Birding Texas with Travis Audubon

Birding in Texas is a year-round sport, and each season brings something new. Fall brings the raptors heading south and presents ID challenges for warblers not in breeding plumage. Winter brings sparrows, waterfowl, and shorebirds and fills the Walmart parking lots with Great-tailed Grackles. Summer brings...heat. The Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Western Kingbirds are nice, but there’s not much else. But spring! Well, spring is what most birders look forward to.

Birders come in all flavors, from back-porch viewers who enjoy visitors to their yards to world travelers seeking to increase their life list by two hundred species each trip. For those looking somewhere in between, Travis Audubon has an extensive field trip program that offers birders of all levels a chance to get outside, travel to new locations, and meet interesting people.

In March and April of this year, Travis Audubon is offering more than twenty-five field trips. These range from two-hour walks to week-long excursions. Most of the trips are free, and all are offered to members and non-members alike. Travis Audubon encourages non-members to participate in the hopes that they will catch the birding bug and will become members.

Some of this spring’s highlights include trips to favorite hot spots such as: Big Bend with its western migrants and local specialties like the Colima Warbler, High Island with its eastern migrants like the Cerulean and Cape May Warblers, and the Rio Grande Valley with a wide variety of migrants and local beauties. These are each four-day trips with costs involved, including travel, lodging, and other fees. In addition, many free day trips are offered in or near Austin. Travis Audubon also offers several monthly recurring field trips, including a walk for beginning birders and trips to Hornsby Bend and Laguna Gloria.

If you haven’t been on a Travis Audubon field trip recently, you should consider it. Check out the field trip listings both in this issue of Signal Smoke and on the Travis Audubon website. Go to www.travisaudubon.org, select ‘Get Outdoors’ and click ‘Field Trips.’

We hope to see you in the field!

Jeff Whitlock
Member, Field Trip Committee

Photo credits: Jeff Whitlock

Left to right: Black-throated Green Warbler (High Island), Brown Jay (Rio Grande Valley), Audubon’s Oriole (Rio Grande Valley)
Mission Statement
Travis Audubon promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and conservation of native birds and their habitats.

From the Travis Audubon President

Thank you to everyone in Travis Audubon for letting me serve as your President for the last three years. These have been exciting times for me as we all work to grow Travis Audubon’s service to the community in “inspiring conservation through birding.”

It has been a privilege to work with you to add additional land to Chaetura Canyon, to restore Blair Woods, expand the Youth Education program, and have the best classes and field trips of any Audubon chapter in the U.S. We have also expanded Bird-a-thon to include more people and we have established the Victor Emanuel Conservation Award luncheon as a special fall event to celebrate leaders in conservation.

There will always be many more things to do as we work to care for our natural heritage, but at the end of my service as President I just wanted to pause to thank you, and I look forward to being a part of Travis Audubon for many more years. See you on the birding trails!

Valarie Bristol

About Signal Smoke

Subscription Information

Signal Smoke (ISSN 1931-9282) was published 11 times yearly through Volume 56, No.4, and beginning with Volume 56, No.5, is published 6 times yearly. Subscription is a TA membership benefit. To join, use the form on the back page of this issue or go to www.travisaudubon.org for an online form. For address or subscription changes, please call 512.300.BIRD (2473) or e-mail info@travisaudubon.org. The USPS does not forward Signal Smoke. Copyright © 2012. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission in writing from Travis Audubon.

Newsletter Deadline

The submissions deadline is the first day of the month preceding the first month of publication (for example, June 1 for the July/August 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 CD are preferred but not required. Call Tess at 300-BIRD if you have questions.
Monthly Meeting Information

Travis Audubon Regular Monthly Meeting - 7:00 pm
Location: Westminster Presbyterian Church at 3208 Exposition Blvd. Austin TX 78703
Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for social time.

Directions: From Mopac, take the 35th street exit and go west on 35th to Exposition Blvd. Turn left on Exposition and go approximately two blocks to Carlton Lane. The church sits on the corner of Carlton and Exposition. Drive down Carlton past the church to the parking lot on your left. We will be meeting in rooms 9 and 10. Refreshments will be provided. No monthly meetings are held during June, July, August, or December.

Thursday, March 15, 2012
Energy Flow in the Environment
Speaker: Dr. Chuck Sexton

In this wide-ranging talk, Chuck Sexton takes a fun and non-technical look at how energy flow can be recognized in its many forms in the habitats around us and how the mysterious concept of entropy (order and chaos) can offer an important framework for better understanding patterns in nature and the activities of birds and other wildlife around us. He applies these ideas to an overview of this past remarkable year of birding in the Central Texas landscape. If you know Chuck, you know this will be an entertaining presentation!

