

Rustlin's

Volume XXIII
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May 2004

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

FROM THE PRESIDENT – “ANOTHER GOOD YEAR”

PTAS did some great things this past year. I'm proud of what we have accomplished, but I'm sure we can do more and extend our influence to a wider circle of people. As you know, the driving force behind each of our accomplishments is a committee of dedicated people. The way for us to be more effective is for more people to get involved.

You may have some ideas for things you would like to see done. I'd like each of you to consider first, what types of activities you would like to see PTAS sponsor, and second, how you can be involved in making them happen. Please send me your ideas plus let me know the kind of things that interest you and we'll try to match you up to serve on a committee.

Let's get organized and **do more starting fall 2004!**

Gailon Brehm, President, g-brehm@msn.com



A YEAR IN REVIEW

Whoever said that birders were old, khaki-clad, reclusive people with binoculars strapped to their necks looking for LBBs, never met the members of the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society. We have been very busy. We have traveled the state (some the world) to see birds, aid in education and conservation and make new birding friends. A log of the number of miles walked was not kept, so here for your reading pleasure is our year in review.

The members of PTAS learned about Heard Museum and reptiles from Roger Sanderson in August and then we got batty about bats in October while listening to a presentation from Vicki Hatfield. We took a slideshow trip to the Antarctic with Alton Biggs, an Allen High School Biology teacher. December was our traditional Christmas Bird Count. We rang in the New Year in January when we toured the Peruvian Amazon with Mike Mizell, Sally Evans and Mary Lou Cole where they saw 153 species of birds. Doug Rhodes, of the Bluebird Society, showed us, in February, how to attract bluebirds to our backyard. We hosted our 4th annual Birding Day in March and our speaker was Winnie Burkett from Houston Audubon. She described the rescue of Bolivar Flats and the birds that call it home. This April we learned about the birds and bees. Well, actually John Talbert of the Collin County Beekeeper Association spoke to the group. May will be our final meeting for the season and we will tour the Outdoor Learning Center and maybe take a night walk.

Members of PTAS also taught educational birding classes prior to the meetings. These classes were very informative for both the beginner and experienced birder. We saw the Heard Museum skins and listened to songs/calls on tape. In these classes we learned about: winter sparrows, waterfowl, raptors, woodland birds, backyard friends, and warm weather birds. Think you have learned them all – think again!! See the class schedule for the next season in this newsletter.

We extended our classes to the outside world by leading second Saturday bird walks at the Heard Museum. We have had good success in leading these walks for beginners and intermediate birders alike. During the walks we included plenty of time for questions and tips on birding techniques and using binoculars. We also conducted the 2003 McKinney Christmas Bird Count We had 33 participants who counted 96 species.

Our field trips took to us to each compass point. We went north to the Eisenhower State Park and the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, east to Garland, Greenville Lakes and Graham Park, northeast to the Caddo Grasslands in Bonham, southwest to Benbrook Lake and Arlington's Village Creek Drying Beds and south to Richardson's Prairie Creek Park. 428 species were seen – of course, this is a duplicated number! On average 53 species were seen.

Our chapter recognized Jamie Rutter, a 13-year old Wilson Middle School student and PTAS member, with scholarships totaling \$1000. These scholarships will allow Jamie to attend summer camp in Maine. PTAS supported Billy Collins' Eagle Scout project by providing funding for materials for a boardwalk at the Heard wetlands.

Five newsletters are mailed to over 500 members at a cost of \$373 for each mailing. If members downloaded the newsletter via the web site, money could be saved to support conservation projects, the Heard Museum's nest box program, educate more birders and do more outreach within our community. If you would like to help, contact Membership Chairman Jerri Kerr by email at 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 for all the happenings.

MEETINGS AND SPEAKERS

May 25, 2004 – What Was That?

Did You Hear Something?

Night Walk at the Outdoor Learning Center in Plano
All members are asked to bring an appetizer or finger food to enjoy at our last meeting of the season.

September 28, 2004 – Flora and Fauna of the Galapagos Islands

Alton Biggs will join us again to show us animals that have gone through great changes in order to adapt to their harsh environment. Be prepared for the colors of black, white and gray with occasional splashes of startling red.

October 26, 2004 – Experiences of a Service Elderhostel

Tom Heath will have a presentation about his experiences at a Ramsey Canyon (south of Tuscon, Az) Elderhostel.

November 23, 2004 – Pelagic Birds

Returning speaker, Steve Carlson, travels extensively with his work and has seen some wonderful birds. His presentation will be on pelagic birds. He has over 700 life birds and is still looking for more.

December 26, 2004 – Christmas Bird Count will be the Bird Count

More information on this annual event to follow.

January 25, 2005 – Relationships;

You, Birds and Native Plants

David Ilfrey, Jr of Native Texas Garden Designs will explain how you, birds and native plants can co-exist in the suburban neighborhood.

