



SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 53, NO. 9

September 2004

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

From the TAS President 2, 8

TAS Field Trips & Events..... 3-4

Non-TAS Events 5

Education Committee News and Classes 6

Membership Committee News 6

Golden-cheeked Warbler Survey.....7

Hornsby Security News 8

Dastardly Duos 9

Urban Habitat Development 10

Purple Power..... 11

Volunteer Opportunities 12

Volunteer of the Month 12

The Dan Callaway Report 13

Letters to the Editor..... 13

Sanctuary News 14

Naturalist's Calendar 15

Travis Audubon Society Membership Form Back page

CHAETURA CANYON A BIRD SANCTUARY

Thirty years ago Paul and Georgan Kyle bought three small lots near Mansfield Dam in western Travis County. With tender loving care and lots of hard work, they have expanded their property to more than eight acres and created a premier bird sanctuary that is a showplace for conservation efforts. Their main focus has been research and habitat creation for Chimney Swifts. Thus the name of the sanctuary comes from *Chaetura pelagica*, the scientific name for Chimney Swifts. The preserve provides a safe place for native species of birds to forage, raise their young, or rest in migration. They have identified 150 species of birds there, including Golden-cheeked Warbler, Red-shouldered Hawk, Painted Bunting, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Chuck-will's-widow and most recently Black-capped Vireo.



Swift nest in tower, adult and young.

Photo credit: Paul & Georgan Kyle

Paul and Georgan have long been concerned that their property remain a bird sanctuary indefinitely and that it also be used as a tool for conservation education. Thus, they plan to will the property to Travis Audubon for that purpose. In an effort to expand the boundaries of the preserve, both TAS and Driftwood Wildlife Association have decided to purchase available lots next to the Kyles' property. In April the TAS board voted to allocate \$19,000 for a lot containing the headwaters of the creek flowing through Chaetura Canyon. We hope to raise funds to add other parcels as they become available. It appears that a race is underway to preserve this beautiful habitat before the developers can unleash their bulldozers on it.

Continued on page 9



TAS Regular Monthly Meeting
Thursday, September 16, 6:30 p.m.

Program: **How to Establish a Native Prairie Benefiting
Dickcissels & Over-wintering Sparrows**
Presenter: **Jay Kane, Native American Seed**

Highland Park Baptist Church
5206 Balcones Drive, Austin TX (see page 14 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

President

Shelia Hargis 291-1861

First Vice President

Sam Fason 474-1185

Second Vice President

Barbara Anderson 346-6584

Treasurer

Currently Vacant

Recording Secretary

Anne Donovan 472-3030

Past President

Pat Dillon 347-0452

Directors

Shawn Ashbaugh 288-0517
Robert Bates 528-9317
Theresa Bayoud 836-3511
Mark Bentley 301-2675
John Kelly 331-8693
Richard Manson 347-8192
Marsha Reimer 282-6714
Bill Reiner 445-0565
Jane Tillman 794-0058
Marcie Wilcox 219-8425

ADMINISTRATOR

Tami Blevins 291-1575

BAKER SANCTUARY STEWARD

John Wilcox 219-8425

ACT REPRESENTATIVES

John Kelly (state president) 331-8693
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



Signal Smoke is printed 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

I hope everyone had a great summer. Are you ready for fall migration? Shorebird migration has been underway for a few months now. Waterfowl are moving back into Central Texas, and the hawks are starting to move south. So, check your favorite birding spots frequently for new arrivals. Send your bird records to the Bird Records committee so we can keep track of when different species move through our area and the number of birds moving through. If you're at Hornsby, stop by the hawk watch tent and help count hawks for a while and participate in the Shorebird Monitoring Project. There are lots of ways to make your birding time benefit the birds, so get involved in a citizen science project of your choice.

Speaking of Hornsby, be sure and read the article on page 8 regarding their security measures.

If you aren't checking our website on a regular basis, you're missing out! Some of the new additions include conservation news from various sources and hummingbird information (don't take those feeders down during winter!) to name a few.

Your board has been busy this summer. A sub-committee has been working very hard to update our bylaws. You'll be seeing the rough draft soon. Take the

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
Education—Adult	Jean Martin	343-7053
Education—Youth	Julia Balinsky	926-7312
Field Trips (interim chair)	Kathy McCormack	895-7268
Hospitality	Vacant	
Latin America	Bob Warneke	443-5488
Membership	Chris Doggett	512-898-5500
Membership Secretary	Shirley Doggett	512-898-5500
Programs	Howie Richey	444-4550
Property and Finance	Pat Dillon	347-0452
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, ts Sherman1@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.

Materials are copyrighted by their authors. For permission to reproduce for nonprofit purposes, please contact TAS.

TAS FIELD TRIPS & EVENTS

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.

Saturday, September 4 (Labor Day Weekend), a couple of hours after sunrise (7:10 AM) or before sunset (7:49 PM)

Bird Walk at Your Local Park. Go bird ! ☺

Saturday, September 11, 7:30 – 11:30 AM

Fall Field Trip to Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

For more details see the Field Trips webpage or contact Maggie Burnett (mburnett@austin.rr.com, (h) 899-0390) for more information.

Saturday, September 11, 7:00 AM and 4:00PM

Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend

Led by Russ Nelson. Meet at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. Contact Kevin Anderson (972-1960) for more information.

Saturday, September 18, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

Monthly Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park

Led by Charles Stephens and Rob Fergus. This trip will be tailored for young children ages 5 – 10 and their parents, but all are welcome! For details see the Field Trips webpage or contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) or Rob Fergus (fergus@mail.utexas.edu, (w) 347-7572) for more information.

Saturday, September 18, 7:30 AM – 12:00PM

Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

Led by Richard Kaskan. See the Field Trips webpage for more details or contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieee.org, (c) 748-8660) for information.