Dr. Chuck Sexton
Photo courtesy of Laurie Foss

Thursday, April 19, 2012
Saving the World’s Birds
Speaker: Dr. Gerard Bertrand

Dr. Bertrand’s presentation will cover a selection of global efforts to save birds by BirdLife International and other organizations and individuals. At a time when more than 12 percent of the world’s species are threatened or endangered, conservationists are trying almost every avenue to call attention to the global decline in birds. By protecting the best loved and best known class of vertebrates, we hope to save biodiversity generally. Because conservation is almost always local, Texas has a key role as part of the global effort. The talk is illustrated with photos of rare and endangered species from around the globe along with charts and graphs on the current status of the world’s birds.

Dr. Gerard Bertrand (left)
Photo courtesy of Edmond Bertrand

Jerry Bertrand has been involved in global conservation for over 40 years in 92 countries. He served for 10 years as the first Chairman of BirdLife International’s global council, is a former Vice-chair of the Board of National Audubon and was President of Massachusetts Audubon for 18 years. He was a founding board member of the American Bird Conservancy and the World Land Trust in England where he is the Honorary President. Dr. Bertrand holds B.S., M.S and Ph.D. degrees in biological sciences and oceanography and a J.D. in environmental law.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING SPONSORS
Travis Audubon thanks the sponsors of our January and February general membership meetings for their generous support.

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For more information, see www.alamoinnsuites.com/

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING
Please join us for our annual business meeting held at the same location as our general membership meeting on March 15, 2012 at 7 pm. We’ll be reporting on our successes from the prior year as well as talking about where we’re going in 2012. Also, current Travis Audubon members will vote on a slate of candidates for the Board of Directors. Their new term will begin on April 12, 2012.

The following Travis Audubon members make up the slate of nominees:

- Valarie Bristol
- Sam Fason
- Clif Ladd
- Ruth Pelphrey

More information about the candidates is available on our website, www.travisaudubon.org. Make sure your membership is current so you can vote in this election and have a voice in the governance of Travis Audubon.

You asked and we responded!
Sustaining Membership Program Now Available
Many of our members have requested a monthly giving program. We are pleased to announce that beginning March 1, 2012, you can become a “Sustaining Member” of Travis Audubon. As a Sustaining Member you will receive no renewal notices or need to remember when your yearly dues should be paid. The amount that you designate will be automatically drafted from your bank account or credit card each month. This will also help Travis Audubon to sustain our programs year-round with a more consistent income stream.

You can give $20 or greater per month by visiting our monthly giving webpage at www.travisaudubon.org/support-us/sustaining-membership.

We are very grateful to the ongoing support of our members – you make it possible for us to continue to inspire conservation through birding!

Membership Dues Increase
On April 1, 2012, our individual membership dues will increase from $25 to $30 per year and our family membership dues will increase from $35 to $45. As you can well imagine, the costs of our programs and activities continue to increase yearly. Travis Audubon has not increased its membership rates for seven years. Additionally, our membership dues are lower than most other conservation organizations which offer less programming and activities. We trust you will continue to support us at this level or even consider upgrading to a premium membership.

2012 Travis Audubon Initiatives
One of the strategic goals for Travis Audubon is to ignite in Central Texans a life-long fascination with and admiration of birds to build public support for conservation of native birds and their habitat. To this end, we have designed several initiatives to increase our visibility and membership, which we hope you will support. Each initiative will include a coordinator responsible for ensuring the success of the initiative for a one-year period. A small stipend will be offered to the coordinator. If you would like to be a coordinator for any positions still open, please contact Megan at volunteer@travisaudubon.org.

Speakers Bureau
Jane Tillman, coordinator
Speakers will decide upon regular topics for presentations. In the Travis Audubon Office each topic will have its own box with a PowerPoint presentation, laminated pictures to affix to the display board and any handouts relevant to the topic. If you want to participate as a speaker, please contact Megan.

Table at Events
Coordinator needed to sign us up for events and find volunteers to staff the tables.

Sidewalk Birdwatching at Lady Bird Lake
Coordinator needed to arrange a consistent date/time for this activity and to line up volunteers. Scope provided by Travis Audubon.

Social Networking Team
Laurie Foss, coordinator
The team will be made up of volunteers who have an interest in digital media and social networking platforms. As the team comes together, it will develop a multi-phased plan that will begin with an emphasis on Facebook and Twitter content. If you are interested in volunteering for this team, please contact Megan.

