



SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 53, NO. 10

October 2004

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Join Us for The Big Sit 2004

The Big Sit is an annual nationwide “big day” event where the object is for teams to identify as many species of birds as possible from a fixed location, actually from within the confines of a 17-ft diameter circle. This year’s Big Sit takes place on Sunday, October 10th, 2004, and we’re looking for those interested in participating on the Travis Audubon team.


A comment from a past Texas participant... “A Big Sit is a chance to watch birds as they are doing their thing as opposed to actively searching them out and seeing their tail-end as they flee from us. The Big Sit is also about community, patience, competition, and, of course, enjoying nature. It is a different thing to pick one spot, a good spot mind you, and watch the day unfold...”

In 2001 we fielded a Big Sit team at Hornsby Bend that recorded 53 species, good for 6th place out of 25 teams in Texas. In 2003 we tallied 57 species, good for 3rd place amongst 12 teams in Texas. It’s hard for us to top the coastal teams but we definitely seem to be on an improvement curve! The event is sponsored by Bird Watcher’s Digest and more information can be found at www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bigsit.html.

Like in 2001 and 2003, we plan to conduct our Big Sit at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Facility located about 7 miles (as the Peregrine Falcon flies) southeast of downtown Austin off FM 973. Candidate sites for the circle this year are the NW, NE, or SE corners of Pond #1W. We plan to operate in three shifts, starting at dawn when the Hornsby gates open, to dark, when they close (we’ll probably have to sacrifice the nighttime hours). Participants are welcome to come and go as they please, but setting up shifts helps to assign list-keeping responsibilities and ensure that there are an adequate number of viewing scopes present at all times. In addition to those who enjoy bird identification (both by sight and sound), we’ll need good spotters as well as “proofers”- those willing to venture out from the circle to verify a tentative identification. We hope to have a sun shade set up so we don’t bake or get drizzled on and all participants are free to eat cookies, play cards, etc. There’s no fee to participate.



Continued on page 9



TAS Regular Monthly Meeting
 Thursday, October 21, 7:00 p.m.
 Doors open at 6:30 for social time

Program: Introduction to the World of Bats

Presenter: Meg Goodman, Texas Bat Biologist

*Highland Park Baptist Church
 5206 Balcones Drive, Austin, TX
 (see page 8 for details)*

Travis Audubon Society

General Address

P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704

Address for Donations

P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704

Phone numbers listed below without an area code are local numbers in the 512 area. For e-mail addresses, see "About Us" at www.travisaudubon.org.

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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John Wilcox 219-8425

ACT REPRESENTATIVES

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Bryan Hale (state treasurer) 474-5599

SIGNAL SMOKE EDITOR

Tess Sherman 293-1880

TAS HOTLINE

Call 926-8751 for information on rare birds in our area (press 5), TAS events (press 6), or field trip status (press 7). To report sightings of rare or unusual birds, press 1. To ask a question, press 2. No touch-tone phone? Call 331-8693.

TAS WEB SITE

www.travisaudubon.org

TAS EMAIL

info@travisaudubon.org



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on recycled paper
using soy ink.**

Mission Statement

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

LETTER FROM THE TAS PRESIDENT

On August 28, 2004, a friend and I visited Port Aransas, and we kayaked to Shamrock Island, a protected nesting site for birds. As I was paddling along, feeling very small and insignificant in my little kayak in the Corpus Christi bay, I lost count of how many hummingbirds flew past. It was amazing to watch them whiz by, inches above the water. And to think of the journey that lay ahead of them! I never cease to be inspired by the incredible creatures around us. Aren't birds the coolest?

Fall is upon us, and if you're like me, your weekends are full of birding and various festivals.

This is a busy time for Travis Audubon Society, and we need your help. Please consider donating a couple of hours of your time to help us at the Texas Wildlife Expo or Texas Ornithological Society's fall meeting which we are hosting. If you like helping kids learn about birds, volunteer to help with our Youth Camp. More details are available in our Volunteer Opportunities section. I look forward to seeing you at an event!

Oh, and don't forget about the Big Sit at Hornsby. Come out and join us as we try to break our record for the number of bird species seen from within a 17' circle. This is a wonderful opportunity to get to know your fellow birders better and to

Continued on page 8

COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS

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

TAS Rare Bird Alert	Isaac Sanchez	263-2767
	Alert number	926-8751
Bird Records	Lawrence Buford	452-6344
	Ethel Kutac	346-7659
Conservation	John Kelly	331-8693
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Education—Youth	Julia Balinsky	926-7312
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Latin America	Bob Warneke	443-5488
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Programs	Howie Richey	444-4550
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Publications	Tess Sherman	293-1880
Publicity	Barbara Anderson	346-6584
Sales	Marcie Wilcox	219-8425
Sanctuary	John Wilcox	219-8425
Urban Habitat Development	Jane Tillman	794-0058
Volunteer Opportunities	Rob Bates	528-9317
Webmaster	Chris Doggett	512-898-5500

ABOUT SIGNAL SMOKE

Subscription Information

Signal Smoke, published monthly or bi-monthly by Travis Audubon Society, is a TAS membership benefit. To join TAS, see the back page of this newsletter. For address or subscription changes, notify Shirley Doggett (TAS Membership Secretary), P.O. Box 1132, Round Rock TX 78680-1132; membership@travisaudubon.org; 512-898-5500. The post office will not forward *Signal Smoke*.

Newsletter Deadline

The submissions deadline is the first day of the preceding month (for example, September 1 for the October issue). Submit uncopyrighted articles, announcements, and art to Tess Sherman, tsherman1@austin.rr.com; or mail to 210 E. Walnut Dr. Austin, TX 78753. Submissions by email or on a floppy are preferred but not required. Call Tess at 293-1880 if you have questions.

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE NEWS - Classes

Beginning Birding Class

The fall 2004 Beginning Birding Class will start in late October. This class is designed to provide new birders with the techniques and skills to help them identify unfamiliar birds. Lecture/slide presentations will be held on Wednesday evenings, Oct. 20, Nov. 3, Nov. 17, and Dec. 1, from 7 to 9:30 p.m. in a meeting room at First Presbyterian Church, 8001 Mesa Drive, in northwest Austin. Field trips will be on Saturdays following each class. Trips will begin at 7 a.m. and end between noon and 2 p.m. Because field trips provide the opportunity to put into practice the skills taught in the classroom, we strongly encourage registrants to make a commitment to attend the field trips as well as the lectures.

Class members will receive a beginning birding booklet, plus many other handouts. Topics will include tips for identifying any unfamiliar bird, buying and using binoculars, and using birding resources. The class will be taught by Education Committee chair Jean Martin, who has been a birder for more than 15 years and has taught this class numerous times, with excellent reviews each time. The class fee is \$40, and the class size will be limited to 12 people. This class fills quickly. To sign up, contact Jean Martin, jeanmartin@austin.rr.com or 343-7053 to sign up.

Sparrow Identification Class

Dates to be announced – check the website or contact Jean.

The fall 2004 Sparrow Identification Class will be taught by Byron Stone. According to recent participants in the classes, this course is awesome! Byron has been an avid birder and listener since the early 1970s. He became interested in sparrows when he found his first Fox Sparrow in a mixed flock



near Luling 25 years ago. He spent much of the intervening two decades trying to figure out how to tell all those “little brown birds” apart. He has traveled all parts of Texas to listen and watch for birds and has seen all of the sparrows that occur naturally in Texas. Byron enjoys many other activities, including fishing, hiking, and playing classical guitar.