PTAS meetings are the fourth Tuesday

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

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. "Learn the birds" is a birding class that meets at 7:00 p.m. just prior to the chapter meetings which are at 7:30 p.m. Gailon Brehm and Sid Dunkle, experienced members of the local chapter, will be offering these identification classes.. The class format is an informal discussion tailored mostly for beginning birders but a few rare species will be mixed in to pique the interest of more experienced folks. Featured during each class will be bird specimens provided by Ken Steigman of the Heard Museum and a few recordings of bird sounds All you need to bring is your favorite field guide. Upcoming 2004 – 2005 classes include: September - Shorebirds, October - Owls, November - Ducks, December - Sparrows, January - Winter Woodland Birds, February - Woodpeckers, March - Hawks, and April - Warblers. All are welcome.



2004 Field Trip Schedule

Saturday, May 8 –

“Prairie Creek Park in Richardson”

Carolyn and Dave Oldham

Expected Birds: Migrants- Warblers, Vireos, etc.

Length: 1/2 day

Meet at the Park at 7:30 am

Saturday, May 15 –

“Whatever Place is Hot for Migrants”

Check the web site for further information.

Meet time: 8:00am – come for see what is passing through!

Saturday, May 15 –

Longhollow Ranch – Erath County

Location: Longhollow Ranch – Erath County /

Lee & Bev Clauser’s Place

Meet promptly at 6:00am - Benbrook Antique Mall parking lot at 9250 Hwy 377S

Directions to Antique Mall: From W Loop I-820 S take the Hwy 377S / Granbury exit and head southwest on Hwy 377S for approximately 1 mile. Benbrook Antique Mall will be on the right. The group will then proceed to Longhollow Ranch.

Directions to Longhollow Ranch: From Benbrook head SW on HWY 377S thru Granbury on the loop to area where highway goes from 4 lanes to 2 lanes, turn left on to Holmes (UPS Office) which deadends into 51, turn right go 20 miles to 1014. From Hwy 51 turn right onto CR 1014. CR 1014 turns into CR 196 upon entering Erath County From CR 196 turn right onto CR 104. Longhollow Ranch - 818 CR 104.

Expected Birds: Black-capped Vireo / Golden Cheeked Warbler

Trip Length: ¾ - full day

Contact: Mike Patterson - 817-283-2658,

MfPchat@yahoo.com or

Lee Clauser - 254-823-6937,

longhollowranch@msn.com

FWAS Trip (www.fwas.org)



CHECKOUT PRAIRIE & TIMBERS WEB SITE:

www.prairieandtimbers.com

GREAT WEB SITES TO CHECK OUT by Tom Heath

Everything about birds!

<http://www.birdzilla.com/>

Want to know something about an animal other than a bird? For

Aardvark to Zorilla go to:

<http://www.americazoo.com/>



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

OR

Tom Heath at 972-867-8648
email 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.

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.

4th ANNUAL BIRDING DAY A HIT



BIRDING DAY 2004 was held at the Heard Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary on March 27, 2004 and was a delightful success. A lot of volunteer hours and donated items helped make this year's birding day possible. Due to the "early" date and the type of weather preceding the event, there were few migrant birds but the scissor tailed flycatcher came

through right on schedule and gave us a sign that migration had begun. This has also happened in previous years. Sixty species of birds were observed by three teams of attendees. Highlights of those birds sighted were: LeConte's sparrows, barred and great horned of owls, and some early sightings of migrants: yellow-crowned night herons, B&W warbler, snowy egret, little blue heron, white-eyed vireo, and blue-gray gnatcatcher. Winnie Burkett explained to us the rescue of Bolivar Flats by the Houston Audubon chapter and why it is important to the migrants and birds that live there year round. **Sally Evans**

THANK YOU FROM THE HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE



Bonnie Champion and Willie Meyers extend their sincere appreciation to all members who brought refreshments to the meetings during the year. If you wish to provide soft drinks or snacks at one of the meetings, please contact them. See the officer list on the back of this newsletter.



You might be a birder if...

- ... your spouse thinks "DEEP WOODS OFF" is your cologne.
- ... your pants are permanently wrinkled at the ankles from being tucked into boots.
- ... you think ripping open owl pellets is NOT gross.
- ... you have been seen looking out of restaurant windows with your binoculars.
- ... you don't think of elections when you hear the word primaries.
- ... you identify the anatomy of your Kentucky Fried Chicken.
- ... you refer to a good day of watching TV and don't mean television
- ... your children have not had new shoes in two years but you own a Swarovski.
- ... you have actually BEEN to the Brownsville Dump.

Get Meeting & 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, 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 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.



