



SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 55, NO. 3

March 2006

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Travis Audubon Society
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Doing a Big Year at Hornsby Bend

Any birdwatcher that has spent time in Austin has likely spent some time birding at Hornsby Bend Wastewater Treatment Facility. During 2005, I made a dedicated effort to search out and enjoy the bird-life on the Hornsby property. Prior to doing this, I had only casually birded Hornsby during my ten years in Austin, primarily checking out birds on the three main ponds and in the adjacent woods. Before the year started, I had only visited Pond 3 twice, driven down Platt Lane only a couple times and had *never* ventured down to Platt Pond, the Old Cypress River Crossing or the northwest fields. As it would turn out, the Colorado River corridor between Pond 3 and Platt Pond would become my favorite area at Hornsby.



Hooded Warbler
photo credit: Eric Carpenter

My goal for the year was primarily to get a better handle of the status of birds in the area. I also was curious as to how many species I could see though I wasn't real sure what was possible since much of the area was "new" to me. I knew Rob Fergus and Glenn Perrigo both had Hornsby Big Year counts of 239 different species in years past, though that seemed like a daunting goal the first few months. Another goal was to try to find a bird that had never been recorded on the property.

2005 has now come and gone. Reflecting back on the year, twelve months of birding at Hornsby was more exciting then I would have originally thought. Due to both persistent efforts on my part (parts of ~190-200 days in the field) and a great network of friendly Austin-area birders, I was able to tally 249 species on (or flying over) the property. Finding new or unusual species was very exciting, but so was watching the ebb-and-flow of birdlife that one is only able to do by sampling the area every day or every few days:

- Tracking the pair of Ringed Kingfishers that were present virtually the entire year along the Colorado River. I was hoping to see them nest in a favored sand bank, though they would shy away from it in late spring.
- Realizing by mid-to-late March that Hornsby's Bewick's Wrens had departed only to see them return in late September. I don't think I had ever noted this seasonal movement in our area before.
- In the spring, watching wading birds and other species fly in (probably for the first time) from the southeast along the river, circle the ponds for a bit, and either land or keep heading northwest (also along the river corridor). In the fall, I would witness the same thing but in the opposite direction (birds heading generally down river).

The year was full of highlights that I'll treasure for some time. It was a great year to bird at Hornsby because our feathered friends sure seemed to be cooperating. Statewide and even nation-wide attention was focused on Hornsby in the fall with the very cooperative Fork-tailed Flycatcher (present for over a month) as well as a White-winged Scoter and Hornsby's first Black Scoter (both scoters stayed for a week).

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*TAS Regular Monthly Meeting
Thursday, February 16, 7:00 p.m.
Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for social time*

Backyard Wildlife Habitats
Speaker: Bill Stout
National Wildlife Federation

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

see page 9 for additional details



Travis Audubon Society

General Address

P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704

Address for Donations

P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704

Phone numbers listed below without an area code are local numbers in the 512 area.

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Executive Director

Valerie Staats, PhD 300-BIRD
valerie@travisaudubon.org

BAKER SANCTUARY STEWARD

John Wilcox 219-8425

ACT REPRESENTATIVES

John Kelly (state president) 331-8693

Bryan Hale (state treasurer) 474-5599

SIGNAL SMOKE EDITOR

Tess Sherman 974-8582

TAS TELEPHONE

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

www.travisaudubon.org

TAS EMAIL

info@travisaudubon.org



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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

"I have a dream," said Martin Luther King, Jr., and the dream he envisioned changed a nation. How different would our country be if Mr. King had not taken the time to define his dream? His dream touched the hearts and souls of many people and galvanized them to action. Studies have shown that organizations that have defined their visions are much more successful than those organizations that have not. An organization with a defined vision has a powerful competitive and strategic advantage. One universal truth rules strategic planning: You will never be greater than the vision that defines you.

What does this have to do with Travis Audubon Society? We cannot have a profound impact in our community unless we clearly define our vision and hold it in our minds and hearts as we shape Travis Audubon. Your board and staff have been working to define our vision, and the process has been energizing. Conservation has been a prominent thread throughout the discussions. And, because we're "Audubon," birds must play an important role. Using birding as our method of teaching conservation provides us a niche that no other organization in Central Texas is filling. We haven't completed the visioning process, but we're close. Stay tuned!



Shelia Hargis, photo by Robert Baumgardner

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COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS

TAS Rare Bird Alert	Eric Carpenter	300-2473
		select option #3
Bird Records	Lawrence Buford	452-6344
	Ethel Kutac	346-7659
Conservation Education—Adult	John Kelly	331-8693
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Urban Habitat Development	Tess Sherman	974-8582
	John Wilcox	219-8425
	Jane Tillman	794-0058

ABOUT SIGNAL SMOKE

Subscription Information

Signal Smoke, published 11 months of the year by Travis Audubon Society, is a TAS membership benefit. To join TAS, see the back page of this newsletter. For address or subscription changes, please call 512-300-BIRD (2473) or email TAS at info@travisaudubon.org. The post office will not forward *Signal Smoke*.

Newsletter Deadline

The submissions deadline is the first day of the preceding month (for example, September 1 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 974-8582 if you have questions.

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Hornsby, continued from page 1

My favorite moment was either the Short-eared Owl that flew by Richard Kaskan and me, seemingly checking us out (as much as we were him) early one pre-dawn morning in March, or the two Long-billed Curlews that flew briefly over the ponds around dusk on April 1st, giving their rather distinctive call as they deemed the ponds "not worthy" and kept heading northwest.

Both of those sightings above were birds that I would only see once. Other one-timers included: a Glossy Ibis, a group of three Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, a Wild Turkey, a Least Tern, a Barn Owl, a Brown Creeper, a Yellow-throated Vireo, a Gray-cheeked Thrush, a Louisiana Waterthrush, a Scarlet Tanager, a Spotted Towhee, a Cassin's Sparrow, two LeConte's Sparrows, a Dark-eyed Junco, a Pine Siskin, and a Brewer's Blackbird. The Brewer's Blackbird (common not far from Hornsby but hard to come by on the property) was one of the most out-of-place sightings of the year with the only bird being one that walked around the drying basins, near the hawk watch on October 8th.

