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*Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society*

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Volume XXIII

Number 8

January/February 2004

## **MEETINGS AND SPEAKERS**

### **January 27, 2004 – Peruvian Amazon.**

Come listen to Mike Mizell, Sally Evans and Mary Lou Cole tell of their adventures of birding the depths of the Peruvian Amazon. In total they saw 153 species!

### **February 24, 2004 – Bluebirds in my Backyard?**

Doug Rhodes of the Bluebird Society will speak on how to attract bluebirds to urban areas.

### **March 23, 2004 - Warbler Warm-Up.**

Carolyn Oldham will present a slide presentation on warblers.

### **March 27, 2004 – Birding Day at the Heard Museum.**

Winnie Burkett, who is in charge of the wetland areas for the Houston Audubon Society chapter, will be our speaker for Birding Day.

### **April 27, 2004 – The Bees and Birds and Other Good “Information.”**

John Talbert of the Collin County Beekeeper Association will present.

### **May 25, 2004 – What Was That?**

#### **Did You Hear Something?**

Night Walk at the Outdoor Learning Center in Plano

#### **PTAS Meetings are the fourth Tuesday**

7:00 p.m. at the Heard Museum • Call 972-562-5566 for directions

## **FROM THE PRESIDENT**

### **Conservation**

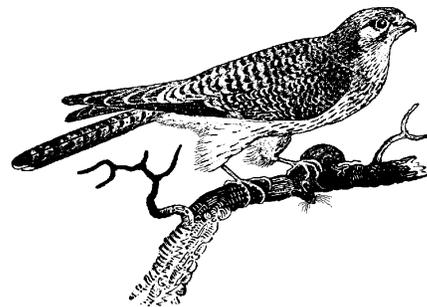
Many of you heard that a poacher killed a Whooping Crane a few weeks ago in the area just south of Dallas. It is a great tragedy to lose one of the 190 wild birds of this species. The good news is that such incidents are rare and their natural predators, like bobcats, now represent a greater threat. In fact, the population of whooping cranes is stable or slowly growing.

However, it's still a fragile situation and it would be all too easy to blame that one individual for threatening whooping cranes with extinction. However, the sobering reality is that the greatest threat to whooping cranes and many other wild species is habitat loss. There are all too few places to stop and feed along the migration routes, and ongoing development is continually reducing these resting grounds.

So if we got excited about the reports of what happened to that one whooping crane, let's focus our energy, our money, and our political activities on preserving wildlife habitat – though public land management, private land acquisition by organizations like the nature Conservancy, or by private landowners granting conservation easements on their land to organizations like the Connemara Conservancy.

Think about it.

**Gailon Brehm, President**



**CHECKOUT OUR NEW  
PRAIRIE & TIMBERS WEBSITE:  
[www.prairieandtimbers.com](http://www.prairieandtimbers.com)**

## LEARN THE BIRDS AT THE HEARD

Collin County is rich with opportunities to observe birds. Again this year your Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society is offering an outstanding opportunity to birders of all levels of experience and knowledge. This birding class meets at 7:00 p.m. just prior to the chapter meetings which are at 7:30 p.m. Come in through the back door off the parking lot and you will be directed to the basement amphitheater where the class will be taught. Teachers are experienced members of the local chapter. The class format is an informal discussion teaching keys to identification of a small number of local birds each month. All you need to bring is your favorite field guide. Upcoming classes include:



### Tuesday January 27 7:00 PM

**Raptors** - Red-Tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-Shinned Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Eastern Screech Owl

### Tuesday February 24 7:00 PM

**Woodland birds** - American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing Brown Thrasher, Brown Creeper, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush

### Tuesday March 23 7:00 PM

**Backyard friends** - Mourning Dove, White-Winged Dove, Rock Dove (Pigeon), Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, American Goldfinch, Eastern Bluebird

### Tuesday April 27 7:00 PM

**Warm-weather birds** - Green Heron, Yellow-Crowned Night Heron, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike

## ARE YOU READY FOR FIELD TRIPS? RSVPing is most important!

One of the most satisfying experiences of being an Audubon member is attending a successful field trip. As you consider joining a field trip, be sure to keep in mind these following tips:



**First:** RSVP the week of the trip to one of the co-chairmen:  
Carolyn Oldham at 972-517-8987

email [carolyn.oldham@verizon.net](mailto:carolyn.oldham@verizon.net)

OR

Tom Heath at 972-867-8648

email [heathwtom@netscape.net](mailto:heathwtom@netscape.net)

**Second:** Be on time. When it says the trip will meet, that means *DEPART!* So be at the location noted. Our carpooling site is the parking lot of the Kelly-Moore Paint Store at the northwest corner of Spring Creek Parkway and Hwy 75 in Plano. - **DON'T BE LATE.**

**Third:** Bring water and snacks for yourself.

## 2004 Field Trip Schedule

### Saturday, January 24 -

#### **Hagerman Wildlife Refuge & Denison Dam**

Depart Kelly-Moore Paint Store 7:00 a.m.

