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VOLUME 56, NO. 1

January 2007

New Congressional District Contains New Birding Opportunities

Congressman Lloyd Doggett

Some think that federal support for avian centers is “for the birds,” but such efforts are critical to keep these treasured places available to appreciate natural beauty, educate students (both young and old), and stimulate the local economy. One positive benefit of the many geographic changes to my district is that these changes afforded me the opportunity to travel around Texas and experience the wonderful biodiversity of our state. I would like to share with you some of the wonderful birding opportunities on public lands in both my current and former districts.

World Birding Centers: Birders on the Border

While representing the Rio Grande Valley, I worked with local officials, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to open a series of World Birding Centers along our border with Mexico. Once complete, the World Birding Center will consist of nine sites - all in Texas - comprising more than 10,000 acres. The Birding Centers fall along the migratory path of countless species, providing both a haven for birds and an attraction for birders. One birder, Jane Kittleman, has already documented over 100 different species at a single location near McAllen. These World Birding Centers will boost the growing business of eco-tourism in the Valley, serving to conserve the environment and promote economic development. You can learn more about the World Birding Centers at www.worldbirdingcenter.org.

The Pride of the Hill Country:

Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge

My new district includes the beautiful rivers of Hays County, the Lost Pines in Bastrop, plus all of Gonzales, Caldwell, Lavaca, Fayette, and Colorado Counties. I am pleased that there are two National Wildlife Refuges at either end of this new district. The western edge brushes along the shores of Lake Travis - just across the water from the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge (see www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/balcones).

I have long championed the protection and expansion of the critical avian habitat of the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo - two birds that nest and breed in Central Texas. Thanks to a partnership among city, county, and federal officials, millions of acres have been acquired for the Balcones

TAS Regular Monthly Meeting

Thursday, Jan 18, 7:00 pm

Doors open at 6:30 pm for social time

Exploring Nature through Tracks and Signs

Speaker: Dwight Wilson

LCRA Board Room
in the Hancock Building
at 3700 Lake Austin Blvd. Austin TX



see page 8 for additional details

continued on page 3

Travis Audubon Society

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Address for Donations

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The office number is 512-300-BIRD (2473). To leave a message for Board President Shelia Hargis, press 1. To leave a message for Executive Director Valerie Staats, press 2. To report sightings of rare or unusual birds in Central Texas, press 3. To ask a bird-related question, press 4.

TAS WEB SITE

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Mission Statement

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

LETTER FROM THE TAS PRESIDENT

Happy 2007! At this time of year, I like to look back over the past year and analyze our accomplishments and our challenges. From a national perspective, most of the year was one challenge after another for those of us who work to protect our environment. The November election offered a glimmer of hope, but the outcome remains to be seen. But, in spite of the challenges, we saw some major victories. The Endangered Species Act remains intact. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge remains oil rig free, and climate change is pretty much accepted as fact now. Those are three huge victories in my opinion!

On the Travis Audubon front, 2006 was a banner year with many accomplishments. A few of the highlights follow. The Jackie Arnold Education Center is under construction at Baker Sanctuary. Thanks to the financial support of our members, we are very close to buying nearly 10 acres as an addition to our Baker Sanctuary. Through the efforts of our



Shelia Hargis,
photo by Robert Baumgardner

continued on page 14

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Newsletter Deadline

The submissions deadline is the first day of the preceding month (for example, September 1st for the October issue). Submit uncopyrighted articles, announcements, and art to Tess Sherman, tsherman1@austin.rr.com; or mail to 210 E. Walnut Dr., Austin, TX 78753. Submissions by email or on a floppy are preferred but not required. Call Tess at 300-BIRD if you have questions.

Birding Sites, continued from page one

Canyonlands Preserve. Local birders deserve credit for helping to make this conservation effort a reality. By bringing communities together, we were able to protect endangered species while offering reasonable compensation to property owners whose land contains important habitats. While environmental collaborations of all kinds face greater challenges than ever before, they remain one of my priorities.

A Refuge for an Endangered Species: Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge.

Colorado County, at the eastern edge of my new district, is home to the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge. This 10,000-acre refuge just outside of Eagle Lake is one of the few refuges in the country that was created specifically to protect an endangered species (see www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/attwater). More than a million Prairie Chickens once inhabited the coastal prairie lands that stretched from central Texas to western Louisiana, but over-hunting brought the species to the brink of extinction. Habitat loss as the coastal prairie was farmed and developed further harmed the prairie chicken. With less than one percent of coastal prairies remaining in the United States, it is unfortunate but not surprising that this visually stunning creature will need to battle greatly for its species' survival. Today, there are more Attwater's Prairie Chickens living in captivity than living in the wild, although there are efforts to increase their numbers and avoid extinction.

The Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge provides a safe haven for these remaining creatures, and allows those birds bred in captivity to be returned

to the wild. It is a case study in good environmental stewardship. And it demonstrates why we must oppose attempts to weaken and undermine the Endangered Species Act. The latest attack against this law threatens to eliminate its critical habitat system which, for over a generation, has worked to stop the habitat loss that precipitates species endangerment and extinction. Furthermore, as a member of the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus, I will continue to advocate in the strongest terms for the preservation of our wild lands, conservation, and biodiversity.

Readers who wish to contact me can send me a note by mail at 300 E. 8th Street, Suite 763, Austin, 78701, via e-mail at Lloyd.Doggett@mail.house.gov or on my Web site at www.house.gov/doggett.

