J. David Bamberger is This Year’s Conservation Hero

Travis Audubon’s Conservation Hero of 2013 is renowned conservationist and educator J. David Bamberger, Executive Director of the Bamberger Ranch Preserve. He will be honored at the fourth annual Victor Emanuel Conservation Award luncheon and live auction, to be held Oct. 26th at the AT&T Conference Center.

Bamberger grew up in rural Ohio and learned early on to live in harmony with the land. His mother instilled in him a love for the natural world and gave him a book that would serve as an inspiration for his future work: Pleasant Valley, by Louis Bromfield, an early advocate for land restoration. Bamberger worked his way through college selling vacuums, then became co-founder and CEO of Church’s Fried Chicken. He subsequently bought what he described as “the sorriest piece of land in Blanco County” and spent decades restoring the ecological balance of 5,500 acres that had been virtually destroyed by more than a century of misuse and overgrazing. It is now described as the largest habitat restoration project on private land in Texas. He named his preserve Selah, from the Old Testament term meaning “pause and reflect.”

According to the Bamberger Ranch website, “It took J. David Bamberger over 40 years of toil and trial to achieve his vision of what Selah could be. He struggled with invasive plants, an abused and neglected landscape and mistaken conventional wisdom. He persisted. Today he generously shares the lessons he learned along the way. The reality is: it doesn’t take 40 years to achieve these results if one has the desire, the resources and the commitment to restore natural space to its original health and abundance. He dedicates himself and his resources to protecting species and educating school children, conservation groups, government officials, and everyone else who will listen to his central message: We must take care of the earth, and anyone can help.”

Bamberger’s environmental education workshops and years of connecting children to nature have inspired countless people and earned him many awards. He and his late wife, Margaret, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Garden Clubs of America, awards from the Texas Forest Service, the Texas Wildlife Association and the National Arbor Day Foundation. He has been hailed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, receiving the state’s top voluntary land stewardship award and being inducted into the TPWD Hall of Fame.

The awards luncheon will include remarks by Bamberger and a live auction to raise funds for Travis Audubon’s conservation and education programs.
President’s Column

Just the bird and I

by Caroline C. Jones

The entrance to my middle and high school had a beautiful mosaic tile with a quote from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Children’s Song.” The quote was “Teach Us Delight in Simple Things.” I saw that quote daily for six years and it is one of the guides for how I live. It is one reason I enjoy urban birding. It delights me to walk out my back door, sit on the porch and hear a Red-bellied Woodpecker tapping on the telephone pole behind my fence or watch a Carolina Wren in the pile of leaves on the ground. And a routine day of running errands becomes less routine when I take the time to stop by my neighborhood preserve to see what I can find.

Simple is not the same as easy. I can miss a bird when everybody else sees it and I am a perpetual beginner when it comes to the study of ornithology. But in those moments when I have a bird in my binoculars, the complexities of life fall away and it is just the bird and I. Those are simple moments and I hope to always take delight in them.

Whether you are staying home or traveling to far distances, enjoy this summer and the birding delights it holds.

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Mission Statement
Travis Audubon promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and conservation of native birds and their habitats.

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About Signal Smoke

Subscription Information

Signal Smoke (ISSN 1931-9282) is published six times yearly. Subscription is a membership benefit. To join, use the form on the back page, or go to www.travisaudubon.org for an online form. For address or subscription changes, call 512.300.BIRD (2473) or e-mail info@travisaudubon.org. USPS does not forward Signal Smoke. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission in writing from Travis Audubon. Copyright © 2013.

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 non-copyrighted articles, announcements, and art to Aaron Prager, care of Nancy Manning, at nancy@travisaudubon.org. Submissions by email are preferred but not required. Call Nancy at 300-BIRD if you have questions.

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Signal Smoke is printed on recycled paper with soy ink.

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Travis Audubon Society
Signal Smoke • July/August 2013
It started with a small but brave group of team captains at a lasagna dinner in March. It grew to a whopping 14 teams. At print deadline, $21,024.90 was raised! A special thank you to our team captains for helping us organize this event, and to all the participants who went out birding for us. And thanks to all those who supported the teams!

There were some great field stories written so it was difficult to choose the favorite for the Funniest / Best Story category. We are going to let our members decide who gets the best story prize. We have added the stories and a voting poll on our website. To vote in that category, and to vote for the team with the best team name, go to: travisaudubon.org/events/bird-a-thon-2013/bird-story-poll

Announcing our winners (drum roll, please)

**Most money raised:**
1. Fledglings Take Flight: Shelia Hargis & Laurie Foss
2. Legal Migrants: Jane Tillman & Byron Stone
3. Anahuac Anhingas: Jo Wilson & Valarie Bristol

**Most money raised by a team that has never participated in Bird-a-thon:**
1. Phoebe Friends: Frances Cerbins
2. East to West: Terry Banks
3. Rule-Breaking Sing-Songers: Ronnie Kramer (the prize was awarded to UT Bird Nerds, since RBSS “broke the rules” to do things their way)

**Most golden-cheeked Warblers identified:**
The Pterodactyls, with 10.

**Most Northern Mockingbirds identified:**
UT Bird Nerds with 49.

Rarest local bird was chosen by Eric Carpenter. The winning team was Legal Migrants who saw Lazuli Buntings and a Black-capped Vireo in Hays County.

Prizes for our great teams were made possible because of the generosity of the following donors:

**Gift Certificates:**
- 1-hour Landscape Consultation from Native Earthscapes.
- Geocaching training session with Jacque Austin.
- Custom Creation consultation and photo printing with Precision Camera.
- 4 passes to Paramount Theater.
- Uchi/Uchiko.

