



# SIGNAL SMOKE

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon Society

VOLUME 53, NO. 2

FEBRUARY 2004

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### Urban Habitat Development

## Planting Native Palm Trees

*Sabal mexicana* is an excellent choice for urban habitats because it provides shelter and bears an edible fruit. For over a century people have, with impunity, planted *Sabal mexicana* palm trees just about anywhere in the southern half of Texas, and often north of there. These trees have been planted regularly—and readily reproduce—in such godforsaken places as Fort Stockton, Odessa, and Dallas, where I have heard that occasionally some have frozen.



Moral: Unless you regularly see the northern lights, *don't sweat it.*

In Austin a once-in-a-decade mother of all freezes may kill the leaves, but new leaves start growing as soon as the weather warms. The last such M of all Fs in Austin was December 1989, when it got down to 4° above. But then there was 1949, when it got down to 2° below, Austin's record. Judging by the size of many *S. mexicana* in Austin and Georgetown today, they went through that '49 freeze with hardly a shiver.

As for where to plant in the "micro" sense, choose a lower and therefore damper part of your yard, but not standing water. Drained soil is better. *Sabal minor* (dwarf palmetto) likes swamps, but *S. mexicana* doesn't, yet it always grows near water. If the water is a little salty, *S. minor* tolerates it, but *S. mexicana* doesn't. When Lindheimer described the vegetation of the central coast, he noted that *S. minor* occurred on the bay shore, but *S. mexicana* occurred only some miles up the rivers (without saying how far up the rivers they extended). You can see this pattern today on Garcitas Creek, the only remaining wild and naturally occurring *S. mexicana* population north of the Rio Grande Valley.

Finally, plant these palms in the sun. A friend who bought a place on the San Marcos River 15 years ago planted these trees in both sun and shade. The ones in the sun are now mature. The ones in the shade are still dwarf palmetto size. Of course, to get this full growth in the sun, they must have plenty of water.

### Soil

Since I'm a conservationist, not a gardener, I know zilch about soils. Mainly I'll say that although I read articles about the soil finickiness of this or that native plant, my

Continued on page 11



### TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

Thursday, February 19, 6:30 p.m.

Program: History of Bastrop and Buescher State Parks' Christmas Bird Counts

Presenter: David Mitchell, MS, PhD

Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Drive

(See page 7 for details.)

## Travis Audubon Society

Email addresses are at "About Us,"  
<[www.travisaudubon.org](http://www.travisaudubon.org)>.

### Officers and Directors

#### President

Pat Dillon 347-0452

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### Baker Sanctuary Steward

John Wilcox 219-8425

### ACT Representatives

John Kelly (state president) 331-8693

Bryan Hale (state treasurer) 474-5599

### Signal Smoke Editor

Rosemary Wetherold 892-1606

### TAS Hotline: 926-8751

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

### TAS Web Site

[www.travisaudubon.org](http://www.travisaudubon.org)

### TAS Email

[info@travisaudubon.org](mailto:info@travisaudubon.org)

### TAS Fax

892-2026



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on recycled paper.

## 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

### Be a Student of Nature

Why do birds sing? I think this is a question we have all asked ourselves at one time or another. I know that there are several reasons, but the one that catches my attention is to establish and defend their territory. Think about that for a minute. Somebody tries to invade your space, so you sing to them. How neat would it be if we could replace bombing Afghanistan with sending over the likes of Perry Como, Bruce Springsteen, and Justin Timberlake? We could chase Saddam Hussein with a multinational force of Celine Dion, Sarah Vaughn, and Ziggy Marley. I know it sounds absurd, but so often our efforts to manage things cause more problems than they solve.

Our efforts to manage nature have had many unintended consequences. Perhaps instead of trying to influence nature to fit our needs, we would profit from letting nature influence us a little more. It is a different approach, but the next time you hear a little "warrior" singing his heart out, realize that there are different ways to solve old problems.

—Pat Dillon



## COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS

Email addresses are available at <[www.travisaudubon.org](http://www.travisaudubon.org)> under "About Us."

