



SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 52, NO. 2

FEBRUARY 2003

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Great Backyard Bird Count Needs Birdwatchers

All across North America, birds face survival challenges ranging from loss of habitat to introduced predators and diseases such as West Nile virus. The sixth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (February 14-17) promises to add important new information to our understanding of birds' movements and overall health by focusing on common birds as well as on birds of special concern.



Once again, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society call on birders of every age and skill level to make the count possible. "We need every birder to join us," said Frank Gill, Audubon senior vice president of science. "The Great Backyard Bird Count has become a vitally important means of gathering data to help birds, but it can't happen unless people take part. Whether you're a novice or an expert, we need you to take part and help us help birds."

A project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited, the GBBC combines high-tech Web tools with an army of citizen-scientist bird observers. The GBBC asks families, individuals, classrooms, and community groups to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, schoolyards, and other areas during any or all of the four count days. Participants enter their sightings at BirdSource, <www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>. The state-of-the-art website was developed by Audubon and the Cornell Lab.

Begun in 1998, the GBBC has united more than a quarter of a million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in the effort to keep common birds common. "When the last Ivory-billed Woodpecker was seen in the 1930s, there was no concrete way for citizens to help professional ornithologists monitor bird populations," says Cornell Lab of Ornithology director John Fitzpatrick, who led an expedition hoping to rediscover one of North America's most spectacular birds. "We cannot allow other species to face the same fate as the Ivorybill. The Great Backyard Bird Count provides a way for citizens to help determine which birds are where and in what numbers, so we can take

(Continued on page 11)



TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

Thursday, February 20, 7 p.m.

Program: Freshwater for Wildlife

Presenter: Cindy Loeffler, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and Myron Hess, National Wildlife Federation

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive

(See page 7 for details and directions.)

Travis Audubon Society

Email addresses are at "About Us,"
<www.travisaudubon.org>.

Officers and Directors

President	
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First Vice President	
Vacant	
Second Vice President	
Dan Smith	451-2632
Treasurer	
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BJ Dertien	
Pat Dillon	347-0452
Anne Donovan	
Al Green	512-357-1427
Shelia Hargis	291-1861
John Kelly	331-8693

Sanctuary Caretakers

TAS Wildlife Sanctuary	
John and Marcie Wilcox	219-8425
Blair Woods	
Stennie Meadours	443-8152

ACT Representatives

John Kelly (state president)	331-8693
Bryan Hale (state treasurer)	474-5599

Signal Smoke Editor

Rosemary Wetherold	892-1606
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TAS Hotline: 926-8751

The hotline has information on TAS events (press 6) and rare birds in our area (press 5). To report sightings, press 1. To ask about birds, environmental issues, or TAS, press 2. No touch-tone phone? Call 474-5599.

TAS Web Site

www.travisaudubon.org

TAS Email

info@travisaudubon.org

TAS Fax

892-2026

Mission Statement

The Travis Audubon Society promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and preservation of birds, wildlife, and their habitats in Central Texas.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Travis Audubon field trips date back to the founding of the society more than 50 years ago. Since then, thousands of birdwatchers have participated in our excursions around Austin and farther afield. A few months ago, Georgia Harper agreed to chair our Field Trip Committee, and the exciting selection of trips in the *Signal Smoke* are a tribute to her leadership. Georgia has gathered an enthusiastic committee to organize these trips so that we now have trips planned almost every week. Some are local bird walks, while others travel to more distant locations. There are trips for all interest and skill levels—from beginning bird walks to more rigorous searches for rare or uncommon birds.

Georgia still needs additional volunteers to lead occasional birding trips or regularly scheduled beginning bird walks in local parks. If you know the common birds in your local park and can schedule a regular morning walk, contact Georgia Harper and join her team of intrepid field trip leaders. You don't have to be an expert, and you can team up with a spouse or friend if you want additional support. All you need is a desire to share your enthusiasm and whatever knowledge you have with others. We will advertise beginning bird walks around town, so they will mostly attract folks who are just learning how to identify birds. They don't need leaders that can identify every last bird, but they will need friendly people to get them started and tune them into the world of birds and nature.

As we turn the corner on the winter season and head into spring, join us for an outing and make a commitment to lead a bird walk to your favorite local bird haunt. To join Georgia's team of leaders, contact her at <gharper@utsystem.edu> or 467-9700.

—Rob Fergus

COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS

Email addresses are available at <www.travisaudubon.org> under "About Us."

TAS Rare Bird Alert	Shawn Ashbaugh	970-7170
	Alert number	926-8751
Bird Records Conservation	Bob Barth	327-1173
Cyberspace	John Kelly	331-8693
Education	Jenny Rasmussen	218-1580
Field Trips	Shelia Hargis	291-1861
Hornsby Bend Hospitality	Georgia Harper	467-9700
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Membership Secretary Programs	Vacant	
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Publicity	Rosemary Wetherold	892-1606
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Sanctuary	Dan Smith	451-2632
Urban Habitat Development	Bryan Hale	474-5599
	Chuck Simms	331-9630

SIGNAL SMOKE INFORMATION

About the Newsletter

Signal Smoke, published monthly or bi-monthly by Travis Audubon Society, is a TAS membership benefit. To join Travis Audubon Society, see the back page of this newsletter. Notify National Audubon Society (800-274-4201) and Chris Doggett (Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 1132, Round Rock TX 78680-1132) of address changes.

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Newsletter Deadline


The deadline for submissions is the first day of the preceding month. Submit articles, announcements, and uncopyrighted art for the March issue by **February 1** to Rosemary Wetherold, 4507 Cliffstone Cove, Austin TX 78735-6610; 892-2026 (fax); or <rosemaryw@austin.rr.com>. Submissions by email or on a floppy are preferred but not required. Call Rosemary at 892-1606 if you have questions.


Signal Smoke is printed on recycled paper.



February 2003 Calendar of Travis Audubon Society Events

 Field Trip—See pages 4–6

 Meeting—See page 7

 Birding Class—See pages 8–9

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 Deadline for March <i>Signal Smoke</i> (p. 2)  Field trip, Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, 7:30 am  Bluebird Class, 8 am
2	3  Education Committee Meeting, 7 pm	4	5	6	7	8  Monthly Bird Count, Hornsby Bend, 7 am  Field trip, St. Edward's District Park, 8 am  HBBO Meeting & Potluck, 11:30 am
9  Field trip to Camp Tejas, 6:45 am	10	11  Planning Group Meeting for Youth Birding Mini-Camp, 6:30 pm	12  Urban Habitat Development Group Meeting, 7 pm	13  TAS Board of Directors Meeting, 6:45 pm	14	15  Bird walk, Hornsby Bend, 7:30 am  Bird walk, Canyon of the Eagles Nature Park, 8:30 am
16  Bird walk, Meadow Lake, 4 pm	17  Beyond Binoculars Class begins, 7 pm	18	19  Purple Martin Class begins, 7 pm	20 TAS Regular Monthly Meeting with program, 7 pm (see page 7)	21	22  Field trip, Moore property on Pedernales River, 7 am  Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend (workday & nature walk), 9 am
23	24	25	26	27  Bird Records Committee Meeting, 7 pm	28	MARCH 1 Deadline for April <i>Signal Smoke</i> (p. 2)  Field trip, Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, 7:30 am

TAS FIELD TRIPS AND EVENTS

All TAS field trips are open to members and nonmembers and to experienced and inexperienced birders. Wear appropriate clothing and walking shoes, and bring binoculars and water. Unless otherwise noted, field trips are free. Carpoolers should expect to pay a share of the gasoline expense. **Please check the TAS website** <www.travisaudubon.org> **or the TAS hotline (926-8751) for up-to-date information on field trips, including cancellations due to weather or other circumstances.** Because of the publication schedule of the newsletter, things can change!

