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Claude’s River Survey: July 1, 2017  
JULY 5, 2017

Each month, Claude Morris leads an ecological survey on the Colorado River. Participants bring their own canoes and kayaks. On July 1st, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, they surveyed 6 miles of the river (Howard Lane to Utley (969) Bridge, Bastrop). Claude sent us the following report:

Whenever the Cicadas are noisy to the point it is difficult to hear other things, you know it is summer in Central Texas. From the time we left Austin Colony all the way to Webberville we had the constant sound of the Cicada. If fact, as I write this, I still think I hear the pulsing rhythmic call. When I was a kid we used to go to the beach and for hours after we left you could feel the rhythmic push of the waves. Yep, same thing.

Two Kingfisher species today, Belted and Green. We found another Osprey. Here is one we do not get to list very often, Anhinga. Best bird of the day, even though it was not in the survey area we are still giving it the most honorable mention, a Roseate Spoonbill. Turtles and Snakes are escaping the summer noon day heat. We saw very few.

Butterflies, damselflies and dragonflies and getting very numerous. Sulfurs, Swallowtails, Hackberry Emperors. Queens, Question Marks were all listed It’s hard to get a good photo of a damselfly.

Kids at Commons Ford  
JULY 10, 2017

By Janice Sturrock

Seventy-five fifth graders from Valley View Elementary attended the “Kids at Commons Ford” pilot program, on May 18, 2017. The program was developed as an educational outreach effort by the Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Organization, a committee of the Travis Audubon Society. Ten volunteers from Capitol Area Master Naturalists, Travis Audubon Society and other groups guided excited students on a day of exploration and discovery at Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park. The 215 acre park is owned by the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department and provides several diverse habitats for outdoor exploration.

Using tools like insect nets, bug boxes, binoculars and meter sticks, small groups of 9-10 kids assumed the role of scientists for the day as they hiked around the 40 acre restored prairie while observing and documenting birds, flowers, grasses, butterflies, lizards and more. In addition to exploring and documenting their discoveries on the prairie, the students hiked through a wooded canyon where they observed tadpoles and black fly larva in the nearby creek.

Volunteer leaders assisted students in comparing the open prairie which consisted of 3-4 foot tall prairie grasses and flowers and very few trees, with the wooded canyon trail which hosted tall Ashe juniper and live oak trees as well as rocky cliff outcroppings. The students from Valley View Elementary, located in the Eanes Independent School
District, all live in the neighborhood near Commons Ford Park. Students and parent chaperones enjoyed learning more about the prairie and the park. Many students had visited the park before and all were encouraged to come back to the park with family and friends in the future.

The program was developed over the last 2 years and was modeled after the “Kids on the Prairie” program at Tandy Hills Natural Area in Fort Worth. A colorful field guide was created for the program and provides an outline of content information for volunteer guides and an educational journal for students to record observations, descriptions, thoughts, drawings, time and date and weather conditions.

The purpose of the program was to provide students with an outdoor educational field experience to learn about components of a prairie ecosystem. Students had fun in the outdoors while exploring and discovering the natural world outside of their classroom. A poster depicting a prairie grass with underground roots over 12 feet long emphasized the importance of prairies in providing natural erosion control and providing a filter to remove pollutants from rain water as it percolates through the ground to the water table. Hopefully, students and parents will all learn to conserve and preserve that which we come to know and understand.

The Children in Nature Network, a national organization promoting time in nature for children and families, has conducted research that shows that spending time in nature has positive effects on brain development for both children and adults. Some may say that the highlight of the day was spotting the great horned owlets in the pecan bottom. Or maybe it was the opportunity to be in the park for the day, or seeing the incredible display of color on the prairie exhibited in wildflowers like sunflowers, Indian blankets, wine cups and purple thistle; or a chance to see tadpoles in a pool along the creek, or discover black fly larva on the rocks under the flowing water, or the fun of sharing a day with your friends in the great outdoors.

Read more about the restoration work at Commons Ford Prairie here.

You can visit Commons Ford Prairie with a Travis Audubon guide on August 19 for a Prairie Bird Walk with Shelia Hargis. More details and registration here!

**Battling Invasives at Blair Woods**

**JULY 13, 2017**

By Chris Murray, Land Manager & Educator

One of the most common mistakes when managing a significant invasive plant infestation is to underestimate the tenacity of the species you are attempting to eradicate. They are invasive for many reasons that include being pre-adapted to the soil conditions, having no significant predators or disease, and prolific seed production. Their seeds persist in the seed bank for many years and are difficult to kill, even with judicial use of herbicide. As a result, giving up too early is fairly common. At Travis Audubon, we are committed to seeing our restoration work through.

In 2008, the Blair Woods Team was formed with the express purpose of reclaiming Blair
Woods from the invasive plants which had taken over the majority of the property. While an impressive array of invasive plants could be found at Blair, by far the most abundant was Small-leaf Privet, which formed acres of a near monoculture, shading out any native plants. Work days were scheduled, volunteers recruited, and nine years later, the battle continues. Progress can be maddeningly slow as an area is cleared and then the seed bank erupts with new invasives, which are then cleared out only to be replaced by weedy, native invasive plants such as Stickleaf and Ragweed. However, the only way to proceed is to not lose faith. With consistent effort, the battle against invasives can be won.

