



SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 52, NO. 3-4

MARCH-APRIL 2003

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

- Naturalist's Calendar 1, 19, 21
- From the Executive Director 2
- Calendar of TAS Events 3
- TAS Field Trips & Events 4-6
- TAS Meetings 6-7
- Non-TAS Events 8-9
- Texas Songbird Festival 9, flyer insert
- Education Committee Classes 10-11
- Kids' Section 12-13
- Listing Challenge Results 14
- Volunteer of the Month 14
- Volunteer Opportunity 14
- Conservation News 15
- Urban Habitat Development 16-17
- Poem 17
- Backyard Birding 18-19
- Sanctuary News 20
- Combined March-April Newsletter .. 20
- Oak Wilt Reminder 21
- Membership Form Back

Naturalist's Calendar

Springtime Entertainment from Nature's "Rock" Band

"Tick. Tick. Tick..." Like two stones clicking together, the tapping accelerates until it settles into a rapid, steady beat. You might hear it in the daylight, and mistake it for a Green Kingfisher's calls, which sound very similar but more erratic. More likely, you'll hear it at night, in company with several more; then the sound is more like someone juggling bags of marbles. Spotting one of the noisy gnomes with your flashlight is tricky. If you're patient, you may soon see the slight movement as an inch-long frog inflates its throat pouch to begin another round.



These frogs, nature's "rock" band, are Blanchard's Cricket Frogs (*Acris crepitans blanchardi*), one of the most common amphibians in Central Texas. They sometimes begin calling as early as February, when the Strecker's Chorus Frogs are still creaking, but they reach full chorus in spring and continue through the summer.

Like the chorus frogs, Blanchard's Cricket Frogs live at the edges of water bodies, but they are partial to the grassy banks of ponds and sluggish streams that are exposed to the sun during the day. If you walk beside such a pond on a sunny afternoon, you may send a cascade of them plopping into the water.

Blanchard's Cricket Frogs have rough, warty skin, colored an inconspicuous muddy gray-brown. Unlike the chorus frogs, they have only indistinct dark markings on the head and body, though the legs are usually crossed by dark bars. There is usually a pale line running from the eye to the foreleg, and a dark triangular blotch between the eyes. Sometimes there is a reddish or greenish mark in the middle of the back.

Their cryptic coloring helps them survive, for cricket frogs have many predators. Ribbon snakes are especially fond of them. Water snakes, raccoons, and Green Herons also take their toll. In turn, cricket frogs eat a variety of small invertebrates, including beetles, springtails, slugs, spiders, and (appropriately) crickets. A

(Continued on page 19)



TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING Thursday, April 17, 7 p.m.

Program: Local Recovery of an Endangered Songbird:
Black-capped Vireos at Fort Hood

Presenter: Gil Eckrich

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive

(See page 7 for details and directions.)

Travis Audubon Society

Email addresses are at "About Us,"
<www.travisaudubon.org>.

Officers and Directors

President	
Russ Nelson	431-1420
First Vice President	
Vacant	
Second Vice President	
Dan Smith	451-2632
Treasurer	
Wayne Bartholomew	507-3553
P.O. Box 40787	
Austin TX 78704-0014	
Recording Secretary	
Wilma Anderson	301-5866
Past President	
Bob Warneke	443-5488
Executive Director	
Rob Fergus / TAS	926-0999
10803 Platt Lane	
Austin TX 78725	
Directors	
Jackie Davis	292-6261
BJ Dertien	
Pat Dillon	347-0452
Anne Donovan	472-3030
Al Green	512-357-1427
Shelia Hargis	291-1861
John Kelly	331-8693

Sanctuary Caretakers

TAS Wildlife Sanctuary	
John and Marcie Wilcox	219-8425
Blair Woods	
Stennie Meadours	443-8152

ACT Representatives

John Kelly (state president)	331-8693
Bryan Hale (state treasurer)	474-5599

Signal Smoke Editor

Rosemary Wetherold	892-1606
--------------------	----------



TAS Hotline: 926-8751

The hotline has information on TAS events (press 6) and rare birds in our area (press 5). To report sightings, press 1. To ask about birds, environmental issues, or TAS, press 2. No touch-tone phone? Call 474-5599.

TAS Web Site

www.travisaudubon.org

TAS Email

info@travisaudubon.org

TAS Fax

892-2026

Mission Statement

The Travis Audubon Society promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and preservation of birds, wildlife, and their habitats in Central Texas.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I have never seen Mountain Plovers as well as I did on February 1. A couple of friends from Utah had flown into town on business, and I picked them up from the Marriott early in the morning for a few hours of birding up near Granger Lake. We drove through miles of agricultural fields to a location where 60 plovers had been found the week before, and a nice flock was still there close to the road.

After watching these rare winter residents for a while, we were getting ready to leave when one of my friends said, "Look at the flying saucer." Through binoculars, we could see a bright object streaking across the sky to the north. I said, "Maybe it's the space shuttle," but just then, we noticed it breaking apart, so I said, "No, can't be the space shuttle—it's breaking up. Must be a satellite reentering the atmosphere." We watched the fireball continue to break up until it passed out of sight to the east. It wasn't until two hours later that a phone call informed us of what we had actually seen.

We weren't the only birders to witness the *Challenger* disaster. Maggie Burnett and Richard Kaskan were leading a Travis Audubon Society field trip to the Barton Creek Habitat Preserve that morning and had a similar experience, as did Randy Pinkston, looking for Red-headed Woodpeckers along the Lampasas River, and a group of birders at the Village Creek Drying Basins in Arlington.

As birdwatchers, our wanderings often lead us to witness events that many

(Continued on page 17)

COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS

Email addresses are available at <www.travisaudubon.org> under "About Us."

TAS Rare Bird Alert	Shawn Ashbaugh	970-7170
	Alert number	926-8751
Bird Records Conservation	Bob Barth	327-1173
Cyberspace	John Kelly	331-8693
Education	Jenny Rasmussen	218-1580
Field Trips	Shelia Hargis	291-1861
Hornsby Bend	Georgia Harper	467-9700
Hospitality	Tim Hissam	251-6067
	Vacant	
Membership Secretary Programs	Chris Doggett	512-898-5500
	Al Green	512-357-1427
Property and Finance Publications	Pat Dillon	347-0452
Publicity	Rosemary Wetherold	892-1606
Sales	Vacant	
Sanctuary	Dan Smith	451-2632
Urban Habitat Development	Bryan Hale	474-5599
	Chuck Simms	331-9630

SIGNAL SMOKE INFORMATION

About the Newsletter

Signal Smoke, published monthly or bi-monthly by Travis Audubon Society, is a TAS membership benefit. To join Travis Audubon Society, see the back page of this newsletter. Notify National Audubon Society (800-274-4201) and Chris Doggett (Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 1132, Round Rock TX 78680-1132) of address changes.

The post office will not forward *Signal Smoke*. All original material © 2003 Travis Audubon Society; all rights reserved.

Newsletter Deadline

The deadline for submissions is the first day of the preceding month (e.g., April 1 for the May issue). Submit articles, announcements, and uncopyrighted art to Rosemary Wetherold, 4507 Cliffstone Cove, Austin TX 78735-6610; 892-2026 (fax); or <rosemaryw@austin.rr.com>. Submissions by email or on a floppy are preferred but not required. Call Rosemary at 892-1606 if you have questions.

Signal Smoke is printed on recycled paper.



March–April 2003 Calendar of Travis Audubon Society Events

 Field Trip—See pages 4–6

 Meeting—See pages 6–7

 Birding Class—See pages 10–11

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MARCH 23  Warbler Survey, Bright Leaf State Natural Area, 8 am	24	25	26	27  Introduction to Wildscaping Class begins, 7 pm  Bird Records Committee Meeting, 7 pm	28	29  Waco Wetlands, 8:30 am  Annual Open House, Baker Sanctuary, 9 am  Ecological Literacy Day, Hornsby Bend (workday/nature walk), 9 am
30	31	APRIL 1  Warbler ID Class begins, 7 pm Deadline for <i>May Signal Smoke</i> (p. 2)—no foolin'!	2  Urban Habitat Development Group Meeting, 7 pm	3	4	5  Youth Camp Follow-up Birding Walk, time TBA  Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, 7:30 am  Cave/Bird Walk, Westside Preserve, 8 am
6  Bird walk, Emma Long Metropolitan Park, 7 am	7  Education Committee Meeting, 7 pm	8  Sanctuary Committee Meeting & Potluck, 6:30 p.m.  Planning Group Meeting for Youth Birding Mini-Camp, 6:30 pm	9	10  TAS Board of Directors Meeting, 6:45 pm	11	12  Biodiversity Project BioBlitz, Hornsby Bend  Monthly Bird Count, Hornsby Bend, 7 am  HBBO Meeting & Potluck, 11:30 am  South Llano River State Park weekend trip
13  Field trip, Warbler Vista and Cow Creek in Balcones Canyonlands, 6:30 am  Continuation of weekend trip to South Llano River State Park	14	15	16	17 TAS Regular Monthly Meeting with program, 7 pm (see page 7)	18	19  Bird walk, Hornsby, 7:30 am  Bull Creek Greenbelt, 7:30 am  Riata Pond/Yett Creek, 8 am  Children's nature walk, 8 am  Hummer Workshop, 1 pm
20  Bird walk, Meadow Lake, 4 pm	21	22	23	24  Bird Records Committee Meeting, 7 pm	25	26  Wild Basin 7:30am  Ecological Literacy Day, 9 am  Kickapoo Caverns weekend trip
27  Continuation of weekend trip to Kickapoo Caverns	28	29	30  Beginning Birding Class begins, 7 pm	MAY 1 Deadline for June <i>Signal Smoke</i> (p. 2)	2 Texas Songbird Festival begins (p. 9)	3  Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, 7:30a  Shield Ranch, 7:30 am

TAS FIELD TRIPS AND EVENTS

All TAS field trips are open to members and nonmembers and to experienced and inexperienced birders. Wear appropriate clothing and walking shoes, and bring binoculars and water. Unless otherwise noted, field trips are free. Carpoolers should expect to pay a share of the gasoline expense. **Please check the TAS website <www.travisaudubon.org> or the TAS hotline (926-8751) for up-to-date information on field trips, including cancellations due to weather or other circumstances.** Because of the publication schedule of the newsletter, things can change!