Saturday, February 1, 7:30–11:30 am Field Trip to Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve

Led by Georgia Harper and Diana Seidel; no sign-up needed, just arrive on time. Wild Basin trails pass through woodland, grassland, and streamside habitats that are home to threatened and endangered species and to hundreds of native plants, animals, and birds.



Participants will meet at the “back entrance,” by special permit of the preserve, and hike (at times) moderately steep trails. Bring water and snacks; no facilities at this entrance. **Directions:**

From Bee Caves Road, take Westlake Drive north past Red Bud Trail. Turn left on the High Road, then take the second left onto Wild Basin Ledge. Continue to the end of the road. **Contact:** For questions: <ggharper@utsystem.edu> or call 499-4508 (Georgia Harper); 306-0931 (Diana Seidel).

Saturday, February 8, 7 am Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend

Meet at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. The Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory meeting and potluck lunch will be held at **11:30 a.m.** after the morning survey. **Contact:** Russ Nelson, 431-1420, <russelln@concentric.net>.

Saturday, February 8, 8–11 am Field Trip to St. Edward's District Park

Led by Kathy McCormack and Stu Wilson; no sign-up needed. Hope to see Spotted Towhees, Eastern Phoebe, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. No bathrooms, relatively level trails north of Bull Creek, steeper trails south of Bull Creek. Hiking boots recommended; bring water. Only pouring rain, icy roads, or a wind chill of less than 32° F will cancel the field trip. **Directions:** The parking lot for St. Edward's District Park lies on the west side of westbound Spicewood Springs Road, 2.3 miles north of its intersection with Loop 360 (Capital of Texas Highway). **Contact:** For questions: <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>, 996-6906 (w) (Kathy); or <stu@bga.com>, 459-1082 (h) (Stu).



Sunday, February 9, 6:45 am–noon Field Trip to Camp Tejas

Led by Charles Stephens of Wild Birds Unlimited and jointly sponsored by TAS. We should see lots of wintering field/meadow and riparian habitat birds (sparrows/thrushes galore). Meet at Wild Birds Unlimited–Lakeline parking lot. **Contact:** If interested or for directions: <charles_stephens@yahoo.com>, 600-1700.

Saturday, February 15, 7:30 am–noon Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

Led by Rob Fergus. Meet in the parking lot of the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. **Contact:** 347-7572, <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Saturday, February 15, 8:30 am–1:30 pm

Bird Walk at Canyon of the Eagles Nature Park

Led by Mark and Charlsa Bentley. Two-hour birding walk on trails in park <www.canyonoftheeagles.com>, followed by a 2½-hour trip up the river to the Bald Eagle habitat on the Vanishing Texas River Cruise (cost: \$16.50/person). Park has facilities; boat has facilities and snack bar. **Directions:** From North Austin, take Hwy. 183 N to Hwy 29 (33 mi.); go west on Hwy. 29 to Burnet (23 mi.). From South Austin, take Hwy. 71 W to Hwy. 281 (44 mi.); go north on Hwy. 281 to Burnet (18 mi.). From Burnet, go west on Hwy. 29, then north (right) on FM 2341 to park. **Contact:** Please call early so that we may ensure adequate space on the boat. For information, call 301-2675 or 461-5375 (cell), or email <mebentley@austin.rr.com>.



Sunday, February 16, 4–5:30 pm Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

Led by Jenny Rasmussen and one or more coleaders. **Directions:** Going north on I-35, get off at the 3406 exit (Exit 254) in Round Rock (next exit past U.S. 79). At the light, turn right and go east on Old Settler's Blvd. Go straight through two 4-way stops, then turn left onto Settlement Drive. Go about a quarter mile, and park along the side of the road (the park and 65-acre lake will be on your right).

Saturday, February 22, 7 am–2 pm Field Trip to Moore Property on Pedernales River

Led by Anne Donovan. We will survey birds on 150 acres of private land bordering the Pedernales River, Dead Man's Creek, and Live Oak Creek. Meet in the parking lot of the Albertson's grocery store at the “Y” in Oak Hill at 7 a.m. Property is about one-hour drive from the “Y.” The hiking can be fairly steep, but it is easy for some less-eager hikers to stay along the river or on the uplands looking for sparrows, while others walk down the trails into the canyons that hold the two creeks. Bring lunch,

TAS TRIPS AND EVENTS (CONTINUED)

water, jacket, etc. Participants can stay as long into the afternoon as we have birds that want to be watched. **Contact:** For more information and to sign up: 472-3030 (Anne).

Saturday, February 22, 9 am–1 pm

Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend

Volunteer workday at Hornsby Bend. For more information, visit www.hornsbybend.org or contact Tim Hissam at tp_hissam1@yahoo.com or 251-6067.

Saturday, March 1, 7:30–11:30 am

Field Trip to Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

Led by Maggie Burnett. Bring water and snacks; facilities at entrance only. TAS is conducting regular bird surveys within the preserve. We will carpool from the entrance to a site within the preserve, and hike moderate trails. The property, which is not generally open to the public, is very scenic and has many options for birding. Meet at the preserve headquarters, 11617 FM 2244 (Bee Caves Road). **Directions:** From Loop 360 and FM 2244, follow FM 2244 west for 6.2 miles. The entrance to the preserve will be on your left, just before the traffic light at the Lake Pointe business center. From Hwy. 71 and FM 2244, follow FM 2244 east for 1 mile. The entrance to the preserve will be on your right, after the Uplands residential subdivision, and just after the light at the Lake Pointe business center. The entrance to the Preserve is a dirt road with a sign posted on the fence next to the open gate. The dirt road is easier to see than the sign, however, because the sign is below the grade of the road. Follow the dirt road down about ¼ mile to the parking area. **Contact:** If you have questions: mburnett@austin.rr.com, 899-0390.

Saturday, March 8, 8 am–noon

Field Trip to Rio Vista Park and Aquarena Springs Boardwalk, San Marcos

No sign-up needed. Easy walking—hope to see winter residents and early migrants. There may be several co-leaders from TAS, Comal County Birdlisters, and/or the Wimberley Birding Club. Bring water and a snack; optional lunch at nearby restaurant. **Directions from Austin:** Take I-35 South, then take Exit 205 in San Marcos, and continue south on the access road for a couple of blocks—meet at the San Marcos Visitor Center, which will be on the right. There's plenty of parking in their lot, but the Visitor Center may not be open until 9 a.m., so you may want to stop someplace else for rest rooms. After birding Rio Vista Park, we'll caravan to the Aquarena Springs boardwalk, where there also are rest rooms. We'll go north about one exit on the Interstate and then west on Aquarena Springs Drive; go less than a mile, past some Southwest Texas



University buildings, and the Aquarena Springs Center/golf course will be on the right (with flagpoles out in front); drive all the way to end of the parking lot. We'll meet at the start of the boardwalk (which runs along the bank of the San Marcos River and encloses part of a marsh) just to the left of the greenhouse at the end of the parking lot. **Contact:** For questions: Kathy McCormack, 996-6906 (w), kathy.mccormack@motorola.com.



