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*Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society*

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*March / April 2006*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Birdathon!

Again this year our chapter will be conducting a birdathon during April. You should plan to participate. The approach is simple – you plan a birding outing, line up some sponsors, and go see the birds. After it's all done, Mike Bedford will ask you to fill out a very short form, turn in all the money you raised, and bask in the glory. The money goes for a good cause -- support of education and conservation activities of this chapter -- and you get to challenge yourself to be a little better birder.

Some people don't feel comfortable asking for sponsors, so they self-sponsor their own birdathon. (Some have even listed their grandchildren as sponsors!) Any way you like, it's great to participate. Think about some place you might not go or some bird you haven't seen in a long time, plan a birding trip for that purpose, set yourself a tough goal, and base your birdathon on achieving that goal. When you are done and have achieved success, the reward for you will be satisfaction and the ability to provide financial support to the chapter.

Remember, April is time for our Birdathon!

Gailon Brehm, President

PTAS WEBSITE  
<http://prairieandtimbers.org>  
Check It Out!

### March, April, and May Field Trips

**March 18:** We will meet at the entrance to Lake Tawakoni State Park at 8:00am. Richard Kinney is the field trip leader. Our target birds are late wintering birds and early spring migrants. The trip will last 3/4 of the day. Bring snacks, water, and a lunch. Carpooling will be available from Kohl's in McKinney at 6:00am.

**April 15:** Spring migrant field trip and Bunting Walk at the Education Building at Cedar Ridge Preserve, 7171 Mountain Creek Parkway in Dallas. Marcy Brown Marsden is the leader for this field trip, which will last approximately 2 hours. We will walk Cattail Pond trail to look for common spring residents such as White-eyed Vireo. We will take a brief walk to search for some spring warblers at the entrance to Cedar Break Trail and from our observation tower. We will then walk down the escarpment to view Painted and Indigo Buntings and search for flycatchers on Escarpment Trail, and briefly visit some of the Black-capped Vireo restoration areas at the preserve.

Cedar Ridge Preserve covers 633 acres on the White Rock Escarpment, and contains 10 miles of scenic hiking trails. CRP has been managed by Audubon Dallas since 2003 under charter from the City of Dallas and the Dallas County Open Space Program. Carpooling will be available from Kohl's at 6:30am.

**May 6:** Prairie Creek Park and Arapaho Park

Warblers, Warblers and Warblers are expected. Carolyn and Dave Oldham will be are leaders. Start time 7:30am at Prairie Creek Park. Carpooling will be available from Kohl's at 7am.

**May 13:** Fox Creek Greenbelt, and Central Park in Lewisville followed by a side trip to LLELA if time permits. This trip will be easy walking and handicapped accessible for those who stay on the sidewalk and do not wish to walk on the trails down by the creek. A sampling of sightings from 2005 is still up on the web page for reference. Planned start time is 7:30am. Directions to this site may be found at <http://www.duhons.net/FoxCreek.htm>. Parking is available in three cul-de-sacs at various points along the greenbelt.

### **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 7:00pm just prior to the chapter meetings which are at 7:30pm. Gailon Brehm 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.

#### **Bird Identification Class Schedule 2005/2006**

March: Hawks

April: Warblers

May: No Class – Outdoor Learning Center

### **Upcoming PTAS Programs**

#### **March 28, 2006: Bonnie Bradshaw – “Backyard Wildlife: The Dos and Don’ts of Sharing your Habitat”**

Learn what to do if you find an orphaned or injured bird or other wild animal. Find out ways to prevent some of the most common wildlife conflict situations, such as squirrels in attics, ducks in swimming pools, and skunks under decks.

Ms. Bradshaw is a wildlife rehabilitator and member of the DFW Wildlife Coalition, a native Texan, a certified Texas Master Naturalist, and the public relations coordinator at Texas Discovery Gardens in Fair Park.

Bonnie Bradshaw - Texas Discovery Gardens  
3717 Atrium Dr.; Plano, Texas 75075  
972 743 7737

#### **April 25, 2006: Mark Klym - “Chasing Hummingbirds across Texas”**

Another informative presentation of some of the wonderful birds found in our state. The ‘hummers’ have been found to do some unusual antics, have done some habitat adjusting, and have been seen at new sites in the past years.

