Hello Travis Audubon friends and members,

Greetings from month four of pandemic lockdown. If you had told me on New Year’s Day what 2020 would have in store, I’m not sure I’d have believed you!

With all the loss and isolation many of us are feeling, I am heartened by how much solace I have found in watching birds and spending time outside. I take a walk most mornings and have found many opportunities to talk (from a distance) with other neighbors about the birds we encounter—a nest of Yellow-crowned Night Herons in a live oak; a pair of Green Herons gobbling fish in Shoal Creek; a gregarious Eastern Phoebe in Northwest Park. So many people are enjoying their backyard birds, seeing and hearing them for the first time, putting out inaugural feeders and bird baths. It’s exciting to see new folks understand what most birdwatchers have long known: slowing down to look at and listen to the birds around us will likely improve your outlook… and your day!

We have been thrilled with the participation in our virtual programs and will continue to offer lots of excellent bird and birding content online until it is safe to be together again. Your support during this uncertain time has been overwhelming, and we are so grateful for it. All of us at Travis Audubon wish for you and yours to stay healthy and sane-- we miss you and we’re with you!

Be well and take care,
Nicole

Nicole Netherton
People
AT TRAVIS AUDUBON

Staff
Executive Director
Nicole Netherton
Land Manager and Educator
Chris Murray
Development Manager
Kelsey McKenna
Education and Program Coordinator
Caley Zazula
Operations Coordinator
Judith Allen
Design Director & Website Producer
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Baker Team
Clif Ladd
Blair Woods Management
Chris Murray
Commons Ford
Mark Wilson
Chaetura Canyon Management
Shelia Hargis
Adult Education
Ellen Filtness
Field Trip
Paul Kyle
Hornsby Bend
Georgean Kyle
Outreach/Member Meetings
Mark Wilson
Youth
Byron Stone

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Carter Smith
**Upcoming Events**

WITH TRAVIS AUDUBON

09 JULY, 2020
July Lunch Series with Laurie Foss

11 JULY, 2020
CLASSES
Virtual Class: Introduction to Nature Photography II

12 JULY, 2020
Ruffled Feathers Book Club Meeting

16 JULY, 2020
July Lunch Series with Sheila Hargis

16 JULY, 2020
Virtual Event: Purple Martins & Parking Lot Birding with Jennifer Bristol

18 JULY, 2020
CLASSES
Virtual Class: Introduction to Lightroom II

23 JULY, 2020
July Lunch Series with Pauline Tom

30 JULY, 2020
July Lunch Series with Kevin Anderson

01 AUGUST, 2020
FIELD TRIPS
Beginners’ Bird Walk

08 AUGUST, 2020
FIELD TRIPS
Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Count

15 AUGUST, 2020
FIELD TRIPS
Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Walk

16 AUGUST, 2020
CLASSES
Virtual Class: Shorebirds 2020

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**Thank You**

TO OUR BIRDS AND BUSINESS PARTNERS

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[Logos of business partners]

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3
Updates
FROM THE SIGNAL SMOKE BLOG

Thanks for Birding with Us on April 29th

POSTED ON MAY 5, 2020

TRAVIS AUDUBON’S
BIRDING TOGETHER
IN SPIRIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL SPECIES</th>
<th>TOTAL BIRDS SEEN</th>
<th># CHECKLISTS</th>
<th>COUNTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>2,032</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MIGRATORY BIRDS

- Purple Martin 40
- Pointed Bunting 16
- Northern Parula 10
- Summer Tanager 6
- Indigo Bunting 8
- Dickcissel 3
- Baltimore Oriole 2
- Bell’s Vireo 1
- Ovenbird 1
- Magnolia Warbler 1
- Pine Warbler 1
- Red-bellied Woodpecker 1

TOP 5 MOST ABUNDANT SPECIES
White-winged Dove (330) * Carolina Chickadee (120) * Cedar Waxwing (198)
Northern Cardinal (205) * Carolina Wren (77)

TOP 5 MOST COMMONLY SEEN
White-winged Dove (42) * Northern Cardinal (51) * Carolina Chickadee (37)
Carolina Wren (38) * Blue Jay (31)

Thanks to everyone who participated in our Birding Together in Spirit event on April 29th! See a summary of the birds we saw below. Please direct any questions about the event to caley@travisaudubon.org.
Virginia Rose Joins Chicago Ornithological Society for Inclusivity in Birding Webinar

Reposted from Chicago Ornithological Society

Travis Audubon board member and Birdability founder Virginia Rose and National Audubon’s GIS Designer Elizabeth Todd were invited to present Birdability at the Chicago Ornithological Society Birds & Bytes, a virtual programming series about birding!