Saturday, March 15, 7:30 am–noon

Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

For details, see February 15 calendar item.

Saturday, March 15, 8 am–noon

Field Trip to McKinney Roughs Nature Park

Birding walk on approximately 2 miles of easy to moderate improved trails in park <http://static.lcra.org/roughs/>. Led by Mark Bentley and one or more coleaders. Cost is \$3 per person, payable at the park office. Bring water and snacks; facilities available at trailhead only. **Directions from Austin:** Take Hwy. 71 East. Park is on the left 13 miles after the Austin airport. **Contact:** For information: 301-2675, mebentley@austin.rr.com.

Sunday, March 16, 4–5:30 pm

Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

For details, see February 16 calendar item.

Sunday, March 23, 8–11 am

Warbler Survey in Bright Leaf State Natural Area

Led by Georgia Harper and Beck Runte, with Friends of Bright Leaf; no sign-up necessary. Bright Leaf is not yet open to the public, so this is a nice opportunity to explore this wonderful resource. Participants will help to compile a warbler survey for the park. Meet at the parking lot located on Old Bull Creek Road. **Directions:** Take 2222 to Creek Mountain. Turn south onto Creek Mountain and follow it until it dead-ends on Old Bull Creek Road. Turn right, and the parking lot is immediately on your left. Park on the south side of the street (along the edge of the State Natural Area). **Contact:** For information: Georgia Harper, ggharper@utsystem.edu or 499-4508.

Saturday, March 29, 8:30 am–noon

Trip to Waco Wetlands with Central Texas Audubon Society

No sign-up necessary; bring water and lunch (there is a Subway sandwich shop nearby). Survey winter and migratory birds at newly created wetlands on the Bosque River. A forest



TAS TRIPS AND EVENTS (CONTINUED)

trail along the river and duck boxes are planned. We will be walking on even terrain to ponds and upland habitat. Hope to see waterfowl, woodland and riparian birds, Swamp Sparrow, Marsh Wren. **Directions:** *Carpooling from Austin:* Meet at 6:45 a.m. at the new Tech Ridge shopping plaza at the southeast corner of Parmer Lane and I-35 in the south end of the HEB parking lot. Cars will leave at 7 a.m. for the *meeting place in Waco* (about 90 miles). Travel I-35 north, take the exit for Texas Hwy. 6 (just outside of Waco), and turn left (west) onto Texas Hwy. 6. After several miles, turn left (south) onto Bosque Blvd. (a convenience store is in the southeast corner of the intersection). Turn left into Bosque Square, just past the convenience store—we will meet the Central Texas Audubon Society group there and then carpool a few more miles to the site. Rest rooms are not yet available at the site. After lunch, additional birding at other Waco sites in afternoon will be optional. **Contact:** For questions: Julie Crouch, 339-0193 (h), <jul.c@care2.com>; or Kathy McCormack, 996-6906 (w), <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

**Saturday, March 29,
9 am–noon**

Annual Open House at the TAS Baker Sanctuary

Mark your calendar now for this event, and plan to join us for walks throughout the sanctuary to see Golden-cheeked Warblers.

Volunteers are needed to help guide tours and direct traffic. If you would like to help with this event, contact John and Marcie Wilcox at 219-8425 or <jmwoso@earthlink.net>.



Saturday, April 5, time TBA Youth Camp Follow-up Birding Walk

All kids and their parents who have attended a TAS Youth Birding Camp are encouraged to attend. We will be working on spring migrating birds. Details to come in future newsletters. For more information, contact Amy Sugeno at 512-396-3642 (San Marcos) or <amydave@thrifty.net>.

Saturday–Sunday, April 12–13 South Llano River State Park

Birding opportunities include a blind with feeders/drippers, picnic areas with tall trees, a low bridge over the river, and trails

in the park; also, city parks and county roads in/near Junction. Hope to see Wild Turkeys, spring migrants, kingfishers, vireos, buntings, and orioles

Bring sunscreen, hiking boots, insect repellent, food, and water.

Participants will need to make their own campsite reservations, and it is strongly recommended that this be done

by March 8; contact Texas Parks & Wildlife at <www.tpwd.state.tx.us> or 512-389-8900. Alternatively, participants can make hotel reservations in Junction. *After making your reservations,* contact one of the coleaders to let them know when you plan to arrive. If you're in town by 6 p.m. on Friday, you can meet the coleaders at the park headquarters (HQ), and we'll do some preliminary birding; otherwise, meet at the park HQ at 7:30 a.m. on both Saturday and Sunday. We'll be leaving the park on Sunday around noon. **Directions from Austin:** Take Hwy. 290 West through Fredericksburg to I-10 West to Exit 456 in Junction to Rt. 377S, then about 6 miles south to the park entrance (about 150 miles total). If you're leaving Austin on Friday morning, you may want to continue about one hour west from Junction to visit the Caverns of Sonora (<www.cavernsofsonora.com>, 915-387-3105; 8 miles west of Sonora, 7 miles south on RM 1989) before arriving at the state park. **Contact:** Coleaders: Stu Wilson, <stu@bga.com>, 459-1082 (h); Kathy McCormack, <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>, 996-6906 (w).



Thursday–Sunday, July 3–13, 2003 The Galapagos Islands: A Family Adventure

TAS and Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT) invite you to join Victor Emanuel and Greg Lasley in exploring the Galapagos Islands on the comfortable cruise ship *Eclipse*. The emphasis will be on birds and general natural history, and we'll try to see all of the endemic birds possible. A family cruise director will organize daily activities and meals for children onboard. Enjoy the Darwin's finches, giant tortoises, and iguanas you've always dreamed



of. For more information, contact VENT at <www.ventbird.com> or 328-5221. VENT will make a donation to TAS for each member on the trip, so mention TAS when making your reservation.

TAS MEETINGS

Monday, February 3, 7–9 pm EDUCATION COMMITTEE

North Village Branch Library. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis: 291-1861; <shargis@austin.rr.com>.

Saturday, February 8, 11:30 am HORNSBY BEND BIRD OBSERVATORY MEETING & POTLUCK LUNCH

Following the monthly Hornsby Bend bird count (see page 4). Center for Environmental Research (building near entrance to Hornsby bend complex). Contact Rob Fergus: 347-7572; <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Tuesday, February 11, 6:30–7:30 pm PLANNING GROUP FOR YOUTH BIRDING CAMP

Threadgill's (south location, 301 W. Riverside). All are welcome to come and help plan the next TAS Youth Camp. Contact Amy Sugen: 512-396-3642 (San Marcos) or <amydave@thrifty.net>.