This class will focus on the two dozen members of the family Emberizidae that occur regularly in Central Texas—everything on your checklist between Spotted Towhee and White-crowned Sparrow. The class will begin in October and there will be four Wednesday-night lectures and four Saturday-morning field trips the same week as the lectures. By the time you read this, the dates will have been finalized, and will be posted on the TAS Web site under “Birding Classes.” Alternatively, feel free to contact Jean Martin (see below) for those dates.

Class room sessions will be held in a meeting room at First Presbyterian Church, 8001 Mesa Drive, in northwest Austin. Field trips will focus on nearby areas that provide excellent opportunities to observe many of our native sparrow species. In October and November, sparrows are arriving in Central Texas, where they will winter. Thus, class participants will have several months in which to practice their new skills following the conclusion of the class. This will be a good class for people who already have some birding experience but want to refine their approach to the identification of sparrows, including subspecies. Byron also says it is a good class for “people who don’t mind tromping through some grass.” Tuition is \$60 for TAS members and \$70 for nonmembers. Contact Jean Martin at jeanmartin@austin.rr.com or 343-7053 to register or ask questions. The class is limited to 12 participants.

Jean Martin

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE NEWS

As I write this, Shirley and I are off to England to visit family and friends. We haven’t been back for four years, so I imagine it will be somewhat different – and, yes, we can drive on the wrong side of the road! Bird life there is different from our childhood, as the English Sparrow, so prevalent when we grew up, has somewhat declined. It will almost be autumn there, and a great opportunity to cool off from this year’s mild Texas summer.

We will have had our first of the new season’s membership meetings when you read this, and if you haven’t been to one before, please come to the next one and introduce yourselves to us. It’s fun for us, and the Board Members, to meet with you all, and it’s your chance to tell us whether we are doing

the things you wish us to do, or how we can do better. Travis Audubon’s mission can be more successful, the more folks who can participate, so please come and talk to us.

We also need ideas as to how we can increase our membership numbers. There are over 350 local chapter members now and we thank you very much for your support. Signal Smoke alone costs us over \$10 a year for each member, so if you feel you can contribute to Travis Audubon by joining us as a local member, please do so. There is a membership form on the back of this newsletter, or on our website at www.travisaudubon.org. If you have any questions or ideas, please contact Shirley or I at ckdoggett@mindspring.com, or phone us at (512) 898-5500.

Chris Doggett

TAS Events

October Events

Additional event details always available at www.travisaudubon.org

- Saturday, October 2, 7:30 – 11:00 AM**
Joint TAS/LCCC Field Trip
Fall Field Trip to Lost Creek Country Club. Registration required, joint field trip with Lost Creek Country Club (LCCC), maximum is 12. Contact Maggie Burnett (mburnett@austin.rr.com, (h) 899-0390) to register or for info.
- Saturday, October 2, 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM**
Naturalists Field Day
Naturalists Field Day at Shield Ranch. Joint field trip with Capital Area Master Naturalists. Contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) for more information.
- Saturday, October 9, 7:30 AM – 3:00 PM**
Fall Bird Survey
Fall Bird Survey on Nancy Moore's property, "Acacia". Registration required. Contact Anne Donovan to register (ajdonovan@austin.rr.com, (h) 472-3030) or for more information.
- Saturday, October 9, 7:00 AM and 4:00 PM**
Monthly Bird Count
Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend. Led by Russ Nelson. Contact Kevin Anderson (972-1960) for more information.
- Saturday, October 16, 10:30 AM – after 9:00 PM**
Field Trip
Fort Martin Scott in Fredericksburg, Fort Mason City Park in Mason. Registration required. Contact Anne Donovan (ajdonovan@austin.rr.com, (h) 472-3030) or Barbara Anderson (bsfanderson@earthlink.net, (h) 346-6584) to register or for more information.
- Saturday, October 16, 8:00 – 11:00 AM**
Monthly Bird Walk
Monthly Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park. Led by Charles Stephens and Rob Fergus. Contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) or Rob Fergus (fergus@mail.utexas.edu, (w) 347-7572) for information.
- Saturday, October 16, 7:30 AM – 12:00 PM**
Monthly Bird Walk
Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend. Led by Richard Kaskan. Contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieee.org, (c) 748-8660) for more information.
- Saturday, October 23, 4:00 – 6:30 PM**
Fall Bird Walk
Fall Bird Walk at Meadow Lake. Two co-leaders needed. Contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) to volunteer to be a co-leader or for more information.
- Saturday, October 30, 9:00 – 11:00 AM**
Fall Bird Walk
Fall Bird Walk at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. If you're not already a member, say that you're there for the bird walk at the gate and there will be no entrance fee. Contact Rupert Chambers (rchambers@wildflower.org, (w) 292-4200, ext. 140) or Rachel Zierzow (zierzow@mail.utexas.edu, (w) 475-8724) for more information.

About TAS Field Trips 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. For complete, up-to-date information on field trips, including cancellations due to weather or other circumstances, please check the TAS Field Trips webpage at www.travisaudubon.org (click on "Field Trips") or the TAS hotline (926-8751). Because of the publication schedule of the newsletter, things can change. If you do not have Internet access, contact phone numbers are provided below.

About Hornsby Bend Maps and other information about the Hornsby Bend facility may be found on the Hornsby Bend website at www.sbs.utexas.edu/hornsby.

Oct/Nov 2004

November Events

Additional event details
always available at
www.travisaudubon.org

Saturday, November 6,
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Fall Bird Walk

Fall Bird Walk at Riata Pond/Yett Creek Park.
One co-leader needed. Contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) to volunteer to be a co-leader or for more information.

Saturday, November 13,
6:30 AM – 3:00 PM
Joint TAS/TLAS field trip

Joint TAS/TLAS field trip to Fort Hood (near Killeen).
Registration required, trip maximum is 20. Contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) to register or for more information.

Saturday, November 13,
7:00 AM and 4:00 PM
Monthly Bird Count

Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend.
Led by Russ Nelson. Contact Kevin Anderson (972-1960) for more information.

Saturday, November 20,
7:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Joint TAS/TLAS field trip

Joint TAS/TLAS field trip to Granger Lake.
Registration required, trip maximum is 15. Contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) to register or for more information.

Saturday, November 20,
8:00 – 11:00 AM
Monthly Bird Walk

Monthly Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park.
Led by Charles Stephens and Rob Fergus. Contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) or Rob Fergus (fergus@mail.utexas.edu, (w) 347-7572) for more information.

November 20,
7:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Monthly Bird Walk

Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend.
Led by Richard Kaskan. Contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieee.org, (c) 748-8660) for more information.

Saturday, November 27
(Thanksgiving Weekend)

Bird Walk at Your Local Park.
a couple of hours after sunrise (7:07 AM) or before sunset (5:30 PM). Go bird !

Training Series for Songbird Festival Field Trip Co-Leaders

Would you be willing to co-lead a field trip at next May's Lago Vista Songbird Festival, but don't think that you know enough about the birds and other plants and animals in the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge (BCNWR)? Well, here's the opportunity that you've been waiting for! Over several months and at each meeting, we'll spend about an hour reviewing species lists and field guides, then take a short break, and then spend one-to-two hours in the field to reinforce what we've learned. We will focus on the flora and fauna likely to be present during the Festival, but information will also be provided on the other species reported from the Refuge. Several guest instructors will discuss the following potential topics (but please note that this list is subject to change !):

- October – butterflies, grasses, BCNWR history/facts
- November – reptiles, trees, shrubs
- January – mammals, geology, climate/weather
- February – birds, amphibians, tips on how to co-lead field trips, review tentative list of Festival field trip locations/schedules
- March – dragonflies, damselflies, flowers, birding by ear, match Festival field trips with co-leaders, preliminary Festival logistics (maps, keys/codes, radios, etc.)