Saturday, September 18, 3:00 – 8:00 PM

'Serendipity' (3:00 – 5:30 PM), Drive/Dinner (5:30 – 7:00 PM), and the Jonestown Chimney Swift Roost (7:00 – 8:00 PM)

See the Field Trips webpage for details or contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) for directions or more information.

Saturday, September 25, 9:00 AM – 12:00PM

Fall Field Trip to Williamson County Regional Park

One additional co-leader needed. We will walk a level, double-wide, mulched, loop trail (approximately three miles in length) through the future Karst Preserve area of the new park. This trail traverses former ranch land and provides opportunities to see several types of grassland and woodland species (e.g., woodpeckers, wrens, and sparrows). See the Field Trips webpage for details or contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) to volunteer to be a co-leader or for more information.

Saturday, October 2, 7:30 – 11:00 AM

Fall Field Trip to Lost Creek Country Club

Registration required, joint field trip with Lost Creek Country Club (LCCC), maximum is 12. LCCC is applying for designation as a Green Golf Course from the Audubon International, and TAS will be assisting their members with quarterly bird surveys as a part of this process. This is an excellent birding opportunity for anyone with difficulty getting around since we will be using golf carts to navigate the golf course. The course includes a variety of habitats and is beautifully landscaped with native and xeric plants. Forty four species were observed during an early June scouting trip including various herons, woodpeckers, flycatchers, wrens, vireos, and finches. Contact Maggie Burnett (mburnett@austin.rr.com, (h) 899-0390) to register or for more information.

Saturday, October 2, 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM (or later, if you stay for lunch)

Naturalists Field Day at Shield Ranch

Joint field trip with Capital Area Master Naturalists. Shield Ranch is a privately held property offering varied habitats from savannah to riparian corridors. For more details see the Field Trips webpage or contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) for more information.



TAS FIELD TRIPS & EVENTS (CONTINUED)

Saturday, October 9, 7:30 AM – 3:00 PM

Fall Bird Survey on Nancy Moore's property, "Acacia"

Registration required. For details see the Field Trips webpage or contact Anne Donovan (ajdonovan@austin.rr.com, (h) 472-3030) to register and for more information.

Saturday, October 9, 7:00 AM and 4:00 PM

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

Fort Martin Scott in Fredericksburg, Lunch, Fort Mason City Park in Mason, Hart's River House on the Llano River (near Mason)

Registration required. For details see the Field Trips webpage or contact Anne Donovan (ajdonovan@austin.rr.com, (h) 472-3030) or Barbara Anderson (bsfanderson@earthlink.net, (h) 346-6584) to register and for more information.

Saturday, October 16, 8:00 – 11:00 AM

Monthly Bird Walk at Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park

Led by Charles Stephens and Rob Fergus. This trip will be tailored for young children ages 5 – 10 and their parents, but all are welcome! Contact Charles Stephens (charles_stephens@yahoo.com, (w) 328-9453) or Rob Fergus (fergus@mail.utexas.edu, (w) 347-7572) for more information.

Saturday, October 16, 7:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Monthly Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

Led by Richard Kaskan. See Field Trips webpage for details or contact Richard Kaskan (kaskan@ieec.org, (c) 748-8660) for more information.

Saturday, October 23, 4:00 – 6:30 PM

Fall Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

Two co-leaders needed. For details see the Field trips webpage or contact Kathy McCormack (kathy.mccormack@freescale.com, (w) 895-7268) to volunteer to be a co-leader or for more information.

October 23, 2004

Youth Birding Camp

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 Always fun for everyone who attends!

Saturday, October 30, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Fall Bird Walk at the 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. For details see the Field Trips webpage or contact Rupert Chambers (rchambers@wildflower.org, (w) 292-4200, ext. 140) or Rachel Zierzow (zierzow@mail.utexas.edu, (w) 475-8724) for more information.

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 (jkellyaustin51@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.

Friday-Sunday, September 10-12

Swift Night Out

Visit www.chimneyswifts.org for complete details

Saturday-Sunday, October 2-3

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 a.m. 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. Topics may include a variety of topics such as native grasses, flowers, woody plant and butterfly identification, and refuge management practices. A couple of these afternoon walks have specific themes. A Native Grass Walk will be led by Bill Reimer on October 2nd. And a Plant and Animal Ecology walk will be presented by John Ahrens 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, presentatio 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.

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 weekend. 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.

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 lister 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

We were lucky to go birding at Bob Petersen’s ranch in Kendall County, (see article in July/August Signal Smoke), and we appreciated his great hospitality. It was somewhat cooler out and about in the Hill Country, and apart from the birds, the scenery was spectacular. We thank Bob for all he is doing to create and manage wildlife habitat.

This is the last you will have to hear, this year, of our barn swallows that we love so much. They are beginning to gather on our electricity cables – there will usually be two or three hundred of them before they leave to fly their long journey South. Today there are the first fifty or so as they sit together almost touching on their favorite piece of wire. The purple martins we think have already gone.



Now I have a request. We meet with many of you at our Membership meetings, but there are very many more of you that we don’t get to visit with. We want to hear from you about what we are doing, specifically related to membership. Does our website, www.travisaudubon.org, have the information you

want and is it easy to find? Are there things we are not putting on the site that would be a good addition? Is the “notice board” front page style effective? Are our website and our newsletter complementary? Any feedback you wish to give us on the website, or Signal Smoke, please either email us – Chris Doggett, ckdoggett@mindspring.com for the website or Tess Sherman, tsherman1@austin.rr.com for Signal Smoke – or even drop us a line – to the Membership Chair, PO Box 1132, Round Rock, Texas 78680-1132. We’d love to hear from you, so please give us the feedback we need so badly.

This request applies to Membership issues as well. We do have flyers that briefly explain Travis Audubon and include membership forms. If you can use some please let us know.

The new season of Membership meetings begins this month with our first meeting on Thursday, September 16th at 6:30 pm, (not September 23 as was reported in the July/August issue of Signal Smoke) at Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive. There’s sure to be good speakers, so please come along and join us. We’ll see you there.

