



SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 52, NO. 6

JUNE 2003

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Urban Habitat Development Websites to Enhance Your Wildscape



Photo by Benny Simpson

Now that the dog days of summer have arrived, and you are spending less time gardening, take time to expand your naturalist knowledge with a website that showcases Texas nature writers <<http://TexasNature.rulestheweb.com>>. You will recognize familiar names like Ro Wauer and Terry Maxwell, whose current and archived articles will take you from spotted skunks to back-road birds. Be sure to bookmark it!

A website showcasing Benny Simpson's work with Texas native shrubs is at <<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/nativeshrubs/>>. Benny Simpson, a horticultural researcher at Texas A&M Dallas, spent most of his 42-year career researching, popularizing, and propagating native plants. Find the perfect plants for your yard on this site, or identify that mystery plant you saw while birding.

Travis Audubon's own Jenny Rasmussen has a wonderful website <www.BirdCrossStitch.com/garden/TexasGardening.html> with everything from larval food plants for Central Texas butterflies to the calls of frogs and toads. Scroll down to find links to many useful other sites that will encourage your active stewardship of wildlife.

To keep you on the right side of your neighbors, the Wild Ones website <www.for-wild.org/weedlaws/weedlaw.htm> will give you insight into weed ordinances that can rear their ugly heads when your yard does not conform to the St. Augustine norm. The article "Weeding Out Bad Vegetation Control Ordinances" is a must-read.

The National Wildlife Federation <www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat> recommends keeping the acronym BRASH in mind, when you start a natural landscape. Create a border around your landscape to frame it and give it a sense of order.

Recognize the rights of others to enjoy their manicured lawns. Advertise. Tell your



Photo by Jenny Rasmussen

(Continued on page 10)

SUMMER SCHEDULE: COMBINED JULY-AUGUST NEWSLETTER



The next two issues of *Signal Smoke* will be combined, so be sure to include your announcements of events for both July and August with your next newsletter submissions (see page 2 for details).



NO GENERAL MEETING IN JUNE, JULY, OR AUGUST

Travis Audubon Society

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

Officers and Directors

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| President | |
| Pat Dillon | 347-0452 |
| First Vice President | |
| Shelia Hargis | 291-1861 |
| Second Vice President | |
| BJ Dertien | |
| Treasurer | |
| Wayne Bartholomew | 507-3553 |
| P.O. Box 40787 | |
| Austin TX 78704-0014 | |
| Recording Secretary | |
| Anne Donovan | 472-3030 |
| Past President | |
| Bob Warneke | 443-5488 |
| Executive Director | |
| Rob Fergus / TAS | 926-0999 |
| 10803 Platt Lane | |
| Austin TX 78725 | |
| Directors | |
| Barbara Anderson | 346-6584 |
| Wilma Anderson | 301-5866 |
| Mark Bentley | 301-2675 |
| Lois Burkes | 261-9923 |
| Sam Fason | 474-1185 |
| Al Green | 512-357-1427 |
| Marcie Wilcox | 219-8425 |
| John Kelly | 331-8693 |
| Richard Manson | 347-8192 |
| Russ Nelson | 431-1420 |

Sanctuary Caretakers

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| TAS Wildlife Sanctuary | |
| John 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 |
|--------------------|----------|

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

I have a dream. Instead of rampant urban growth and uncontrolled habitat loss, I see an Austin that is guided by development that benefits humans as well as local wildlife and plant communities.

For this dream to become a reality, we all have to work together. This may seem daunting to those of us who consider ourselves merely avocational birdwatchers. We like to slip out occasionally for some recreational birding or to enjoy the birds at our feeders. We may not feel comfortable marching on city hall or chanting slogans at a rally. We respect the rights of people to develop their land, even though we may abhor the parking lots, chain stores, and zero-lot-line housing projects spawned by their development interests. Though Travis Audubon has worked to protect the local birds, wildlife, and habitats of Central Texas for more than 50 years, we are not known for boisterous complaints or outspoken and alienating political diatribes. Most of us are probably happy with this approach, though we recognize that we haven't been as effective in our advocacy as we could be.

Austin does not need another loud voice chanting environmental slogans. However, it does need reasoned, studied, and intelligent solutions to its environmental problems. Central Texas needs a vision for a sustainable future for ourselves and other species, and it needs a community of people working to build that future. Travis Audubon is taking a lead in forming that community.