U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett has served in Congress since 1995. He has a 100 percent lifetime rating from the League of Conservation Voters, and was honored in 2006 by the Texas League of Conservation Voters with its inaugural Environmental Champion Award.

The Missing Binoculars Bruce Berger

To trace the missing binoculars
Through the labyrinth of yesterday's
Inattentions, you must thread your life
In backward self-parody to the precise
Absence out of the general mist
When the hands laid them down and the feet floated off,
Chasing among the brain's false leads
That scatter unresolved as birds
To the naked sight, to arrive at last
At the desolation where still they lie
Intact on some forgotten ledge
And staring, unfocused, at the sky.

Reprinted with permission *Whole Terrain* (Vol. 5, 1996/97). Bruce Berger is best known for his books exploring the intersections of nature and culture. He writes for the Spanish-language Web site, www.planetapeninsula.org.





NATURALIST'S CALENDAR

by Bill Reiner

photo by Robert Baumgardner

January might seem a poor time to look for butterflies. Nights are usually cold, as are most days. Few flowers bloom, so nectar is hard to find. However, Austin's climate is warm enough that some butterflies can be seen year-round.

For instance, if you go walking through a woodland on a warm, sunny, January afternoon, you could find yourself "attacked" by a butterfly whose black and dusky-brown wings are handsomely set off with bands of bright orange. No need to duck, though: after it rockets off the trunk where it was perched, it will normally flit around you for a few seconds, then return to its post. It may, however, adopt you as a new perch, especially if it finds the salt from your perspiration to its taste.

This pugnacious little sprite is a male Red Admiral defending his territory. If you had been found to be harboring another male Red Admiral, a speedy chase would have ensued, probably spiralling upward several feet until the resident forced the interloper away.

Red Admirals are quite distinctive, not easily confused with any other butterfly in our area. The top side of the hindwing is broadly margined with orange, and a similar band cuts diagonally across the forewing. When the wings are spread just right, the butterfly's body appears to be enclosed in two orange parentheses – or military chevrons. The latter semblance gives the species its name. The black apex of the forewing, projecting beyond the orange band, is squared off, and spangled with white spots. It resembles, in a way, the outer primary feathers of an adult gull.

You might wonder how you could have missed such a dazzling creature, until you watch it land, and close its wings over its back. Then what you see is the underside of the hindwing, cryptically mottled with browns and grays – a superb camouflage against tree bark.

Another butterfly you might find flitting from trunk to trunk in a winter woodland is a relative of the Red Admiral called a Question Mark. The top side of its wings are burnt-orange at the bases blending to tawny brown toward the edges, and banded with many large inky-black spots. The jagged margins of the wings, including a prominent tail on each hindwing, are delicately outlined in silvery lavender, as if frosted.

The jagged wing margins are an important part of this butterfly's disguise. Like those of its cousin the Red Admiral, the undersides of the Question Mark's wings are patterned in a camouflaging mosaic of soft tans. When the wings are closed, a Question Mark can easily be mistaken for a dead leaf.

This butterfly's curious name comes from the distinctive – but hard to see – pair of silvery spots in the center of the underside of the hindwing: one a small dot; the other a short, curved line.

Together they look like the punctuation mark – or, on the left wing, a mirror image of a question mark. (Close relatives of the Question Mark found elsewhere in North America have the curved line but lack the small dot, and are called, what else? Commas.)

On cold winter days both Red Admirals and Question Marks take shelter under loose bark or in tree hollows, and enter a dormant state called "diapause." Diapause is a sort of suspended animation common among insects. It differs from true hibernation in that the animal does not grow during diapause. Many other butterflies also enter diapause during the winter, but do it at a different stage in their development: as eggs, caterpillars, or pupae (chrysalids).

Another reason Red Admirals and Question Marks can survive winter weather is that they do not rely upon nectar as a food source. Instead, they get the nourishment they need from tree sap, fermenting fruit, carrion, and bird droppings, and only visit flowers for nectar when these other resources are scarce.

Other winter butterflies do rely more upon flowers, and are more likely to be found in open areas, such as grasslands or brushy edges. There you may spot them hovering around lingering goldenrods and asters, or visiting such hardy blooms as Prairie Verbena (*Glandularia bipinnatifida*, formerly *Verbena bipinnatifida*) and Plains Yellow Daisy (*Tetaneuris scaposa*, formerly *Hymenoxys scaposa*). European weeds such as Henbit and Common Chickweed may also provide sustenance.

In particular, look for Variegated Fritillaries, Common Buckeyes, Orange Sulphurs, Pipevine Swallowtails, Sleepy Oranges, Dainty Sulphurs, Gray Hairstreaks, Painted Ladies, and Common Checkered-Skippers. (Aren't butterfly names great?) The last two in this list have look-alike relatives common in Austin (though not as likely in January); otherwise all are quite distinctive, and easy to learn.

To see a picture of a Common Buckeye, you need only visit your local post office. The 24¢ postcard stamp carries the likeness of this stunning butterfly. Otherwise, you'll need to pick up one of the many good guides to North American butterflies. If you've been wanting to learn about this group of brightly colored insects, winter might be a good time to start. Then you can increase your knowledge slowly as new species emerge in the spring. By September, it's possible to see more than 100 species in a day around Austin – fun, but a bit daunting if you're just learning!