From January 2016 through June of 2017, twelve work days were held at Blair Woods for a total of 115 participants and 420 volunteer hours. Approximately 60 cubic yards of invasive plants (mostly small-leaf privet) were removed from Blair, chipped and spread on the trails. In addition to the invasive plant removal effort, we expanded and improved the parking lot, upgraded the entry gate and fence, cleared and widened trails, installed a variety of native plants near the Chimney Swift tower, constructed new steps near the parking lot and tower, and installed three new bridges now gracing creek crossings. Blair Woods also benefited from its first Eagle Scout project. Paul Sennyey and his troop cleared about $\frac{3}{4}$ an acre of invasive plants, chipping and spreading the remains. None of this would have been possible without the help of volunteers, many thanks once again.

With all the effort to reclaim the landscape from the invasive plants sometimes we forget to take a step back and remember why the work is so important. East Austin is a very urbanized section of the city and Blair Woods is one of only a few parcels left undeveloped in the area of any significant size. At ten acres, Blair Woods is home to native plants and animals that are being squeezed out everywhere else. As the habitat is slowly converted to a more natural state it will better be able to support a greater diversity of wildlife and provide a green oasis for those willing to explore.

The next restoration days at Blair Woods will take place on July 29 and September 23. Sign up to volunteer on our calendar!

**July Bird Forecast**

JULY 17, 2017

What to watch for in July: Purple Martin Parties and Chimney Swifts

Roosting Purple Martins

On Friday and Saturday evenings in July join Travis Audubon to witness one of Austin’s famous phenomena – a Purple Martin migratory roost – which may have 300,000 to 400,000 birds. Before our largest swallows head to South America for the winter they stage here. The juvenile birds that were born this year use this time to improve their stamina, and all the birds need to fatten up for their long flight. For years the roost was at Highland Mall, but in recent years it has moved. No one knows why. Nor does anyone know how long any individual bird stays at the roost. Some may just be here overnight, while others stay a week or two. Some birds were born locally but others have flown a distance to join the roost.

This year the birds have chosen to roost by Texas Land & Cattle at the junction of IH 35/290. (Please park on Clayton Lane, not in the restaurant parking lot.) You will be treated
to an acrobatic hurricane of birds as the Purple Martins “swirl” in the skies above the roosting site each evening. It’s better than the bats! Binoculars are optional. Lawn chairs, picnic blankets, cameras, and hats are highly recommended. Learn more.

**Chimney Swifts**

Chimney Swifts also gather in migratory communal roosts (of up to 10,000 birds), but generally this occurs in September. In July the young of the year are newly-fledged, leaving their nest sites in chimneys, incinerators and hollow trees to learn to hunt on the wing. Chimney Swifts, like Purple Martins, are aerial insectivores, capturing flying insects. Unlike Purple Martins, Chimney Swifts do not perch. You will never see them lined up on a wire. Instead swifts cling to vertical surfaces when at rest. Chimney Swifts have small cigar-shaped bodies only 5.25 inches long, and incredible 14 inch wingspans. Compare this to the Purple Martin’s 8 inch length and 18 inch wingspan.

Both Chimney Swifts and Purple Martins are chatty birds. Often you will hear them before you see them. Chimney Swifts chitter and twitter, sometimes with hard chip notes. Purple Martins have a fuller, throatier sound.

Chimney Swifts and Purple Martins use human-provided housing in the form of brick chimneys and gourds respectively. Travis Audubon has a preserve for Chimney Swifts in the Apache Shores area, occasionally open to the public in the summer months. There you can see several housing examples, including the sanctuary stewards’ home, which has double chimneys built for the birds. Travis Audubon also offers an early spring class for would-be Purple Martin landlords.

Travis Audubon Field Trips—Beginners welcome. Learn more about central Texas birds by going on a free field trip. July is hot but the birds are still out there. Check the Travis Audubon calendar for details.

Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Walk: Saturday, July 15, 7:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Over 330 species of birds have been seen at this famous east Austin birding location. No registration required.

The Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park has a restored 40 acre prairie that supports grassland birds like Dickcissels and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. The wildflowers and native grasses attract butterflies too. This popular walk requires registration.

July is a good time to be an indoor air-conditioned bird watcher. If you are a hummingbird lover, learn how to identify them in a two-part class coming up in mid-July.

There is an optional field trip to west Texas in August where you can practice your skills. Backyard birds are the focus of a late July offering. A three-part specialized class on shorebird identification also begins in late July. Shorebirds do occur in Austin, landing here to rest and refuel as they travel between their summering and wintering grounds.