Wednesday, February 12, 7 pm URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

1925 Rutland Dr., in Root Cause Project office. Contact Chuck Simms: 331-9630; <charlesvsi@aol.com>.

Thursday, February 13, 6:45 pm TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive. Contact Russ Nelson: 431-1420.

Thursday, February 20, 7 pm TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

For details, see box below.

Thursday, February 27, 7 pm BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Contact Ethel Kutac: 346-7659.

Monday, March 3, 7–9 pm EDUCATION COMMITTEE

North Village Branch Library. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis: 291-1861; <shargis@austin.rr.com>.

Saturday, March 8, 11:30 am HORNSBY BEND BIRD OBSERVATORY MEETING & POTLUCK LUNCH

For details, see February 8 calendar item.

Tuesday, March 11, 6:30–7:30 pm PLANNING GROUP FOR YOUTH BIRDING CAMP

For details, see February 11 calendar item.

Wednesday, March 12, 7 pm URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

1925 Rutland Dr., in Root Cause Project office. Contact Chuck Simms: 331-9630; <charlesvsi@aol.com>

Thursday, March 13, 6:45 pm TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive. Contact Russ Nelson: 431-1420.

Thursday, March 20, 7 pm TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

Program (beginning at 7:30): "Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge." Terry Rossingnol, manager of the Prairie Chicken NWR near Eagle Lake, Texas, will give a status report on the rehabilitation research on prairie chickens and provide information on some of the other projects on the refuge. See box below for location and directions.



Thursday, February 20, 7 pm TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

Program: Freshwater for Wildlife
Presenters: Cindy Loeffler, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and Myron Hess, National Wildlife Federation



Cindy Loeffler of Texas Parks & Wildlife and Myron Hess of the National Wildlife Federation (and possibly other speakers) will talk about water law and water planning and their impacts on wildlife in Texas. Cindy will discuss how the agencies are trying to balance water needs between people and wildlife; Myron will discuss needs that are not addressed or problems in the implementation of plans for wildlife. Program begins at 7:30. **Location:** Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Dr. (Exit MoPac at 2222, go west on 2222, turn left on Balcones Dr., stay to the left at the fork, turn right into church parking lot.) Bus routes: <www.capmetro.austin.tx.us>; 474-1200. Bicycle routes: <www.ci.austin.tx.us/bicycle/bikemap.htm>; 974-7240. **Refreshments provided.**

EDUCATION COMMITTEE NEWS

Listing Challenge Lessons

One of the reasons we enjoy birding is that there's always something new to learn. Listing challenges can be a great way of learning more about where and how to find birds by understanding their habitat needs and seasonal distribution patterns. If a yearly listing challenge doesn't appeal to you (or



doesn't challenge you enough), there are many other kinds of challenges or goals you can set for yourself to increase your knowledge and thus your enjoyment of birds.

Think about what you'd like to learn this year, and set some goals accordingly. Here are some possibilities to get you started:

- Visit all of the sites listed in the Austin Area Birding Guide at least once.
- Find several new places that aren't on the official birding guide (pick a place on the map, read *TexBirds*, etc.).
- Bird all the city parks in Austin at least once.
- Identify all the birds that commonly nest in our area by voice on their nesting territory.
- Learn the call notes of all our wintering sparrows.
- Pick a specific area close to your home or office and bird it

once a week/month/season.

- Start a bird checklist for a park or some other area that doesn't have one.
- Lead a bird walk (or two or three).
- Keep track of where (in a tree, on the ground, on a wire, in the air) you see a particular species.
- Keep track of all the birds you see in a particular location (on wires, on telephone poles, in trees).
- Keep a list of all the bird species that you have heard call or sing.
- Learn the species names of all the warblers/sparrows/ . . .



If you can't get out in the field as often as you'd like, try some armchair birding: research the food and habitat preferences of each new reporting on the Rare Bird Alert.



This can be a purely personal experience, but if you'd like to share what you've learned, send us the results of your personal challenge at the end of the year and we'll publish as many as we can.
—Roxie Rochat

EDUCATION COMMITTEE CLASSES

Beyond Binoculars: Observing Bird Behavior and Birding by Ear

Starting on February 17

Want to learn more about birds than their field marks and to expand your ability to make positive identifications in the field? This course will help you focus on the many aspects of bird behavior that you might be missing while you strain to see a bird that refuses to give you a good look through your binoculars. You'll learn to notice and accurately describe key aspects of the bird's behavior; its habitat; its size, shape, and posture; its song, call, or other sounds; as well as colors and field marks that jump out at you without the aid of binoculars. With this information, a reasonable idea of the possibilities in the locale, and your field guides, you will be able to positively identify many birds even when they don't grace you with a good look.

The class will be taught by Georgia Harper, a local birder with seven years' experience. Georgia realized several years ago that binoculars could actually get in the way in some circumstances where you really need more information than they can provide in order to make an identification. She spent six months one year without using binoculars and learned much about

birdsong, behavior, and "jizz," information that she will share with you in this class.

The class meets in three lecture sessions, with individual field trips for practice on your own between sessions and a group field trip the last week of the course. Lectures will take place on Monday, February 17, from 6:45 p.m. to 9:15 p.m.; and on Monday, February 24, and Tuesday, March 4, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Center for Environmental Research auditorium. The group field trip will be March 8. Tuition is \$40. Contact Shelia to sign up, at 291-1861 or <shargis@austin.rr.com>.



EDUCATION COMMITTEE CLASSES (CONTINUED)

At Home with the Birds: Bluebird Class and Purple Martin Class

During the spring and summer, I was fortunate to share my yard with nesting Carolina Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, and Barn Swallows. The chickadee pair raised their family in a wooden nestbox that I had installed. The wrens used a plastic gourd, and the Barn Swallows built their own nest, using my front porch light as a base. It was fascinating to watch these birds as they raised their young, but the more I watched them, the more questions I had! Will they raise just one brood? How many eggs will they lay? Will I disturb the birds if I open the nestbox to check on the nest and babies? Will they migrate, and if so, when? And so many other questions.

So, along those lines, we are offering two classes—one focusing on bluebirds and the other focusing on Purple Martins. Each class will cover the following topics and answer questions such as the ones posed:



Life history: What do they eat and how much? What is the normal life expectancy? How many broods do they have per year? What is the clutch size? Do they migrate? If so, where and when?

Conservation issues: Is the population increasing, decreasing, or staying constant? If declining, what are the contributing factors? What can we do to help?

Attracting them to your yard: benefits, habitat requirements, nestbox specifications, predators.

Monitoring: Why? Procedure, Citizen Science projects.

Resources: Books, organizations, listservs.

BLUEBIRD CLASS

February 1

Bluebirds usually nest in cavities in a somewhat open area with short grass and a few trees nearby (this includes suburban residential areas). Even if you don't have this type of habitat, you and the birds can benefit from this class. The concepts are applicable to *all* cavity nesters such as chickadees, wrens, titmice, etc. The nestbox that "my" chickadees used was originally built as a bluebird box, but they didn't seem to mind.