Writers Bureau
Coordinator needed
This team will watch for articles that impact birds and/or bird habitat in Central Texas. Individuals on the team will summarize important articles for use in our newsletter, eblasts, and for Facebook and blog.
Please Welcome Megan Taylor

Megan Taylor began volunteering in the Travis Audubon office in 2009, providing support to all staff members. She was then hired as Volunteer Coordinator in September of 2010 to work part time. In July of 2011, she took over as Office Administrator and since that time, she has balanced administrative duties, membership director duties and volunteer coordinator duties. Travis Audubon’s programs and activities have grown to the extent that we have asked Megan to join us as a full-time employee on March 1, 2012. She will continue as Office Administrator but will also take on the expanded role of Volunteer Manager as well as continue her Membership Director duties. She will have a full plate but we trust that her calm nature, ability, and skill will serve us all very well.

Megan replacing a hard drive, one of her many talents! Photo credit: Nancy Manning
“The earth looks good, it smells good, it is good. By the creek in the woods you hear the first water-thrush – a short, bright, ringing, hurried song.” – John Burroughs, “A Breath of April” in Leaf and Tendril.

With a loud “chip” call, a small brown bird darts up from the creek in the wooded canyon. After you have spent a winter chasing sparrows it is easy to despair that, now you’ve flushed it, you’ll never see it again. Sigh. Another one that got away, unidentified. But look again, Charlie Brown; Lucy might not have yanked that football out of range this time. It’s spring! Time for second chances! Unless the bird flew around a bend of the stream ahead of you, it could be perched on a branch within view, and another indignant-sounding “chip” may direct you to it. And, unlike a Chipping Sparrow or a goldfinch that can be invisibly motionless in plain sight, this bird just can’t seem to control its tail. It wags so vigorously that the bird’s entire body teeters. Yes, there it is, the motion giving the bird away. But what is it?

Is it a phoebe? Eastern Phoebes call with a similarly emphatic note, and also wag their tails. But phoebes sit vertically; this bird stands on a branch with its body more or less horizontal. The bold white stripe over each eye is more like a Bewick’s Wren than a phoebe. It then flies down to the creek where it resumes walking purposefully along the water’s edge, occasionally picking at the surface of the water, or leaf litter, or rocks, still teetering…like a Spotted Sandpiper. But the breast is striped, not spotted, and the legs are too short for a Spotted Sandpiper. It looks like one of the many brown-backed thrushes, but thrushes have neither the eyebrow nor the wag.

It is, of course, none of these, and not even closely related to any of them. It is a warbler; in particular, it is a waterthrush, one of two species of warblers, superficially resembling the thrushes, that have evolved to fill a particular niche exploiting the plethora of insect life at the water’s edge.

But which waterthrush? Well, yes, that can be a puzzler. You do have a couple of clues that can lead you in the right direction. First, it’s March or early April. Second, you’re birding beside a flowing stream (if we’re lucky enough to have those this spring). Neither of these facts is enough, separately or together, to clinch an identification. You’ll need to check your field guide for that. However, they are strongly suggestive that your bird is the species that will sometimes stay to nest here: a Louisiana Waterthrush.

Louisiana Waterthrushes are among the earliest of the warblers to arrive in spring. They appear by mid-March, about the same time as other breeding warblers – the Golden-cheeked and Black-and-White Warblers, and the Northern Parulas – and well ahead of most warblers that simply migrate through our area. Among those passage migrants are the Northern Waterthrushes, which almost never reach the Austin area before mid-April. The look-alike cousins also differ in their habitat preferences. Northern Waterthrushes favor the stagnant waters of swamps and bogs, which are so common in the boreal forests where they breed. Louisiana Waterthrushes gravitate to flowing water – usually small, clear streams in forested settings. In migration, however, neither species can afford to be too persnickety, so either could be found on the other species’ preferred hunting ground.

If you are fortunate enough to hear the song, that is another way to distinguish the two species. In fact, if your waterthrush sings at all, it is probably a Louisiana Waterthrush, since the Northerns rarely sing this early in their northward trek.

You might think that, beside a turbulent stream, a singing Louisiana Waterthrush would have difficulty making itself heard by potential rivals. But its song, beginning with sweet, upslurred whistles – usually three – then cascading into a variable jumble of notes, is amazingly loud for such a small bird. It is easily audible even over the thundering waters of a stream in flood, and you may chase that reverberating song for many yards up or down a stream before you actually see the songster.

Louisiana Waterthrushes depend for their livelihood on a rich supply of insects, especially those that, in their larval stage, are aquatic. Mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies are their bread and butter. These are also the insects that aquatic biologists monitor to gauge the health of stream ecosystems, because they soon disappear from polluted waters.

A study in the coal-mining region of western Pennsylvania, as reported in a recent issue of Birding magazine, has found Louisiana Waterthrushes to be easily-surveyed surrogates for gauging water quality. A stream polluted with acid mine drainage will support substantially fewer waterthrushes, and their territories will be much larger than in otherwise similar but healthy watersheds. The territories are larger because the adults need to forage much farther afield to find enough food to feed their young. They also bring back food items not really appropriate for their chicks, such as salamanders, fish, and crayfish, because they cannot find enough insects.
Our streams are erratic enough, given our variable rainfall, that the absence of Louisiana Waterthrushes does not mean a stream is polluted. However, their presence and successful breeding are good indications that the stream ecosystem is functioning and healthy. That is important news as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues pondering whether certain salamander species that share their habitat – such as the Jollyville Plateau and Georgetown Salamanders – should be listed as endangered.