Leader: Mike Mizell

Length- 3/4 day

Expect to see wintering geese, ducks, Bald Eagles, sparrows, raptors, and other winter visitors.

Bring water, snacks and/or lunch

### Saturday, February 14 -

#### **Greenville Lakes & Graham Park plus Jennifer Maxwell's house in the woods**

Depart Kelly Moore Paint Store 7:00 a.m.

Leader: Jennifer Maxwell

Expect to see wintering ducks, raptors, sparrows and other winter visitors.

Lunch will be served at Jennifer's house- she has great birds at her feeders as a bonus!

### Saturday, March 20 -

#### **Caddo Grasslands near Bonham**

Depart Kelly-Moore Paint Store 7:00 a.m.

Leaders: Carolyn and David Oldham

Length- 3/4 day

Expect to see early spring migrants, East Texas specialties (Pine Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Northern Parula, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, 2 kinds of Nuthatches), raptors and late winter visitors Bring water, snacks and/or lunch

### Saturday, March 27 -

#### **Birding Day at the Heard**

More information to follow

### Saturday, April 17 -

#### **"The Forbidden Zone" Arlington & Village Creek Drying Beds**

Depart Kelly-Moore Paint Store 7:00 a.m.

Length-3/4 day

Expect to see early migrants, shore birds, ducks, raptors, and sparrows

## PTAS SPONSORS

### BIRD WALKS AT

### THE HEARD MUSEUM

The Heard Museum and Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society is now offering guided bird walks on the Heard Museum and Sanctuary on the second Saturday of each month, September - May. Sign-in for these walks will be at the Heard store at 9:00, rain or shine! The bird walks are for beginning and intermediate birders and will last 1.5 hours with plenty of opportunity for questions and tips on birding techniques. Attendees who have binoculars and field guides should bring them.

## WHAT WOULD FEBRUARY BE WITHOUT A VALENTINE?

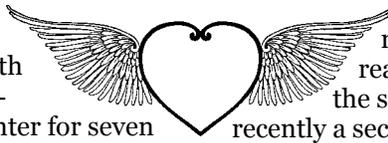
For those of you who do not know the name of Al Valentine, he was one of our “consummate”\* birders. He came to us by way of Michigan where he helped to form an Audubon chapter and was a newsletter editor. Al was one of the founding members of the Prairie and Timbers Audubon as well. Many went on birding trips with Al where his energy seemed boundless, his notes were meticulous, and his bird identification exacting. He was a mentor to many folks, both young and mature. Mr. Valentine had a bird-banding station at the Outdoor Learning Center for seven years and left them with copies of his excellent records. Al's wife Gretchen, though not an avid birder, supported him in all of these activities. She was often the “kitchen crew” at the Heard Christmas Bird Count. Al passed away November 20, 1999 after a long illness. We still miss his exuberance and enthusiasm for life and for birding.

In September our chapter awarded a double scholarship to thirteen-year-old Jamie Rutter for use at an Audubon Camp or similar experience. Jamie has shown extraordinary skill in bird identification, participated in bird counts and bird walks, and supported our chapter in attendance and helping with special occasions. She raised a

considerable amount of money for the National Audubon while participating in a birdathon and was recognized for it by the Texas Audubon. Her friend and mentor, Barbara Roth, nominated her.

The first scholarship for five hundred dollars (\$500) has been given by PTAS many times to deserving chapter members who applied by letter or were nominated by one of their peers. A committee reads the letters and decides who is eligible for the single scholarship given each year. More recently a second scholarship was donated by two chapter members in honor of the memory of Al Valentine. It had never been awarded. Due to the high costs of the various camps and Jamie's age, the committee decided to award both scholarships to her to facilitate her attendance.

Prairie & Timbers will consider any member of the chapter for a scholarship of five hundred dollars (\$500) for use at an Audubon Camp. The experience is a proven valuable extension of one's life experiences and education. Please apply by letter to the Scholarship Committee giving the reasons why you feel this would be a good experience for you or for the person you are nominating. Only one scholarship is available each year.