(Continued on page 10)

COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS

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

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| TAS Rare Bird Alert | Isaac Sanchez | 899-9414 |
| | 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 | Georgia Harper | 467-9700 |
| Hospitality | Tim Hissam | 251-6067 |
| | Vacant | |
| Membership Secretary | Chris Doggett | 512-898-5500 |
| Programs | Al Green | 512-357-1427 |
| Property and Finance | Pat Dillon | 347-0452 |
| Publications | Rosemary Wetherold | 892-1606 |
| Publicity | Vacant | |
| Sales | Vacant | |
| Sanctuary | Bryan Hale | 474-5599 |
| Urban Habitat Development | Jane Tillman | 794-0058 |

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 (TAS Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 1132, Round Rock TX 78680-1132) of address changes.

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Newsletter Deadline


The submissions deadline is the first day of the preceding month (June 1 for combined July-August issue). Submit articles, announcements, and uncopyrighted art to Rosemary Wetherold, <rosemaryw@austin.rr.com>; 4507 Cliffstone Cove, Austin TX 78735-6610; 892-2026 (fax). 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.

















June 2003 Calendar of Travis Audubon Society Events

 Field Trip—See page 4

 Meeting—See page 5

 Birding Class

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--|--|--|--|---|--------|--|
| JUNE 1 Deadline for July–August <i>Signal Smoke</i> (p. 2) | 2  Education Committee Meeting, 7 pm | 3 | 4  Urban Habitat Development Group Meeting, 7 pm | 5 | 6 | 7  Field trip, Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, 7:30 am |
| 8 | 9 | 10  TAS Youth Camp Planning Group Meeting, 6:30 pm | 11 | 12  TAS Board of Directors Meeting, 6:45 pm | 13 | 14  Monthly Bird Count, Hornsby Bend, 7 am  Meadow Lake and Inner Space Cavern, 7 am  HBBO Meeting & Potluck, 11:30 am |
| 15  Bird walk, Meadow Lake, 4 pm | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21  Bird walk, Hornsby Bend, 7:30 am  Children's nature walk, Colorado River, 8 am |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26  Bird Records Committee Meeting, 7 pm | 27 | 28  Bird walk, Colorado River, and butterfly walk, Zilker Park, 7 am  Ecological Literacy Day, Hornsby Bend (workday/nature walk), 9 am |
| 29 | 30 | | | | | |

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!

Note: To provide more timely and updated information on field trips organized by the TAS Field Trip Committee, we are experimenting with providing complete details about those field trips only on the **Field Trips page** of the TAS website <www.travisaudubon.org/fieldtrips.html>. From there, you may print out directions and other details about specific trips. For those of you who do not have Internet access, contact phone numbers are provided below. We are hoping that this will improve our overall service to you by allowing for field trips to be organized on shorter notice and for trip changes to be available on the TAS website.

Saturday, June 7, 7:30–11:30 am

Field Trip to Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Maggie Burnett at <mburnett@austin.rr.com> or call 899-0390.



Saturday, June 14, 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 Tim Hissam, 251-6067, <tphissam1@yahoo.com>.

Saturday, June 14, 7 am–1 pm

Field Trip to Meadow Lake and Inner Space Cavern

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Georgia Harper at 499-4508, <gharper@utsystem.edu>, or Kathy McCormack (w) 996-6906, <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>.

Sunday, June 15, 4–5:30 pm

Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Jenny Rasmussen, 218-1580, <roadrunner1@mindspring.com>.



Photo by Jenny Rasmussen

Saturday, June 21, 7:30 am–noon

Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Richard Kaskan, 748-8660, <kaskan@ieee.org>.

Saturday, June 21, 8–11 am

Children's Nature Walk, Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park



Tailored for children ages 5–10 and their parents, but all are welcome. For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Charles Stephens, 600-1700, <charles_stephens@yahoo.com>; or Rob Fergus, 926-0999, <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Saturday, June 28, 7 am–noon

Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park and Butterfly Walk at Zilker Gardens

For details, see the Field Trips webpage or contact Kathy McCormack (w) 996-6906, <kathy.mccormack@motorola.com>, or Charles Stephens at <charles_stephens@yahoo.com> or 600-1700.