Chris Doggett

Golden-cheeked Warbler Survey

Each year, Travis Audubon surveys the Golden-cheeked Warblers at the Baker Sanctuary. The survey is one of the requirements of being a partner in the Balcones Canyonland Preserve. This year, Dan Callaway surveyed the birds for us and did a wonderful job. Below, Dan describes the survey protocol, the results, and other interesting information. -Shelia Hargis

The survey protocol consisted of 10 visits conducted on a 100 acre plot beginning with the arrival of males in mid-March to the fledging of young birds near the end of May. The visits were spaced between 5-8 days apart. The day of survey began no earlier than 30 minutes after sunrise and continued for 6 consecutive hours. All areas of the plot were covered during that time. The temperature must be 55 degrees or above and the wind velocity below 20 mph. No surveys are conducted in the rain.

As the males arrive they establish their territory in good habitat containing trees of mature ashe juniper and oak. After marking their boundaries, they criss-cross the territory singing from high perches as they go. They alert intruding males to stay away and also sing to attract a mate. Some of the territories meet at common boundaries where males countersing from adjacent treetops. One "dog-fight" was observed as one male chased another through the trees while uttering harsh clicking call notes. This occurred after a female had arrived. She was seen afterward feeding among the branches and flitting her wings. By late March, two of the territories were observed to have a mated pair. They were busy feeding, looking for a suitable nest site, and searching for nesting material from the bark of mature junipers.

Mated males now become less vocal, singing for short periods (maybe 3 to 5 phrases) then remain silent for 10-15 minutes. Since females are more secretive and hard to find, this male behavior, however, indicates one is present. One unmated male was observed to sing tirelessly long after females had arrived.

Territories and location of birds were plotted on a map using a GPS device. At any one visit, the number of territories signified by a singing male ranged from 8 to 18. Seven of the 18 were overlapping the border of the 100 acre plot. Four of the remaining 11 territories had females observed and 2 of those had fledglings observed. Two of the females were 1st year with green backs and napes according to Sibley. The Black-throated Green Warblers also have green backs and napes but also have some

yellow on the sides and flanks.

Three fledglings were observed on the 100 acres. Two young were with parents and all were feeding. The young birds were feeding themselves and making "tic" notes. The male was singing the "B" song very softly.

On a nearby territory, one lone fledgling was "ticking" but not feeding. He seemed to be calling for a parent. A male was singing in the area and probably searching for food to feed him. This youngster was rather ashy colored and had pale yellow lores and yellow on the cheeks forward of the eye. Two other family groups were seen outside the plot. One was not far from the parking lot near trail marker #6. Both groups had 2 fledglings - each and all were feeding themselves.

Songs were either "A" or "B." It could not be determined for what reason each was used. The "A" song began with 3 to 8 ascending "zee" notes with the next to last being a longer "zeeee" and last being a quick "zeet", both of which continued to ascend in pitch. The "B" song was more varied and usually one of the following:

- (1) zay-zee-zeedle-zee
- (2) zay-zee-zeedle-zay-zee
- (3) zay-zeedle-zay-zee

Some of the "B" songs were preceded by sharp clicking, or ticking, chip notes. Both "A" and "B" songs were sung occasionally with missing notes. The confusing similar song of the Black-throated Green Warbler was heard as "zeee-zeee-zoo-zoo-zee." Some bird books characterize this song as "trees- trees-murmuring-trees."

Other good birds noted at the sanctuary this Spring were accipiter hawk, Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Screech-Owl, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Kinglet, thrush species, White-eyed Vireo, Nashville Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Summer Tanager, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and one mystery bird, crow-sized, and sounded like a Pileated Woodpecker. Only 2 snakes were seen - a coral snake and a ribbon snake.



Dan Callaway

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 content 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 if you know of an area teacher who would like to receive a Classroom Kit. Many thanks.

Julia Balinsky

ON THE WEBPAGE

For details on Board Motions Passed, Committee Meeting Schedules, and the Rare Bird Alert please visit www.travisaudubon.org

LETTER FROM THE TAS PRESIDENT (CONTINUED)

time to look at it and give us your feedback. Also by the time you read this, the board will have met for a day retreat to begin defining our short-term and long-term goals. You'll be seeing our ideas soon. Again, let us know what you think. Your input is very important as TAS moves forward.

Other items of interest include our purchase of a lot in Apache Shores. See the associated article on the front page for more details.

The Texas Living Waters Project has outlined five Principles for Protecting Texas' Water Resources. The board voted to endorse those principles. See the website for full details. Also, ask other organizations that you are involved in to endorse the principles. Together, we can make sure that the needs of wildlife are considered when water issues are addressed.

A big change for TAS involves our editor. After ten years, Rosemary Wetherold has decided it's time to let someone else take over. Rosemary took us from a four page newsletter to one that has anywhere from 16 to 22 pages. Thank you Rosemary for all of your hard work! Tess Sherman is our new editor. She is very excited about the posi-

tion and is looking forward to working with our contributors. Tess would love to hear from you regarding any ideas or suggestions you have about *Signal Smoke*. In the spring, we participated in National Audubon Society's newsletter contest. Although we didn't win, we received useful feedback from the judges which will be taken into consideration for future editions. I served as a judge for the contest and had the opportunity to see some awesome newsletters. I'm still very proud of *Signal Smoke*!

Due to new demands of her job, Lois Burks resigned as our treasurer. We will miss her, and we wish her the best with her new work responsibilities.

Check out our Volunteer Opportunities section on page 12. We have a variety of tasks that we need help accomplishing. Pitch in and help us out!

Texas Ornithological Society (TOS) will hold their fall meeting in Austin on Oct 28 - 30. Travis Audubon is sponsoring the meeting, so we'll be working closely with TOS to make the meeting a success. We'll need help, so again, see our Volunteer Opportunities section!

See you at our September meeting.

