A Note
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Happy Summer!

We’ve had rain, we’ve had heat, we’ve had more and more people getting vaccinated! As we continue to move out of the pandemic and reflect on the lessons of the past 18 months, we continue to be grateful for the solace that birds have provided during our time at home. Birds (and birders) are great company, and it has been a great relief to start to feel more normal again.

As we return to our programming and (we hope) in-person activities again, the TAS Staff and Board want to say thanks to all our members and friends who continued to support TAS during the pandemic. We are here because of you!

Hope to see you out at the Purple Martin roost. Stay cool and enjoy the daylight while we can.

Happy Birding,
Nicole

Nicole Netherton
People
AT TRAVIS AUDUBON

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**Purple Martins**  
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Susan Rieff  
Andrew Sansom  
Carter Smith
# Upcoming Events

**WITH TRAVIS AUDUBON**

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**Thank You**

**TO OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS**
Thank You

We are grateful to all of our members and donors who have supported Travis Audubon in any capacity in 2020-2021. Special thanks to our Lifetime Members and Leadership Giving Circle.

**Lifetime Members**

Membership at $1,500

- The Aeschbach Family
- Ross Bee
- Holly and Tom Brandt
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- Valarie Bristol
- Sam Burns
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**Leadership Giving Circle**

These members support our critical efforts in education, conservation, and advocacy. Members of this highest giving category set an example by making an annual gift of $1,500 or more – over and above membership, celebration sponsorship, and Birdathon.

- Frances and Oskar Cerbins
- Ann and Don Connell
- The Donovan Family
- Chris Gunter
- Julia Marsden
- Lino Mendiola
- Sharon Little
- Lorna M. Terhune
- Adrienne Watt
- Jo Wilson and Carol Bennett
Thank You

We are grateful to all of our members and donors who have supported Travis Audubon in any capacity in 2020-2021. Special thanks to our Wise Owl, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Warbler Members.

Wise Owl Sustaining Members
These members support Travis Audubon through a monthly donation of $10 or more.

- Barbara Anderson
- Judith Bailey
- Melissa Bedrock
- Janet Brandt
- Valerie Bristol
- The Bergman-Carton Family
- Frances and Oskar Cerbins
- Fred Dalbey and Sonia Ralls
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- Sharon and Jeff Richardson

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Annual membership of $500

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- The Watt Family
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Warbler Members
Annual membership of $250

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- Kim Soechting
- The Swisher Family
- Laura Tull
- The Vinson Family
- Judy Willcott and Laurence Miller
- Pat Yingst and Tony Parchman
Birdathon 2021 Winners Announced

POSTED ON MAY 18, 2021

A HUGE thanks to you all who participated in and donated to Birdathon this year! You helped us raise over $26,000. We could not have done this without you!

After much deliberating and double and triple checking of submitted info, we have determined the 2021 winners:

- Most species (full day): Too Many Coots (210 species)
- Most species (half day): A Wing and a Prairie (52 species)
- Most Funds Raised: Gone Pishing ($5,121)
- Rarest Bird: Gone Pishing (Glossy Ibis in Hudspeth County)
- Reveling in Raptors: Gone Pishing (15 species)
- Most Mockingbirds: Hays Hawks (50 individuals)
- Neatest Non-bird: Gone Pishing/Toucan Play That Game (Texas Bobcat)
- Most Creative Team Name: Toucan Play That Game
- Rookie of the Year: Ann Richards Ravens: Clever Girls
- Best Yard List: Fisher Hollow Goldies (32 species)
- Best Story: Parking Lot Birders

"While birding on Bolivar Flats a woman drove up and asked us if she could bird with us. She was new to birding and feeling a little unsure where to go and what she was looking at. We said – sure, come on. She birded with us for about 2 hours and we had a blast. She is a climate researcher at the University of Texas and we talked in length about the impact of climate change on avian life. That's the cool thing about birding, you never know who you are going to meet and share a rich experience in nature with. We saw her later in the parking lot of Smith Oaks and turned her onto the concept of Parking Lot Birding."