## BOOK REPORTS by Sid Dunkle

*Birds of the Great Plains*, by Paul A. Johnsgard, 1979, University of Nebraska Press, 539 pp. This book is not particularly easy to read, but it does contain lots of interesting information. It covers a large rectangle of the Great Plains area of the U.S., including the Texas Panhandle, and includes some adjoining areas like the Black Hills of South Dakota, western Minnesota, and the Ozark Plateau of Oklahoma. An extensive introduction covers the topography, climate, and vegetation of the area. There are some black and white photos of habitats, and a nice black and white drawing of a species in each family. There are also 30 even nicer color photos of birds. The main part of the book is accounts with rather detailed maps showing breeding ranges of the 320 species that have bred in the area. Interestingly, Johnsgard considers only 16 species of birds to be actually endemic to the Great Plains grasslands, including 2 Prairie Chickens, 4 Shorebirds, 8 Finch types, the Chihuahuan Raven, and Sprague's Pipit. Each species account includes paragraphs on Breeding Status, Breeding Habitat, Nest Location, Clutch Size and Incubation Period, Time of Breeding, Breeding Biology, and Suggested Reading. Of these, the most interesting beside the maps is usually the Breeding Biology section. Among the interesting factoids one can glean are:

Breast feathers in Hooded Merganser nests are narrow and off-white rather than wide and white as for Wood Ducks, Red-shouldered Hawks may line their nests with those of tent caterpillars, male Wild Turkeys stay together as life-long groups of brothers, Virginia Rails nest in cattails and eat duckweed whereas Soras favor sedges and eat seeds, Rock Pigeons may nest up to 12 times a year while Mourning Doves may nest up to 6 times, male Roadrunners have white skin behind the eyes whereas females have pale blue skin there, Bluebirds should have a tree perch with a view of their nest hole which should face away from the prevailing rain, female Parula Warblers may build a curtain around their nest site before actually starting the nest, Orchard Orioles often nest in the same tree as Kingbirds, and there's lots more good stuff. An Appendix locates and briefly discusses 44 places to bird in the Great Plains area, including Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, but no site maps are included. Another Appendix is a checklist showing the breeding status of bird species in 30 of the 44 listed birding sites. In summary, this is mostly a reference book, but north Texas birders will likely enjoy it, and I plan to take it with me when I travel in the Great Plains area.

*The Joy of Birding* by Chuck Bernstein, Capra Press, Santa Barbara, CA, 201 pp, cover price \$8.95.

I enjoyed this book, although personally I did not learn very much compared with most other birding books. In 22 short chapters Bernstein mostly describes birding trips he has taken, most of them in California. A pen and ink sketch starts each chapter, but there are no photos or maps. A variety of stories describe such things as searching for Great Gray Owls and California Condors, Christmas Bird Counts, the Salton Sea, the effect of El Nino on sea birds, and the dismal future of birding as the expanding human population destroys nature. The most interesting chapter was one on taking Guided Bird Tours, which he highly recommends. Another chapter describes birding British Style, in which one makes drawings and notes, THEN looks up the bird in a field guide, a practice that at least I do not preach. You'll enjoy this book, and it's a quick read.

## Birding Information

**Jerri Kerr** reported the following web site as an excellent location for helping birders narrow down bird identification by type, color, size, habitat and region search criteria. Check it out.

[http://www.enature.com/guides/advSearch\\_Birds.asp](http://www.enature.com/guides/advSearch_Birds.asp)

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

**Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, 10/25** - The trip to Hagerman NWLR happened to be the day that the first serious "norther" blew in. Approximately 15 people ignored the dire weather forecasts and came to see what the birds held in store. Fortunately, there was no rain, and it never got as cold as predicted. However, the wind held the songbirds in cover, and a screech owl tape did very little to pull them out. Even so, we turned up with a pretty good variety of species. The assortment of water birds was very predictable, and the only geese that had arrived were a small group of White-fronteds. We ended up with a species count of about 60, as follows: Pied-billed grebe, Double-crested cormorant, White-fronted goose, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern pintail, American widgeon, Wood duck (heard), Northern Shoveler, Green-winged teal, American Coot, White pelican, Ring-billed gull, Franklin's gull, Forster's tern, Great-blue heron, Great egret, Snowy egret, Cattle egret, American Avocet, Black-bellied plover, Killdeer, Dowitcher, Greater yellowlegs, Least sandpiper, Cooper's hawk, Sharp-shinned hawk, Northern harrier, Red-shouldered hawk, Red-tailed hawk, Turkey vulture, Black vulture, Mourning dove, Greater roadrunner, Belted kingfisher, Red-headed woodpecker, Red-bellied woodpecker, Northern flicker, Downy woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker (?), Eastern phoebe, American crow, Blue jay, Carolina chickadee, Tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, Ruby-crowned kinglet, Northern mockingbird, Eastern bluebird, Loggerhead shrike, Yellow-rumped warbler, Orange-crowned warbler, Red-winged blackbird, Meadowlark, European starling, Northern cardinal, Song sparrow, Savannah sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, White-throated sparrow, Swamp sparrow and American goldfinch. **Tom Heath**