Shelia Hargis

Hornsby Bend Security Status

Have you been wondering what all the new security fences at Hornsby mean for birders? With a little encouragement and guidance from Kevin Anderson, I set out to find out.

On June 29, I met with David Barker, Treatment Superintendent of Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Plant. It was during our monsoon season, and it was raining as it had been for days! The Center for Environmental Research building had developed many leaks due to the heavy and persistent rain. A group of city employees were checking it out, trying to figure out what to do. (I'm a city employee too, so no jokes about city employees are allowed!) Even with all this activity, David met with me and was very gracious and helpful. Here's what I found out.

At this point in time, nothing has been finalized. Mandates are coming from the federal government regarding homeland security requirements, and a Risk Management Plan is being developed for Austin. Hornsby Bend will be addressed in this plan. SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) are being written with input from David and his group, but it's unclear how much of their input will be incorporated into the SOPs. David wants to keep the plant as accessible to birders as possible, but there will be parts of the plant, the "process area", that will be off-limits to birders. How big the process area will be has yet to be defined. David will keep us updated on the changes as they occur.

Generally:

If the Threat Advisory Level is **Yellow**, the site will be open from sunup to sundown. The gate on Platt Lane will be open.

If the Threat Advisory Level rises to **Orange**, the main gate into the facility will be manned by plant personnel. Birders can get in by showing some type of official identification such as a driver's license. The gate on Platt Lane will be closed.

If the Threat Advisory Level rises to **Red**, the plant will not be accessible to birders.

Once the "process area" has been defined, background checks and approval by the Department of Public Safety will be required for anyone entering that area.

For now, please be patient and follow these rules:

- Obey ALL signs.
- Do not drive or walk across the field behind the Center for Environmental Research (to get to Platt Lane) or any other land application areas. These areas will be marked. Land application machinery does not stop for birds or birders!
- Do not block roadways.

David and his group are happy to have us around enjoying the birds. Let's keep it that way by following the rules.

On a somewhat similar note, due to construction, a portion of the road around Pond 1 West will be closed soon. Areas to turn around will be provided.

Shelia Hargis

DASTARDLY DUOS

Reprinted with permission from Tucson Audubon Society (www.tucsonaudubon.org) from the April 2002 issue of the Vermilion Flycatcher newsletter. In the Austin area, the Travis Audubon Society bird checklist indicates that Western and Least Sandpipers can be found together during March, April, and May, and then again in July, August, September, and October.

Western and Least Sandpipers

Spring is here! This time of year is when shorebirds are migrating through, and two shorebirds that confuse some of us regularly are Western and Least Sandpipers. Although the books say that these two are easy to identify (if Semipalmated Sandpipers are not in the area), they are very similar in appearance at longish distances or under poor lighting conditions. Least Sandpipers can be encountered in southeastern Arizona all months except late May through June, while Western Sandpipers are common only around April and August/September.

The key to becoming confident in identifying these two species is to observe them when they are present together, seeing how their differences appear to you. Recently, I encountered a single Western amongst several Least Sandpipers at close range. I was astonished at how different they appeared!

Most birders are aware that Western Sandpipers have black legs and Least Sandpipers have yellowish ones. This works great at close range but can be frustrating when a low sun angle causes lots of shine from wet mud or water, or when Least Sandpipers have muddy legs! A bright sunny day is surprisingly not the key, as I found out on one outing. The legs of a Least Sandpiper appeared dark in the shade of its body and only showed the light color when illuminated directly by the sun, so be careful with leg color.

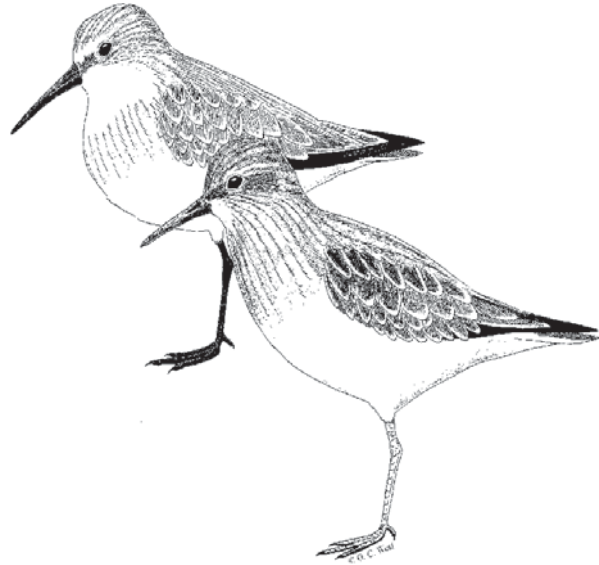
The lesser known but distinct other differences are in body and bill shape, upper breast streaking, back/scapular coloring, and overall color. From long distances, a Least Sandpiper's shape will look plumper and more compact. Western Sandpipers have a lankier look. Western Sandpipers in general have a longer bill, which droops more than the Least Sandpipers' bill does. The Western's bill is broader based and narrows conspicuously.

Plumages vary considerably with age and season, but some traits hold for the times they are common here. Least Sandpipers are browner with more streaking on the breast, while Westerns are grayer, have a "salt and pepper" look, and have more white in the throat and upper breast. Western juveniles and adults entering breeding plumage have rufous feathering on the scapulars (auriculars and crown on adults as well). This coloring contrasts highly and can be easily distinguished from the overall brownish color of the Least. A Least Sandpiper's head and back will appear the same color, while a Western Sandpiper typically has a contrasting cap color.

Try observing posture and habits once you've identified a mixed group. I haven't seen this yet, but the Least is supposed to look more crouched and the Western more long-

legged and front-heavy. I've also heard that when both are present in numbers, one of them likes slightly deeper water than the other, but I forget which!

Larry Liese



Chaetura Canyon, continued from page 1

The Kyles have built 15 Chimney Swift towers on their property and more than 50 at many other sites, mostly in central Texas. They continually observe and study these little-known birds, and the results of their observations have been published in local, regional, national and international publications and are the subject of two books about Chimney Swifts soon to be published by the Texas A&M University Press. They currently offer a 20 page set of plans for a Chimney Swift tower to anyone who wants to build a tower, and participants are urged to send their observations to the Kyles.