### TAS Rare Bird Alert

Isaac Sanchez 899-9414

Alert number 926-8751

### Bird Records

Bob Barth 327-1173

### Conservation

John Kelly 331-8693

### Cyberspace

Chris Doggett 512-898-5500

### Education

Vacant

### Field Trips

Georgia Harper 467-9700

### Hornsby Bend

Kevin Anderson 972-1960

### Hospitality

Vacant

### Membership Secretary

Chris Doggett 512-898-5500

### Programs

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### Property and Finance

Pat Dillon 347-0452

### Publications

Rosemary Wetherold 892-1606

### Publicity

Vacant

### Sales

Marcie Wilcox 219-8425

### Sanctuary

Bryan Hale 474-5599

### Urban Habitat Development

Jane Tillman 794-0058

## 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 Chris Doggett (TAS Membership Secretary), P. O. Box 1132, Round Rock TX 78680-1132; <[membership@travisaudubon.org](mailto: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, March 1 for the April issue). Submit uncopyrighted articles, announcements, and art to Rosemary Wetherold, <[rosemaryw@austin.rr.com](mailto:rosemaryw@austin.rr.com)>; 4507 Cliffstone Cove, Austin TX 78735-6610; 892-2026 (fax). Submissions by email or on a floppy are preferred but not required. Call Rosemary at 892-1606 if you have questions.

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# February 2004 Calendar of Travis Audubon Society Events

 Field Trip—See pages 4–5

 Meeting—See page 7

 Birding Class—See page 8

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Deadline for March <i>Signal Smoke</i> (see p. 2)	2  Education Committee Meeting, 7 pm	3	4	5	6	7  Field trip, Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, 7:30 am  Field trip, Colorado Bend
8  Field trip, Granger Lake, 7:30 am	9	10	11  Sparrow Identification Class starts	12  TAS Board of Directors Meeting, 6:45 pm	13	14  Monthly Bird Count, Hornsby Bend, 7 am & 4 pm
15  Big Hour, Commons Ford, noon  Bird walk, Meadow Lake, 4 pm	16  Urban Habitat Development Group Meeting, 7 pm	17	18  Beginning Birding Class starts, 7 pm	19 TAS Regular Monthly Meeting with program, 6:30 pm (see page 7)	20	21  Bird walk, Hornsby Bend, 7:30 am  Children's nature walk, Colorado River, 8 am
22  Field trip, Balcones NWR & Serendipity, 8 am  Sparrow walk, Mary M. Seawright Park, 8:30 am  Field trip, Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, 2 pm	23	24	25	26  Bird Records Committee Meeting, 7 pm	27 Rio Grande Valley birding trip →	28  Field trip, Camp Tejas/Lake Georgetown  Baker Sanctuary Workday, 8:30 am (p. 4)  Ecological Literacy Day, Hornsby, 9 am
29 ← Rio Grande Valley birding trip	MARCH 1 Deadline for April <i>Signal Smoke</i> (see p. 2)	2	3	4	5	6

# TAS FIELD TRIPS AND EVENTS

All TAS field trips are open to members and nonmembers and to experienced and inexperienced birders. Wear appropriate clothing and walking shoes, and bring binoculars and water. Unless otherwise noted, field trips are free. Carpoolers should expect to pay a share of the gasoline expense. **Please check the TAS Field Trips webpage ([www.travisaudubon.org](http://www.travisaudubon.org); click on "Field Trips") or the TAS hotline (926-8751) for complete, up-to-date information on field trips, including cancellations due to weather or other circumstances. Because of the publication schedule of the newsletter, things can change! If you do not have Internet access, contact phone numbers are provided below.**

## Hornsby Bend Information

The Hornsby Bend website <[www.sbs.utexas.edu/hornsby](http://www.sbs.utexas.edu/hornsby)> contains maps and other information about the facility.

## Saturday, February 7

### Field Trip to Colorado Bend

For details, see the Field Trips webpage.

## Saturday, February 7, 7:30–11:30 am

### Field Trip to Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Maggie Burnett, <[mburnett@austin.rr.com](mailto:mburnett@austin.rr.com)>, 899-0390.