Truth be told, waterthrushes of either species are not easy to find in Austin. However, if you visit a clear-flowing Hill Country stream often enough, you are likely to find a Louisiana Waterthrush eventually. Good places to search are Bull Creek, especially in Saint Edwards Park on Spicewood Springs Road, and the upper reaches of the Barton Creek greenbelt – though in both locations you will need to arrive before hikers and dog-walkers displace them into remote headwaters. Louisiana Waterthrushes seem to enjoy their solitude, preferring to sing their wild, rollicking song with only a rushing stream as accompaniment.

References for this article included “A Tale of Two Streams, What Louisiana Waterthrushes Tell Us About Water Quality,” by Felicity L. Newell, in Birding, v. 43, no. 3; and “Louisiana Waterthrush (Seiurus motacilla)” by W. Douglas Robinson, in The Birds of North America, no. 151. A recommended resource for distinguishing between the two waterthrush species is Kenn Kaufman’s Field Guide to Advanced Birding.

We at Travis Audubon would like to thank those individuals and organizations that helped us make our Second Annual Victor Emanuel Conservation Award Luncheon honoring Andy Sansom a huge success! We couldn’t have done it without you.

Auction Donors
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Earth Share of Texas
expresses thanks to the following organizations for their contributions to Earth Share of Texas:

1-800-GREENTX www.earthshare-texas.org
enx@earthshare-texas.org
Nocturnal Neighbors – the numerous overnight visitors to the Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary are most commonly heard rather than observed: the bark of a fox, harmonies of a coyote clan, the rustling of dry leaves over the snout of an armadillo and snarling conversations between raccoons. The gift of a wildlife camera from two very good friends and longtime supporters of the canyon is putting snapshot faces to the vocalizations. We have included a few we would like to share.

Clockwise from above: Nine-banded Armadillo, Eastern Cottontail, Coyote, Virginia Opossum, Ringtail

Photos using the game camera are courtesy of Paul and Georgean Kyle

Invasion of the Berry Snatchers! As the juniper berries ripen and the leaves drop from the deciduous yaupons exposing their bright red fruits, the resident Northern Mockingbirds grow nervous and even more territorial as the winter interlopers arrive to pilfer their carefully guarded larders. High in the tree tops the visually striking Cedar Waxwings preen and squeal before diving into fruit laden vegetation. Barking on the ground as they toss leaves like gardeners working at their compost piles, the American Robins work their way through the canyon understory. But insects are not enough, and they noisily join the waxwings to harvest the bounty of the trees and shrubs.

In years past (circa 1980), there were seemingly endless “rivers of robins” flying over the hills in northwest Travis County. Marjorie Valentine Adams recounts her experiences in her book Bird-Witched!

“...We [Marjorie and her husband Red] pulled off a highway west of Austin to watch a stream of robins two or three hundred feet wide, flying from horizon to horizon. The spectacle lasted so long, with no sign of diminishing, that we finally got back in the car and drove home...”

We have sorely missed this phenomenon for the past 20+ years, but were graced with a reminder of the spectacle during the last week of January. The “rivers” were only “streams”, but to our delight thousands of American Robins inhabited the Canyon and surrounding area for a few days. We also had visiting Dark-eyed Juncos and Spotted Towhees – species which have been noticeably absent over many recent winters.

Paul and Georgean Kyle
Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary Stewards
On January 21st, Travis Audubon held a Volunteer Appreciation event at the AGE building in Central Austin to honor the tireless efforts and valuable contributions of Travis Audubon members, with special recognition to the indefatigable Laurie Foss. Even after working with Travis Audubon for the past several years, I am still amazed at the sheer number of volunteer hours put in by our members. They staff committees, lead field trips, teach classes, write articles, educate the public, organize bird watching jaunts in exotic locales, remove invasives, and much more. Baker has certainly been the recipient of such efforts in the past and it is our hope to continue the tradition into the future with the goal of making the sanctuary a better place for Golden-cheeked Warblers as well as Travis Audubon members.

