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Cover Image:
Green Herons create fishing lures with insects, twigs, or feathers on the water surface to entice small fish.
Shell Game, Flickr, Creative Commons.
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Yellow-crowned Night Heron by Stan Lupo, Creative Commons
We have much to be proud of at Travis Audubon. Over the past year, we presented an unprecedented number of events, programs and classes—including more than 130 free field trips for novice and expert birders—all across Austin and Central Texas. This is a significant milestone for community outreach, one that is seeding new interest in preserving native habitat for birds and other wildlife.

As the oldest conservation organization in Austin, we have long relied on the strength of our volunteers and their passion for birds and nature. This year, we’re building on that strength by launching a Master Birder Program. We’re inviting a new level of volunteer opportunity that will enrich your knowledge of the natural world while expanding Travis Audubon’s outreach to new audiences.

The Master Birder Program is designed to increase your understanding of birds and their habitats, while also developing the skills for sharing that knowledge and enthusiasm with others. I’m happy to report that University of Texas professor Peter English and noted biologist Chuck Sexton will be the instructors. Through a series of classes and field trips, the program will cover bird anatomy and specialization, bird behavior, flight and migration, native habitat and vegetation, and conservation issues affecting Central Texas. Additional topics will help prepare you to provide education and outreach to the community in support of Travis Audubon and its programs.

I hope you’re as excited about the program as I am and will consider joining the inaugural class of Master Birders! We are very excited to be one of a handful of Audubon Chapters around the country offering such a program. I encourage you to apply by August 15—classes start in late September and are held on Tuesdays through November. For more information, check out our website or call me at 512-300-2473.

JOAN MARSHALL
Executive Director, Travis Audubon
Purple Martin Parties

*Voted Best Nightly Air Show in 2013 by the Austin Chronicle!*  
**Fridays and Saturdays, 7:45 – 9 pm, July 8/9, July 15/16, July 22/23, July 29/30**  
Embassy Suites, 5901 N. I-35 Frontage Road, 78723

Watch a hurricane of birds as hundreds of thousands of Purple Martins swirl into their roosting site each evening. It’s better than the bats! Binoculars are optional, but lawn chairs, cameras, and hats or umbrellas are highly recommended!

Fun Facts

Purple Martins are songbirds in the swallow family. They are the largest swallow and the only martin in North America.

Martins feed in flight, catching large insects such as dragonflies, moths, and wasps.

Purple Martins are amazing migrants. They spend the summer months in North America where they lay eggs, raise their young, and prepare for travel. For winter, the birds travel to the warm South American country of Brazil.

People have provided martins with nesting cavities for hundreds of years. Now, martins in the eastern US depend on human-supplied housing. The bond between birds and people cannot be undone. These graceful, insect-eating companions need our assistance.

John James Audubon remarked in 1831, “Almost every country tavern has a martin box on the upper part of its sign-board; and I have observed that the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be.”

For more information about Purple Martins, visit The Purple Martin Conservation Association at [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org).
Travis Audubon is looking for a few good birders... to join the inaugural class of the Travis Audubon Master Birder program!

What is a Travis Audubon Master Birder?

- Someone who is passionate about birding and who wants to expand their knowledge of birds, our natural community, and how they work together.
- Someone who wants to share their knowledge and love of birds and nature through service to the community as a Travis Audubon ambassador.

The Travis Audubon Master Birder program consists of an 8-week intensive course that focuses on bird biology, anatomy, and ecology, combined with the study of birds, bird habitats, and conservation issues specific to Travis County and surrounding areas.

Classroom lectures by Professor Peter English and noted biologist Chuck Sexton will take place on Tuesday nights beginning September 27, 2016, at the Wild Basin Creative Research Center, 805 North Capital of Texas Highway. Field trips will take place on most Saturdays following weekly classes. Participants will commit to sharing their knowledge and experience through 30 hours of volunteer service over the coming year.

Travis Audubon Master Birders will play a powerful role in helping raise awareness and understanding about birds and the natural environment in our community.

To find out more and complete an application for the 2016 Travis Audubon Master Birder class, see http://travisaudubon.org/master-birder-program, email volunteer@travisaudubon.org, or call 512-300-BIRD (2473).
Shady, moist, and relatively cool, the canyons near Austin have long provided a respite from the summer heat for people and wildlife alike. The Colorado River and major streams, such as Barton Creek and Bull Creek, have carved many of these canyons, especially along the Balcones Escarpment that arcs along Austin’s western boundary. But smaller streams dissecting the Edwards Plateau have also left deep ravines in the limestone—in places such as Wild Basin, Hamilton Pool, and Westcave Preserve.