Note: To provide more timely and updated information on field trips organized by the TAS Field Trip Committee, we are experimenting in this issue with providing complete details about those field trips only on the Field Trips page of the TAS website <www.travisaudubon.org/fieldtrips.html>. From there, you may print out directions and other details about specific trips. For those of you who do not have Internet access, contact phone numbers are provided. We are hoping that this will improve our overall service to you by allowing for field trips to be organized on shorter notice and for trip changes to be available on the TAS website.

Sunday, March 23, 8–11 am

Warbler Survey in Bright Leaf State Natural Area

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Georgia Harper, 499-4508, <gharper@utsystem.edu>.



Saturday, March 29, 8:30 am–noon

Trip to Waco Wetlands with Central Texas Audubon Society

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Julie Crouch, 339-0193 (h), <jul.c@care2.com>; or Kathy McCormack, 996-6906 (w), <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

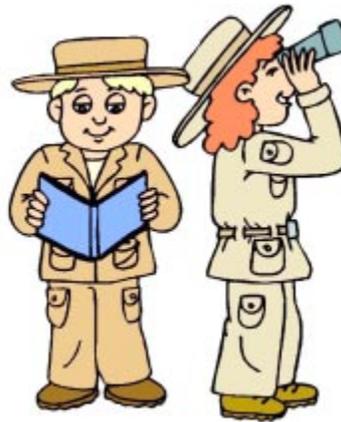
Saturday, March 29, 9 am–noon Annual Open House at the TAS Baker Sanctuary

Join us for walks throughout the sanctuary to see Golden-cheeked Warblers. Volunteers are needed to help guide tours and direct traffic. If you would like to help with this event, contact John and Marcie Wilcox at 219-8425 or <jmwo@earthlink.net>.



Saturday, March 29, 9 am–1 pm Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend

Volunteer workday at Hornsby Bend. See Volunteer Opportunity on page 14 for details.



Saturday, April 5, time TBA

Youth Camp Follow-up Birding Walk

All kids and their parents who have attended a TAS Youth Birding Camp are encouraged to attend. We will be working on spring migrating birds. Details to come in future newsletters. For more information, contact Amy Sugeno at 512-396-3642 (San Marcos) or <amydave@thrifty.net>.

Saturday, April 5, 7:30–11:30 am

Field Trip to Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Maggie Burnett, 899-0390, mburnett@austin.rr.com.

Saturday, April 5, 8–10 am

Interpretive Cave/Bird Walk at Westside Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Kathy McCormack, 996-6906 (w), <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

Sunday, April 6, 7 am–noon

Bird Walk at Emma Long Metropolitan Park (Turkey Creek)

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Charles Stephens, 600-1700 (w), <charles_stephens@yahoo.com>.

Saturday, April 12

1st Annual Austin Biodiversity Project BioBlitz

Teams of experts and volunteers will join the Hornsby Bend monthly bird survey (see next calendar item) in an attempt to identify as many plant, animal, and microbe species as possible at Hornsby Bend. We will need birders to help survey the birds, and volunteers knowledgeable in finding and identifying other organisms to join other field teams. Public presentations and displays of identified organisms will take place at the Center for Environmental Studies at Hornsby Bend from 2 to 5 p.m. If you are interested in joining a plant, insect, wildlife, or other survey team, contact Rob Fergus, 347-7572, <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.



TAS TRIPS AND EVENTS (CONTINUED)

Saturday, April 12, 7 am

Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend

Held in conjunction with Austin Biodiversity Project BioBlitz (see preceding calendar item). Meet at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. The Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory meeting and potluck lunch will be held at **11:30 a.m.** after the morning survey. Contact Russ Nelson, 431-1420, <russelln@concentric.net>.



**Saturday–Sunday,
April 12–13**

Field Trip to South Llano River State Park

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Stu

Wilson at 459-1082 (h) or

<stu@bga.com>; or Kathy McCormack at 996-6906 (w) or <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

Sunday, April 13, 6:30 am–noon

Field Trip to Warbler Vista and Cow Creek in Balcones Canyonlands

For meeting location and directions, call or email Charles Stephens of Wild Birds Unlimited at 600-1700 or <charles_stephens@yahoo.co>.

Saturday, April 19, 7:30 am–noon

Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Richard Kaskan, 748-8660, <kaskan@ieee.org>.

Saturday, April 19, 7:30 am–noon

Field Trip to Bull Creek Greenbelt

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Stu Wilson, 459-1082, <stu@bga.com>; or George Kerr, 345-8791, <GKKerr@aol.com>.

Saturday, April 19, 8–11 am

Spring Bird Walk at Riata Pond/Yett Creek Park

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Merry Cox, 401-6991 (h), <merrycox@austin.rr.com>.

Saturday, April 19, 8–11 am

Children's Nature Walk, Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park

Tailored for children ages 5–10 and their parents, but all are welcome. For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Charles Stephens, 600-1700, <charles_stephens@yahoo.com>; or Rob Fergus, 347-7572, <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Sunday April 20, 4–5:30 pm

Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Jenny Rasmussen, 218-1580, <roadrunner1@mindspring.com>.

Saturday, April 26, 7:30–10:30 am

Field Trip to Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Georgia Harper, 499-4508, <gharper@utsystem.edu>; or Diana Seidel, 306-0931.

**Saturday, April 26,
9 am–1 pm**

Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend

Volunteer workday at Hornsby Bend. See **Volunteer Opportunities on page 00** for details.



Saturday–Sunday, April 26–27

Trip to Kickapoo Caverns and Fort Clark Springs

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Kathy McCormack, 996-6906 (w), <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

Saturday, May 3, 7:30–11:30 am

Field Trip to Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Maggie Burnett, 899-0390, <mburnett@austin.rr.com>.

Saturday, May 3, 2003, 7:30–11:30 am

Field Trip to Shield Ranch

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Georgia Harper, 499-4508, <gharper@utsystem.edu>.

Saturday, May 10, 7 am

Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend

Meet at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. The Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory meeting and potluck lunch will be held at **11:30 a.m.**

after the morning survey. Contact Russ Nelson, 431-1420, <russelln@concentric.net>.



Saturday, May 10, 7 am–noon

Field Trip to Palmetto State Park (between Luling and Gonzales)

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Erik Huebner, 448-4071 (h), <EMHuebner@pbsj.com>; or Kathy McCormack, 996-6906 (w), <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

Saturday, May 10, 8–about 10:30 am

Bird Walk at Blunn Creek Nature Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Wayne Bartholomew, 507-3553.

TAS TRIPS AND EVENTS (CONTINUED)

Saturday, May 17, 6 am–3 pm
OR Sunday, May 18, 6 am–3 pm

Field Trip to Fort Hood (Killeen)

TAS members can go either Saturday or Sunday but not both days. For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Kathy McCormack 996-6906 (w), <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

Saturday, May 17, 7:30 am–noon

Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Richard Kaskan, 748-8660, <kaskan@ieee.org>.

Saturday, May 17, 8–11 am

Children's Nature Walk, Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park

Tailored for children ages 5–10 and their parents, but all are welcome. For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Charles Stephens, 600-1700, <charles_stephens@yahoo.com>; or Rob Fergus, 347-7572, <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Sunday, May 18, 4–5:30 pm

Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Jenny Rasmussen, 218-1580, <roadrunner1@mindspring.com>.

Thursday–Sunday, July 3–13, 2003
The Galapagos Islands: A Family Adventure

TAS and Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT) invite you to join Victor Emanuel and Greg Lasley in exploring the Galapagos Islands on the comfortable cruise ship *Eclipse*. The emphasis will be on birds and general natural history, and we'll try to see all of the endemic birds possible. A family cruise director will organize daily activities and meals for children onboard.



Enjoy the Darwin's finches, giant tortoises, and iguanas you've always dreamed of. For more information, contact VENT at <www.ventbird.com> or 328-5221. VENT will make a donation to TAS for each member on the trip, so mention TAS when making your reservation.



TAS MEETINGS

Thursday, March 27, 7 pm
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Contact Ethel Kutac: 346-7659.

Wednesday, April 2, 7 pm
URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

1925 Rutland Dr., in Root Cause Project office. Contact Chuck Simms: 331-9630; <charlesvsi@aol.com>

Monday, April 7, 7–9 pm
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

North Village Branch Library. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis: 291-1861; <shargis@austin.rr.com>.



**Tuesday, April 8,
6:30 pm**
**SANCTUARY
COMMITTEE MEETING
AND POTLUCK**

Baker Cabin, TAS Baker Sanctuary, at 12308 Lime Creek Road. Contact Marcie and John Wilcox: 219-8425; <jmwo@earthlink.net>.

Tuesday, April 8, 6:30–7:30 pm
PLANNING GROUP FOR YOUTH BIRDING CAMP

Threadgill's (south location, 301 W. Riverside). All are welcome to come and help plan the next TAS Youth Camp. Contact Amy Sugeno: 512-396-3642 (San Marcos) or <amydave@thrifty.net>.

Thursday, April 10, 6:45 pm
TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive. Contact Russ Nelson: 431-1420.

Saturday, April 12, 11:30 am
**HORNSBY BEND BIRD OBSERVATORY
MEETING & POTLUCK LUNCH**

Following the monthly Hornsby Bend bird count (see page 4). Center for Environmental Research (building near entrance to Hornsby bend complex). Contact Rob Fergus: 347-7572; <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Thursday, April 17, 7 pm
TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

For details, see box on page 7.

TAS MEETINGS (CONTINUED)

Thursday, April 24, 7 pm BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Contact Ethel Kutac: 346-7659.

Monday, May 5, 7–9 pm EDUCATION COMMITTEE

North Village Branch Library. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis: 291-1861; <shargis@austin.rr.com>.

Wednesday, May 7, 7 pm URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

1925 Rutland Dr., in Root Cause Project office. Contact Chuck Simms: 331-9630; <charlesvsi@aol.com>.

Thursday, May 8, 6:45 pm TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive. Contact Russ Nelson: 431-1420.

Saturday, May 10, 11:30 am HORNSBY BEND BIRD OBSERVATORY MEETING & POTLUCK LUNCH

For details, see April 12 calendar item.