Paul and Georgean have additional plans for using Chaetura Canyon for environmental education, while keeping the habitat safe for the birds. Some workshops which they plan to make available with the help of TAS are Chimney Swift conservation, songbird nest box construction, habitat restoration and native plant propagation, trail building and maintenance, wildlife management for small hill country properties.

The Kyles are planning to provide the program for a TAS meeting in the 2004-2005 year. Thus we all can learn more about what they have done and are continuing to do for the wildlife in Chaetura Canyon. We all in TAS are overwhelmed by their generosity and dedication to the birds of Central Texas.

Anne Donovan

See page 5 for information on a Nestbox workshop at Chaetura Canyon & Swift Night-Out

Create a Purple Martin Society in Your Neighborhood!

Laura Joseph says purple martins changed her life. Back in third grade, her parents decided she would go to school in the next county over, which was 9 miles by bus. She was completely devastated until she saw two big martin houses right in front of the school. Then she knew everything would be okay. A great uncle of hers had kept gourds and houses and she loved martins.



When she moved to Austin's Virginia Avenue in 1992 Laura had the perfect spot for martins – a wide open lot with no trees and that had overhead wires close by. She started with one gourd rack, and before long had 20 gourds and a couple of houses. One winter about seven years ago she sent invitations to the neighbors, inviting them to join the Virginia Avenue Purple Martin Society (VAPMS). She hoped to get people with small children involved in the joy of martin tending. Laura fed everyone dinner, showed a martin video and successfully persuaded neighbors to each take a day of the week when they would monitor the nest boxes. It caught on and this year they had enough monitors to have a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening crew. Volunteers have ready access to all the tools they need for proper monitoring: a journal, plastic bags, gloves, binoculars, and pliers are available in a metal tin on the purple martin lot. Laura has found that during the three to four week period when martins are building their nests, it really helps to check twice a day. She uses the *Purple Martin Prognosticator*, and when the martins start laying eggs, the monitoring tapers off so the eggs won't be jostled too much. Laura says, "Get cranks instead of pulleys – women find them easier to operate and they are easier on the eggs." One day is set aside for a really thorough egg count.

So how did Laura's martins fare this spring and summer?

The earliest adult arrived on February 7. Within 2 or 3 days 25 adults made it, tired and bedraggled. Laura had put pine needles in all of the gourds. Over the next week she found 6-8 dead adults – one on the ground, some in gourds and one in the Alamo purple martin house. She thinks they were first year sub-adults. Charles Stephens checked things out and she replaced the possibly moldy pine needles with freshly collected pine needles from Bastrop, and wiped out the gourds. During a three-day cold spell, Laura bought freeze-dried grasshoppers for them, and tried throwing them, then using slingshots. Laura says she has read it can take 30-40 tries to get a bird to take food thrown into the air. She finally put them on platform feeders, which a few birds went to.

She had 71 nests this spring. The VAPMS was very vigilant, pulling out sparrow nests, and changing out some of the nests that got wet, even when there were nestlings involved. They also

retrofitted the gourds with the starling-resistant crescent-shaped openings. Laura reports, "These are really working to keep out starlings. They are a must for a successful colony. No one should ever buy round openings...or the round openings should be immediately changed to crescent."

When asked to explain her success with purple martins, Laura says location is key. They won't use any nest box close to a tree. They like having wires close by for perching. She doesn't trap or shoot sparrows or starlings. In fact the starlings don't seem to favor the gourds, perhaps due to the swinging. Adult starlings peck at the eggs, and decapitate the nestlings. When the parents try to defend, they are no match for the starlings' beaks and are injured or killed. Her experience with sparrows is that you can't allow them to establish a nest or they will develop site fidelity.

At the end of the season when the martins have left, Laura lowers the houses, cleans them out and then puts clothes pins over the opening – an effective deterrent recommended by the Lonestar House builder from Seguin. This year, the martins started lining up on the wires on June 22 – the wagons were gathering – and as of July 14 she assumes "her" martins went to join others at Highland Mall, going to Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana, then on to South America and Brazil by one of several routes across the Gulf.

Now Laura has 60 gourds and six houses. Her recipe for success could be duplicated all across Austin. Drive by her house – Virginia Avenue is a short street just up the hill from Flipnotics in South Austin- and see what works. This is yard art at its best! Instead of Neighborhood Watch, why not have a Neighborhood Watch Purple Martin Society?

Purple Martin Prognosticator

This ingenious 8" calculator wheel accurately tells landlords five important things about each active nest under their care: 1) the clutch-initiation date of each nest, 2) the hatching dates of eggs in each nest, 3) the age of young on any given date, 4) the earliest possible fledging dates for the young in any nest. Based on these dates, landlords can determine: 5) the breeding success of each nest (i.e., whether young have fledged successfully from a nest, or disappeared prematurely due to predation or other causes). To operate, simply place the number of eggs in a complete clutch (from the inner wheel), opposite the date (on the outer wheel) when the first egg in that clutch was laid. Read around the wheel to predict hatching and fledging dates, and for nestling ages on any given date. The back side of the wheel has detailed instructions on how operate the wheel. Made of weatherproof plastic and available for a small fee from

The Purple Martin Society online at:

<http://shop.purplemartin.org/shopsite/purplem/nestchecktools>.

Purple Power

Julia and I took over land lording duties at Hornsby Bend's active Purple Martin colony this year. We are happy to report a very successful year, with over 115 fledglings! We can also report that our maintenance efforts were partially responsible for at least 22 of these fledglings.