Part of the allure of these oases is the lush plant growth, for many plant species also find refuge here from the desiccating sun and wind. Ferns, in particular, can be abundant in these microhabitats. Verdant drapes of Southern Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*) seem to cloak every dripping limestone wall. But other fern species are common here. One, Mexican Fern (*Anemia mexicana*), fairly common in Barton Creek canyons, reaches the northern limit of its range in Travis County.

We often think of ferns in association with moist places, but why is that?

Ferns and their relatives are very different from most other plants. For most plants, reproduction is a matter of transporting pollen grains—and the sperm encased within them—from the *staminate* (male) flowers of one individual to the *pistillate* (female) flowers of another. The agents of transport are usually wind or animals. Once a pollen grain lands on a receptive pistil, the sperm will tunnel through the flower tissue to fertilize the ovary at the base of the pistil. Ferns, though, developed before that elegant (and effective) system evolved.

Among the oldest of all *vascular* plants (vascular equals having a system of water-conducting tissue), ferns have no flowers and produce no seeds. For that matter, the plants we consider ferns are actually only one generation of a complex life cycle—and a generation that is not directly involved in sexual reproduction at all. The sexually-reproductive stage is a separate growth called a *prothallus*. The
prothallus is a tiny, inconspicuous, disc-shaped plant only about the size of a fingernail.

Specialized structures form on the surface of a prothallus that are capable of producing eggs; other structures produce sperm. Both structures may be present on the same prothallus, or only one or the other. But for genetic crossing to occur—allowing for a healthy population and the ability to evolve to meet changing conditions—the challenge is getting the sperm of one prothallus to the egg of another. Unlike in flowering plants, the sperm are free-swimming, not contained in a protective pollen grain. So for genetic crossing to occur, you need: water.

Not a lot of water is necessary, only enough to allow the sperm to swim to another plant and fertilize an egg on it. But a constant, or at least frequent, film or drip of water is ideal to allow fertilization to take place through much of the growing season. That makes the seeping limestone walls of Edwards Plateau canyons superb niches for ferns.

The problem with the life cycle so far, though, is that it does not allow for wide dispersal of ferns. How do new colonies develop in suitable but isolated moist spots in an otherwise hostile Texas landscape? That’s the role of this second life stage that is sprouting from the fertilized egg, the one that makes the lush curtains around Hamilton Pool. Once the egg is fertilized, the next generation of the life cycle begins to grow. Sometimes called the sporophyte (because it produces spores), this is the lacy-leaved fern that we recognize so readily.

If you turn over some of those fern fronds and look at the undersides, you may see them lined with fuzzy brown spots, or the margins may be crowded with tiny brown or black beads. Those are not insect eggs or fungal infections, but rather structures that contain the spores. Depending upon the species of fern, the spores may be contained simply in sporangia (spore cases), or the sporangia can be wrapped in a modified flap of leaf tissue called an indusium for further protection. Sometimes, as with Southern Maidenhair Ferns, the margins of the frond will fold over the spore cases in what is called a “false indusium.” How the spores are arranged and contained is a primary way to distinguish among different groups of ferns.

When you see the sporangia or the indusia under the fern frond, you are not seeing the...
spores themselves. The spores are extremely small—so small that 100 of them may fit on the period at the end of this sentence. Since they are so small, they are easily transportable by wind, water, and possibly also by animals. When a spore lands in a congenial location, it will sprout into a prothallus, and the life cycle starts again.

One difference between spores and seeds is that spores are not the product of sexual reproduction. Most contain only half the number of chromosomes of the “parent” (sporophyte) plant. Once the spore sprouts into the prothallus, and produces sperm or eggs, cross-fertilization will restore the proper number of chromosomes.

Some ferns, however, have adapted strategies for exploiting particularly isolated microhabitats in arid regions. In the desert of Big Bend, the chances are pretty low of the wind carrying two spores of the same species to the same distant spot, and close enough together that the sperm of one can swim to the egg of the other. So, many arid-land species have developed spores with a full complement of chromosomes. These spores grow into fully-developed ferns, skipping the sperm-and-egg stage altogether.

Because there has been no cross-fertilization, these plants are essentially clones of the parent. This strategy, then, allows for colonization of isolated habitat patches, but not for adapting to changing conditions through genetic variation. It may also help to explain how 80 species of ferns and their relatives have been identified in the arid trans-Pecos region of Texas!

Ferns have developed other strategies to deal with hot, dry conditions. Many have scales or long hairs that shield the surface of the frond from desiccating sun and wind, or leathery outer surfaces to minimize water loss. Arid-land ferns often have very small, finely-cut fronds, which allow for rapid heat dispersal. The Powdery Cloak Fern (Argyrochosma dealbata), which grows on rocks in Balcones canyons, has a whitish, mealy-looking, waxy substance (called farina) on the underside of the frond. In dry times, the leaf curls up to expose this light- and heat-reflecting surface, which also inhibits water loss.

