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Blair Woods – Protected for Wildlife, Open to All!
NOVEMBER 3, 2017

Blair Woods Preserve is the perfect place to bring your family and explore! This fall Travis Audubon has been thrilled to host our first ever Blair Woods Family Nature Days. We have been working hard to get kids and families out to the preserve, in part of a larger initiative to connect children to nature and creating meaningful, formative, experiences outside. We want future generations to value the natural world, and hopefully Blair Woods can play a part in this noble goal. Gifted to Travis Audubon by Dr. Frank Blair in 1985, Blair Woods Preserve is truly a hidden gem of Austin. These 10 acres feel like so much more with winding trails, tall trees, and a pond bustling with wildlife activity. During our Family Nature Days, visitors are invited to explore the preserve and participate in fun activities related to important environmental topics. On October 21st the theme was Water and kids were able to learn about watershed, discover aquatic insects that live in our pond, and explore other aquatic wildlife with Austin Park Rangers.

This past Saturday visitors learned about Migration. Participants were able to engage in a bird migration game provided by Capital Area Master Naturalists. We were also joined by Dianne Odegard and Lee Mackenzie of the Austin Bat Refuge (and several of their adorable bat friends), to talk about all things bats – including migration! Teacher Ari Colasanti and her student Elder from Lanier High School showed off their fabulous monarch photo display and were eager to talk about the amazing monarch butterfly garden they have created at their school. A migration bird walk led by Travis Audubon volunteer Terry Banks revealed some wonderful feathered visitors to Blair Woods including several Yellow-rumped warblers!

Family Nature Days have something to offer the whole family. If you have missed out, don’t despair! We will have four Family Nature Days at Blair in the spring. Come on out, join us, and get to know Blair Woods. Who knows what you might discover?

Get to Know 2017 Conservation Hero Mickey Burleson
NOVEMBER 10, 2017

Mickey Burleson is a name every Texan should know. Mickey and her late husband Bob are among Texas’ original environmentalists. Together they brought attention to the plight of native prairies and worked tirelessly to restore this imperiled ecosystem. For her tremendous contributions to the conservation of Texas’ birds and their habitats, Mickey received Travis Audubon’s 2017 Victor Emanuel Conservation Award on October 14th. We are pleased to share this video honoring Mickey and her accomplishments. The fight to protect vulnerable habitats continues and Mickey is inspiration to all of us: go make a difference!

Reptiles visit the Blair Woods After School Program
NOVEMBER 13, 2017

This fall Travis Audubon is excited to begin a new partnership with Westcave Outdoor
Discovery Center! Through a new after school program, 4th and 5th graders from Sims and Ortega Elementary Schools have been visiting our Blair Woods Preserve once a week to learn about the natural world. Recently the City of Austin Park Rangers dropped by with some cold-blooded friends to talk about reptiles and amphibians. The kids had a blast getting up close and personal with these scaly creatures, and some even conquered their own personal fears for a chance to pet a snake! We are looking forward to more exciting experiences out at Blair Woods with these amazing kids, and we can’t wait to see what they’ll discover next!

Interested in seeing Blair Woods for yourself? The preserve is open daily to the public.

**Ask-a-Birder: “Friendly” Phoebes**
**NOVEMBER 20, 2017**

It seems something has gotten into the Phoebes this November. While phoebes are known to be quite tame around humans, Travis Audubon has received multiple reports of especially bold birds. At Commons Ford, a phoebe sat on several participants of both the recent Travis Audubon Master Birder and Intro to Birds class field trips. A solo birder at Commons Ford even reported a phoebe that took the contact right out of his eye!

At the boat dock a “friendly” Eastern phoebe alighted on a railing about 3 feet from me, then as I was observing it flew up into my face, wings flapping away. It then perched on my right shoulder. My right eye felt as if the bird’s wings had dislodged the contact. After a moment it flew up into my face again, then perched on my left shoulder. It was then that I got to thinking it was after my contacts, but was too enchanted by this behavior to shoo it off. Suddenly it flew into my face a third time, then retreated to the railing. I was able to see a contact lens sticking out of the end of its bill, which it then swallowed.

In northeast Austin, a phoebe has been visiting a family during their outdoor play time:
For weeks, [a phoebe] lands right next to my family, swooping down on us and sitting right next to us. It appears every day when my daughter and I go outside. It has hit my phone, grazed my ear and hair, and doesn’t want to leave us alone.