Sources for this article included *Butterflies of Houston & Southeast Texas*, by John & Gloria Tveten, and the websites: Butterflies and Moths of North America: www.butterfliesandmoths.org/ The Red Admiral and Painted Lady Research Site: www.public.iastate.edu/~mariposa/homepage.html



Dan Callaway,
photo by Robert Baumgardner

THE DAN CALLAWAY REPORT

Birding to Willis Creek Park - 12/6/06

Participants: Ethel Kutac, Homer Cunningham, Catfish Kelly and Dan Callaway

Target bird: Henslow's Sparrow, as reported on the "rare bird alert" (none found)

We began the day about 7:30 at Pflugerville Lake three miles NE of town. Clustered at the shallow West end were Gadwall, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked and Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe and about 200 American Coots. Scores of American Pipits were feeding along the rocks and road of the causeway. We also saw a Great Egret, a Northern Harrier (one of six for the day), Killdeer and a Greater Yellowlegs. North on Weiss Lane to Cele Road, we found a blackbird megaflock containing mostly Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds. North on Melber Lane, we had American Kestrel, and Brewer's Blackbirds. One pond contained a Cinnamon Teal with some green-wings and a Dowitcher. We followed Melber as it turned East, then North on Engleman to the bridge over Brushy Creek. Here we heard Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and saw Eastern Phoebe, a Song and several Lincoln's Sparrows, and our only American Robin for the day. Right on FM 1660, left on FM 3349, right on US 79, left on 95, then right on CR 347 just North of San Gabriel River to the Wildlife Mgt. Area.

The SGWMA revealed the calls of Red-shouldered Hawk and Northern Flicker. The mesquite savannah produced a flock of Vesper Sparrows. Good woodland birds included Hermit Thrush, Orange-crowned Warbler, Harris's and White-throated Sparrows, and our only American Goldfinch for the day. North on CR 347, right on CR 378, left on CR 390, and right on CR 346 to Willis Creek Park. The view from the boat ramp area revealed Double-crested Cormorant, Gadwall, a Mallard, a Great Egret, Great Blue Herons, and Forster's Terns. Birds at the group picnic area included Tufted Titmice, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Chipping and White-crowned Sparrows. Homer was the only one to see the Pileated Woodpecker on the dead tree stump near the shore while the rest of us had begun searching the grassland for a Henslow's Sparrow. We did manage to roust a Le Conte's Sparrow from the grass. He eventually perched in leafless willow trees for all of us to get great views. While driving through the blacklands, we scanned the fields for Mountain Plover but only saw Savannah Sparrows and Meadowlarks. We returned to Austin by 3 pm. Sunny and 74 degrees.

Total species: 69 (thirty-four by 9 am, and fifty-nine by 11 am)

Best bird: Le Conte's Sparrow

Dominant bird: White-crowned Sparrow

Birding to Reimers Ranch - 11/29/06

Participants: Ethel Kutac, Ingrid Huskey, Homer Cunningham, Terry Banks, Catfish Kelly and Dan Callaway

Target bird: Canyon Towhee

Milton Reimers Ranch Park is a Travis County park located at 23610 Hamilton Pool Road. This newly acquired property is popular for rock climbing and mountain biking. It is also excellent for birding. Entrance fee is \$8 per car, and free for any group with a senior citizen. The road from the entrance to the headquarters is about two miles long and recently paved. The area is typical hill country habitat containing Canyon and Spotted Towhee, Chipping, Field, and White-crowned Sparrows, House Finch, Black-crested Titmice, Bewick's Wren, Ruby and Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Mourning Dove. At the headquarters, a pair of Canyon Towhees were playing around an old car body and farm equipment. We followed the non-paved road about another mile to the Pedernales River. Here we saw more sparrows including Song, Lincoln's, Lark, and White-throated. We also had Lesser and American

Goldfinch, Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Canyon Wren, Belted Kingfisher, and Common Ground-Dove. At one point, all birds scattered and quickly hushed. Then we saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk soaring high over the river.

Upon our return to Austin, we stopped below Mansfield Dam. Here we saw Double-crested Cormorant, American Wigeon, Gadwall, one Cinnamon Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead and Lesser Scaup. Other good birds for the day were Northern Cardinal, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Western Scrub-Jay, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Mockingbird, American Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Loggerhead Shrike, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Red-winged Blackbird and Great Blue Heron.

Total species: 56, including thirty-five on the ranch property

Best bird: Canyon Towhee

Dominant bird: Black Vulture

We thank these persons and groups who generously made recent contributions to Travis Audubon Society (as of press time):

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Ingrid Huskey
The Powell Foundation
Danette Ray

Audubon Adventures Kit

Ray Toburen

Baker Chimney Swift Tower

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Anna Faye Peterson

Tribute to Shelia Hargis

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OUR DECEMBER HOLIDAY PARTY THANKS!

The following generous local businesses and donors made our 2006 Holiday Party and Silent Auction a great success. Thank you for supporting conservation and wildlife in Central Texas.

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Driftwood Wildlife Association
H-E-B
Habitat Suites Hotel
John Dromgoole's Natural Gardener
Little Sam Fason
Lucy Hammett Games
Mangia Pizza
Penny Potter
Rootin' Ridge Toymakers
Santa Elena Coffee Company
Texas Hills Vineyard
Whole Earth Provision Co.

We also thank the Travis Audubon volunteers, members, and friends who attended and helped put on the event – we couldn't have done it without you!