The monthly webinar invites listeners to “grab a beverage or a bite, listen in and share [their] own thoughts and questions.”

On April 9, in addition to Birdability, Wild Indigo Nature and Feminist Bird Club presented their innovative initiatives. “After the call,” Virginia said, “I sat in awe, reminded once again, that even in the midst of or maybe even energized by the Corona virus, plenty of good people are doing good work in this country. Awesome!”

Birding Brawl 2020 Results

POSTED ON MAY 26, 2020

1st Place: Shelia Hargis
Total species: 91

Her Birding Brawl Story: I have done many Big Days, but never one by myself. I was a little nervous that if I failed miserably, I’d have no one else to blame but myself. (-: I started at 4:30 AM in my neighborhood, hoping to hear the Screech Owl down the block and some robins. Nothing. I then headed out to Fitzhugh Rd. The five Great Horned Owls that I had heard on my scouting trip – none of them were around or if so, I couldn’t hear them over the wind. I continued to the edge of Blanco County and started my day birding backtracking along Fitzhugh Rd and numerous side roads, mainly in the northwest part of Hays County. I missed some species that were there two days earlier but got a good number of the Hill County species. I then hoofed it to Bastrop County, arriving just in time for a big downpour. I persevered and picked up a lot of the eastern species I was after even though it was getting later in the day and getting hot. Luckily I had a couple of locations for several high target species, so if I missed them at the first location, I hung out a little longer at the second location until I heard them. Two Green Kingfishers in the Sayersville area was very nice! But, by 2:20 PM, the Cassin’s Sparrow was not singing. He was likely hiding in the shade somewhere laughing at that crazy birder lady, sweating in the sun and eating road dust. The Swainson’s Warbler was a different story. Thinking that it was highly unlikely these birds would still be singing at 3 PM, I was still a little upset when I didn’t hear one at the first location, but then the birding gods smiled and I heard one at the second location,
just a short distance down the road. My recording has thunder in the distance, moments before the rain hit. Because I had missed Pileated Woodpecker up to this point, I made the decision to return to Bastrop to try again for the bird (I was really trying to get all of the possible woodpeckers except Hairy), giving up on my plans to try for the Horned Larks in NE Travis County. I got the Pileated and then headed to Austin for urban birding at numerous staked out locations. The American Kestrels were at 45th/Guadalupe as were Monk Parakeets. And two Wood Ducks flew past! Then I was off to SE Travis County in hopes of hard to find water birds. At the first pond, I could just barely see the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron through the hard rain. Check. On to pond two. I had been thinking that it was a shame to not have a Loggerhead Shrike staked out somewhere. As I pulled into the second pond, I remembered that I usually have one at that location during the Austin CBC. I pulled up, see a Starling, and then catch a glimpse through the rain of what else, a Loggerhead Shrike! Pond three gave up its expected Pied-billed Grebe, and unexpectedly an American Coot. Then I saw two Black-bellied Whistling Ducks with eight ducklings in tow. The birding gods were definitely smiling on me. I then went to the pond in Bauerle Ranch Park that I monitor for Least Grebe. They were on the nest as expected (this is at least their fourth nesting attempt this year and thankfully the nest survived the storm last night). Then back to my neighborhood nearby as the rain seemed to be getting more persistent. I drove the neighborhood about 7:05 PM, not finding the screech owl but catching a quick glimpse of an American Robin. I had planned to walk my dog and get the owl a little later, but when we tried, the rain and hail made us turn around pretty quickly. No owl, but still a pretty fun day! Now if I can ever figure out how to be at four places at once at 6:15 in the morning… Thanks Virginia, Eric and Dennis for being awesome competitors!

See Shelia’s full list here.

2nd Place: Eric Stager
Total species: 79

His Birding Brawl Story: After starting in Bastrop, I went to Hornsby, figuring that I could probably get more species there than any other single location. With only the Platt Lane entrance open, I walked all the way to the ponds. It wasn’t as productive as I hoped, and I had only 49 species for all my effort, walking 5+ miles round trip. The walk back from the ponds was so hot and humid, by the time I got back to my car I was getting cramps in my legs. I sat in my running car for 30 minutes drinking water before I could consider moving on.