Wildlife Biologist Chuck Sexton shed some light on the subject:
The behavior is not strange at all, just a bit more aggressive than we usually expect out of an Eastern Phoebe. This is a bird establishing and defending a *winter* feeding territory. Although E. Phoebe’s are resident in the area, we also get an influx of birds from elsewhere in the winter time. Perhaps more than jays, yellow-rumps, and other species, they tend to establish territories in the winter.

Chuck went on to explain that the birds should settle down soon and not be as aggressive.
Have a question? Ask a birder! Submit your question to membership@travisaudubon.org

**Chimney Uncapped at Brooke Elementary**
**NOVEMBER 21, 2017**

A tower at Brooke Elementary School may soon be home to Chimney Swifts! Last week,
Greg Smith of Jamail & Smith Construction with B.J. Electric volunteered their services to remove a cap on an unused chimney on this East Austin school property.

Chimney Swifts are birds that used to live in large hollow trees, but as large trees disappeared they began to use chimneys. Now modern chimneys are often capped and made of slick metal creating an extremely limited amount of habitat for Chimney Swifts to nest and raise their young.

The recent uncapping at Brooke Elementary is part of an ongoing initiative to identify and preserve Chimney Swift habitat as well as raise awareness about the need for Chimney Swift conservation. If you would like to get involved with this project, please contact volunteer@travisaudubon.org

Groundbreaking at Baker Sanctuary
NOVEMBER 24, 2017

Travis Audubon board members and Solluna Builders recently held a groundbreaking ceremony at Baker Sanctuary. They celebrated the promise of a bright future for this 715+ acre preserve as new improvements will help lead the way for continued robust conservation efforts of the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and its treasured habitat. Construction has begun on a new land steward’s residence and maintenance barn. The Jackie Arnold Education Pavilion will be upgraded with new flushing toilets. The historic cedar-chopping cabin – former home of the Bakers – as well as a stone bunkhouse will also be restored. All improvements are expected to be completed in 2018.

Deer Creek Students Study Ecology at Baker
NOVEMBER 27, 2017

For the last three years, Baker Sanctuary has partnered with Deer Creek Elementary teachers to augment their 4th grade Ecology unit. Christopher Murray, the Baker Sanctuary steward, collaborated with Deer Creek teacher Charlie Ciernia to develop a Project Based Learning experience which would help make the science of Ecology come alive to the fourth graders at Deer Creek. To kick off the unit, Chris visited the Deer Creek campus to give an Ecology presentation which focused on possible career paths for students interested in science, ecology of the Texas Hill Country, and challenges particular to managing Baker Sanctuary. Following the presentation, the 4th grade science team introduced and discussed ecological concepts with their students with the goal of visiting Baker to collect data specifically on invasive plants, human impacts to the environment, and native flora and fauna. After gathering data on the field trip and seeing in real life what they discussed in the classroom, students unpacked what they learned and saw how it related to their studies and to their lives. This year’s session saw 110 students, five teachers, and 15 parents visit the Sanctuary for the annual field trip.
New Travel Opportunity with Travis Audubon
DECEMBER 1, 2017

Join Travis Audubon on an exceptional and affordable Birding and Wildlife Trip to India in November 2018!

In partnership with JB Journeys and Mowgli Expeditions, we invite you to experience the bird life in the Western Ghats of India. Encounter the beautiful Pied Hornbills, Racket-tailed Drongos to colorful Barbetas and Kingfishers as well as wild elephants, gaur (Indian bison) and maybe even a tiger – all in the company of fellow birders and Travis Audubon members!
Travel November 11-21, 2018. Space is limited to 12. Cost per person is $3250 and includes a $300 donation to Travis Audubon. Please contact info@jbjourneys.com to reserve your spot!

Unique opportunity to bird Guatemala
DECEMBER 4, 2017

You’ve seen the Golden-cheeked Warbler in Central Texas (if not, be sure to visit Baker Sanctuary this spring!), but have you seen this remarkable bird and Hill Country favorite in its winter home? JB Journeys is offering Travis Audubon members an amazing opportunity to bird Guatemala. Amazing for a variety of reasons:
• See the Golden-cheeked Warbler in its winter home
• Search for stunning birds such as Resplendent Quetzal, Slender Sheartail, Amethyst-throated Hummingbird, and the beautiful Pink-headed Warbler
• Travel with Travis Audubon board member Eric Stager
• Bird with Guatemala’s top birder, 22 year old John Cahill
• Stay in the Guatemala home of Alexander Skutch, author of A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica
• Bird the Mayan Ruins of Tikal
• Support a local NGO working with indigenous community leaders in environmental education and land preservation
• Support Travis Audubon: A $300 donation will be made for each Travis Audubon member who travels

Travel January 3-13, 2019. From $2995 per person. Click here for more details!