Thursday, May 15, 7 pm TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

This last general meeting program of the season will be presented by John Karger, executive director of Last Chance Forever. This organization rehabilitates raptors and has a very interesting show with live hawks, owls, eagles, and vultures. We will be meeting at the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department headquarters at 4200 Smith School Road. The program is outside, and attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or blankets to sit on. The program will begin at 7 p.m. sharp, as John will not let the birds fly after sundown. (The next TAS general meeting will be in September.)



Thursday, April 17, 7 pm TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

Program: Local Recovery of an Endangered Songbird: Black-capped Vireos at Fort Hood

Presenter: Gil Eckrich

Join us as Gil Eckrich describes how Fort Hood increased its Black-capped Vireo population from 85 pairs in 1987 to approximately 3,000–5,000 pairs. The vireo is listed as an endangered species because of loss of habitat and cowbird parasitism. Gil will explain how Fort Hood approached these problems and the potential transfer of these approaches throughout the vireo's range. Gil has been working on the Fort Hood Endangered Species Project since February 1991. Before that, he served 20 years in the U.S. Army. There he

began his endangered species work while assigned to the United Nations Armistice Commission in Korea, by counting Manchurian Cranes in the Demilitarized Zone. Gil began working at Fort Hood by doing cowbird control, succeeding where previous efforts had failed—increasing the number of removals of female Brown-headed Cowbirds from 162 in 1990 to 1,284. The percentage of Black-capped Vireo nests parasitized by cowbirds had been as high as 90.9%, but it has been in the single digits for the past six years. Gil's paper "Effective Landscape Management of Brown-headed Cowbirds at Fort Hood, Texas" was published in *Studies in Avian Biology*. He has presented the Fort Hood cowbird control program at various conferences and seminars. In 2001 he received recognition as a Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Lone Star Legend for his work with private landowners in restoring and preserving endangered species habitat. Gil is now the outreach coordinator for Fort Hood's Natural Resources Management Branch. Program begins at 7:30.

Location: Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Dr. (Exit MoPac at 2222, go west on 2222, turn left on Balcones Dr., stay to the left at the fork, turn right into church parking lot.) Bus routes: <www.capmetro.austin.tx.us>; 474-1200. Bicycle routes: <www.ci.austin.tx.us/bicycle/bikemap.htm>; 974-7240. **Refreshments provided.**



OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

The following events are not Travis Audubon Society events but may be of interest.

Mondays–Thursdays, 1:58 pm; Fridays, 12:58 pm

“Passport to Texas”

90-second radio program on KUT (90.5-FM) from Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

Thursdays, 6:04 pm

Howie Richey’s Eco-Calendar

Spot during *All Things Considered* on KUT, 90.5-FM.

Thursday–Sunday, March 27–30

Texas Tropics Nature Festival, McAllen

Celebrating the unique biodiversity of the Rio Grande Valley, an important migratory route for birds and butterflies with more than 450 bird species and over 260 butterfly species. Guided field trips, seminars, trade show. Contact McAllen Chamber of Commerce, McAllen TX 78505; 877-622-5536; <www.mcallencvb.com>.

Thursday–Sunday, April 3–6

Galveston Featherfest, Galveston

A birding festival combining birding field trips and nature seminars with the art and history that makes Galveston Island one of the leading Texas destinations. Festival participants will enjoy excursions to a variety of the top birding spots in the country during spring migration, a time of year that the island abounds with 300+ species of birds. Contact Renee Adame, Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council, 409-945-6302, <radame@houston.rr.com>.

Saturday, April 5, 10 am–1 pm

Trowel and Error Gardening Symposium, Mayfield Park, Austin

Lectures include “Pond Plants for Shade and Sun Gardens” (Jeff Yarbrough, owner of Emerald Garden Nursery and aquatic garden specialist),



“Woodland Haven and Meadow Delight—The Joys of Gardening for Wildlife” (Cathy Nordstrom, owner of San Souci Gardens and backyard habitat expert), and “Made for the Shade—Well-Adapted Plants for Shady Places” (Trisha Shirey, director of Flora and Fauna, Lake Austin Spa Resort). Plus plant

sale, raffle, and tour of Mayfield-Gutsch home. Proceeds benefit Mayfield Park, which is located at 3505 W. 35th Street (next to Laguna Gloria Art Museum). Free admission; \$5 donation requested. For more information, call Karen Cannatti, 453-7074.

Saturday–Sunday, April 5–6 Spring Plant Sale and Gardening Festival, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

For details, visit <www.wildflower.org> or call 292-4100.



Friday, April 11 Texas Amphibian Watch Seminar, Hornsby Bend

Learn about the frogs and toads of Central Texas and how to census them in this evening seminar.

Contact Marsha Reimer at 912-7062

or <marsha.reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us>. Hornsby Bend will host one presentation the evening of April 11. Another will take place May 21 at Wild Basin.

Saturday, April 12

Attwater’s Prairie Chicken Festival, Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, Eagle Lake, Texas

Wildlife viewing tours; arts and crafts; information booths on natural history of the Coastal Prairie. Contact Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, P.O. Box 519, Eagle Lake, TX 77434; 979-234-3021.

Tuesday–Sunday, April 22–27

4th Annual NatureQuest Birding and Nature Festival, Concan, Texas

Field trips, workshops, afternoon seminars, and evening programs and activities related to birds, bats, mammals, snakes, butterflies, insects, wildflowers, native plants, Champion Trees, Hill Country plant and river ecology, Central Texas geology, and stargazing. For details, call 800-210-0380 or visit <www.thcrr.com/quest.htm>.

Thursday–Saturday, April 24–26, 2003

Texas Ornithological Society 50th Reunion Convention, Port Lavaca

Field trips, scientific sessions, banquet, and annual meeting. Motels must be contacted directly; rooms at special rates until March 31. For details and registration form, visit <www.texasbirds.org/meetings/port_lavaca_2003.html>.

Friday–Saturday, April 25–26

10th Annual Bluebird Festival, Wills Point, Texas

Driving tours afford access to hundreds of bluebirds and nesting boxes lining the roads into town. Arts and crafts, games and food, and educational booths are set up throughout the brick-lined streets of downtown. Contact Wills Point Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 217, Wills Point, TX 75169; 903-873-3111; 800-WPBLUBI; <www.flash.net/~junction/festival.htm>.

Friday–Sunday, April 25–27, Kountze, Texas Birding in the Big Thicket

Birding celebration with workshops, tours (Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, High Island, The Big Thicket); children’s workshop with hands on projects. Contact Kountze Chamber of Commerce, 866-456-8689; <www.kountzecoc.org>.

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST (CONTINUED)

Saturday–Sunday, April 26–May 4 **The Great Texas Birding Classic, Texas Coast**

Week-long birding tournament with \$50,000 first place Conservation Cash Grand Prize to benefit bird habitat protection; 400 species possible, including Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and Green Kingfisher. Contact Birding Classic, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744; 888-TX-BIRDS (892-4737); <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gtbc/>; <shelly.scroggs@tpwd.state.tx.us>.



Sunday, April 27, 2–5 pm **Bright Leaf Earth Day 2003**

Celebrate Earth Day as Bright Leaf State Natural Area is opened for an afternoon of exploration, with guided hikes of varying difficulty, kids' activities, and refreshments. Take RR 2222 west from MoPac, go one block west of the light at Mesa.

Take a left (south) on Creek Mountain to the base of the hill. Turn right. The parking lot will be on your left.

Friday–Sunday, May 2–4

3rd Annual Texas Songbird Festival, Lago Vista

For details, see the box at the right and the flyer inserted in this newsletter.

Saturday–Sunday, May 10–11

Spring Bird Count, Bamberger Ranch, Johnson City

The count is on Sunday, but you are welcome to arrive on Saturday evening after 6:00 PM and spend the night at the center (bring your own linens and towels). A potluck dinner is scheduled for 7 p.m. that night (bring food that is ready to eat or takes little preparation). We may take a walk to search for night birds that evening. Sunday morning we will be getting up bright and early for the bird count. Coffee will be available, but bring your own “no cook” breakfast and lunch in your own cooler. The count will be from 7 a.m. until 12:00 PM, when we'll meet for the tally. The terrain is rugged, so



wear sturdy shoes and field clothes. Registration required. Email Marsha Reimer at <Marsha.Reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us> to let her know if you are going and if you will be arriving Saturday evening (after 6:00 PM) or Sunday morning (at or before 6:30 AM), or if you would like to be placed on an email list for information on future bird counts. A map to the ranch is at <www.bambergerranch.org/map.htm>.

Saturday–Sunday, May 17–18 **4th Annual Dragonfly Days, Weslaco, Texas**

Focusing on diversity of dragonflies found in Lower Rio Grande Valley. field trips, seminars, and opportunities to see birds, butterflies, and dragonflies. Contact: Valley Nature Center, Weslaco, TX; 956-969-2475.

Wednesday, May 21

Texas Amphibian Watch Seminar, Wild Basin

Learn about the frogs and toads of Central Texas and how to census them in this evening seminar. Contact Marsha Reimer at 912-7062 or <marsha.reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us>.

Thursday–Monday, September 18–29 **Ecuador–Galapagos Islands**

Birding and natural history tour sponsored by Wimberley Birding Society. Home base in Galapagos will be Finch Bay Hotel, on the nature-rich island of Santa Cruz. Twin beds, private baths, hot showers, yet close to wildlife, beach, tidal lagoons, cliffs, and cactus forests. Day trips on small, modern cruiser to other islands to see marine iguanas, sea lions, boobies, albatrosses, etc. Stay in Quito will include birding trips to Andean cloud forest reserves and other great birding sites. 390+ species, 38 endemics. Also included: Folkloric Ballet performance, shopping at Otavalo and other ancient Indian markets, city tour. Contact: Joe Sigg in Austin, 454-8363; Jerry Hall in Wimberley, 512-847-3730.