**COMPILED BY JANE TILLMAN, TRAVIS AUDUBON VOLUNTEER**
**REPOSTED WITH PERMISSION FROM KXAN’S WEATHER BLOG**
Susan Combs, Endangered Species Act Opponent, Joins Department of the Interior
JULY 18, 2017

Conservation efforts will face another adversary as former Texas Comptroller Susan Combs has been nominated to serve as the Department of the Interior’s Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget. Travis Audubon Executive Director Joan Marshall was asked to comment by Texas Monthly:

“Susan Combs’ appointment as assistant secretary of the Interior is not welcome news for conservation. Combs and the Trump administration aim to roll back environmental protections in the name of economic progress. As Texas Comptroller, Susan Combs fought enforcement of the Endangered Species Act in Texas and started a war against the Golden-cheeked Warbler. As assistant secretary, she will have a much bigger arsenal to wage a much larger war.

We’re at a critical moment in our history and need to decide what kind of world we want to live in: A world that includes birds and birdsongs, wild spaces and clean rivers, or a world paved over with parking lots. What is nature worth? We shouldn’t measure forests by their board feet alone or rivers just by their hydroelectric power.

“If we manage nature for short-sighted, short-term gains, nothing will be left for future generations.”

Read full coverage by R.G. Ratcliffe in Texas Monthly. In the face of building threats to birds and wildlife, your help is needed more than ever. Support Travis Audubon’s mission with a donation or membership today!

Trump Administration Preparing Texas Wildlife Refuge for First Border Wall Segment
JULY 19, 2017

A mass hike and tour of Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is taking place on Sunday August 13 to protest the Trump administration’s plan to cut off this wonderful wildland with a border wall! More details here. If you are interested in traveling to the march with Travis Audubon, please contact Jordan Price, membership@travisaudubon.org.

Home to at least 400 bird species, the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is one of the top birding destinations in North America. The refuge is home to the rare Sabal Palm, Texas ocelots, Gulf Coast jaguarundi, and almost half of all butterfly species found in the United States. Federal officials have selected the refuge, located ten miles southeast of McAllen, as ground zero for the first segment of the coast to coast border wall with Mexico. Established in 1943 for the protection of migratory birds, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is positioned along the east-west and north-south juncture of two major bird migratory routes.

For at least six months, private contractors and U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have been quietly preparing to build the first piece of the border wall, in the
form of a levee, through this critically important wildlife refuge in South Texas. The federally owned 2,088-acre refuge, called the “crown jewel of the national wildlife refuge system” by US Fish and Wildlife Service, could see levee construction begin as early as January 2018, according to a federal official who has been involved in the planning but asked to remain anonymous.

Earlier this month, the House Appropriations Committee approved $1.6 billion to be allocated toward construction of the southern border wall. The proposed border wall plans for the wildlife refuge call for building a road south of the wall and clearing refuge land on either side of the wall for surveillance, cameras and light towers.

Congressman Filemon Vela, from Brownsville, told the Observer, “We’re going to come up with a plan and do everything we can to stop it. These refuges are sacred from an environmental standpoint. There’s so little protected land left and we need to do whatever we can to save it.”

Travis Audubon urges its members to call their Congressional representatives, Senators, and other federal officials to let them know that Texas wildlife deserves freedom.

**Texas Bird Project Art Opening**
JULY 24, 2017

Texas Bird Project | Frank X Tolbert 2
OPENING RECEPTION
August 4, 2017 from 6 to 8 PM
Flatbed Press and Gallery 2830 East MLK Jr Blvd Austin, Texas 78702

Frank X Tolbert 2 has a magical way of interpreting the world with line and color. For the past three years he has explored the birds of Texas in paintings, etchings and drawings. In the process Tolbert’s birds have been transformed through his work into darkly familiar personalities. Flatbed is excited to show the large scale paintings, prints and drawings that have emerged from his ornithological sojourn. Expect the unexpected for these are no ordinary birds. Tolbert’s Texas Birds fly artistic boundaries.

Contact: Annalise Gratovich 512.477.9328*30

**Notes From the Canyon**
JULY 27, 2017

Visitors to Chaetura Canyon will notice some great new additions to our trail network at the Sanctuary! Thanks to the hard work of volunteers in the winter and spring, we have been able to complete a connective trail through the new property addition, construction of more than 50 new steps, and installation of a new bridge in the lower Canyon. This trail will ultimately connect the new Windows on Nature wildlife viewing area with the main trail system.

The Windows on Nature is a wonderful new feature for Chaetura Canyon that provides a place to view the flora and fauna in a comfortable, relaxed setting away from the residence. Constructed of all recycled materials, the Windows on Nature includes
benches, shade and camouflage to observe activity on the Champaign Notch tract. More than 60 new plantings of native vegetation will enhance the already diverse plant life and provide food and habitat for birds, butterflies and other nectoring insects. Many butterfly larval host plants have also been added. Several feeders and a small water feature have been installed to enhance the food supply, but the focus is to create a place to observe wildlife “in the wild” rather than on feeders. During April and May alone, more than 40 species of birds, butterflies, reptiles and mammals were recorded. Future plans include making the site more sophisticated with a metal roof, rainwater collection system, a composting toilet and ADA accessibility. These plans will require funding outside the normal fundraising activities at Chaetura Canyon. Anyone interested in sponsoring any aspect of this project is invited to contact the Sanctuary Stewards (Kyle@ChimneySwifts.org).