**Spring Creek Preserve and One-Eleven Ranch, Garland – 11/22** - Approximately 20 birders led by guest expert Jack Hill participated in this trip. More than 35 species of birds were observed including Fox Sparrow, Field Sparrow, White-Throated Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Spotted Towhee. Other expected sparrows were not seen, perhaps due to the strong winds and recently mown grass. Forest birds were hot at One Eleven Ranch where Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Orange-crowned warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Golden-crowned Kinglet were First-of-Season sightings for some in the group. A surprise sighting of a Blue-headed Vireo rounded out the trip. Thanks go to Carolyn Oldham and Tom Heath for organizing this excellent activity. **Gailon Brehm**

## OTHER BIRD SIGHTINGS

On a recent outing to the shores of Lake Lewisville, the most numerous bird of the day was probably the Carolina Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglets came in a close second, followed by many White-throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Field Sparrows, and even a Dark-eyed Junco.

It turned out to be a very pleasant morning for birding. We went in the back door of Pilot Knoll Park, along the equestrian trail, where it was somewhat muddy, but where the habitat of low scrubby brush made for excellent bird watching. The rains of earlier in the morning had dissipated by the time we started the walk so the birds were pretty active. Even though all the winter sparrows, Harris's, Fox, etc., were not evident, none of us were disappointed with the birds we did see. The highlight birds of the 43 species we counted were the Blue-headed Vireo and the Brown Creeper. But the four woodpecker and two wren species, coupled with excellent looks at a Brown Thrasher, Eastern Kingfisher, and the crows mobbing a rather damp Red-tailed Hawk all went in the books as good birds for the day.



I learned about this location while on a butterfly walk earlier in the summer and couldn't wait for fall to arrive. Then I saw a posting on **TEXBIRDS** two weeks ago, I knew the time had come to schedule a visit. For all the time involved in the drive over there, it was well worth the trip and definitely a place I will revisit again. **Mike Moore**

A walk at White Rock Lake was quite successful, both in terms of the birds. We surveyed parts of the lake, the dam spillway, and the woods of the Old Fish Hatchery, to tally 37 different species of water birds, shorebirds, and passerines.

We encountered one raptor, a Red-shouldered Hawk, and one recently arrived Song Sparrow, and several lingering Nashville Warblers. Our attempts to locate the Green Parakeet among all the Monk Parakeets were, unfortunately, unsuccessful. There were lots of small shorebirds on the spillway, but the back lighting silhouettes made much of the identification problematic. The Spotted Sandpiper, however, was easily recognized by its ever-bobbing tail. Of special interest, were the several Ring-billed Gulls on and around the spillway. We could actually see the different plumage sequences among the variously aged birds. All in all, an interesting and satisfying morning of bird watching. **Mike Moore**

**COOL FACT** – Cedar Waxwing (*Bombcilla cedrorum*). Over most of North America, the Cedar Waxwing is the most specialized fruit-eating bird. This bird's primary foods are fleshy fruits that are high in sugar content. Like tropical birds with this diet, Cedar Waxwings are social all year long, they nest in loose clusters, and at times they wander widely in flocks in search of temporarily abundant sources of fruit. Because of their reliance on summer ripening fruit for feeding their hatchlings, they are among the latest birds to nest in North America.

## COMMENTARY

by Ann Reynolds

### **Conservation Subdivision – Believe It or Not!**

I recently had the opportunity to visit a new subdivision in the East Texas Lake Country area that touted itself as being a conservation subdivision. First of all, I did not know what kind of housing area this would be and second, did not believe it could be true. This private enclave of 38 half-acre home sites is thoughtfully placed in a 66-acre parkscape located in Rains County between Emory and Mineola. The subdivision includes hiking trails, meadows, woodlands, a small lake and pond and a picnic pavilion. The home sites are adjacent to the 100-year-old Woodson family farmstead. The concept is to preserve in perpetuity over half of the total land as open space, which will be managed for wildlife habitat, and native plants of east Texas and the developer has taken great strides to leave the land as undisturbed as possible in the development process. There are some restrictive covenants and architectural guidelines but those did not seem overbearing. Planting natives and using organics are encouraged. When I visited, I was impressed by the way the roads had been installed so as to preserve as much of the integrity of the landscape. There were several species of birds and a snag that I am sure held an Eastern screech. Several of the lots have already sold – one to a retired superintendent of Rains county schools who is a birder. Prices for lots were between \$27,000 – 29,600. I found out that this concept is not unique – there are many subdivisions in the United States that operate harmoniously with nature. I only wish there were more! If you are interested,

visited the web site [www.woodsonplace.com](http://www.woodsonplace.com)