Saturday, June 28, 9 am–1 pm

Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend

Several hours of outdoor work, such as trail maintenance, habitat restoration, or work in the native plant nursery, are followed by at least an hour of learning about local ecology. Wear boots and work clothing, and bring binoculars. For more information, contact Kevin Anderson, 972-1960 or <Kevin.Anderson@ci.austin.tx.us>; or Tim Hissam, <tphissam1@yahoo.com>.

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, June 2, 7–9 pm

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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

Wednesday, June 4, 7 pm

URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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



Tuesday, June 10,

6:30–7:30 pm

TAS YOUTH CAMP PLANNING GROUP

Schlotsky's, 218 South Lamar. Contact Amy Sugeno: 512-396-3642 (San Marcos) or <amydave@thrifty.net>.

Thursday, June 12, 6:45 pm

TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive. Contact Pat Dillon: 347-0452.

Saturday, June 14, 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: 926-0999; <fergus@travisaudubon.org>.

Thursday, June 19, 7 pm

No TAS regular monthly meeting in June, July, or August.

Thursday, June 26, 7 pm

BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE MEETING

Contact Ethel Kutac: 346-7659.

Wednesday, July 2, 7 pm

URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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

Monday, July 7, 7–9 pm

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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

Tuesday, July 8, 6:30 pm

SANCTUARY COMMITTEE MEETING & POTLUCK

Baker Cabin, TAS Baker Sanctuary, at 12308 Lime Creek Road. Contact John Wilcox: 219-8425; <jmwoeso@earthlink.net>.



VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

TAS Education Committee Chair Needed

The Education Committee is looking for a motivated individual to coordinate Travis Audubon's adult and youth education programs. This is one of our most active committees, with many members willing to help carry the load, but we need someone to run the monthly committee meetings and to schedule the classes and workshops. This is definitely not a job for someone to do all by themselves, and we have a good committee to help get the work done. For more information, contact Shelia Hargis at <shargis@austin.rr.com> or 291-1861.

Westcave Preserve Seeks Volunteers

Westcave Preserve is seeking volunteers to greet and assist visitors. Travis Audubon is proud to support the new environmental learning center at Westcave. If you would like to help staff this important facility, please give these friends a call at 800-776-5272 ext. 2926 or email <lpincoff@lra.org>. There will be an orientation and training on Saturday, June 14, 10 a.m.–2 p.m., at the Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center; bring a lunch. For more information about the preserve, visit <www.westcave.org>.

TRAVIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

TAS Volunteer of the Month

June

Shawn Ashbaugh

There is no possible way to adequately thank someone who spends hours each day for months on end working to complete a special project. Shawn Ashbaugh recently donated over 250 hours of professional design services to get the new Austin-area bird checklist to print. In addition, he served for a year as the Rare Bird Alert compiler and assumed the responsibility for compiling the Austin Christmas Bird Count. We are proud to celebrate Shawn's exemplary service and are proud to work with volunteers of his impeccable dedication and character.

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 Department.

Thursdays, 6:04 pm

Howie Richey's Eco-Calendar

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

Saturday, June 14, 10 am–2 pm

Westcave Preserve Volunteer Orientation and Training, Westcave Preserve

For details, see page 5.



**Saturday–Monday,
June 21–23**
**“Creating Schoolyard
Habitats” Workshop and
Field Trip, Lady Bird
Johnson Wildflower
Center, Austin**

Sponsored by National Wildlife

Federation, in partnership with the Wildflower Center. Learn to use your school grounds as a wildlife habitat and teaching tool at this two-day workshop. Learn to create a schoolyard habitat, including site inventory, design, and native plant selection; understand the importance of creating a habitat team; explore how to integrate outdoor classroom activities with required curriculum content; and participate in fun, hands-on activities

(K–8). The third day will be a field trip to existing schoolyard habitats in the Austin. Participants will receive up to 16 hours SBEC. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Fee. Space is limited. Registration deadline is June 6. To register, contact Marya Fowler at 476-9805 ext. 37 or <fowler@nwf.org>.

Wednesday–Sunday, July 23–27

Brownsville International Bird Festival

Pelagic trips, Laguna Madre, thorn scrub and butterfly trips, field trip into Mexico. Daily seminars, a marketplace, and evening activities. Contact David Lee, Brownsville Convention and Visitors Bureau, <www.brownsville.org>, <dlee@brownsville.org>.