Other species I would have been glad to see on only one occasion, that I would see multiple times included: Anhinga (July & August), Greater Scaup (Feb & Nov), Long-tailed Duck (several weeks in January), Bald Eagle (Jan, March, April, October, November), Common Moorhen (May & June), Red-necked Phalarope (one bird that lingered a few days in September), American Woodcock (April, November), Caspian Tern (May & August), Common Ground-Dove (April, November, December), Green Kingfisher (March, Sept, October), Pileated Woodpecker (April & August), Say's Phoebe (March, Nov, Dec), Vermilion Flycatcher (Oct, Nov, Dec), Ash-throated Flycatcher (Jan thru April, Nov thru Dec), Bell's Vireo (May, Sept), Red-breasted Nuthatch (Feb, March, April), Veery (2 sightings in May), Sprague's Pipit (March, Nov, Dec), Prothonotary Warbler (April thru September) Hooded Warbler (May, Sept), and Bullock's Oriole (a couple sightings in May).

I was also able to find a bird that had never been recorded at Hornsby (one of my goals) - a singing Rock Wren on Mount "Hornsby" along Platt Lane. Richard Kaskan and I were standing at the Platt Lane gate one morning in late November when it suddenly dawned on me that a bird we had been hearing for a few minutes sure as heck sounded like this species (and it was!).

My nemesis bird for much of the year was a Blue Jay. It would take me until Labor Day weekend (Sept 4th) until I saw my first one, though I would see up to four birds on-and-off for the remainder of the year.

My biggest miss was probably Red-breasted Mergansers, which were seen in late November on-and-off but never when I was around. I also missed a couple fly-over species (Sandhill Crane, Herring Gull, Snow Goose) though I don't think any of these ever landed on the property. Other



Blue-headed Vireo

birds I'm aware of that occurred but I didn't see (many of them are birds that were seen/present on days when I was at Hornsby): Eastern Screech-Owl, Prairie Warbler, Snowy Plover, Lazuli Bunting, Green-tailed Towhee, and Zone-tailed Hawk.

Some of my non-birding highlights were seeing a Bobcat two times (once on the southeast side of Pond 2; the other time near Pond 3), seeing maybe half a dozen Coral Snakes, and "discovering" the crashed jet on Pond 3 where I also encountered one of the biggest snapping turtles I've ever seen.

There are a large number of folks (too many to list) who helped make 2005 an exciting time for me at Hornsby. Many of the exciting birds I mentioned above were first discovered by an Austin-area birder and then passed on to me directly, via the Texbirds Listserve, or via the HBBO website. Inspiration for this year goes to folks who have recently done local Big Years who brought to my attention how fantastic local birding can be. Rob Fergus and Jeff Hansen also had recent big years at Hornsby and I spent a lot of time searching through the Texbirds archives and the HBBO sightings for their notes to give me a good groundwork of what I could expect.

Kevin Anderson was very generous and helped me understand life at Hornsby, from a birding and a non-birding perspective. A special thanks to Sally Breed who a couple times went out of her way to get me on a great bird she had found. Sally also joined me (and survived!) one of my death-marches of walking the length of the Colorado River from the ponds to Platt Lane.

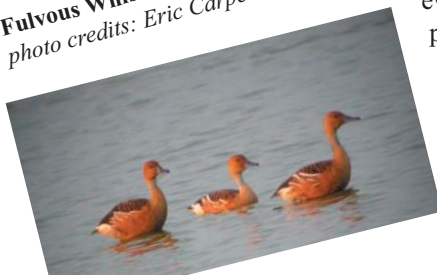
I spent countless hours in the field with Richard Kaskan, not only enjoying his company but also learning quite a bit in the process. Richard is one of the more astute birders I've been with in the field, possessing a keen eye and trained ear, as well as a good knack for pulling the rare bird out of the flock.

To conclude (and no real surprise), Hornsby Bend is probably one of the best birding spots in central Texas. As far as a species count per year goes, I would bet its only rival would be Mitchell Lake (San Antonio). The combination of its location, the fact that it is an island of habitat in otherwise suburban sprawl and gravel/dirt pits, its proximity to the river, and the nutrient-rich ponds draws in lots of birds (and birders). The main ponds might be the easiest area to bird but the most exciting can be found by patiently walking (and listening) along the river corridor from Pond 3 all the way over to Platt Lane.

Anyone considering a Big Year (whether it be in their backyard, their home county, their favorite hot-spot, or even a state-wide effort) should realize that they're probably in for a little more work (and stress) than expected but also a **lot** more fun.

Eric Carpenter

Fulvous Whistling Ducks
photo credits: Eric Carpenter





NATURALIST'S CALENDAR

by Bill Reiner

photo by Robert Baumgardner

This month's *Naturalist's Calendar* is a reprint from March 2001

The spring parade that began in February picks up tempo in March. Mexican Plum and Agarita flowers that excited us last month are on the wane, but we scarcely notice their disappearance in the flurry of new blossoms and leaves and migrants and other emerging life.

Ironically, March is also a sort of second autumn – at least where Live Oaks grow. As the Live Oaks' new leaves and blooms emerge, the old leaves fall. On windy days – and March is our windiest month – each gust brings a clatter of leaves to the ground as if in applause. Unlike the leaves of other trees which shrivel when they dry, the waxy upper surface of a Live Oak leaf keeps it rigid even after it falls. When wind or water deposits them into piles, Live Oak leaves tend to stack; tilted on edge, they look like playing cards that have been swept against a wall.

Just when the Live Oaks are looking most bedraggled, the Spanish Oaks of the Hill Country (and the closely-related Shumard Oaks farther east) have donned bright green flowers and new leaves. Spanish Oaks are also called Texas Oaks (and Spotted Oaks and Rock Oaks; of course each of these names is also used for one or more other oaks – aren't common names fun?). All but the most recent reference sources identify them with the scientific name *Quercus texana*. But botanists digging into the history of the name have discovered that the oak first christened *Q. texana* is a different species, one whose range only edges into Texas from Louisiana. For consistency's sake, the rules of nomenclature dictate that the first species named keeps the name, so our oak has been re-named *Q. buckleyi*, for Samuel Buckley, a former state geologist and plant collector.

But nomenclature is too dry a subject for bright spring days. Enough.

The celebrated Texas Bluebonnets debut this month, but they are by no means the only showy blooms. Buttercups, Blue-stars, spiderworts, paintbrushes, both pink and yellow evening-primroses, phlox, and white Blackfoot Daisies dot the roadsides. The unusually-shaped pink flowers of Mexican-buckeye adorn the limestone bluffs where this shrub often grows. Red Buckeyes often bloom nearby. Their flowers, among the earliest red flowers of spring, entice the first Black-chinned Hummingbirds when they return from the south.

Many of the March migrants are birds that will nest here. White-eyed Vireos return to their thickets – though you'll likely hear their snappy songs long before you see them. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Black-and-White Warblers, and Northern Parulas dance again in the treetops with the wintering kinglets. Later in the month, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers begin to appear, almost magically, on the same utility lines and barbed wire fences where we last saw them in fall. Our two endangered breeding birds also

return. Golden-cheeked Warblers sing among the new Spanish Oak leaves by mid-month, and by late March raspy Black-capped Vireo songs emanate from the shinneries, also awash now in green leaves.