I headed west to Reimers Ranch, but mid afternoon was so hot, I limited my hiking there. There were some good birds there despite the heat. I thought I heard a Black-capped Vireo singing near the river but not sure enough to count it. I had planned on making a couple more stops, but was so spent by 5:00 that I birded by car a little and then ended my day. I was sad that I missed Golden-cheeked! I did get a Screech Owl later at home.

I’ve only done a couple of big days, and never solo. It was fun, next time I’d walk less and cover more locations! We should do it again next year, earlier in May when there’s still some migrants around and we’d have a shot at 100 species.

See Eric’s full list here.

3rd Place: Dennis Palafox
Total Species: 72
**His Birding Brawl Story:** I started at Yeager Cr Rd in Blanco County. The dawn chorus was great and I thought constantly about Jeff’s bird song class and the frame work it gave me for learning bird song. Then I motored to Reimer’s Ranch and picked up a few new species. I was hoping to find a breakfast taco on the way but who knew places aren’t open on Sunday morning! The sunrise made for a beautiful morning especially while viewing the Pedernales River. There was a slight breeze and the cloud cover kept things comfortable. Then off to Commons Ford. I talked the gate guards into letting me in. I was running behind schedule so I literally jogged parts of the trail. I didn’t find out until this morning that I actually got the Brown-crested Flycatcher after reviewing some photos – thanks to the B3 class! I got to Mills Pond at 10:45 and it was very slow. Of course the temp was warming up. Then on to Triangle Pond. The Least Grebe and Black-bellied Whistling Duck I had seen on Friday were nowhere to be found, but I did pick up the Wood Duck and a Green Heron. I whiffed on the Kestrel I had seen on Friday at the substation on 45th and Guadalupe. I decided to take quick look at the pond at Central Market hoping the Least Grebe had found a new spot but no such luck. I began to get really hot so I ducked into CM to sit in the AC, sip a cool drink and eat a light snack. After hearing Eric’s story I’m glad I did. I did a quick tally and thought I was doing well but little did I know what the afternoon had in store for me. But the rest help my spirits pick up along with some good music on Sirius XM. On to Mueller to pick up Coots and Pied-billed Grebes. I then headed east and decided to bypass Platt Ln. I went to Greengate Farms in Bastrop County which is on my Lost Pines CBC; they’re great folks. A thunderstorm was brewing so I high-tailed out of there but not before driving by Eberhardt Ln where there’s a low spot in a pasture that occasionally has some interesting birds. Time was running out so I made an executive decision to leave Bastrop Co and take the 1 hr drive to Warbler Woods in hopes of hitting the mother lode. It was slow there too and hot! My goal was slipping away. I was watching radar and I saw the big storms in Austin and the ones west of San Antonio moving in. So, I elected to head home and leave the results in the hands of the birding gods. I had given it the good ole college try. What I found interesting was the easy, common birds that I whiffed on – a lesson learned.

Congrats again to Shelia, and we all deserve a fist bump for the money we raised for Travis Audubon. Thanks to all the donors as well and the Nicole, Caley, Judith, and Kelsey for making this happen!

See Dennis’ complete bird list here.

**4th Place: Virginia Rose**
**Total Species: 55**

**Her Birding Brawl Story:** At 5:40 AM, I was at Riata Pond for dawn song. It was dark, but beautiful. My favorite scene was lightning bugs everywhere, beside me and across the pond in the grassy meadow. Gorgeous. Also, Common Nighthawk making passes above the dark water. I wheeled up to but not into the forested part of that park because I wasn’t sure how safe it was. I
had 16 species by 7:00ish and headed for Lake Creek.

First birds at Lake Creek were a Red-winged Blackbird ALL OVER a Red-shouldered Hawk. Picked up Eastern Pewee, Least Flycatcher, another certain Empid, but could not get it in time, Couch’s Kingbird and others…THANK YOU JEFF PATTerson FOR THE B3 CLASS! I picked up 24 new birds there and headed for Berry Springs at 10:30.