If you participated in this year’s Birdathon Photography Contest, please know that we are in the process of judging the submissions. This year will take longer than usual because we received over 4 times the number of submissions we have in previous years, which is awesome! Stay tuned for more.

Featured image above: Glossy Ibis from Audubon DAM Database

What Makes a Birder?
Nicholas Komar Jr.: A Family Tradition

POSTED ON MAY 19, 2021

By John Bloomfield

Some travel the world and amass huge life lists. Others travel as far as their backyard and may not list at all. Some bird with expensive optics and big camera lenses. Others use modest bins and maybe a point-and-shoot. Some hike miles in search of a rarity. Some take pleasant walks and just enjoy whatever they see.
Some bird from a wheelchair or walker. Others enjoy birdsongs from an open window. Birders. They come in more flavors than an ice cream store. Yet they share one thing in common: an unabashed love for all things birds.

In this new series we explore the diversity of our local birding community. We wanted to know what interested them and what keeps them going. We call it: “What Makes a Birder?”

****

Some people have a spark bird that lit their passion for birding. For Nick Komar Jr., birding itself was the spark. It runs in his family.

“You could say I was born into birding,” says Nick. “My dad turned me on to it as a young kid when he showed me an Evening Grosbeak through a pair of binoculars.” He was spellbound by the colors. Today you can find Nick in the field in and around Travis County before or after work most days, as well as good chunks of the weekend.

Born in Boston in 1993, Nick spent most of his childhood in in Fort Collins, Colorado, where his father, Nicholas Komar, is a biologist specializing in vector-borne diseases for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nick’s father is also founder of Quetzal Tours, has birded on five continents and is co-author of Wild Birding Colorado: The Big Year of 2010.

“Dad’s a compulsive birder,” Nick says. “I think I inherited that from him.”

Catching up with Nick on the trails adjacent to Onion Creek Metropolitan Park, we were hoping to find a Blackpoll Warbler that had been reported there the day before. With quick reflexes and sharp eyes, he followed every movement in the woods. There was no Blackpoll that day, but he was able to get his eyes on a small Empidonax flycatcher, which he identified as a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher from its olive-yellow colors and yellow eye ring. Nick also found a Mourning Warbler foraging down low, Least and Great-crested Flycatchers and Yellow-bellied Cuckoos calling on this cool early evening in mid-May.

Growing up, the Komar family vacations strategically included planned birding stops. “My mom, my sister and I had to choose between waiting in the car or following dad into the woods and join the hobby that we didn’t quite understand. As time went by, I would enjoy helping my dad spot birds in the field and he always complimented me on my natural instincts, which I imagine is why I continued to join him.”

Birding wasn’t always exciting for Nick, however.

There was the time when his father had him out in the freezing cold looking for an Arctic Tern in Colorado. Or the time Nick had to wait “forever” in the car while his father went off in search of an owl.

But despite these little traumas, Nick was hooked. He poured all over his father’s field guides, memorizing every detail he could. And he started joining his father on field work trips to Central and South America. By the time he was 12, Nick had traveled to five countries and accumulated a life list of more than 1200 species.

Nick didn’t bird much in his high school and college days, but the birding bug came back after college when he moved to Dallas for work.

“I didn’t know anyone, and birding was this old skill I had and a means to explore the new area around me. I started keeping track of my observations on eBird and joined the competitive side of birding. Setting a goal of seeing the most species in the county during my time in Dallas motivated me to spend all of my free time in the field.”

Nick moved to Austin three years ago, where he just bought a home south of downtown. During his first year here, he developed a friendly rivalry with Jeffrey Jackson, a great young birder in his own right, and that year each saw about 280 birds. He did not say who won.

Nick derides stereotypes in birding. “Although it has a long way to go, birding is becoming more diverse than it used to be, and as the technology keeps evolving, it is attracting more people. One of the best birders in the area is a young teenager,” he says. “He can do circles around any of us.”