The majority of passage migrants, those birds that simply pass through central Texas on their way to breeding grounds farther north, wait until April. A few shorebirds are expected, though: Lesser Yellowlegs join their Greater cousins; Pectoral and Baird's Sandpipers mingle with the wintering Least. Flocks of American Golden-Plovers touch down in wet meadows on their way to the arctic tundra. The first Swainson's Hawks pass overhead, as do the first American White Pelican flocks.

Monarch butterflies begin to pass through, as well, on their migration north from their Mexican wintering grounds. And temperatures are often warm enough now that other cold-blooded critters can venture out. Snakes re-appear to bask in the afternoon sun. Several amphibians, such as Gray Treefrogs and Gulf Coast Toads, take the initiative to begin breeding, though others, like Strecker's Chorus Frogs, have been at it for weeks. Small pools of quiet water may be quite musical with their calls, especially at dawn and dusk.

Beginning Friday, April 29 through Monday, May 1

Travis Audubon is a proud sponsor of this event.

BALCONES SONGBIRD FESTIVAL at the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. Join field trips seeking birds of the Hill Country, including the Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler. Other trips will explore the Refuge's ecosystems, backcountry areas usually closed to the public, sounds of the night, wildflowers, and butterflies, and the night sky. Family events include a spider walk, a search for pond creatures, birdhouse building, and free tethered balloon rides. For more information, visit www.balconessongbirdfestival.org.





Dan Callaway,
photo by Robert Baumgardner

THE DAN CALLAWAY REPORT

Birding to Granger Lake - 2/1/06

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

Target bird: Short-eared Owl (none seen)

We arrived at Sorefinger WMA East of Granger on FM 971 at 6:45 am. Due to overcast skies, which lasted all day, it was still dark. Within five minutes it was light enough to scan the prairie grasses and possible perches on both sides of the road. Several of us walked out into the WMA from the gate for about 200 yards, scaring up Savannah Sparrows and meadowlarks. We did see a Northern Harrier dive at a perched Red-tailed Hawk. Other good sightings here were Great Blue Heron, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Osprey, Greater Yellowlegs, and Common Yellowthroat. On CR 356 nearby we saw Brewer's Blackbirds. We continued East on 971 and birded below the dam.

While searching for the Eastern Phoebe we were hearing behind the restrooms, we spotted a Say's Phoebe feeding over the dam's overflow outlet and perching on the rails above the concrete with the Eastern Phoebe. We could easily notice the larger size of the Say's. Each time it would prepare to perch, its black tail would spread into a wedge-shape, reminding us of its kinship to kingbirds. Of course, the salmon-colored belly was diagnostic. The wooded area 200 yards back up the road revealed a Fox Sparrow perched in good view and singing its sweet whistling tune. Others here were Barred Owl and Pileated Woodpeckers (heard only), Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Hermit Thrush, Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, and White-throated Sparrow. On the lakeside of the dam was a small raft on Green-winged Teal.

Returning West on 971, we turned right on CR 360 and searched for Horned Lark and McCown's Longspur at the "L" curve to no avail. At Alligator Rd, we turned right and made the Althea/Hunt Jones Loop back to Alligator. At Aubrey Messer, we made a spur to the pond to find a Belted Kingfisher. We turned left on Williamson Co Rd which becomes CR 352 at the county line. We searched the megafield for Mountain Plover to no avail. We continued South to 971 and turned right, then left at the cemeteries and drove to Willis Creek Park, which requires a \$4 entrance fee per vehicle (or \$2 with a Golden Age Pass).

We ate lunch in the picnic area and identified Great Egret, Double-crested Cormorant, Ring-billed Gull, and Forster's Tern. The group shelter area revealed Bewick's Wren and Harris's Sparrow. We could not find the Pyrrhuloxia reported earlier. We then headed West to 95, stopping occasionally to look for plover in the plowed fields. At 29 we went West to CR 366 and viewed the ducks on the pond about two miles to the South, which included Pied-billed Grebe, American Wigeon, Redhead and Ring-necked Duck. Further West on 29 we made a final stop (rain began about 2:30) at Mankin's Crossing to see a Spotted Sandpiper, three Wilson's Snipe and several Killdeer. Other good birds for the day included American Kestrel, Crested Caracara, American Pipit and a swarm of 10,000+ blackbirds.

Total species: Sixty-five (twenty-nine at 9 am, forty-five at 10 am, forty-nine at 11 am, and fifty-one by noon)

Best bird: Say's Phoebe
Dominant bird: meadowlark species



President's column, continued from page 2

By the way, at the January board meeting, the board elected Marsha Reimer to fill the 1st vice president position; Sam Fason had to step down from that Executive Committee role due to other commitments, but thankfully he is willing to continue serving on the board. Thank you, Sam, for your invaluable help and guidance as 1st VP. Thank you, Marsha, for your commitment to helping lead Travis Audubon Society!

At our March 16 membership and business meeting, we'll hold our board member election. Current chapter members will vote on all 12 positions. Thanks to the hard work of our Nominating Committee, who provided an awesome slate of candidates!

During Jason Spangler's Native Prairie presentation at our January meeting, he began his presentation with a quote from Jane Goodall: "We have a choice to use the gift of our lives to make the world a better place." I encourage you to make that choice, and Travis Audubon stands ready to help you put your commitment to environmental issues into action.

Please join us for our March 16 membership meeting to hear Bill Stout talk about National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Habitat program and learn how to make your yard more bird- and wildlife-friendly. And come vote for your new board members. See you there.

Shelia Hargis

Travis Audubon Board of Directors **Slate of Candidates**

- *Current chapter members of Travis Audubon Society will vote in person at the March 16, 2006 general membership meeting.*
- *Twelve candidates have been nominated for twelve seats on the Board, four each for one-year, two-year, and three-year terms.*
- *To be eligible to vote in the Board election, you must be a chapter member of Travis Audubon Society and current with dues no later than March 10, 2006.*

Rob Bates

1-yr. term

My time on the Board so far has been a great enjoyment and learning experience. I hold a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from the Ohio State University and have worked on a number of endangered species projects across the U.S. I am an avid birder, and have been at it since the age of five. I am eager to start another term on the Board, and continue to drive Travis Audubon into the future.