## Sunday, February 8, 7:30 am–noon

### Field Trip, Granger Lake (Williamson County)

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or con-

contact Kathy McCormack, 895-7268 (w), <[kathy.mccormack@motorola.com](mailto:kathy.mccormack@motorola.com)>.

## Saturday, February 14, 7 am & 4 pm

### Monthly Bird Count at Hornsby Bend

Meet at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. For more information, contact Russ Nelson, <[russelln@concentric.net](mailto:russelln@concentric.net)>, 431-1420.



## Sunday, February 15, noon–2 pm

### Austin/Travis Big-Hour Team Bird-Spot, Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park

For details, see the Field Trips webpage or the January issue of *Signal Smoke*, or contact Stu Wilson at 459-1082 or <[stu@bga.com](mailto:stu@bga.com)>.

## Sunday, February 15, 4–5:30 pm

### Bird Walk at Meadow Lake

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Kathy McCormack, <[kathy.mccormack@motorola.com](mailto:kathy.mccormack@motorola.com)>, 895-7268 (w).

## Saturday, February 21, 7:30 am–noon

### Bird Walk at Hornsby Bend

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Richard Kaskan, 748-8660, <[kaskan@ieee.org](mailto:kaskan@ieee.org)>.

## Saturday, February 21, 8–11 am

### Children's Nature Walk, Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park

Tailored for children ages 5–10 and their parents, but all are welcome. For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Charles Stephens, 600-1700, <[charles\\_stephens@yahoo.com](mailto:charles_stephens@yahoo.com)>; or Rob Fergus, 478-8486, <[fergus@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:fergus@mail.utexas.edu)>.

## Sunday, February 22, 8 am–noon

### Balcones National Wildlife Refuge and Jean Nance's Property, "Serendipity"

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Georgia Harper, <[gcharper@utsystem.edu](mailto:gcharper@utsystem.edu)>, 467-9700.

## Sunday, February 22, 8:30–10:30 am

### Sparrow Walk in Mary Moore Seawright Metropolitan Park

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Maggie Burnett, <[mburnett@austin.rr.com](mailto:mburnett@austin.rr.com)>, 899-0390.

## Friday–Tuesday, February 27–March 2

### Rio Grande Valley Birding Trip

For details, see the Field Trips webpage, or contact Georgia Harper, <[gcharper@utsystem.edu](mailto:gcharper@utsystem.edu)>, 467-9700.

## Saturday, February 28

### Field Trip to Camp Tejas/Lake Georgetown

For details, see the Field Trips webpage.

## Saturday, February 28, 8:30 am

### TAS Baker Sanctuary Workday

We are going to line-trim the tall grass in all three trail systems in preparation for our annual open house on March 20. We'll meet at the parking lot at 12221 Lime Creek Road. For more information, see page 12; or contact John Wilcox, 219-4825, <[jmwoeso@earthlink.net](mailto:jmwoeso@earthlink.net)>.



## TAS TRIPS AND EVENTS (CONTINUED)

### Saturday, February 28, 9 am–1 pm Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend

Several hours of outdoor work, such as trail maintenance, habitat restoration, or work in the native plant nursery, are followed by at least an hour of learning about local ecology. Wear boots and work clothing, and bring binoculars. For more information, contact Kevin Anderson, 972-1960, <Kevin.Anderson@ci.austin.tx.us>; or Tim Hissam, <tp\_hissam1@yahoo.com>.



### Saturday, March 20, 9 am–noon

### Annual TAS Baker Sanctuary Open House

Mark your calendar now for this special event! See page 12 if you'd like to help with this event.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### One of the Most Popular Programs in America

In January the National Environmental Education Training Foundation announced that *Audubon Adventures*, Audubon's in-school education program, placed second among the top 10 most popular environmental education programs.