- April – review all bird species (and answer any questions about other flora and fauna) likely to be present during the Festival, final Festival logistics, tour parts of the Refuge likely to be visited during the Festival

Snacks will be provided in the classroom. Bring your own field guides if you have them, but some will also be available to share. Don't worry, there won't be a test at the end – but you'll definitely feel more confident about your ability to help others enjoy the Festival. This invitation is going out to the members of the Travis Audubon Society, the Capital Area Master Naturalists (hours will count toward the advanced training requirement), the Highland Lakes Master Naturalists, the Highland Lakes Birding and Wildflower Society, the Williamson County Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSoT), the Highland Lakes NPSoT, the Austin NPSoT, and the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. Participants who co-lead a field trip at the Songbird Festival will receive free registration, dinner at the Festival Keynote Address, and one additional field trip at no charge (CAMN members will also earn approved volunteer hours). Contact John Kelly (jfkellyaustin51@hotmail.com, (h) 331-8693), Jean Nance (jnance@texas.net, (h) 259-0299), or Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) for meeting date/time information. Come learn more about our closest National Wildlife Refuge and support our closest annual Nature Festival!

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

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

Saturday-Sunday, October 2-3rd & 9 -10th

BALCONES CANYONLANDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The public is invited to attend free bird and native plant nature walks and other activities at Doeskin Ranch on Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge on October 2-3 and 9-10, 2004. This Refuge Week celebration is held from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. each day. Bird Walks will be held on October 2nd and 3rd from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 am. General nature walks which include some birding will be offered during the same times on October 9 and 10. It is possible that migrating hawks and kettling Swainson's Hawks can be observed. Bring your binoculars for these walks! Afternoon nature walks will be offered each day from 2:00 pm- 4:00 pm. A couple of these afternoon walks have specific themes. A Native Grass Walk will be led by Bill Reiner on October 2nd. And a Plant and Animal Ecology walk will be presented by John Ahrms from West Cave Preserve on October 9th.

Special activities include the opportunity to catch and tag Monarch butterflies as part of a research project, Monarch Watch, at any time during the four days. At your leisure, visitors can observe up close many interesting and bizarre looking pond and creek creatures from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm each day. See how these water creatures are collected from 9:00 am – 10:00 am. each day.

Some native plants will be on display in a demonstration that discusses specific Texas native plants that attract certain animals. A National Wildlife Federation Steward also will be showing other examples of ways to attract wildlife to your property. Folks can visit this demonstration at any time on both Sundays from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 P.M. Live snakes and turtles will be on display along with horned lizard displays sponsored by The Horned Lizard Society on Saturday October 9 from 10:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. For more information about Refuge Week, contact Rob Iski at (512) 339-9432 x 70 or check out the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge web site at www.friendsofbalcones.org.

Saturday-Sunday, October 9-10

Fall Bird Count, Bamberger Ranch, Johnson City

Registration required. The count is on Sunday, but you are welcome to arrive on Saturday evening after 6:00 PM and spend the night at the center (bring your own linens and towels). A potluck dinner is scheduled for 7:00 PM that night (bring food that is ready to eat or takes little preparation). We may take a walk to search for night birds that evening. Sunday morning we will be getting up bright and early for the bird count. Coffee will be available, but bring your own "no cook"

breakfast and lunch in your own cooler (there will be limited space in the refrigerator). At 6:30 AM we will gather and area assignments will be announced. The count will be from 7:00 AM until 12:00 PM, and then we'll meet at the Center for the tally. The kind folks at the Bamberger Ranch are letting us use this great facility for our potluck and sleepover, and ask that we pick up after ourselves and leave the Center in the same condition that we found it, so we should be sure to show our appreciation. The terrain is rugged, so wear sturdy shoes and field clothes, and be prepared for rain. Email Marsha.Reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us to let her know if you are going and if you will be arriving Saturday evening (after 6:00 PM) or Sunday morning (at or before 6:30 AM), and if you need more details on the directions. You can also let her know if you would like to be placed on an email list for information on future bird counts. A map to the ranch is at www.bamberger-ranch.org/map.htm.

Friday - Saturday, October 15 & 16

Audubon Texas Forum

Third Annual Audubon Texas Forum & Assembly is scheduled for October 15 & 16, 2004, at the University of Dallas in Dallas, Texas. Planning is well underway and invitations will be mailed out soon. Similar to last year, presentations will include updates and information on "Bird Conservation Across the Lone Star State" that will be of great interest to those in the conservation community. Please check the web site periodically for up-to-date information on the event at www.tx.audubon.org.

Monday, October 25, 7 pm

Passion Vines and Butterflies

Dr. Phil Schappert speaks to the Austin Butterfly Forum on 'Passion Vines and Butterflies.' Location: the auditorium of the Zilker Garden Center. For more information call John Kelly, 331-8693.

Thursday - Saturday, October 28 to 30

Texas Ornithological Society in Austin

The meeting of Texas Ornithological Society for the Fall of 2004 will held in Austin on October 28 - 30. Travis Audubon Society is the local host organization for this meeting. Details of the meeting speakers and field trips are available on the TOS web site at www.texasbirds.org, and will be available in the October Signal Smoke as well. This meeting will bring birders from all around Texas to the Austin area for a week-end. Make your plans now to attend this event which will showcase the birds, wildlife and their habitats of Central Texas.

Sunday, October 17

Nestbox Workshop

Paul and Georgan Kyle will lead a workshop on building nestboxes (birdhouses) on Sunday, October 17, from 1-4 pm. Each class member will be given a pre-cut kit to construct his/her nestbox during the class. Participants will learn about the nesting needs of several cavity nesting birds such as Carolina Wrens, Eastern Bluebirds, Black-crested Titmice, etc. and the proper placement and care of the boxes.

After the boxes are completed, Paul and Georgan will lead the class through the trails of their bird sanctuary, examine and clean out nestboxes that have been used during the year (including a Chimney Swift Tower) and discuss the advantages of each location. The class will then install a nestbox in a new location. Registration is limited to 10 builders. Children age 8 and above will be welcome if accompanied by a parent. The cost of this workshop is \$25 for TAS members and \$35 for non-members. This includes the cost of the nestbox. Additional kits may be purchased for \$15. For more information or to sign up, contact Anne Donovan at 472-3030 or ajdonovan@austin.rr.com or Barbara Anderson at 346-6584 or bsfanderson@earthlink.net.

Recent Books for Birders

The Big Year, by Mark Obmascik (Free Press, 2004)

This is the story of three top birders, each attempting to set a new record for a North American Big Year, each unaware—at first—of the competition. Obmascik’s account of this 1998 race is thoroughly enjoyable; at times it reads like a thriller. He makes the obsessive heroics of these men look alternately admirable, awe-inspiring, and insane. Weaving a quick but informative history of American birding into the narrative, he traces the evolution of big years from Peterson and Fisher’s *Wild America* of 1953 to Sandy Komito’s 1987 record of 714 species. By the time the wild race is over, Obmascik has created sympathy for three completely different characters, taken the reader to just about every exotic birding locale in the USA and Canada, and taught (this reader, anyway) scores of tips on how and where to find birds. The best Big Year story since *Kingbird Highway* and a great read for anyone, birder or not.