Valarie Bristol

3-yr. term

I would be honored to serve on the Board of Directors of Travis Audubon because TAS is an important participant in building community support to appreciate and protect our native habitat. Central Texas is undergoing tremendous growth and it is important that we as a community take actions to assure our native habitats have as much protection as the community can support. This requires multiple partners and TAS has an important role to educate the community and lead in protection strategies that focus on birds and their habitat needs. I am Director of External Affairs for The Nature Conservancy of Texas and currently Chair of the Texas Land Trust Council.

Anne Donovan

2-yr. term

In addition to being secretary of the TAS Board of Directors for several years, my primary interest in TAS has been the Education Committee. I have given many programs, both to adults and children, about birds of the Austin area, have helped with the Youth Birding Camp, and have served as registrar for a number of our classes. My other community volunteer activities are also associated with conservation and environmental education. They include Bamberger Ranch Preserve, Master Naturalists, Wild Basin Preserve, Texas Memorial Museum, and Natural Areas Preservation Association.

Sam B. Fason

2-year term

I have served on the TAS board since 2002 and have been particularly interested in the conservation and preservation of wildlife habitat. To become a major conservation organization, TAS needs to improve our fundraising and management of resources. I have practiced as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in Austin since 1970, and founded Austin Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Associates, a 10-doctor practice. I am a graduate of UT Austin, Baylor College of Dentistry, and did my residency at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas. I have served on the boards of Guarantee National Bank and the Austin Symphony. Maydelle Foster Fason and I have two children and four grandchildren, including Sam, age ten, an avid birder.

Shelia Hargis

1-yr. term

During my presidency, my focus was to improve Travis Audubon Society's effectiveness as a conservation organization. We improved our infrastructure so that we can support and maintain our efforts. We also worked on defining a clear vision for TAS so that we know what we are striving to achieve. We made significant progress over the last two years, and I believe we are on the verge of becoming a *major* conservation force in Central Texas. I am very excited about the future of Travis Audubon and would be honored to serve another year on the TAS Board of Directors.

Gray Jolink

3-yr. term

Birding touches every aspect of life. It is both mental and physical, visual and auditory, scientific and artistic, urban and rural, social and solitary. It also combines hard work with good luck. No other activity I can think of covers so many fields of endeavor. The importance of having organizations to foster birding and improve bird habitat, ensuring the survival of birds in general and individual species in particular, cannot be overstated. I have enjoyed my experience over the last several years with Travis Audubon and its members. It would be a privilege to serve on the board so that I can in some small way return those benefits. I am an attorney in private practice in Austin and a founding fellow of the Austin Bar Foundation.

John Kelly

1-yr. term

A native Texan, I moved to Austin in 1948. As a student at UT Austin in the 1960s, I first became involved with TAS through the Audubon Film Tours. After graduation I moved around as a member of the Air Force, joining Audubon chapters from Florida to Alaska and serving as president of Grand Forks Audubon in North Dakota and Lake-Cook Audubon in the Chicago suburbs. I returned to Austin in 1989 and joined the TAS Board in 1991. President of TAS from 1994-96, I've also served on the Education and Conservation committees. I also volunteer at the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. If elected, I hope to strengthen the Chapter's ties with other local conservation organizations such as the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory.

Jeffery Mundy

3-yr. term

Dedicated to conservation advocacy. I served on the board of directors of the Houston Audubon Society including serving as president. I am Board Certified in Personal Injury Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization and my firm, Mundy & Singley LLP, is based in Austin. I most recently helped persuade the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission not to proceed with the sale of over 50,000 acres of the Big Bend Ranch State Park. TAS has a unique opportunity to serve an important role in conservation. With the population of Central Texas likely to grow dramatically, conservation issues will increase in frequency, difficulty, and need. I am honored to be nominated to serve in the pursuit of TAS' mission and the community.

Marsha Reimer

2-yr. term

I am a biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in the Wildlife Science, Research and Diversity Program and have coordinated Texas Nature Tracker projects for five years. I am involved in training volunteers how to monitor populations of freshwater mussels and amphibians throughout the entire state of Texas. I received a M.S. in Aquatic Biology from Texas State University and a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from Texas A&M University. I am an avid birder and a long-standing member of Travis Audubon. I am willing to work hard and do the best that I am capable of for this wonderful organization.

Bill Reiner

2-yr. term

Bill Reiner began birding with his father in Columbus, Ohio, more than 35 years ago. A member of Travis Audubon Society for 13 years and a director for two, he has taught sparrow and grass identification classes for TAS, and has led several field trips. He has written the Naturalist's Calendar column for *Signal Smoke* for the past six years. Until last spring, he had been a biological technician at Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge for five years. He is currently between jobs, but working hard as the chair of the TAS Education Committee.

Terri Siegenthaler

3-yr. term

While I have been involved with conservation organizations in the past – including serving on the TAS Board in the late '80s and early '90s – I am mostly a side-liner these days and want to get intimately involved again. I enjoy group work on focused planning and action related to natural resource protection and environmental awareness. There are many exciting and challenging issues and opportunities facing the Austin area today, and I believe I can contribute to the voice of Travis Audubon Society and will gladly take up a share of the work to further the TAS agenda. I am Ranch Steward at the Shield Ranch, responsible for managing conservation programs on several ranch properties in Travis, Real, Atascosa and Jeff Davis counties.

Jane Tillman

1-yr. term

I have been involved with Travis Audubon for about four years and am interested in furthering the goal of getting more people interested in birds, by creating backyard wildlife habitat. I have hosted a couple of National Wildlife Federation Habitat Steward classes to spread the word about gardening for wildlife, and write an occasional column for the *Signal Smoke* on this topic. I love outreach and have helped with Travis Audubon's presence at area events such as the upcoming Green Garden Festival. I would be honored to support its mission as a board member this coming year.

Join us for the vote on March 16, 2006!

Education Committee News - Classes

Warbler Identification Class

The spring warbler migration will start soon. To learn how to differentiate among this colorful, but large, diverse, and sometimes confusing group of birds, consider enrolling in our Warbler Identification Class. The instructor will again be Cliff Shackelford, ornithologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., who has taught the class every spring for the past 8 years. This very popular class will focus on the warbler species likely to be seen in Texas, but other species will be included as time allows.

Lectures will take place Tuesday, April 11, Thursday, April 13, and Tuesday, April 18, from 7-9pm at the Center for Environmental Research auditorium at Hornsby Bend. The field trip will be Saturday and Sunday, April 22-23, at High Island on the Upper Texas Coast. Tuition is \$60 for TAS members and \$70 for non-members. Class members who participate in the field trip to the Upper Texas Coast will pay an additional \$15 to cover the expenses of the instructor.

To register, contact Roxie Rochat, 345-6935, or roxier(at)austin.rr.com. The class is limited to 14 participants; several vacancies remained at press time, but may soon be filled, so please ask the registrar if there are openings before sending payment.