Nick offers the following advice for new birders.

“Don’t be intimidated,” he says. “You don’t need to be an expert, and if you don’t know what something is, there are plenty of people around to help you figure it out.”

He adds: “Especially, don’t be afraid of misidentifying a bird. We all do it. I once mistook a tree frog for a Ferruginous Pygmy Owl! My father says that to find rare birds you have to have a great imagination, and that was pretty imaginative.”

While Nick has big plans for his birding life in Texas and beyond, his main ambition doesn’t center around his life list or some rare, sought-after bird. “Birding will always be a special bond I have with my dad,” he says, “and my goal is to share it with him for as long as I can.”

They’ll be traveling soon to Alaska, where the family birding tradition will continue.
Travis Audubon Staff Participate in Birdathon

POSTED ON MAY 21, 2021

This year, the Travis Audubon staff decided to join forces and compete as a Birdathon team. Here are the highlights from team Don’t Quit Your Jay Job, who together saw 102 species:

**Judith Allen**

“I went to McKinney Falls SP. Was walking along the Onion Creek Hike and Bike Trail on the west side closest to Onion Creek just as an adult Red-shouldered Hawk dove down from a nest and out of sight. Looking back to the nest, there were two white-ish fluffy heads that had popped up – babies! So precious.

Basically made my year right there.”

**Kelsey McKenna**

Male Painted Bunting spotted by Kelsey at Commons Ford.

“When planning my Birdathon day, my number one goal was to see a male Painted Bunting—a lifer that has eluded me since I moved to Texas in 2019 (embarrassing, I know!) Using eBird and the Travis County Birds Facebook group, I decided Commons Ford was the best place to be with so many reports of Painted Buntings, Summer Tanagers, Blue Grosbeaks, and Indigo Buntings... just the thought of so many cool birds makes my head spin.

I set out from my home in Buda, taking the backroads and scanning the telephone lines along long stretches of pastures, counting several Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. To my surprise, I counted about as many species on my way to Commons Ford as I counted at Commons Ford... what a treat!

I parked near the mouth of prairie trail loop at Commons Ford, stepped out of my car, and immediately noticed a red-and-blue bird blasting its song at the top of a tree. The moment I landed my binoculars on him, he turned his back to me—a flash of green—as if to say ‘I know you think it's too good to be true, but make no mistake!’ My Painted Bunting! I could have packed it up then and the day would have been a success. The day only got birdier. I saw several more Painted Buntings, an Eastern Bluebird feeding its babies along the fence near the barn, and another birder pointed me in the direction of a male Blue Grosbeak—another lifer! I’m still a beginner, so I heard songs that I couldn't identify, and wondered about several high-in-the-sky raptors. The beauty of beginning birding is that with every exciting ID, there are two ‘mystery birds’ that keep you up at night. It is a joy to know my learning has only just begun, and there is so much more to discover! I look forward to beating my list next year.”

**Chris Murray**

“I birded at Caddo Lake State Park. A highlight for me was getting eyes on a Northern Parula. I could hear them singing in the canopy but those tiny buggers can be tricky to see!”

**Nicole Netherton**

Curve-billed Thrasher at the burrito shop.

“I went out to Big Bend National Park for four days of birding and exploration with my sister, Katie. We were worried that the wildfires would ruin our experience, but all turned out to be well, thanks to a lot of very brave and dedicated firefighters.”
Spring in West Texas is magical!

Caley Zuzula

Birding at Baker.

“First I went to Baker, where I helped my husband see his first-ever Golden-cheeked Warbler! There were so many that day that we both heard and saw, and since we were at Baker it was a really quiet and peaceful experience. Then I went to Mills Pond, and with the help of other excellent birders (especially Sharon Richardson and Christy Esmahan), saw a bunch of exciting birds, including Prothonotary Warbler, Ovenbird, and Common Yellowthroat.”