### **Adopt A Nest Box**

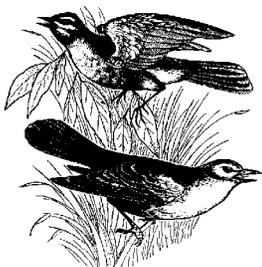
***Is your home too crowded to foster a dog or cat?***

***Do you really like nature and want to do your part for conservation?***

***How about adopting a Heard Museum Nest Box?***

The Heard Museum has created a great nest box trail program. These boxes are used by the cavity nesting species on the sanctuary (bluebirds, prothonotary warblers, titmice, chickadees, wrens, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, screech owls, great-crested flycatchers and American kestrels). Duties include installing the boxes,

monitoring the boxes, entering and retrieving data and assist with the prothonotary study. Participating by adopting a nest box would be a great educational opportunity for the entire family. If you are interested in this fun and beneficial activity, please contact Jennifer Maxwell at 903-454-3358.



## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The 2003 McKinney, Texas Christmas Bird Count is in the books! The count has been a successful joint venture between the Heard Museum and Sanctuary and the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society since 1976. What a wonderful synergy this relationship has become over the years!



Now for the numbers:

Total Participants: 33

Average: 33

High: 54 last year

Total Species: 96

Average: 93

High: 106 last year

Total Birds: 13,286

Average: 56,686

High: 496,475 in '92

New Bird: White-winged Dove

Missing: Lincoln's Sparrow (never been missed before)

There were a record number of Snow, White-fronted, and Canada geese recorded. Ducks in general were up this year. Wood ducks were at record numbers last year, and up again this year. This year had the fewest ever birds of prey. For a complete breakdown, visit the CBC home page at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>. This year's data will be updated as soon as the database is ready.

I want to thank all of the participants for their time and effort in making this a success. I especially want to thank Bonnie Campion and Willie Myers for preparing refreshments and lunch.

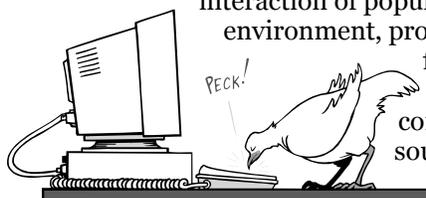
**Dan Smith**

### ***Meetings & Field Trip information at the speed of the internet!!***

Did you ever want the news before anyone else? Well, now here is your chance. If you would like to receive an email letting you know the latest and greatest version of the newsletter is available on the website, just let us know! Contact Membership Chairman Jerri Kerr by email at [Jerri.Kerr@mci.com](mailto:Jerri.Kerr@mci.com), by phone 972-578-3146 or by snail mail at 1719 Mimosa Avenue, Plano, TX 75074 and she will put your email on the P&TAS distribution list. Once you receive the email you can check the website – [www.prairieandtimbers.com](http://www.prairieandtimbers.com) for all the happenings.

Won't you help us better the habitats for our birds by using the Internet for your newsletter? By doing so, we can work together to fulfill the Audubon mission of conserving native plants and animals and their habitats, using land and water wisely, seeking solutions for global problems involving the

interaction of population, resources, and the environment, promoting rational strategies for energy development and use, and stressing conservation and renewable sources.



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\* = Board Members

**Membership Application** 

**NOTE:** Existing members should respond directly to National Audubon when they receive renewal notice.

Please enroll me as a NEW member of National Audubon Society and Prairie & Timbers Chapter at the special introductory price of \$20.00. Enclosed is my check made out to: National Audubon Society

I do not wish to be a member of National Audubon Society. However, I would like to receive Prairie & Timbers Rustlin s Newsletter. Enclosed is my check for \$8.00 made out to: P&T Audubon Society

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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How did you hear about Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society?

- From a member of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society.
- From the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society web site.
- From the National Audubon Society.
- Other

**Mail to P&T Audubon Society  
c/o Mike Mizell 800 Edgewood Denton, TX 76201**

Audubon Code 7XCH PTAS Chapter Code W15

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