Business Members

Travis Audubon is delighted to recognize its new Business Members:

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To learn about the benefits of supporting Travis Audubon as a Business Member, please go to www.travisaudubon.org and click on Business Members, or contact Valerie Staats at 512.300.BIRD (2473).

Monthly Meeting Information

Thursday, January 18, 2006, 7:00 pm (doors open at 6:30 pm for social time)

TAS Regular Monthly Meeting

Program: *Exploring Nature through Tracks and Signs*

Presenter: Dwight Wilson

Have you ever wondered who left those footprints in the mud or what prompted a robin's alarm call? Dwight Wilson will share his experiences exploring nature through reading the tracks and signs that are left behind. He will share personal stories and photographs. Learn how birds lend an amazing element to tracking because they vocalize what is going on in the forest floor. Each song or call can tell us something about a specific predator or potential food source. It is possible for you to understand the signs that nature gives and add a new dimension to your outdoor experiences.

Dwight Wilson has over 20 years of tracking experience with wildlife and humans. He has trained with some of the nation's best trackers including Charles Worsham, Paul Rezendes, Stanley Liston, Nate Kempton, Jon Young's Wilderness Awareness School, and Tom Brown's Tracker School. He has provided his services for institutions such as the National Park Service, Texas law enforcement officers, and the Dallas FBI (ERT) in man tracking. He also gives classes on wildlife tracking and behavior, land navigation, and wilderness survival.

Program begins at 7:00 pm. **Location:** LCRA Board Room, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd. The board room is in the Hancock Building, the middle building in the courtyard. We'll be in the room on the left upon entering. Parking available in garage. **Bus Routes** available at www.capmetro.austin.tx.us. **Bicycle routes** at www.ci.austin.x.us/bicycle/bikemap.htm; 974-7240. Refreshments provided.

More information on
January's topic

**The Byrds
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On-line resources:

- www.princeton.edu/~oa/nature/tracking.shtml
The Outdoor Action program at Princeton University, this site includes a section on animal tracking with very detailed guides, instructions, tracking cards, and more.

- www.bear-tracker.com/birds.html This commercial site features bird tracks including excellent images of 16 species' tracks. It also has sections on tracks of many mammals, some reptiles, and other animals.

On-line for kids:

- www.concord.org/~btinker/guide/tracks/tracks_activities.html
From the Concord Consortium, a nonprofit educational organization, a set of interactive activities and "lessons" that teach tracking and will definitely appeal to kids.

Recommended reading:

Field Trips: Bug Hunting, Animal Tracking, Bird-watching, Shore Walking by Jim Arnosky (HarperCollins, 2002)

Mammal Tracks & Sign: A Guide to North American Species by Mark Elbroch (Stackpole Books, 2003)

Peterson Field Guide to Animal Tracks: Third Edition, by Peterson Field Guides (Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Tracking and the Art of Seeing: How to Read Animal Tracks and Signs by Paul Rezendes (Collins, 1999)

Baker Sanctuary News

The residential development along our eastern boundary is continuing at a fast pace. The underground utilities, streets, curbs and gutters and sidewalks have been completed and lots staked off in that part of the development next to the intersection of Lime Creek Road and Anderson Mill Road (Anderson Mill Road is now open from 620 to 1431).

While the houses built next to us on city lot-sized areas do not create as hard of an edge on our border as would, say, a mall or strip center with paved parking lots, single family residential developments next to preserve lands are problematic.

We anticipate increasing negative impacts to the eastern edge of the Sanctuary bordered by the residential development by factors such as non-point pollution and street runoff, illegal dumping, introduced feral dogs and cats, the planting of non-native plants, the increasing presence of native but invasive avian species, human trespass, increasing risks of wildfire along with other disturbances associated with denser human occupation.

The residential development adjacent to the Sanctuary along our western boundary presents a softer edge than does the development along our eastern fence because the houses are built on parcels of land ranging from five to twenty acres. Most of these owners of the land to our west have left much of their property wooded. However if the current owners sell their property, the new owners

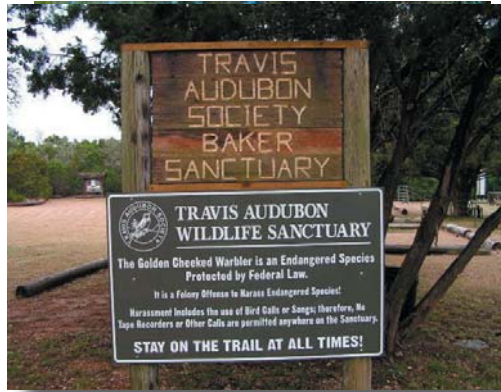


Photo courtesy of John Wilcox

could clear their property right up to our fence and create an edge nearly as hard as the one on our eastern boundary.

With increasing habitat fragmentation, smaller patches of land are becoming more important to wildlife, particularly those parcels of habitat located near preserve areas. The ideal neighbors of the Sanctuary are owners who leave their property intact, like the LCRA and the City of Austin, our partners in the BCP, or owners who elect to mitigate their development by habitat restoration and landscaping with native plants. With the completion of the Jackie Arnold Education Center (JAEC), the TAS will have a place to offer programs about landscaping with native plants, as well as other related topics, that can enlighten adjacent landowners about the creation of wildlife friendly habitats in their own yards that will, in turn, lessen the impacts of their activities on the Sanctuary.