Orioles Double Stuff

POSTED ON MAY 26, 2021

By Jim Pauff

Orchard Orioles are studied in countries like Panama because they fertilize a large forest tree (Erythrina fasca Loureiro) by sipping nectar from its flowers. Only Orchard Orioles do this; other wintering orioles peck through the base of the blooms to steal nectar. The flower has some mahogany color and scientists wonder if that causes the difference in behavior. Coming north, Orchards will steal nectar from trumpet creepers in the same way their relatives do down South, pecking through the flower bottom. In the 1970s ornithologists concluded Baltimore Orioles and Bullock’s Orioles were the same bird, and called both “Northern Orioles.” Why they did this seemingly defies logic, but in any event the brain of bird science reversed itself, going back to the original species designations. By contrast, Orchard Orioles may soon be divided into two species: our familiar Orchard and Fuertes’ (Icterus fuertesi), which is a lighter-colored Orchard look-alike. Here tofore Fuertes’ was considered only a subspecies. New ornithologists refer to both as “the Orchard Oriole group.” Also called the ochre oriole, Fuertes’ live on the east coast of southern Mexico from Veracruz to Yucatan—the part where Mexico curves around the Gulf. Fuertes’ don’t migrate far. Genetic testing and color spectrometry analysis suggest the two are indeed taxonomically separate—but as yet this is not official. Speculation is some 200,000 years ago Orchards began diverging due to habitat availability. Those living along the Mexican Caribbean lightened due to terrain differences. They turned from chestnut brown to gold-ochre. DNA reveals Fuertes’ do not interbreed with their darker relatives due to geography and separation. It’s an example of “allopatric speciation”—speciation due to natural partition.

Pigments called carotenoids produce the bright oranges and yellows in oriole feathers. However, male Orchard Orioles at maturity produce another pigment called phaeomelanin that mutes carotenoids with a reddish-yellow wash. It isn’t present in females or immatures. Why melanin masks the flashy colors is a puzzle. Brightness is often used to claim territory and indicate the health of mates. These things don’t seem important to Orchard Orioles. As compensation, perhaps, Orchard Orioles are gregarious. They will share a large nesting tree near water, close to kingbirds as insurance against predators. Orchard males give more help to females raising young than larger, brighter Baltimores do. Orchards also sing a lot. Speculation is attributes like these make up for losing their flash, being muted but handsome in their own way.

Orchard Orioles (Icterus spurius) look like Baltimores dipped in mahogany wood stain which shrank them when it dried. At six inches long, orchards are North America’s smallest blackbird. There are more around than is obvious. They breed not only in the United States and Canada but as far south as Baja California and northern Mexico. All orioles spend winter in the tropics or near-tropics where, like true blackbirds, they flock in small, noisy, chattering, scolding groups. At night, flocks sleep in tall dense grasses—like Red-winged Blackbirds among cattails in North America.
Celebrating a Legacy of Service and Education

POSTED ON MAY 27, 2021

Enlisting the aid of two friends, an English teacher and an illustrator, that book became a reality in 2015. The proceeds for the sale of *The Adventures of a Chimney Swift Family* benefit Travis Audubon's maintenance of the Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary.

Today we celebrate Anne Donovan as a consummate educator and conservationist. We are thrilled to celebrate her legacy of service and education with a gift to BookSpring in her honor. We know her work will inspire future conservationists for years to come!

Anne Donovan was a science teacher at Saint Andrew’s Elementary for 17 years. She took the students out of the classroom to experience the natural world whenever and wherever possible. We first met Anne on one of her spring outings with her students to observe bird banding at the Driftwood Bird Banding Station in Hays County in the 1980s, where we assisted with the research. Her students experienced various types of habitats and came eye-to-eye with the myriad avian species in Central Texas.

