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Travis Audubon 2018 Annual Report is published.

The 2018 Annual Report is available online. If you want a printed copy, please call the office at 512 300 2473.

Action Needed to Help Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park

POSTED ON DECEMBER 12, 2018

By: Mark Wilson, TAS Board Member

At a recent public hearing in Mission, the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission confirmed that the planned border wall/fence project through Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park and World Birding Center could result in closure of this important Lower Rio Grande Valley bird sanctuary. The construction, funded and slated to begin next February, will result in over 15 miles of new wall through numerous wildlife preserves and corridors, including Bentsen, the National Butterfly Center and tracts of the LRGV National Wildlife Refuge. The 18 foot wall will be flanked by a 300 foot wide ‘no-go’ zone of bare earth through the preserves. This construction will pass directly through the habitat where birders from around the country have had the chance to view a recent Roadside Hawk, a rare visitor to the United States.

TPWD Chairman Duggins confirmed the department has been communicating with the Department of Homeland Security to find alternatives to a wall structure, but with no success. He asked all concerned citizens to contact our Senators, Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, along with Governor Abbott, and ask for their help.

The Travis Audubon Advocacy Committee made a brief presentation at the above TPWD Commission hearing, assuring TPWD of our support. In addition, we recently delivered over 25 letters, signed by members, to Governor Abbott and both our Texas Senators, asking them to help stop this destructive and unneeded project.
Please consider taking a few minutes and calling Governor Abbott and Senators Cruz and Cornyn, asking for their help. You may speak to a staff member or can leave a recorded message. Here is some helpful information:

Senator John Cornyn 202-224-2934  
Senator Ted Cruz 202-224-5922  
Governor Greg Abbott 512-463-2000

Suggested message: “Hello, my name is (state name) and I am your constituent from (city/town). I urge you to stop the expansion of border wall in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The wall will result in damage and possible closure to over 6500 acres of state and county parks and national wildlife refuges. Texas Parks & Wildlife has stated that this project will likely result in the closure of Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park.” (add your own personal comments).

Photo Credit: Jan Dauphin

Why We Allow Deer Hunting at Baker

POSED ON DECEMBER 12, 2018

If there is one thing that unites all Travis Audubon members, it is our appreciation for birds. Aside from that, our community holds a variety of beliefs and opinions— and we are quite proud of that! Recently, some of our members have expressed disappointment to hear that we allow hunting of White-tailed deer at Baker Sanctuary. We certainly respect personal positions on hunting, but also wish to elaborate on why we allow this hunting to occur.

Our Land Manager and the Steward at Baker Sanctuary, Chris Murray, has provided a succinct explanation of the ecological importance of controlling White-tailed deer populations:

Every year Baker Sanctuary closes to the public from November through mid-January for the annual White-tailed deer (WTD) management hunt. This hunt is needed primarily to remove browsing pressure on desired hardwood species such as Spanish Oak, Escarpment Black Cherry, Texas Ash, and Shin Oak, which Golden-cheeked Warblers need to provide a varied strata on which to forage for their insect prey. Due to various forms of human interventions and habitat modifications throughout the years, the WTD population in Texas, and arguably throughout many states, is at an unnaturally high level so, without management, little hardwood regeneration would occur.
In simple terms: the Golden-cheeks need a very particular habitat to successfully breed, and the deer eat the tree-seedlings that make up that habitat. Higher deer populations have a negative impact on this endangered bird's survival outcomes. Therefore, we allow hunters to help control the deer. Indeed, it would be ideal to let nature run its course, but years of human intervention has resulted in unnatural changes to native habitat. We choose to allow hunting at Baker because it is an essential tool to preserve habitat, which is a much better place for all native wildlife to live.

Baker Home to New Chimney Swift Tower

POSTED ON NOVEMBER 26, 2018

Baker Sanctuary is the proud owner of a new Chimney Swift tower! The tower was donated to TAS by Susan and Tom Mitchell who recently moved and could not take the tower to their new home. The tower was installed at Baker by Paul and Georgeann Kyle and dedicated to Susan's mother, Barbara Anderson, a former TAS board member and active member for many years. At the dedication the tower contents were scrutinized and it was deduced that the tower fledged three new Chimney Swifts into the world—not bad for its first season at Baker.
Earlier this year, Travis Audubon promoted a bird book drive by member Sebastian Casarez, during which dozens of books were donated to support his efforts to support youth birding clubs. Sebastian is still collecting used, outdated, or new bird books for The Texas Blue Jay Project in supporting youth birding clubs/ornithology clubs in high schools and middle schools. If anyone would like to donate their used, outdated, or new bird books to this birding project, he would truly appreciate their book donations. His goal is to reach several Texas communities in need of birding/nature programs in their schools.

Right now, he has three Greater Austin Area libraries hosting The Texas Blue Jay Project Bird Book Donation Boxes:

**Travis Location(s):**

1. Austin Public Library–North Village Branch Center  
   2505 Steck Ave.  
   Austin, Texas

**Williamson Location(s):**

1. Georgetown Public Library  
   402 W.8th Street  
   Georgetown, Texas  
2. Cedar Park Public Library  
   550 Discovery Boulevard  
   Cedar Park, Texas

***The listed libraries above will be continuously accepting your used bird books for The Texas Blue Jay Project Bird Book Donation Boxes.

***Turn in your donated bird books at the circulation desk. Don't forget to mention that your donated bird books are for The Texas Blue Jay Project Bird Book Donation Box.

Please consider recycling/donating your old, outdated, used, or new bird books to this awesome cause!
First Encounter with a Common Pauraque Roost

POSTED ON NOVEMBER 15, 2018

By: Laura Heartwood, Travis Audubon Master Birder

The Common Pauraque (Nyctidromus albicollis) is a well-camouflaged bird of the nightjar family and one that I would not have spotted without the help of another friendly birder. I was visiting Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco, TX as part of my first trip to the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. In an attempt to see alligators at Alligator Lake, the trail leading to the lake included a roost site for the pauraque. It took an extra few seconds for my eyes to adjust and make out the bird. It was far too close to see with a scope or binoculars. Despite the close proximity to the trail and human disturbance, this bird was not going to make any movement and was fully confident in its camouflage.

Roosting on the ground during the day and hunting for insects at night, it can be best identified by looking for the golden edges on the back and wing feathers. It prefers the forest floor with dense thickets and extensive leaf litter. At dusk, it is best found along woodland edges. It was a pleasure to see this species for the first time and made the trek in cold and wet weather well worth it. If you haven’t seen one yet, this bird is spotted on a regular basis at Estero Llano Grande State Park. Luckily I was able to return the bird spot favor with helpful information on where a set of missing rental car keys was located.

Sources include:
National Audubon Society
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
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<td>08 JAN</td>
<td>Super Tuesday! At Tejas Camp with Lee and Deb Wallace</td>
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<td>24 FEB</td>
<td>Pedernales Falls State Park with Judith Bailey and Cinda Crosley</td>
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<td>26 FEB</td>
<td>Super Tuesday! At Emma Long Metropolitan Park with Jane Tillman and Suzie McCann</td>
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<td>23 APR</td>
<td>Class: Spring Warblers</td>
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