I began birding at Berry Springs at 11:00 and picked up 10 new birds, including Summer Tanager, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Western and Eastern Kingbird, making the kingbird trifecta! I headed for Richard Moya about 2:00 and ate a good picnic lunch in my van, listening to yellow warbler singing across the way. I began birding about 3:00, and like Eric, I did a hell of a lot of wheeling for only 3 new birds, Cattle Egret and Red-eyed Vireo with Yellow Warbler. Starting to be tired and hot and a little bleary-eyed, truth be told.

Next stop LBJ Wildflower Center after hours! I had called two days prior to find out if the great horned owls were still on the premises. Yes! I scheduled a time slot in this time of COVID-19 for 8 AM., but wasn’t sure I’d be able to make it. I obviously didn’t make the 8 AM slot, but at 5 PM, I thought I might drive over there and get lucky. I did not get the Great Horned Owl, but I did enjoy perched painted buntings males singing their fool heads off and yellow-green females blatantly eyeing me at close range with their perched up tails.

Two Cooper’s Hawks were flying above me with black rain clouds as a backdrop. After about 45 minutes, I popped back in my van at 6:45, and the sky opened up!

My last stop was Beverly Sheffield NW park near my home. It was 7:15 PM., and I hoped the rain would let up long enough for me to get something new before nightfall, but it wasn’t to be. 55 species would have to stand!

Home and in bed by 8:30. I reviewed my lists, submitted and shared them, calculated I wheeled 9ish miles and slept 12 hours.

See Virginia’s complete bird list here.
us happy. Those of us who are extroverted (like myself) have had a rough adjustment. However, discovering the avian world around me has been one of the surprising upsides to flattening the curve, and I expect it to pay dividends for years to come.

I suppose I have more of a “birdy” background than the average Joe. I can’t say why, but I’ve always known the difference between a Mallard and a Wood Duck. And my mom would point out Red-winged Blackbirds at forest preserves in suburban Chicago. In 2013, I worked as an ecological restoration planner and was fortunate enough to go birdwatching with Chicago Audubon staff. One of those trips took me to the frigid shores of Lake Michigan in January, where we tried our best to ward off the 5-degree temperatures as we used high-power spotting scopes to observe Common Goldeneyes and Mergansers floating on the icy lake. That experience opened up a new world to me, I had never seen or even heard of all these aquatic species—but there they were, living their best life, riding out winter. On the Great Lakes, of all places! But my casual fascination got put on the back burner for a few years… until the coronavirus came calling.

I started to reconnect with birds after buying a standup paddleboard in late February, which was perfect timing since there was nothing else to do while the world shut down. I started seeing birds out on the lake that made me do a double-take— they just didn’t go to my “inland” east Austin neighborhood. One day I became entranced with a black “duck” with a white head. I had to know what it was. So I downloaded Cornell’s Merlin app while paddling, punched in a few traits and boom, it had a name! A Lesser Scaup. I was hooked. On the way home I saw dozens of large white birds preparing to roost for the night along Lady Bird Lake. These Cattle Egrets all had a reservation at the same Bald Cypress tree and were checking in all at once.

But my 20/20 vision wasn’t cutting it. I decided to take the plunge and buy some binoculars. I spent days reading reviews from birders and mulling over the merits of 10x versus 8x magnification. And what’s this? Now someone is making 9x? I ended up buying a pair of Nikon Prostaff 8×42 and never looked back. It just so happened that the same week I was invited to stay at my friend’s vacation home in Port Aransas, Texas. With brand new optics and my trusty Merlin app in my pocket, I ventured out to “Port A”, where I had encounters with birds—and the people that love them—that would change my life.

Cooped Up: How I jumped on the “bird-wagon” during quarantine (Part 2)

POSTED ON JUNE 8, 2020

By Colter Sonneville

In April I took advantage of my friend’s generous offer to “shelter in place” somewhere better than my 400-square-foot Austin apartment—his Port Aransas vacation home. It didn’t take much convincing, and my friend and I hit the road. As we drove towards the coast the trees got smaller and smaller until they disappeared and were replaced with scrub and coastal grasses. We woke to gulls chattering. When I took poolside conference calls, my mind would wander off while gazing at a flock of
Brown Pelicans cruising overhead. Since nearly everything was closed, we contented ourselves with roaming the empty fog-cloaked beach with brand new Nikon binoculars. In addition to waves of pelicans, we were treated to Roseate Spoonbills a few blocks inland. We then turned our attention to the smaller denizens of the shoreline. These were birds I had barely noticed before, but now had names! And summer nesting grounds! That morning we slowly strolled through our Merlin app to identify gossipy Laughing Gulls, busybody Sanderlings and Semipalmated Plovers, and formations of Caspian Terns. Perhaps if you’re a coastal resident, this is boring stuff. But to us landlocked Austinites, this seemed an exotic paradise! We found out what most birders already know—that being able to name a bird and learn about its life, habitat, and ecological niche makes you appreciate nature more deeply.