Some ferns can lose up to 90% of the water from their tissues and still survive; some species can be dormant for several years. The fronds turn brown and brittle, but, upon wetting, “resurrect.” Such is the case with...
the Resurrection Fern (*Pleopeltis polypodioides*) common in east Texas, and at the extreme edge of its range here. The fronds of this species, too, curl upward when dry. But instead of farina, on the undersurface of the frond are specialized scales that can rapidly funnel water to the leaf tissue. The plant can resurrect in as little as 15 minutes!

The primary reference for this article was *The Ferns and Lycophytes of Texas*, by George M. Diggs, Jr. and Barney L. Lipscomb.

From the desert gardens of Big Bend to hawk watching on the Gulf Coast to caving and bat watching in the Hill Country, nature-oriented travel in Texas also includes lesser known getaways.

Organized by the seven official state travel regions, *Explore Texas* features descriptions of almost one hundred nature-oriented sites, including information about the best time to visit and why it’s worth going; location, and other logistics; and a “learn” section on the observations and natural phenomena a visitor might expect to experience.

Perfect for planning the family’s next outing, this book also contains a message of how nature tourism helps to protect biodiversity, promote conservation, and sustain the state’s tourism economy.

**Summer Reading**

*Explore Texas: A Nature Travel Guide*

by Mary O. Parker

Photographs by Jeff Parker

*Texas A&M University Press*

We think of the sprawling King Ranch as one of the state’s iconic cattle ranches. But the historic ranch’s 825,000 acres also provide pristine habitat for wildlife and are designated as an Important Bird Area. Over 360 bird species have been recorded on the property, including the largest known population of Ferruginous Pygmy Owls in the US. In addition to Northern Bobwhites and Wild Turkeys, the ranch is home to numerous tropical specialties including Green Jays, Great Kiskadees, Olive Sparrows, and more. The ranch is also located along several migratory pathways and is a fantastic location for spring and fall migrants and wintering birds.

The King Ranch’s commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation dates back to the early 1900s. In the late 1990s, Tom Langschied became involved with the King Ranch as a graduate student with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University, Kingsville. His thesis work involved doing bird surveys throughout the ranch for 2.5 years. After finishing his Master’s degree, the King Ranch hired Tom to start a nature tour program to complement their already existing historical/agricultural tourism activities. Tom grew up in Indiana and became interested in birding at an early age through his local Audubon Chapter and pursued a degree in Wildlife Science from Purdue University. Interestingly, his first birding trip to Texas was five years earlier which included passing through King Ranch on Hwy 77—he never expected to be living there a few years later.

“Finding out what was on the ranch was the first step in creating a Nature Tourism program,” said Langschied. “They needed to know the diversity of birds and their distribution.” Victor Emanuel also played a key role in convincing the ranch to start a program. Victor had been taking clients on tours of the ranch and felt there was a larger
market for them. In fact, the ranch is regarded as the birthplace of Texas wildlife management and game conservation, and has spurred the development of hunting regulations that have allowed deer and turkey populations to rebuild after years of over-harvesting. With Tom’s involvement, the ranch has continued to maintain important habitat for both game and non-game wildlife and the nature-tour program has continued to provide high quality experiences through a variety of bird and wildlife outings for over 20 years.

“The biggest challenge for wildlife conservation in Texas today is habitat loss from development,” said Langschied. “The cumulative loss of habitat is really alarming. And the second challenge in Texas is water—or the lack of.”

This year, the King Ranch has generously donated two birding packages that will be auctioned at our annual Victor Emanuel Conservation Award Luncheon on October 8. A private half-day bird/wildlife tour for four people, on the northern end of the ranch, is combined with a 1.5-hour bus tour exploring the history of the ranch.

A second full-day tour for two people includes a day of birding with lunch visiting the southern Norias division of the ranch. This part of the ranch is great birding for the rare Ferruginous Pygmy Owl and Tropical Parula. Other species to look for include White-tailed Hawk, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Vermilion Flycatcher, Botteri’s Sparrow, and Audubon’s Oriole. In 1947, famed conservationist Aldo Leopold called the King Ranch “one of the best jobs of wildlife restoration on the continent .... it is a gem among natural areas and must be kept intact.” Don’t miss your chance to experience it for yourself!
Why I Love and Cherish the Ashe Juniper

By Don Gardener

Golden-cheeked Warblers are drawn to the ranch owned by Pam Murfin and Don Gardner, who is one of this area’s best-known consulting arborists. The old growth Ashe junipers on his property provide warblers with essential nesting materials. An endangered species, Golden-cheeked Warblers are struggling to find adequate habitat in Central Texas to build nests and raise their young.

In 1980, my wife Pam and I moved from the lush Big Thicket near Livingston to a worn out, overgrazed, and eroded ranch in western Travis County. After studying natural forest succession in East Texas for 10 years and then moving to a hard scrabble Hill Country ranch with limestone and caliche sticking all over the place, I was distressed that so much of the Hill Country had become depleted.