In 2007, Travis Audubon purchased the 9.8 acre Fredericksen tract (RFT) located on the northern end of the sanctuary, adjacent to the original 94 acres acquired way back in 1966. Encompassing acres of Little Bluestem, Seep Muhly, scattered Ashe Juniper, and a towering grove of Cedar Elms, the vegetation community found on the RFT is a bit different than what is typically encountered at Baker. During the flood of 2010, the low-water crossing that allows access from Red Wagon Lane became clogged with gravel and cobble when the rushing water scoured the creek bed. For over a year the much needed culvert cleansing languished at the bottom of the ever expanding ‘to do’ list as higher priority projects were completed. Finally, in December a hardy group of six volunteers spent three hours digging, scraping, tossing, and hauling approximately seven tons of rock in an effort to clear out the crossing. While to a person our backs may have been a little worse for the wear, temporarily anyway, in that one morning we accomplished a job that would have taken me the better part of a week and several bottles of Advil to finish by my lonesome.

Currently another project is in the works that will provide a direct benefit to all members who are adventurous enough to come out to Baker and explore. On the south side of the sanctuary we have two trails, Hatfield and Baker Point, which not many people visit because they both come to a dead end. Once again with the help of volunteers, a new trail is being built that will connect the ends of the two existing trails to form a loop, for more a more desirable hiking experience than venturing to a dead end and back again. Routing the trail to take advantage of the landscape features, trimming trees thoughtfully with regard to preserving canopy cover, and doing so when the Golden-cheeks are not nesting, has yielded approximately 200 feet of new trail to date, a slow yet steady pace. Tentatively, I expect the trail to be open by early 2013, if my volunteers hold out.

This time a year ago, I mentioned in Signal Smoke that we were getting ready to collect baseline data on 34 vegetation plots scattered throughout the sanctuary. Volunteers not only led the effort but also trained and led students from Concordia University in the endeavor. Much was learned from that inaugural season and we are gearing up this spring to add more plots, move others, and visit all the study sites by the end of April. If you have some plant identification skills or are willing to learn, we have room for you on our crew; just send me an email at christophermurra@hotmail.com to reserve a spot. Thanks again to all the volunteers who make our efforts possible.

Christopher Murray, Baker Sanctuary Steward
512-219-8425 or christophermurra@hotmail.com

Hardworking volunteers at Baker Sanctuary
Photo credits: Christopher Murray
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<td>Rio Grande Valley</td>
<td>This Trip is Full</td>
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<td>8:00-10:00am</td>
<td>Beginner's Bird Walk at Richard Moya County Park</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>8:45-10:45am</td>
<td>Laguna Gloria Art Museum</td>
<td>Sam Fason <a href="mailto:scfason@gmail.com">scfason@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>3/6/12</td>
<td>6:00 am-noon</td>
<td>Super Tuesday! at Palmetto State Park</td>
<td>Terry Banks <a href="mailto:55bluebirds@att.net">55bluebirds@att.net</a></td>
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<td>3/10/12</td>
<td>7:00am and 4:00pm</td>
<td>Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Eric Carpenter at <a href="mailto:ecarpe@gmail.com">ecarpe@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Balcones Canyonlands NWR Simons Tract</td>
<td><a href="http://www.friendsofbalcones.org">www.friendsofbalcones.org</a></td>
<td>Shelia Hargis <a href="mailto:Shelia.hargis@gmail.com">Shelia.hargis@gmail.com</a> 512-294-0272.</td>
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<td>3/11/12</td>
<td>8:00-11:00am</td>
<td>Barton Creek Habitat Preserve</td>
<td>Jeff Patterson <a href="mailto:jepbird@att.net">jepbird@att.net</a></td>
<td>Rich Kostecke</td>
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<td>3/13/12</td>
<td>8:00-10:00am</td>
<td>Tuesday Mystery Bird Walk!</td>
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<td>Camp Mabry Urban-wildland Interface</td>
<td>Jake McCumber <a href="mailto:jakemcumber@gmail.com">jakemcumber@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>7:30-11:00am</td>
<td>Bird Survey at Baker Sanctuary</td>
<td>Shelia Hargis <a href="mailto:shelia.hargis@gmail.com">shelia.hargis@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Shelia Hargis</td>
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<td>Two-hour Tuesday! at Travis Co. East Metro Park</td>
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<td>8:00-10:00am</td>
<td>Two-hour Tuesday! at McKinney Falls State Park</td>
<td>Deb Wallace <a href="mailto:apeld@austin.rr.com">apeld@austin.rr.com</a></td>
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<td>8:45-10:45am</td>
<td>Laguna Gloria Art Museum</td>
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<td>Sam Fason</td>
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<td>Stan VanSandt</td>
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**FIELD TRIPS AT A GLANCE**

For complete details of each field trip see the Field Trips webpage at www.travisaudubon.org