Claude’s River Survey: December 2, 2017
DECEMBER 4, 2017

183-Hornsby, Travis, Texas, US
Dec 2, 2017 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Protocol: Traveling
9.0 mile(s)
EPISODE 139: GORGEOUS WINTER DAY
This section of river was once again a treat to visit. What started out as a foggy chilly morning quickly turned into a warm sunny delight. During the early morning chill we had so much bird activity it was hard to keep up with the IDing and the counting. I am way sure our counts are far from accurate. That is what kind of morning it was.

Included in the IDing are 3 kinds of woodpecker, 3 kinds of wren, 5 kinds of sparrow, 2 kinds of warblers, Bald Eagle, and Barred Owl. We have lots of other winter birds starting to be very numerous. Disappointingly, we found few duck, grebes, and all the egrets and smaller herons have disappeared. The total count for the day was 54 species.

In the other critter department we found a few Sulphur butterflies still hanging around. Various turtle species came out to sun themselves.

We are thanking Wilda Campbell, Leslie Morris, Wendy Harte, Sharon Richardson, Bob West, Denis Brenning, Bobby Hughes, Tam Tran, Dan Galewsky, and John Barr. Thank you all for an enjoyable morning.

**Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante Statement**
DECEMBER 7, 2017

Earlier this week, President Trump announced that two million acres would be removed from two national monuments in Utah. Bears Ears will be reduced by over 80 percent and nearly half of Grand Staircase-Escalante will be eliminated.

Travis Audubon opposes this decision and the negative impact it will have on birds and other wildlife. The decision opens the door to oil and gas drilling, coal and uranium mining, and logging that will forever change the beauty of these natural sites. Bear Ears contains the largest contiguous important habitat for the Mexican Spotted Owl. This owl’s preference for old growth forests makes it an “indicator species.” This means that the presence of a Mexican Spotted Owl can reveal useful information to scientists studying the overall health of its habitat.

Bears Ears also provides critical habitat for Golden Eagles, Hairy Woodpeckers, Mountain Bluebirds, and many other species. More than 200 bird species can be found in Grand Staircase-Escalante, including the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and California Condor.

Please contact your elected officials today and ask them to protect the integrity of these two fragile national monuments.

**Texas Naturalist’s Notes by Bill Reiner**
DECEMBER 8, 2017

Legend tells of a great debate that arose among the birds over who should lead them. To
settle the matter, they held a contest: whoever could fly the highest would become their king. From the many contenders, the powerful eagle, as expected, soon soared above the others. But as the eagle tired and began to descend, the tiny wren emerged from the eagle’s feathers where it had been hiding, and flew above the eagle. Since that time, the wren has been known as the king of all birds.

Small and furtive, but inquisitive and bold, with loud voices that belie their size, wrens have long delighted the people with whom they frequently share living space. Seemingly fearless, wrens will challenge much larger birds and other animals. Most birders can probably recall receiving a tongue-lashing after intruding too close to a wren’s nest or young – sometimes from the entire family! Their imperious nature certainly provided fodder for the legend, but it has not always benefited them.

In Ireland, Wales, and other countries with a Celtic history, a curious custom called “The Hunting of the Wren” is still performed about the time of the winter solstice. In these parts of the world, there is only one wren species, called simply the Wren (or “Wran” in Ireland, Troglodytes troglodytes). Until recently, the European Wren was considered the same species as the Winter and Pacific Wrens (now split off as T. hiemalis and T. pacificus), among the smallest wrens of North America. All three are essentially feathered punctuation marks, by no means big enough to qualify as game birds, though like others in the family all have outsized personalities.

The origins of the custom are murky. It may have begun with a winter solstice ceremony, in which a wren, representing the ending year, would be killed and buried to signify the “dying” of the sun on the year’s shortest day. As with other pagan customs, however, there is also an alternative Christian explanation: a legend that a wren betrayed Saint Stephen to his enemies, who then stoned him to death. For that reason, the Hunting of the Wren now typically takes place on Saint Stephen’s Day, Dec. 26th.