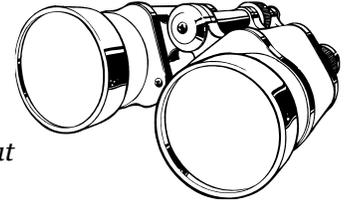
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Caddo Grasslands Field Trip - March 20, 2004

Seventeen birders enjoyed a rather cool, cloudy tour of the Caddo Grasslands, Coffee and Davy Crockett lakes area near Bonham. One in the group was a businessman from Virginia who picked up a "lifer" LeConte's Sparrow. Georgette Guernsey, also new to the group, heard a Louisiana Waterthrush singing from the woods. Sid Dunkle, our resident dragonfly expert, identified an unusually early Texas Darner for us. So many talents among birders!

Sixty-two species were seen or heard. Highlights were: Pine Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Northern Parula (heard), Louisiana Waterthrush (heard), LeConte's Sparrow, Roadrunner, Pileated Woodpecker, and one lone Snow Goose (blue phase). All had a great day!

Carolyn Oldham



OTHER BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mike Moore returned from FeatherFest 2004 down in Galveston and reported great birding. Read on.

I spent Friday morning with Sumita Prasad co-leading a group around Galveston's East Beach area. We saw terns galore - Gull-billed, Caspian, Royal, Sandwich, Common, Forster's, and Least; shorebirds - Black-bellied, Snowy, and Piping Plovers; buckets full of Sanderlings, Willet, and Short-billed Dowitchers, stilts and yellowlegs, as well as a "lifer" Marbled Godwit. Of course, there were herons of all feathers with many White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbills tossed in for good measure as well as several large flocks of Black Skimmers sunning themselves on the beach. My second lifer for the day was Mottled Duck, a common bird for the area, but new for me.

My Saturday morning was scheduled as a reprise of Friday's trip. However, East Beach had to be canceled at the last minute because the military was staging a beach landing reenactment there. Indeed, later that morning, we saw several WWII-vintage aircraft swooping in low over the beach, much like the Peregrine Falcon we saw at about the same time, strafing a flock of American Avocets. Anyway, our trip was re-routed across the bay to the Bolivar Flats and Horseshoe Marsh areas on High Island. While crossing the bay and in a light rain, I caught a glimpse of a bird, too raptor-like to be a gull and too gull-like to be a raptor, attack a small group of Laughing Gulls. Could it be a jaeger? After several minutes of consultation with Stennie Meadors, another of the leaders, we collectively decided it was a Pomarine Jaeger, an uncommon bird for the area, but lifer #3 for the trip for me.

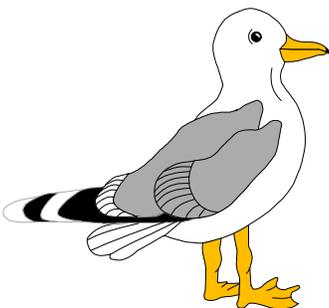
Once at Bolivar Flats, besides the Peregrine, we again saw lots of shorebirds, an Osprey, a Long-billed Curlew (#4), and several sparrows in the beach grass. One of the sparrows was a Seaside (#5) and the others were Savannahs. A pair of Wilson's Plovers that were probably already nesting was lurking in and around the grass. We gave them wide berth and headed across the highway to Horseshoe Marsh and even though time was running out, we still managed to hit the edges of the area. Lots of birds were in the many roadside pools...spoonbills and ibis, including a White-faced, fantastic looks at a Clapper Rail to go along with the earlier spotting of a Sora. The fly-over of a Swallow-tailed Kite (#6) capped off the morning. The ferry trip back across the bay was uneventful...no sign of the jaeger...with only the frolic of dolphins as entertainment. Most of the kids on the ferry got their kicks tossing out bits of food for the thousand or so Laughing Gulls following in the wake.

Sunday's trip was a tour of Galveston Bay out to the Deer and Pelican Islands. It started with a ride downtown to the pier on the city's quaint trolley then on to the boat. The passage out to Deer Island was as pleasant as the day, punctuated with brief sightings of Common Loons feeding in the bay. The nesting spectacle at Deer Island was truly amazing. Brown Pelicans, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbills, Great Blue Herons, and Great Egrets all vying for just the perfect spot to build a nest. The beach was occasionally dotted with American Oystercatchers, with a Willet here and there. Pelican Island was equally nice although not as raucous and lively as Deer Island.

We made a special stop at Smith Woods in High Island to check out at the rookery there. Roseate Spoonbills and Great Egrets were nesting in abundance, all very interesting to witness the interplay between them. It was also interesting to see the Common Moorhens skedaddle out of the way of an oncoming alligator. I was glad we were on the deck overlook at the time.

Next years' event is planned for March 31-April 3. If you have ever wanted to visit the Upper Texas Coast during spring migration, I could not more highly recommend this event as the way to do it. The birds are there and the island hospitality is top-shelf.