At Horseshoe Bend Ranch, named after the bend in the Colorado River where it sits, we immediately took off the cows. We wanted to be a working ranch, so after building miles and miles of cross fences we came back with angora goats.

Over the next 10 years, I observed natural forest succession. I saw how quickly the Ashe junipers, also known as cedar trees, were multiplying in the most rundown areas of the ranch. Where areas were so eroded the ground was little white ridges of caliche, the Ashe junipers came up and scattered over the entire 250 acres.

After the cow era of 200 years and the folly of bulldozing the Balcones Escarpment to make grasslands for cows, only one plant—the Ashe juniper—could germinate on bare limestone and caliche. It did not need organic matter to germinate on these extremely hard alkaline materials. All it needed was a little moisture to get going.

Today some of those barren areas have become beautiful woodlands with an upper story of Ashe juniper, live oak, Spanish oak, Durand oak, wild cherry, Texas ash, cedar elm, sycamore and others. Also an understory is rapidly developing as the oaks and junipers lose their lower foliage to shade and get taller. These areas are developing a gorgeous understory of woody plants such as purple sage, flame and evergreen sumac, foresteria, mountain laurel, agarita and many others.
more. And in wet years like the last two, the ground story has established an amazing array of grasses under the trees.

This is a huge ecological success story that is being repeated in many areas of the Hill Country. I credit two factors: first, getting livestock off the land; second (and equally important), the amazing Ashe juniper trees.

In forestry terms, the Ashe juniper has become nature’s “pioneer species” of Central Texas. Nature always finds plants that can come into the most abused land and start the recovery process.

Watch and you’ll see that Ashe junipers have an annual needle cast where the oldest inside needles fall off. Under each juniper on the bare caliche or limestone is an ever-increasing ring of soil, made entirely from needle castings. Every year, the humus layer increases in width and depth as the junipers grow. Over time, live oaks, Spanish oaks and Durand oaks will germinate in the organic matter formed by the castings under the junipers.

Not only that, but Ashe junipers protect the oaks due to the prickly and spiky nature of juniper foliage and branches. Deer especially, but also cows, will not push into the foliage to pick off oak leaves. These young oaks can grow for years in the deep shade of the junipers, then outgrow them in height and push the junipers aside for their space in the sunlight.

I figured out that Ashe junipers were in fact native. After finding 200- to 300-year old junipers, I realized these trees did not invade from Mexico with the cows, as we had been told. Then I began to question the whole notion that junipers are water hogs. Tree identification books for North America report that western junipers like the Ashe juniper have compact root systems; in fact, all western junipers, as a natural characteristic, are water thrifty.

Today our ranch is vibrant and alive in the live oak/juniper woodlands of western Travis County. Yet I regularly hear the refrain: “Everybody says cut all the cedars down.”

We must get beyond the myths of the last century and begin making decisions based on reality. Unlike the Big Thicket (with 25 different oaks), we in Central Texas have relatively few tree species. We must upgrade Ashe juniper to the status it deserves.
A Mediterranean Feast!
At Chaetura Canyon

Saturday, September 10
6:00 pm - 10:00 pm
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 30 years of observation and research by Georgean and Paul Kyle. To insure 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 resource by attending an unforgettable evening 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 30 participants, so don’t wait too long! To secure your reservations, register here: https://travis.z2systems.com/np/clients/travis/event.jsp?event=532

Admission is $75 per Travis Audubon member ($100 for non-members) with all proceeds going to the Travis Audubon Chaetura Canyon maintenance fund. The fund is used for maintenance and ongoing conservation and education projects at Chaetura Canyon. Travis Audubon is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization.
Every year Baker Sanctuary hosts an Open House as an interactive way to engage the local community and Travis Audubon members. This year the Open House was held on May 7 and was graced with beautiful weather and, due to copious rain, the unusually verdant Firewheels and Mexican Hats provided a visually arresting background to the festivities as an added bonus. Over 250 visitors participated in the Open House but in case you missed it, it is my hope the following description of the event will entice you into visiting us next year!

One of the most popular activities was the guided nature hike. While some folks were intent on seeing our local celebrity, the Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA), many others were new to hiking and just wanted an introduction to the local ecology and landscape. Our four hike leaders were kept quite busy throughout the day as they tirelessly led multiple short hikes into the juniper/oak uplands and answered a stream of questions from excited children and adults alike. Golden-cheeked Warblers were reliably spotted as well as other crowd pleasers such as Painted Buntings, Summer Tanagers, Black-chinned Hummingbirds, and Carolina Chickadees.