The bluebird class will be taught by Pauline Tom, president of Texas Bluebird Society and new member of the North American Bluebird Society board of directors. The first portion of the class will consist of a lecture that covers the above-listed topics. Then participants will assemble a bluebird nestbox that they can take home with them to install in their yard or their neighborhood park. Or they can donate the nestbox to Hornsby, where it will be installed as part of the bluebird trail.



(For those who don't see themselves as mechanical, assembled nestboxes will be available.) The class will conclude with a walk along the bluebird trail.

The class will be held at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend on Saturday, February 1, from 8 a.m. noon. The cost of the class is \$25, part of which goes to cover the nestbox materials. Contact Shelia to sign up, at 291-1861 or <shargis@austin.rr.com>.

PURPLE MARTIN CLASS

Starting February 19



Habitation of a martin house is more likely if the house is placed in an open area with a clearance of 16 feet in all directions, but there are other ways to entice martins to nest in less-than-ideal locations. Come learn what these methods are, in addition to the topics listed above.

Jenny Rasmussen will instruct the Purple Martin Class.

Jenny has been a martin landlord for two years, and she is very enthusiastic about martins and loves to share what she has learned at her home and the Hornsby Bend site. Jenny monitored the martins at Hornsby last year and her journal is available on her website at <www.TinyBirds.com/PurpleMartins/2002journal.html>.

She also has many photographs of purple martins that she would love to share (a few of



which are shown here), including photos of parents feeding babies inside the nest cavity. One of her photos was on the cover of the *Purple Martin Update* magazine this year, published by the Purple Martin Conservation Association. There is a lot of information about martins at the organization's website at <www.purplemartin.org>.

The lecture portion of the class will take place on Wednesday, February 19, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. Then, on Saturday, March 8, from 4:30 p.m. until about 5:30 p.m., participants will observe



the Purple Martins as they return to their martin houses at Hornsby. Interested participants will also be able to accompany Jenny as she monitors the martins throughout their breeding season. Cost of the class is \$15. Contact Shelia to sign up, at 291-1861 or <shargis@austin.rr.com>.

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

The following events are not Travis Audubon Society events but may be of interest.

**Mondays–Thursdays, 1:58 pm;
Fridays, 12:58 pm**
"Passport to Texas"

90-second radio program on KUT (90.5-FM) from Texas Parks & Wildlife.

Thursdays, 6:04 pm
Howie Richey's Eco-Calendar

Spot during *All Things Considered* on KUT, 90.5-FM.

Saturday–Sunday, February 8–9
8th Annual Eagle Fest, Emory, Texas

Educational exhibitions and lectures; nature tours; Native American art and performances; gospel singing; live music; presentations by On the Wing Again, Last Chance Forever, and Animal Adventures America; children's entertainment; food; arts and crafts; vendors. Contact: 800-561-1182; <www.eaglefest.org>, <info@eaglefest.org>.

**Thursday–Thursday,
February 20–
March 6, 2003**

Birds of the Mayan Heartland

A birding, natural history, and archaeological adventure through southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, led by Paul Wood, a bird researcher and conservationist for 40 years who has led 30 birding tours to the Mayan area and other countries around the world. Susan Allen Lynch, a member of Texas Ornithological Society, San Antonio AS, and Hill Country Birders, is organizing the trip. More than 300 species are expected. Limited to 18 participants. Contact Susan: P.O. Box 40, Rio Frio TX 78879; 830-232-6666; <sallen@htc.net>.



**Friday–Sunday,
February 21–23**
**Celebration of Whooping
Cranes and Other Birds,
Port Aransas, Texas**

Organized birding tours, guided nature and birding boat trips, workshops, seminars, demonstrations, trade show, concessions. Contact: 800-452-6278, <portaransas@centurytel.net>, <www.portaransas.org/cranes.asp>.

Saturday, February 22
Nature Celebration, Lake Jackson

Featuring everything from snakes and fish to birds and gardening for wildlife, including special events for the kids. Contact Connie Stolte: Sea Center Texas, 979-292-0100.

Saturday, March 15
**Celebration of 100th Anniversary of National
Wildlife Refuge System, Balcones Canyonlands NWR**

Guided nature walks throughout the day, beginning at 8 a.m. See page 14 for details.

Saturday–Monday, March 15–17
10th Annual Migration Celebration, Lake Jackson

Birding field trips, speakers, trade show. The area is haven to over 350 species of birds in the area's diverse habitats. Contact Edith Fisher: 979-265-2505

Thursday–Sunday, March 27–30
Texas Tropics Nature Festival, McAllen

Celebrating the unique biodiversity of the Rio Grande Valley, an important migratory route for birds and butterflies with over 450 bird species and over 260 butterfly species. Guided field trips, seminars, trade show. Contact McAllen Chamber of Commerce: McAllen TX 78505; 877-622-5536; <www.mcallencvb.com>.

Friday–Sunday, April 4–6
**Spring Plant Sale and Gardening Festival,
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center**

For details, visit <www.wildflower.org> or call 292-4100.

BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

Calling for Your Records!

The Bird Records Committee meets each month to record the birds sighted in the 60-mile radius of Austin. We are nearing the end of recording the 2001 records (yes—we are one year behind), but we think that perhaps we have not received all the records. If anyone has records from 2001 and 2002 that have not been sent to us, we urge you to help us out by sending them in. Please send them to either Bob Barth, 602 Terrace Mountain Drive, Austin TX 78746, or Ethel Kutac, 8306 Summer Place Drive, Austin TX 78759. Thanks for your support.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY



Volunteers Needed for Annual Baker Sanctuary Open House

At least 10 guides and 6 people to direct traffic will be needed for the annual TAS Baker Sanctuary Open House on Saturday, March 29, 9 a.m.–noon. If you would like to help, contact Marcie and John Wilcox at 219-8425 or <jmwoso@earthlink.net>.

Great Backyard Bird Count Needs Birdwatchers

(Continued from page 1)

steps to protect those that need protecting.”

Too many species are already showing population declines. GBBC 2003 will put the spotlight on birds that appear on Audubon's WatchList, an accounting of bird species in decline or at conservation risk due to dwindling habitat and other threats. “The WatchList is an early-warning system designed to raise awareness of birds in trouble, before they become endangered or threatened,” says Audubon's Gill. “Think of the WatchList as preventative medicine.”

Audubon and Cornell are asking participants to pay special attention to the nearly 200 species of birds on the WatchList, which can be found at <www.audubon.org/bird/watchlist/>. The website includes features relating to these birds and what participants can do to help them.

The GBBC is also important for more common species. In 2002, more than 47,000 participants counted millions of birds throughout North America. They helped Audubon and Cornell Lab scientists make interesting observations. Evening Grosbeaks, plentiful in California in 2001, were nearly absent in 2002. Snowy Owls, magnificent hunters found predominantly in the northern part of the continent, were reported in 20 states and provinces during the 2002 count, including sightings from as far south as Oklahoma, Colorado, and Virginia. Last year's count was again instrumental in helping track winter finches, such as Common Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, and White-winged Crossbills, that periodically shift their winter ranges southward, particularly in the Northeast.

For the last four years, GBBC participants have shown that Eurasian Collared-Doves are also “on the go”, backing results from other studies such as the Cornell Lab's Project Feeder-Watch. Since their introduction into Florida in the 1980s, the birds have increased in number in that state and have steadily expanded their range in the United States. They were reported in 21 states during the 2002 count. GBBC 2003 participants will continue to help scientists keep track of the consequences of this movement.

