



Rustlin's

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

March/April 2005

**Extra, Extra !!
Read All About It**

FROM THE PRESIDENT Habitat

As a birder and amateur naturalist, I continually wonder about what habitat should be conserved to help our birds and other wildlife survive and thrive for centuries to come. The more I learn the more I realize that it's a really complicated question. Lots of different kinds of habitat in large amounts would be the best answer, but with the increasing human population and the increasing success of humans at "managing" the natural environment, habitat seems to shrink and get less diverse.

As a birder, I'm amazed at how seemingly similar habitats are favored by different species. Sparrows, many of which winter in our part of Texas, provide an interesting study. Short grass meadows -- Savannah Sparrows; tall grass meadows -- Song Sparrows. Tall grass near water -- swamp sparrows, etc.

I've had friends remark that since I'm a birder I must really love to walk the forests. To many people, birds equate to trees. But of course, that's limited to only a few species. Again, it's not that simple. I like the term biodiversity. That's a fancy way of saying that the abundance of different animals, birds, and plants in different arrangements (habitats) makes for environmental health.

So back to thinking about habitat. What if you own or control some open space, maybe a farm? How should you maintain it for wildlife? Would you just let it be? Would that promote the best wildlife habitat? No, probably not. In this part of Texas, unmaintained land becomes completely overgrown with brush in a few years. That contrasts the natural situation over the last few thousand years when frequent fires created lots of open meadows. As a result, some sort of active maintenance by the landowner will probably be best for wildlife. If you're lucky enough to own some wildlife habitat, please consult a wildlife biologist familiar with your region to develop a maintenance plan.

Gailon Brehm, President

Rustlin's, the PTAS newsletter, will be electronic beginning with the September 2005 issue. There will be no paper newsletters mailed after the May issue.

As a member of PTAS you will receive advance email notification that the newsletter is ready to be viewed on the PTAS web site (www.prairieandtimbers.org). **To receive this notification, please provide your email address to Tom Heath at his email address: heathwtom@netscape.net.**

If you do not have access to a home computer with internet capability or email, check with your local library or community college. Both have computers for community patrons and you can establish a free email account (such as Hotmail) through many of the internet service providers.

By going paperless, PTAS will save over \$1500 in mailing expenses for the year. This money can be applied to such worthwhile projects such as habitat restoration, education and scholarships. This also aligns the chapter 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.

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.



A Birdathon is similar to a walkathon, but with a twist – participants count bird species and collect pledges from friends, family and co-workers. Some people pledge money for each species identified; others donate fixed amounts. So get ready for the Prairie and Timbers Audubon spring migration Birdathon! What better way to see some great birds and raise money for our mission of environmental conservation and education. All you do is line up your sponsors, who will pay you based on how many species you see, then enjoy a great day of birding at High Island, Rio Grande Valley or your own neighborhood. Finally, collect from your sponsors and turn the money in to Prairie and Timbers Audubon.

Choose a weekend in April to conduct your Birdathon. Your choice of locations is as big as the State of Texas. Go individually or as a team. Sponsors can be drawn from your family, friends, workplace, Christmas card list, or other organizations you may belong to.

Pledge forms will be available at the February meeting. Start lining up those sponsors and planning your Birdathon trip soon!

Any guesses who will have the most birds? Could it be Jamie this year?

For more information contact **Mike Bedford** at **214-692-7137**.

MONTHLY CALENDAR

March 22, 2005

Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Hawks
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. - Warblers
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

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

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.



2005 Field Trip Schedule

Saturday, March 12, Arbor Hills Preserve in Plano (the park is located off Parker Rd. just west of Midway)

Time: 8:00-meet in the parking lot

Length: 2-3 hours

Expect to see winter and early spring migrants, hawks, sparrows, resident woodland birds

Leader: Carolyn and Dave Oldham

Saturday, April 23, Prairie Creek Preserve in Richardson

Time: 8:00-meet in parking lot at Lookout and Prairie Creek West

Length: 2-3 hours

Expect to see spring migrants

Leader: Dave and Carolyn Oldham

Saturday, May 7, Arapaho Park and Prairie Creek Park

Time: 8:00 meet at Arapaho Park

Length: 3-4 hours

Expect to see spring migrants- warblers, vireos, etc.