Thanks to the ABA

The American Birding Association has again donated copies of *Birding* magazine, for which the Education Committee is grateful. This time, participants in Byron Stone's Sparrow Identification Class (the one that started in January) received copies of the January/February issue, which emphasized grassland birds.

.....> New Course Payment Procedure! <.....

To pay course tuition, you must first check with the course registrar to make sure a place is available. If the registrar has confirmed your place, then please mail a check, payable to Travis Audubon Society, to TAS Classes, P.O. Box 40787, Austin, TX 78704 or just go to www.travisaudubon.org, click on CLASSES, and use the easy PayPal buttons to pay tuition online.

Conservation Notes...how you can help

Want to help spread the word about the City of Austin's upcoming bond issue for purchase of open lands? Travis Audubon needs a representative to meet periodically with other interested organizations. For more information, call John Kelly at 331-8693, or e-mail him at jfkellyaustin53@hotmail.com.

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Travis Audubon also needs a representative to work with the City in developing guidelines for its Water Quality Protection lands. For more information, contact John Kelly.

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The Wimberley Valley Watershed Association has purchased 50 acres surrounding Jacob's Well, one of the outstanding natural springs in the Texas Hill Country. Jacob's Well is believed to be the longest underwater cave in the state. It's the primary source of water for Cypress Creek, which flows downstream through Wimberley to the Blue Hole swimming area and on to the Blanco River. The Jacob's Well Natural Area will be used for research and environmental education, and will serve as a model for protecting environmentally sensitive areas in the Edwards Aquifer region.

The purchase was made possible through a \$2 million loan from a conservation-minded lender. Within two years, the Watershed Association hopes to repay the loan and raise additional funds for management and restoration of the area. If

you'd like to make a contribution, write to the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, P.O. Box 2534, Wimberley, Texas 78676. And if you'd like information on visiting Jacob's Well, call David Baker, the executive director of the Watershed Association, at (512) 847-1582. You can also visit the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association's Web site at www.visitwimberley/water.

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If you've visited Hornsby Bend recently, you've probably noticed a lot of new security measures, including a guardhouse, surveillance cameras, and additional fencing. With the heightened security comes the heightened possibility that access to Hornsby Bend may eventually be restricted. One way to help ensure that Hornsby Bend remains open is to show the facility's staff that Audubon members appreciate the work they're doing. For one thing, we're planning an appreciation barbecue later this year. We also need to show the staff that we're willing to help maintain some of the things that have been put in place over the years, such as the birding shelter and the trail system.

If you'd like to help keep Hornsby Bend open, you can take part in the monthly Ecological Literacy Day (in March that'll be on the 25th). You can also join the committee that's being formed to support Hornsby Bend. If you'd like more information on this, contact John Kelly at jfkellyaustin53@hotmail.com or 331-8693.

Conservation Notes continues on next page

TAS Monthly Meeting - March 2006

Resources for you compiled by the Travis Audubon office:

On-line resources:

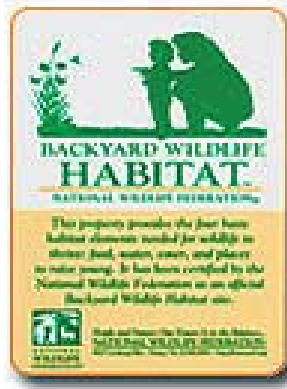
www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat
National Wildlife Federation's rich resource page covering how to get started, how to attract wildlife, tips and field guides, how to get your yard certified by NWF, and more

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildscapes
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Texas Wildscapes program on habitat restoration and conservation plan for rural and urban areas

www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard/WildHab.html
The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service

Recommended reading:

Kids' Easy-to-Create Wildlife Habitats: For Small Spaces in City-Suburbs-Countryside by Emily Stetson et alia (Williamson, 2004) [for kids aged 9-12]



National Wildlife Federation Attracting Birds, Butterflies & Backyard Wildlife by David Mizejewski (Creative Homeowner, 2004)

The Natural Habitat Garden by Ken Druse (Timber, 2004)

Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife by Noreen Damude and Kelly Conrad Bender (Texas Parks and Wildlife Press, 1999)

Related local organizations:

Capital Area Master Naturalists – www.camn.org

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center – www.wildflower.org

Native Plant Society of Texas – www.npsot.org

National Wildlife Federation Gulf States Natural Resource Center – www.nwf.org

Thursday, March 16, 7:00 pm (doors open at 6:30 pm for social time)

TAS Regular Monthly Meeting

Program: Backyard Wildlife Habitats

Presenter: Bill Stout, National Wildlife Federation

The Backyard Wildlife Habitat program gives people the knowledge to turn their backyards into valuable wildlife refuges and teaches them the rewards of connecting with nature by inviting wildlife into their lives. Through this program people learn that habitat restoration is critical for wildlife survival in urban and suburban setting where commercial and residential development has eliminated most natural areas. Bill Stout is a National Wildlife Federation educator. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Water Resource Management from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada and has seven years experience in environmental education and program coordination. Prior to NWF Bill worked with the City of Austin Water and Wastewater Utility where in addition to environmental education and program development he created a partnership between the Sierra Club, the City of Austin, and the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality to train volunteers to become water quality monitors. His experience includes oversight of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant to develop nature trails, creation of hands-on educational activities, conducting river ecology and composting facility tours, and production of educational videos.

Program begins at 7:00 p.m. **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.

Conservation, continued from previous page

Concerns about the decline of the urban forest are being heard in more places than Austin. In a recent development, reported by *The New York Times*, San Francisco passed an emergency amendment of its urban forestry ordinance to protect "significant" trees. The action was done to protect trees being used by the famed parrots of Telegraph Hill. Other tree battles are being waged in cities from coast to coast.

Meanwhile, *American Forests* recently completed a study of three dozen American cities. The magazine found that urban forests have been in general decline over the last 25 years—

down by 30% in one case. Some cities still have an impressive tree canopy: in Washington, 28.6% of the city's area was shaded. Others don't fare so well – San Francisco has a paltry 11.9% tree coverage. The last such study in Austin, conducted in 1992, found that trees covered 31.7% of the city's area.

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We can always use help in negotiating with various locations about installing Chimney Swift towers. Some spots where we're hoping to place towers include McKinney Falls State Park, McKinney Roughs, and the Zilker Botanical Gardens. If you'd like to work with any of these places, contact John Kelly at 331-8693 or jfkellyaustin53@hotmail.com.