Thursday–Monday, September 18–29

Ecuador–Galapagos Islands

Birding and natural history tour sponsored by Wimberley Birding Society. Home base in Galapagos will be Finch Bay Hotel, on the nature-rich island of Santa Cruz. Twin beds, private baths, hot showers, yet close to wildlife, beach, tidal lagoons, cliffs, and cactus forests. Day trips on small, modern cruiser to other islands to see marine iguanas, sea lions, boobies, albatrosses, etc. Stay in Quito will include birding trips to Andean cloud forest reserves and other great birding sites. 390+ species, 38 endemics. Also included: Folkloric Ballet performance, shopping at Otavalo and other ancient Indian markets, city tour. Contact: Joe Sigg in Austin, 454-8363; Jerry Hall in Wimberley, 512-847-3730.



EDUCATION NEWS & CLASSES



**Thank You to All Class Instructors
and Participants!**

If you have been keeping up with Education Committee activities lately, you've realized that we have offered a bunch of classes this winter and spring. Between January and the end of April, we completed nine classes with another one just beginning. I don't think we've ever come close to offering that many classes.

Of course, we couldn't offer classes if we didn't have devoted and expert instructors. I'm proud to say that we have the greatest group of instructors around. It is a pleasure to work with them, and having been a student myself, I know that it is a pleasure to learn from them.

On behalf of the Education Committee, I would like to thank the following instructors and their class participants:

- Sparrow Identification Class—Byron Stone and 12 students

- Backyard Birding—Kathy Reeves and Martha Renfroe and 10 students
- Waterfowl Identification Class—Amy Sugeno and 10 students
- Bluebird Natural History Class—Pauline Tom and 5 students
- Beyond Binoculars Class—Georgia Harper and 10 students
- Purple Martin Natural History Class—Jenny Rasmussen and 9 students
- Introduction to Wildscaping—Jane Tillman and Martha Renfroe and 15 students
- Warbler Identification Class—Cliff Shackelford and 10 students
- Hummingbird Workshop—Mark Klym and 22 students
- Beginning Birding—Jean Martin and 12 students

Education Finances and Upcoming Changes

Recently, we compiled and submitted our 2003 Education

EDUCATION NEWS & CLASSES (CONTINUED)

Committee budget proposal. During this process, it came to my attention that some Travis Audubon members think that we cover all of our expenses by charging for the classes that we offer. Admittedly, we make a profit on our classes, but it's not enough to cover the other activities and projects that we are involved in. Some of these projects include our Youth Camp, for which we offer scholarships; a Roughwings team in the Great Texas Birding Classic (participants come from our Youth Camp); and *Audubon Adventures*, which we provide free to interested teachers in Central Texas. If you would like to help us further our goals of educating kids and adults about the wonders of birds, we would gladly accept any donations that you care to make. Just note on your check to Travis Audubon Society that your donation is to go toward education.

Because of the difference between the amount of money we bring in and the amount we need to pursue our goals, you'll see some changes in the near future. The prices that we charge for our classes will increase slightly. But even with an increase, our classes will remain a steal! Also, in the past we have charged one price for members and nonmembers alike. Now we'll reward TAS members by offering them a discounted rate for classes. So if you're not a member of Travis Audubon already, join us and reap the benefits!

Education Committee Chairperson

I will soon step down as chairperson of the Education Committee. I have held the position for about two and a half years, and it has been a fun and challenging time. I have had the opportunity to work with many wonderful people, but it is time for someone new to lead the committee. As of this writing, my replacement hasn't been determined. I plan to continue to be involved with the committee, and in June when my position as first vice president of TAS begins, I'm sure I'll be very busy with that job. Thank you to everyone who made my tenure as Education Committee chairperson a great experience!

—Shelia Hargis

UPCOMING CLASS

Shorebird Identification Class

Our 2003 Shorebird Identification Class is fast approaching and is a great way for intermediate birders to learn to distinguish Least, Semipalmated, and Western sandpipers; Lesser and Greater yellowlegs; and other shorebird ID challenges. After completing the class, there are numerous ways of putting your new knowledge to good use. The Shorebird Monitoring



Program at Hornsby is a citizen science project in which you can help keep track of the species and numbers of shorebirds moving through our area. If you're participating in the listing challenge, the ability to identify shorebirds will help you reach 200+ species. And there is the personal satisfaction of being able to identify that difficult group of birds we refer to as shorebirds.