The 2017 Event Season at Chaetura Canyon began with the annual Chaetura Canyon Birdathon on April 15th. Fifty participants joined the Stewards for breakfast, a tour of the Canyon and wrapped up with a delicious lunch on the deck overlooking the sanctuary. The Chalupas and Chimney Swifts fundraising dinner took place on May 6th, the inaugural Chaetura Canyon Crawl on the morning of May 13th and Second Saturday Swift Watch that same evening. An Appreciation Day for the Board of Directors, Advisory Council and TAS Staff was held on May 28th, and was accompanied by a spectacular thunderstorm. The storm subsided just as presentations on the three TAS sanctuaries wrapped up, and several of the participants took a twilight tour of the Lower Canyon Trails before returning to watch the Chimney Swifts go to roost.

June brought another Second Saturday Canyon Crawl and Second Saturday Swift Watch – both of which were booked to capacity. There are still spots available on the last Canyon Crawl of the summer to be held August 5th. You can register by contacting the Kyles via email.

August will be a slow month at Chaetura Canyon while the Kyles travel to Lac Èdouard, Quebec to assist with the construction of several new Chimney Swift Towers in the northern-most range of their favorite birds.

The final scheduled event of the year will be the Mediterranean Feast fundraising dinner on September 16th. This is usually a sell-out, so register early online on our calendar or contact us directly via email (kyle@chimneyswifts.org).

Check the calendar in the fall for some possible additions to our Chaetura Canyon event season!

We hope to see you in the Canyon soon! Georgean and Paul Kyle, Sanctuary Stewards

**Golden-cheeked Warbler Beer!**

**JULY 27, 2017**

In preparation for the launch of the first beer to be named after the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler, Jordan Price, Travis Audubon's Director of Membership, met with David Pasternak, Blue Owl Brewing's Head Brewer. While chatting in the barrel room, Dave asked Jordan for specific details about the life of the Golden-cheeked Warbler and what made it so special. Unbeknownst to Jordan, Dave was looking for creative ways in
which to incorporate specific attributes of this tiny Texas native into the flavor profile of the beer.

Come join us on August 25, at 7:00 PM at Blue Owl Brewing (2400 East Cesar Chavez, Austin) for the launch of the “Golden-cheeked Wild Barrel“! A Filipino/Mexican Fusion food truck will be parked outside the brewery for snacks and dinner!

**Save Santa Ana! March on August 13**  
**JULY 31, 2017**

Save Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and Lower Rio Grande Valley Sierra Club are organizing a mass hike and tour of Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge to protest the developing plan to cut off this wonderful wildland with a border wall. For at least six months, private contractors and U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have been quietly preparing to build the first piece of the border wall, in the form of a destructive levee, through the critically important Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in South Texas.

The hike will take place August 13, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM at the refuge. Travis Audubon will be taking part in the hike to protect this important habitat and birding destination. If you would like to travel with our caravan from Austin, please contact our office at 512-300-2473 or volunteer@travisaudubon.org.

If you plan to attend the hike, remember to bring plenty of water, sun protection and bug repellant. Plan to arrive promptly at 9, as the hike will begin at 9:15. Signs are not necessary, as there will be a banner. March participants may also be interested in attending the Save the Mission! Save the River! Resist the Wall! event taking place in Mission, TX near Santa Ana on August 12. Santa Ana is an amazingly diverse remnant of the riparian forest that once lined the Rio Grande Delta, and hiking it is like walking back in time. Over 400 bird species can be found here, some of which are subtropical species whose ranges do not extend further north into the U.S. It’s also the heart of the ecotourism economy in the Rio Grande Valley.

**Legal Action Taken to Save the Golden-cheeked Warbler**  
**AUGUST 3, 2017**

Travis Audubon Society is extremely concerned about the recent suit filed to remove the Golden-cheeked Warbler from the Endangered Species List. This action has been taken by the Texas General Land Office with support of the Texas Public Policy Foundation against the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

On August 1st, Travis Audubon Society, the Texas Ornithological Society, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Defenders of Wildlife filed a motion in federal district court to intervene into the suit to oppose the effort to delist the Golden-cheeked Warbler. The suit claims that warbler populations have recovered and no longer need protection. However, no new evidence has been presented and Golden-cheeked Warbler habitat continues to diminish each year.
Travis Audubon stands by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s decision to uphold the listing of the Golden-cheeked Warbler. In 2016 the Agency said, “Due to ongoing, widespread destruction of its habitat, the species continues to be in danger of extinction throughout its range.”

We intend to oppose the delisting request with our utmost efforts. If you want to get involved, please call the office at 512/300-2473, or click here to make a donation. Learn more.