Baker Sanctuary News

Due to the ongoing drought and the extreme fire danger in our area and in spite of the rain we received on January 28, the Sanctuary remains closed to visitors until the danger of wild fire has passed the county wide burn ban has been lifted. Typically, January is a month we receive the least amount of rainfall anyway, but from August 2005 through January 2006, the Sanctuary has received just a little over 7 inches of rain! Hopefully, the rain on the 28th, though not enough eliminate the threat of wild fire, signals the returning influence of the sub-tropical jet stream on our weather. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation, so please bear with us and we will open the Sanctuary as soon as possible.

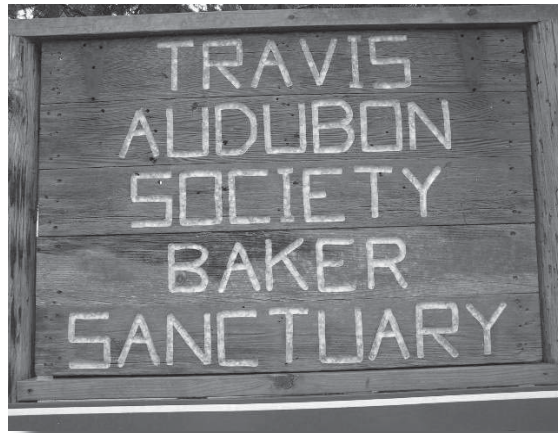


photo courtesy of John Wilcox

pink skies as dust from North Texas was blown into our area, the grit in my mouth when I was allowed outside and my family's efforts to conserve water). The study of tree rings, lake sediment and ice cores, packrat middens, pollen, historical documents and archeological evidence allows scientists to reconstruct past droughts and recent research indicates that Texas can expect to experience a Drought of Record once every 50 to 100 years. (Source: Texas Water Foundation, *Texas Water* by Todd H. Votteler, Ph.D.) An excellent book covering related topics is: *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* by Jared Diamond.

Droughts in Texas

Water defines Texas and drought is a normal condition in Texas. Texas experiences so many droughts, in part, because of its location along 30 degrees north latitude, a climate transition zone called the Great American Desert. This is the latitude where many of the earth's deserts are found, including the Sahara. Texas receives most of its moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, with lesser amounts from the Pacific Ocean. Precipitation across the state varies seasonally. April, May and June are normally the wettest months because of thunderstorm activity provoked by cold and warm fronts. A secondary rainfall peak occurs in September and October, caused by tropical cyclones originating in the Gulf of Mexico. Droughts in Texas occur primarily when the Bermuda High, a zone of high pressure in the atmosphere, becomes fixed over the southern United States. Global factors, such as El Niño (a warming of the seas surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean west of Peru and Ecuador), La Niña (a cooling of the sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean west of Peru and Ecuador), greenhouse effect and sunspot cycles can influence the intensity and duration of droughts because of the differences in how the atmosphere and oceans interact can alter precipitation patterns over decades and centuries.

The Drought of Record generally refers to the worst drought that has occurred in a region since the beginning of detailed record keeping. For Texas as a whole, the drought of record lasted from 1950 to 1957, although it may have begun in parts of the state in the 1940s. The end of 1956 saw 244 of Texas' 254 counties classified as disaster areas. (Author's note: Growing up in Austin, I vividly remember looking outside at

Baker Sanctuary Annual Open House Date Set*

Mark your calendars for the Annual TAS Baker Sanctuary Open House scheduled for Saturday, March 18, 2006 from 9:00 am until noon. Last year, we had a great group of guides, interpreters, support staff and traffic controllers. This year, we will need at least ten bird guides, four individuals to greet visitors and sign them in and four people to show our visitors where to park. If you would like to help with our Open House this coming March, contact us at 219-8425 or email me at jmwoso@earthlink.net.

*** Please be advised that if extreme fire danger persists into March, the Annual Open House will be cancelled.**

John Wilcox, TAS-Baker Sanctuary Chair and Steward

**One Environment.
One Simple Way To Care For It.®**



TAS Events - March 2006

Feb 28 to March 5, 2006 Lower Rio Grande Valley

The plan is to spend one night in the upper Valley and visit spots near Laredo and or Zapata. Then, two nights in the McAllen/Pharr area to allow visits to many refuges from Mission to Weslaco. The last 1-2 nights will be in the Harlingen/Brownsville area and would allow visits to Laguna Atascosa NWR, Sabal Palm Sanctuary and South Padre Island area. Return to Austin on Sunday. Contact Gary Waggerman or call him at 512-301-2615.

Saturday, March 4 Pedernales Falls State Park
8:00 am to noon

Led by George Kerr and Mark McClelland. Participants who wish to camp overnight on Friday night should make campsite reservations as soon as possible since Pedernales Falls State park fills up fast! Contact Texas Parks & Wildlife at www.tpwd.state.tx.us or 512-389-8900 for reservations. Complete details available online at www.travisaudubon.org. Contact George Kerr (georgekerr@austin.rr.com, (c) 785-3579) for more information.

Saturday, March 11 Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend
7 am & 4 pm

Contact Kevin Anderson (972-1960) for more information - sponsored monthly by the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory.

Sunday, March 12th Fledgling Birders Walk
8:30 am - 11:30 am

There is no age limit for participating in the walk, but children under 8 years old must be accompanied by an adult (older children may be dropped off and picked up at the meeting site). Parents and other adults are welcomed to attend. Please bring your own snacks, water, and binoculars. With advance notice we are able to provide loaner binoculars. Good walking shoes and long pants and weather appropriate garb are recommended. With questions, please e-mail Bernadette Noll at [nollanderson\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:nollanderson(at)sbcglobal.net).

Saturday, March 18 Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend
7:30 am to noon

Contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieee.org, (c) 748-8660) for more information.

Sunday, March 19 Monthly Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Park
7:30 am & 9:30 am to 10:30 am

Meet at the ball field parking lot at the end of Grove Road (turn north off Riverside and go past the ACC campus). Contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) for more information.

Saturday, March 25 First Seasonal Bird Survey at Cherry Springs Ranch

7:00 am to noon+

Registration required. A thousand acres of Hill Country fields, scrub, and riparian areas being managed for wildlife, opened to Travis Audubon for the first time since J. Frank Dobie sold it to the present owners in the 1950s! Highlight of first visit was a flock of Bushtits, but who knows what we might find as migration begins? Bring snacks, water and lunch, and wear sturdy shoes or hiking boots. Contact Stan VanSandt at 707-7438 for more information.

New event!
A first in
decades!

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.com.

TAS Events - April 2006

Sunday, April 2 Bird Walk at Turkey Creek

8 am to 11 am Charles Stephens will lead this walk to a traditional Golden-cheeked Warbler nesting area. For more information contact Charles at (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, or phone (w) 328-9453.