Concurrent with the hikes a veritable smorgasbord of family friendly activities was held at the Jackie Arnold Education Center (JAEC). Kids could use shredded paper and a cookie cutter to craft a native seed ball or construct a bird feeder from peanut butter, pine cones, and seeds. For the more tool-oriented, nest box kits were available for purchase which could be built on site with help from a volunteer or

Among the Firewheel and Mexican Hat, Emma Dietrich catches bugs for youngsters to observe and identify. Heather Valey
transported home to be assembled at a later date. Children (and adults) learned common bird species at two stations, one which focused on visual identification and binoculars and another where an interactive display had participants matching bird songs to the correct species. Another popular station was the owl pellet dissection activity where folks received a barn owl pellet and dissected out the rodent bones. Some kids took it to the next level and, with the aid of a reference sheet, assembled some fairly complete rodent skeletons from their pellets! It seemed skulls were in short supply and the discovery of one elicited quite a bit of excitement when it occurred. To round out the activities, a Golden-cheeked Warbler themed bean bag toss was set-up near the pavilion as well as a station where kids could color and make their own bird masks.

New for this year, several vendors hosted tables and activities which turned out to be crowd pleasers. The good folks of Austin Wildlife Rescue hosted a table with abundant wildlife rehabilitation information and they also brought their mascot, Tito the ten-pound tortoise. Tito wandered about the pavilion area and contently munched grass while surrounded by a gaggle of kids. Emma Dietrich led families on several ‘bug walks’ where participants used nets to collect and then identify insects and spiders found near the Baker Cemetery. Finally, and arguably the most well attended activity of the day, Sky King Falconry put on an educational program with their raptors. They had hawks,
owls, falcons, vultures, and my favorite, a Kookaburra. At the end, attendees had the option to take a selfie with a raptor and Tito could only look on in jealousy as the birds stole his limelight.

Thanks to Our Volunteers
The Open House would not have been possible without the efforts of a cadre of twenty volunteers, many of whom stayed for the entire four-hour day. Not only did the volunteers lead the hikes and staff the activities, others worked behind the scenes to set-up the JAEC, coordinate hikes, facilitate parking, and help with the snack table and visitor sign-in. I cannot give enough thanks to those who volunteered and made the day possible. If you are reading this, please give yourself a pat on the back and know you are appreciated and valued. The next Open House will be in April/May 2017. If you have not made it out in the past, please consider a visit as a participant, volunteer, or both! While on the subject of volunteerism, hikers to the Sanctuary will notice a new Travis Audubon sign gracing the parking lot gate at 12221 Lime Creek Road. The old Baker Sanctuary sign, which was not very visible and had begun to rot, was replaced by Nathan Sloey as his Eagle Scout project. The new sign is two-sided and set at an angle to the road to make it more visible to drivers. The sign features the Travis Audubon logo with the ‘Listen. Look. Learn.’ motto. Many thanks to Nathan and the troop who helped him install it! Observant readers will notice that the GCWA has a brown belly instead of white —don’t worry, it will be white; there was a paint oversight during the installation but it is in the process of being corrected. In any event, the new sign is a wonderful new addition to the Sanctuary and greatly appreciated, thanks again Boy Scouts!

Sanctuary Work Days
We greatly appreciate our Sanctuary Work Day volunteers! Please join Travis Audubon Land Steward and Educator, Christopher Murray, to help us improve and maintain our special sanctuaries.

Blair Woods Sanctuary Work Day
Saturday, July 23, 9 am - noon
For details, see http://travisaudubon.org/audubonevent/blair-woods-sanctuary-volunteer-work-day-3
Three major events were held at and for Chaetura Canyon in April and May. The inaugural Birdathon event was on April 9 and sold out with a waiting list. Guests enjoyed breakfast, a nice walk through the Canyon that included the lower canyon trails, and finally a relaxing lunch on the deck overlooking the Canyon.

Our 10th annual Chalupas and Chimney Swift Mexican food buffet was held a bit earlier this year on April 30. This was also a sell out with loads of appetizers, the upper canyon trails open for wandering, followed by a spectacular Mexican food dinner. This was our first year to have a real “sit down” dinner complete with tables and chairs. The swifts put on a good show, but this year they decided to roost in the Castle Tower rather than the one adjacent to the deck. Consequently, the entry count was low. Guests did not seem to mind and had a great time watching the aerial antics of the sanctuary’s namesake. As a special treat, a 3-D Chimney Swift video created by one of our colleagues in North Carolina was presented—complete with 3-D glasses. Gasps and giggles abounded as the swifts seem to fly off of the screen into the dining area. “That one hit me in the forehead!!”