Audubon Adventures Classroom Kits Need Donations

Audubon Adventures Classroom Kits for grades 3–6 sold like hotcakes over the winter! For the 2002–2003 school year we reached our quota

of 70 classrooms that signed up to use this nature curriculum, which highlights Freshwater Wetlands, Temperate Deciduous Forests and Woodlands, Coastal Environments, and Deserts this year. These materials are a gift to Austin-area schoolteachers from Travis Audubon Society. The cost is approximately \$40 per kit, which includes shipping. Please consider donating to the TAS *Audubon Adventures* program. You can send a check payable to Travis Audubon Society, to P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704. Please note on the check that it is for *Audubon Adventures*. Many thanks.

—Julia Balinsky

Tim Fennell returns again this year to teach the class. Tim teaches science at the LBJ Science Academy and is an expert birder. He is also a wonderful instructor—in the classroom as well as in the field.

The class dates have been scheduled to cover the majority of the fall shorebird migration. As with other groups of birds, different shorebird species come through at different times. And if you are concerned about being at Hornsby in July and August, don't worry. Those field trips will start early and won't last past 11 a.m. If you get too hot, you can leave at any time.

The lectures will be held at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend on Thursdays, July 31, August 14, and September 4, from 7 to 9 p.m. The first two field trips will be at Hornsby on Saturdays, August 2 and 16. The third field trip will be a weekend on the coast, September 6 and 7. The cost of the class is \$55 for TAS members and \$65 for nonmembers. Participants will also be responsible for covering Tim's expenses during the weekend trip, which will be approximately \$15 per participant. Contact Jean Martin at <jeanmartin@austin.rr.com> or 343-7053 to sign up.

—Shelia Hargis



FIELD TRIP REPORT

McKinney Roughs, March 15



Fog cut visibility to the point that Michelle and I could barely see road signs as we drove from Austin to McKinney Roughs Nature Park on Saturday, March 15, 2003. Although we feared that the weather would cause us to arrive late and miss the group, I felt encouraged by the fog-delayed

dawn. I'd worried that the 8 a.m. start meant we'd miss out on prime birding time.

We arrived not only on time but early. As we saw the sign for the park and turned into the drive, we were surprised to find it paved instead of gravel. The Lower Colorado River Authority maintains this area and is obviously trying to make this park welcoming and accessible.

After parking and gathering our gear, we went inside the clean and spacious visitor center and signed the guest book. Tentatively looking around the welcome area, we tried to decide who else was there for the birding trip. A binocular necklace was usually a dead giveaway. While waiting for the group leaders to arrive, I amused myself by milling around the live displays. I was especially fascinated by the native frogs and snakes displayed in aquariums.

Mark Bentley and Charles Stephens showed up with Krispy Kreme doughnuts and rounded up the seven assorted birders who'd arrived for the excursion. I felt nervous and excited—several years had passed since my last TAS field trip, and I was happy to have a whole morning to spend doing something I enjoy with others who have a similar interest.

We left the visitor center and walked through the small complex of seemingly new buildings toward the trailhead. As we straggled through the main grounds, we saw several common birds. A Northern Cardinal swooped past and landed in a small tree. This was to be an omen of things to come—we saw (and heard) more cardinals than any other bird, sometimes to the point of distraction!

Although we were impatient to get into the woods, we took the time to record Carolina Chickadees, Blue Jays, and Tufted Titmice flitting about the

main grounds. Mark pointed out a Field Sparrow as it flew past and disappeared into some shrubs. I didn't get a good enough look at it to include it in my year list, disappointingly. Sparrows (like warblers) are still a challenge for me, even after twenty years of birding. I get so excited to see a bird that it often flies away before I'm calm enough to take in its strong and weak identifying features. Still trying to slow down and breathe into the Zen of birding.

Charles birds McKinney Roughs Park regularly, so he took

the lead as we followed him onto the narrow Pine Ridge Trail. We were almost immediately surrounded by American Robins, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Carolina Wrens. American Crows cawed regularly but stayed out of sight for the first hour or so. Downy Woodpeckers popped up here and there. But the birds we really wanted a good look at were the Pine Warblers and White-eyed Vireos. They sang all around us but kept hidden behind the modest spring growth and the live oak leaves.