**TRIPS:**
- Overnight stay at the Hyatt Regency, Austin
- Weekend at Cherry Springs Ranch, courtesy of Bill Edward
- Day at Seven Oaks Ranch, courtesy of Anne Donovan
- Trip to Acacia, courtesy of Nancy Powell Moore
- A trip for 2 for either fall hawk watch or spring migration at Fennessey Ranch, courtesy of Sally Crofutt

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**Notes from Blair Woods**

**Sixty Kids and One Solitary Sandpiper**

Article by Nancy Manning

May 3rd was a gloriously beautiful day at Blair Woods. A cold front had just passed through, leaving the sky a deep blue, the air clean and crisp, and the clouds puffy and white. It was an Explore & Restore day at Blair Woods, and participating were Norman Elementary’s entire 4th grade class of 40 strong and 20 students from Pecan Springs Elementary. After dispersing the kids to their learning stations, I sat alone by the pond. It was very quiet in spite of the kids. In that quiet moment I realized that Blair Woods was very birdy. I could see there were at least two large flocks of Cedar Waxwings, so I grabbed my binoculars from the car for a better look. I hiked back up the hill to get a good sighting and was excited to get my first ever up-close and personal look at the red on their wings. As I turned to look at the pond, I noticed what was obviously some kind of sandpiper. I was determined to make my first “solo” identification. So I took another trip to the car for my field guide. I was able to creep up close enough for a good look, heart pitter-patterning because I had never seen a shorebird at Blair Woods. At first I thought it was a Spotted Sandpiper, but after many looks between binoculars and field guide, I was excited to determine that it was a Solitary Sandpiper, its white-eye ring being my first real clue. I verified by looking at all of the other sandpipers in the book. No doubt about it — a Solitary Sandpiper at Blair Woods, and a nice way to end the season of exploring and restoring at Blair Woods.
As the steward of Baker Sanctuary, one of my foremost concerns is determining if management activities are having the desired effect. How to measure progress or the lack thereof is always a challenge, especially when it may take multiple years of effort and monitoring (and possibly several steward tenures) to see any evidence one way or the other. While we are currently fairly adept at generating, organizing, and storing data and reports regarding activities at the sanctuary, in the early days, back when Baker was known as the Travis Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary (TAWS), such records were a bit sparser; understandably so, computers are now so pervasive it is hard to recall the challenges faced by wielding a typewriter and storing all documents in filing cabinets. I think the last time I used a typewriter was when I was 10 years old and my kids will probably never do so. Times can change quickly. As stewards came and went, TAWS files were distributed to various TAS members for storage, usually ending up forgotten in a closet somewhere. However, occasionally old files will be re-discovered like buried pirate treasure, and returned to the main office where we scan everything into the computer for storage. Aside from the historical importance of the documents, sometimes we can also obtain insights into how management practices in the past have helped shape the present.

David Lyter was the sanctuary steward from 1983 to 1990 and, among many other activities, was responsible for initiating Brown-headed Cowbird (BHCO) trapping at the sanctuary. Brown-headed Cowbirds are a problem but I’ll let David explain (excerpts are from David’s 1986 report to TPWD):

“The cowbird is a small finch like blackbird which breeds from mid March to early August. Males are iridescent black with a brown head, while the females are a dull brownish grey. The bird is noted for its habit of laying eggs in the nests of other birds. Females will actually remove eggs from the host’s nest prior to or after laying one of its own eggs while the unsuspecting owners are away. Generally, cowbird eggs are larger, and hatch sooner than those of the host species. It is typical that young of the host species, if they hatch at all, are knocked out of the nest by the young pugnacious cowbird.”

David suspected BHCO were parasitizing Golden-cheeked Warbler nests at Baker so, with the help of Bill Meriwether, a preliminary cowbird trap was built, modeled after traps that at the time were successfully being employed in Michigan’s Kirtland Warbler project. They set the trap “…in an open meadow in the central part of the Sanctuary, where cowbirds had been sighted perching on electrical wires and tall trees.” I believe the area under discussion is north of Lime Creek Road, somewhere between Baker Cabin and the TCEQ air monitoring station.

With the trap in place, Jim O’Donnell, who was then running a trapping program at Wild Basin, generously donated four adult males as bait birds. Cowbirds are a gregarious species so the idea is that wild birds flying overhead would see the cowbird party in the trap and want to join, never to escape. With the bait birds in place, Dave and Bill eagerly awaited their first capture but all did not go as planned, “Our efforts were frustrated by raccoons that apparently grabbed the decoy birds as they roosted on the side support at night. The raccoons were licking their chops after eating the last of the moths; sometimes landing on the trap, and on several occasions, actually entering the trap to feed the juvenile [cowbird].”

To hear or see a cowbird at Baker today is a fairly uncommon occurrence, even in the open areas around Baker Cabin and the steward’s trailer. While David caught 16 juveniles in 1986, no juveniles have been captured in at least the last two breeding seasons, indirect evidence that cowbirds at Baker are not being very successful in their nest parasitism. David’s timely actions, supported by intensive trapping by the City, County, and private land owners throughout Travis County, has certainly curtailed GCWA nest parasitism by cowbirds, a trend we will strive to keep up in the future.
Austin–Round Rock is the second fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States with 1.7 million residents. Development here threatens an ecosystem that supports more than 30 imperiled species (Audubon Texas from U.S. Census). Urban development has also moved an entire generation indoors and in front of screens. No organization meets these challenges more effectively than Travis Audubon.

Each of our three sanctuaries interfaces with dense urban populations, providing unique platforms for conservation education. As birders, we recognize the value of engaging with our environment and sharing those experiences with others. By providing opportunities to make others aware of the abundance of plant and animal life, we are opening city doors to nature.

How many acres of backyard, churchyard, and schoolyard are there in Austin? Imagine the impact if these yards were converted to native landscapes. Meet our Urban Habitat Committee, saving the world, a yard at a time. This group of tireless worker bees transforms yards to native landscapes and city dwellers to backyard birders through teaching, designing and planting.

Travis Audubon's youth education programs ensure that our urbanized youth connect to nature today, inspiring them to take up the conservation mantle in the future, when they will be the ones making decisions about land and water use.

Our field trip committee provides opportunities for the Central Texas public to observe, enjoy, and understand native birds and other wildlife, and in the process raise awareness of the importance of preserving their habitat. Our Adult Education committee teaches us to identify birds, grasses, dragonflies, trees, plants, and all things natural. What difference does it make that people take field trips or are able to identify a bird? Our members say that learning to identify birds has improved their cognitive abilities, brought them closer to nature, and brought an untold joy to their lives.