Mark Klym - Texas Parks and Wildlife Information Specialist  
4220 Smith School Road; Austin, Texas 78744  
512 389 4644

#### **May 23, 2006: “Indoors and Outdoors”**

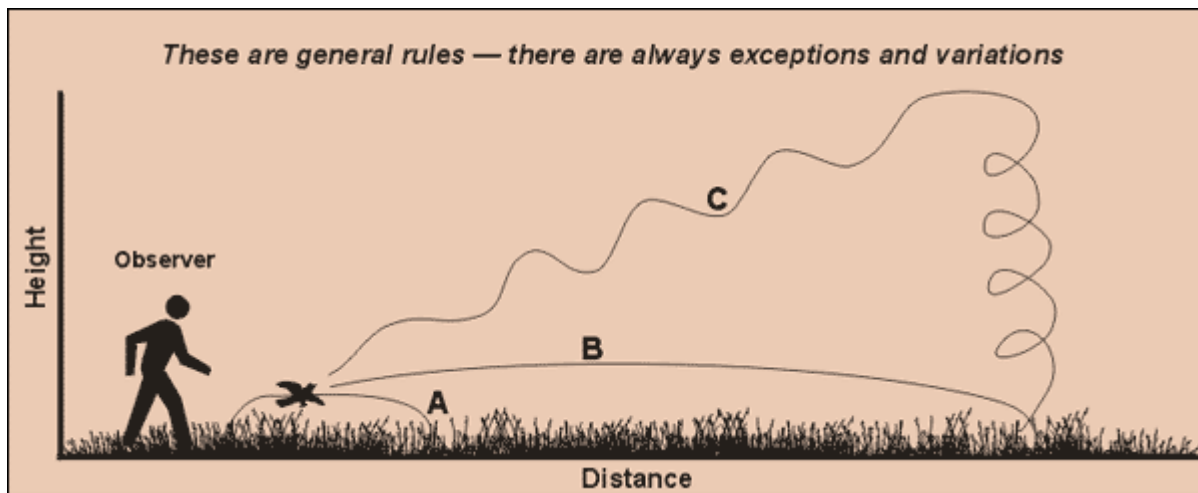
We have once again been invited to the Plano Independent School District’s Outdoor Learning Center to visit with the many animals housed there for instructional purposes and to walk the woods in the dark listening to sounds and feeling the peaceful quiet of night.

### **April Birdathon**

How can we raise money for PTAS and have fun at the same time?

The Birdathon! The Birdathon is a fundraising event to support our mission of conservation and education. You can 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. You can go to our website at <http://prairieandtimbers.org> and download the sponsor pledge sheet and find more information.



### Identifying Sparrow Flight Patterns

Flight paths with notes on appearances (*jizz*) as seen from above (dorsal and posterior views):

#### **A. Appears to be a weak flyer; typically makes short, laborious flights**

1. Dark above; crash landing = SEWR (Sedge Wren)
2. Pale buffy-yellow above = LCSP (LeConte's Sparrow)
3. Reddish-rust above = HESP (Henslow's Sparrow)

#### **B. Appears to be a strong flyer; typically makes long, hurried flights**

1. Flies low and straight; appears very gray; usually lands in a shrub or other perch where it sits up and looks back at you = SAVS (Savannah Sparrow)
2. Flies low to medium height with flashes of white from outer tail; appears very gray = VESP (Vesper Sparrow)
3. Appears a very rich buff color = GRSP (Grasshopper Sparrow)
4. In pineywoods; appears long-tailed and buffy = BACS (Bachman's Sparrow)
5. In wet grass/reeds:
  - Appears orange-headed = NSTS (Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow);
  - Appears dark with rapid wing beats; typically peers back at you once it lands = SESP (Seaside Sparrow)
6. Dark, long-tailed birds typically in shrubby areas where they like to perch in a shrub after being flushed:

- LISP (Lincoln's Sparrow)
- Larger and plumper = SOS (Song Sparrow)
- Reddish wings = SWSP (Swamp Sparrow)
- Weak flight; stays hidden = HOWR (House Wren)
- Flocking = FISP (Field Sparrow)

#### **C. Stair-steps high then drops to the ground = SPPI (Sprague's Pipit)**

#### **D. Other?**

1. White outer tail?  
Try VESP (Vesper Sparrow); HOLA (Horned Lark); either of the pipits or either of the meadowlarks
2. Flock of larger, plump-bodied birds?  
Try NOBO (Northern Bobwhite) or either meadowlark
3. Flock in pineywoods of small, rufous-capped birds?  
Try CHSP (Chipping Sparrow)

**SEE YOUR ADVERTISEMENT HERE!**  
Do you know someone that would like to advertise in the PTAS newsletter?  
Your business card, coupon, or graphic can be seen by fellow birders for a cost much lower than traditional advertising. Please contact [Rebecca.Hughes@eds.com](mailto:Rebecca.Hughes@eds.com) to place your ad in our next newsletter. Prices start at \$65 for one year of advertising.