**Commons Ford Prairie Designated as a Monarch Watch “Monarch Waystation”**

**AUGUST 6, 2017**

Commons Ford Prairie was recently designated a “Monarch Waystation” by the organization, Monarch Watch, a nonprofit educational outreach program based at the University of Kansas that focuses on the monarch butterfly, its habitat, and its spectacular fall migration. Monarch Watch has one of the most widely known and respected “citizen scientist” monarch habitat projects in the U.S., with initiatives directed toward monarch tagging programs to track the insect’s migratory pathway.

The actions at Commons Ford Prairie support the City of Austin’s own initiatives aimed at helping this species in peril. In 2015, Austin signed the Monarch Mayoral Pledge through the National Wildlife Federation and is in the “Leadership Circle.”

Additionally, the City Council passed a resolution in May of 2015 to implement as best as possible plans to increase milkweed, the only plant on which monarch butterflies lay their eggs, on city property.

The reason for the concern about the iconic insect is its decline over the past 20 years. Monarch Joint Venture, another organization devoted to the recovery of the species, provides data each year on the approximate number of the butterflies at their overwintering site in Central Mexico. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is exploring the possibility of listing the species as endangered.

The Commons Ford Prairie Committee is committed to creating and maintaining habitat for native birds as well as other native pollinator species important to the health of the prairie.

Additionally, in April 2017, Commons Ford Prairie received a grant for free milkweed plugs from Monarch Watch as part of their annual grant program (value of ~$1500 to City of Austin).

Milkweed is the host plant for monarch butterflies. Part of the reason for the decline of the monarch butterfly is decreasing milkweed habitat and range. There are 36 species of milkweed in Texas (Texas Parks and Wildlife), and four species found in the park. One species, Asclepias asperula (antelope horns milkweed), is by far the one most suited. The committee applied and received a grant of 500 free antelope horns milkweed plugs. The plants were provided by Monarch Watch through their nation-wide “Bring Back the Monarchs” Program. The mission of this program is to address changes in agricultural
practices and development which decimated monarch habitat and to restore habitats for
monarchs, pollinators, and other wildlife. The goals of this program are to restore 20
milkweed species, used by monarch caterpillars as food, to their native ranges throughout
the United States and to encourage the planting of nectar-producing native flowers that
support adult monarchs and other pollinators.

To participate in Monarch Watch’s Milkweed Restoration Program, applicants for
restoration must demonstrate that they have a land management plan and that other nectar
sources are either pre-existing or are included in the new planting. Commons Ford Prairie
is a very good example of the conditions for which the program is looking. For more
information on Monarch Watch visit www.monarchwatch.org.

Two members of the Commons Ford Prairie Committee, as well as one other volunteer,
planted the milkweed plugs at several locations in the prairie in May. As a result of good
rains in late May and early June, the plugs are thriving.
In 2016, the Commons Ford Prairie Organization merged with Travis Audubon Society
to ensure the prairie’s long-term sustainability.

Today, the 40-acre restored native prairie at Commons Ford Metropolitan Park supports
an amazing diversity of wildlife and grassland birds. The prairie explodes in color
throughout the spring and early summer and is teeming with hundreds of species of birds,
butterflies, insects and other wildlife throughout the year.

Much remains to be done to combat a potential re-infestation of invasive plants, as was
the case before restoration, and to augment growth through further native seed plantings.
Through its Commons Ford Prairie Committee, Travis Audubon Society conducts bird,
plant—and, in future—pollinator events at the prairie on a regular basis. Please consider
visiting the prairie and supporting the continuing conservation efforts.

The next Commons Ford Prairie Bird Walk will take place on August 19 led by Shelia
Hargis. Sign up here!

Claude’s River Survey: August 5, 2017
AUGUST 7, 2017

This day started a bit different and did not change as the hours passed. Shortly after
leaving we found a Diamond-backed Watersnake with a huge carp. We did not stay long
enough to see if the snake got it swallowed. That would have been a good show by
itself. We have photos of the snake with the carp that should end up on the Facebook
page.

We have been looking for otter for years. Finally we have some to report. A few of us
were sitting in the river enjoying the coolness of the hyporheic flow. A couple paddle
past and ask if we had seen the otter just upstream. Of course we had not but took that as
a positive for the survey. Later some of our group said they had gotten good sightings of
two others. We have photos that should end up on the Facebook page.

Bird sightings were a bit difficult today. We did manage 42 species including two types
of Kingfisher, Belted and Ringed. We found Barred Owl, several Pileated woodpecker
and two American Robin. My favorite sightings were a small flock of Orchard Orioles. Queens, were numerous. We got a Swallowtail too. It’s hard to get a good photo of a damselfly. Just saying.

**Warbler’s Golden Tunes May Soon Vanish From Central Texas**

AUGUST 9, 2017

The Waco Tribune-Herald recently featured Travis Audubon Board President Frances Cerbins as a guest columnist discussing the current threat faced by golden-cheeked warblers:

One of Texas’ native sons could be in big trouble. The golden-cheeked warbler, a tiny songbird found in Central Texas, has come under attack from several special-interest groups that would love to move in and develop the warbler’s pristine territory. Land Commissioner George P. Bush, backed by the right-wing Texas Public Policy Foundation, is suing to have the warbler removed from the federal endangered species list. This challenge comes despite the fact experts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have twice reviewed the bird’s status and twice ruled the golden-cheeked warbler still needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

Bush and the General Land Office filed a federal lawsuit in Austin against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Now the Travis Audubon Society and three other conservation groups have moved to intervene in defense of the Fish and Wildlife Service — the Texas Ornithological Society, the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife.