From A Voice in the Wilderness: Conversations with Terry Tempest Williams: "If we are not home, if we are not rooted deeply in place, making that commitment to dig in and stay put ... if we don't know the names of things, ... then, it's gone before we know that it matters." Williams continues: "I remember a phone call from a friend of mine who lives along the Mackenzie River. She said, 'This is the first year in twenty that the chinook salmon have not returned.' This woman knows the names of things. This woman is committed to a place. And she sounded the alarm."

Travis Audubon has a long tradition of sounding the alarm, of advocating for wildlife and the environment; of building partnerships resulting in protection of lands such as the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve and our own Baker Sanctuary. Forging a connection between the natural world and an increasingly urban population is what Travis Audubon does well. Your donation will help us to continue to inspire others to explore and conserve our natural spaces.

You can donate online with the link on our home page or you can use the form below to mail in a check to: 3710 Cedar St., Box 5; Austin, TX 78705

2013 Summer Appeal

Name
Address:
Email:
Donation amount:
Feather Identification Class

Saturday, July 13, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Learn everything you need to know to master bird feather identification with Dave Scott, author of *Bird Feathers: A Guide to North American Species*. This class will teach participants to identify feathers that they find in the field through a combination of shape, size, and color. Dave will share all of the information necessary to unlock the mysteries found within a single feather. This class will not only teach you how to identify feathers but will help you understand an incredible amount about the flight, lives, and habits of the world’s bird species. Knowledge of wing morphology and feather identification is an amazing addition to your birding tool box, and this class will provide you with a great start.

Dave Scott is a skilled wildlife tracker and naturalist who has been involved in environmental education since 2003. Dave’s focus as an educator is to help his students reconnect with the natural world through wildlife tracking, increased sensory awareness, wilderness survival skills, and the development of a strong sense of place. Dave is the founder of Earth Native Wilderness School in Austin where he currently teaches courses on bird feather identification, wildlife tracking, wilderness survival, and ecology. For more information, visit www.EarthNativeSchool.com. Autographed copies of *Bird Feathers: A Guide to North American Species* will be available for purchase at the class, cash or check accepted.

The class will be half lecture/Power Point and half hands-on feather identification using the field guide. Dave will be bringing feathers from over 50 species occurring in North America for students to identify in small groups during the second half of the class. The workshop is limited to 36 participants and will be held on Saturday, July 13, from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm in southeast Austin. Plan to bring your lunch to eat on-site. Tuition is $45 for TAS members and $60 for non-members. Register online for the class. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis at shelia.hargis@gmail.com or at 294-0272.

To register, go to: travisaudubon.org/education/adult-classes/feather-identification-class

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Hummingbird Identification Class

Tuesdays, July 30 and August 6

Ft. Davis Field Trip, August 9 – August 11

Central Texans have a wealth of hummingbirds visiting us each year. From our nesting Ruby-throated and Black-chinned Hummingbirds to the elusive visitors like Broad-billed Hummingbirds and Green-breasted Mango, Central Texas hummingbirds can be a challenge to identify.

This class will introduce the 15 hummingbird species that have been seen in Central Texas. Mark Klym will discuss their ranges, habitat, and frequency of occurrence, and will emphasize those characteristics that can be used for effective identification, and sounds that can be used for locating and differentiating these birds. Each species will be examined in detail, looking at key diagnostic features, and compared to similar, often confusing species.

Mark Klym is coordinator of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup and Texas Wildscapes programs for Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD). He is also co-author of *Hummingbirds of Texas* (Texas A&M Press, 2005). No prior birding experience is necessary. Participants will receive a Hummingbird Roundup kit from TPWD as well as other handouts.

Two lecture sessions will be held on Tuesday evenings July 30 and August 6 at a central Austin location. An optional field trip to the Fort Davis area will be offered August 9-11.

Tuition for the class is $40 for TAS members and $55 for non-members. For those who go on the field trip, there will be an additional fee of $90 to cover Mark’s expenses. A minimum of 10 and maximum of 15 people can attend the field trip. For more information, contact Jane Tillman at mljt@austin.utexas.edu. If you have taken the class before and want to go on the field trip only, contact Jane to be put on the waiting list in case there is space available.

To register, go to: travisaudubon.org/education/adult-classes/hummingbird-identification-class
**Wildlife Tracking Class**

**Saturday, August 3, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm**

Don’t just look up, look down! Through wildlife track and sign interpretation, a trained observer can discover the stories of animal movement and interactions on a given landscape, and in the process, gain a much greater understanding of animal behavior. In this class, expert wildlife tracker Dave Scott (see Hummingbird ID class) will introduce you to some of the core concepts behind accurate track and sign identification and interpretation. Topics discussed will include: basic mammal and bird foot morphology as a tool for track identification, gait pattern interpretation, ecological tracking, and methods for accurately recording tracks and signs found in the field.

The class will be divided between lecture and field work. The workshop is limited to 24 participants and will be held on Saturday, August 3, from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm. Plan to bring your lunch to eat on-site. Tuition is $60 for TAS members and $75 for non-members. Register online for the class. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis at shelia.hargis@gmail.com or at 294-0272.

To register, go to: [travisaudubon.org/education/adult-classes/wildlife-tracking-class](http://travisaudubon.org/education/adult-classes/wildlife-tracking-class)

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**Bird Photography Workshop with Jeff Parker**

**Mondays, October 7 and 14, 7:00 – 8:30 pm**

**Saturday, October 19, 8 am – 12 pm**

Travis Audubon member and professional wildlife photographer Jeff Parker will teach this Bird Photography Workshop. Jeff is an award-winning nature, bird and wildlife photographer who leads the naturally curious on photo tours throughout North and Central America. He also offers photography workshops designed to enhance technical know-how as well as knowledge of the natural world. His photographs have appeared in many publications and websites including: Audubon Magazine online, NANPA’s Expressions 2011, NANPA’s Expressions 2012, American Profile, Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine, American Airlines’ Celebrated Living, Texas Wildlife Magazine, and Cenizo. You can learn more about Jeff at his website: [http://jeffparkerimages.com](http://jeffparkerimages.com)

The workshop will be composed of two classroom sessions and a morning in the field. The class sessions will be held on Mondays, October 7 and 14, 7 – 8:30 pm at a north Austin location and the field work will be on Saturday, October 19, from 8 am to noon. The workshop will cover equipment, exposure, depth of field, light, composition, flight photography and set-ups—all at an introductory level.