The NEETF list can be seen at NEETF's "Classroom Earth" <[www.classroomearth.org](http://www.classroomearth.org)>, a new, free website with information on how educators can obtain the best and most usable environmental education programs available today. It amounts to a "best of the best" collection of environmental education programs and resources for K-12 teachers, parents, and students. If you'd like to contribute to TAS's *Audubon Adventures* program, see the box at right.

### Audubon Nature Center: The Greenest of Them All

The National Audubon Society announced in January that its Audubon Center at Debs Park in Los Angeles has been certified as the most environmentally friendly building in the United States. The center received a Platinum Rating—the highest possible—from the U.S. Green Building Council, the nation's leading authority on sustainable building practices. The building's design includes renewable energy sources, water conservation, recycled building materials, and native landscaping. It is the first building in the city of Los Angeles to be entirely powered by on-site solar systems—functioning entirely "off the grid." The building also uses significantly less water

than a conventional building of its size. To find out more, visit <[www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)>.

### Stewardship Grants Available

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is now accepting applications for the Private Stewardship Grants Program (PSGP), which is aimed at protecting endangered and threatened species on privately owned lands. PSGP provides grants and other assistance to groups and individuals engaged in private, voluntary conservation efforts that benefit endangered or threatened species or other at-risk species on private lands within the United States. The deadline for grant submissions is March 8. For information and grant applications, go to <[http://endangered.fws.gov/grants/private\\_stewardship.html](http://endangered.fws.gov/grants/private_stewardship.html)>. Also, feel free to contact Audubon's Public Policy Office for assistance in completing the application: 202-861-2242.



### Audubon Adventures Classroom Kits Need Donations

*Audubon Adventures* Classroom Kits for grades 3–6 have been ordered for this school year. For 2003–2004 this nature curriculum highlights Grasslands, Nature in Your Neighborhood, Coniferous

Forests and Water, and Wildlife and People. These materials are a gift to Austin-area schoolteachers from Travis Audubon Society. The cost is approximately \$40 per kit, which includes shipping. Please consider 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. Please note on the check that it is for *Audubon Adventures*. You may contact me if you know of an area teacher who would like to receive a Classroom Kit. Many thanks.

—Julia Balinsky, <[jwaxwing@employees.org](mailto:jwaxwing@employees.org)>

# EDUCATION COMMITTEE CLASSES



## **Sparrow Identification Class**

The winter 2004 Sparrow Identification Class will be taught by Byron Stone. According to previous participants, this class is awesome! Byron has been an avid birder and lister since the early 1970s. He became enamored of sparrows when he found his first Fox Sparrow in a mixed-species flock near Luling 25 years ago. He has traveled to all parts of Texas to watch and listen to birds and has seen all of the sparrows that occur naturally in Texas. He has a special interest in birdsongs and bird vocalizations.

The class will focus on the two dozen members of the family Emberizidae that occur regularly in Central Texas—everything on the checklist between Spotted Towhee and White-crowned Sparrow. Classes will be held in a meeting room at First Presbyterian Church, 8001 Mesa Drive, in northwest Austin. There will be four Wednesday-night lectures—on February 11 and 25 and March 10 and 31—with field trips on the Saturdays following the lectures. Field trips will focus on nearby areas that provide excellent opportunities to observe native sparrow species. In February and March, sparrows in Central Texas are preparing for migration or local breeding, and they become more vocal. This class is a good one for people who already have some birding experience but want to refine their skills. Tuition is \$60 for TAS members and \$70 for nonmembers. Contact Robert Reeves at <reeves1@austin.rr.com> or 779-9038 to register. The class is limited to 12 participants.

## **Beginning Birding Class**

The spring 2004 Beginning Birding Class will start in mid-February. 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, February 18, March 3 and 24, and April 14, 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, preference will be given to registrants who are willing 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 identifying local birds, buying and using binoculars, and using birding resources. The class will be taught by Education Committee member



Jean Martin, who has been a birder for more than 12 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.

## **Backyard Birding Class**

Kathy Reeves and Martha Renfroe will offer their annual Backyard Birding Class on Saturday, April 3, at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend. If you're interested in attracting birds to your yard and want to learn to identify some of the typical Central Texas backyard birds, this is the class for you. Contact Robert Reeves at <reeves1@austin.rr.com> or 779-9038 to register and for more information.