So what did we do? Approximately once a week between March and July, we checked each of the 37 Purple Martin nesting housing cavities, which were in a combination of gourd racks, and metal houses, and gourds on light poles. Our checks were centered on 3 maintenance tasks:

- **Removal of non-native bird nests.** Purple Martins have 2 aggressive competitors for nest sites, both non-native introduced birds from Europe:

House Sparrows and European Starlings. Both species will destroy martin eggs, and Starlings will even attack and kill adult martins. As non-native birds, their nests can be legally removed, and we removed 27 House Sparrow nests, and 3 European Starling nests. The starlings quit nesting after we replaced all the round-holed gourds with crescent- or bat-shaped excluder holes.

- **Removal of hazards.** This category included removing a dead adult (allowing a successful nest, probably by another couple), removing addled and sparrow- or starling-pecked eggs, and replacing nest material that had become infested with mites.

- **Gathering of data.** This task was the least useful to this batch of martins, but useful to us, and hopefully of long-term use to the species. We counted eggs and young, and kept tally sheets. We'll report these numbers to the Purple Martin Conservation Association, who does long-term martin research. We'll also try to use the numbers to determine which types of housing work best for martins in Central Texas.

Then there were some interesting stories we could gather from the data:

- **Disaster House.** One family of 4 youngsters had an unexplained disappearance of 1 sibling, and later we found all the remaining young dead. We cleaned the cavity and it was filled with a second nest. This produced 1 young, who we also found dead. Perhaps this cavity was the home of an inexperienced couple who just couldn't feed their young, or perhaps it was just haunted by ghosts.

- **Egg Mysteries.** About 1/5 of the eggs just disappear. Whether they're bad, or whether they're pecked or tossed out by sparrows or starlings, we don't know.

- **Nest fight.** In one gourd, we found a dead adult female hanging out of a gourd in which sparrows had built a partial nest over what looked like a successful martin nest. We can only conjecture that she died in some kind of struggle, perhaps defending her young from the sparrows' incursions.



Photo Credits: Andy & Julia Balinsky

- **Happy Stories.** Although they don't make exciting stories, there were many nests that followed the idyllic "eggs laid, babies hatch, babies grow, youngsters fledge" story line. Several gourds had failed nests, only to have a new nest built and young successfully fledge from it. And those are the stories that make all the work worthwhile.

We learned a few lessons:

- Tanglefoot is a great tool to keep fire ants off the houses. We found we needed to re-apply it after a month, as the ants eventually got past it and overran 2 of the housing units (luckily after fledging had occurred).

- Housing that can't be lowered with a pulley or winch is too much of a pain to check regularly. We had some single hanging gourds on poles, which we needed a ladder to

access. We ended up checking them only every 2 weeks or so, which was too big a gap to learn anything much about the outcome of the nests.

- Although it is a small data set, we found that the gourds were much more conducive to egg survival. Egg mortality was 4 times greater in the aluminum houses. Whether that was due to more sparrow and starling attacks or just the heat addling the eggs, we cannot tell. After hatching, survival was about the same in both housing types, though all 15 deaths of young occurred in crescent, as opposed to excluder-shaped holes. The few round holes were simply an open starling invitation and a disaster.

And we are left with fascinating questions:

- When a nest fails, is it the same couple or a different one that re-nests in the cavity?

- Do adults remove bad eggs or dead young on their own sometimes?

- What do they think about us benign intruders who seem to scare them, yet from whom they won't nest more than 100 ft away?

- What goes through a martin fledgling's mind when less than two months out of the nest, she has to leave and fly south to Brazil?

The martins are all fledged now, and are preparing for their long journey by learning to hunt and fattening up. By the time you read this, they will probably all be in Brazil.

We are happy to answer questions about Purple Martins, or to have visitors as we check the houses in the spring. Just contact us at PurpleMartin@Balinsky.com. We have more data and photos on our website: <http://balinsky.com>.



Andy & Julia Balinsky

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. Interested individuals can contact Barbara Anderson at 346-6584 or bsfanderson@earthlink.net.

- 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.

- **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.

TAS Volunteer of the Month

September 2004

Kathy McCormack

Kathy has been involved with the Field Trip Committee for nearly two years. On a monthly basis, she:

- Organizes field trips
- Leads field trips
- Solicits leaders and compiles the field trip calendar.

She was also involved in the compilation of the 2003 annual field trip report.

Kathy is now serving as the Field Trip Chairperson and is also getting involved with the Education Committee. Lastly, Kathy was instrumental in getting permission from Tucson Audubon to print Dastardly Duos (page 9) which previews in this edition of Signal Smoke.

Thanks Kathy for all your hard work!



- **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.

- **Treasurer** - we need a treasurer! Interested individuals can contact Shelia at 291-1861 or shargis@austin.rr.com.

- **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 birdsbnats@hotmail.com or by phone - 512-219-8425

THE DAN CALLAWAY REPORT

Birding to Pace Bend Park, 7/26/04

Participants: Ethel Kutac, Betty Foster, Terry Banks, Catfish Kelly, and Dan Callaway

Target birds: any oriole

We left Austin and headed West on 71, turning right on 2322 just prior to crossing the Pedernales River. About 2-3 miles we turned left on Old Ferry Rd and birded a couple of spots before turning right on River Rd. Along here we saw Lark Sparrows and heard a Field Sparrow and a Canyon Towhee. At the end of the road we heard a White-eyed Vireo and saw a Great Egret. We returned to Old Ferry Rd, then went right all the way to the neighborhood park at the lake to see an Eastern Phoebe hunting from a perch on a low cable near the shore. Back to 2322, we turned left and on into Pace Bend Park.

We stopped at several points along the left side to call up several Canyon Wrens, many Bewick's Wrens and one very inquisitive Cactus Wren. We all had great looks at the Cactus Wren building a nest and searching for food on the pavement leading to the boat ramp near the helipad. We heard a Northern Bobwhite, a Ladder-backed Woodpecker and several Western Scrub-jays.

Other birds seen on the left side of the peninsula were House

Finches and an Orchard Oriole. We watched a pair of Rock Squirrels playing among the boulders along the shore in one of the coves.

