockport Beach Park hosted the Sooty Tern again this year. I spotted it in the parking lot on March 6th hanging around with Laughing Gulls. This sighting was earlier than usual.

Region 8—Central Prairie

As our region slowly begins to return to some sense of normalcy, birders were excited to take advantage of the many parks we have on offer during spring migration and beyond. A number of interesting birds showed up this spring. A **Mexican Duck** was found on March 21 in Harris County. The drake was interacting with a female described as a Mexican Duck x Mottle Duck hybrid. This was a first county record, and many were able to see the bird as it remained for several weeks. Galveston County had a number of notable reports in April: a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** on 4/14, a **Green-tailed Towhee** at Dos Vacas Muertas from early April through early May, a **Scott's Oriole** on 4/24 (this species was also reported in Calhoun County on 4/21), **Lazuli Buntings** near Dickinson and High Island, and a **Varied Bunting** at High Island on 4/24. May saw a steady stream of good birds as well, starting with a **Tropical Parula** in Brazoria County on May 2. A **Black-whiskered Vireo** was found at Stevenson Woods in Galveston County on May 5. Then, on May 6, a first state record **Limpkin** was photographed at Brazos Bend State Park in Fort Bend County. Birders flocked to the park to search for this incredible bird. Eventually, a local couple found the Limpkin in their neighborhood park adjacent to Brazos Bend. They were kind enough to provide access to many birders, all thankful to add this species to their state list. It soon became obvious there were at least two Limpkins and possible more. With plenty of snails to eat, it is possible these birds will remain in Texas. As the summer doldrums set in, there is still plenty of birdwatching to be had, and you never know when a rare bird will appear. A **Common Raven** was reported in Calhoun County on June 4, and an immature **Masked Booby** was photographed on the beach at San Luis Pass on June 26. Hopefully, you too will have an enjoyable and birdy summer!



Mexican Duck. Photo by Letha Slagle



Limpkin. Photo by Jerry Chen

—Kendra Kocab, Director

Improvements at TOS Hooks Woods Sanctuary



People using bleachers at Hooks Woods during spring migration.



Here's a few of us assembling the new bleachers—James Giroux in the first photo and James and Chuck Davis in the second photo.

Laredo preserves 'ecotourism gem'; Activists hope designation blocks border barrier technology

From the Border Report.com by Sandra Sanchez

Border city designates 1st birding sanctuary, nature preserve

Posted: May 30, 2021 / 03:40 PM GMT-0600 / Updated: May 30, 2021 / 03:40 PM GMT-0600

LAREDO, Texas (Border Report) — As he looked through his binoculars for rare birds on Friday out at the banks of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Raul Delgado spotted something else even rarer: A birder from another state.

Delgado, 69, considers himself a “real” birder. The humble, retired telephone technician spends most days traipsing the trails at this crook on the banks of the Rio Grande near International Bridge No. 2 — across from a shuttered water plant in Nuevo Laredo — looking for Muscovy ducks, red-billed pigeons, and the rare Amazon kingfisher, which he saw here in 2016.



Matthew Voelker, an insurance auditor from Syracuse, N.Y., enjoys birding Friday, May 28, 2021, on the banks of the Rio Grande in Laredo, Texas. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

On Friday, Delgado spotted Matthew Voelker, 36, an insurance auditor from Syracuse, N.Y., wearing a bright blue shirt and a heavy-duty pair of binoculars himself. Voelker said he came to find the elusively rare Morelet's Seedeater in a newly established nature preserve and birding sanctuary in this South Texas border city during his Memorial Day weekend vacation.

It's a spot where the mighty Rio Grande and Zacate Creek meet to form an oasis for rare, tropical birds as they migrate north from South and Central America. And it's one of two areas that the Laredo City Council recently voted to designate as the city's first natural landmarks to entice more birding and ecotourism — especially for those wanting to see “Laredo's signature bird – the Morelet's Seedeater,” according to the resolution.

But the move might also help prevent border barrier and law enforcement construction from taking the border shorelands, environmentalists tell Border Report.