Local Songbird Festival Coming **May 2–4**

Enjoy the Third Annual Texas Songbird Festival, to be held in Friday–Sunday, May 2–4, in Lago Vista (on the outskirts of Austin). See the Balcones Canyonlands

National Wildlife Refuge, home to the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. Take a guided tour with wildlife experts who can share with you rare encounters with these endangered songbirds, other unique native wildlife, and the gorgeous natural habitat of the Texas Hill Country during the peak wildflower season. Bring a camera and enjoy a real hunt as you “shoot” wildlife on a guided tour with expert wildlife photographers who will share tips on how to bring home that perfect shot. Nearly 100 different species of birds were sighted at last year's festival. There will also be butterfly tours, a “Natural World Market” with outdoor products, seminars with nature experts, backyard habitat tours, and much more! Whether you are a novice or veteran birder, you will find something of interest to you. The Texas Songbird Festival is cosponsored by Lago Vista Chamber of Commerce. For more details, see the flyer in this newsletter for a registration form and additional information. You may also visit the festival's website at <<http://songbirdfestival.homestead.com/>>, or contact Lago Vista Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 4946, Lago Vista TX 78645; 888-328-LAGO; <info@lagovista.org>. Call now to get on the preregistration mailing list.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE CLASSES

Wildscaping Is for the Birds! Introduction to Wildscaping

Starting on March 27

Members of the Education Committee are busy developing a new set of classes. These classes will teach people to wildscape their yards, parks, schools, and so on. Wildscaping is a landscaping method that provides wildlife with food, water, shelter, and a place to raise young. Destruction of habitat is one of the leading causes for the decline in the numbers of many bird species. So, by creating new habitat, you are helping to ease that



crunch. Also, because a wildscaped yard is much more appealing to wildlife than a tradi-

tional lawn, you'll have many more birds than your neighbors! You won't have to travel to other locations to see good birds. They'll be in your backyard.

The first class in this series will be Introduction to Wildscaping, which will cover the basics of wildscaping. The topics will include advantages of wildscaping, use of native plants, design concepts, installation issues, maintenance considerations, and resources. Field trips to various wildscapes, both residential and public, will allow participants to see the end results and to talk to the owners or designers of the wildscapes.

In addition to the introductory course, we'll also offer more specialized/advanced classes that will deal with such topics as Design and Maintenance, Birdscaping, Butterfly Gardening, Integrated Pest Management, and Water Features. Stay tuned for these.

The lecture portion of our first Introduction to Wildscaping Class will be held on Thursdays, March 27 and April 3, from 7 to 9 p.m., at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin, 4700 Grover. The field trip to view several wildscapes will occur on Saturday, April 5, 9 a.m. to noon. Martha Renfroe and Jane Tillman will teach the class. Martha has been teaching the habitat portion of our Backyard Birding class for years and is very knowledgeable about birds, native plants, and wildscaping. Jane has volunteered at the National Wildflower Center and was very active in the Xeriscape Garden Club. She is an amateur naturalist, and her backyard is certified as a wildlife habitat by the National Wildlife Federation. Cost of the class is \$25. Contact Shelia at <shargis@austin.rr.com> or 291-1861 to sign up.

Warbler Identification Class

Starting on April 1

Warblers will be migrating north before long. Are you ready to ID them all? If not, consider taking our Warbler Identification class taught by Cliff Shackelford of Texas Parks & Wildlife. This very popular class will focus mainly on the warblers likely to be seen in Texas, but other species will be included as time allows.

Lectures will take place on April 1 and 8 (Tuesdays) and

April 10 (Thursday), from 7 to 9 p.m., at the Center for Environmental Research auditorium at Hornsby Bend. The field trip will be Saturday and Sunday, April 12 and April 13, at High Island. Tuition is \$45. Participants will also be expected to cover Cliff's expenses during the field trip, which will be about \$15 per person. To sign up, contact Shelia at <shargis@austin.rr.com> or 291-1861.

Hummingbird Workshop

April 19

Hummingbirds. The word inspires visions of flashing jewels of red and green darting about your landscape, visiting flowers and feeders alike. Many people in the Austin area enjoy these birds year-round, while others experience their thrill for only a few months of the year.

TAS is excited to be offering our first ever Hummingbird Workshop, which will be cosponsored by Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. The workshop is designed to raise awareness of hummingbirds and their ecology. Mark Klym, TPWD's Hummingbird Roundup Coordinator, will teach the workshop, and topics will include hummingbirds and their place in our changing world, how Austinites can enjoy more hummingbirds in their garden, identification tips, and managing pest concerns around your hummingbird feeders. Participants will also receive a Hummingbird Roundup packet.

"Hummingbirds are one of the many families of birds that Texas has been blessed with a great diversity of," says Mark. "We have more recorded species of hummingbird in Texas than any other state in the nation, with 18 different species being found at times in Texas. Ten of these species have been seen right here in Travis County, yet most people still look for 'a hummingbird' as if there was just the one species."

Feeding hummingbirds has a long history in North America, but these birds, like many of the species that pollinate our wildflowers, have experienced some declines in the past. "These birds feed primarily on nectar from wildflowers and insects," says Klym. "Since our landscaping plans often include removing all the wildflowers and replacing them with carpet grass or flowers that provide little nectar, we have removed a significant part of their diet. We then protect these

exotic flowers with insecticides, killing still more of the needed diet for these birds. Then we hang up a feeder and wonder where the birds are!"

If you would like to learn more about these fascinating creatures, plan to attend the workshop, which will take place on April 19 from 1 to 5 p.m. and will be held at the Center for Environmental Research auditorium at Hornsby Bend. Tuition is \$7. To sign up, contact Shelia at 291-1861 or <shargis@austin.rr.com>.



EDUCATION COMMITTEE CLASSES (CONTINUED)

Spring 2003 Beginning Birding Class

Starting on April 30

The Education Committee will offer its next Beginning Birding Class starting in late April. This class is designed to provide new birders with the techniques and skills to help them identify unfamiliar birds. Lecture/slide presentations will be held Wednesday evenings, April 30, May 14 and 28, and June 11 from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in a meeting room at First Presbyterian Church, 8001 Mesa Drive in northwest Austin. Field trips will be on Saturdays following each class—May 3, 17, and 31 and June 14. Trips will begin at 7 a.m. and end between noon and 2 p.m. Because field trips provide the opportunity to put into practice the skills taught in the classroom, preference will be given to registrants who are willing to make a commitment to attend the field trips for this class.



Class members will receive a beginning birding booklet, plus many handouts. Topics will include identifying local birds, buying and using binoculars, and birding resources (books, websites, multimedia, etc.). The class will be taught by Education Committee member Jean Martin, who has been a birder for more than twelve years and has taught this class numerous times with excellent reviews each time.

The class fee is \$40 and class size will be limited to 12 people, so if you really want to begin learning about birds, don't delay. This class fills up quickly! As with all our classes, you don't have to be a TAS member to attend. To sign up, contact Shelia at <shargis@austin.rr.com> or 291-1861.

Interpretive Birding Workshop

Starting May 16

Have you ever been intrigued by the behavior of birds and wondered what function a specific behavior served? Would you like to add another dimension to your birdwatching? If you answered yes to either of these questions, consider taking part in the Interpretive Birding workshop being offered in May.

We're bringing in Dr. Jim Davis, a passionate observer of avian behavior and editor of the *Interpretive Birding Bulletin*. And we're bringing him all the way from Minnesota! Jim received his Ph.D. from UT Austin and went on to work at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. His scientific contributions have focused on kingfisher behavior, including territoriality, vocal communication, and mating systems. Over the past 15 years, Jim has traveled to different parts of the world to observe and write about bird behavior. In 1997 he started the Australian edition of *Interpretive Birding Bulletin* and launched the North American edition in 2000. Check out the *Interpretive Birding Bulletin's* website at <www.ibirding.com>.

Using an interactive style, Dr. Davis will explain the ins and outs of interpretive birding, an approach that encourages ama-

teurs to speculate on why birds behave the way that they do and to think about what's going on in the natural world around them. The workshop's goal is to improve one's observational skills and increase the enjoyment of watching birds. Also, Jim will cover what to look for when watching behavior and offer suggestions on how to interpret firsthand observations.

The workshop also includes an overview of the behavior of specific groups of birds such as woodpeckers, herons, and others, and it covers behavioral topics such as caching, mobbing, lekking, and vocal signaling. Since identification of species is *not* the goal, this workshop is appropriate for both advanced and novice birders.

For those participants wanting to put their newfound knowledge to the test, several field trips are planned. Jim will host small groups (limited to 12 adults) interested in watching behavior. IB outings are unique and are designed to be intellectually engaging.

Participants can choose from two options: attend the lecture only or attend the lecture and a field trip. The lecture will take place on Friday night, May 16, from 7 to 10 p.m. at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin, 4700 Grover. The fee for attending the lecture is \$45.

The field trips will be held on Saturday morning and Sunday morning at Hornsby Bend. Participants who want to attend a field trip will be assigned to one of the two days, with every effort made to accommodate the participant's schedule. Participation in the field trip is limited, so sign up early! The field trip fee is \$20. Contact Shelia at <shargis@austin.rr.com> or 291-1861 to sign up.

—Shelia Hargis



Audubon Adventures Classroom Kits Need Donations

Audubon Adventures Classroom Kits for grades 3–6 have been selling like hotcakes this winter! For the 2002–2003 school year we have reached

our quota of 70 classrooms that have signed up to use this nature curriculum, which highlights Freshwater Wetlands, Temperate Deciduous Forests and Woodlands, Coastal Environments, and Deserts this year. These materials are a gift to Austin-area schoolteachers from Travis Audubon Society. The cost is approximately \$40 per kit, which includes shipping. Please consider donating to Travis Audubon's *Audubon Adventures* program. Please consider donating to the TAS *Audubon Adventures* program. You can send a check payable to Travis Audubon Society, to P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704. Please note on the check that it is for *Audubon Adventures*. Many thanks.

—Julia Balinsky

KIDS' SECTION

Roughwings: That's What We Are!

by Katrina Troppy

What birds would I see today? I asked myself that in the misty dawn. The answer was unknown at the time, but I would know eight hours later. Many other students also were up at dawn, looking for birds and trying to go for the first-place prize. We are Roughwings.

Roughwings is a program for young men and women under the age of 14. This program is one of four programs in the Great Texas Birding Classic. The competition days are close to the Easter holidays (which is the best time for birds). This is a very exciting time for most people.

I remember when I first got asked to join a Roughwings team in South Texas. I was in fourth grade at that time. It was a very exciting experience for me.