The stone for the JAEC has been delivered and the structural steel has arrived. The contractor is currently working out the details of the steel erection. Most of the steel fabrication will take place off-site and the pieces hot-dipped with galvanizing prior to installation.

Sanctuary Closed

The Baker Sanctuary will remain closed until February 3, 2007.


Baker Sanctuary Annual Open House Date Set

Mark your calendars for the Annual TAS Baker Sanctuary Open House scheduled for Saturday, March 17, 2007 from 9:00 am until noon. This year, we will need at least ten guides to show our visitors our Golden-cheeked Warblers, plus other volunteers to greet our visitors, help sign them in and show them where to park. Please contact us here at the Sanctuary at 219-8425 if you would like to volunteer to help with the Open House.


John Wilcox, TAS-Baker Sanctuary Steward



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TAS NEWS & NOTES

The new year's arrival often triggers a reckoning or accounting of some kind. Looking over our books for 2006, I wonder if Travis Audubon has done a good job of letting you know how we use your chapter membership dues to support other conservation and education work in Austin.

For example, in 2006 Travis Audubon co-sponsored the **Balcones Songbird Festival** (organized by the Friends of Balcones) with \$1,838 in support. We gave a \$1,000 grant to the **Save Barton Creek Association** for a project protecting Bracted Twistflower habitat, and donated \$845 to this year's local **Cats Indoors Campaign**. Travis Audubon donated \$500 in unrestricted support to the **Native Prairies Association of Texas** and \$350 toward the building of a Chimney Swift tower at **Austin Discovery School**. We also supported with memberships several local conservation organizations, including TPWD's **Adopt-a-Prairie Chicken** program, **Driftwood Wildlife Association**, and the **Texas Land Trust Council**. Your chapter dues support our own robust education and conservation programs, but help support other local, like-minded work, too.

Speaking of reckoning, with the start of the new year I want to be sure to thank again the wonderful office volunteers who have made life at Travis Audubon quite a bit easier. **Ken Blake**, **Ethel Kutac**, and **Stan Van Sandt** volunteered all year doing tasks ranging from filing to data entry to helping us move into our new space. **Penny Potter** gave hours of labor helping set up in our new office, and **Sharon Bauer** made a major contribution of time and expertise in enhancing our membership database. These chapter members have earned our biggest thanks!

It's not too early to plan for the **Great Backyard Bird Count**, a fun weekend of citizen science taking place all over the nation, **February 16-19, 2007**. The tenth annual GBBC is a joint project of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. All ages and skill levels are welcomed and



From the 2006 Great Backyard Bird Count: Orange-crowned Warbler. Simon Tan, Texas

there is no registration fee. You can count birds anywhere at all, and track the counts as they cumulate in real time at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. We encourage you to participate!

Finally, would you like to put together a Travis Audubon youth team for this year's **Great Texas Birding Classic**? Taking place **April 15-22, 2007** to coincide with spring bird migration in Texas, the GTBC is a "competitive birdwatching tournament" sponsored by our friends at the **Gulf Coast Bird Observatory** and **Texas Parks and Wildlife**. Last year Travis Audubon sponsored a youth team at the Gliders level (\$500), the Travis Audubon Towhees. The funds raised by the tournament directly support habitat conservation in



Texas. It's also a lot of fun and a great way to get kids out in the field birding! Please contact Travis Audubon at youth@travisaudubon.org or 512.300.BIRD if you will organize a youth team that Travis Audubon can sponsor. Please let us hear from you by February 1st.

Valerie Staats



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Letters from Our E-mail Box

Q *I was at Bethany UMC on Anderson Mill in Northwest Austin and saw a pair of green birds flying away. I have never seen anything like them, they were much bigger than song birds, but appeared smaller than the crows that hang around here. They were light green and had long graceful wings. In fact they reminded me of seagulls in flight. Do you know what they might be? Or where I might look to find out? - MT, Austin*

A I read your question with interest because it is the first time in quite a while that I have heard of sightings of these birds which I believe are green parakeets. Green parakeets are native to Mexico; however, it is not unusual for them to wander this far north. Another possibility regarding their presence here is that they may be escaped caged birds. They are popular pets. I have seen them on several occasions in the past in the area south of here and in Austin.

They are described in *Birds of North America* as large birds, 13" long and as being almost totally green. They move around to take advantage of food opportunities. I am glad you had the opportunity to see an unusual visitor to our area. - LB

Q *A pair of Black-bellied Tree Ducks came in just before sunset and landed in the larger snag on the far side of the pond. I only ever recall seeing them in the winter months before. It's seemed to me that they generally preferred the seasonal bog/marsh on a lower part of the property. Lost? Drought? Climate change? I have no idea. Perhaps they are more common than I think. I'd welcome any enlightening comments. - EQ, Bastrop County.*

A Thanks for your question regarding the seasonality of black-bellied whistling ducks. They nest in the area and have for a number of years, in my memory. They nested and raised young at Hornsby Bend Wastewater Treatment Plant for several years and I know of a farm south of Hwy 71 in Bastrop County where there is a population of about 25 or so that are there year round (nice place to visit in the summer when they have nested and there are ducklings all over the place). Our Checklist shows them to be more prevalent in the summer than in the winter. There are usually one or two in the pond at the treatment plant on Hwy 969, near Johnny Morris Road. It is not unusual to see them on small ponds all over the area. - LB