**JUNIPER BARK**

The object of the court case is the golden-cheeked warbler, a strikingly colorful songbird that is the only bird species in the world to breed exclusively in Central Texas. Identified by its distinctively buzzy songs, the warbler is totally reliant on conditions specific to the Hill Country. They build nests from the bark of mature junipers and breed in woodlands having both junipers and oaks. Without this particular habitat in 33 counties ranging from the San Antonio area to near Fort Worth-Dallas, golden-cheeked warblers cannot survive. With Texas’ rapid rate of urbanization, an estimated 1.5 million acres — almost one-third of warbler territory — have disappeared since 1999. Any data purporting to show otherwise has been widely disputed by biologists, wildlife managers and others in the scientific community.

**HABITAT DECLINE**

Other causes of warbler decline are breeding habitat degradation caused by grazing and range improvement; construction of dams that flood the breeding habitat; oak wilt; parasitism of nests by Brown-headed Cowbirds; and overbrowsing by white-tailed deer. The simple truth is that, without federal protection, golden-cheeked warblers will see their remaining territory overtaken by commercial exploitation. Can we allow this to happen?

Join Travis Audubon in giving this native species your full support. Let’s perpetuate our natural heritage and enable future generations to enjoy an exquisite songbird that calls Texas its home.
Read more about the golden-cheeked warbler, why it matters, and what you can do to protect this Hill Country treasure!

**Bird of the Week: Black-crested Titmouse**  
AUGUST 14, 2017

Once thought to be a subspecies of the Tufted Titmouse, the Black-crested Titmouse actually has genetic differences indicating it speciated from its eastern cousin at least 250,000 years ago. However, the two species remain close enough that they hybridize readily in the area where their ranges overlap—an area which includes Austin and Central Texas. This means that many of the birds you see around here will display significant variation in the color of their crests, and can’t rightly be called pure Black-crested or Tufted. While their wide eyes and furtive behavior may bear a passing similarity to field mice, the Titmouse’s name actually has nothing to do with rodents. It comes from the Icelandic word for small, titr, combined with the Anglo-Saxon word masr, which means “small bird”. (Incidentally, this means that the correct plural would be “titmouses” and not “titmice” — but Merriam-Webster lists the latter as correct.)

Compiled by Owen Moorhead. Sources include the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society.

**August Bird Forecast: Migration Heats Up**  
AUGUST 16, 2017

You would never know it by the weather, but the shortening day length tells shorebirds that winter is on its way. Birds such as the Spotted Sandpiper, which may have spent the summer as far away as Canada, are now returning to spend the winter in Texas or further south in Central and South America.

Since Austin is about 200 miles from the coast, most people don’t think shorebirds occur here. Where is the shore after all? Some shorebirds are adapted to using lake shores, river banks and drying up stock ponds as migratory stopover sites. Still others are more likely to show up on grasslands and sod farms in migration. The best place in town to see shorebirds is Hornsby Bend, home of Austin’s wastewater sludge treatment plant. The drying beds where Dillo Dirt is being composted are go-to spots if it rains. Pond 1 west, close to the drying beds, also has good stopover mudflat habitat. Although it is not a particularly aesthetically-pleasing experience, the abundance and diversity of shorebirds on a good August day will make up for the Hornsby odor and relentless sun. The eBird database maintained by Cornell Lab of Ornithology shows you might find sixteen or more fairly common shorebird species there in August. A spotting scope and/or binoculars are a must in order to see the birds well.

Fun shorebird fact: Shorebirds are precocial which means that their young are capable of leaving the nest almost immediately after hatching. They are born with downy feathers unlike helpless and unfeathered songbird nestlings. At first the chicks stay close to their parents for safety and protection from the elements.

**Just Call Them Peeps**
Shorebird identification presents many challenges, since so many of the species look pretty similar. Because of that most people just resort to calling the small ones “peeps.” In order not to be overwhelmed, learn some of the most distinctive shorebirds first. Two that fit that bill are the Spotted Sandpiper and Killdeer.

In August when Spotted Sandpipers are showing up in good numbers, the 7.5 inch bird may or may not have spots since it is molting out of breeding plumage. Look for the almost comical bobbing motion of its tail end, while it walks, as a behavioral identification clincher. No one knows why it does this. When startled, the Spotted Sandpiper flies with a fluttery stiff-winged flight followed by a glide, and it usually voices alarm with a peet-weet call. You can find them at Hornsby or along Lady Bird Lake or area creeks where they often are catching insects at the water’s edge. According to All About Birds, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, Spotted Sandpipers have the widest breeding range of any North American sandpiper. Although you might be able to find a summering bird in the northern half of the state, there are very few breeding records for Texas.