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<td>Terry Banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/12-4/23/12</td>
<td></td>
<td>High Island and Surrounding Hot Spots</td>
<td>Jeff Whitlock</td>
<td>Virginia Rose and Jeff Whitlock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21-25/12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Davis Mountains and Big Bend</td>
<td>$700/person (includes a donation to Travis Audubon)</td>
<td>Mountain Trails Lodge &amp; Outdoor Learning Center (800-403-3484)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21/12</td>
<td>7:30am-noon</td>
<td>Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Sam Fason and George Kerr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/24/12</td>
<td>7:00-11:30am</td>
<td>Super Tuesday! at Berry Springs Park</td>
<td>Dan Callaway</td>
<td>Dan Callaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/28/12</td>
<td>6:30am-noon</td>
<td>A Visit to Warbler Woods</td>
<td>Robert Reeves</td>
<td>Robert Reeves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/6/12</td>
<td>7:00-11:30am</td>
<td>Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, co-sponsored by Travis Audubon and Friends of Balcones Canyonlands NWR</td>
<td><a href="http://www.friendsofbalcones.org">www.friendsofbalcones.org</a></td>
<td>Deb Wallace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:apeld@austin.rr.com">apeld@austin.rr.com</a> 512-312-0797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/10-18/12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Great Midwest Warbler-a-thon</td>
<td>$2125/person (includes a donation to Travis Audubon)</td>
<td>Kim Risen of NatureScape Tours (218-426-3293)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the large number of events and limited space in *Signal Smoke*, readers are asked to visit the Field Trips page at www.travisaudubon.org for complete trip details and possible updates. Although emails to the registrar are preferred, those who do not have email access can register for any field trip by contacting Jeff Patterson at jepbird@att.net or 512-487-2755.
Bird-a-thon 2012

Travis Audubon’s biggest, best-attended, most fun event – yes, I’m talking about Bird-a-thon – takes place during the time period of April 21st – May 13th.

For those of you who may be new to this annual madness, the Bird-a-thon is a fundraising event that we have held for more years than we have records for. We do know that since 2006, Bird-a-thons have raised over $74,000 for Travis Audubon. How impressive is that?

I really have been wondering what it will take to have more than 100 participants this year. We’ve been close for a couple of years, but we haven’t quite gotten there yet. For those of you on the fence, or that don’t like to ask for donations, or can’t take the time, here are some ideas for you to try out:

1. Why not organize a team with a minimum contribution of $50 per team member? That’s a pretty reasonable amount of money for one person to give, and offers a chance for participants to raise funds from friends and relatives if they want to.

2. Have a yard sale with a booth set up with binoculars/spotting scope/bird books off to the side. It costs $1 to look through the binoculars at a bird, $2 for the scope, and you also have a “Tip Jar” for additional donations to Travis Audubon. Half of your yard sale proceeds then go to Bird-a-thon.

3. Set up a table on the Hike and Bike Trail with binoculars/scope/bird books and a big poster saying that you are participating in Travis Audubon’s Bird-a-thon. Ask SHAMELESSLY for donations from passers-by, and make some new birding friends while you’re doing it.

4. Take your Sunday School class (knitting group, rowing club, square dance group) out for a birding trip around your meeting place for $10 per person for everyone in their household. The Travis Audubon office has binoculars and a scope to share!

Last year Shelia and I ran our traditional Travis County Big Day with Team Gone Pishing. We had an outstanding day, saw lots of birds, and raised a bunch of money. Then we had a Bird-a-thon with graduates of our Intro to Birds Class. They each paid $100 to participate, and we took them on a field trip to Cherry Springs Ranch. While we were there we saw a Zone-tailed Hawk! That was really special. They even ended up winning a prize for a first-time team!

Notice that this year we have even more time for you to get in your Bird-a-thon event. Find some time to do it! You need to know that people don’t just hand money over to an organization. They have to be asked! The birds can’t ask for what they need, so let’s all be a voice for the birds. Join me in Bird-a-thon 2012 and make a difference for birds and be a voice for them.

To register just contact Nancy at the TA office at 300-2473 (BIRD) or by email: nancy@travisaudubon.org. Print out the packet on our website for email samples you can send to your friends and relatives asking for support of our conservation and education programs through their pledges. Don’t forget that last year’s prizes were spectacular. Watch our website for the announcement of this year’s prizes.

**FAQ (Glad you asked!)**

**What is a Bird-a-thon?**

Bird-a-thon is the biggest birding event in the country, according to National Audubon, and it’s Travis Audubon’s annual fundraiser that makes our programs possible all year. Like a walk-a-thon, Bird-a-thon is a day when our friends go out birding and collect pledges for each species they count, or a set amount for the day. A quarter, a dollar, ten dollars a species – it’s up to you and your sponsors.

**How many people make up a team?**

One or more people are a team, and the more the merrier – just register with Travis Audubon and start collecting pledges! Don’t forget to name your team – no name is too silly.