But the real fun began that afternoon when we saw a label on the map that said “Turnbull Birding Center”. Since we had pretty much exhausted the quarry on our self-taught coastal bird hunt, we decided to take a look at the bayside bird life. And wow, what a difference a half mile makes when it comes to birding! Within minutes of parking the car, we met a very friendly birder named Ellen, who noticed us struggling with our Merlin app. She dismissed the app with an eye roll and insisted we buy a copy of Birds of North America ASAP. “It’s your new bible.”

Ellen was about 35 years our senior and was clearly thrilled to interpret for newbies like us. Within seconds she pointed out a Magnolia Warbler flitting from shrub to shrub. Then a Hooded Warbler. Out beyond the grass in the flats, she pointed out Reddish Egrets doing a shuffle dance as they forage for fish. Suddenly our guide became excited. “Oh my god, is that a Worm Eating Warbler?”, she hurriedly pointed to the base of a tree. After a quick consult with “the bible,” it was confirmed. She hadn’t seen one in a long time. As we made our way down the boardwalk, the habitat changed, and different birds took center stage. A brilliantly neon Indigo Bunting showed off on the fence. We were joined by more seasoned pros, and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo caused quite a commotion. A photographer came up to us and whispered in hushed tones conspiratorially, “Do you want to see a Painted Bunting?”. Yes, please! The hunt was on. It seems birds don’t like to stay put for long. Finally, we spotted it, in all its Crayola-worthy glory. It was the highlight of our trip. That day, with the help of our new island friends, we spotted over 25 species. We were now officially on the bird-wagon.
Bird Rescue at Baker

POSTED ON JUNE 10, 2020

By Chris Murray, Travis Audubon Land Manager

Sunday morning I got a text from Shirley and David LaVergne which read ‘bird 911.’ I gave them a call back and they told me about their discovery of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher caught in the web of a Lichen Orb Weaver, which was bad enough, but it was also suspended about 30 feet off the ground between a Cedar Elm and an Ashe Juniper. My wife Julie and I found a long piece, about 12 feet, of PVC in the barn and attached a fishing net to the end before meeting Shirley and David on the trail. After consultation it was decided the best course of action was for me to climb the Cedar Elm with the net contraption and try to get the bird from there.

Chris Murray (lower left corner) rescuing the bird from a web.

I clambered up the tree and, with some jockeying about, managed to get in a position where I could extend the net pole while hanging onto a Cedar Elm branch and scoop up the bird, the large spider coming along for the ride. Once the bird was safely in the net, I climbed down and handed it to Julie, who was waiting on the ground. The gnatcatcher appeared to be a hatch year and the spider’s silk was tightly wrapped about its legs, wings, and head. At first we thought it was dead but it stirred a bit and partially opened one eye to check us out. We decided to take it back to the house where Julie could work on it with some tweezers in good light and also afford it the opportunity to cool off a bit.

Chris Murray holding the rescued gnatcatcher.

My eldest son Braeden met us in the kitchen and he prepared a mixture of sugar water to give the gnatcatcher as I held the bird and Julie carefully disentangled the surprisingly strong silk, a process which took about ten minutes. Several times we thought that maybe the bird had died but it perked up when Julie got the silk off the bird’s head and it was able to drink some of the sugar water. Once it was thoroughly cleansed of the offending web, the gnatcatcher was placed in a box and returned to where we had caught it, placing it on a log low to the ground and in the shade. We backed off a bit to observe the bird and soon we were joined by another Blue-gray Gnatcatcher who sat up in the trees, seemingly giving encouragement in its faint, wheezy voice. After about five minutes, the rescued gnatcatcher began to preen with a passion and shortly afterwards flew to a low perch, preened some more, and then flew into the canopy to join the other gnatcatcher.

Many thanks to Shirley and David LaVergne, whose keen observation made it all possible. I asked Shirley how she found it and she said that Laurie Foss always said that if you hear chickadees and titmice making a commotion, look around and try to figure out why, and that’s exactly what she did.