## **Butterflies for Beginners**

Mike Quinn of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department will teach Butterflies for Beginners at the Center for Environmental Research auditorium at Hornsby Bend on Saturday, April 17, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The first two hours will be in the classroom, followed by a walk to observe the many species of butterflies at Hornsby Bend.

Mike Quinn holds B.S. and M.S. degrees in wildlife and entomology, respectively, from Texas A&M. He has worked as an invertebrate biologist for Texas Parks & Wildlife since 2000. His duties include the coordination of TPWD's Texas Monarch Watch Program. He coauthored the recently published book *Monarchs, Milkweed, and More*. Mike regularly gives butterfly and other entomological presentations around the state. He is a consultant for the 84-acre North American Butterfly Association (NABA) International Butterfly Park, which is being built in Mission, Texas, and he has been active in the Texas Butterfly Festival since 1997. In his spare time, he maintains the NABA-South Texas and his Texas Entomology websites.



Class participants will learn about butterfly diversity; identification techniques, including equipment and books; life history information, including behavior and host plant usage; history of Texas butterfly watching; and other resources for butterfly information. To register for the class and for more information, contact Robert Reeves at 779-9038 or <reeves1@austin.rr.com>. Additional information will also be available on the TAS website.

—Martha Renfroe

# TAS MEETINGS

**Monday, February 2, 7–9 pm**

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

North Village Branch Library, 2139 West Anderson Lane.  
Contact Shelia Hargis, 291-1861, <shargis@austin.rr.com>.

**Thursday, February 12, 6:45 pm**

**TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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

**Monday, February 16, 7 pm**

**URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

North Village Branch Library, 2139 West Anderson Lane.  
Contact Chuck Simms, 331-9630, <charlesvsi@aol.com>.

**Thursday, February 19, 6:30 pm**

**TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING**

For details, see box below.

**Thursday, February 26, 7 pm**

**BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

Contact Ethel Kutac, 346-7659.

**Monday, March 1, 7–9 pm**

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

See February 2 calendar item for details.

**Thursday, March 11, 6:45 pm**

**TAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

See February 12 calendar item for details.

**Monday, March 15, 7 pm**

**URBAN HABITAT DEVELOPMENT GROUP**

See February 16 item for details.

**Thursday, March 18, 7 pm**

**TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING**

Details in next *Signal Smoke*.

**Thursday, March 25, 7 pm**

**BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

Contact Ethel Kutac, 346-7659.



## Thursday, February 19, 6:30 pm TAS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

**Program: History of Bastrop and Buescher  
State Parks' Christmas Bird Counts  
Presenter: David Mitchell, MS, PhD**

According to National Audubon Society figures, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has drastically changed since its inception in 1900. In that first year, there were 27 participants in 25 localities. One hundred years later, the number of volunteers had increased to more than 52,000, and they were counting birds in more than 1,800 sites. At the February TAS meeting, Dr. David Mitchell will speak about the

CBC in two of our nearby state parks, Bastrop and Buescher—a CBC that started in 1977. In his talk, he will present trends in bird populations in this CBC, as well as relationships between different birds (e.g., Black and Turkey Vulture ratios, ducks, etc.). He will also discuss the count itself (e.g., participants, totals, etc.) from its inception to the present.

Dr. Mitchell is the founding president of the Bastrop County Audubon Society, which was established more than 20 years ago. He has been a resident of Bastrop since 1973 and been involved in the Bastrop and Buescher State Parks' CBC since the early 1980s. In the late 1980s he took over the job of compiling the records after the count. His son, Josh, has also been active in the count for the past few years. Dr. Mitchell is a professor of carcinogenesis at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in the Department of Carcinogenesis in Smithville.

**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 church parking lot.) **Bus routes:** <www.capmetro.austin.tx.us>; 474-1200.

**Bicycle routes:** <www.ci.austin.tx.us/bicycle/bikemap.htm>; 974-7240. Refreshments provided.