Tuition will be $60 for TAS members and $75 for non-members. Class size will be limited to 10. For questions or for more information, please contact Frances Cerbins at fcerbins@yahoo.com. To register, go to the following link:


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**Shorebird Identification Class**

**Wednesdays**

August 7, 14, 6:30–8:30 pm

**Saturday:**

August 10, 8:00–11:00 am

**Sunday:**

August 11, 6:00am–2:00 pm

**Field Trip to Coast:**

August 16–18

Can you tell the difference between those little brown birds on the mudflats at Hornsby Bend? If not, join Jeff Patterson and Eric Stager for Travis Audubon’s Shorebird Identification Class of 2013! This class is intended for intermediate birders who would like to increase their skills at identifying sandpipers, plovers, godwits, phalaropes, dowitchers, and other shorebirds.

Shorebirds are a fascinating and varied group of birds, with many interesting identification issues. Some undertake some of the most spectacular long-distance migrations of any animal (Hudsonian Godwits embark on a 6,000 mile migration which frequently includes stops in Texas). When suitable habitat is available, Central Texas can be an excellent place to study birds at their migration stopovers.

Jeff teaches the popular TAS class on Birdsongs and Eric grew up on the coast and is an active member of the TAS field trip committee. Both have been birding most of their lives.

Class lectures will take place from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, August 7 and 14, at central and north Austin locations. There will be a short introductory field trip at Hornsby Bend on Saturday, August 10, followed by a longer trip to Lake Buchanan on Sunday, August 11. The class will culminate in an optional trip to the Central Texas coast on the weekend of August 16-18.

The tuition is $75 for TAS members and $85 for non-members. For those who go on the coast trip, there will be an additional fee of $45 to partially cover the leaders’ trip expenses.

A minimum of 5 and a maximum of 15 people can attend the coastal field trip. For more information, contact Nancy Radding at nradding@sbcglobal.net. If you have taken the class before and want to go on the field trip to the Coastal Bend only, contact Nancy to be put on a waiting list in case there is space available. To register, go to: [travisaudubon.org/education/adult-classes/shorebird-identification-class](http://travisaudubon.org/education/adult-classes/shorebird-identification-class)

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**On the Cover**

**Red-cockaded Woodpecker**

*Picoides borealis*

Listing Status: Endangered

Photo from Wikimedia Commons
In July and August, the breeding season for most of the local birds is waning. Territorial defense, including song, is less common, and many birds are harder to find. Some, such as Golden-cheeked Warblers and Ash-throated Flycatchers, leave central Texas altogether. Yet even on a hot summer afternoon, a common sight in the hazy blue skies of central Texas is the silhouette of a soaring vulture.

Most people who watch birds in Austin know that there are two species of vultures here. Turkey Vultures fly with wings held in a shallow V, often teetering unsteadily from side to side, and flashing the silvery undersides to their flight feathers. The adults have featherless red heads, like their gallinaceous namesakes. The smaller, gray-headed Black Vultures fly with their shorter wings held flat, and they flap more in flight. From below, a white patch toward the end of the wing is distinctive. (It’s best not to rely too heavily on head color right now, for juvenile Turkey Vultures may have dusky heads through the summer and well into fall.)

You might assume that the two species are very much alike, since they often occur together – soaring on the same updrafts, roosting on the same high perches, feeding on the same carrion. That assumption may have clouded a scientific debate that went unresolved for more than a century. The two species are actually quite different, and interactions between them are interesting.

Turkey Vultures have a highly-developed sense of smell – rare among birds – that helps them find carrion hidden under forest canopy or otherwise invisible from the air. Though this ability was long suspected, experimental corroboration came only within the last 50 years. In fact, when a 19th-century naturalist, Charles Waterton by name, first suggested that Turkey Vultures find their food by smell, he ignited quite a controversy in ornithological circles. John James Audubon himself weighed in against what was considered, at the time, a preposterous notion.
Controlled experiments begun in the 1930s by Kenneth Stager, a Los Angeles researcher, confirmed that Turkey Vultures do rely heavily upon their sense of smell to find food. He reasoned that contrary results in crude earlier tests may have come from using Black Vultures as subjects, since he found that Black Vultures have little or no sense of smell.

In addition to their superior olfactory sense, Turkey Vultures are also comparatively lighter-bodied and longer-winged than Black Vultures. Such low “wing loading” gives Turkey Vultures greater aerial mobility, and helps them lift off from the ground or a perch with minimal expenditure of energy. A Turkey Vulture can better exploit weak updrafts near the ground, allowing it to sail along slowly at lower altitudes, where odors are easier to detect. It can also leave its nighttime perch earlier in the morning, while Black Vultures at the same roost are still waiting for the sun to stir stronger thermal currents.

So how do Black Vultures overcome the handicaps of a poor sense of smell and high wing loading? Watchfulness, teamwork, and... well, for lack of a nicer word, chutzpah.

While Turkey Vultures cruise low to catch odors, Black Vultures soar high, where they can watch the movements of other vultures. When one vulture begins its descent to a food source, others (of both species) flying near it will notice, and quickly follow.

First to arrive at fresh carrion will usually be a Turkey Vulture. It will have a few precious minutes to gulp down as many delectable entrails as possible before the sharp-eyed Black Vultures in the vicinity arrive. A Turkey Vulture can defend its find against one Black Vulture, but not against a group of them. The more aggressive Black Vultures will quickly join forces to displace the larger species.