Leader: Dave and Carolyn Oldham

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.

Notes from the Field

Greenville City Lakes - 01/22/05

It seems that regardless of when a trip is scheduled for the Greenville City Lakes, nature throws us a curve ball. Last year on the scheduled trip day we were snowed out with over an inch of snow on Valentine's Day. This year was no exception as we experienced sustained winds of 20 MPH with gusts of over 40 MPH with temperatures in the low 40s.

In spite of the adverse conditions, 20 PTAS members and guests braved the weather and birded the Greenville Lakes and vicinity.

We started the day in search of Smith's Longspurs, but in the high winds we were unable to add them to the day list. We flushed numerous Horned Larks, but were unable to positively find and ID the Smith's Longspurs. Although they were heard when we first entered the field, we were not able to locate and flush the flock that had been seen and monitored for a couple of weeks prior to the trip.

We then proceeded to Jennifer Maxwell's well-managed back yard habitat where we had a little better luck. Jennifer wasn't able to make the trip, but graciously allowed us to bird her property. We were able to get great looks at male and female Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, lots of American Goldfinches, and Song, Field, Fox, White-throated, Savannah, and LeConte's Sparrows. We had a total of 38 species at Jennifer's place and really appreciated the opportunity to bird her very special property.

We proceeded on to the Greenville City Lakes where despite the extremely high winds; we were able to tally Horned Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-breasted Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Great Blue Heron Forster's Tern, and Ring-billed Gull. Overhead we had Red-tailed Hawk, Red Shouldered Hawk, Northern Harrier and American Kestrel. We missed the winter resident Bald Eagle, although it was seen the following day and again the following Saturday.

We tallied a total of 58 species for the day, which wasn't bad for the conditions in which we were birding. Maybe we'll have better luck with the weather next year.

Ron Baltzegar, Greenville TX

BANDING AT THE HEARD

Banding is back at the Heard! The following report was submitted.

Net open time: 7:30

Net close time: 11:30

Number of Nets: 15

Banders Present: Sandy Polcyn, Jennifer Maxwell, Judy Woods, Barbara Hyink, Chuck Jones, Karen White, Roger Sanderson

Birds Banded

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet - 3
American Robin - 1
Northern Mockingbird - 1
Brown Thrasher - 2
Myrtle Warbler - 1
Song Sparrow - 1
Swamp Sparrow - 2
White-throated Sparrow - 1
Northern Cardinal - 2

Recaptures

Carolina Chickadee - 2
Carolina Wren - 1
Song Sparrow - 1
Swamp Sparrow - 1
Northern Cardinal - 6

Escapes

Northern Cardinal - 1

Birds seen or heard on sanctuary

Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Canada Goose
American Woodcock
Mourning Dove
Belted Kingfisher
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Yellow-shafted Flicker
Eastern Phoebe
Blue Jay
American Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Eastern Tufted Titmouse
Carolina Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin

Northern Mockingbird
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Song sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Harris Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Rusty Blackbird
Great-tailed Grackle

CHAPTER CHATTER

My Favorite Bird

Most of you who know me would think I'd be writing about a raptor. Since I really do like raptors, I thought so as well, but I just couldn't focus on a specific one, probably because I haven't seen one that really got my attention recently. So -- guess what? My favorite bird is the Varied Thrush. Its color is a delicate combination of orange and black. It's elusive and a treat to see. Twice, I've seen Varied Thrushes, both times near the northern coast of Oregon. The last time was this February. I was driving along a park road near the mouth of the Columbia river when alongside the road in the predawn light was a flock of birds on the ground. I stopped to check them out. From the size and habit, I was thinking of large sparrows or robins, but when I got my binoculars focused, Wow! Orange with a black necklace -- Varied Thrush. Best bird of the trip! **Gailon Brehm**



For my favorite bird I would pick the Carolina Wren, mainly because he is such an incredible songster, and he sings all year-long even when everybody else has quit singing. He seems to sing for the pure joy of it. In addition, they are cute, playful little birds, and their rich golden brown color is quite beautiful. **Mike Mizell**



One of my favorite birds is the Greater Yellowlegs. First of all, it is a shorebird I can usually identify! Second it is large and does not hide in the brush, and third it has a wonderful ringing and mellow tu-tu-tu call. Most of all perhaps is its spectacular long bill and subtly beautiful mottled coloration.