In mid-July last year there were close to 175 Killdeer, a shorebird bigger than the Spotted Sandpiper, gathered at Hornsby on the mudflat that is Pond 1 west. Possibly it was a staging area for birds that are going to Mexico and further down into Central and northern South America for the winter. In Austin we have Killdeer year round, where they breed in unusual places such as parking lots, baseball fields, and flat gravel-covered roofs, as well as lawns and golf courses.

They don’t build a nest, instead just creating a shallow depression called a scrape where they lay their eggs. Killdeer are quite vociferous, calling their name repeatedly when alarmed, “kill-dee, kill-dee.” You might be familiar with Killdeer as the bird that does a broken-wing display to lure you away from a newly hatched chick which resembles a ping pong ball with legs. Bottom line: You should be able to find a Killdeer in many places around Austin during August.

**Swifts On the Move**

In additions to shorebirds many other birds are heading south during August. Chimney Swifts congregate in large migratory roosts before going to South America. One way to learn more about these aerial acrobats is to visit Swift Fest in Jonestown on August 19 which celebrates Jonestown’s roost located in an old cistern. You will be treated to a tornado of swirling birds as they settle in for the night. Or maybe your neighborhood school has an abandoned incinerator that hosts these long-distance flyers. Check and see.

COMPiled BY JANE TILLMAN, TRAVIS AUDUBON VOLUNTEER
REPOSTED WITH PERMISSION FROM KXAN’S WEATHER BLOG

**Springtime at Baker Sanctuary**
AUGUST 18, 2017

Spring feels like a far off dream during these dog days of summer. The birds who headed north March – May are already starting to head back south. Chris Murray looks back and recaps the eventful spring migration season at Baker Sanctuary.
The spring is always a busy time at Baker. Between education and outreach programs, Golden-cheeked Warbler monitoring, and habitat management and restoration there is little time to rest!

Golden-cheeked Warbler (GCWA) monitoring began in earnest in early March when the males began to arrive and set up territories. To gain a more comprehensive understanding on how the GCWA utilize the sanctuary, monitoring efforts this year shifted to a 75-acre tract in the northeast sanctuary. Five males were banded and the following 12 weeks were spent mapping territories and searching for fledglings. The data is still being analyzed, but it seems seven males established territories in the study plot with all but one attracting a mate. One surprising observation was that several males had territories which spanned Lime Creek Road; in the past it had been assumed that the road would act as a natural territory boundary. It seems that is not always the case!

When April rolled around, a sanctuary-wide point count effort was undertaken for GCWA to gather data on their distribution and abundance throughout Baker. During the point count, which ran for the entire month of April, 50 stations spaced 250 meters apart were visited and all GCWA present were duly noted. Once again, the data still needs to be analyzed but I can say that 56 individual males were detected for a 72% occupancy rate. As more point count data is collected it will provide valuable insight with regard to population trends and help inform management decisions.

On the education and outreach front, a few tried and true programs saw continued success and one new program made its debut. The sixth annual Youth Nature Camp took place on a sunny April weekend and was well attended by students from a handful of LISD schools. Participants searched for GCWA on a three-mile hike and later retired to the education pavilion to learn about Neotropical migration and GCWA natural history. Through immersive games, participants role-played and learned firsthand the many challenges faced by birds.

The annual Baker Open House, recently renamed Baker Nature Day, took place in early May and was attended by over 200 community members. Many folks went on guided bird hikes but equally popular were the spider hikes led by Austin’s Spider Joe and Alysa Joaquin’s amazing insect display! The Jackie Arnold Education Center hosted many crafts for kids (and some adults). The highlight was probably the raptor show put on by Sky Kings Falconry, a nonprofit whose mission is to rehabilitate raptors and to educate. While Sky Kings had several impressive raptors from around the world, the show stealer may have been Grimley the surprisingly agile Black Vulture. Grimley can no longer fly due to a powerline mishap but he can run with the best of them. Many thanks once again to the volunteers who made the day possible!

In an effort to further spread the word about Golden-cheeked Warblers, a new hike series was launched this spring whose target audience was students of all ages (and hopefully their parents) from Leander and Cedar Park schools. Six hikes offered over the course of two months taught folks about GCWA natural history and habitat. Seventeen students and seventeen adults from six LISD schools partook in the hikes and most at least got a glimpse of the sometimes elusive warbler. In future years we hope to increase participation from students in middle and high school. Many thanks to TAS volunteer hike leaders Linda Lippe and Charlie Ciernia whose enthusiasm for hiking and educating
never waned!

Written by Chris Murray, Travis Audubon Land Manager and Educator

Baker Sanctuary will be holding a restoration day to remove invasive plants and maintain trails on August 26. Sign up here! To visit the sanctuary during fall migration, become a member and start receiving the monthly gate code.