**Who can participate?**

Children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, big people, little people, Travis Audubon members, people who are not members of Travis Audubon, people who are expert birders and people who have never picked up binoculars. In other words, ANYONE can participate in our Bird-a-thon! All it takes is that you register your team with the Travis Audubon office, collect pledges and donations for your team’s efforts, and then go watch some birds and have a great time!

Laurie Foss

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Volunteer Appreciation Event

Travis Audubon is blessed to have volunteers who make magic. Really! Think of the breadth and depth of our programs. During his 10 years on the National Audubon Board of Directors, Andy Sansom, our 2011 conservation award recipient, visited the Audubon chapters around the country. He complimented Travis Audubon for offering more field trips than any other chapter. We offer a rich array of adult education classes planned, coordinated, administered by volunteers passionate about sharing their wisdom. Our urban habitat program extends its arms throughout the community to teach and to install native wildscapes in schools, churches and backyards. We have two core teams of volunteer scientists sharing their experience, knowledge and skills at Baker Sanctuary and Blair Woods. The richness and effectiveness of this organization is built upon the passion, dedication and commitment of our volunteers.

continued on next page
**Chimney Swift Tower Workshop**

**at Chaetura Canyon**

**Sunday, March 11, 1-4pm**

Chimney Swifts are now listed as an endangered species in Nova Scotia, and the future for these aerial insectivores is also uncertain in the remainder of their breeding range. Georgean and Paul Kyle will conduct a workshop on building and maintaining new habitat for this declining species on Sunday, March 11th, from 1-4 pm.

The workshop will begin with an introduction to Chimney Swifts that includes a slide presentation and video highlights from a typical nesting season. Participants will then construct an actual Chimney Swift tower. After the project is completed, participants will take a one-mile walking tour of the Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary. There are currently 16 Chimney Swift towers on the property that demonstrate a variety of designs and materials. One of the towers will be opened, and the class will be shown how to evaluate the nesting productivity of last year’s season. Refreshments will be served on the deck overlooking the canyon following the tour.

Chaetura Canyon has been the epicenter for Chimney Swift conservation and research world-wide for more than 20 years. Master Naturalists and property owners with wildlife exemptions may find this workshop useful in their conservation efforts. Chimney Swift towers also make great Eagle Scout projects, so Scout Masters, Eagle candidates and their parents should consider taking advantage of this unique opportunity.

Registration is limited to 10 builders (16 years of age and older). The cost of this workshop is $35 for Travis Audubon members and $50 for non-members. The fee includes a copy of the Kyles’ book, *Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America’s Mysterious Birds*. For more information or to sign up for the workshop, please contact Anne Donovan at 472-3030 or email her at ajdonovan@att.net. For a preview of the walking tour, visit www.ChimneySwifts.org and click on the ‘Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary’ link.

**Super Powers include:**

- Chair of the Habitat Conservation Committee, responsible for launching several initiatives.
- One of the bird surveyors at Browning Ranch, resulting in a $1000 donation to Travis Audubon, yearly.
- Baker Open House Field Trip Coordinator
- The Coordinator and Leader of JB Journey’s Travis Audubon Belize field trips, leading to a very nice donation to Travis Audubon.
- One of the dynamic duo, along with Shelia Hargis, who brings us the fantastic programs at the general membership meetings each month, including finding sponsors who have defrayed all costs of the meeting.
- Along with Shelia Hargis, who leads a variety of field trips for Travis Audubon throughout the year.
- Birdathon Committee Member responsible for our yearly Birdathon packets, Signal Smoke articles, web page design, & more.
- ‘Gone Pishing’ Birdathon team member for several years, raising lots of money for Travis Audubon.
- Travis Audubon’s go-to resource for bird questions submitted via our site.
- Instructor for Travis Audubon’s eBird and Birding Apps for Smart Devices classes.
- Assistant instructor for our popular Introduction to Birds & Birding class.
- Presenter for UT Forum.
- Currently spearheading a social media outreach effort to help spread Travis Audubon’s message in our community and beyond.

Our thanks goes out to Laurie and all of our volunteers who make the magic happen.

A special thank you goes out to three of our Volunteer Appreciation door prize contributors:

- Georgean Kyle for donating a Cedar Sage and a Texas Aster plant
- Magnolia Cafe for donating a gift certificate
- Santa Rita Tex Mex Cantina for donating a gift certificate

**A special thank you goes out to:**

- **Nancy Manning**

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**Upcoming Classes – Watch the TA Website**

- Hummingbird Identification
- Shorebird Identification
- Gardening for Birds and Wildlife for Families
- Wildscaping and Wildlife
- Trees and Shrubs
Travis Audubon needs your help. While the generous donations of our members and friends have made it possible for us to offer the wide spectrum of programs and services we provide, we do have some specific needs that we hope you will consider supporting.