Studies have suggested that, in many cases, these Black Vultures are closely related to each other: immediate or extended family. Strong family ties may develop from the prolonged dependence of the juveniles upon the parents. Adult Black Vultures have been known to feed their young for as long as eight months after they have left the nest. By contrast, Turkey Vulture parents are rarely observed to feed fledged offspring.

A Black Vulture family, or a coalition of related families, will feed together, roost together, even preen each other. They will fight off unrelated Black Vultures that attempt to join them at a meal or a roost.

The teamwork that comes with such social bonding yields benefits beyond simply being able to shoulder aside a Turkey Vulture from a roadkill. Having more eyes alert for danger may mean that each individual Black Vulture can devote more time to ripping apart and eating the carcass. The birds may also work together to dismantle a carcass. For instance, two birds might pull at opposite ends of a tough piece of hide to rip it apart. The communal roost may also act as an information center: a Black Vulture coming hungry to roost can follow its more successful relatives when they return to a carcass the next morning.

Of course, teamwork and a scrappy nature can only take Black Vultures so far. Other scavengers that they encounter in different parts of their range, such as Crested Caracaras, King Vultures, and Andean Condors, are not as easily cowed as Turkey Vultures. A single individual of these larger or fiestier species will displace a group of Black Vultures.

For that matter, neither Black nor Turkey Vultures have the strength to tear the hides of some animals, such as cattle and deer, and they must wait for a mammalian scavenger, such as a coyote, to rip the hide so that they can reach the innards of the carcass. (This is one more reason why coyotes are important players in the web of life in central Texas.)

Lest you feel pity for the Turkey Vultures, they are doing quite well, despite the competition. Counts show that, continent-wide, their population has increased since the 1960s. They apparently specialize on carcasses of smaller animals, for which a Black Vulture posse may not bother to fight. Black Vultures are more likely to gather at a dead cow, deer, or hog, and leave the squirrels and lizards to the larger birds.

Today the greatest threats to both vulture species comes from humans: collisions with cars, trucks, and aircraft, and poisoning by human-manufactured chemicals. That we still have so many vultures today, cleaning up the roadkills along our highways, is partly thanks to the banning of DDT in the 1960s. This pesticide and its derivative, DDE, were responsible for thinning the eggshells of vultures as well as those of Bald Eagles and Ospreys – a phenomenon that led to the drastic decline of the latter two species. A study of vulture eggs in Texas showed that shells were, on average, 16% (Turkey Vultures) and 17% (Black Vultures) thinner during the period when DDT was used than they were before that time.

Today, the most widespread poisoning of vultures comes from lead shot, which the birds often consume when gulping down carcasses of deer and other wildlife that are not retrieved by hunters. Ingestion of lead shot is also a major concern in attempts to restore the population of the related California Condor. Fortunately, hunters are being encouraged to replace lead shot with the more expensive, but non-toxic, steel shot.

Connecting Children to Nature – An Important Legacy

Article by Gail Buxton. Photos by Nancy Manning.

Travis Audubon has a long history of connecting children to nature. The first meeting of what would become the Travis Audubon Society was convened to discuss an Audubon Camp for teachers that was sponsored by National Audubon in Kerrville, Texas, in 1950. The purpose of this camp was to educate teachers so that they would spread “Audubonism!” Bradley Davis, a science teacher at University Junior High School, attended this meeting and was named the first board president of TAS in 1952.

In the late 1950s, TAS members participated in the creation and development of the City of Austin’s Natural Science Center (now called the Nature and Science Center). Its original focus was to introduce children to the natural heritage of central Texas and to encourage them to consider a career in science. Classes were offered to children for the first time in 1960. Travis Audubon provided volunteers for the Natural Science Center Safari, a fundraiser for the Center that occurred every spring from the early 1970s through 1999. The Safari was a family event exploring wildlife, habitats, history, and geology on Travis Audubon’s Bee Creek Nature Trail.

In the December 1979 edition of Signal Smoke, funds were solicited from members to sponsor children’s matinees of Audubon Wildlife Films, “providing Austin school children with a chance to see top-quality conservation films presented by professional speakers. All reports indicate that the children enjoyed these films and they spread the Audubon way to future decision makers.”

Jackie Arnold chaired the education committee in the 1970s, which included adult and youth education. She developed a wildlife color-slide program for the schools, newspaper and TV features and brought a youth education booth to community events. In 1974, members of the education committee, under Jackie’s leadership, developed a TAS Audubon Camp Scholarship fund, stating, “An interest in ecology and nature in general is best developed at a younger age.”

The summer of 1974 saw the launch of the children’s bird walks, which took place every week at various locations through a cooperative effort between Travis Audubon and the Natural Science Center. In 1974, Sanctuary Committee Chair Luke Thompson led a workshop for a group of San Antonio high school students who were taking a summer course in environmental science. He taught them how to do transects across Baker Sanctuary to determine the distribution of a specific plant species, which resulted in the collection of some valuable data.

In 1980, TAS member Rhea Copenning developed workshops for area elementary school teachers “to help children better understand their natural environment.” From 1993 through 2011, TAS member donations funded scholarships for local 3rd through 5th grade teachers to receive Audubon Adventure Kits. These kits are curriculum supplements developed by the National Audubon Society, and the goal is to encourage children’s interest in and understanding of birds and other wildlife and their habitats. Travis Audubon supplied on average 40 to 50 Austin teachers with this educational resource, and many years up to 75 kits were provided.

In 1998, TAS urged members to promote “Classroom Birdwatch” in local middle schools. This was a technology-based curriculum designed to engage students in science by making them active partners in a real, ongoing scientific study. In 1999, Travis Audubon donated $9,000 to Austin’s Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve as part of a partnership to develop a youth education program with a focus on birds and birding.

That same year, TAS member Stennie Meadours launched an East Austin partnership with the fourth and fifth grade classes (and a total of ten teachers) of Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary School. The program, called “Living Lab,” was supported by the University of Texas, the Capital Area Master Naturalists, Austin’s Water and Wastewater Utility, and the Colorado River Watch. Stennie guided the program through its first school year, conducting three field days (comprised of four mornings each) that featured hands-on exploration of the diversity of habitat, plant and animal life present at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Facility. These field days entailed a total of 400 on-site volunteer participation hours (including many TAS volunteers who brought their own scopes), and a mentor was provided for every three children.