Continuing along the road, we scouted the mud flats on the right side of the peninsula to find Great Blue Herons, Green Herons, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper and Red-winged Blackbirds. We found a shady picnic table for lunch and enjoyed a cool breeze blowing from the South across the lake. Several Painted Bunting males were observed as we headed back to the park entrance completing the loop. Also a female was feeding two fledglings that were following her.

On 71 returning to Austin, we took a road to the right called Pedernales Canyon Trail. This road is about 3 miles long and dead ends at the river. Three Greater Roadrunners were seen along this road. Two were together and catching grasshoppers. We returned to Austin by way of 620. Below Mansfield Dam, we watched 3 male Belted Kingfishers chasing one another and clattering. One lone cormorant was perched at the base of the dam, but due to the great distance, we could not be sure of its identity. Returned to Austin by 2:30 pm.

Total species: 47 (24 by 9am, 34 by 10am, 38 by 11am, 44 by noon, and 45 by 1pm)

Best bird: Cactus Wren

Dan Callaway

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In the May 2004 Signal Smoke, in the Dan Callaway Report, is the statement "The trash bird today was Northern Cardinals."

The term "trash bird" is used by some birders to refer to a species that is easily and often seen. The term comes from birding with a competitive focus on finding rare birds simply because they are rare. A common, numerous species does not further that objective, so it is seen as worthless and therefore trash. I'll agree that cardinals are plentiful and easy to find, but what kind of environmental consciousness would consider them trash?

If the worth of a bird is proportional to its scarcity, would you be happier and would the world be a better place if cardinals were so rare you would be lucky to find one or two a year? Ask yourself the same question about every other species, starting with Great-tailed Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and White-winged Doves.

I've been birding since 1963. I've seen way too many species decline. Birds need all the help they can get. I'm happy for any species doing well. I see cardinals every day. After more than 40 years of birding, I still enjoy every cardinal I see and I'm glad it's there, and the same goes for every other bird I find.

Birders who use the term "trash bird" may need to rethink why they watch birds.

73 [Best regards],
Hugh Brown
3026 County Road 316
Lexington TX 78947

Dan Callaway responds:

I appreciate the opportunity to write my birding trip articles, and I welcome any criticism that may help to improve the report. I apologize for the recently used phrase "trash bird," to refer to a particular species that happened to be so abundant on a particular day that it kept interfering with our attempts to see and hear other birds. Most birders can identify with that problem. I am open to suggestions for a proper term to describe that particular bird that seems to want to be seen and heard above all others on any given outing. What are birders here or in other parts of the country calling that bird? Thanks.

Dan Callaway

June 11, 2004

To the members of Travis Audubon Society:

I teach 3rd grade at Cook Elementary School and wanted to thank you for the contributions to my classroom and school. Special thanks to Julia Balinsky, through her education outreach I found out about Audubon Adventures Kits and through your organization's contributions I had the kits to use in my classroom. My students really enjoyed learning about nature.

We also enjoyed the entertaining, Bill Oliver, 'Mr. Habitat'. Many thanks for providing the funds for his visit.

Lucy Weber, A.I.S.D.

SANCTUARY NEWS

Long time Travis Audubon member and Friend of the Baker Sanctuary, Bob Simons passed away on April 2, 2004. Bob and Cindy, his wife, were regular visitors to the Sanctuary, coming out every other week or so while we were open. Bob and Cindy attended our Sanctuary Committee meetings and volunteered with their own tools, good humor and hard work on our workdays. Bob's contributions to the Sanctuary will be missed and I offer my condolences to Cindy and Bob's family.



Photo Credit: Chris Doggett

TAS member Dan Callaway handled our Golden-cheeked Warbler survey this past spring (see pg. 7). This survey is just one of the items required by our management plan. And, since the Travis Audubon Society is a participant in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) system, the results of this survey will be included in my annual BCP report. Dan used the City of Austin, 100-acre Plot Protocol that the Sanctuary Committee adopted on September 2, 2003. He began his survey on March 18 and completed his survey on May 26, 2004, spending over sixty hours in the field. Dan kept meticulous records and submitted both daily summaries and a summary map to me on June 7th. Dan found eleven breeding territories within our 100-acre survey plot and 2 fledging groups. I want to thank Dan for his hard work and for giving the Sanctuary the most complete Golden-cheeked Warbler Survey we have ever received! Well done, Dan.

The Sanctuary received 10" of rain in June, which kept things green, the flowers in our native landscape beds blooming and the grass growing. Many of our oak trees responded to this welcome moisture by adding new growth of a foot or more. By contrast, our July rainfall totaled just .3 inch of rainfall. Heading into August, what was lush and green in June is now brown and dry.



The Jackie Arnold Education Center Update

I have recently completed a series of site plans for this project and we are now at a place where we need the professional services of an Architect, Structural, Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing Engineers, all registered to practice in the State of Texas. We need these services, pro bono if possible, to complete a set of contract documents, including sealed plans and written specifications. Our fellow Balcones Canyonlands Preserve partners, Travis County as well as the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service will need to review these documents, prior to construction. If you know of someone with the above credentials that would be willing to help us get this project off the ground, please contact me at 219-8425 or email me at jmwoeso@earthlink.net.

Sanctuary Closed Date

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

*John Wilcox, TAS Baker Sanctuary Steward
and Sanctuary Committee Chair*



Thursday, September 16, 6:30 pm TAS Regular Monthly Meeting

Program: How to Establish a Native Prairie Benefiting Dickcissels and Over-wintering Sparrows

Presenter: Jay Kane

This presentation will focus on the goals and tools that need to be considered when attempting to bring back a native prairie habitat. Topics covered include site preparation, exotic-invasive species, soil condition, seed selection, planting, and maintenance.

Jay Kane is Sales Manager for Native American Seed. He started his native plant career with Upper Texas Coastal Prairie restoration efforts at Armand Bayou in Harris County. He continued with prairie restoration efforts during graduate school and as Preserve Manager for the City of Austin. An avid prescription-burner, he is the former owner of Enviro-Pyro of Austin and currently is involved with grassland restoration efforts all over the state.