At the bottom of this page is a tear off section allowing you to choose how you are willing to help. You can also visit our website to donate to a specific need at: www.travisaudubon.org/support-us/2012-spring-appeal.

Help Support the Purchase of New Computers
Our office staff is currently working within the constraints of outdated and low-functioning computers, making it increasingly difficult for us to perform our work efficiently. The desktop computer that also acts as our office server is slow and quirky, and needs to be re-started several times a day to perform basic functions, such as sending and receiving emails. This is also a concern because the server is critical to our operations and data storage.

We need three reliable desktop computers for our every-day office operations, as well as a laptop for our outreach presentations to the community. We will also need the appropriate software for these computers, as well as a reliable printer. The effective operation of the office equipment is critical to fulfilling our commitment to engage adults and youth in our conservation and education programs.

Amount needed: $5,118

Help Support Our 2012 Initiatives (for a full description, please see page 4 of this issue)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Amount needed</th>
<th>Pays for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speakers Bureau</td>
<td>$840</td>
<td>Coordinator Stipend, materials, rolling cart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table at Events</td>
<td>$420</td>
<td>Coordinator Stipend, materials, rolling cart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk Birdwatching</td>
<td>$320</td>
<td>Coordinator Stipend, materials, rolling cart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking Team</td>
<td>$350</td>
<td>Coordinator Stipend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers Bureau</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>Coordinator Stipend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes, I want to support Travis Audubon's needs and initiatives. My check is enclosed.

Name: ________________________________
Email: ________________________________
Phone: ________________________________

$________ Computers

$________ Initiative  (Write in your choice here: ________________________________)

Mail to: Travis Audubon, 3710 Cedar St., Box 5, Austin, TX 78705
Many thanks to all our donors – your support is critical to the ongoing conservation and education efforts of Travis Audubon.

**Chaetura Canyon Expansion**
- Dorothy Buck
- Lynn Hill
- Carol Ray

**Chaetura Canyon Maintenance Fund**
- Ann and Don Connell
- Steve Janda
- Diane and Eddie Priour

**Annual Appeal**
- Heinz and Margaret Aeschbach
- Barbara Anderson
- Robert and Margaret Ayres
- Larry and Sandra Brown
- Sam Burns
- Caroline C. Jones
- Lois Caffey
- Christi Carletti
- Barbara Carlson
- Joseph Carter
- Julia Clarke
- Cinda Crosley
- Fred and Gayle Dalbey
- Craig Damuth
- Charlie Davis
- Shannon Davis
- Robin Dennis
- Jon and Sherry Devries
- Pam and Gary Gerritsen
- Shelia Hargis
- Nanette Harper
- Elizabeth Hendrix
- Wanda Holcombe
- Dudley and Mari Houghton
- Sharon Itaya
- Rachel Jenkins
- Joe Kulhavy
- Diane and Bryan Jones
- Suzanne King McAnna
- Ann Kraatz
- Ethel Kutac
- Wayne and Rachel Lindsay
- Julia Marsden
- Sherry Mason
- Cheryl McGrath
- Lynn and Mary Moak
- Peggy Moore
- Peggy Murphy
- Elizabeth Netherton
- Mary Parker
- Donald Paul
- Gary and Ruth Pelphrey
- Johnna Robinson
- Alan Roddy
- Vince Shouba
- Steve Sigman
- Bryan Sperry
- Lorna Terhune
- Daphne Vaughan
- Karen Verser
- Lawrence and Jane Wilson

**Warbler**
- Juliana Crouch
- Julia Marsden
- Nicole Netherton

**Vireo**
- Judith Bailey
- Deborah Blackburn
- Nancy Charbeneau
- Olive Forbes
- Nancy Sue Hall
- Becky Jones
- Ron Martin
- Francine Mastrangelo
- Elizabeth Maxim
- Jorjanna Price
- Bill Reiner
- Amy Rose
- Betsy Ross
- Michael Smith
- Clarese Walker
- Nancy Webber

**In Honor of Larry Brown**
- Jacqueline Stouffer
- Warren Weber

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**Business Members**

Travis Audubon is delighted to recognize its Business Members:

**Powell, Ebert & Smolik, PC**

**Charles J Stephens, Prudential Texas Realty**

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

Join your local Audubon chapter, Travis Audubon, 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 National Audubon, please go to their website at www.audubon.org. Don’t forget to include the National Audubon Source Code of 79M7 and the Travis Audubon Chapter code of W03, so Travis Audubon receives credit.

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

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

To join Travis Audubon

Make your check payable to Travis Audubon and send it with this form to Travis Audubon, 3710 Cedar St., Box 5, Austin, TX 78705, or join on-line using any major credit card by going to www.travisaudubon.org and clicking on ‘Membership.’

Visit the Travis Audubon Web site:
www.travisaudubon.org