At the beginning of the program, only two of the 10 elementary school teachers were supportive of the Living Lab field days; by the end of the first school year, all of the teachers were actively using what they had learned from the Living Lab Program, incorporating scientific observation techniques and ecological connections as the basis for their lesson plans. During the second year, a team of students from UT helped develop materials for the program and worked on in-class activities with the Hornsby teachers; one doctoral student worked on the Living Lab Program as part of her dissertation.

In 2000, Sheila Hargis became the chair of the education committee and the committee developed a strategic plan. One of the goals targeted youth education and stated that the committee would provide: walks/talks at elementary schools, brochures, Audubon Adventure Kits, family nature walks and an outdoor camp. Nature/Bird Walks for Beginning Birders of all ages were established at this time and offered every month.

In February 2001, the Education Committee launched Youth Birding Camp, which was offered every fall at Hornsby Bend through 2010. The camp evolved into Youth Nature Camp, which is now held in the spring and fall at Travis Audubon’s Baker Sanctuary in Leander. TAS Youth Camps have relied on the expertise of volunteers, who have consistently enriched these important youth education programs. Some of the camps led to follow-up
birding walks at Hornsby Bend for campers and their parents. Although now the camp is funded by grants and offered at no charge, originally each camper had a sponsor who donated the tuition and then presented the child with the gifts of binoculars, field guide and field notebook used during the camp.

In the early 2000s, TAS members Barbara Anderson and Anne Donovan visited local schools and made presentations about birds, including observation walks. In April 2002, TAS volunteers participated in the first of four Outdoor Kids Adventure Days sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife. Along with other community organizations, the TAS volunteers helped children draw pictures of birds and identify birds in nearby trees.

In 2004, Travis Audubon sponsored concerts by “Mr. Habitat” (Bill Oliver), a local “environmental troubadour” who teaches youth about conservation and habitat protection through his songs.

Signal Smoke had a “Kids’ Section” during the years 2003-2004, which was written by Amy Sugeno and featured articles, puzzles, and notices about local birding and wildlife events geared toward young people, including articles written by kids.

The Travis Audubon Youth Education Committee met in February 2013 to develop criteria for current and future youth education programming. The committee reviewed the Texas Children in Nature Strategic Plan, which was drafted by the Texas Partnership for Children in Nature. The recommendations of the partnership focus on the roles of health, education, access, and community in furthering children’s engagement with nature and increasing their understanding of Texas’ natural resources. The committee decided to adopt the Texas Children in Nature Strategic Plan, where relevant, as the guiding criteria for Travis Audubon’s youth programming.

Travis Audubon’s current programming continues to build on our commitment to connect youth with the natural world through focused study in an outdoor setting. Now in its fourth year, Explore & Restore features hands-on scientific study at Blair Woods, in partnership with Norman Elementary and newly-added Pecan Springs Elementary. Spring and Fall Youth Nature Camps take place at Baker Sanctuary, under the leadership of Sanctuary Steward Christopher Murray, and Leander ISD students participate in the after-school Hiking Club at Baker.

As natural areas disappear and urbanization and technology move us indoors, there is a growing concern that children are losing an appreciation for the natural world. We believe that giving young people the tools to interpret and enjoy the natural world increases the likelihood that they will become engaged stewards of the environment in the future.

### Travis Audubon Legacy Giving

**Find out how you can make a lasting difference.**

**Give a lasting gift to Travis Audubon.**

Did you know that you can help support Travis Audubon without giving any money today? In addition to enhancing your own financial plans and taking advantage of laws that help preserve estate assets, a gift through your estate can help ensure that Travis Audubon will always be able to serve as a voice for conservation in Central Texas.

Regardless of your age or income, you can benefit from financial and estate planning. Philanthropy can be an important tool in your planning strategy.

A bequest in your will is the most direct and significant way to make a planned gift to Travis Audubon. Another option is to bequeath a percentage of your estate to Travis Audubon, or to give the residual to Travis Audubon after other bequests have been fulfilled.

If you are interested in including Travis Audubon as a beneficiary in your will, please consult with your attorney. You and your attorney may find the following language helpful:

“I bequeath to Travis Audubon Society, a not-for-profit organization, with its offices in Austin, Texas, the sum of $_________ (or _________% of my residuary estate) for Travis Audubon Society’s ongoing environmental conservation and education programs.”

If your plans already include a gift for Travis Audubon, please let us know. We will honor all requests for anonymity, and you can always modify your gift if circumstances change.

### Q&A

#### Why should I include Travis Audubon in my will?

By including Travis Audubon in your will, you will ensure that we remain at the forefront of conservation and environmental education in Central Texas. Your gift will help us continue to provide all the programs and services you value in perpetuity.

#### Can I specify how my donation will be used?

Yes, any gift made through the legacy program can be earmarked for particular projects at the donor’s request.

#### How can I find out more about this program and other giving opportunities?

Contact the Travis Audubon office by calling 512-300-2473 or sending us an e-mail at info@travisaudubon.org.

Thank you for providing for the future of Travis Audubon.

Travis Audubon is a tax exempt, nonprofit organization. This publication is for general informational purposes only, and is not intended as legal or financial advice. Travis Audubon recommends that people considering a planned gift consult with their legal or financial advisor.
Spring is always a busy time at the Canyon for the Stewards and wildlife as well. Migration was interesting with late-season weekly cold fronts encouraging wintering birds like Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches to linger longer than usual. The Chimney Swifts that would normally pass over us on their way to breeding areas as far north as Canada were stopped cold—literally. Many reports from South Texas had weather-stressed swifts huddled on the south side of large tree trunks when they could not find better enclosed shelter from the northern winds and cold temperatures. We observed these same effects at Chaetura Canyon where the skies were black with flocks of 300...
to 400 birds crowding into the two large towers on the residence for warmth. They remained in the towers for more than a day waiting for the weather to warm and their flying insect prey to become available. Several dead, emaciated swifts were found on the bottom of the towers after these events – a first for us in more than 25 years of observations. We must assume that this unusual spring took a further toll on the already declining population.

