



Rustlin's

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Citizen Science - Many of you, like me, may have participated in one or more Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) this year. The CBC program has been organized by the National Audubon Society and conducted by volunteers for over 100 years. Nearly 2000 15-mile diameter count circles were staffed last year, covering every state and province of the US and Canada and much of the rest of the western hemisphere. This activity provided invaluable census data for birds, allowing scientists and amateurs alike to understand population trends.

Another such type of "citizen science" is Project Feederwatch of Cornell University. In this program, individual volunteers provide internet reports on the number of birds of each species that visit their backyard feeders during a specified period of time.

There are others ways in which those of us who are not professional Ornithologists can contribute to knowledge on the wellbeing of birds. Reporting rare bird sightings to Audubon chapters or on Texbirds are examples.

Back to the CBCs - I helped with the Caddo Grasslands CBC. The count leader was Dr. Doug Wood, a biology professor at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. I participated on a three-person team and tallied all the birds within a few miles of the Red River northeast of Bonham. This entire count area is rural - farms, very small towns, and national grasslands. It was as great opportunity to see the countryside along with lots of birds. Our highest counting species was the American Robin (not one of the blackbird species as I had expected). A good effort by all teams and a fun time!

Next, by the time you read this, we will have completed the McKinney CBC, a great Heard / PTAS tradition. **Gailon Brehm, President**

MONTHLY CALENDAR

January 25, 2005

**Bird Identification Class - 7:00 p.m. - Sparrows
Monthly Meeting - 7:30 p.m.**

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.

February 22, 2005

**Bird Identification Class - 7:00 p.m. -
Woodpeckers and Woodland Birds**

Monthly Meeting - 7:30 p.m. - Just Ducky!

Members are asked to bring their pictures and slides of ducks. The group will help with identification and talk about location for sightings of ducks. This meeting will be quackers!

March 22, 2005

**Bird Identification Class - 7:00 p.m. -
Monthly Meeting - 7:30 p.m.**

Texas through the Lens

Paul Bozzo of Sixth Day Wildlife Images will be our speaker. Sixth Day Wildlife Images specializes in Texas wildlife photography.

April 26, 2005

**Bird Identification Class - 7:00 p.m.
Monthly Meeting - 7:30 p.m.**

What's Buggin You

Pest Control expert Mr. Michael Bohdan of The Pest Shop will speak on pest control and bird seed - how to make both compatible

May 24, 2005

**Bird Identification Class - 7:00 p.m.
Monthly Meeting - 7:30 p.m.**

Outdoor Learning Center

Vicki Hamrick of the Plano Parks Department will host this meeting which includes dessert, tour of the center and a night walk. The center is located at 2100 Shiloh Road Plano, Texas



What Is Your New Year's Resolution?

Everyone does it – make resolutions and most of the time it is at the beginning of the New Year. Often we target our health, diet, financial matters, meeting new people in our life. Not often do we think about a resolution that will affect our world. The Board of the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society has resolved to discontinue the printing and mailing of over 450 newsletters to its membership. Instead the newsletter will be posted to the web site each month and members have the opportunity to sign up to receive email notification when the newsletter is posted.

This resolution will save over \$1500 in expenses for the year. This money can be applied to such worthwhile projects such as habitat restoration, education and scholarships. In other words we will be putting money where our mouth is. This also aligns us with our mission to which is to conserve native plants and animals and their habitats, protect life from pollution, radiation, and toxic substances, further the wise use of land and water, seek solutions for global problems involving the interaction of population, resources, and the environment, and promote rational strategies for energy development and use, stressing conservation and renewable sources.

If you do not have access to a home computer with internet capability, check out your local library or the local community college. Access to their computers are free (a nominal charge for paper may exist) for residents of the community.

This is one New Year's resolution that **you** can keep! Won't you help us do our part in this conservation effort?

PTAS WEBSITE

<http://prairieandtimbers.org>

Check It Out!

LEARN THE BIRDS AT THE HEARD

Prairie and 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.