The site invites beginners and experts alike to participate, providing useful information to make participation easy and enjoyable. There is a vocabulary section, birdwatching and bird-feeding tips, bird vocalizations, and more, including information about House Finch eye disease. Educators will find the bibliography and geography sections especially handy, as well as suggestions on how to conduct the count with groups of kids. For those tired of winter and ready for spring, there will be tips about planning and preparing for the spring bird garden.

“The Great Backyard Bird Count is a terrific way for individuals, families, schools, and community groups to contribute to a better understanding of birds,” says the Cornell Lab's Fitzpatrick. “In return, they learn more about birds in the process. I can't think

of a more enjoyable—and more rewarding—way to spend a little time on a late-winter day.”

Instructions for participating can be found at <www.birdsource.org/gbbc>. There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but aren't online can enter their data at a public library. Many Wild Birds Unlimited locations also accept reports. Libraries, businesses, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in promoting the GBBC or getting involved can contact Shelia Hargis at <shargis@austin.rr.com> or 291-1861.

Note: In 2002 the top 10 Texas cities (based on the number of species reported) were Dallas and Rockport with 105 species each, Houston with 100, Rio Hondo with 98, Austin with 97, Beaumont with 95, San Antonio with 93, Corpus Christi with 92, Georgetown with 73, and Humble with 70. Surely we can do better this year!



Hornsby Wedding



On a rainy December 8, local Audubon members Andy Balinsky and Julia Miller dressed in their warm birding clothes and headed to Hornsby Bend, just like any other Sunday. However, this one was different. They brought their friends Marc Airhart and Ruth Chaffin, and the Reverend “Mr. Habitat” Bill Oliver, a well-known local folksinger. In a ceremony full of bird puns, and accompanied by the slurping chatter of Northern Shovelers, they were married in the birding shelter on Pond 2. Rufus the birddog celebrated his 70th birthday at the event. The wedding cake was decorated with seven species of handcrafted beeswax birds, which the couple made themselves. Andy and Julia had already taken their first honeymoon four months earlier in Peru. So after the ceremony, for a mini-honeymoon, the newlyweds put on their raingear and went to Civitan Park to see the Pyrrhuloxia, number 189 on their Travis County list.

Wildscaping One Step at a Time



This month make time to walk around your yard, take stock of your plants, and think about ways to enhance your landscape to make it more attractive to wildlife. Although fall is the best time to plant in Central Texas, late winter is still a good time to put in 1- and 5-gallon trees and shrubs.

Most of us have inherited our landscapes and are loath to remove non-natives that are flourishing. Ligustrums, red-tip photinias, and nandinas come to mind. So what can you do, short of taking out a loan to re-landscape?

Start small! Perhaps you have a gap in a hedge where you lost one of the above. How about filling in with a mountain laurel? Whoever said everything had to match? Mountain laurels are evergreen with glossy leaves, and they can be hedged if necessary. They are an excellent tree for cover and nesting, provide fragrant purple blooms for insects in March and April, and coevolved with our fauna. Once you get a mountain laurel established, you will have a ready supply of seeds to give to friends. And if you live in deer country, mountain laurels are extremely deer resistant. Really!

You might argue that ligustrums serve as an early nectar source and that cedar waxwings love the winter berries. True. *But* they are an invasive non-native species, overtaking our greenbelts and natural areas, depriving native plants and dependent fauna of habitat. Ligustrums et al. outcompete natives and rob us of our rich natural heritage, so Austin looks like Anywhere, USA.

Do your shrubs have to hug the house like a moustache? Consider putting in an island bed.

If you groan at the thought of digging out all that Saint Augustine, kill the grass the lazy-gardener way. There are many different variations on this theme. One is to put down 10 to 15 sheets of wet newspaper (some people use thick cardboard) on the grass to be killed. Spread a 1-to-2-inch layer of Dillo dirt on top of the paper, topping it with a 2-to-3-inch layer of mulch. Native Texas hardwood mulch is a good choice. Then water it in well, and let nature go to work. By fall you should have a bed ready for planting. Bermuda grass is a different story that requires more drastic measures, usually involving the use of a non-residual herbicide like Roundup or Finale several times before putting down the newspaper.

Do you have a corner of the yard where you struggle to keep anything alive? Or maybe you have to water a non-native like aucuba frequently to keep it from drooping in the summer heat? It may be time to take the plunge and sentence it to death. Replace it with a drought-tolerant native. The evergreen sumac

is a gorgeous shrub that times its fall blooms to coincide with the Monarch butterfly migration. It is slow growing and, without hedging, will eventually fill a corner of your yard, growing 8 to 12 feet in height and 8 feet around (according to Sally Wasowski's book *Native Texas Plants*.) Check out a natural area near you to see its growth habit for yourself. What better way to reduce your lawn area, while providing shelter, nectar and fruits for birds? Plant an evergreen sumac in full or part sun for best blooms. It will grow in dappled shade too as an understory plant. Deer will browse this plant until it gets established, so cage it, or spray with a deer repellent.

Has your crape myrtle gotten powdery mildew one too many times? It probably does not have enough air circulation around it. Give it the axe and substitute a native that likes heat and humidity. Yaupon and possumhaw will flourish here. Our native Texas persimmon is a good substitute for the crape myrtle, because of its beautiful gray bark. On the subject of crape myrtles . . . This beautiful summer bloomer is not a native. Birds do eat its seeds when gardeners don't commit crape murder—cutting it back in fall or winter to encourage blooming. The newest thinking is that this murder is unnecessary—just prune to shape. Blooms happen on new growth, which the tree will do quite nicely on its own.

Do you have any high-maintenance shrubs like azaleas that really don't care for our alkaline soils? Let them bloom one last time, then retire them to the compost heap.

For roughly \$7/gallon you can replace them with wildlife friendly Barbados cherry, a shrub that stays evergreen until temperatures drop below 20°F and that will sport pink and white blossoms and red fruit throughout our long growing season.

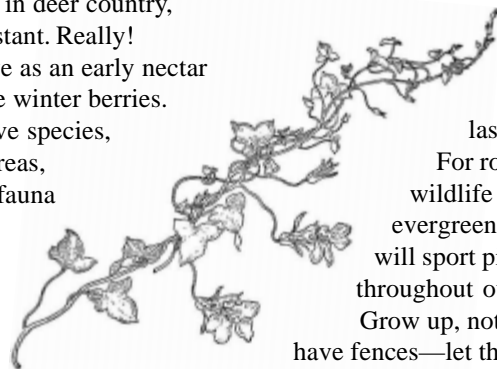
Grow up, not out. Add some vines! You probably already have fences—let them support vines rich in wildlife value.

- **Carolina jessamine** is available in nurseries now. Its beautiful yellow flower clusters lure lots of insects, including swallow-tail butterflies. It blooms from January through April and is evergreen. Once established it will give good cover for small birds. It is an East Texas native, so it likes deeper soil and moisture to get established.