Saturday, April 8 Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend

7 am & 4 pm Contact Kevin Anderson (972-1960) for more information - sponsored monthly by the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory.

Saturday, April 15 Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

7:30 am to noon Meet in parking lot of the Center for Environmental Research. Contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieee.org, (c) 748-8660) for more information or visit the Hornsby Bend website at www.hornsbybend.org

Sunday, April 16 Monthly Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Park

7:30 am & 9:00 am to 10:30 am Meet at the ball field parking lot at the end of Grove Road (turn north off Riverside and go past the ACC campus). Contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) for more information.

Saturday, April 22 Field Trip to Warbler Woods

7:30 am to Noon Susan and Don Schaezler will host us on their wonderful property near New Braunfels. Warblers and other migrants should be hoppin'. Contact Stan VanSandt at 707-7438 for more information.

(No field trips on weekend of April 29/30 due to Balcones Songbird Festival – see page 4.)

And don't forget, after your field trip please add your sightings to our online Bird Records database! We've made adding entries very easy - just go to:

 www.travisaudubon.org and click on the **Bird Records** link 

P.S. We want entries about your "every day" backyard bird sightings, too!

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. Below is March's pick.

March 23rd, 2006 – *A Country Year: Living the Questions* by Sue Hubbell (Mariner, 1999)

Please note that 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 tessiebanks@msn.com to find out if the book is still current.

FROM THE TAS OFFICE

On the street where you live

Austin is such a fun place. With my newcomer eyes, I've noticed all the great street names in town, including many bird names. Near Stassney and Congress there are Red Bird Lane, Blue Bird Lane, Mockingbird Lane, and Hummingbird Lane. We held our holiday party at a venue on Cardinal Lane in 78704, a street that's parallel to Peacock Lane. West of town, not far from Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, you can find Vireo Cove and Canon [sic] Wren Drive. Heading way up north and east, near Braker and Metric, note the Drives named Hidden Quail, Ruffed Grouse, Golden Pheasant, Snow Goose, and Ptarmigan, and see Bittern Hollow and Pheasant Roost Cove. Just east of 620 and the Lakeway area, you'll find Whippoorwill Trail, Meadowlark Street, Flamingo and Heron Drives, and others. We have TAS members who live on Falcon Drive in Round Rock, Whippoorwill Cove in Georgetown, and Mallard Lane in Taylor – to name a few.

Randalls is good for the birds

If you shop at Randalls and would like an easy way to support Travis Audubon, don't forget to stop at the Customer Service desk and ask them to connect your Randalls Remarkable card to our code #10828 – they will donate 1% of your purchases to us. They do all the work, and send us a check once a quarter. Thank you to the Travis Audubon members who already do this.

Farmers market

Did you know that the Sunset Valley Farmers Market (SVFM) was recently voted by national Audubon as one of the ten best farmers markets in the country? Travis Audubon will have a booth on two days coming up at SVFM, devoted to green growing (March 25th) and to green building (May 20th). If you haven't been there yet, SVFM takes place every Saturday and is an open-air market set up between Brodie and Westgate, just south of Ben White. The SVFM offers locally grown, seasonal produce direct from farmer to market. Most of the produce is organically and sustainably grown. By shopping there you support local farmers and help minimize further urban sprawl (e.g., new superstores). Finca Pura Vida, Round Rock Honey, Georgetown Pecans, Austin Natural Soap, and other vendors, small and big, sell at SVFM. Mark your calendars and stop by the Travis Audubon booth while you're there!

Travis Audubon's wish list

We always need volunteers at Travis Audubon, to join and support the work of our committees, help out in the office, and staff our special events. Are you new to Travis Audubon and/or curious about what it's like to volunteer with us? No time like the present! How about signing up to help with our booths at the Sunset Valley Farmers Market? Or to do data entry in the TAS office two hours per week (prior experience using MS Access is necessary). For the practical among you who have no time to

Volunteer of the Month

Have you noticed the beautifully presented refreshments at our membership meetings over the past year? They are the handiwork of **Susan Moak**, our Volunteer of the Month, who quietly and efficiently comes to the meetings early to provide munchies and drinks for us all. Susan does the shopping, battles traffic and transports everything in her pick-up, and sets everything up – and then breaks it down at the end, too.

Susan was born and raised in Austin and now lives in Round Rock. As happened for so many of us, she was introduced to birding by a parent, in her case her father, an avid birder. He took her to Galveston Island for her birthday once, and “dragged me to some mud flats,” Susan says with a chuckle. The first bird she identified there was a Black-bellied Plover, and she got hooked. Now she is a knowledgeable birder and her favorite bird is the Whooping Crane. We sure do appreciate Susan's thoughtful work for Travis Audubon.



volunteer but would like to help in other ways, we need a heavy-duty hand truck that can carry 50 pounds or more. Please contact Valerie in the office at 512.300.2473 or valerie@travisaudubon.org if you would like to volunteer or donate a hand truck. Thank you for your support.

New in Signal Smoke!

For about a year now, Travis Audubon has been considering selling small display advertisements in our newsletter to like-minded services and businesses who wish to reach our more than 2,000 members. We've researched it and are ready to give it a go. (Postal regulations prohibit us from selling travel-related ads, by the way.) If you are a bird-, conservation-, or nature-related concern, you may be interested in having a business-card size display ad in *Signal Smoke*. (Our ads will be limited to this size and format.) You'll design the ad and send us a PDF file. We offer single- and multiple-insertion rates and a non-profit discount. For more information, go to www.travisaudubon.org and click on Publications

Valerie Staats



Saturday, May 13, 2006

What is a Birdathon?

Birdathon is Travis Audubon's annual spring fundraiser. It is a great way for you to raise money for TAS programs just by watching birds, or by pledging to a Birdathon participant. We need these unrestricted funds to keep offering our wide array of programs and activities. According to national Audubon, The Birdathon is the world's largest birdwatching event.

Birdathon competition

Anyone can compete – all skill levels welcomed! Go alone, with a team, or a friend, and to any location you choose. Scout, school, home school, church groups encouraged! Collect pledges for each species you or your Birdathon team see on Saturday, May 13th (sunrise to sunset). Pledges can range from a quarter to ten dollars per specie. Then, go birding and have fun! You might even win a prize.

Notes from Our E-Mail Box

Q: If a person wanted to look for Eagles in the Lake Buchanan area; would you recommend the Vanishing River cruise, or is there a better way/place to spot the Eagles? We are planning to come to the Austin area around the first of March. – JH, Dallas.