LEARN BIRDS FROM THE EXPERTS

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 are bird specimens provided by the Heard Museum and a few recordings of bird sounds. All you need to bring is your favorite field guide.

Did You Know?

Do you know a good place to bird, a good birding book or have you added a bird to your life list? If so, report it to Ann Reynolds, newsletter editor at annmreynolds@earthlink.net and it will be published in the newsletter.

Did you know that back issues of the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society's newsletters for years 2003 and 2004 are now available on the PTAS website, <http://prairieandtimbers.org>

BIRDATHON IS COMING

Question: How can we raise money for Prairie and Timbers Audubon and have fun at the same time?

Answer: The Birdathon! The Birdathon is a fundraising event to support our mission of conservation and education. The Birdathon is a great way to raise money while participating in one of your favorite activities. All you have to do is go to your friends, family, neighbors and co-workers and ask them to sponsor you. Tell them about the birding you plan on doing during April and the need for funds to support the Audubon's mission. Your friends agree to either pay you a lump sum for your sightings or pay you per bird or per species that you see while birding during the month of April. You collect from your friends at the end of the month. All money raised stays with the local chapter. Let's see who can raise the most money and see the most birds! Start planning now those April birding outings and lining up folks to pay for your Sightings. Watch our newsletter and website for further details. **Mike Bedford, Birdathon Chairman**

2005 Field Trip Schedule

Saturday, Jan 22, Richard Graham Park & Greenville Lakes, 8:00am.

LEADER: Ron Baltzegar, leader.

TRIP LENGTH: 1/2 to 3/4 day.

EXPECTED BIRDS: Wintering ducks, raptors, sparrows, other winter visitors

MEETING PLACE: Richard Graham Park in Greenville

TIME: 8:00 a.m.

DIRECTIONS: Take US75 north to US380. Go east on US380 to Greenville. At first light when you get to Greenville, at the intersection of US380 and Hwy 69, go straight on Spur 302, also named Lee St. Go 1.0 mile to the traffic light at Walnut.

Turn left onto Walnut and go 0.9 miles to Richard Graham Park, on the right just after railroad tracks.

CAR POOL: Depart the paint store at 7:00am.

Saturday, Feb 19, Hagerman NWR, 8:00am.

EXPECTED BIRDS: Bald Eagles, Geese, Ducks, and Winter Sparrows.

TRIP LENGTH: 1/2 day at Hagerman, optional lunch at a local restaurant followed by birding in the Denison/Eisenhower Park area.

MEETING PLACE: Hagerman Visitor Center,

TIME: 8:00 a.m.

DIRECTIONS: Drive time is about 1 hour (not counting pit stops or birding along the way). Go north on US 75 to US 82, exit 63, on the north side of Sherman, about 42 miles from Plano. Go to the second red light and turn left. Take the entrance ramp to US 82 west just past the Shell station. Go west on US 82 about 1.5 miles to FM 1417, exit 640. Turn right, north, onto FM 1417 go about 4.1 miles and watch for the brown Hagerman sign. Turn left, west, onto Refuge Rd. and go about 6.4 miles to Refuge Office and Visitor Center.

CAR POOL: Depart the paint store at 7:00am.

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 the chairman: Tom Heath, 972-867-8648 or email at:

heathwtom@netscape.net

Second: Be on time. So be at the location noted.

Don't be late. 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.

Third: Bring water and snacks for yourself.

BANDING AT THE HEARD MUSEUM

The banding team met at the museum on December 9th to check for any wintering prairie birds in three large transects on different areas of the sanctuary. These transects measuring 100 meters by 20 meters were set up four years ago by Dr. Ken Steigman under the direction of Texas Parks and Wildlife's "Project Prairie Bird". Vegetation studies of these areas will be conducted at a later date and more prairie bird checks will be made on the transects in January and February.



To flush the birds from the grassy areas without harming them, three people walk from one end of the transect to the other. The central person is the observer and the other two carry 29 foot long poles (named Brandonizers) that are made of bamboo and PVC. These poles are moved up and down, alternating left and right arms, as the length of the transect is walked. In this manner, the three people can effectively cover the entire 20 meter width of the transect.