On May 15, the Connell family hosted the long-awaited official release of the children’s book *Adventures of a Chimney Swift Family* at their world-class event venue, The Greenhouse at Driftwood. More than 50 folks attended to purchase signed copies of the book written by Anne Donovan and Kay Hart. Limited edition prints by Georgean created for the book were also popular. More than $900 was raised from the event for the Chaetura Canyon Management Fund. Thanks so much to the Connell family and everyone who attended.
Chimney Swifts made a spectacular showing in mid-April when more than 1000 individuals came to roost and find shelter from a large storm system moving in from the north. The next day they continued on their migration northward leaving only the locals to inhabit the towers. As usual, the main roost fluctuated between 50 to 100 individuals through the end of May. The first eggs were recorded on April 29th and the first hatchlings emerged on May 24th.

This brings us to the Second Saturday Swift Watches: These events are held the 2nd Saturday in June, July, and August. It is a chance for you to visit Chaetura Canyon, enjoy beverages and snacks on the deck, and observe the Chimney Swifts do their thing up close and personal. Reservations are required and space is limited, so contact us ASAP to reserve your space at Kyle@ChimneySwifts.org

Coming the second Saturday in September is our annual fall fundraiser: Mediterranean Feast! It is always a sell-out, so don’t wait too long to get your reservations. Check the Travis Audubon calendar for more info.

We hope to see you in the Canyon soon!

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**Travis Audubon Welcomes New Staff Member**

Please join me in welcoming Jordan Price, our new Manager of Membership and Administration. Jordan is taking the place of Janet Reed who left in June to pursue work as a wildlife biologist. Jordan is from southern California and graduated from Northern Arizona University in 2003 with a Master of Public Administration. He spent several years in the Peace Corp in Africa and ran a social service non-profit agency while living in a national park in East Africa. He has broad experience working with volunteers, managing projects and fundraising.

~ Joan Marshall
What fun was had by all who participated in Birdathon. And, we made a lot of money for Travis Audubon! Thanks to all who participated in events or teams, planned events, or donated to Birdathon—we could not have done it without you. At press time Birdathon 2016 raised over $29,000 for Travis Audubon.

The winning teams were announced at the Birdathon Party, May 22, at the home of Nancy Townsend and will live on in the virtual plaque of winners. This year’s winners are:

- Team with most species while birding less than 6 hours: Roadrunner Racers lead by Sebastian Casarez
- Team with most species while birding all day: Gone Pishing led by Shelia Hargis
- Team earning most money while birding less than 6 hours: Corsican Cruisers lead by Jo Wilson
- Team earning most money while birding all day: Gone Pishing led by Shelia Hargis

Thank you all for helping make Birdathon happen. It’s never too early to start thinking now about fun events and teams for next year.
Featured Auction Items

Here are just a few of the distinctive, one-of-a-kind auction items featured at this year’s Victor Emanuel Luncheon on October 8:

• Birding in Belize with a 2-night stay at the Ka’ana Boutique Resort & Spa
• Three-night birding getaway to the Rio Grande Valley at The Inn at Chachalaca Bend
• Birding in Mexico with Chiapas Birding Adventures
• Cornell Lab of Ornithology behind-the-scenes tour
• King Ranch birding tour with lunch for four

Individual tickets go on sale August 15, subject to availability. Reserve your table today: http://travisaudubon.org/feature/victor-emanuel-conservation-award-luncheon
Film Screening: The Messenger
Sunday July 10
Director: Su Rynard
2 pm at Marchesa Hall and Theater
6226 Middle Fiskville Road
$10 Admission

Can you imagine a world without birdsong? The Messenger is a new documentary about songbirds and what they tell us about the state of our planet and our shared future.

Su Rynard, Director of The Messenger, said of her motivation to make the film, “In recent years I noticed that the birds I used to see and hear were no longer around. To understand why this is happening and what can be done, we embarked on a journey. Over the course of a year, following the seasons and the birds, our team filmed on three continents. We discovered that the causes are many, and each species has a different story to tell. Yet everywhere we went, we met people who are working for change—as this is not just about the future of birds, it’s about us too.”

Young Birders Club: Migratory Birds
Sunday, July 3
8 – 9:30 am, Berry Springs Park

Are you curious about the Migratory Birds we have here in our community? Join Award-winning Travis Audubon Youth member Sebastian Casarez on this bird walk/talk about our Migratory Birds. Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/event.jsp?event=529

Young Birders Club: Herons and Egrets
Sunday, August 7
8 – 9:30 am, Lake Creek Trail

Learn birdwatching tips on how to identify herons and egrets from award-winning Travis Audubon Youth Member Sebastian Casarez. We will meet in the parking lot off Braes Valley and Effingham. Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/event.jsp?event=1046
Classes

Digiscoping Workshop with Clay Taylor
Instructor: Clay Taylor
Friday, July 8, 7 – 9 pm and Saturday, July 9, 8 am – 11:30 am

Clay Taylor of Swarovski Optics will teach a workshop on digiscoping—using a camera to take photographic images directly through the eyepiece of a spotting scope.