Golden Wings, and Other Stories about Birders and Birding, by Pete Dunne (University of Texas Press, 2003)

The essays in this collection, mostly short ones, were first published in magazines such as *Living Bird* and *Wild Bird News*. In the introduction, Dunne claims that there is a theme running through the essays, but he doesn’t tell what it is. My guess would be something like this: birding reconnects a person with nature, engendering a desire to preserve our world and the creatures in it, and thus the best way to create an environmentalist is to give someone a field guide and binoculars. This sounds too serious: the essays are actually lighthearted, even laugh-out-loud funny at times, and engaging enough to keep the reader turning the page.



The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds, by Mark W. Lockwood and Brush Freeman (Texas A&M University Press, 2004)

This is a book every Texas birder must own, if only for the beautiful color photos of all those birds—Masked Tityra, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, Yellow-billed Loon—that you’ve promised yourself not to miss if they ever show up in the state again. The photographs are a judicious mix of Texas specialties (common birds for us in some cases, but not for visitors to the state) and documented Texas rarities. The heart of the book is, of course, the species descriptions and range maps for each of the 623 birds listed for the state. These are exact, up-to-date, and thorough, but quite readable. For the casual and accidental birds, the authors show the location of each occurrence on a map, often a close-up of a region of the state, and provide the dates for each occurrence. This is a fun book to browse, as well as an invaluable reference. The authors are donating all of their royalties from the sale of the book to the Texas Ornithological Society. The least you can do is buy a copy—you won’t regret it!

Chasing Birds across Texas: A Birding Big Year, by Mark T. Adams (Texas A&M University Press, 2003)

Another Big Year book, this one is the personal narrative of Adams’s year 2000 attempt to break the Texas Big Year record. Not a professional writer like Obmascik or Dunne, Adams can’t muster as much style or drama, but Texas birders will recognize so many places, people, and situations that you can’t help but get intrigued by his story. Nor can you help but admire his pluck (and his luck!) as he puts in endless miles to see those one-day-wonders that constantly pop up across this state. Adams was a fairly recent convert to birding and a new resident of the state when he managed to tie the record set by Brush Freeman and Petra Hockey in 1995, and though his record has since been eclipsed (as records will be), his efforts are admirable, as is his book.

Stan VanSandt



Thank you, Rosemary
for 10 great years of Signal Smoke.
We couldn’t have done it without you!

With Gratitude,
The Travis Audubon Society



HOW TO NOMINATE BOARD MEMBERS

Our bylaws specify that the Nominating Committee will be composed of the President, one other board member, and three TAS members. The nominating committee is responsible for finding candidates for board positions. Check our website for the names of the current committee members. Contact these individuals if you'd like to be considered for a board position or if you would like to recommend someone for a board position.

LETTER FROM THE TAS PRESIDENT (CONTINUED)

learn from more experienced birders. See Stu Wilson's cover article for more details.

We have more new faces in various positions. Jean Martin has returned to fill the Education Committee Chair position, and Barbara Anderson has volunteered to be our Publicity Chair. Stan VanSandt is working to compile Travis Audubon's history by reading old Signal Smokes and interviewing long-time TAS

members. Jane Wilson, a retired CPA, is our new treasurer. Thank you Jean, Barbara, Stan, and Jane!

In closing, I encourage you to read the article on Socially Responsible Investing. You CAN have a say in how your money is used. Take advantage of this opportunity to protect the environment and make the world a better place.

See you at our October meeting.

Shelia Hargis

What is Socially Responsible Investing?

The integration of personal values with investment decisions is called socially responsible investing (SRI). In a practical sense, socially responsible investing strategies can be grouped into three categories:

SCREENING describes the inclusion or exclusion of corporate securities in investment portfolios. Socially concerned investors generally seek to own profitable companies with outstanding employee relations, strong records of community involvement, excellent environmental policies and practices, respect for human rights around the world, and safe and useful products. Conversely, they often attempt to avoid investment in firms that fall short in these areas.

SHAREHOLDER ADVOCACY describes investor efforts to submit and vote proxy resolutions as a means of influencing

company behavior. This strategy was successfully utilized in pressuring corporations to pull out or improve their business practices in South Africa. It has also been followed on a wide variety of other issues such as reporting on minority hiring practices and improving environmental reporting through adoption of the CERES Principles, an environmental corporate code of conduct.

COMMUNITY INVESTING includes investment programs in community-based financial institutions such as development banks, loan funds, and community credit unions. Such "economically targeted investing" supports development initiatives in the U.S. and developing countries.

For more information on SRI, visit our website where we have links to many useful information sources.

Source: The Social Investment Forum's Directory of Socially Responsible Investment Services

Shelia Hargis



Thursday, October 21 TAS Regular Monthly Meeting

Program: An Introduction to the World of Bats

Guest Speaker: Meg Goodman

This presentation will introduce you to the world of bats and then focus on our own Texas bats and how to attract them to your own backyard. Meg has worked as the Texas Bat Biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department since March 2002. Before this she was an endangered species biologist working mostly with golden-cheeked warblers but also many species throughout the southwest. She has a BS in Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Biology from University of Texas at Austin.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. with social time. Program begins at 7:00pm. **Location:** Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Dr. (Exit MoPac at 2222, go west on 2222, turn left on Balcones Drive, stay to the left at the fork, then turn right into the church parking lot.) **Bus Routes** available at www.capmetro.austin.tx.us. **Bicycle routes** at www.ci.austin.x.us/bicycle/bikemap.htm; 974-7240. Refreshments provided.

BOARD MOTIONS - AUGUST 2004

Motions of the August 12, TAS Board Meeting

A motion was made and seconded (Mark/Marcie) to accept the July minutes as corrected by email messages and verbally at the August meeting. Motion passed. Anne will email the final, corrected minutes to board members.

A motion was made (Mark/Barbara) that we appoint Rebecca Combs as our representative in matters of the Hamilton Pool Road Community Planning

Process and the LCRA water line. Motion passed. (Richard abstained, all other members voted in favor of the motion.) Mark asked that we contact the TAS membership, to find members who hold property in the HPR area.

A motion was made (Barbara/Richard) to accept Jane Wilson as treasurer of TAS. Motion passed, unanimously.

Checking account signatures: A motion was made and seconded (Mark/Bill) that on the signature card for our bank

account, Shelia Hargis, Jane Wilson, Sam Fason, and Barbara Anderson be authorized to sign checks for TAS. The motion passed unanimously.

Safety deposit box signatures: A motion was made and seconded (Anne/Barbara) that Shelia Hargis, Sam Fason, Pat Dillon, and John Kelly (President, 1st Vice-President, Property and Finance Committee Chair, and Registered Agent) be authorized to access the TAS safety deposit box. Motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made (Mark/Pat) that the board adopt the Corporate Secretary's Certificate Regarding Accounts (JP Morgan Chase Bank form), and authorize the TAS secretary to sign this document and see that it is delivered to the bank. Motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made (Richard/Mark) that Shelia be a delegate to the Audubon Texas Annual Assembly, representing TAS, and that she appoint the second delegate as she sees fit. Motion passed unanimously.

TAS Ongoing Meetings

Education Committee: meets on the 1st Monday of each month, contact: Anne Donovan, 472-3030

Sanctuary Committee: meets quarterly, contact: John Wilcox, jmwozo@earthlink.net or 219-8425

TAS Board of Directors: meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, contact: Shelia Hargis, 291-1861

Urban Habitat Development Group: meets on the 3rd Monday of each month, contact: Jane Tillman, 794-0058

Bird Records Committee: meets on the 4th Thursday of each month, contact: Ethel Kutac, 346-7659

TAS Regular Monthly Meeting: meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month except for June, July & August. See page 8 for Sept. meeting details

What Is Earth Share of Texas?