By late April into May, migration seemed to be back on track with the arrival of regular summer breeders including Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Painted Buntings, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and White-eyed Vireos, to name but a few. Over the two months, new sightings brought our 2013 avian species count to 76, keeping us just barely ahead of our northern neighbors at Baker Sanctuary.

In early April, Don Connell graciously transported the new personalized bricks from Mason County, which saved considerable freight charges. On Sunday, April 14, Mark Wilson and Dana Kuykendall helped us install the bricks. This completes the first phase of the new entry, but there are still bricks available for sale. Check the TAS web site for information. The project has been very successful in raising funds for the expansion of the Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary. Thanks so much to Mark for heading up the project and to everyone who has purchased bricks to date.

We were honored to host a reception for Carter Smith (Texas Parks and Wildlife Executive Director), his wife Stacy, and some of their family and friends on Friday, April 26th. After a tour of the upper trails, we all watched the swifts go to roost and viewed a short video about the home life of Chimney Swifts. Carter shared his impressions of the Canyon in the June issue of the Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

Jacque Austin brought the Austin chapter of the Texas Outdoor Women’s Network (T.O.W.N.) group out for their annual spring field trip on Sunday, April 28th. Breakfast was followed by a two-hour tour of the sanctuary. The interpretive walk included the Little Beaver Hill property where the first Summer Tanager of the year was heard and then sighted. While enjoying lunch at the residence, the group was serenaded by the resident Golden-cheeked Warbler as he patrolled the lower canyon just below the deck.

“Chalupas and Chimney Swifts” was a sellout for the seventh year, and we had a lot of first-time visitors. We offer our thanks to our “regulars” for bringing so many new guests. The evening’s final presentation was joyfully interrupted by a typically vociferous Chuck-will’s-widow calling near the gathering. It is not too early to book your reservation for the “Mediterranean Feast” on September 7th, so act now. Don’t be left out!

As the month of May came to a close, work on the southern fence line and Phase III of the accessibility ramps project began in earnest. As industrious as we stewards tend to be, we have nothing on the avian parents. Fledglings were everywhere: Northern Cardinals, House Finches, Titmice, Lesser Goldfinches, Canyon, Bewick’s and Carolina Wrens, and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers were ubiquitous. Judging from the uninterrupted shuttling of food from the supplemental feeders at the residence, Golden-fronted Woodpeckers and Western Scrub-Jays were not far behind. The first Chimney Swift egg was laid on May 29th, so there should be a shimmer of fledgling swifts out and about in time for the July Second Saturday. Contact us to reserve your spot ASAP.

Finally, we had a glorious rainfall of 6 inches over a two-day period the last week of May that scoured the basins in the creek bottom and recharged the seep springs. Life at the Canyon is good. Come see for yourself!

Please join us for a Mediterranean Feast at Chaetura Canyon!

Date: Saturday, September 7th
Time: 6:00 – 10:00 PM
Place: The Steward’s Residence at Chaetura Canyon

The Travis Audubon Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary is unique. It is the only place in the world where Chimney Swifts are so carefully protected and so closely observed in such an intimate setting. As their numbers dwindle elsewhere, Chimney Swifts thrive at Chaetura Canyon due to innovative conservation practices resulting from over 20 years of observation and research by Georgean and Paul Kyle. To ensure conservation for future generations of swifts and birders alike, Georgean and Paul donated their beautiful property and home to the Travis Audubon Society in 2006 to be protected in perpetuity. You can help maintain this wonderful TAS resource by attending an unforgettable event this Fall.

The evening will begin with an optional stroll that wanders past numerous Chimney Swift Towers, through a haven of native plants, carefully restored wildlife habitat including an amazing grove of sapling Spanish Oaks and several small ponds teaming with dragonflies, chorusing Leopard Frogs and other aquatic critters along the easily walkable upper trails.

Enjoy drinks and numerous delicious appetizers on the covered deck overlooking the Canyon, followed by other more filling entrees from Georgean’s now-famous culinary imagination. After dinner entertainment will include a brief video presentation about the Canyon and its most famous avian residents, which often make an impressive appearance at sunset.

This event is limited to 25 participants, so don’t wait too long! To secure your reservations, contact the Kyles ASAP for a reservation form: Kyle@ChimneySwifts.org

Admission is $75 per TAS member ($100 for non-members) with all proceeds going into the TAS Chaetura Canyon maintenance fund.

The fund is used for maintenance and ongoing conservation and education projects at Chaetura Canyon.

The Fennessey Ranch

Let us show you the nature of things!

The Fennessey Ranch is part of a legendary 750,000 acre Texas land empire located along a region of the Texas coastline known as the “Coastal Bend.” It consists of 4,000 acres of abundant wetlands, meadows, natural lakes, riparian woods and brushland.

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The Travis Audubon Society

Signal Smoke July/August 2013 13
### Travis Audubon Society

**July–August 2013 Field Trips**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Location/Description</th>
<th>Registration Required</th>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>Saturday, August 17</td>
<td>Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Walk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, August 27</td>
<td>Two-hour Tuesday for Shorebirds!</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ken Zaslow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kz@att.net">kz@att.net</a></td>
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<td>7:30 to 9:30 am</td>
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**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.**

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**Take a Trip to the Rockport HummerBird Celebration**

**Join the 25th Anniversary Rockport HummerBird Celebration**

**September 12–15**

Enjoy migrating hummers and rich birding opportunities, including private homes and kayak tours, also exhibits, classes in bird photography and nature journaling, and many interesting speakers. Make a party of it with friends or family—they needn’t all be birders—and book a stay at “View2,” a big bright corner condo directly on Aransas Bay. Convenient to Festival events, freshly remodeled.

Three bedrooms (one king and two twins), three baths, a furnished kitchen with granite counters and new appliances, and a high-ceilinged living- dining room with wrap- around views of the bay. Free WiFi, good stations for recharging equipment. Pools, tennis court, fishing pier. Boat rental down the street.