The stone Las Palmas Trail is seen leading to where Zacate Creek meets the Rio Grande in Laredo, Texas, an area now established as a natural landmark by the Laredo City Council. Across the river is the town of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, as seen on Friday, May 28, 2021. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

The area is so close to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, that music from passing vehicles can be heard on the U.S. side. It is a popular crossing spot for migrants who cross the Rio Grande illegally to get into South Texas, which is happening by the thousands each day on the Southwest since Joe Biden took office.

Border Patrol agents or Army Corps officials are usually positioned here, but die-hard birders, like Voelker, don't seem to mind.



A National Guardsman is seen on Friday, May 28, 2021, patrolling the Rio Grande in Laredo, Texas, at an area where Zacate Creek empties into the river and where rare birds are found. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

“This spot here is known for Morelet’s Seedeater and it’s a bird that is pretty much impossible to get anywhere else in the state except for this area so I think it (the preserve) will really benefit this area,” Voelker said as he scurried about jagged rocks, cane fields and silted soil in the 90-degree humidity looking for the bold white-collared plumage of the male of the species.

The sight of Voelker gave Delgado hope that more birders soon will come. “This is great luck. I can’t believe it,” Delgado said. “We have a real birder!”



Laredo birder and retiree Raul Delgado, left, speaks with visiting birder Matthew Voelker, of New York, at the Las Palmas Trail in Laredo, Texas, a new nature preserve, on May 28, 2021. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

It’s the Amazon Kingfisher, along with the Morelet’s seedeater, that actually helped to persuade the City Council on May 18 to set aside these two riverbank regions in the hopes of enticing ecotourism.

Environmentalists, like Melissa Cigarroa, president of the board of directors of the nonprofit Rio Grande International Study Center (RGISC,) also hope it will prevent further border technology — such as paved roads, floodlights, and underground sensors — from being used in these riverfront areas.



Melissa Cigarroa, board president of the Rio Grande International Study Center, and naturalist Raul Delgado hike May 28, 2021, on the Las Palmas Trail beside Zacate Creek in Laredo, Texas. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

On Friday morning, Delgado and Cigarroa took Border Report on an extensive tour of the two riverbanks spots where the city has carved out the nature preserves. This including 36 acres at Zacate Creek, called the Las Palmas Trail, and 77 acres in a city-owned riparian area just below Laredo College known as Riverbend, and the “gravel pits,” because it used to be a concrete factory.

“It’s an amazing place,” Cigarroa said as she made her way through towering sugar cane stalks, mulberry trees and fallen logs on a two-mile hike down the Las Palmas Trail.



Birding enthusiast Raul Delgado hikes the las Palmas Trail in Laredo, Texas, on May 28, 2021. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

TOSNEWS Staff

Jack Eitnrear
Judy Kestner

Editor
Advertising

Judy Kestner
Susan Foster
Bron Rorex

Proofreader
Proofreader
Proofreader

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The trail is named after its towering Washingtonia palms. It's also home to 20 species of Warblers, "known as the colorful gems of the bird world," and the Audubon's Oriole, Gray Hawk, Hooded Oriole, and Altamira Oriole, according to the city resolution.

Read the Las Palmas resolution

"This is where Laredo got some good street cred in the birding world for having an Amazon Kingfisher sighted in

2010, the first time in the continental U.S., which was a big deal," Delgado said.

A Canadian was the first to spot the Amazon Kingfisher here, and then four other kingfisher species were seen in this spot in subsequent years.

Delgado has seen all four, he said with a smile.



Raul Delgado and Melissa Cigarroa explore the Las Palmas Trail in Laredo, Texas, on May 28, 2021. (Border Report Photos/Sandra Sanchez)

There is a stunning rock waterfall and a partial stone walkway already in place. It's an area where in the 1930s a developer had wanted to build a river walk that didn't happen and eventually the city of San Antonio built a successful riverwalk, instead.



It's just past the downtown El Barrio Azteca historic neighborhood, which was build in the 1870s.

Turning these riverfront areas into natural landmarks to preserve their beauty has been a couple of decades in the making. Since 1998, the city has worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a \$5.5 million ecological restoration project to turn the gravel pits into functioning ponds and suitable wetlands for the endangered inland Least Tern, a migratory bird species, which has been spotted here, according to the resolution passed by the city council.