Q *We currently have many endangered species of animals at the West Ft. Hood Stables (Montague Stables). I am trying to save the habitat of the birds and keep it safe for generations to come. We have seen the Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, both the male and the females for both, the Eastern Bluebird, Vermilion Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, the Black-capped Vireo, and some kind of woodpecker, as well as several other birds I don't know the correct names for. We are in a bit of urgency for protecting the birds; they are trying to shut down the stables and remove the horses ... destroying the coverage and protection as well as the livelihood of the birds. We have birds that nest in the holes in posts as well. Any help or suggestions would be appreciated. - KB, Killeen*

A First, let me assure you that tearing down the stables at Fort Hood will not mean the demise of the birds you see on that property. Birds are enormously talented when it comes to changing from one place of living to another. They will find a similar place on the reservation or in the vicinity and continue to live in the area just as they did before Fort Hood was put into operation. The birds have been flying into the same nesting areas probably for centuries. Incidentally, only the Black-capped Vireo of the birds you mentioned is on the endangered list. The others listed are very common over the whole Central Texas area.

Fort Hood is very proud of its record as being environmentally concerned and active. There is a person at the place whose has the job of working with The Nature Conservancy to protect endangered species. He leads groups from neighboring cities which are interested in seeing the Golden-cheeked Warbler, of which they estimate 2,000 nesting pairs, and the Black-capped Vireo, breeding estimate - 5,000 pairs. I have made the trip from Austin with fellow birders and had a very interesting and rewarding experience. The man is "Gil" Gilchrist and I no longer have the information to contact him, but I'll bet the main switchboard at Ft. Hood could find him, and he could probably answer your questions about all wildlife on the property. I really believe they are familiar with the situation you describe and have made whatever arrangements necessary to preserve the wildlife. I hope you get to visit and learn of their concern!

*Lawrence Buford, Co-Chair;
Travis Audubon Society Bird Records Committee*

TAS Events - Jan 2007

Monday, Jan. 1, 2007 **The Westcave Preserve Christmas Bird Count**
Contacts for information are Dan Callaway at 512-251-3501 or dandscallaway@juno.com and John Ahrns at 830-825-3442.

Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2007 **The Balcones Canyonlands Christmas Bird Count**
Contact information is John Kelly, 331-8693, jkellyaudubon@hotmail.com.


Saturday, January 6, 2007 **Bird Walk at Commons Ford Park**
7:30 to 11:30 am or longer
The park has one of the most extensive bird lists in Travis Co. with at least 150 species. Interesting winter visitors include Merlin, Ringed Kingfisher, Brown Creeper, Common Raven, Purple Finch, and Le Conte's, Fox, and Swamp Sparrow. The gate will be open at 7:00 so early-birds can try to find an owl. Limited to 12 participants; registration required. Contact Ed Fair at 512-560-1943 to register and get directions.

Saturday, January 13 **Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend**
7 am & 4 pm
Contact Kevin Anderson at 972-1960 for more information. Sponsored monthly by the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory.

Tuesday, January 16 **Field Trip to Pedernales Falls State Park**
9 am to 12 noon
The first of a projected series of monthly, mid-week bird walks in Austin-area State Parks. Contact Terry Banks at 451-6302 or tessiebanks@msn.com for more information

Saturday, January 20 **Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend**
7:30 am to noon
Contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieee.org, 748-8660) for more information.

Sunday, January 21 **Granger Lake (Williamson County) Field Trip**
7:30 am – 2:00 pm
Registration required, maximum is 15. Tim Fennell and Byron Stone will be leading this field trip, and they'll explore a variety of habitats searching for waterfowl, shorebirds, Mountain Plovers, longspurs, woodland birds, and sparrows. Please keep in mind that seeing Mountain Plovers or longspurs is not guaranteed, and may only consist of flyovers or scope views, but we'll hope for the best. Dress in layers, bring snack/lunch/water and \$5/vehicle entry fee for Willis Creek Park, plan on carpooling once you arrive in order to reduce the number of vehicles in the caravan, and bring a two-way radio if you have one. Contact Kathy McCormack (VEFL21@yahoo.com, (c) 698-9880) to register or for more information.

Wednesday, January 24 **Lunchtime at Central Park Pond**
12 noon to 1 pm

Excellent for complete first-timers, beginning birders and kids! Lunchtime birding at Central Park, led by Travis Audubon's Executive Director. Bring your binoculars and we'll see what turns up at the Park's pond and grounds. We may see a few species or many. (We've seen a variety including Green Heron, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Wood Ducks, and others.) The weather and time of year play a big role in what we'll see. If you live or work in the neighborhood, walk over to meet us at the NW corner of 38th and Guadalupe (at the entrance to the Park). If driving, you could park at Central Market and walk to that corner. Dress for the weather, including hat and sunscreen. We'll walk the flat, finely crushed gravel trail at a leisurely pace. Wheelchair accessible. Please e-mail valerie@travisaudubon.org to sign up.


Saturday and Sunday **Weekend field trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley**
January 27 and 28
For those who haven't been able to take off for our longer LRGV trips, here's one where we try to hit the high spots in one weekend. Santa Ana NWR, Bentsen State Park and Westlaco on Saturday, then Sabal Palms and Laguna Atascosa on Sunday is one do-able (barely) scenario, but we may modify it to chase rarities. Contact Stan Van Sandt at 512-707-7438 or empidider@yahoo.com to register or for more information. Optional extensions led by Gary Waggerman may be available: if interested contact Gary at waggerman@sbcglobal.net.