A: The Vanishing Texas River Cruise is an excellent way to spot bald eagles in the winter on Lake Buchanan - I've never made the trip without seeing a few eagles. However, fortuitously, three adult bald eagles have nested in a big pecan tree within 100 yards of Highway 29 along the Llano River about 9 miles west of Burnet, near Llano. People parked on the side of the highway back in 2003 and made a mess of the highway shoulder and some even climbed over the fence to get closer to the nest for pictures of the adults and their fledglings. During the winter of 2003-04, the Highway Department cleared a parking area along the highway, built a more secure fence, and when the birds nested again in 2004, people were able to view the birds in some degree of comfort. Each year they had two fledglings which matured and flew away. The adults, assumed to live somewhere on the river, then disappeared for the remainder of the year.

They have been reported in the area recently, but I have not heard yet that they are nesting again this year. I expect that they will and the view and behavior study from this vantage point is excellent. Some friends have made very good photographs of the eagles, also. I know - you want to know why there are 3 adults. So do we! Lots of speculation has been offered, but none that I find acceptable. Maybe you can come and see them and figure it out. I am serious about this and 3 adults is a real puzzle, but I have seen them both years. The river cruise closes in March, I believe. Most of the eagles on the lake have gone north by then.

Q: I have seen hundreds of these parrots flying and feeding around my store in late fall and early winter, they are green in color. I saw one early this fall with a red head! I just wondered what kind they are and any other info that you have on these birds. I love watching them every fall, where are they coming

How do you get started?

Fill out the Birdathon Registration Form in the April or May *Signal Smoke* and mail it in, or go to our

Web site and sign up on-line there (on-line sign-ups begin March 13). We will mail you instructions and the forms you need to collect pledges and plan your birding adventure. If you are new to birding or feel you need help with birding, be sure to mark Beginning Birder. Be sure to let us know as well if you would like us to assign you to a team.

Birdathon participants compete for prizes:

Most Donation Dollars Raised

Most Species Seen

Largest Number of Donor Sponsors

Rarest Bird Seen

Most Unusual Birding Location

Biggest Birdathon Team

from and why have I not seen anything in the news about them? I have lived here for the last 25 years and just noticed them 2 years ago! – KK, Austin.

*A: I believe that the birds you have seen in flocks are not really parrots, but Monk parakeets. The National Geographic Society field guide, *Birds of North America*, states 'Some are found in cities of the northeast, midwest and Texas.' It also remarks that '(It is) the most widespread parrot in south Florida.' Monk parakeets are not native to the Austin area, but some years ago they began showing up (possibly escaped or released pets) and over the years, they developed into a large enough population that Travis Audubon recognized them as a stable population and started carrying them on their checklist. The Butler Softball diamonds down on Town Lake west of Lamar Blvd. was a place where they developed great colonial nests on the power poles that held the lights for the ball fields. These nests were something to behold, maybe 5-6 feet in diameter and with as many as 15 or 20 families in the nest, each family with its separate apartment. After many years, the city decided they were a hazard and tore down all the nests and the birds had to scatter and find new nesting areas. The University of Texas Intramural fields on Guadalupe Street is one place near where I live where they can be found. I would not be surprised if they did not also nest at the softball diamonds in southeast Austin. I know there must be a population somewhere south of the river in central south Austin, because I had a complaint last year that they were denuding trees along Blunn Creek.*

Now, about the one with a red head. Evidently the parakeets attracted a parrot with a red head into their midst. Not unusual, because birds seek out similar species to hang with. They were probably after a food source that lives in your part of Austin. They eat fruit and berries and evidently leaves of some trees. I have probably told you more than you wanted to know about these birds, but I find them fascinating because, like humans, they live in colonial settings - they like each other and their company!

Lawrence Buford, TAS Bird Records Committee Co-Chair

Bird Jeopardy - test your knowledge! created by John Kelly

1. The official bird of Texas, this famed mimic is also the emblem of four other states.
2. The most popular state bird of all, claimed by seven states, is this redbird.
3. The state bird of Louisiana, its bill can hold more than its belly can (according to a famous limerick, anyway).
4. Not only is this a state bird, it's also the nickname of any member of a certain major league baseball team.
5. The two states having a chicken as their state bird.

1. What is the (Northern) Mockingbird? 2. What is the (Northern) Cardinal? 3. What is the Brown Pelican? 4. What is the Baltimore Oriole? 5. What are Rhode Island Red and Delaware Blue Hen?

News from Hornsby Bend



March Workshop: The Cultural and Natural History of Purple Martins Friday and Saturday, March 3-4, 2006

Purple martins are America's most-loved bird, and they are currently returning to Central Texas in search of nesting sites. Millions enjoy the antics and company of these birds each spring and summer. If you are a veteran martin landlord, a hopeful enthusiast with a new martin house, or just curious about these amazing birds, we invite you to join Rob Fergus, coauthor of *The Purple Martin* (UT Press, Austin: 2002) and National Audubon Science Coordinator of the Audubon At Home Program for a workshop on the cultural and natural history of the Purple Martin. Friday evening will focus on the natural history of the martins and the cultural history of human interactions with this gregarious bird. Saturday morning will be spent addressing the culture of martin landlords and techniques for maintaining and monitoring a purple martin colony. Participants will learn about various martin house and gourd designs as well as the proper placement and management of martin colonies. Participants will also learn monitoring techniques and protocols for recording breeding data.

Date: Friday, March 3 (7:00-9:00pm) and Saturday, March 4 (9am-2pm). Location: The Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend [see location map on HBBO website www.hornsbybend.org]. Cost: \$50, cost includes Breakfast and Lunch and information packets.

To register for the workshop or for information on the events listed below contact Kevin Anderson by email at kevin.anderson@ci.austin.tx.us or by phone at 972-1960.

March 15: Lunchtime Lecture, sponsored by the Center for Environmental Research. "The Colorado River: Early Settlement Impacts on the Riparian Landscape," by Kevin Anderson. Noon to 1 p.m. in Room 104 of the Waller Creek Center, 625 East 10th Street. Bring your lunch and learn more about the natural environment of Central Texas.

March 25: Ecological Literacy Day, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Hornsby Bend. Meet in the parking lot of the Center for Environmental Research. We'll spend two hours working on various projects at Hornsby Bend and another two hours learning about the environments of the Colorado River and Central Texas. Wear work clothes and work shoes. Bring water, a snack, and binoculars.

Ongoing TAS Meetings

Program Committee: meets on the 2nd Monday of each month, contact Marsha Reimer, 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: Bill Reiner, 445-0565

Latin America Committee Meeting: meets most 3rd Wednesdays, contact Bob Warneke at warneke@austin.rr.com for details

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

Travis Audubon Society
Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 40787
Austin TX 78704

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www.travisaudubon.org



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.)

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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

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- \$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)

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