Rates, $275/night, 2 nights minimum. Book “View2” through Key Allegro Rentals, at rentals@keyallegro.com.
Travis Audubon gratefully appreciates the support of our donors.

Travis Audubon gratefully appreciates a grant from the Ram Foundation which funded our Spring 2013 Explore and Restore Program for Pecan Springs Elementary students.

Bird-A-Thon 2013

Edward Fair
Dina Ferguson
Lucy Flanagan
Joan Foster
Michael Gagarin
Larry Garrett
Allison Gaskins
Dan Gilbertson
Pi Yun Hamilton
Vern Hampton
Chad Hanna
Jessica Hanover
Faye Harris
Beth Hedger
Betty Hendrix
Julia Heskett
Maruta Hiegel
Lynn Hill
Daniel Hodges
Deborah Holle
Dan Horowitz
Patrick Hotze
Caroline Jones
Richard Kaskan
Jammy Kazanoff
Suzanne Kho
Barbara Kier
George Kitzmiller
Jill Klucher
Priyadarshan Kolte
Barb Kraemer
Ronnie Kramer
Kim Krieg
Hemant Kulkarni
Ethel Kutac
Shirley Lavergne
Caroline Legette
Stephen Livingston
Jonathan Luce
Mark Lyon
Nancy Manning
Julia Marsden
Jean Martin
Raeanne Martinez
Kathlene McCall
Cheryl McGrath
Frances McMath
Monica Meadows
Janelle and
Paul Medrano
Michael Miles
Tom Mitchell
Leslie Anne Morris
Priscilla Murr
Monica Nelson
Tom Nilles
Janet Nye
Sally Orpsal
Jeff Patterson
Barbara Pitts
Michael Primm
Nancy Radding
Linda Ramirez
Mary Lou Ramsey
Carol Ray
Danette Ray
Sharon Richardson
Jeff Richardson
Virginia Rose
Walter Rudzinski
Rebekah Rylander
Andrew Sansom
Susan Schaezler
Clifford and
Joan Schopf
Meredith Schrup
Sally Scott
Diana Seidel
Roger Shaw
Chula Sims
Ellen Smith
Kim Soeecting
Brooke Spurrell
Ray Steelman
Byron Stone
Janice Summer
Judith Tasch
Gayla Thorpe
Elly Tittle
Nancy Townsend
Mike Voit
Deb Wallace
Rick, Ruben, and
Renee Wallace
Andrea Walsh
Jean Warneke
Jacqueline and
Richard Werner/
Soffer
Julie Williams
Stuart Wilson
Shirley Winslow
Ken Zaslow

Chalupas and Chimney Swifts
Barbara Anderson
Carol Edwards
Joan Foster
Tom Mitchell
Jeff Mundy
Andrew Sansom
Edward Sones
Mark Wilson

Chimney Swift Brick
Jacque Sue Austin
Jackie Davis
Wynn Estes
Joan Foster
Sheila Hargis
Mark Lyon
Jeff Mundy
Kristin Reno
Jane Tillman
Mark Wilson
Linda Yost

Donation to Chaetura Canyon
Bethany Camp
Lynn Hill
Nancy Townsend

General Donation
Jennifer Failla
Michael Gibson
Ron Graczyk
Norma Hutchinson
Mady Kaye
Caroline Legette
Jane Little
Marilyn Rabkin
Patrick Ryan
Mark Wilson
John Wilson

Grant Donation
Ross Bee
Alec Rhodes

Painted Bunting Membership
Elsie Mogck

Spring Appeal
Sue Anderson
Anne Donovan
Patricia Guthneck
Diane Jones
Jeff Mundy
Carolyn Powers
Mary Lou Rizzo
Timothy Stuart

Town Austin
Hope Lochridge
Jaque Sue Austin
Julia Youngblood

Vireo Membership
Amy Rose
Michael Savercool

Youth Nature Camp
H-E-B

This poem by Ogden Nash ran in the summer 1974 Signal Smoke.

“Up From The Egg: The Confessions Of A Nuthatch Avoider”

We don’t need too much birdlore, do we
To tell a flamin’o from a towhee;
Yet I cannot and never will,
Unless the silly birds stand still.
And there’s no enlightenment in a tour
Of ornithological literature.

Bird watchers top my honors list.
I aimed to be one, but I missed.
Since I’m both myopic and astigmatic,
And I, bespectacled and binocular,
Exposed myself to comment jocular.

And I, bespectacled and binocular,
My aim turned out to be erratic,
Since I’m both myopic and astigmatic,
I aimed to be one, but I missed.
Exposed myself to comment jocular.

Or if it did, it has changed its plumage,
And plunges you back into ignorant gloomage.

We don’t need too much birdlore, do we
To tell a flamin’o from a towhee;
Yet I cannot and never will,
Unless the silly birds stand still.
And there’s no enlightenment in a tour
Of ornithological literature.

Or if it did, it has changed its plumage,
And plunges you back into ignorant gloomage.
That is why I sit here growing old by inches,
Watching the clock instead of finches,
But I sometimes visualize in my gin,
The Audubon that I audubin.

The Audubon that I audubin.
And plunges you back into ignorant gloomage.

Travis Audubon gratefully appreciates the support of our donors.

Travis Audubon gratefully appreciates a grant from the Ram Foundation which funded our Spring 2013 Explore and Restore Program for Pecan Springs Elementary students.

This poem by Ogden Nash ran in the summer 1974 Signal Smoke.

“Up From The Egg: The Confessions Of A Nuthatch Avoider”

We don’t need too much birdlore, do we
To tell a flamin’o from a towhee;
Yet I cannot and never will,
Unless the silly birds stand still.
And there’s no enlightenment in a tour
Of ornithological literature.

Or if it did, it has changed its plumage,
And plunges you back into ignorant gloomage.
That is why I sit here growing old by inches,
Watching the clock instead of finches,
But I sometimes visualize in my gin,
The Audubon that I audubin.
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 a year 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!

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