- **Crossvine**, another East Texas native, grows well here. Getting more common in nurseries, it has yellow-orange-red tubular flowers attractive to hummingbirds migrating in spring. It tolerates seasonal poor drainage. Although the jessamine needs support, the crossvine will cling to fences or brick and climb into shrubs and trees.

- If you have not tried **snappedragon vine**, which has purple flowers attractive to insects and is the larval

(Continued on page 13)



BOOK REVIEW

Greening School Grounds: Creating Habitats for Learning

Edited by Tim Grant and Gail Littlejohn (Green Teacher Magazine, Toronto, Ontario, 2001), 136 pp., \$16.95

In a day and age when education ranks consistently as a top political issue, what can we do to improve the quality of our schools and the educational experience of our children?

Wouldn't it be great if we could use nature education to

improve standardized test scores, grade point averages, and student willingness to stay on task? According to the authors of *Greening School Grounds*, we can do all of that—and foster connections to the natural world—by creating schoolyard gardens and nature areas.

The concept of beautifying and improving schoolyards dates to at least the mid-1850s, with a peak during the nature study boom of the early 1900s. More recent attempts to create natural areas in schoolyards began in earnest during the 1980s. Although many schools in Austin and neighboring communities already have schoolyard gardens, *Greening School Grounds* is a valuable guide for teachers and community members seeking to establish new gardens and trying to increase the educational value of gardens already in place. As such, it will be of special interest to Travis Audubon Society members working on schoolyard habitat projects through our Urban Habitat Development program.

Greening School Grounds reflects the views and experience of more than 40 authors and 75 reviewers from the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and Great Britain. It features sections on designing a school garden and organizing its creation and maintenance, planting and tending the garden, attract-

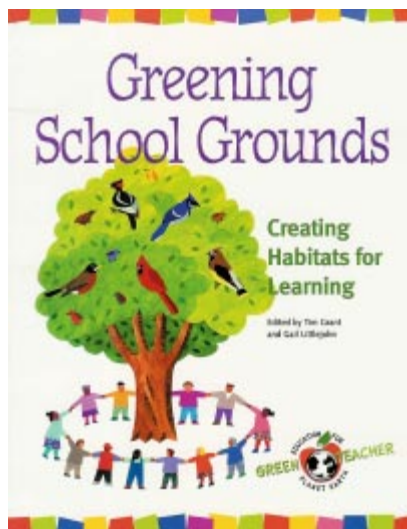
ing wildlife to the garden, enhancing the garden with benches, sun shelters, and ponds, and using the natural garden as an outdoor classroom.

Each section consists of 4 to 10 chapters addressing topics as varied as maximizing participation in school habitat programs, restoring prairies, making rooftop gardens, creating an oasis for amphibians, discouraging vandalism at schoolyard sites, developing a field guide for the schoolyard garden, and tips and tricks for taking kids outside. There are a total of 38 chapters, each containing valuable advice and guidelines for ensuring the successful implementation of new gardens and suggesting improvements for established sites.

Extremely valuable are several case studies and more than 100 photographs showing the range of possibilities that have already proven successful. These range from a discussion of a worm composting program run by a student garden club in Nova Scotia to a seasonal pond in Ontario and greenhouses and vegetable gardens in Alaska. In fact, these examples are so valuable that I hope future editions of this great

book include even more case studies. *Greening School Grounds* does not offer plant lists or detailed instructions for planning gardens, but it does provide guidelines for every other step in planning and maintaining natural areas in schoolyards.

So whether you are a teacher, parent, school volunteer, or administrator, *Greening School Grounds* is a valuable resource with suggestions for every aspect of schoolyard habitat planning, implementation, and use as an outdoor classroom. Copies of *Greening School Grounds* can be ordered by calling 416-960-1244 or online at <www.greenteacher.com>. —Rob Ferguson



URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 12)

host for the Buckeye butterfly, put this on your list of plants to buy at the Wildflower Center plant sale in April. It has small delicate leaves and is not very showy, but it can redeem the dwarf yaupon shrubs you may have in your landscape, by using them as a trellis.

- **Coral honeysuckle** is our native honeysuckle that is popular with hummingbirds, blooming from March to December. Like most plants it blooms better with more sun, particularly morning sun, and shadier afternoon conditions. After it is established, it won't need supplemental water.
- A vine that will keep your chickadees, titmice, and woodpeckers fat and happy is our common **Virginia creeper**. Besides

knowing that your birds love its berries, you will enjoy its fall color and the fact that it is a vigorous climber that grows in full sun to dappled shade.

- Just like common landscape plants, natives have preferences for light, soil and moisture conditions. Get to know your landscape's growing conditions to put the right native in the right spot. Visit the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's native plant database at <www.wildflower.org/?nd=npin>.

Summary Checklist for February

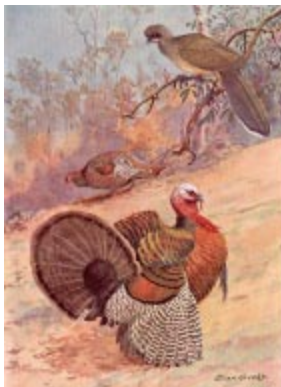
- Do your plant homework now.
- Get your beds ready.
- Mark your calendar for the Wildflower Center's Plant Sale and Gardening Festival from April 4–6. —Jane Tillman

SANCTUARY NEWS

December ended with the Baker Sanctuary receiving 3.65 inches of rain. The total rainfall at the sanctuary for 2002 was 44.74 inches. June, July, and October were our biggest rain months, with a total of 25.92 inches in those months alone. The soil remains saturated as we begin 2003, and most of even small amounts of rain run off.

During the 2002 visitor season here at the sanctuary, 284 people signed in at the registration box. Of these, 62% were members. Last year, we had 281 visitors sign in, and 55% were members. Based on these statistics, it appears that the membership made greater use of the sanctuary this past year. This is good news; after all, the sanctuary belongs to you, the membership.

We had a wonderful Christmas present this year, although it came one day early. On December 24, we looked out the front window, and 30 Wild Turkeys were in our front driveway, between our porch and the fence! They were gathering gravel from our driveway, and they then headed through the barbed-wire fence into the parking lot. From there, they strolled through the woods, into the open area behind the trailer, and cleaned up the corn scattered there. Hardly a week goes by that we don't see



at least a few turkeys, but this was a real treat—and for Christmas, too!

On December 31, some coyotes near our trailer began celebrating New Year's early. At 6:15 p.m., as the wind began to lay, the whole pack tuned up with high-pitched yips and lower-pitched howls and barks. They sounded like they were just east of the parking lot; then the sound moved toward the Baker Cabin and around to our west. The serenade ended almost as quickly as it started, with the last dying rays of sunlight. We couldn't think of a better way of celebrating the New Year!

Annual Open House Date Set

Mark your calendars for the annual TAS Baker Sanctuary Open House scheduled for Saturday, March 29, from 9 a.m. until noon. Last year we had a great turnout, but we ran short of guides. This year we are going to have the guides park their vehicles at the Baker Cabin so there will be more room in the Parking Lot for our visitors. We will need at least 10 guides and 6 people to direct traffic. Please let us know if you are willing to help with this event by contacting us at 219-8425 or by emailing us at <jmwoeso@earthlink.net>.