Many members of Travis Audubon Society have the opportunity to support the work of Travis Audubon and Audubon projects throughout Texas through payroll deduction plans at work. The Audubon Foundation of Texas is represented by Earth Share of Texas, an umbrella group of Texas' leading environmental and conservation groups. Contributions designated for Audubon Foundation of Texas are used for grants to local Audubon chapters and to Audubon Texas. Most workplace giving campaigns are conducted from September through early November, so now is the time to look for pledge cards in your workplace.

Look for Earth Share of Texas in campaign literature and on pledge cards at all state agencies; all state colleges and universities; federal agencies in most of Texas; Houston and Austin school districts, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, and Houston municipal offices; and many private employers, including American Airlines, Compaq Computer, Dell, Green Mountain Energy, and Vignette. If your employer doesn't offer the chance to support Audubon Foundation of Texas and other Earth Share of Texas environmental groups, visit Earth Share of Texas on the Web at www.earthshare-texas.org, call 1-800-GREENTX, or email estx@earthshare-texas.org.

org. You may also contact Bryan Hale at 474-5499 or John Kelly at 331-8693.

Big Sit 2004, continued from page 1

The shifts:

1. From Gate Opening (about 6:00am) until 11:00am
2. From 11:00am until 3:30pm
3. From 3:30pm until Gate Closing (about 7:30pm)

If you're interested in participating, please contact me at 459-1082 or stu@bga.com and include the following:

- a) your shift in order of preference (if you can't make a particular shift, don't list it)
- b) whether you have a spotting scope that you can bring
- c) your email address and a telephone number, in case we need to reach you at the last minute.

Ideally, each shift should be covered by between four and eight participants. Once we have our team in place, I'll send out more details on the ground rules, the exact location of the circle, and other logistics.
Stu Wilson

URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT

Act Now for Fewer Fire Ants in the Spring!

With all the cards stacked against our desirable wildlife, like invasive non-native plants, habitat loss, and habitat fragmentation, it is amazing we have any left at all. Imported fire ants are just one more challenge they have to overcome. These fire ants will eat anything, from invertebrates like ticks and flea larvae, to reptiles, amphibians and unfortunate nestlings. They have out-competed the native ant species in the southeast and now are found in the eastern two-thirds of Texas.

The vast array of products available to control fire ants will present a challenge when you venture out to do something about those nuisance mounds that pop up after the fall rains. Sadly, the toxicity of most of these products will endanger the food chain on which our feathered friends depend. Texas A&M has excellent advice on its Department of Entomology website, <http://fireant.tamu.edu>, that can help you make informed decisions for fire ant control in urban, rural and agricultural settings. While you may not agree with all of their extension agents' conclusions, such as "Baits pose NO hazard to children, pets, birds, and earthworms when properly applied," they have methodically set out to test procedures and products, and present the plusses and minuses of different fire ant control techniques. They also engage in research to further knowledge of biological control agents like the gruesome decapitating fly that lays its eggs on the worker ants. (The larva migrates to the head, develops into an adult, severs the head in the process, and emerges to attack other fire ants.)

To Bait or Not To Bait – That is the question.

At your local big box home improvement store, your eyes may start smarting as you stand in front of the 10 or so different chemical products designed to either kill mounds quickly via a dust, granular bait or drench, or the ones designed to take the longer acting route with a broadcast application. Rule out the ones that state they are toxic to birds. Then rule out the ones that are highly toxic to fish and aquatic invertebrates. Now what are your options? Locate the organic section and you will find two products that are more environmentally friendly. Citrus products that contain d-limonene, like Orange Guard and Safer Fire Ant Killer, have been shown to be effective in killing fire ants quickly. Both are used as mound drenches as opposed to bait. Drenches are desirable because they don't leave any tempting morsels for birds to confuse with food. Green Light

Fire Ant Control with Conserve is a spinosad bait that disrupts the ant's nervous system, and is a less toxic option for birds and mammals than other chemical controls.

Sprinkle on individual mounds. According to Texas A & M you should see results after a week, with best results after two to four weeks. Other organic options to investigate are horticultural diatomaceous earth, pyrethrins, rotenone and pine oil (turpentine). Rotenone is toxic to fish, but breaks down quickly. Specialty garden centers may stock these.

Here are the recommendations from Texas A& M to manage fireants in your home landscape using bait as a mound treatment:

- *If you have fewer than 20 mounds per acre, then individual mound treatment is the way to go.

- *Make sure the bait is fresh. (Fire ants like the oil in the bait, and if it is rancid, they won't eat it.) Purchase only enough for one application. It should not be more than 2 years old and should not have been sitting in your 100° F garage.

- *Apply when worker ants are actively foraging. Foraging slows when soil temps are below 65-70° or higher than 90°F.

- *Check the weather forecast to make sure no rain is expected for 12-24 hours after application.

- *Don't disturb the mound when baiting it. Why? You don't just want them to move from the sidewalk to the driveway and leave the bait uneaten! (Some people do like to disturb the mounds with the idea of moving them from a nuisance location to a less frequented spot. If you are going to disturb a mound, coat your shovel handle with talcum powder to prevent the ants from climbing into your gloves. And don't bother baiting it.)

- *Don't apply baits directly to streams or lakes.

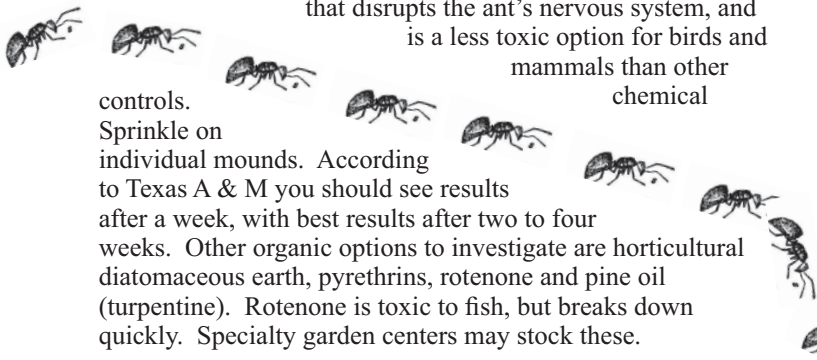
- *Don't bother with grits, cornmeal, flour, etc. They are not deadly to ants and only move the mound.

Cheap and Effective

A study has shown that very hot or boiling water (about 3 gallons needed per mound) will kill about 60% of fresh mounds treated. You will have the best success on a cool sunny morning when the ants are close to the surface. (It turns out that October is a good time to address the problem, since temperatures are cooler and ants are actively foraging.)

What are some other things you can do to manage fire ants?

Texas A & M is looking into some landscape design elements and practices that *may* deter fire ants. Create more shade. Fire ants prefer to nest in open sunny areas, and surveys show fewer colonies in the shade. More diverse habitat, like less lawn and more understory, seems to encourage competitor ants. Add purple martin lodging and watch the martins make short work of the swarming reproductive male and female fire ants. Newly-mated fire ant queens are also killed by lizards, spiders, robber flies, toads, and robber flies which may be present in your backyard habitat. Cut down on your watering. Fire ants need water daily, so limiting your lawn and planting native plants should have a positive effect. Last, don't over use insecticides -even organic ones! All ants are not imported fire ants. Most are desirable, and should be encouraged. You'll know you are doing something right when the horny toads come back!





Conservation Notes

It happens every year around this time. The calls start coming in about the birds. Or, to be specific, about the absence of birds from feeders. Where did they all go?