Tuition: $45 for TAS members & non-members
Limit: 10 participants
Questions: Frances Cerbins at fcerbins@yahoo.com
Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/np/clients/travis/event.jsp?event=1591&

Texas Nature Trackers Workshop: Tips and Tricks on the Use of iNaturalist
Instructor: Cullen Hanks
Saturday, July 23, 8:30 am – 2:00 pm

This workshop focuses on iNaturalist and how Texas Parks and Wildlife uses it to support research and conservation efforts. The workshop will teach you how to improve the overall quality of your nature observations. You’ll also learn how to:

• Use the iNaturalist app
• Include photos and sound recordings with your observations
• Efficiently add GPS coordinates to your photos
• Create observations based on the metadata already attached to your photos

You’ll have time to practice observing in the field and see a demonstration of tools for identifying observations. If you have a laptop, you can also upload and identify your observations with more experienced iNatters on hand to answer questions.

Registrants will be sent further information about downloading the app and setting up an iNaturalist account.

Cullen Hanks is a Texas Nature Tracker Biologist in the Wildlife Diversity Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife and serves on the board of the Travis Audubon Society. He grew up in Texas with a love for natural history and outdoor adventure. Cullen earned a BA in biology from Cornell University, and a MA in Latin American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. In his masters, he focused on issues relating to biodiversity conservation and conducted research on the economics of the wildlife trade. Cullen has extensive experience with the collection and management of data on rare and threatened species. He is very passionate about being a naturalist and the contribution of the naturalist community to conservation. Cullen lives in Austin, Texas with his wife.
To learn more about the Texas Nature Trackers Program go to http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/

Tuition: $10
Questions: Jane Tillman at jtillman@utexas.edu
Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/event.jsp?event=1075

Shorebird Identification
Instructors: Jeff Patterson and Eric Stager
Sundays, July 31, August 7 and 21, 4 – 8 pm
Optional field trip (Corpus Christi): Friday, August 26, 5 pm – Sunday, August 28, noon

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 2016! 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 spectacular long-distance migrations (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 Travis Audubon class on Birdsongs, and Eric grew up on the coast and is an active member of the Travis Audubon field trip committee. Both have been birding most of their lives and this will be their fourth year to teach the shorebird class. Class lectures occur from 4 to 6:30 pm at Hornsby Bend, followed by a short field trip to the Hornsby Bend ponds till about 8 pm. Since class occurs from 4 – 8 pm, students are encouraged to bring their picnic dinners.

If you have taken the class before and want to go on the field trip to the Coastal Bend only, contact Nancy Radding to be put on a waiting list in case there is space available.

Tuition: $75 TAS members, $85 non-members, $45 for optional field trip
Limit: 5 – 15 participants required for Corpus Christi field trip; wait list accepted
Questions: Nancy Radding at nradding@sbcglobal.net
Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/event.jsp?event=1085

Fall Warblers
Instructor: Doug Booher
Tuesdays, September 6, 20, and 27, 7 – 9 pm,
Local field trip: Saturday, September 24
Optional field trip (Corpus Christi): September 30 – October 2

Can you confidently identify a yellow warbler in its fall plumage? Do you know the
difference between a Philadelphia vireo and a Tennessee warbler? Ever seen just a glimpse of the underside of a warbler and not known what to think? Warblers can be very challenging to identify. They appear in a variety of plumages and can be so active or skulky that it is hard to get a good look. Learn to quickly identity warblers from various viewpoints by piecing together diagnostic features. When you leave this class you should be able to definitively tell the difference between the most common warblers in Texas even in their fall plumages! The class will use extensive photos and videos to illustrate multiple viewing angles and song files to hone your ear. Then we will practice our skills in the field.

The class is designed for birders with at least one year of birding experience.
Tuition: $70 TAS members, $100 non-members, $50 for optional field trip
Location: Central Austin
Limit: 16 participants
Questions: Cindy Cannon at prsart@yahoo.com
Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/event.jsp?event=1235

**eBird Workshop**
Instructor: Shelia Hargis
**Wednesday, August 17, 6 – 9 pm**

This class is for those who are new or fairly new to eBird. eBird is an online database that birders can use to store their bird sightings. The data that birders across the world enter is used by other birders to learn more about birds and by researchers as they answer questions about bird populations, range expansion, and other pressing questions about birds and their conservation. Several of the last State of the Birds reports have relied on eBird data along with data from Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys to draw conclusions about the state of our birds.

We’ll meet at a Central Austin location. Computers will be provided. We will start by creating an eBird account and entering a checklist. You’ll learn how to:

- Look at your data and the various statistics available for exploring your data (how many birds are on your Life List, where did you see those birds and when)
- Use eBird to build your Life List (target species, alerts)
- Explore all of the data to answer your questions about birds (Where can I go birding when I go visit Aunt Suzy? Where can I find a Horned Lark in Travis County?)
- Access other information (various monthly contests, BirdCast, migration animation maps)

It will be a very full class with lots of useful and fun information.