Pausing at one of the higher points of the Pine Ridge Trail, we could hear something singing in the pine boughs high above us. We had a brief and frustrating glimpse of the ventral view of a Pine Warbler. Even though it was directly above our heads, it flitted in the top of a very tall tree and I couldn't get a good look at it. Searching the treetops, I craned my neck long enough to give myself a headache, but no luck. We had to move on, following the path down the hill.

I was glad to have long pants and a jacket with me. The cool temperatures and the mist and fog seemed to subdue the birds and the birders alike. Cardinals were the exception, singing loudly from all directions and drawing our gaze with their bright red feathers. The voices of several Pine Warblers and White-eyed Vireos harmonized nicely with the Cardinals, but only as a tease—the birds themselves were as hard to see as the cardinals were obvious.

Even though we weren't bagging a bird a minute, the walk through the pines was mystically beautiful. Fragile green plants dripping with moisture were draped in mist. The dark bases of the trees appeared rooted in a layer of fog. At one point, a large bird erupted from the shadows of the branches and disappeared deeper into the forest. Charlie said it was a Pileated Woodpecker. I didn't get a good enough look at it to be sure, but I appreciated the almost metaphoric ghostly flapping of large wings into the gray unknown.

Even though there were nine of us, long stretches of time passed without a word spoken. A meditative quality blanketed the walk and left me feeling peaceful, content with seeing mockingbirds, Ruby- and Golden-crowned kinglets, and Turkey Vultures. The sound of our feet crunching on the path was rhythmic and soothing.

We stepped into a meadow area and halted to watch a solitary Double-crested Cormorant fly 30 feet above our



FIELD TRIP REPORT (CONTINUED)

heads. Charlie had hoped to be able to show us some Painted Buntings, but none were present. Disappointed, we started to leave the open area of the meadow to head back into the woods, but the rattling call of a woodpecker stopped us in our tracks. We searched the tree line until I saw the flash of red on the back of the head of a Red-bellied Woodpecker and pointed it out to the others.

With more pep in our step, we transitioned onto the Cypress Trail. We began to hear the mating calls of a pair of Red-

shouldered Hawks. The low clouds kept them from rising high on thermals, but we caught tantalizing glimpses of them above the ridges.

The Cypress Trail runs along the Colorado River before joining up with the Riverside Trail. When we first reached the banks of the Colorado, we all stopped to admire the flowing river. As we stood quietly, the call of a Barred Owl echoed across the water. Several of us (myself included) were surprised to hear an owl calling during the day. According to Sibley, the Barred Owl is the most common owl to be heard in the daytime. We soaked in the magic of the moment before moving on and up the Riverside Trail.



Cresting the ridge, some of us were able to get a better look at the Red-shouldered Hawks we'd been hearing. Watching their mating ritual made me feel like I'd gone back in time, connecting me with something ancient and beautiful.

We hiked for a while without any sightings, but still enjoying the early spring weather. Just when I'd lost hope of seeing anything else, we walked up a hill we later dubbed "Song Slope." We traced the source of a rising buzzing song to a beautiful little warbler—pale blue and yellow with a distinct black and red breast band: a Northern Parula.

The excitement of the sighting did not have time to subside before a White-eyed Vireo came out in full view and began to sing his almost mechanical song *tic-a-purrr-chik*, not 20 feet away from the group. Even with nine pairs of binoculars focused on his tiny body, he tilted back his head and sang unself-consciously, throat vibrating. We could see every detail, right down to the white eyes in his yellow spectacles.

To round out the luck of the moment, another voice we'd been hearing all day, simple upslurring notes, made itself known. Miraculously, a Pine Warbler joined in the festivities and

graciously allowed us to observe him in full, unobstructed light, singing his heart out.

We traipsed happily back to the trailhead, casually noting a Black Vulture and a Red-tailed Hawk along the way. The morning had ended at a happy peak. I returned home feeling contented and blessed to have spent a spring morning out among the birds.

—Anissa Housley



KIDS' SECTION

Audubon Jumble

by Amy Sugeno



What did the girl say to her friends during an early-morning trip to an Audubon bird sanctuary?