**ANNE BECOMES INCREDIBLY SUPPORTIVE OF CONSERVATION WORK WITH CHIMNEY SWIFTS.**

Later Anne’s family foundation helped fund numerous Chimney Swift Towers in the Austin area, and Anne even assisted in the construction. While attending the dedication of a Chimney Swift Tower at Drippings Springs Elementary school as a workshop project by Travis Audubon, she was dismayed by the lack of factual knowledge the students had about the birds. She determined that day that there was a need for a children’s book about Chimney Swifts.

Volunteer Spotlight: Jane Tillman

POSTED ON JUNE 2, 2021

A retired dietitian, Jane Tillman taught in Nutritional Sciences at UT Austin for 22 years. Her real passion all along has been nature, especially birds and native plants. She’s spent her volunteer career giving back to our ecosystem, ever since she took the Capital Area Master Naturalist training back in 2001. She was instrumental in putting on the National Wildlife Federation habitat stewards training with the City of Austin for years. She also helps put on the Native Landscape Certification Program classes through the Native Plant Society of Texas Austin Chapter.

**TRAVIS AUDUBON HONORS DEVOTED VOLUNTEER ANNE DONOVAN WITH A BOOKSPRING FLYING BOOK SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP.**

**BOOKSPRING IS THANKFUL TO TRAVIS AUDUBON FOR THE LOVELY GIFT OF A DOZEN COPIES OF THE ADVENTURES OF A CHIMNEY SWIFT FAMILY BY KAY HART AND ANNE DONOVAN. THIS EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN’S BOOK WILL BE GIVEN TO KIDS THROUGH OUR PROGRAMS.**

Reposted with permission from BookSpring.org.

By: Georgean and Paul Kyle

By: Alexis Puchek
I had the pleasure of speaking with Jane to learn more about her experiences birding and volunteering with Travis Audubon and what keeps her motivated to do so.

**When did you first become interested in birding?**

When I was growing up, I was an outdoor girl. My mother took us on hikes and I remember seeing my first Red-headed Woodpecker down at **Beavers Bend in Oklahoma**. My husband and I backpacked and hiked and he gave me my first Sibley guide back in 2001 which got me interested in birds. It was a bit of a progression, and as I took all the Travis Audubon classes, the more interested I got. Later on, there was one field trip that I went on at the home of some Habitat Stewards and this younger birdner Jeremy, probably 14 or 15, could identify the birds by song. I was going, "wow, I could do that." I think that was another one of the reasons I got more interested in birding, since listening to them is pretty cool.

**How long have you been volunteering with Travis Audubon?**

I really appreciate the things that Travis Audubon does that help people become more aware of the birds out there, so they can identify them. I started volunteering with Travis Audubon when Valerie Staats was Executive Director, around 2006. It's been a long time. I really enjoy the people aspect of it. I wanted to do more than just bird; educating people is my kind of thing. I really like outreach where you can point out specific birds to people, and say “Stop! Don’t go down there yet, there’s a Black-bellied Plover, a very special bird all dressed up in its breeding finery, and look at those gulls, they’re coming all the way from Chile, through Texas, and up to the Dakotas.” It’s pretty fun to get people excited.

**What are the different ways in which you volunteer with Travis Audubon?**

I’ve volunteered in a variety of ways for Travis Audubon. I used to write articles for this very same Smoke Signals blog back when it was a paper newsletter. We had an urban habitat committee, and I was involved with that. The committee created the **plant list that’s still on the Travis Audubon website** for people interested in native plants and hummingbird plants. I really just do what I’m interested in. I taught at UT, so I’m used to putting together PowerPoints which helps since I’ve given a lot of talks. I’m Co-Chair of the Monthly Program Committee and I like to help line up the speakers. I’m on the Education, Advocacy, and Field Trip Committees and help out with the Master Birders classes. I’m just involved. (Jane also teaches the **Beginning Backyard Birding class** through Travis Audubon that can teach you a lot about how to make an environment conducive to help birds thrive in your yard.)