Not to worry. In fall, many birds temporarily desert feeders to take advantage of natural foods such as seeds and berries. But they'll be back. Admittedly, their return could take a while. In a year like this when natural foods are abundant, some feeders may not be fully back in business until late November or even December. So be patient. If your feeders aren't attracting as many birds as usual, keep stocking them (but with less food than you'd normally use). Eventually, your customers will return.

When's the best time to put up bird houses? Right now. In our part of the world, the breeding season begins early--as early as February for the wrens (and October for the larger owls). That means birds will be spending the fall and winter investigating housing opportunities for the following year. So don't wait till spring to get those houses up. If you put them out now, you'll have a better chance of attracting tenants in 2005. (As an exception to the rule, keep your martin houses closed until the martins return. That way you'll help ensure that the starlings and House Sparrows don't take over.)

Something else to do now: plant trees and shrubs. By planting them in the fall, you'll give them a chance to get established before the return of summer's unrelenting heat. And when you plant, don't just put in another crape myrtle. Think about what you can do to support wildlife. For helpful suggestions, check with a local nursery which specializes in native plants (such as the Native Texas Butterfly Gardens). Or visit the National Wildlife Federation's web site for ideas. You might also check "Wildscaping," published by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Butterflies aren't like birds. If you go out in (say) June, you can be pretty confident that you'll find the same species of birds you found the previous year, and in about the same numbers. But with butterflies--except for the really common species--you can't be sure exactly what to expect.

This summer, Central Texas butterfly watchers were treated to unusually high numbers of Bordered Patches, medium-sized butterflies variably patterned in black, white, yellow, and orange. In our area we almost always have a few Bordered Patches during summer and early fall. But this year folks have been seeing 40 or more in a single day!

Also unusual were the Harvester reports coming from scattered locations throughout Central Texas. An eastern butterfly, the Harvester doesn't turn up in our area very often. What makes finding it here exceptionally memorable is the chance to study North America's only carnivorous butterfly. Actually, adult



Harvesters feed on standard butterfly fare--tree sap and the fluids from dung and carrion (and, more unusually, the honeydew secreted by woolly aphids). But their caterpillars feast on woolly aphids, using that protein-rich food to blaze through growth from egg to chrysalis in little more than a week.

Still another unusual visitor this year has been the Black Witch, with reports coming from as far north as Lubbock. A tropical moth, the Black Witch is often called the "Doobie Bat" in the English-speaking Caribbean. It's almost as big as a bat, with a wingspan of up to six inches. In the lands to our south it's the subject of much folklore, almost all of which involves omens of ill-fortune. And there's no doubt that even here it's distinctive enough to win more attention than the average moth. Mike Quinn, invertebrate biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife, would like to hear about any Black Witch sightings in our area. You can contact him at (512) 912-7059.

YOUR HELP NEEDED FOR THE BALCONES CANYONLANDS

This year Congress appropriated \$2 million for land acquisition at the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge (the BCNWR is the Federal counterpart of the BCP, the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve). Since the current Federal budget gives refuges throughout the nation only \$30.1 million to purchase land, that \$2 million was quite a coup for our local refuge. It means that about a thousand acres of the Hill Country will be saved forever.

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison's efforts secured that \$2 million (if it had been up to the House of Representatives, the Balcones Canyonlands NWR would have gotten nothing). But even with \$2 million in hand, the Refuge has a long way to go. Its current size--just about 20,000 acres, including conservation easements--is still far short of the ultimate goal of 46,000 acres.

So here's where you come in. You can help ensure the Refuge's future. Please contact Senator Hutchison and thank her for her support of land acquisition funding at the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. And urge her continued support for the Refuge's land acquisition program.

You can write to Senator Hutchison at her local office: Federal Building Suite 961, 300 East 8th Street, Austin, Texas 78701. Or call her--her local phone number is 916-5834, and the number in her Washington office is (202) 224-5922. Her local fax is 916-5839; her Washington fax is (202) 224-0776. And you can also contact her through her web site: <http://hutchison.senate.gov>

John Kelly

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

TAS Volunteer Opportunities

Travis Audubon Society depends on the generous donation of time and effort from our volunteers to accomplish our mission. No matter how much time you have available to donate, we would love your help. Below are a variety of volunteer opportunities. Find something that interests you and get involved! Not only will you make a contribution to the society, you'll also meet some great new friends and birding buddies. Check our website for updates. If by chance you don't see anything that interests you on the list, contact our Volunteer Opportunities coordinator, Rob Bates, at robertkbates@hotmail.com or 528-9317 to discuss specific interests and talents that you'd like to put to work for TAS.

Thank you!

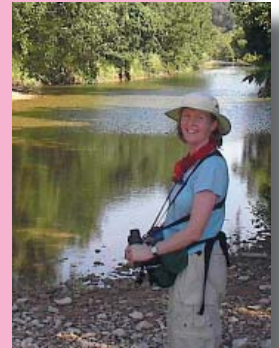
- **Webmaster:** maintain & improve our website. Contact Chris Doggett at ckdoggett@mindspring.com or 512-898-5500.
- **Membership Committee Members:** help maintain & increase our membership. Contact Chris Doggett at ckdoggett@mindspring.com or 512-898-5500.
- **Adult Education Committee Members:** help coordinate adult educational opportunities. Contact Jean Martin at jeanmartin@austin.rr.com or 343-7053.
- **Youth Education Committee Members:** help coordinate youth educational opportunities, assist with our fall youth camp. Contact Julia Balinsky at AudubonAdventures@balinsky.com or 926-7312.
- **Field Trip Committee Members:** help coordinate field trips. Contact Kathy McCormack at Kathy.McCormack@freescale.com.
- **Field Trip Leaders:** lead a field trip to your favorite birding location. Contact Kathy McCormack at Kathy.McCormack@freescale.com.
- **Programs Committee Members:** help coordinate monthly general meetings. Contact Howie Richey at zow@io.com.
- **Hospitality Coordinator:** coordinate refreshments for monthly general meetings & other events (budget available). Contact Howie Richey at zow@io.com.
- **Texas Wildlife Expo volunteers** - Oct 2 & 3, help man our booth which we share with Audubon Texas. Texas Wildlife Expo: Help staff our booth which we share with Audubon Texas. Interested individuals can contact Lk Loflin at 306-0225 or lloflin@audubon.org.
Shifts: Sat, Oct 2 & Sun, Oct 3:
8:30a - 11:30a
11:30a - 2:30p
2:30p - 5:30p
- We're sponsoring **Texas Ornithological Society's fall meeting in Austin**, Oct 28 - 30, so we need volunteers to help with a variety of tasks: Interested individuals can contact me at 291-1861 or shargis@austin.rr.com.
- **Nature Book Club Coordinator:** develop & coordinate a monthly book club focusing on books about nature. Contact Shelia Hargis at shargis@austin.rr.com or 291-1861.

TAS Volunteer of the Month

October 2004

Maggie Burnett

Travis Audubon could not have been more fortunate than to have Maggie Burnett, a long-time Capital Area Master Naturalist, turn her "volunteer attention" to birding two years ago. Joining our Field Trip committee's team of enthusiastic go-getters, Maggie took on one of the committee's first big projects – establishing a bird list for the Nature Conservancy's Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, on the Southwestern outskirts of Austin. She organized monthly field trips inside the preserve while participating in our Field Trip committee's on-going organizational efforts, including leading an overnight trip to Choke Canyon that no one who attended will forget (several of the participants were nearly washed away by torrential rains!).



Maggie currently alternates her BCHP field trips with trips to other destinations like October's trip to Lost Creek Country Club. Her dedication and commitment are outstanding!