Unscramble the letters below to form five bird names.

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| K | O | T | R | S |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| R | E | O | H | N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C | F | N | I | H |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| O | N | B | I | R |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E | V | D | O | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Arrange the letters from the bold squares to form the answer to the above question.

"This is

!"

See page 11 for the solution.

Questions about the Kids' Section?

Do you have questions about the Kids' Section? Email your questions to Amy Sugeno <amydave@thrifty.net>.

SANCTUARY NEWS



Spring is upon us, and nature is bustling with all kinds of activity. A pair of Bewick's Wrens found our new birdhouse, and their eggs have hatched. As I write this, we can periodically see the adults fly in and thrust an insect into the waiting maw of a chick that has stuck its head out of the entrance of the house. A pair of Golden-cheeked Warblers occasionally visit our water pond, and the leopard frog tadpoles are beginning to

transform themselves into frogs. A Carolina Wren built a nest in our tool shed, and their two chicks are nearly fledged. One morning, I watched as one of the wrens chased down a sphinx moth, struggle to capture it, and then fly toward the tool shed to feed its chicks. A Great Crested Flycatcher is in our area again this year to nest, and we can hear its loud whistled *wheep*. Chimney Swifts have returned to nest in the tower again this year. We sighted our first swift when we witnessed one plunge into the tower the evening of April 6. On several occasions this month, a Wild Turkey hen has walked up the

WEBSITES FOR WILDSKAPING (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

neighbors why you are reducing your lawn. Calling your new garden a butterfly or songbird garden is something they can relate to. Get your wildscape certified either with the National Wildlife Federation or through the joint Texas Parks & Wildlife/NWF program and put up the sign they provide. *Start small*. Making the switch from an easily mowed yard to more shrubs and flower beds can be the ticket to more hands-on weeding, at least in the short term. Don't bite off more than you can maintain. Last, *humanize*. Put in a bench, a birdbath, or a feeder. Create a path. People will be more willing to accept that your landscape has a plan, and then they can share your enjoyment.

—Jane Tillman

Want to Keep Receiving This Newsletter?

To keep your newsletters coming after September, be sure to join the Travis Audubon Society—even if you are already a member of the National Audubon Society. A TAS membership form is available on the back page of this newsletter. For details about this change, see the May 2003 issue of *Signal Smoke*.

South Alley and drunk out of the water trough that is outside our back fence. We saw our first Painted Bunting of the season when a brilliant male landed on our cage feeder on April 21. On April 20, I watched a Texas garter snake work its way across our backyard. This striking specimen had a dark back split by a broad orange stripe that ran from near the base of its head to almost the tip of its tail, and it was approximately 24 inches in length. In the spring, this snake is found in marshy, flooded pastureland or meadows when these areas are full of cricket and chorus frogs. At other times, it is found in grassy or brushy cover near ponds and streams. This snake seemed out of place in our backyard, but perhaps it had located our pond and was scouting it for the frogs that will soon inhabit it. And speaking of snakes, recently one of our neighbors spotted a three-and-a-half-foot-long western diamondback rattlesnake near the Old Quarry gate.

It looks like we will close out April with the sanctuary receiving only 0.1 inch of rain. This is similar to the weather pattern of last year, when we received 0.22 inches of rain in April. The soil still retains a lot of moisture from the rainfall we received last winter, but increasing temperatures and lower humidity will dry out the ground quickly. Given that we've had so little rain in April, I don't expect too much in the way of May flowers.

Sanctuary Meetings Scheduled

The next TAS-BS Sanctuary Committee meetings are scheduled for Tuesdays, July 8 and October 7. We will meet at the Baker Cabin, 12308 Lime Creek Road, and will begin the meeting at 6:30 p.m. with a potluck dinner.

—John Wilcox, TAS Baker Sanctuary Steward

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 2)

Travis Audubon is becoming the go-to group for information and expertise in protecting our local wildlife and habitats. Our committees are focused on gathering and disseminating the information we need to create a Central Texas rich in birds and wildlife for generations to come. We need people to help us monitor local bird populations at Hornsby Bend and elsewhere. We need folks willing to work with our local communities to create better habitats in our parks and residential neighborhoods. We need more people quietly leading field trips in their neighborhoods or giving presentations to their homeowners association. We also need people to stuff envelopes and provide office and administrative support.