The two birds that amazed me on my first competition were the eerie-looking Gray-crowned Yellowthroat and the docile Gray Hawk. I spotted the Gray Hawk on her nest, raising a tiny chick that looked like a pillow with the down coming out of it with black ink stains. The Gray-crowned Yellowthroat looked like its head had been dunked in a can of gray paint, and the belly all the way to the rump looked like it absorbed the sun's color all day long. This bird was seen hiding in the dense leaves of the cattails of Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. That year we had 96 birds.

The next year brought even more extravagant species. The one that stood out that year was the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. This bird has a much bigger bill than its cousins the gold-finches, Phyruloxia, and Northern Cardinal. This bird has a



black crown with red splotches over the chest accompanied by white on the chest. We came home with a tally of 110.

Last year's competition was the best yet. I saw the rare and gorgeous Purple Gallinule. At first glance it looks like a chicken with a paddle-shaped comb. That is where this species and its cousin the Common Moorhen get the name "water chicken." It looks like an artist painted the bird with the colors of the night sky. Maybe he also wanted to have warm colors that are on its comb and beak.

The practices start in March.

Practices consisted of watching slides and identifying them when our mentor, Mr. Delesantro, stopped the slide. Sometimes when we met for practice, we went outside and identified birds at the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco, Texas. Other times we met at different places like Anzalduas County Park, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, or other similar places such as these. One time we caught birds and observed their field marks.

When the "date" arrives, everyone has to wake up very early to get to our "meeting place." Our mentor takes attendance, and we head off to our first destination and stay there about an hour. If we didn't see many birds, we would head off to the next planned destination. In the meantime, we would mark down the species that we had seen on a life list. It looks like an Iowa Test booklet with a few pages. If we see some birds that are not listed on the list, we record the species on a special

WORD SEARCH

Clues

1. Only bats and birds can do this
2. A type of flightless bird: O_____
3. What cormorants eat
4. Very small bird: Bumblebee H_____
5. Nests in tree cavities: Wood D_____
6. This fast-running member of the Cuckoo family can eat rattlesnakes
7. These large birds migrate through Central Texas in large numbers: Broad-winged H_____
8. Looks like Woody Woodpecker: P_____ Woodpecker
9. Blue _____ or Scrub _____
10. Colorful bird that builds hanging, sac-like nests: Altamira O_____



Solution on page 19

Created by Amy Sugeno

KIDS' SECTION (CONTINUED)

section of our list. We would keep going to our destinations this day until our eight hours were called.

After our hours were up, we tallied the species that we marked down that we had seen that day. We counted the species, and we came up with the total number of species seen.

Although my life list now totals more than 250 birds, many of the specialty birds that I have on the list, I first discovered during Roughwings practice sessions and competition days.

Katrina Troppy, age 13, is from Raymondville, Texas. She is a seventh-grader at Teacher's Academy in Edinburg, and she began birding at age 7, when she was in the second grade. She also enjoys singing and crocheting.

How I Began Birding

by Jesse Huth

I love birding. I would like to tell you how I got started. I am home-schooled and had a lesson in science on birds. We studied behavior and anatomy—the basic stuff in a second grade lesson. Since my neighbor is a birdwatcher, my mom



thought I could learn more about birds from her. (We are always looking for good field trips!) My mom arranged for us to go over to her house. She invited me to come over in the mornings and sit on her porch and watch birds. First, she taught me how to look for field marks; then, how to use a field guide. She next taught me how to use silhouettes. She said that was very important! Then she showed me her husband's journal. After that, I watched birds with her all the time. Marilyn Beckwith (an Audubon member) is the one who netted me into birding! After that, I got all the birding gear I could get my hands on!

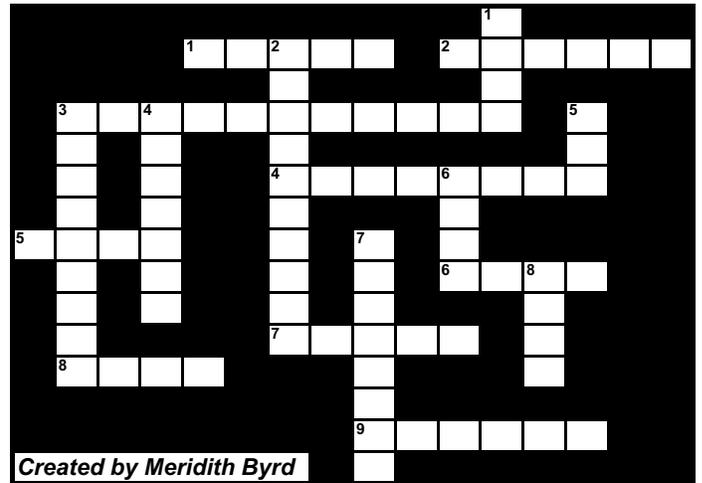
I am now 11 years old and a proud member of the Wimberley Birding Society. I also participate in Texas Parks & Wildlife Department activities and recently did the Audubon Youth Birding Camp. It was *great!* I love playing virtual birder on the Internet and my board game, *Gone Birding!* I wish all my friends would love birding. Two friends and I are planning to do the Birding Classic (as Roughwings) this year. Please wish us luck, but I know it will be fun anyway!

Questions about the Kids' Section?

Do you have questions about the Kids' Section? Email your questions to Amy Sugeno at <amydave@thrifty.net>.

Surprise Visitor

Some residents of Central Austin had a visit from the fellow on the right in December—an Eastern Screech-Owl. They were renovating their house, and he apparently found an opening. They noticed him when the cats started chasing a flying object down the hallway during the middle of the night! (Photo by Jennifer Primrose)



Created by Meridith Byrd

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Clues

Across

- This bird is associated with spring
- Made in a tree by a woodpecker or in your tooth by too many cavities
- State bird of Texas
- "Redbird"
- Red-tailed _____
- What you put in a bird feeder (example: sunflower)
- Signal _____: the name of this newsletter
- A bird's home
- What a hummingbird eats

Down

- _____ Eagle: national symbol

- Don't forget these when you go birdwatching!
- The biannual trip some birds make
- Golden-_____ Warbler: endangered bird that nests in Central Texas
- Barn or Snowy _____: bird that hunts at night
- White-faced or Glossy _____: this bird is in the same family as the Roseate Spoonbill
- _____ Crane: bird that spends the winter at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge
- Female birds lay these

Solution on page 15



CONSERVATION NEWS

NATIONAL CONSERVATION

Bad news about **wolves**. The last survivor of the pack released into Yellowstone back in 1995 has died. But there's also good news: more than 160 wolves now roam the park. In fact, wolves have now reoccupied much of their former range in the Northern Rockies—about 700 of them now live there. The wolf's recovery has been so successful that the federal government is proposing to upgrade its regional status from Endangered to Threatened. In the near future, wolf populations in the Northern Rockies may be de-listed altogether, leaving their management to the tender care of state game departments.

The Spotted Owl is in the news again—only this time it's the **Mexican Spotted Owl**, a close cousin of the more famous Northern Spotted Owl. A federal court recently rejected the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's plan to designate 4.6 million acres as critical habitat for the owl. Judge David Bury ruled that the proposed acreage was inadequate to ensure the subspecies' survival. The USFWS originally planned to designate 13.5 million acres as critical habitat, but the proposed acreage was drastically reduced in 2001 when all national forests in Arizona and New Mexico were removed from consideration. (In areas designated as critical habitat, federal agencies must confer with the USFWS before undertaking activities that might adversely affect the habitat.)

Hawaiian conservation officials plan to capture the last three po'o-uli (*Melanerpes formicivorus*). Perhaps the world's rarest bird, the po'o-uli was unknown to science before 1973. It has been declining ever since, as avian malaria has spread deeper into the mountain forests of Maui, the species' last refuge. So far as is known, the three survivors—two males and a female—have never been in contact with one another. It's hoped that bringing them together in a captive breeding program may yet save the species.

The U.S. Supreme Court sure muddied the waters in a January 2001 ruling. The issue: what kinds of "isolated waters" can the federal government protect under the Clean Water Act?

In a 5-4 vote (*Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers*), the court held that the "migratory bird rule" could not serve as the sole basis for protecting isolated wetlands, if those wetlands had no other connection to navigable waters. (Invoking the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, the migratory bird rule allows the government to protect wetlands used by migrating birds.)

But the Court didn't bother to explain which isolated waters *did* fall under the Clean Water Act's purview. In a worst-case interpretation of the ruling, as much as 60% of the nation's wetlands and waterways might lose protection. Under a narrower interpretation, losses would be much less. In January the Bush administration more or less split the difference, proposing regulations that would withdraw protection from about 20% of American wetlands.

But there's a catch: the announcement was only preliminary. The administration plans to accept comments through February 28 before issuing its final regulation. When those final regulations are promulgated, it's possible that more wetlands may lose

protection. Still, Environmental Protection Agency head Christie Whitman, speaking for the administration, has stated that she's committed to "no net loss" of wetlands. In support of that policy, the president recently signed a bill reauthorizing the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. We'll have to see how all this plays out.



The administration has announced that it's considering privatizing about 70% of the **National Park Service's** positions. Jobs proposed for conversion include those of NPS biologists and other scientists, while the interpretive naturalists—the folks who lead walks—would be eliminated altogether (their duties would be given to volunteers). Among jobs slated to remain filled by government workers: management, law enforcement, and "most" ranger positions. Since NPS managers are mostly promoted from within the ranks, this policy, if adopted, would mean that an increasingly large proportion of park managers will come from police backgrounds rather than from science and natural resources.

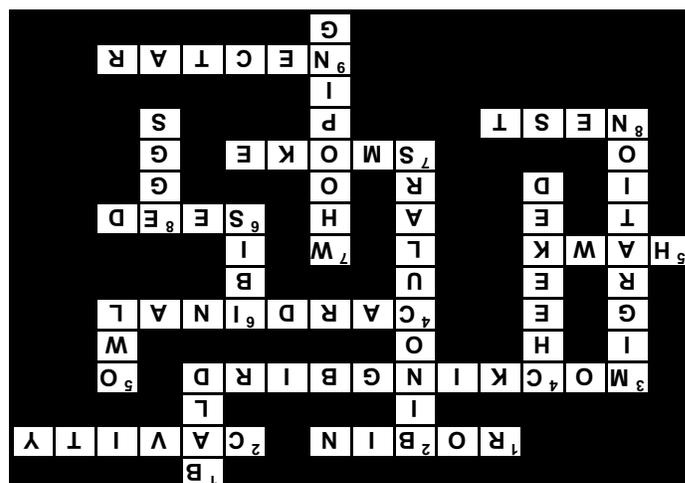
A recent **Gallup poll** listed 14 issues and asked Americans to rank their importance. The environment wound up in next-to-last place. Terrorism was the number one concern.