TAS Events - Feb 2007

Saturday, February 10 7 am & 4 pm **Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend**
Contact Kevin Anderson at 972-1960 for more information. Sponsored monthly by the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory.

Saturday, February 17 7:30 am to noon **Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend**
Contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieec.org, 748-8660) for more information.

Saturday, February 17 **Annual Canyon of the Eagles Field Trip**
Led by Mark Bentley. This year's trip is contingent on Lake Buchanan's water level. Contact Mark for registration and information at mebentley@austin.rr.com.

Wednesday, February 21 12 noon to 1 pm **Lunchtime at Central Park Pond**
Excellent for absolute first-timers, kids, and beginning birders.
 Lunchtime birding at Central Park, led by Travis Audubon's Executive Director. Bring your binox and we'll see what turns up at the Park's pond and grounds. We've seen a Green Heron, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, and a large family of Wood Ducks. If you live or work in the neighborhood, walk over to meet us at the NW corner of 38th and Guadalupe. If driving, you could park at Central Market and walk to that corner. Please dress for the weather! We'll walk the flat, crushed gravel trail at a leisurely pace. Please e-mail valerie@travisaudubon.org to sign up. Wheelchair accessible.

Tuesday, February 27 9 am to 12 noon **Field Trip to Bastrop and Buescher State Parks**
Second of a projected series of monthly, mid-week bird walks in Austin-area State Parks. Contact Terry Banks at 451-6302 or tessiebanks@msn.com for more information.

Tuesday, February 27 through Monday, March 5 **Field trip to Oklahoma, led by Gary Waggerman**
Lesser Prairie Chickens, Smith's Longspurs, American Tree Sparrows, Snow Buntings – who knows what northern birds we might see just a six or eight hour drive due north of here? The dates include two driving days and five birding days, but Gary has promised to save the best spots for the weekend for those of us who can't take the whole week off. Contact Gary Waggerman to register, waggerman@sbcglobal.net.

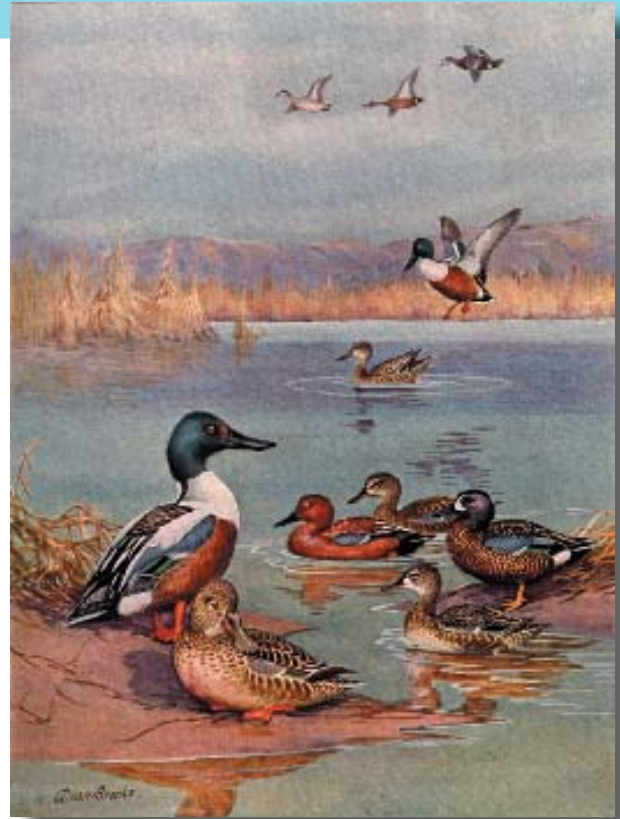
About TAS Field Trips All TAS field trips are open to members and nonmembers and to experienced and inexperienced birders. Wear appropriate clothing and walking shoes, and bring binoculars and water. Unless otherwise noted, field trips are free. Carpoolers should expect to pay a share of the gasoline expense. For complete, up-to-date information on field trips, including cancellations due to weather or other circumstances, please check the TAS website at www.travisaudubon.org. Because of the publication schedule of the newsletter, things can change. If you do not have Internet access, please contact the person(s) listed with the event description.

About Hornsby Bend Maps and other information about the Hornsby Bend facility may be found on the Hornsby Bend website at www.hornsbybend.org

Waterfowl Identification Class

Begin the new year by learning how to distinguish those ducks! In January, Jean Martin will again teach the Waterfowl Identification Class. Jean also teaches the Beginning Birding Class, and has many years' experience birding. This course will focus on ducks and other waterfowl found in Texas, especially during the winter months. It is well suited for birders who have completed the Beginning Birding Class or for those who have ignored ducks because "all those females look alike."

Lectures will be from 8 to 10 am on Saturdays, January 20 and 27, in the Center for Environmental Research auditorium, at Hornsby Bend. Field trips will follow classes and will last until about 2 pm; locations will be announced at class time. Participation in field trips is considered part of the class. Plan to bring a lunch to both classes. Tuition is \$30 for TAS members and \$40 for nonmembers. The class will be limited to 14 participants. To register, e-mail waterfowlclass@austin.rr.com, or call Jean Martin at 343-7053.



President's column, *continued from page 2*

Advocacy Committee, Travis Audubon took a stand on a variety of issues relating to the protection of bird habitat in Texas. Under Valerie's careful and persistent attention, our Chapter member list increased significantly. The combination of Tess' and Valerie's skills won us 2nd place in National Audubon's newsletter contest. And many more accomplishments, most of which could not have happened without the support of our members. Thank you all for a great 2006!