Read the city's Riverbend resolution[Download](#)

Over the years, RGISC along with the [Monte Mucho Audubon Society](#) worked with city, state and federal leaders to rehabilitate this twisty section of river, and that's why it was so crushing when during the Trump administration the area was designated for border wall construction, Cigarroa said.

"We have an ecotourism gem here and we feel this designation is important to help continue the development of that industry in Laredo and also to protect our wonderful and beautiful ecological treasures," Cigarroa said.



Melissa Cigarroa, board president of the International Rio Grande Study Center, speaks on May 28, 2021, with a National Guardsman about cutting carrizo cane too short on the banks of the Rio Grande in Laredo, Texas. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

"In the wall-fight, we tried to let people in Laredo understand that we were threatened to lose this," said Cigarroa, a leader in the Laredo No Border Wall Coalition. "The wall would tear down these ecological areas and would deny access of Laredoans to the riverside and it was an integral part of our message to people here."

President Joe Biden has halted all border wall construction. Homeland Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has repeatedly indicated the administration is in favor of "smart border management" methods, which environmentalists fear could include all-weather roads built on the riverlands, floodlights and underground sensors to deter illegal immigration.

But during a May 4 speech before the 51st Washington Conference on the Americas, Mayorkas indicated the administration might go another direction, saying: "We must begin to view our smart border management as a critical piece of our economic security and also as a tool for connection and economic development. Rather than viewing borders solely as the lines that mark national boundaries and that divide us from one another, we should see borders as a point of connection, as the place where the flows of people, goods, and ideas from different countries interact and intersect. This view recognizes the good that we can offer each other, and the connection between international exchange and economic vitality.

We should see borders as a point of connection, as the place where the flows of people, goods, and ideas from different countries interact and intersect."

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas

If the border wall had been built, both of these areas would have been south of it, basically in no-man's lands inaccessible from the United States, Cigarroa said.

She said her organization has upcoming meetings with Border Patrol "to talk about how we can both meet our goals. To have access and preserve the ecological footprint of this area and understand the need border security has for their line of sight."

Several dirt roads already exist in the area and Border Patrol agents frequently are seen on ATVs and in vehicles patrolling. Cigarroa said they'd like for the ATVs to be curtailed because the noisy vehicles disrupt bird nesting, and she's hoping agents will move gingerly "to protect the habitat," she said. "These roads exist now and we want to ask them to respect that and stay on the roads."



U.S. Border Patrol agents in ATV units are seen May 28, 2021, clearing brush for footprints of migrants in Laredo, Texas, in an area known as Riverbend, which has just been designated a natural landmark. (Border Report Photo/Sandra Sanchez)

Right now, nothing is certain.

On Friday, as she came through a clearing of thick brush from the Las Palmas trail to a silt-formed “island” in the Rio Grande, Cigarroa was frustrated to see that federal officials had recently mowed a huge swath of carrizo cane to its nub. She said that will only foster future development of the towering 10-foot-tall invasive cane, not prevent it from growing, according to plans laid out by federal officials in a carrizo cane eradication study program that they produced..

“You cut all the cane,” she told a National Guardsman who was patrolling the banks. “According to their science, you are supposed to allow it to grow to 3-feet and then

maintain it and then you get a nice hedge and it doesn’t grow tall. But obviously they aren’t doing that.”

The guardsman listened to Cigarroa and smiled and then asked Delgado the names of a few birds sitting on rocks in the Rio Grande.

He told Border Report he enjoys the post and has binoculars and often “watches the birds all day.”

—Sandra Sanchez

Sandra Sanchez can be reached at Ssanchez@borderreport.com. Visit the BorderReport.com homepage for the latest exclusive stories and breaking news about issues along the United States-Mexico border.

Birding with Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service in Texas.



The Rio Diablo Birding Camp for teen birders has been traveling around west Texas. You can follow their adventures on the Birding with Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service FB page. RDBC Day 5 (2 June) is a wrap! We explored Seminole Canyon State Park with Mrs. Vicky from the Shumla Archaeological Center for birds and rock art! After a wonderful hike down the canyon we were excited to welcome Noah from @huntsphtovideo this afternoon! Hunt’s has provided participants with loaner cameras and lenses so they can all document their time at Rio Diablo Birding Camp! THANKS HUNTS’.