**Why should someone volunteer with Travis Audubon?**

Volunteering can be a great way to make social connections and learn more about all the birds out there. If you’re interested in volunteering with Travis Audubon, it can be a great way to learn and reach others, and there are many different ways you can get involved.

Learning by doing is one of the best ways to teach yourself, and along the way you’ll hopefully help educate others. The Travis Audubon mission statement is to conserve, learn, and enjoy birding – and hopefully you want to be a part of that.

**Do you have any suggestions for new birders?**

A lot of people begin birding by seeing the birds in their backyard. It can be easy to think that feeder birds are the be all end all, and it’s really just a subset of birds. New birders should get the Merlin app and begin listening for birds and watching for motion. It’s important to get a decent pair of binoculars (not the set your grandfather had). She also suggests going on Travis Audubon field trips and attending birding festivals to expand your horizons to a wider perspective of birds (Eastern vs. Western birds, migrants, residents, etc.). The more exposure you get, the more you learn.

***

I wanted to end my conversation with Jane to see if she had any suggestions for favorite spots to bird. It seems, it will always depend on what you’re looking for. **Windy Point Park, Hornsby Bend,** and **Milton Reimers Ranch** are all some of Jane’s favorite places. Each have a unique habitat that you’ll get something different from. Narrowing your priorities, whether it’s just seeing birds or if you have a target species, will help you pinpoint where you should go. At the end of the day, it’s important to just get out there and see the great state of Texas.

**Birdathon 2021 Photography Contest Winners Revealed**

**POSTED ON JUNE 4, 2021**

Thank you to everyone who submitted their work this year’s Birdathon Photography Contest!

We received a record breaking number of submissions – nearly 200 photos – and our judges Nora Chovanec (Travis Audubon Design Director) and Christina Snitkin (Master Birder and Photographer) scored the photos based on the following criteria: Technical: Focus, Exposure, Lighting, Print Quality Subject: Creative Use of Subject, Composition, Impact, Uniqueness
HERE ARE THE WINNERS:

5TH PLACE:

Yellow Warbler by Terry Banks

4TH PLACE:

Indigo Bunting by Stephen Kierniesky

3RD PLACE:

Greater Roadrunner by Alison Stokes

2ND PLACE (TIED):

Mississippi Kite by Charles Tolliver

Great Horned Owlets by Katherine Daniels

1ST PLACE:

Ruddy Turnstone by Mariela Rodriguez
See Why We’re “Humming” with Excitement at Zilker Botanical Garden!

Last year, our friends at the Zilker Botanical Garden reached out to Travis Audubon with a (literally) sweet proposal: to create a space at the garden that attracts hummingbirds. The plan was two-fold: to dispatch and maintain nectar feeders, and to landscape the garden with native plants that hummingbirds pollinate. Travis Audubon volunteer Jane Tillman provided advice on the best plants to populate the garden, while volunteers Karen Bartoletti, Joyce Bertolacini, and Marc Frazier maintain the feeders on a regular basis to keep them clean and full of nectar.

The garden is looking beautiful; we encourage you all to take a stroll among the flowers and enjoy the tiny gem-like birds flitting around between feeders and flowers.

A special thanks to Cindy Klemmer, Matt Morris, and Meredith Giles with Zilker Botanical Gardens for initiating this fantastic project, all the Travis Audubon volunteers who assist with maintaining the feeders, and Laura Hopkins for donating materials to keep the nectar flowing at the feeders.

Interested in gardening for birds? Check out our resources page.

Celebrating Three Amazing Board Members

This month, the Travis Audubon Board of Directors celebrated the retirement of three fantastic board members: Clif Ladd, Christy Esmahan, and Carol Ray.

Clif Ladd has served on the board since 2009. He has participated on the Advocacy Committee and Baker and Blair Woods Core Teams, providing expertise as a professional biologist. Clif was instrumental in establishing Baker Sanctuary as part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.