Mike Moore



NEWS FROM WHITE ROCK LAKE

"For the Love of the Lake", a newsletter about the happenings at White Rock Lake, reported in their last issue disturbing "bird news" items. Kelly Cotton, past President of Audubon Dallas, said a brass monument dedicated to Ada Henderson, long-time member of Dallas Audubon, was stolen. It had been there ten years. Also, a local birder discovered one of the area's resident Barred Owls dead in a tree. An autopsy revealed a broken spine caused by blunt force trauma such as a rock or other projectile, possibly from a slingshot. The owl was a female with developing eggs. A male Barred Owl was spotted waiting near the nest tree for the mate that will never return.

A birding group in February discovered a spring-loaded

steel trap with a young raccoon caught in it. In all five traps were found. On that same walk, a dead Wood Duck was found with a gunshot wound in its breast. A week later, a camouflage-dressed man was arrested as he emerged from the woods with a rifle, a duck call and a dead squirrel. The Old Fish Hatchery Nature Area is home to over 200 species of birds and dozens of butterflies, reptiles and mammals. It is a quiet retreat from the bustle of city life.

Vigilance is our best defense. We need to go there in groups, never alone, and keep a sharp eye out for suspicious activity.

Kelly Cotton

OUR BACKYARD NATURE OASIS

Two years ago this July, we moved into our home in North Plano. Our backyard had possibilities – after all it included a large red oak and a good-sized pecan tree. Beneath the red oak and pecan tree were crepe myrtles, which had grown up into the lower branches of the bigger trees. And, under that were stunted hollies and other unidentified shrubs dying of neglect and lack of water. Finally, there was almost no grass in the shaded areas.

We decided that we wanted to replace the backyard shrubs with plants that would be shade and drought tolerant. We also wanted plants that would be attractive for us along with birds and butterflies. Fortunately, we found Shades of Green nursery in Frisco and their personnel understood what we wanted and knew what to recommend.

The following February we took out all of the interfering shrubs when we replaced the backyard fence. The backyard was typical of the area, measuring 37 feet from side to side, and 30 feet from the patio to the back fence. Even though it is on the south side of the house, the bed of shrubs got almost no sun under the red oak. Besides the two large and desirable trees, we also had two elaeagnus bushes in the corners of the backyard. The southwest elaeagnus was big and very healthy, while the one on the southeast corner was in really bad shape. We had to cut that elaeagnus almost to the ground, but suckers have sprouted and it is coming back.

The hardest job was removing the old shrubs, particularly the crepe myrtles. After digging them out, we tilled in ten bags of compost. That job took less than an hour. Then we planted our new shrubs and covered the ground with about 15 bags of hardwood mulch.

For the shaded area, we chose American Beauty Berries to grow onto trellises, Mahonias, Forsythia, Turk's Cap, Coralberries, Pigeon Berries, Columbines, Wood and Wavy ferns, and Horse Herb for ground cover. In the area that gets sunlight we added Coral Honeysuckle and a Wax Myrtle.

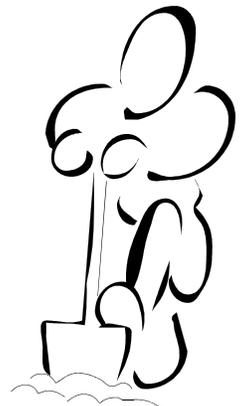
So, how did it all come out? The answer is Great! In the beginning, we watered about as much as normal, but by the middle of August we cut back to watering every fourth day. It seemed like every time we went up to the nursery we brought back two more bags of hardwood mulch. Throughout the summer we were treated to color. Of course, there were the green of the leaves, but there was also the red of the Turk's Cap flowers, the white-pink of the Pigeon Berry flowers, and the yellow of the Horse Herb flowers. Then in the fall it really happened. The American Beauty Berries had bloomed and were bearing fruit. And, as soon as the fruit ripened the mockingbirds would be there devouring it. The bright red berries on the Pigeon Berry looked like little, miniature Christmas trees. In December and January we had the elaeagnus and Coralberries ripen. And finally, in February we had the Mahonias bloom with their berries ripening in early April.

Since putting in our nature oasis, we have seen a red-tailed hawk sitting on our back fence and a female nighthawk make about five attempts to land in our pecan tree. Of course, we have continued to see our neighborhood regulars including a pair of cardinals, several blue jays, morning doves, mockingbirds, house finches and house sparrows.

During the winter we saw dark eyed juncos and white-throated sparrows. And, during the spring migration we saw cedar waxwings and a female yellow-rumped warbler.

We are certain that there have been many more birds, which we have not seen or identified. And, some of those probably were notable. But, if we didn't have a little nature oasis for our common birds, then we feel that there would not be a place for those uncommon visitors.

David Griffith



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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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City _____

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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

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