LOCAL CONSERVATION

With the Texas Legislature back in session, conservationists will want to keep tabs on what's going on under the dome. And one of the best ways to do so is by subscribing to the *State Capital Report*. Just \$15 brings you 12 issues of environmental news from around the state. Make your check payable to the Lone Star Sierra Club, and mail it to Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club, P.O. 1931, Austin TX 78767.

—John Kelly

Solution to Puzzle (on page 13)



Plants Made for the Shade: Calling All Black-Thumb Gardeners, Butterflies, and Birds!



With the long-awaited Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center plant sale looming on the horizon (April 5 and 6), it's time to think about what you want and can afford this spring planting season, to get the most plants for your money. A few impulse purchases are inevitable, but the old adage about "the right plant for the spot" lessens the possibility that your new plants will end up as expensive compost.

Are you looking for some native plants that reseed prolifically or spread enthusiastically once established? Plants that do so well that you have the pleasant chore of thinning them to pass along to friends? Plants that hit the ground growing, with the minimum of fuss? Plants that put up with the shade and still bloom? Then you are in luck. Below are some plants for shade that you should put on your "to buy" list.

If you have not tried any **heartleaf skullcap** (*Scutellaria ovata*) and the Wildflower Center has some, get it! This plant grows along Dry Creek at Bright Leaf State Natural Area, in lots of shade, and the deer don't touch it. It also grows on rocky soil in the shade of cedars on dry uplands at Spicewood Springs Preserve off Burney in Northwest Hills. The Wildflower Center indicates that it likes full sun and partial sun also. Heartleaf skullcap has beautiful violet-blue flowers from April to June. It colonizes readily by interesting bead-like fleshy roots. Once it is through blooming (with bloom stalks, it reaches a height of about 2 feet), heartleaf skullcap makes a lovely ground cover for the rest of the year. It transplants easily.

Golden groundsel (*Senecio obovatus*, now *Packera obovata*) is in short supply, so if you see any at the sale, don't delay in putting some on your wagon. It is reminiscent of ajuga but is our native that has an evergreen rosette. It bolts to reveal yellow flowers as early as mid February. Once they have finished blooming and gone to seed, distribute the seed in a prepared bed and you should have more by next fall. Demand far exceeds supply, so never waste the seed. Barton Springs Nursery would love to have it, so they can begin to sell it commercially. Early last March, a migrating Monarch butterfly stayed on my blooming groundsel all afternoon. If you want to see it growing naturally, look along Bull Creek in St. Edward's District Park on the trail that runs along Spicewood Springs Road. The Wildflower Center indicates that golden groundsel likes moist soil, but it does well on my east-facing sloped lot with no extra irrigation.

If you live on well-drained soil west of I-35, and have shade, you should be able to establish **cedar sage** (*Salvia roemeriana*). In the wild these plants grow happily in company

with cedars, with a natural mulch of cedar needles. In my yard I started with five 4-inch pots about four years ago and now have a colony in dappled shade under cedars. The early-blooming bright red flower spikes (March to July) attract hummingbirds. They need no supplemental water once established, and establishing them means watering them a few times, then forgetting them. Cedar sage doesn't care for reflected heat and light and probably won't like strong west sun. Given that you can still find good colonies in our deer-ridden nature preserves, they are deer-resistant.

You can hardly go wrong with **Turk's cap** (*Malaviscus drummondii*). It thrives in full sun at Zilker but looks a lot better if it gets some shade. Hummingbirds are attracted to its red flowers, and the fruit is popular with birds and small mammals. Turk's cap readily colonizes. It makes a good back-of-the-border plant—not showy but steadily blooming year in and out, even in January this year.

No early spring garden is complete without **spiderwort**. In the past the Wildflower Center has had both *Tradescantia gigantea* and *T. edwardsiana* (from the Edwards plateau). Its purple, pink, lavender, or even blue flowers in March–May attract butterflies. Spiderwort will disappear in summer, so mark the spot, or you may end up planting something on top of it later in the season. Next fall it will reappear with the rains, and the clumps get bigger with each passing year.



Unfortunately, your deer may like it as much as you do. You can find spiderwort growing on trails around the Austin Nature and Science Center.

Tropical sage/scarlet sage (*Salvia coccinea*) will reseed all over your flower beds. Why not dig up the volunteers and transplant them, expanding your bed and reducing the lawn? This is a good shade plant that likes a little extra water to look its best. It will, however, limp through the heat of summer on nature's supply, to bloom enthusiastically in the fall, when the rains begin. You can buy it in red, pink, or white, but hummingbirds vote for the red. If it gets too tall and lank, trim it back and it will still bloom. The deer do seem to like an occasional bloom stalk, but not the leaves. See *Salvia coccinea* blooming in the wild on the Hamilton Pool trail to the river.

Inland sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) is a clumping perennial grass 2 to 4 feet in height, that likes shade, dappled shade, or half-day sun. It grows along many of our greenbelts on the creek bottoms in deeper soil. It will produce a lot of seed that you can use or share. Since it is the larval host for some

URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

skipper butterflies, your caterpillar-loving birds will thank you. Warning: From personal experience, if you plant this grass on thin soil and don't plan to water it, it won't thrive. Give it deeper soil, maybe in a drainage, and it will.

Chile pequin (*Capsicum annuum*) is an airy perennial growing 2 to 4 feet tall. Your mockingbirds will risk their lives for the red pepper, so plant this where they can see the cats coming. It takes shade to sun in well-drained soil and does fine on rainfall alone. The Wildflower Center says it grows on the Edwards Plateau. Where have you seen it growing in the wild?

See if any **baby blue-eyes** (*Nemophila phacelioides*) are available. Native American Seed, which has a booth at the sale, will probably have some seed. Just throw the seed out in a moist shaded bed, and next fall you will have the plants with a nice winter rosette, followed by the most beautiful shade of blue in a flower. If you have been on the woodland trails at Hornsby, in early Spring, you have probably seen this plant blooming prolifically in low spots.

The Wildflower Center should also have plants from other parts of Texas that are easy to grow in the shade. For example, **Texas betony** (*Stachys coccinea*) from the canyons of the Trans-Pecos, attracts hummingbirds. It blooms a lot in March, and then on and off until October. It does fine with no supplemental water. **Lyre-leaf sage** (*Salvia lyrata*) hails from East Texas, so a little extra water will be welcome. You have to remind yourself periodically why you planted this rather unbecoming plant. Yes, it reseeds readily in loose soils. Yes, it makes an acceptable groundcover and has an evergreen rosette. Yes, you can't seem to kill it. But the real reason to get some is that it attracts hummingbirds and butterflies.

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 2)

only see on the news or read about in the paper. Sometimes we are in a position to offer assistance, as I did last winter when I was the first to come on the scene of a motorcycle accident while birding near Manor. Other times, such as during the shuttle accident, there is nothing to be done except to stand as a witness—to recognize one's own place and connection to surrounding events.

As we move into spring, take some time away from CNN and troubling world events to witness the flowers and the return of migratory birds. As you enjoy the myriad plants and animals sharing our world, take a few moments to decide where you stand—as witness and participant—in our community. Sometimes there isn't much that can be done, but in protecting our native birds, wildlife, and their habitats, we are needed as both witnesses and participants. As we have much to both see and do, I would invite you to look through this issue of the *Signal Smoke* and find some way to become more involved in our efforts to make Central Texas better for people and our wild neighbors.

—Rob Fergus

What if you already have all these plants in your yard? Be sure to check out the Native Plant Society booths at the sale. They often will have one-of-a-kind plants that need a home, like our native **Texas aster** (*Aster texanus*), which is easy to grow in dappled shade.

If you don't make it to the Wildflower Center sale, all is not lost. Support our local native plant nurseries. Visit them often as inventory changes frequently. One week they may have a good selection of a hard-to-find plant. The next week it is gone. If they don't have the plant you are looking for, they often can get it.

—Jane Tillman

We Want to Hear from You!

The Urban Habitat Development Group is interested in the native plants your birds and butterflies are visiting. Please email <mljt@mail.utexas.edu> with your observations. For example, TAS member Georgia Harper says the mockingbirds love her native lantana berries and are very territorial in guarding her wax myrtles' berries.

Barton Creek Nature Preserve February 1, 2003

*The winter sky is clear, the sun bright.
A mist hangs over the creek.
Toes tingle with the chill of the wet grass.
Our spirits soar at the prospect of exploring,
Eager to observe the never before observed.
A Lincoln Sparrow in the cedar, chickadees fidgeting
in the oak, grackles overhead.
We have found our bliss in this pursuit of creatures
that fly.
The robin sings "Cheer up."
Our eyes follow a light in the sky
Watching as it breaks into many sparkling colors and
leaves behind a trail of smoke.
We are dazzled as if discovering a meteor,
a piece of heaven fallen to earth.
Soaring spirits crash.
Explorers of space have fallen to earth.
We have witnessed the incongruous.
Standing in a peaceful meadow, we are spectators to
disaster.
In the midst of these protected acres, we have seen
death.
The symbol of success has failed.
This place of isolation cannot isolate us.
Today the universe has grown smaller.
The robin sings "Cheer up."*

—Robin Dennis

BACKYARD BIRDING

Texas' Top 12

What are the top dozen birds at Texas feeders? Here's Project FeederWatch's report from last winter:

Species	Percentage of TX Feeders Reporting
Northern Cardinal	95.28
Mourning Dove	84.43
Blue Jay	83.02
House Sparrow	79.72
American Goldfinch	79.72
Northern Mockingbird	72.64
Carolina Chickadee	69.81
House Finch	63.68
Tufted/Black-crested Titmouse	60.85
Carolina Wren	52.83
Red-bellied Woodpecker	50.47
European Starling	47.17

White-winged Doves came in at #22, reported by only 33.96% of feeder watchers. Obviously, Whitewings still haven't reached a lot of Texas.