Tomorrow we are up bright and early to try to catch the Golden-cheeked Warbler!

FWS Proposes Threatened and Endangered Listing for Lesser Prairie-Chickens



Lesser Prairie Chicken, Tympanuchus pallidicinctus

Photo and Map from *Birds of the World*

<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/lepchi/cur/introduction>

On June 1, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) published a Federal Register Notice proposing to list two distinct population segments (DPS) of lesser prairie-chickens under the Endangered Species Act. The Southern DPS consists of the shinnery oak ecoregion in New Mexico and Texas, and the Northern DPS consists of the sand sagebrush ecoregion, the mixed grass ecoregion, and the short grass/Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) ecoregion in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Kansas; these regions make up the entirety of the range of lesser prairie-chickens. According to the FWS, habitat loss and fragmentation have caused declines of up to 90% from historic levels. As a result, the agency determined that the Southern DPS is warranted for listing as endangered and the Northern DPS is warranted for listing as threatened.

The announcement states: “The primary threat impacting both DPSs is the ongoing loss of large, connected blocks of grassland and shrubland habitat. The Southern DPS has low resiliency, redundancy, and representation and is particularly vulnerable to severe droughts due to being located in the dryer and hotter southwestern portion of the range... (A)s a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, resiliency has been much reduced across two of the ecoregions in the Northern DPS when compared to historical conditions. However, this

DPS still has redundancy across the three ecoregions and genetic and environmental representation. We expect habitat loss and fragmentation across the Northern DPS to continue into the foreseeable future, resulting in even further reduced resiliency.”

“This announcement is emblematic of the loss of prairie habitats across North America, making prairies the most threatened ecosystem on the continent,” said Ted Koch, Executive Director of the North American Grouse Partnership. “The decline of chickens is consistent with unprecedented loss of other grassland birds, pollinators, and other prairie ecosystem functions including soil health, water quality and even carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change.”

The publishing of the proposed listing decision opens a public comment period that closes on August 2, 2021. Comments can be submitted electronically through the Federal eRulemaking Portal and searching for docket number FWS-R2-ES-2021-0015.

June 15, 2021

<https://wildlifemanagement.institute/>

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Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Our first set of Wilson's Plover chicks hatched last week! We currently have 2 pairs with chicks on Matagorda Beach and 1 pair with a chick on Sargent. Please remember



to share the beach and give beach nesting birds and their chicks space!

Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration

Thu, Aug 19–Sun, Aug 22
Hotel Limpia, 101 Memorial Square
Fort Davis, TX

Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza

Sept 18–25
Gulf Coast Bird Observatory,
299 West, TX-332
Lake Jackson, TX

HummerBird Celebration Sept 16–19

Thu, Sept 16–Sun, Sept 19
Rockport-Fulton High School
1801 Omohundro St
Rockport, TX

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Summer 2021 Newsletter

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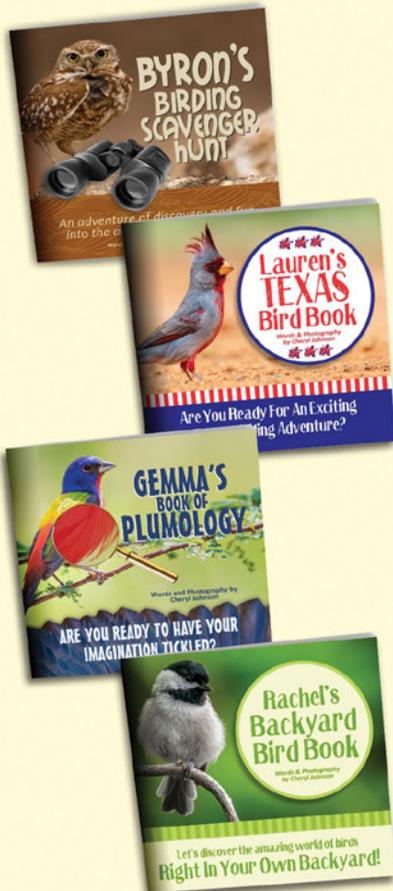
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| ANIMALS |

The 232 animals in this photo were killed by house cats in just one year

The image seeks to draw attention to the more than two billion birds and other animals killed annually by domestic cats in the U.S.

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