December 9th was a beautiful day - sunny and perfect temperature. It was, we thought, a day to see lots of the birds we were looking for. As usual, when birding, great expectations don't often become reality. We did not see one bird fly up.

In research like this, a response of "0" is as good as a large number so it was dutifully recorded. All we can hope is that as winter arrives so will the sparrows, like LeConte's, Savannah, grasshopper, and swamp.

Following the transect check, the team walked the sanctuary to conduct a bird census. 44 species were seen with much activity of several species feeding on juniper berries while woodpeckers and brown creepers fed on insects nearby.

The team hopes to be able to resume activity of the banding station in early spring. One of the team members has applied for a master permit which takes 3 months to obtain. As soon as the permit arrives we will be up and running and hope to have lots of visitors at the station.

Karen White

Notes from the Field

Second Saturday Birdwalk at the Heard, December 11

The following were seen at the Heard Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary: Wood Duck, Gadwall, Mallard, Hooded Merganser, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Killdeer, Ring-Billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Loggerhead Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Blue-bird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal. **Gailon Brehm**

Lake Benbrook, December 11, 2004

A group of 13 birded various locations in Tarrant Co. including Aledo Rd, David Powell's yard, Mosque Point, Cement Creek Lake, Mustang Park and Longhorn Park at Lake Benbrook, and Winscott Plover Rd. We tried Stubbs Ranch, but the entrance was blocked. A total of 93 species were seen.

Highlights included: a Lapland Longspur at Cement Creek Lake in a group of Horned Larks; 4 Red-breasted Mergansers at Lake Worth seen from Mosque Point; 10 Horned and 2 Eared Grebes at Benbrook Lake seen from Mustang Park; 1 Merlin at Mustang Park; 3 Short-eared Owls on Aledo Rd; 1 Blue-headed Vireo at Mosque Point; and 1 Red-breasted nuthatch in David Powell's yard.

Also seen: Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Northern Bobwhite Pied-billed grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested cormorant, Great blue Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-Shoulder Hawk, Red-Tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American coot, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Forster's Tern, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared Dove, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Eastern Screech Owl, Belted kingfisher, Red-bellied woodpecker, Yellow-bellied woodpecker, Ladder-backed woodpecker, Winscott Plover, Downy woodpecker, Northern flicker Eastern Phoebe,

Loggerhead shrike, Blue jay, American crow, Carolina chickadee, Tufted titmouse, Black-crested titmouse, Horned Lark, Carolina wren, Bewick's wren, Ruby-crowned kinglet, Eastern bluebird, American robin, Northern mockingbird, Brown thrasher, European starling, American pipit, Cedar waxwing, Orange-crowned warbler, Yellow-rumped warbler, pine warbler, Spotted towhee, Field sparrow, Vesper sparrow, Savannah sparrow, Le Conte's sparrow, Song sparrow, Swamp sparrow, White-throated sparrow, Harris' sparrow, White-crowned sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged blackbird, Eastern meadowlark, Brewer's blackbird, Great-tailed grackle, Brown-headed cowbird, American goldfinch, House sparrow, and Dark eyed junco. **D. D. Currie Arlington, TX**

Spring Creek Forest Preserve and 111 Ranch Park, October 23, 2004

Fourteen birders from PTAS and Audubon Dallas joined Jack and Derek Hill for a morning of birding in the fields and trails of Spring Creek Forest followed by a walk around 111 Ranch Park. The morning ended with some nice views of Damselflies in the creek. Thanks to Derek Hill for the species list which totaled 45 bird, 9 butterfly and 3 damselfly species. **Tom Heath**

BIRDS (45): Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-romped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Spotted Towhee, Field Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Common Crackle, House Finch.

BUTTERFLIES (9): Dainty Sulfur, Orange Sulfur, Cloudless Sulfur, Pearl Crescent, Question Mark, Monarch, Clouded Skipper, Dun Skipper, Roadside-Skipper.