—Marcie and John Wilcox, TAS Baker Sanctuary Stewards

BALCONES CANYONLANDS REFUGE

Local Refuge to Celebrate the 100th Birthday of the National Wildlife Refuge System in March

The year 2003 marks the 100th birthday celebration of the National Wildlife Refuge System. You are cordially invited to visit Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, March 15 for a celebration of this event. Special nature walks will be offered at two of the refuge public-use areas—Warbler Vista and Doeskin Ranch—from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. These guided nature walks are free to the general public.

Warbler Vista Nature Walks

Participants will be looking for the earliest arriving Golden-cheeked Warblers during the nature walks at Warbler Vista.



Other topics featured on the trail will also be discussed.

The walks will begin at 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. and will last about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Warbler Vista is on the north side of FM 1431 just west of Lago Vista. Meet at the Cactus Rocks Trail. Bring your binoculars!

Doeskin Ranch Nature Walks

Most of the guided nature walks will be conducted at Doeskin Ranch on RR 1174 about 4.5 miles north of the junction with FM 1431. The early guided nature walk is a bird tour. Please bring your binoculars. This walk begins at 8:30 a.m. and lasts for one hour and fifteen minutes.

You will learn about other features of Doeskin Ranch and resource management practices during the other nature walks offered during the day. The general nature walk schedule is as follows: 10 a.m.–noon; 2–4 p.m.; and 3–4 p.m. Visitors should meet at the bulletin board for all Doeskin Ranch walks.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only system of federal lands dedicated first and foremost to the conservation of wildlife. This nationwide network of prime habitat helps protect migrating birds, common and endangered species, and premier fisheries. Please join us to enjoy this area's natural heritage. Call Rob Iski at 339-9432 ext. 42 for additional information.

NATURALIST'S CALENDAR

You're driving home with your valentine after a romantic dinner. You can still taste the wine, still smell the flowers and the cologne. Your thoughts are probably everywhere except on the road in front of you, but be mindful: humans aren't the only amorous mammals out tonight. If you aren't careful, your olfactory senses may leave you with an unpleasant memory of the evening.

Striped Skunks are wandering the countryside now in search of mates. Familiar to almost every American—even those who have only seen cartoon renditions—they wear the trademark black fur with twin white stripes running the length of the back. This distinctive pattern helps to distinguish the more common Striped Skunks from two other species found in Central Texas: Eastern Spotted Skunks and Common Hog-nosed Skunks.

Skunks are easygoing relatives of the hot-tempered weasels. All of the weasel family have well-developed musk glands, and the skunks' defense system is an evolutionary adaptation of these.

The oily, yellow musk is produced in two glands located on either side of the animal's anus, at the base of its tail.

A skunk can accurately aim a jet of liquid musk to a distance of 12 feet, but the spray can carry twice that far, and the odor can be detected more than half a mile away. The two glands hold about a tablespoon of musk each, enough for five or six discharges. However, it takes the animal a week to produce just a third of an ounce, so it usually sprays only as a last resort.

Skunks are sometimes persecuted because of exaggerated fears of being sprayed. In truth, they are docile animals that rarely use their defenses. When a skunk encounters people, it will normally amble away in the opposite direction. Only if you approach too closely, and the skunk perceives you as a threat, will it give warning of dire consequences.



A disturbed or startled Striped Skunk will growl, raise up on its hind feet, stamp its front feet, click its teeth together, or wave its tail. It may even do a "handstand" on its front feet with its tail high in the air. (A Striped Skunk cannot spray from this position, but an Eastern Spotted Skunk can and will.) If these warnings are ignored, then the offended skunk will twist into a U

shape, with tail and nose toward the aggressor, and fire.

A skunk's pungent defense deters most potential predators. A coyote, a bobcat, or a domestic dog might attack a skunk once, but not usually again. (Some dogs, it's said, are slow learners.) The only predators that regularly kill skunks with impunity are Great Horned Owls, which have a poor sense of smell. These big owls were the major threat to skunks . . . until automobiles came along. Since skunks respond to danger is by standing their ground, they are especially prone to fatal encounters with automobiles, which, of course, have no sense of smell and never learn. (And skunks become raven food!)

Overall, skunks are more beneficial to human interests than they are harmful. The bulk of a Striped Skunk's diet, even in the winter, is insects, especially grasshoppers, crickets, and many agriculturally harmful grubs such as cutworms. Skunks are omnivorous, however, and will take advantage of what food they can find, frequently supplementing their diet with spiders, reptiles, small mam-

mals or birds, eggs, or berries. They occasionally invade garbage bags for table scraps, or a henhouse for the eggs.

If you leave food outside for your dog, you might be inviting the neighborhood skunk as well, which could lead to odoriferous conflict. Vets recommend a bath in tomato juice for the unlucky canine that runs afoul of a skunk. If your automobile has a close encounter, you might try sponging it down with vinegar—said to remove some of the offensive odor.

Of more serious concern is a rabid skunk. Anyone bitten by a skunk should receive immediate medical attention, and the skunk should, if possible, be killed and taken to a lab for a rabies examination. All skunks are normally nocturnal, so a skunk encountered abroad in the daytime—especially one that shows no fear of humans—should be given an especially wide berth.

Of course, any wild animal, sick or healthy, merits a respectful distance. Skunks are just a particularly obvious reminder of the wisdom of such respect.

—Bill Reiner



Earth Share
OF TEXAS

Earth Share of Texas represents the Audubon Foundation of Texas and the National Audubon Society in payroll deduction plans for charitable giving. For information, call 1-800-GREENTX or email <estx@earthshare-texas.org>.

Return Service Requested

Visit the TAS Web site!
www.travisaudubon.org



Local and National Audubon Membership

Join the Travis Audubon Society using the form at the right, and all of your dues will be put to use supporting local conservation, education, and research projects. You may also join both Travis Audubon and the National Audubon Society through the Travis Audubon website <www.travisaudubon.org>. As a member of National Audubon, you will enjoy Travis Audubon chapter membership and receive the quarterly *Audubon* magazine, and a portion of your dues will support national programs.

**Join Travis Audubon now and support
local birds, wildlife, and their habitats.**

Travis Audubon Society members receive 11 issues of the *Signal Smoke* newsletter, priority sign-up on local field trips, and educational classes. All of their annual dues support local projects and programs.

To join Travis Audubon Society:

Make your check payable to Travis Audubon Society and send with this form to TAS Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 1132, Round Rock, TX 78680-1132.

Travis Audubon Society

YES! I want to enjoy the benefits of Travis Audubon Society membership. Enroll me as a member of Travis Audubon Society. Enclosed is my check for:

- \$10 Youth Membership (up to age 18)
- \$20 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
- \$60 Wren Membership
- \$100 Titmouse Membership (bonus Travis Audubon T-shirt)
- \$250 Painted Bunting Membership (bonus T-shirt and book)
- \$500 Vireo Membership (T-shirt, book, and free workshop)
- \$1,000 Golden-cheeked Warbler Membership (T-shirt, book, workshop, special conservation briefings and outings)

This is a gift membership from _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Email _____