So, what does 2007 hold for Travis Audubon? That too will depend a great deal on you, our loyal members. There are still plenty of challenges ahead. Will 2007 be the year that: TAS plays an even bigger role in advocating for the protection of bird habitat in Central Texas; TAS saves more bird habitat from development; TAS reaches out to our Spanish speaking neighbors to hook them on birding and then turn them into conservationists; TAS involves more children in birding and conservation; TAS breaks 1000 Chapter members? The answers to many of these questions depend on you.

The Board can't go it alone. So, the ultimate question is, "Will 2007 be the year that you get more involved in Travis Audubon?" I hope your answer is a resounding YES!

On a personal note, 2006 marked my 10th year as a birder. It was wonderful to get to honor one of my first birding mentors, Fred Webster, at our holiday gala. Fred and Marie played a large part in me becoming the birder and conservationist I am today. I hope to do even more for the birds and conservation during my next 10 years!

Help us bring in the new year by joining us at our January membership meeting. Dwight Wilson will be talking about animal tracking. I took TAS' Animal Tracking & Signs class that Dwight taught. It is amazing the amount of information that can be gleaned from an animal track. I think you'll find Dwight's presentation very interesting. See you there.

Shelia Hargis

Second Annual SparrowFest

February 3, 2007

Attention, Sparrowhawks! The event that was intriguing enough to land a front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 23, 2006) is back! This year, Sparrowfest will be packed into one day, from sunrise to sunset and beyond. So if you have wanted a crash course in identifying all those little brown birds sneaking through the brush, but couldn't devote more than a day to them, now is your chance.



White-crowned Sparrow
Photo courtesy of Byron Stone

Central Texas is an excellent place to study our native sparrows. Twenty species regularly winter on or near Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, the site of the event both this year and

last. Activities will be based at the Flying X Ranch tract of BCNWR, and tours will leave from there to various parts of the refuge and vicinity.

Sparrow-meisters Byron Stone and Bill Reiner will return to lead tours. This year they will be joined by Chuck Sexton, the staff biologist at BCNWR and a sparrow expert in his own right.

Friends of Balcones Canyonlands Refuge will again host SparrowFest. Proceeds from the event will go to this organization, whose volunteers do so much to help the refuge. The cost will be \$40 per person for members of the Friends group, \$65 for non-members. The Friends will provide breakfast tacos, and then lunch, at the Flying X. There will be an optional dinner at the Flying X at the end of the day, for an additional \$10.

For further information, and to register, see the Friends' website: www.friendsofbalcones.org or call 512-965-BIRD.

TRAVIS AUDUBON SOCIETY NATURE BOOK CLUB

We invite you to join the Travis Audubon Society Nature Book Club, which is usually held the 4th Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm at BookPeople (6th and Lamar, thank you BookPeople!). The group is informal and fun, and you can choose to go to all the meetings and discuss all the books, or you can pick and choose the meetings featuring books you would like to discuss. You do not have to have read the book to attend. In the coming months we're reading:

Thursday, January 25 - *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey* by Jane Goodall and Philip Berman

Thursday, February 22 - *Paddling the Wild Neches* by Richard M. Donavan

Thursday, March 22 - *A Year in the Maine Woods* by Bernd Heinrich

This selection is tentative! Before you commit to reading a book for a particular month, you may want to call Terry Banks at 451-6302 or e-mail tessiembanks@msn.com to find out if the book is still current.

Ongoing TAS Meetings

Program Committee: meets on the 2nd Monday of each month, contact Marsha May, 965-6714

TAS Board of Directors: meets on the 2nd Thursday of each month (except for December), contact: Shelia Hargis, 300-BIRD

Urban Habitat Development Group: meets on the 3rd Monday of each month, contact: Jane Tillman, 794-0058

Education Committee: meets on the 3rd Monday of each month, contact: Byron Stone, 451-3380

Latin America Committee Meeting: meets most 3rd Wednesdays, contact Penny Potter, ppotter@austin.rr.com

TAS Regular Monthly Meeting: meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month except for June, July & August

Bird Records Committee: meets on the 4th Thursday of the month, contact: Ethel Kutac, 346-7659

TAS Nature Book Club Meeting: the 4th Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm at BookPeople, contact: tessiebanks@msn.com

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Join your local Audubon chapter, Travis Audubon Society, by using the form at the right. Your dues will be put to use supporting local conservation, education, research projects, field trips, and other Travis Audubon activities right here in Central Texas. We seek your support through your membership in our local chapter. (To become a member of the national Audubon, please go to their Web site at www.audubon.org.)

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

Travis Audubon Society chapter members receive eleven issues of this *Signal Smoke* newsletter, priority sign-ups on local field trips, discounts on our educational classes, the opportunity to participate in our e-mail group and attend our wonderful monthly lectures, and more!

To join Travis Audubon Society:

Make your check payable to Travis Audubon Society and send it with this form to TAS Membership Secretary, P. O. Box 40787, Austin, TX 78704, or join on-line using any major credit card by going to www.travisaudubon.org and clicking on Membership.

Travis Audubon Society

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

- \$12 **Youth Membership** (up to age 18)
- \$25 **Individual Membership**
- \$35 **Family Membership**
- \$75 **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, free workshop, and listing in annual report)

T-shirt size (for premium memberships) _____

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