In the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, the custom may have had greater importance as a means of expressing resentment toward overbearing royalty. Speaking out against the reigning monarch was, of course, a hazardous thing to do, usually leading to the demise of the speaker. Wrens, being “royalty” in myth, may have had the misfortune of standing in for the despised monarch. Traditionally, boys would comb the hedgerows to capture (and often kill) a wren, put it in a box, then carry it door to door, requesting donations to “see the King in a box.” Today, a symbolic but empty box is the centerpiece of the festivities.

So if, while participating in the Christmas Bird Count, you encounter his or her majesty, particularly a Winter Wren, please pay your respects. As Shakespeare tells us, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

References for this column included Birds and People, by Mark Cocker and David Tipling, and “Hunting the Wren” from http://piereligion.org/huntwren.html
Notes from the Canyon: 2017 in Review  
DECEMBER 12, 2017

Chaetura Canyon has had an exceptional year with more than 300 visitors!  
Highlights of 2017 included:

• 5 workdays attended by 62 volunteers contributing more than 2300 hours to cut and haul out countless cubic yards of juniper slash, haul mulch to the Upper Canyon trails and many other projects.

• 20 events were held including the two annual fund-raising dinners, Birdathon Breakfast and Lunch and four Second Saturday Swift Watches.

• Several new events included monthly Saturday Morning Canyon Crawls, Girl Scouts working on their Animal Habitat Badge, Mikeal Behren’s Birding-by Ear Class, Brick Donor Appreciation Day, and even more are planned for 2018! For starters, watch for Jane Tillman’s “Two Hour Tuesday” coming in February.

• A new program to train Docents was initiated. Our first graduates, Sarah and Rafael Ruiz, lead two tours!

• Some of the projects included; construction of the “Windows on Nature” birding blind; permanent benches at the top of the Rim Trail; construction of a new trail system into and through the previously inaccessible southern portion of the sanctuary including two new foot bridges; re-construction of several aging sets of steps on the trails; Steps, steps, steps! More than 100 new Juniper steps were installed on the trail system this year bringing the total number to 554; and Rafael Ruiz filmed four seasons for a documentary film about Chaetura Canyon.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to Travis Audubon membership, staff, Board of Directors, the Chaetura Canyon Management Committee and many volunteers for supporting Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary in 2017.

We look forward to your visit in 2018! Check the calendar and TAS web site for upcoming workshops and events.

Georgean and Paul Kyle 
Founders and Sanctuary Stewards 
Chaetura Canyon

New Kiosk Installed at Baker Sanctuary  
DECEMBER 21, 2017

Hikers at Baker will notice a new kiosk sign installed at the trail head for the popular Baker Spring trail. One side contains a map and general information regarding the
sanctuary while the other describes Golden-cheeked Warbler’s natural history, accented by a beautiful photo of a male warbler. This new kiosk sign was made possible by the Burdine Johnson Foundation.

Come see for yourself when the sanctuary re-opens to the public in mid-January!
Chris Murray, Land Steward and Educator
You can support our sanctuaries by making a donation today!

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS, CLASSES, & EVENTS

February 3, 2018 - FIELD TRIP: Beginner’s Bird Walk at Mary Moore Searight Park

February 4, 2018 - Birding At Indiangrass With Park Rangers

February 6, 2018 - FIELD TRIP: Super Tuesday at Tejas Camp, led by Ray and Ginny Steelman

February 10, 2018 - FIELD TRIP: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Count

February 10, 2018 - Birding by Ear at Chaetura Canyon

February 10, 2018 - Baker Sanctuary Restoration Day

February 12, 2018 - Wells Branch Bird Walk

February 13, 2018 - Super Tuesday at Mitchell Lake, led by Deb and Lee Wallace

February 13, 2018 - CLASS: Birdsong

February 13, 2018 - Speaker Series: Denver Holt presents Adaptations in Owls

February 17, 2018 - CLASS: Waterfowl Identification

February 17, 2018 - FIELD TRIP: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Walk

February 20, 2018 - FIELD TRIP: Two-hour Tuesday at East Metropolitan Park, led by Dan Callaway

February 25, 2018 - FIELD TRIP: Commons Ford Prairie Bird Walk with George Kerr and Frances Cerbins

February 27, 2018 - Two Hour Tuesday at Chaetura Canyon