**Bird of the Week: American Crow**
**AUGUST 23, 2017**

The American Crow has been amazingly successful at adapting to human encroachment of their habitat, even taking advantage of humans to expand its own range. This is due in part to its generalist diet and habitat requirements, and partly to its social nature, but most of all to its extraordinary intelligence. Crows are some of the smartest creatures on earth, and have been observed making and using tools, a unique behavior among birds. They use tools to carry heavy objects, find food, and even as weapons against predators! Combined with high sociability and cooperation, their problem-solving skills have suited them ideally to a relationship with humans. In addition to being highly intelligent, Crows are also extraordinarily long-lived: while individuals in the wild generally live ten to fifteen years, a captive American Crow in New York lived to be 59 years old!

Compiled by Owen Moorhead. Sources include the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society.

**Local Gallery Explores the Science of Birds Through Art**
**AUGUST 25, 2017**

Master Birders Amy Rice, Skip Mencio and Beth Arnold enjoyed an evening of swapping bird adventure stories with art patrons while tabling for Travis Audubon at the opening of “The Birds” exhibition at the Art.Science.Gallery in East Austin.

Founded and directed by scientist and artist Dr. Hadley Gillespie, Art.Science.Gallery is a science-inspired communication space. Each artist in the exhibition explored scientific concepts through their compelling depictions of birds.

In the spirit of the space and the exhibition, Beth invited patrons of all ages to play a game with 3-D paper models of water birds. The object of the game was to match each of five species with their mates. The challenge introduced participants to the scientific concept of sexual dimorphism as they found that a water bird can differ greatly from its mate.

Artwork in the exhibit covered a range of topics and bird species. A pen and ink piece featuring Canada Geese by Artist Lauren Rochelle integrates the science and beauty of geese in flight by using the words of a poem, figures of birds and birders, flight illustrations and graphs. Artist Zoe Traut depicts a family tree of global species inspired by her personal experiences with some of the parrots in the piece. Photographs from a local Purple Martin party are displayed in encaustic paintings by Artist Sarah St. Laurent. She transformed the photographs using a hot wax technique that layers colors and images
with intriguing subtlety and beauty. Other exhibit pieces used watercolor, linoleum block prints, remnants from nature and embroidery to highlight various aspects of birds and bird life in striking ways.

Don’t miss this celebration of birds through the imaginative integration of science and art! The exhibition, located at the Canopy fine arts complex at 916 Springdale Road, runs through October 1.

**UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS & CLASSES!**

September 2, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Beginner’s Bird Walk at Roy G. Guerro Park

September 2, 2017 – CLASS: Intro to Photography Part II: Birds

September 5, 2017 – CLASS: Fall Warbler Identification

September 5, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Two hour Tuesday at Hornsby Bend with Ken Zaslow

September 6, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: World Shorebirds Day

September 9, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Count

September 10, 2017 – Ruffled Feathers Book Club: Living on the Wind

September 10, 2017 – EVENT: Drama in the Skies: Raptors Over Austin

September 11, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Wells Branch Bird Walks

September 12, 2017 – Two Hour Tuesday at Camp Mabry with Jane Tillman

September 16, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Walk

September 16, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Wells Branch Bird Walks

September 16, 2017 – EVENT: Chaetuera Canyon Mediterranean Feast

September 17, 2017 – Young Birders Club: Violet Crown Trail

September 17, 2017 – Bird Inspired Classical Music Performance

September 19, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Super Tuesday at Crescent Bend Nature Park with Deb and Lee Wallace

September 21, 2017 – MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES: Scott Weidensaul

September 23, 2017 – Blair Woods Restoration Day
September 26, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Two hour Tuesday at Mills Pond Park with Dan Callaway

September 30, 2017 – CLASS: Introduction to Lightroom

September 30, 2017 – Bird Inspired Classical Music Performance

September 30, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Commons Ford Prairie Bird Walk with Lee and Deb Wallace

October 1, 2017 – Bird Inspired Classical Music Performance

October 3, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Two hour Tuesday at Richard Moya Park with Ken Zaslow

October 7, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Beginner’s Bid Walk at Laguna Gloria

October 8, 2017 – The Big Sit! at Commons Ford Park

October 8, 2017 – Young Birders Club: Lake Creek Trail

October 10, 2017 – CLASS: Fall Butterfly Identification

October 10, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Two hour Tuesday at Cedar Breaks Park with Dan Callaway

October 14, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Count

October 14, 2017 – EVENT: Victor Emanuel Conservation Award Luncheon Honoring Mickey Burleson

October 17, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Super Tuesday at Colorado Bend State Park, led by Terry Banks

October 21, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Walk

October 21, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Wells Branch Bird Walks

October 21, 2017 – Baker Sanctuary Restoration Day

October 21, 2017 – Blair Woods Family Nature Days: Water

October 24, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Super Tuesday at Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park with Ken Zaslow

October 28, 2017 – Blair Woods Family Nature Days: Migration

October 29, 2017 – Young Birders Club: Cherry Springs Ranch
October 31, 2017 – FIELD TRIP: Two Hour Tuesday with Ray and Ginny Steelman at Devine Lake Park