Shelia Hargis is the instructor for this class. She has been birding for 20 years and loves birds! She spends most of her free time birding or thinking about birds and her passion and enthusiasm for birds and birding is infectious. Shelia teaches Travis Audubon’s Introduction to Birds & Birding.
Painted Bunting. Isaac Sanchez

class, gives presentations on a variety of bird topics, surveys birds for the City of Austin and the USGS Breeding Bird Survey as well as private landowners, regularly leads birding field trips, and is Past President of Travis Audubon. She is currently on the Travis Audubon Board of Directors (again!) and the Education Committee and is President-Elect of the Texas Ornithological Society.

Tuition: $30 TAS members, $35 Non-members
Limit: 12 participants
Questions: Shelia at intro2birds@gmail.com or 512-294-0272.
Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/np/clients/travis/event.jsp?event=1596&

Birding 102
Instructor: Shelia Hargis

The goals of the Birding 102 series are to continue the intensive instruction and practice in the field that we had during Introduction to Birds & Birding; to visit more interesting birding locations; to see more great birds; and to experience and discuss different aspects of birds and the birding year such as migration, breeding, behavior, and conservation. The course is comprised of numerous field trips throughout the year.

Due to the popularity of the series, Birding 102 field trips are only open to graduates of Travis Audubon’s Intro to Birds classes who are members of Travis Audubon. The course consists of six to eight field trips throughout the year. Each field trip will be listed as a stand-alone session and registration will be required for each field trip.

Shelia loves teaching Introduction to Birds & Birding and looks for any reason to go birding with her students after they have graduated.

July Birding 102 – Aquarena Springs Breeding Birds
Saturday, July 16, 6:30 am – 2:00 pm

We’re headed south to Aquarena Springs in San Marcos for the July Birding 102 field trip. Summer is a great time to focus on the breeding birds in our area. It is also a good time to observe interesting behavior such as territorial defense, mating behavior, nesting behavior, and care of young. The goals of this field trip are to see as many of the park’s birds as possible and attempt to interpret their behavior. Some of the likely species include: Neotropic Cormorant, nearly all the herons and egrets, Red-shouldered Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Couch’s Kingbird, Red-eyed Vireo, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Common Yellowthroat, Summer Tanager, and Painted Bunting.

The field trip is only open to graduates of Travis Audubon’s Intro to Birds & Birding classes who are members of Travis Audubon. Feel free to join now if you’re not already a member.

Tuition: $25 for TAS members only
Prerequisites: Introduction to Birds & Birding Registration required.
Classes Continued

August Birding 102 – Central Austin and eBird
Saturday, August 27, 6:45 am – 1:30 pm

The August Birding 102 field trip will be to a couple of birding locations in the central Austin area, likely Camp Mabry and the Triangle Pond. There should be breeding birds still engaged in getting the last nestlings of the summer out of the nest and there may be some early migrants showing up. Most of the species we encounter will be our common species. This will give participants more practice with the birds that they should get to know very well. In addition to seeing and identifying as many birds as possible, we’ll practice counting birds and entering our results into eBird in the field using the eBird app. Then over lunch, we’ll summarize our checklists and explore other aspects of eBird.

The field trip is only open to graduates of Travis Audubon’s Intro to Birds & Birding classes who are members of Travis Audubon. Feel free to join now if you’re not already a member!

Tuition: $25 for TAS members only
Prerequisites: Introduction to Birds & Birding
Registration required.
Questions: Shelia Hargis at intro2birds@gmail.com or 512-294-0272
Register at: https://travis.z2systems.com/event.jsp?event=1080

Ask a Birder
Question of the Month

Are Scott’s Orioles common in the Austin area? All of my bird books say they are a west Texas bird, but I have several that are visiting my hummingbird feeder. They have been coming for a couple of years.– Doug

The range of Scott’s Orioles extends just into western Travis County, and sightings are recorded in the western half of Austin and around Lake Travis on an annual basis. So while they are not a common bird in the area, it is very possible to have them visiting your yard, especially if you live in the western half of Travis County. If they stay all summer, it might be possible for you to document breeding in the county, which would be really cool!

The best way to document your sightings would be to use the online bird database eBird, which is run by Cornell University. You can set up an account and submit your observations. You can also document breeding by posting photos of a nest (if you happen to find one) or of young birds that come to your feeder. You can set up your eBird account here: https://secure.birds.cornell.edu/cassso/account/create?service=https%3A%2F%2Febird.org%2Febird%2Flogin%2Fcas%3Fportal%3Dtx

~ T.A. Ask-a-Birder Expert, Dan Smith
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Travis Audubon Wishes to Thank its Members and Donors
(April 1, 2015 to May 31, 2016)

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