DAMSELFLIES (3)
Smoky Rubyspot, American Rubyspot, Dusky Dancer. **Derek Hill**

CHAPTER CHATTER

Aflatoxin in Bird Seed Mixes

The following information was prepared for the Wild Bird Feeding Industry by Dr. David Bonter, Project Feeder Watch, Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology. It is reprinted here with Dr. Bonter's permission.

Recent posts to birding listserves across North America have raised concerns about the potential harmful effects of feeding the birds seeds and grains that may be contaminated with aflatoxin. In response to numerous requests, following are some comments on the issue from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT AFLATOXIN?

Aflatoxins are produced by fungi that are common and widespread in nature, *Aspergillus parasiticus* and *A. flavus*. The fungi grow most rapidly in humid environments and can grow on foods stored in damp conditions. Corn and peanuts are more likely affected than other foods commonly provided at feeders. Research conducted by Dr. Scott Henke of Texas A & M University Kingsville found that 17% of the birdseed samples tested in Texas contained relatively large amounts of the toxin. His research further suggests that feeding wild birds foods contaminated with aflatoxin can be harmful.

SHOULD WE STOP FEEDING BIRDS BECAUSE OF THE RISKS POSED BY AFLATOXIN?

While research studying the effects of aflatoxin on free-living birds is scant, evidence suggests that it is not necessary to abandon bird feeding altogether. Data from Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, and Project FeederWatch show that populations of most species that use feeders are stable or increasing. In fact, a number of common feeder species have expanded their geographic range in recent years. An estimated 40-60 million Americans feed birds and have been doing so for decades. If aflatoxin-contaminated seeds were negatively affecting bird populations, we'd see downward trends in counts of our most common feeder visitors.

Providing supplemental food at feeders likely has little effect on bird populations (positive or negative), but the benefits to humans are immeasurable. Feeding birds has enormous educational value, providing humans with a window on the natural world that is important for encouraging people to protect the environment.

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT BIRDS FROM AFLATOXIN AND OTHER DANGERS?

The aflatoxin issue raises the importance of providing a safe environment for birds. You may follow several strategies to improve the safety and health of birds at your feeders:

-Clean your feeders regularly with a 10% bleach, 90% water solution. Allow feeders to dry completely before filling with fresh seed.

-Only provide a limited supply of food at a time (as much as can be consumed in a few days).

-Store seed in a dry place to discourage growth of mold and fungus.

-Discard any seed that has become wet.

-Routinely rake the ground beneath feeders to prevent the build-up of seed hulls and fecal material that could promote growth of bacteria and mold.

- Keep your cats indoors! House cats kill millions of birds each year.

- Avoid window collisions (another source of mortality for millions of birds in the U.S. each year). While data are lacking about which approach is best, streamers and silhouettes likely do not significantly reduce window collisions. We suggest keeping feeders greater than 30 feet from windows (so birds are less likely to see the window as a route through your home). Alternatively, place feeders less than 3 feet from windows so that birds leaving the feeders cannot gain enough momentum to do harm if they hit the window. Consider placing deer netting over particularly problematic windows.

-Provide cover near your feeders so that birds can escape from predators.

If you are concerned about the risks aflatoxin may pose to birds, consider avoiding seed mixes containing corn and peanuts, as the *Aspergillus* fungi are most likely to grow on these food items.

Submitted by Georgette Guernsey

BLOG CREATED FOR URBAN BIRD CONSERVATION

Rob Fergus, Audubon Texas Assembly President, created a blog dedicated to urban bird conservation. Check it out at: urbanbirdscapes.blogspot.com.

He is trying to post topics related to preserving and protecting urban birds, including links to research and successful programs around the country. Hopefully this can become a resource for all of us trying to implement Audubon at Home and protect birds in our backyards.

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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

— Please enroll me as a member of Prairie & Timbers Chapter ONLY. Enclosed is my check for \$12.00 made out to P&T Audubon Society

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

How did you hear about Prairie and Timbers Audubon?

- _____ From a member of Prairie and Timbers Audubon.
- _____ From the Prairie and Timbers Audubon 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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