Sustainable populations of all local bird and wildlife species will take all of our talents to realize. Take a few minutes to determine how you can best help us achieve our dream, then contact myself or one of our committee chairs to volunteer your services. This is your community, and these are your birds and wildlife. Together we can leave behind an Austin increasingly rich in these natural treasures.

—Rob Fergus

NATURALIST'S CALENDAR

Bluebells and Turk's cap and buttonbush are blooming. The sun is the highest and the days are the longest of the entire year. Katydid's chant through the day, and Chuck-will's-widows through the night. Spotted fawns follow cautious does, and bucks carry velvet-covered antlers. June has arrived in Central Texas.

The Mexican free-tailed bat colony under the Congress Avenue bridge becomes one of the world's biggest nurseries about now. Most of the bats that returned to the bridge in March were pregnant females. More than 90% of them will give birth in June, nearly doubling the population to over a million. For the time being, the mothers leave their pups behind when departing at sunset to find food. When a mother returns, she can find her baby by the sound of its voice.



Gray fox pups, on the other hand, are already adventuring with their parents. Bobwhite chicks, too, are scurrying after their folks. Young Purple Martins are flying now, but more often they sit on an exposed perch waiting for mom or dad to bring food. Great Crested Flycatchers have nestlings hidden in a cavity somewhere—or in a bluebird box or martin gourd.

Most of the resident birds, for that matter, seem to be engaged in familial duties; some tend begging young, while others start second clutches. You may see a fledgling mockingbird, a



House Finch gathering nesting material, or a nest of Bewick's Wren chicks. An odd-looking cardinal—mostly brown like a female, but with a dark bill and streaks of red in unlikely places—is a hatch-year male getting his first red feathers.

Knee-high and waist-high wildflowers are in vogue on the roadsides and the prairies. Gold-and-brown Mexican hats and purple-flowered nightshades crowd the highway shoulders. Stands of pagoda-like flower

heads of lemon beebalm (*Monarda citriodora*) are common on roadsides, too—the purplish pink color coming as much from the leaflike bracts between rings of flowers as from the two-lipped flowers themselves. On sandy soils, you may find a related mint, spotted beebalm (*Monarda punctata*), displaying whitish bracts and brown-spotted yellow flowers.

Still another tall mint that blooms in June, one especially fond of damp places such as stream banks and seeps, is American germander (*Teucrium canadense*). Germander flowers are packed into long, terminal clusters like those of the beebalms,

but without the showy bracts. The blossoms, apparent favorites of hummingbirds, are white to pale pink, with darker purplish markings. They are also “topless,” so to speak. Unlike most mint flowers, the upper lip of a germander flower is much shorter than the lower lip and appears to be absent altogether; instead, the stamens arch through open space above the lower lip.

A normal June will bring more precipitation than any other month except May. Water is usually so plentiful from the May and June rains that wildflowers adorn even the most desolate caliche banks. The most showy of these are the mountain pinks (*Centaureum beyrichii*), which look like ready-for-the-florist bouquets standing on otherwise bare, rocky soil. The many branches of this foot-tall plant form a tight cluster like an inverted cone, the flat or rounded top crowded with pink blossoms.

Less showy but no less intriguing is the white rosinweed (*Silphium albiflorum*). The bloom of this Texas endemic resembles an all-white sunflower, two inches across. The rest of the plant, however, looks as hard-bitten as its barren surroundings: the thick, tough stem, up to three feet tall, and the stiff, broad, deeply lobed leaves are as rough-textured as coarse sandpaper. Look for this survivor on a Hill Country slope too arid and rocky for anything else to grow. —Bill Reiner



Solution to Puzzle (on page 9)

FOR THE BIRD S I

THIS IS

What did the girl say to her friends during an early-morning trip to an Audubon bird sanctuary?

STORK
HERON
FINCH
ROBIN
Dove



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>.

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 Painted Bunting Membership (bonus Travis Audubon T-shirt)
- \$100 Vireo Membership (bonus T-shirt and book)
- \$250 Warbler Membership (bonus T-shirt, book, and free workshop)
- \$1,000 Lifetime Membership (bonus T-shirt, book, workshop, and listing in annual report)

This is a gift membership from _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Email _____