Program begins at 6:30 p.m. **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.



NATURALIST'S CALENDAR



weeds. They invade our lawns, overrun our gardens, and steal water and nutrients from crops when they sprout in farm fields. Some of them, especially the ragweeds and sumpweeds, cause us no end of grief in hay fever season by spewing allergenic pollen grains into the air. They look unkempt: gangly and sprawling, or tall and rank, or just, well... weedy. What good are they?

Wouldn't we be better off if they were eradicated altogether?

Actually, weeds are "pioneer" species, and play an essential role in the drama called ecological succession. They are also, in a way, living bandages, nature's first aid for the "wounds" inflicted by floods, rockslides, and bulldozers.

Many of the plants that we consider weeds are annual plants, which means that, within a single year, they sprout from seed, grow to maturity, flower, produce seeds, and die. Because of their accelerated lifespans, they are able to exploit temporary habitats. For that matter, they don't do so well in more stable environments.

Annuals are poor competitors with perennial plants. Perennials, those plants that live for more than two years, include all of our trees and shrubs, most vines, and many herbaceous plants, such as the prairie tallgrasses. After their first growing season, perennials begin each spring with fully-developed root systems and sugars stored from the previous year. That allows them to leaf out quickly, often depriving the struggling annual seedling beside them, or underneath them, of essential sunlight.

So annuals live around the edges, and their seeds lie dormant in the soil, waiting for opportunities. For instance, Giant Ragweed, Cocklebur, Clammyweed, and several smartweed species quickly colonize sandbars and river banks swept clean by floods. Doveweed (also called Prairie-Tea) and Texas Croton cover fire scars until the prairie grasses can re-sprout.

Human-altered environments also offer openings. Cowpen Daisy, as the name implies, has adapted to the edges of barnyards and feedlots, as have Common Sunflower, Lamb's-quarters, and the amaranths. The large, curved seedpods of Devil's-Claw have been known to catch on the legs of livestock, which then disperse them to other parts of the pasture. Broomweeds, Partridge-Pea, Eryngo, and Snow-on-the-Prairie soon reclaim heavily-grazed pastures. A host of annuals will colonize construction sites: Narrowleaf Sumpweed, sow-thistles, Spotted and Toothed Spurges, Horseweed, Fall Panicum, and Buffalo-bur are only a few of the native species that are blooming now.

The root of an annual is often a simple taproot. Unlike perennials, they have no need to build extensive root systems or store sugars to survive the cold winter. (Winter annuals, however, like the Texas Bluebonnet, sprout with the fall rains; their leaves lie close to the ground, where the temperature stays a little warmer, allowing them to photosynthesize through the winter months.) Instead of stocking up for winter, annuals devote the fruits of their photosynthesis to rapid above-ground growth and prodigious seed pro-

duction. Few of their many seeds actually sprout, but they often remain viable for years, lying dormant until the right moisture and temperature conditions trigger them ...

... if they aren't eaten first. The seeds of several annual plants are excellent wildlife foods. Quail favor ragweed seeds. Dove-weed seeds are favorites of – you guessed it – doves. Ducks are partial to the seeds of smartweeds. Sunflower seeds are sought by many different birds.

Annual plants also play an important ecological role. Their roots, though simple, help to hold soil in place. Their leaves soften the impact of raindrops, reducing erosion. After they die, their dry stems also reduce erosion, and, after decomposing, help to enrich the soil for slower-growing perennial plants. A flush of annual plants is thus the first step in the ecological succession from bare soil to a sustainable climax plant community. Perennial herbaceous plants succeed the annuals, then woody shrubs supplant the herbs, and, eventually, trees overshadow the shrubs.

The process does not always go that far, of course. Sometimes the soil is too shallow, too dry, or too often flooded – or shifts too frequently between drought and flood – even for perennial herbs like prairie grasses. There, the annuals continue to thrive. This is particularly true in very arid regions, where rains are too infrequent to support most perennial plants. In deserts, annuals have the advantage: they can grow, bloom, and produce seeds after the rare soaking rains; their seeds can then wait for the next storm.

Though many of the annual plants that bloom now are not especially attractive, some are quite striking. Clammyweed (*Polanisia dodecandra*) and Devil's-Claw (*Proboscidea louisianica*) have showy, unusual flowers, but be aware that both plants are covered with sticky hairs that make them unpleasant to touch (and give the former species its name). Eryngo (*Eryngium leavenworthii*) looks superficially like a thistle; both its tightly packed flowerhead and the spiny bracts that cradle it are purple, and a field crowded with these plants can be quite stunning. Broomweeds (*Gutierrezia* spp.), palafoxia, and wireweed (*Aster subulatus*) can also, from sheer numbers of their small flowers, paint a field or the shore of a receding stock tank yellow, pink, or white.

In late September and October, watch for a purplish haze between the junipers on rocky Hill Country slopes. Upon closer inspection, you will find crowds of one-to-three foot tall plants with wiry purplish stems, ornamented with dangling, inch-long, pink, tubular flowers. This, too, is an annual species. It is called Plateau Agalinis or Plateau Gerardia (*Agalinis edwardsensis*). Its relative, Prairie Agalinis (*A. heterophylla*) has slightly larger flowers, greener stalks, and grows in wetter situations both east and west of the escarpment. Both are pretty stunning ... for mere weeds.

Bill Reiner



Many of the plants mentioned in this article are illustrated in Marshall Enquist's *Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country*. Other resources for this article included *Shinner & Mahler's Illustrated Flora of North Central Texas*, *A Field Guide to Eastern Forests* by John Kricher (in the Peterson Field Guides series), and personal observations at Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge and elsewhere.

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**
- \$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, free workshop, and listing in annual report)

T-shirt size _____

This is a gift membership from _____

- 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.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____