- **Austin Nature Day 2005 Committee Members:** help coordinate field trips & other activities in association with other like-minded organizations. Contact Shelia Hargis at shargis@austin.rr.com or 291-1861.
- **Lago Vista Songbird Festival Committee Members:** coordinate field trips for the spring festival (work closely with Friends of Balcones Canyonland National Wildlife Refuge). Contact Shelia Hargis at shargis@austin.rr.com or 291-1861.
- **Baker Sanctuary Trail Guide:** develop & produce a trail guide for the Baker Sanctuary trails including information about geology, plants, and history. Contact John Wilcox at jmwoso@earthlink.net or 219-8425.
- **Photographers** - we would like to have bird pictures to use on our website and in Signal Smoke. Also, we'd love to have an "official" photographer to take pictures at various events. Interested individuals can contact Shelia at 291-1861 or shargis@austin.rr.com.
- **Carpenter or handy-person** - to build Chimney Swift towers. For now interested individuals can contact Shelia at 291-1861 or shargis@austin.rr.com.
- **Sales Committee** would like an assistant to help with sales and interested parties should contact Marcie Wilcox via email at birdsnbats@hotmail.com or by phone - 512-219-8425
- **Youth Birding Camp date set for October 23, 2004**
If you know of child aged 8 -12 who loves nature, this is a special day to have on his or her calendar. For information about Youth Birding Camp or if you would like to help out, please contact me: jwaxwing@employees.org or 926-7312

THE DAN CALLAWAY REPORT

Birding at Alcoa 8/18/04

Participants: Ethel Kutac, Betty Foster, Ingrid Huskey, Catfish Kelly and Dan Callaway 8/18/04

Target bird: Wood Stork

We arrived at Rockdale Chamber of Commerce for the guided tour of Alcoa's coal strip mine, plant operations and landscape restoration. For a free public tour on Wednesday or Saturday morning, contact Sherry at 512/446-2030 for reservations. We began the tour with a video at the training center near the boat ramp at the NE end of the lake. While the guide prepared the coffee and doughnuts to watch the film, we had ample time to view the wildlife. Scores of Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and a few American White Pelicans were feeding in the 90 degree waters across from the boat ramp. One Osprey flew over. We returned to this area after the tour and discovered a lone Wood Stork camouflaged in with all the other white birds. With a face only his mother could love, he took flight to reveal his real beauty. He circled several times to gain altitude, then disappeared over the lake. Many more herons, egrets and pelicans were observed in the waters near the plant and across the lake from the dam. Double-crested Cormorants were flying back and forth. A good number of Neotropic Cormorants dotted the willows near the plant water intake.

Alcoa has 3 power plants for a combined output of 375 megawatts and TU Electric has one with 600 megawatts. The plants are powered by coal furnaces which produces the steam to drive the generators. This electric power is used to heat the aluminum ore (alumina). Huge ingots are formed in specified sizes and trucked out to various markets. They make their own copper/carbon anodes for this heating process. They also

produce an aluminum by-product used in rocket fuel. Two monstrous 100 million dollar drag-lines are used to remove about 200 feet of dirt to expose the vein of lignite coal which is loaded on to huge carriers or conveyor belts and transported back to the power plants. Two trainloads of alumina are shipped twice a week from the coast where a plant receives bauxite by ship from various places around the world.

Upon touring the thousands of acres of restored area, we saw the grove of trees where eagles built a nest last winter. It was reported that no eggs were laid. Thousands of trees have been planted and several lakes dot the new landscape. Wild Turkeys were imported from the valley and Northern Bobwhite have made a huge "come-back" on their own. We saw a Swainson's Hawk in a hayfield and several Red-tailed Hawks soaring and all searching for rodents. Last year 13,000 bales of hay were harvested which are used in mulching new ground and the remainder sold on the market. One more Osprey was seen perched on a dead tree near one of the new lakes.

In the afternoon we departed Alcoa by way of the entrance. Three coots were located in the marsh just inside the entrance and the marshy area on the outside contained Green Herons, Belted Kingfishers and Black Vultures. One last stop was made at the roadside park on 79 to call up a Yellow-billed cuckoo and a Downy Woodpecker. One Eurasian Collared-Dove was seen near the park in Rockdale where we had lunch earlier.

Total species for the day: 39 (30 by 1pm)

Best bird: Wood Stork

Dan Callaway

"I love these kits, the kids love them." *"The students enjoyed them last year and the reading passages are great"*

"They fit so beautifully into our curriculum with ecosystems. The kids really enjoy the format!"

"I would love to have them again. My students love them!"

Audubon Adventures Classroom Kits Needed

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, Audubon Adventures has released another all new classroom kit for grades 3 - 6. The featured topics are:

- *The Secret World of Plants
- *Sharing the Earth
- *Birds of Prey
- *Butterflies

Audubon Adventures includes action-oriented con-

tent about healthy habitats, essays, written puzzles, word challenges, games, and recommended web sites. Please consider sponsoring a classroom by donating to the TAS Audubon Adventures program. Mail your donations to Travis Audubon Society, P.O. Box 40787, Austin TX 78704. The cost is approximately \$40 per kit which serves 32 students. Please note on the check that it is for Audubon Adventures.

Please contact me (jwaxwing@employees.org) if you know of an area teacher who would like to receive a Classroom Kit. Many thanks.

Julia Balinsky





NATURALIST'S CALENDAR

At times October seems peaceful, especially on one of the calm sunny days that comes accompanied by a gentle chorus of cricket trills. Nonetheless, change is the hallmark of this month, perhaps more than any other.

Nothing better illustrates the dramatic seasonal shift than the weather records. In the annals of Camp Mabry, October claims both the latest 100-degree day (October 2, in 1923 and 1938), and the earliest freeze (October 26, 1924). For the decade 1993 to 2002, the average daily temperature fell ten degrees from October 1 to October 31, the greatest monthly shift of the entire year. Ever more frequent cold fronts bring not only cooler temperatures, but rainfall. October is normally our wettest fall month. Yet, paradoxically, it also boasts more clear days than any other month.

Early October still looks a lot like summer. Though the foliage shows wear from half a year of insects, fungi, and weather, by and large the trees remain green. There are, however, hints of a color shift. Virginia Creeper leaves are already red, and Poison-Ivy, too, often turns orange or red before most of the other woody plants. Flameleaf Sumac leaves redden and Cedar Elms are touched with gold. By Hallowe'en the green really begins to fade. Some Red Mulberries and Texas Ashes become bright yellow; Western Soapberries are mostly gold; and Arizona Walnuts are mottled gold and brown.

The prairie tallgrasses are glorious now. Switchgrass and Big Bluestem are going to seed. Yellow Indiangrass usually reaches full bloom early in the month, and Little Bluestem peaks a little later. Several other prominent grasses also wave distinctive seedheads: The many short spikelets hanging from stalks of Sideoats Grama resemble Tibetan prayer flags. Bottlebrush-shaped seedheads of Southwestern Bristlegrass (a close relative of the millet found in commercial birdseed) attract the attention of seed-eating birds. The shy flowers of Meadow Dropseed peek from their sheltering sheaths. Tall and Hairy Gramas wave their false eyelashes on rocky hillsides, and the tall paintbrushes of Bushy Bluestem adorn seep zones and streamsides. Because the inflorescences (flowerheads) are often the most distinctive features of the grasses, October is the best month to learn these plants that define the prairies.

Many wildflowers in the aster family (Asteraceae) bloom now, too. In particular, goldenrods (genus *Solidago*), asters (genus *Aster*), and bonesets (genus *Eupatorium*) are well-represented.