Robins Making the Rounds

I've been getting calls asking about the big flocks of robins wandering around Central Texas. Folks seem surprised to learn that when robins head south for the winter a lot of them come here.

Why? Because this is where they can find food. In summer robins seek worms and grubs and other creepy-crawlies. But in cooler weather their diet changes to mostly berries and fruit. And in our part of the world, berries especially mean the berries of mountain cedar (or Ashe juniper, to give the tree its official name). It's those bluish cedar berries that lure masses of robins to Central Texas. One flock near Burnet was estimated to contain over a million birds!

But as abundant as cedar berries are, they don't last forever. Once the supply runs low—typically sometime around January but sometimes as early as December—the robins start moving east out of the Hill Country. That's when urban and suburban homeowners begin noticing flocks of redbreasts swooping down on their hollies and pyracanthas, stripping them bare in minutes. By the end of March most of the berries will be gone, and almost all the robins will have left us for their northern breeding grounds.

Attracting Robins

Would you like to attract wintering robins? Then plant berry-bearing shrubs and trees—especially shrubs and trees that keep their fruit into late winter.

And believe it or not, one of the best trees you can plant—especially if you live west of the Balcones Escarpment—is Texas' beloved **Ashe juniper**, a.k.a. the mountain cedar (*Juniperus ashei*). Not only do the female junipers provide berries for robins and other wildlife, but their evergreen foliage also shelters birds during cold winter nights. (If you suffer from cedar fever, remember: the berry-bearing female junipers produce no pollen. That's the male tree's job.)

What other native plants are good for robins? Stephen Brueggerhoff of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center has several suggestions. In the eastern part of our area, female **Eastern red cedars** (*Juniperus virginiana*) should be a good choice. Good choices everywhere in Central Texas are our two

native hollies, **yaupon** (*Ilex vomitoria*) and **possumhaw** (*I. decidua*); but remember that you'll need at least one male plant to fertilize the berry-producing females. Our three native sumacs are worth considering: **prairie flameleaf sumac** (*Rhus lanceolata*), **evergreen sumac** (*R. virens*), and **fragrant sumac** (*R. trilobata*). **Rusty blackhaw** (*Virburnum rufidulum*) sometimes holds its berries into late winter, and the **chile piquín** (*Capsicum annuum*) often does. **Mistletoe** berries are eaten by many birds, including robins. The berries of **Carolina buckthorn** (*Frangula [Rhamnus] caroliniana*) may remain attractive—to birds, anyway—even after they've shriveled up.



Non-native plants can cause problems and should be used with care. **Pyracantha**, also known as **firethorn** (*Pyracantha koidzumii*) is perhaps the least problematic of the non-natives, since it often produces berries in abundance and seldom escapes into the wild. But such non-natives as chinaberry, nandina, and ligustrum (privet) can become troublesome weeds. Don't use them. (The fruits of the chinaberry are a particular problem, since they can be toxic to robins and other birds. And even if they don't kill robins outright, they can stupefy the birds, leaving them susceptible to cars and predators. One caller reported that her dog had killed a dozen intoxicated robins in less than a week.)

Robins are relatively scarce at feeders—they are only #15 on last year's Texas FeederWatch list. If you want to attract them to your feeder, try using raisins and other dried fruit (but be sure to plump up any dried fruits in hot water before offering them on flat table feeders). Another way to lure robins is to offer pieces of fresh fruit (such as apples). Sticking the pieces on branches or on the prongs of specially designed fruit feeders seems to work best. Suet sometimes attracts robins, especially suet mixed with bits of fruit.

And remember that water is always a big attraction for robins and other wintering birds.

All about Suet

I recently had a query about preparing homemade suet. Unfortunately, the caller's message was mangled by my answering machine, so I wasn't able to return her call. Here's hoping she reads this.

Suet is the hard fat found around the kidneys of cows and other animals, in masses weighing as much as 20 pounds. It often goes to waste in butcher shops, so it's sometimes possible to obtain it just for the asking or by paying a small price. When it's used at feeders, suet can attract birds that would otherwise seldom or never visit (such as wrens and many woodpeckers). Regular feeder visitors often find it attractive as well: jays, chickadees, titmice—the list goes on.

In parts of the country where it's consistently cold during winter, you can use suet as is. But that's not how things are in Texas. In our part of the world, suet has to be treated—"rendered"—or it will quickly turn rancid.

To render suet, melt it over medium heat, then strain it

BACKYARD BIRDING (CONTINUED)

through cheesecloth. Repeat the process at least once. Twice or more is better: the more often suet is rendered, the more impurities are removed and the more resistant it becomes to going bad. (Of course, it'll eventually go bad no matter how often it's rendered, especially once the weather turns warm. I don't recommend using homemade suet much later than March, though some commercially prepared suet may hold up even during a Texas summer.)

When you're satisfied that the suet has been rendered sufficiently, you can, if you like, stir in raisins, seeds, nuts, oatmeal, or whatever else seems likely to attract birds. Then pour everything into a pie tin (or whatever kind of mold you have handy) and let it cool. You can also roll the suet into balls. Some people pour it over pinecones or over the rough bark of a feeding log, forcing the birds to winkle it out and giving them a bit of a challenge. (If you use this feeding method, be sure to discard the cones or log after suet-feeding season is over—you don't want bits of leftover fat rotting during the summer.)

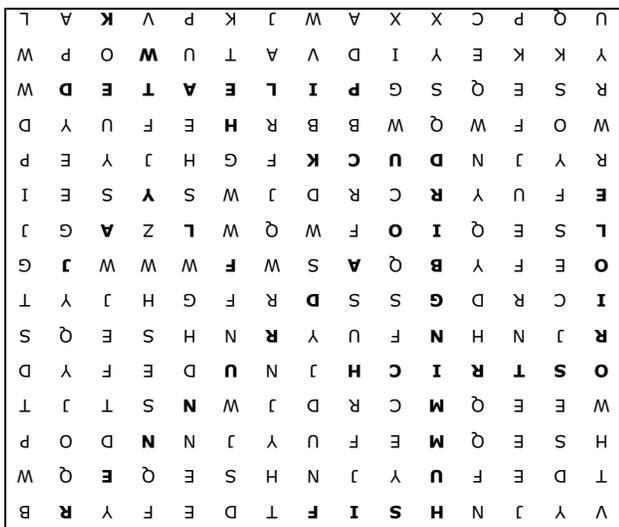
Warning: rendering suet is not an odor-free process. Be prepared for a stink. If home preparation sounds like too much trouble, do not despair. Suet is also available commercially (at our local Wild Birds Unlimited stores, for example). You can buy commercial suet plain or mixed with fruit, nuts, or other foods. Whatever mix you choose, by offering suet you'll be giving wintering birds an excellent source of energy.

And remember that lots of wildlife besides birds appreciate the energy that's packed into suet. This is why many people find that suet is best offered in special cages, also available at Wild Birds Unlimited and additional sources. Those cages allow birds to access the suet, but make things more difficult for other animals to do so.

Correction

The January *Signal Smoke* mentioned that the Texas Crescent was one of our commonest butterflies. This was an editorial slip: the current name for this species is *Texan* Crescent.

—John Kelly



NATURALIST'S CALENDAR (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

Wisconsin study estimated that one Blanchard's Cricket Frog might consume 4,800 small invertebrates in one year.



Blanchard's is the only cricket frog in our area. The most widespread subspecies of the Northern Cricket Frog, it ranges from southern Michigan to southeastern South Dakota and south to northern Tennessee, northern Arkansas, and through most of Texas into northeastern Mexico. Their range, however, is apparently

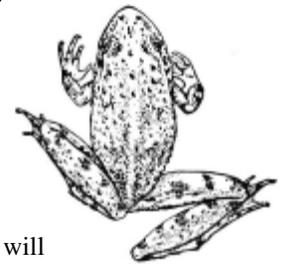
shrinking. They may no longer survive in Minnesota or Ontario; they are considered endangered there and in Wisconsin. They are a species of concern in Michigan, Indiana, and West Virginia and appear to be declining in northern parts of Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.

Herpetologists are not certain why the frogs are disappearing. Loss of habitat as wetlands are drained, water polluted by agricultural chemicals or road salt, and unusually strong floods in the north-central United States associated with the 1993 El Niño season have all been blamed for the decline.

Why should we care about a few frogs? Aside from their value as consumers of insects, and as food for larger animals, amphibian populations tell us about the quality of the environment in which we live. Because of their permeable skins, amphibians are especially sensitive to environmental pollutants in air or water. Disappearing populations may be an early warning of dramatic changes in our world—changes that could prove dangerous to humans as well.

So how are the cricket frogs doing in Texas? Well, no one knows for sure. Frog population trends have not been studied as closely here as elsewhere.

You can help. Attend a Texas Amphibian Watch seminar to learn about the frogs and toads of Central Texas, and how to census them. Hornsby Bend will host one presentation the evening of April 11. Another will take place May 21 at Wild Basin. For more information, contact Marsha Reimer at 912-7062 or <marsha.reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us>. You might also see the Texas Amphibian Watch website: <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/amphibians/>.



—Bill Reiner

For another *Naturalist's Calendar* column, see page 21.

Answers to Word Search (on page 12)

1. Fly
2. Ostrich
3. Fish
4. Hummingbird
5. Duck
6. Roadrunner
7. Hawk
8. Pileated
9. Jay
10. Oriole

SANCTUARY NEWS

January and February News

We opened the sanctuary on January 25 as scheduled. Unfortunately, the wet weather conspired to keep our visitors away. Saturday dawned drizzly, overcast, and cold, and the remainder of the weekend was the same. Whatever the weather, when you do visit the sanctuary, check out the smoother trail heads at the North Trail and the Baker Springs/Hatfield Trail entries. The caliche that John put in the holes where he dug out rocks last fall has packed well. This should allow easier traveling on the first part of the trail system. Also, we want to thank our visitors in advance for keeping the gates closed and latched and for signing in, at each visit, at the registration box located by the parking lot gate. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated!

Our backyard birds ignored the dreary weather in late January, and a steady stream of them cleaned out our feeders on a regular basis. Birds visiting our backyard in January included juncos, Field Sparrows, cardinals, titmice, Black-capped Chickadees, towhees, Wild Turkeys, goldfinches, Scrub Jays, House Finches, Cedar Waxwings, Bewick's and Carolina wrens, and an occasional Pine Siskin. We had an American Robin bathe in one of our birdbaths in spite of the cold, with feather maintenance taking precedence over comfort (please excuse this bit of anthropomorphism on our part).