Christy Esmahan has served on the board since 2019. As chair of the Advocacy Committee, she has been a strong advocate for birds, focusing primarily on preventing building collisions and border wall construction. She also participated in the field trip committee, leading birding walks, the IDEA committee, looking at how to make TAS more open to all birders, and TAS’s book club, Ruffled Feathers. As a native Spanish speaker, she created and taught the nationally-acclaimed Spanish for Birders workshop that was so popular that it required several encore sessions.

Carol Ray has served on the board since 2013, and more recently as the organization’s Treasurer. Her financial expertise as a former CFO has steered Travis Audubon into becoming the financially healthy nonprofit it is today! She is also a regular volunteer for our annual Purple Martin Parties, so if you see her at a party this year, thank her for her service!

We could not do the work we do without the help, time, and commitment of our Board of Directors. We are so grateful for these three, and we won’t say goodbye, just see you later, hopefully out birding!
It all started on a family vacation to Rocky Mountain National Park in 2012. While others in his family were focused on four-legged species, Jeffrey’s eye caught a Great Horned Owl with some beginner binoculars bought at the park’s visitor center. There was no turning back.

At a discount bookstore, he bought a half-priced National Geographic field guide, and he started soaking up as much information as he could about birds. Soon it was eBird, and then a camera to document his sightings – a Canon 70D with a 100-400 mm zoom. Its speed makes it a favorite of many birders. It was his college graduation gift.

He also records bird songs and calls using his smartphone, which helps him review and remember. The best ones he posts to eBird.

We caught up with Jeffrey at Mills Pond, Austin’s favorite migrant trap, in early May. He had just finished a Loggerhead Shrike survey in Williamson County for Texas Parks and Wildlife.

"Like many birders, I’m at Mills Pond a lot at this time of year," he said. "I’m always happy when I see my first Mourning Warbler. For me, that’s a sure sign of spring."

It was an overcast afternoon with a light rain, but the birds were moving all the same. During our time together we saw eight warbler species including a beautiful male Chestnut-sided Warbler (pictured above) we found directly over our heads where Jeffrey had been helping two other birders locate a Northern Waterthrush. Dutifully, the Chestnut-sided paused for photos.

“Birding brings me closer to nature and has renewed my love for the outdoors,” Jeffrey told us. “My wife and I have always enjoyed traveling and we love that birding lets us visit amazing new places while doing what we love.”

Since 2012, he has logged 558 birds in North America, including 487 in Texas and 350 in Travis County.

While Jeffrey is focused on birds, his wife Kimberly, a Natural Resources Specialist for the state, has been helping him get better at identifying trees and native plants. She also took the lead in creating a bird-friendly backyard at their South Austin home.

“Trees are great clues to bird habitat,” he said. “Plus, when you’re leading a birding trip, it helps to be able to point out a specific tree where the bird is perched – it’s much better than saying, ‘up there!’”
When not birding for pleasure, Jeffrey works for Travis County Parks at Hamilton Pool Preserve and Reimers Ranch Park. Before the pandemic, he was leading bird walks at Reimers Ranch, which he hopes to be able to restart soon.

“Reimers Ranch and Hamilton Pool are such amazing places,” he said. “I remember a couple of years ago at Hamilton Pool seeing what I thought was an Eastern Phoebe a couple of feet in front of me. Well, it turned out to be a Black Phoebe, which became my favorite bird. It returned every year for three years, and last year, there were two successful nests. Unfortunately, I don’t think they survived the winter storm this year.”

What keeps Jeffrey going? First is an absolute love of birds. Next are his birding goals.

“I’m close to 500 species in Texas and I hope to get there in the next year or two. Another goal I have is to see 100 species in all 254 Texas counties. I still have a long way to go – I only have 100 in 32 counties.”

That’s still an impressive feat, and it will keep Jeffrey Jackson in the field for a long time to come.