Even Poverty-weed (*Baccharis neglecta*) may become photogenic. This weedy-looking plant, a shrubby member of the aster family that is also called Seep-willow or Jara Dulce, is anything but attractive for most of the year, but now clusters of flowers tip the branches silvery-white.

Butterflies are quick to appreciate the banquet of nectar available from the fall flowers. Diverse

crowds gather at the feast on sunny days, and a large patch of flowers may host ten or more species at a time.

The Texas Crescent is one of the butterflies that are more common in the fall than at other seasons. Velvety blackish-brown with a flush of mottled orange at the base of the wings, Texas Crescent is distinctive for the straight row of ivory-colored spots across the middle of the hindwing. There is also a characteristic semi-circular notch along the wing edge, as if something had taken a bite out of each forewing.

Some years, autumn brings swarms of Snout Butterflies that stream northward, lemming-like, into central Texas and points north. These mass migrations apparently occur when the butterflies over-populate their south Texas range, a phenomenon that may be related to unusually heavy rainfall there – much as has happened this year. Snout Butterflies are named for the elongated palpi (mouthparts) that project beyond the head, like a long beak.

Monarchs are the best-known of the October butterflies, and the largest numbers pass through early in the month. They pause to feed upon the nectar of Frostweed and other flowers when southerly winds postpone their celebrated migration. Then, when north winds return, they sail high overhead, sometimes beyond the range of the naked eye.

Some of those specks in the clear October sky are neither Monarchs nor Snout Butterflies, but hawks. In early October, large, swirling kettles of Swainson's and Broad-winged Hawks are often joined by Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks and American Kestrels. Silent flocks of American White Pelicans, majestic with eight-foot wingspans, also take advantage of rising air currents. Later in the month, the first Sandhill Cranes and Greater White-fronted Geese appear – but not as quietly as the pelicans; you may hear their trumpeting long before you see them.

Barn Swallows and Chimney Swifts also whirl high overhead, catching insects as they move southward. Even spiders take to the air. Newly-hatched spiderlings spin a long streamer of silk and allow the wind to carry them off to new homes – if they're lucky. The setting October sun will sometimes highlight dozens of these gossamer strands clinging to the tips of branches and the taller grasses.

Compared to the spectacle in the sky, birdlife nearer the ground may seem rather sparse. Most of the summer birds have left, though Scissor-tailed Flycatchers linger, often coalescing into large flocks before beginning their migration. Few birds sing at this season, but migrants continue to drift quietly through. If you sift through the ranks of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, you will often find a Nashville or Black-throated Green Warbler or a Common Yellowthroat, bringing up the rear of the warbler

continued on next page



SANCTUARY NEWS

A late summer cool front arrived on August 11th and temperatures for the next several days were almost pleasant. However, August was a continuation of June's dry weather. Then late in the evening of August 19th, we got 1.3 inches of rain and pea size hail as a line of thunderstorms passed over us. The next evening around 11:00 PM another line of thunderstorms gave us .6 inches of rain. We gained another .1 inch of rain from light showers over the next two days that brought our monthly rainfall total to 2.0 inches, which greened things up again. We finished August with another mild cool front and a total of .1 inches of rain at the Sanctuary.



Photo Credit: Chris Doggett

Lisa O'Donnell (City of Austin Watershed Protection & Development Review Department), Franc Trampas, John Chenoweth (City of Austin BCP Wildlife Biologist) and Kathleen O'Connor (Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources Department) conducted a salamander survey at the Baker and Audubon Springs on August 24th. Our recent rains washed a lot of detritus into the Baker Spring run. Lisa, John and I surveyed Audubon Springs, but no salamanders were found there while Kathleen and Franc surveyed Baker Springs and found one salamander. Then we mapped both the Audubon and Baker Springs. All of this data will go into the expanding database being accumulated on the salamanders at the Baker Sanctuary.

As you, the membership know, the Travis Audubon Society (TAS) has committed the 680-acre Baker Sanctuary to the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) system. The goal of the plan that created the BCP system is to assemble and manage at least 30,428 acres of habitat in northwestern Travis County that

will protect listed endangered species, of which the Golden-cheeked Warbler is just one. The TAS is a Managing Partner and the Sanctuary is managed using a U. S. Fish and Wildlife approved Land Management Plan (LMP). One of the activities included in the LMP is the hard reality of controlling White-tailed Deer (WTD) numbers. Adult WTD can consume four to five pounds of Golden-cheeked Warbler habitat per day per deer which prevents hardwood seedlings from replacing trees removed from our woodland canopy by old age or acts of nature. As conservationists, you are also aware that WTD numbers in Central Texas have

soared in recent years due to the lack of major predators, the virtual elimination of the screwworm and outdated WTD management practices. As Sanctuary Chair and Steward, I have a strong commitment here at the Sanctuary to follow through on our obligation to the Golden-cheeked Warbler, the BCP and TAS by implementing our Land Management Plan therefore, I ask for your patience from November through January when I close the Sanctuary to conduct our annual WTD hunt according to our TAS Baker Sanctuary and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Regulations which is aimed at reducing the number of WTD per acre on the Sanctuary. I turn the money that the Sanctuary receives from WTD lease fees over to the TAS Treasurer. This year lease fees covered 40% of the Sanctuary's budget.

I would rather the Sanctuary receive some income from WTD hunting than to see TAS pay over \$250.00 per deer to have them removed. Our only choice is: Fewer White-tailed Deer OR fewer Golden-cheeked Warblers if WTD numbers are left unchecked.

Sanctuary Closed Date

The Sanctuary will close on October 23, 2004 and will reopen on January 29, 2005.

John Wilcox,

TAS- Baker Sanctuary Chair & Steward

Naturalist's Calendar

migration. They will soon be followed by the first Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, the "winter warblers." Indigo Buntings, the males in patchy blue, mingle with Lincoln's Sparrows and House Wrens in brushy places.

Other wintering birds are returning. Ducks re-populate ponds and rivers. The "kee-ah" call of the Northern Flicker resounds again. Northern Harriers return to skim over the fields. A flash of white tail patches disappearing into a thicket signals the return of the Spotted Towhee. Meadowlark identification becomes problematic as Western Meadowlarks join the resident Easterns, and, of course, the skulking sparrows once again challenge birders' skills.

Despite the cooler nights, reptiles are still quite active. In fact, you are more likely to find snakes in daylight hours now that the days are not so hot. Several species shift their hunting times

from night to day, and often bask in the open on sunny days. Watch your path carefully, and you might glimpse a Western Ribbon Snake or a Coral Snake before it slips away.

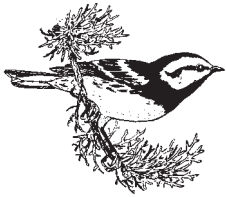
Watch, too, for White-tailed Deer this month, especially if you're driving. With the rutting season in full swing, they have things other than oncoming traffic on their minds. *Bill Reiner*

☞ *In Memoriam* ☞

A memorial donation for Hugh C. Rushing, husband of Elaine Rushing of Austin, TX was made by Meta Hunt & Trent Miller of Austin, TX in the amount of \$50.

A contribution has been received in the name of Sarah Penn Harris who in previous years had written a Sanctuary history for Signal Smoke.

Visit the TAS Web site:
www.travisaudubon.org



Local and National Audubon Membership

Join the Travis Audubon Society by 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 at 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 (their choice of online or through the mail), 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**
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- \$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, free workshop, and listing in annual report)

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I would like to save TAS money and natural resources. Please send me an email each month when the newsletter is posted online instead of mailing me a hard copy.

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