Sid Dunkle



My favorite bird is the Scarlet McCaw. It is large and has 5 bright brilliant colors. It is also noisy.

Don Purinton

I like the kites. Like a cross between a flycatcher and a hawk, they seem so delicate and gentle, flying with such grace yet with such acrobatics.

Additionally, it is such a rare treat to see one since they never appear common, at least around here. Mississippi kites occasionally appear here every year, but always are a pleasant surprise! I have seen the white tail kites in California, but last spring while down at Sea Rim State Park after a sleepless night of fighting mosquitoes we couldn't keep out of our camper, I had at first light gone to lay down on a bench on the beach (the mosquitoes seemed not to like it there). I was lying on my back and when I opened my eyes I was staring at a white tailed kite staring down on me! What a thrilling reward for one of the worst nights I've ever known. I have never seen the swallow-tailed kite or a snail kite but am really looking forward to that day!

Roger Sanderson

I don't know why, but for as long as I can remember, my favorite bird has been the bald eagle. It is a majestic bird that connotes a stately, elegant presence to me. **Kirk Miller**

The Sandhill Crane is my favorite, as it is my "hook bird", the one responsible for my eventually becoming a birder. It is the first bird I took a special trip to see; a drive out to Muleshoe NWR in the Texas panhandle, where they spend the winter. I had read an article about them, and wanted to see for myself what these tall birds would look like. I heard them before seeing them - a dry, rattling sound that raised my eyes high to a circling flock of hundreds of cranes. I believe that once you hear the distinctive call of the Sandhill Crane, you will never forget it. To me, it is the true "call of the wild".

Jerri Kerr

The Downy Woodpecker is my favorite bird because of its habits and personality. A pair has nested in my yard for at least five years. I do not know the exact location of the nest cavity, but it is in one of the large pecan trees on the East side of my house. They are year round residents, very visible in the winter as they visit the suet and peanut feeders separately. In the summer, they are busy finding food for their chicks throughout the yard and the woods nearby. They make many trips back and forth, passing each other with insects, grubs, berries, and suet. In the fall they are busy hunting insects for themselves and are usually seen separately. In the spring, the actions really heats up, as the female Downy defends her nesting territory. If another female enters the territory, she will confront the intruder, and they do battle, with the male as a passive onlooker. The females dance back and forth on a tree branch until one pounces on the other. They battle with beak, talons and beating wings, often tumbling to the ground. The struggle goes on, off and on, sometimes for hours until one gives up and leaves. To the victor goes the territory and the male. These little Amazons are fierce in defense of nesting rights. I like to think that my yard is a much sought after territory due to the fine buffet of home made gorp and peanuts served year round, the sources of fresh water, and the many nesting sites in the trees. **Bonnie Campion**



Commonly known as the "American Dipper Bird", the Water Ouzel has an odd but adorable round body shape. These birds have curious habits, and are truly amusing to observe. The antics of the American Dipper caught my eye while on a visit to Colorado. We were hiking along a stream and saw this bird doing somersaults in the flowing water. What a cutie he was with his little dark gray wet suit on. His feet are webbed too! These birds dive under the water, and use their wings to "fly" underwater. American Dipper Birds may even walk along the bottom of a stream, pecking at the floor as though they were pecking on soil above ground. This characteristic "knee bend" movement that dips the bird's body up and down has helped give the Dipper Bird its name. **Ann Reynolds**

So it seems, just as no two birders are alike so are their tastes in favorite birds!!!

PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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- Regional Delegate:** Reba Collins
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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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