Tales from the Climate Patch

POSTED ON JUNE 21, 2021

by Allan Seils

On a warm Central Texas morning of clear skies, I conducted the spring bird survey of 12 locations within my designated 1-kilometer square area in SE Travis County. This was done as part of the nationwide National Audubon Climate Watch Program. Recent rains in May left lush vegetation everywhere. Johnson grass stood up to 3-4 foot tall and along with other plants filled the roadside ditches. Not easy to park at some survey points. But hey, that’s why I drive a 4-wheel drive truck.

Best birds of the day were the Barn Owl, flock of Cattle Egrets and Flying Cormorant. Oh, and not to forget, the Red-shouldered Hawk that screeched in alarm as I approached and then flew away in disgust from its perch.

Among many good memories, the throbbing sound of a bird’s wings that flew from behind me up to my left. Turning my head in response, I was face to bill with a hummingbird not more than 2 feet from me at eye level. I looked at it and it looked at me than reversed course and flew in the direction of its origin. A brief moment, but a vivid memory.

Other flora and fauna of note: a deer crossing the road (pictured left); a turtle in the road moving swiftly (Do turtles move swiftly?) to the roadside to avoid a dump truck; road-killed snake and a Cottontail rabbit. Morning Glories and Nightshades amongst many other wild flowers of Texas.

On a personal note, my new hearing aids are amazing. At each stop, I heard so many bird songs. In fact, a good portion of my bird sightings were “Heard only” rather than visual. Sadly, many of the bird songs evaded identification. I never experienced hearing them in the field. I guess I will have to sign up for the next Travis Audubon Society birding by sound class. So much to learn.

If you would like to know more about this community science program, click here or contact Caley Zuzula at caley@travisaudubon.org.
Recovering America’s Wildlife Act Needs Your Support

POSTED ON JUNE 23, 2021

In May, Travis Audubon members learned about proposed federal legislation called the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (H.R. 2773) from Rachel Rommel-Crump, State Coordinator for the Texas Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife. The alliance is a coalition of 165 organizations and businesses backing this landmark conservation legislation. If passed, this bipartisan bill would bring about the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in a generation. It would fund wildlife and habitat conservation in states, territories and tribal lands to address our nation’s wildlife crisis and help prevent thousands of species from becoming endangered.

Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) are the lead sponsors of the legislation, which could bring tens of millions of dollars to Texas annually for conservation purposes, without the need for new taxes.

Nationwide, experts have identified more than 12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including over 1,300 in Texas. These include many grassland and coastal birds, bees, butterflies, sea turtles and freshwater species. The bill is supported by National Audubon, the National Wildlife Federation and many Texas-based conservation organizations. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is also advocating for the legislation. You can read its report here. Currently, the United States lacks a dedicated funding stream to conserve vulnerable wildlife. Like the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act of 2020, which established a permanent revenue source for the country’s Land and Water Conservation Fund, the RAWA would provide dedicated and reliable funding for wildlife conservation initiatives. The bill would allocate $1.3 billion per year to states and $97.5 million to tribal nations from existing revenues to fund wildlife conservation, habitat management and restoration, outdoor recreation and education programs.

Of this, Texas would be eligible for more than $50 million per year to implement the Texas Conservation Action Plan and help stabilize at-risk species in our state. Texas Parks and Wildlife would administer the funding, which would support qualified projects conducted by Texas state agencies, conservation organizations, land trusts, universities, nature centers, private landowners and others.

By conserving wildlife, the legislation also benefits an important part of the Texas economy. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, the Texas outdoor recreation economy, which includes birding and nature programs, generates 327,000 direct jobs, $14.4 billion in salaries and wages and $3.5 billion in state and local tax revenue.

The RAWA currently has 56 bipartisan cosponsors nationwide, including one Texan, Marc Veasey, (D-33). More than a dozen Texas legislators from both sides of the aisle supported an earlier version of the bill, including one Austin-area congressman, Lloyd Doggett (D-35). You can help further this legislation by asking your U.S. House Representative to cosponsor the bill. To learn more about the RAWA and find information you can use to write your local member of Congress, visit the Texas Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife website at txwildlifealliance.org.

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