The TAS Board approved funding to construct a high fence along 9,294 linear feet of our eastern boundary between the Baker Sanctuary and the development at the Ranch at Deer Creek. TAS Board member Jackie Davis is heading up this project, and she scheduled three workdays to clear the old fence line right of way. This clearing of trees, brush, and overhanging limbs had to be done by March 1. On our first workday on February 16, ten volunteers joined me in clearing 4,470 feet of fence line. On February 22, seven volunteers joined Marcie and me in clearing another 3,800 feet of fence line. Then on Sunday, February 23, four volunteers joined me and Marcie in clearing the final 1,024 feet of fencing right-of-way. We want to thank all of those who helped with this major effort by furnishing their own tools, giving up all or parts of their weekends, and working very hard. Our sincerest thanks go to Jackie Davis, Shelia Hargis, BJ Dertien, Pat Dillon, Chris and Shirley Doggett, Dan Smith, John Kelly, Mark Sanders, Jonathan Tucker, Steve Wick, Richard Kaskan, Jane Tillman, Scott Edwards, Rob Fergus, and Paul Breaux. This is the first phase of high fencing at the TAS Baker



Sanctuary that will ultimately connect our fence to the fences of other Balcones Canyonlands Preserve partners. Phase 2 will high-fence our western boundary and connect our fence to the LCRA Wheless Tract fence on the west side and the City of Austin Lime Creek property on the north side. The purpose of this fence is twofold. First, it will protect the sanctuary from human and animal trespass from the adjoining residential areas, and second, the fence, once continuous, will curtail the influx of white-tailed deer (WTD) into the sanctuary. Fewer white-tailed deer in the sanctuary will increase plant diversity throughout. In addition, fewer WTD will allow more hardwoods to grow up and replace those trees lost to disease, old age, and acts of nature. This hardwood recruitment into the woodland canopy is vitally important to the continued existence of the Golden-cheeked Warbler.

The sanctuary received about one-half inch of snow during the early morning hours of February 8, all of which melted that day. We had our second cold weather event of the month when sleet began falling the evening of February 24. We heard ice and sleet rattle against the trailer off and on all night, and the thermometer never read above 20° on Tuesday, the 25th. Everything was covered; even the ground under the trees in the deep woods was white, and Lime Creek Road was iced over, as well. The temperature hovered around freezing most of Wednesday, with some thawing taking place late that afternoon. Very few vehicles chanced the hazardous conditions Tuesday and Wednesday; however, emergency power line crews did respond to a brief power outage Wednesday morning, getting our power back on within half an hour. Unfortunately, our Mexican plum and redbuds had begun to bloom, and they got burned by this freeze. However, this storm, though inconvenient, left little damage compared with damage from the storm that blew through here on December 13, 2000, when many trees were split down and the limbs of other tall trees were dragging the ground until they thawed.

Open House at the Sanctuary on March 29

We want to remind everyone of our annual open house here at the sanctuary, scheduled for Saturday, March 29, from 9 a.m. until noon. We have nine wonderful volunteers already signed up to help us direct traffic and guide the bird walks. We anticipate another large turnout this year, especially if the weather cooperates. If you haven't made plans for this day and would like to help us with the open house at the sanctuary, please let us know by contacting us at 219-8425 or emailing us at <jmwoso@earthlink.net>.

Sanctuary Meetings Scheduled

The next TAS-BS Sanctuary Committee meetings are scheduled for April 8, July 8, and October 7. We will meet at the Baker Cabin, located at 12308 Lime Creek Road, and will begin the meeting at 6:30 p.m. with a potluck dinner.

—Marcie and John Wilcox, TAS-BS Stewards

Combined March–April Newsletter

Because of scheduling complications, we have combined the March and April 2003 issues. Monthly issues are planned for the remainder of 2003, except for the usual July–August combined issue.

NATURALIST'S CALENDAR



By March, green is inevitable.

Deciduous trees such as cedar elms that were bare in February may be fully leafed out before April. Even before the trees green up, on cold and dreary gray days of early March, the verdant flush at ground level is unmistakably springlike.

The brightest greens are new growth, but some early-blooming wildflowers get a photosynthetic head start in the spring by putting out leaves in the fall. These winter

leaves usually lie close to the ground, where the temperature stays a few degrees warmer. There, they are screened from frost and drying winds by tall grasses or fallen leaves. Often further protected by long hairs or a waxy coating, these leaves soak up the sun's rays for a quick burst of growth in the spring before taller plants can shade them. Texas bluebonnet is among the best-known of these plants, but others include Missouri violet, stork's-bill, anemones, stemless evening primrose, prairie fleabane, and golden groundsel. Some of these are already flowering, and the others will bloom before month's end.

Another of the March-blooming wildflowers is called blue funnel-lily (*Androstephium coeruleum*). It ordinarily stands only about 6 inches tall and resembles a small daffodil, but the flowers are pale blue to lavender. A good place to look for it (and a colorful display of other early blooms) is McKinney Falls State Park, in the picnic area along the road to the lower falls.

Not all the flowering plants have green leaves. If, after admiring the showier blooms at McKinney Falls, you want a challenge, you might try to find an elusive orchid called Wister's coralroot (*Corallorrhiza wisteriana*). It doesn't flower every year, but it has appeared in March in the woods along the Smith Rockshelter Trail.

Coralroots, named for their branched, pinkish roots that

resemble coral, are unusual among our flora because they lack chlorophyll. They are saprophytes, plants that obtain their nutrients from decaying organic matter, especially leaf litter. Wister's coralroot, the most common in our area, has a yellowish tan to reddish tan stalk that may grow 16 inches tall but is usually much shorter. The leaves, also tan, are reduced to mere scales that hug the stem. At the top of the stalk is a loose raceme of small yellow-brown to rosy flowers. In each flower, the lowest petal (the lip) is the largest; it's white, dotted with magenta or purple.

The dawn chorus of birdsong swells in March, as the year-round residents become more enthusiastic, and new arrivals add their voices. The lisping *wee-see-wee-see* of a Black-and-white Warbler emanates from somewhere in the woods. A White-eyed Vireo, safely ensconced in its thicket, delivers a snappy *Quick! Pick up the beer check!* Blue-gray Gnatcatchers swish their tails like miniature mockingbirds and warble a torrent of high-pitched nasal whines and squeaks.

A Northern Parula's buzzy trill climbs the scale from the top of a post oak east of town, and the first Ash-throated Flycatchers arrive to proclaim *Ka-brick!* and *Ka-breer!* from Hill Country live oaks. Golden-cheeked Warblers, returning by mid-March, and Black-capped Vireos, before the end of the month, also add their voices to the Hill Country choir.

Birds you might *not* notice now are the Blue Jays, which become uncharacteristically quiet and secretive as they build their nests, lay eggs, and begin incubating.

You'll probably see the swallows before you hear them, especially the clouds of Cliff Swallows (and sometimes Cave Swallows) that appear around culverts and bridges. Just as the swallows return, the big swallowtail butterflies appear too—as if Nature is playing a word game. Eastern Tiger Swallowtails startle with their bright yellow wings slashed by black streaks reminiscent of their namesakes. Giant Swallowtails wear broad yellow bands across dark brown wings. Black-winged Pipevine Swallowtails flash iridescent blue on their hindwings and big orange spots below.

March isn't only arrivals and emergences, of course. The crowds of ducks begin to thin—except for the returning Blue-winged Teal that wintered farther south. American Goldfinches, Northern Harriers, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Western Meadowlarks start migrating north. Longspurs are probably already gone. Fox and Harris's sparrows will soon follow, but even they might be inspired to sing a parting song on a warm March morning.

—Bill Reiner



Reminder about Oak Wilt

To avoid infecting your oak trees with the deadly oak wilt fungus, you should postpone pruning them until summer. The fungus is most likely to produce spores from February through the end of May, and the insects that carry the spores to fresh wounds on oak trees are most active in spring.

If you must prune, or if one of your oaks is injured, you should coat the wound with a commercially available protectant as soon as possible. (A tree is vulnerable to infection in the first 48 hours after being injured.)

For more information about oak wilt, visit the Oak Wilt Suppression Project website at <www.ci.austin.tx.us/oakwilt> or call the Texas Forest Service oak wilt hotline at 473-3507.

—Bill Reiner



Earth Share
OF TEXAS

Earth Share of Texas represents the Audubon Foundation of Texas and the National Audubon Society in payroll deduction plans for charitable giving. For information, call 1-800-GREENTX or email <estx@earthshare-texas.org>.

Travis Audubon Society
Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 1132
Round Rock TX 78680-1132

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 2301
Austin, Texas

Return Service Requested

Visit the TAS Web site!
www.travisaudubon.org



Local and National Audubon Membership

Join the Travis Audubon Society using the form at the right, and all of your dues will be put to use supporting local conservation, education, and research projects. You may also join both Travis Audubon and the National Audubon Society through the Travis Audubon website <www.travisaudubon.org>. As a member of National Audubon, you will enjoy Travis Audubon chapter membership and receive the quarterly *Audubon* magazine, and a portion of your dues will support national programs.

Join Travis Audubon now and support local birds, wildlife, and their habitats.

Travis Audubon Society members receive 11 issues of the *Signal Smoke* newsletter, priority sign-up on local field trips, and educational classes. All of their annual dues support local projects and programs.

To join Travis Audubon Society:

Make your check payable to Travis Audubon Society and send with this form to **TAS Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 1132, Round Rock, TX 78680-1132.**

Travis Audubon Society

YES! I want to enjoy the benefits of Travis Audubon Society membership. Enroll me as a member of Travis Audubon Society. Enclosed is my check for:

- \$10 **Youth Membership** (up to age 18)
- \$20 **Individual Membership**
- \$30 **Family Membership**
- \$60 **Painted Bunting Membership** (bonus Travis Audubon T-shirt)
- \$100 **Vireo Membership** (bonus T-shirt and book)
- \$250 **Warbler Membership** (bonus T-shirt, book, and free workshop)
- \$1,000 **Lifetime Membership** (bonus T-shirt, book, workshop, and listing in annual report)

This is a gift membership from _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____