## Bobcat Sighting!

Counting birds out our kitchen window on February 18 for the Great Backyard Bird Count yielded something quite surprising – a pair of bobcats. The first one appeared at 9:30am, casually sauntering across the deck. The second one walked in from stage left, greeting the other with sort of a high-five and a growl. For 30 minutes, we watched them lounge on the deck and react to every movement with their piercing eyes. They didn't seem to be hunting for food but rather just checking things out in the neighborhood. Finally, one walked through the wrought iron fence while the other hopped effortlessly over it, disappearing into the woods. We're listing them as "others" on the bird tally sheet! Life is good.

Carolyn and Dave Oldham

## Field Trip – January 21, 2006 Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois Unit

Fifteen birders attended the field trip. A cold front had come through the day before the trip, so the first hour along the trail at Elm Fork Park was quiet. Don Whited helped fill in the time with a talk about the park. Once we arrived at Lake Ray Roberts in the sheltered coves, the birding picked up.



Savannah Sparrow

Gailon Brehm flushed a covey of Bobwhites that are in the park year around. We were able to observe Wilson's Snipe and Greater Yellowlegs closely. At the picnic area a Pine Warbler, Brown Creepers, and Golden-crowned Kinglets were spotted. A first year Herring Gull flew past for all to see. It was surprising how big this bird can be. A Common Loon in basic plumage was also seen. Our trip ended with a short drive on park prairie to another cove. Those in the first car were treated to a Greater Roadrunner sprinting away from the path. Several species of water birds were seen at this location. In total, despite the cold weather, 56 species were seen.

Georgette Guernsey

## Trip List:

Common Loon	Eastern Phoebe
Horned Grebe	Loggerhead Shrike
Pied-billed Grebe	Blue Jay
Double-crested Cormorant	American Crow
Great Blue Heron	Tufted Titmouse
Mallard	Carolina Chickadee
Gadwall	Brown Creeper
American Wigeon	Carolina Wren
Northern Shoveler	Marsh Wren
Ring-necked Duck	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Turkey Vulture	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Black Vulture	Eastern Bluebird
Red-shouldered Hawk	Northern Mockingbird
Red-tailed Hawk	Brown Thrasher
Northern Bobwhite	American Pipit
American Coot	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Killdeer	Pine Warbler
Greater Yellowlegs	Northern Cardinal
Wilson's Snipe	Field Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull	Savannah Sparrow
Herring Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Forster's Tern	White-crowned Sparrow
Mourning Dove	Fox Sparrow
Greater Roadrunner	Song Sparrow
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Eastern Meadowlark
Downy Woodpecker	Red-winged Blackbird
Northern Flicker	American Goldfinch

Other birds seen traveling to Isle du Bois: Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, European Starling, Great-tailed Grackle



Cooper's Hawk, seen by Tom Heath

**Second Saturday Walk at Heard  
January 14, 2006**

Four ladies from Richardson attended the trip. Due to warm weather and quiet winds we were able to get good looks at the birds in the sanctuary. The sparrows were plentiful and cooperative. All four were beginning bird watchers, so we spent time looking at the field marks. This gave them time to learn the birds. Each saw several "life" birds. Thirty-eight species were seen over a two and a half hour time period.



American Robin

Trip List:

- |                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Red-tailed Hawk          | American Robin         |
| Cooper's Hawk            | Northern Mockingbird   |
| Killdeer                 | Brown Thrasher         |
| Mourning Dove            | European Starling      |
| Red-headed Woodpecker    | Cedar Waxwings         |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker   | Yellow-rumped Warbler  |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | Northern Cardinal      |
| Downy Woodpecker         | Field Sparrow          |
| Northern Flicker         | Savannah Sparrow       |
| Blue Jay                 | Harris's Sparrow       |
| American Crow            | White-throated Sparrow |
| Tufted Titmouse          | White-crowned Sparrow  |
| Carolina Chickadee       | Fox Sparrow            |
| Brown Creeper            | Song Sparrow           |
| Carolina Wren            | Lincoln's Sparrow      |
| Winter Wren              | Dark-eyed Junco        |
| Ruby-crowned Kinglet     | Red-winged Blackbird   |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet   | House Finch            |
| Eastern Bluebird         | American Goldfinch     |

**Heard Birding Notes -  
Mid December through End of February**

With the drought having dried up the impoundments, there are few water birds at the sanctuary. On February 22, a skein of Snow Geese were observed

flying north. The same day, twelve Green-winged Teal spent the day before leaving for their nesting grounds.



Gray Squirrel

Wood Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and Great Blue Herons are still present. Four pairs of Great Blue Herons are currently building nests in a large sycamore tree along Wilson's Creek. Two Red-shouldered Hawks are now defending their territory against others of their species. The staff was treated to a visit by two Bald Eagles in late January. This is only the second time they have been seen at the sanctuary. A Red-headed Woodpecker wintered over.



Barred Owl

This has happened only 5 times in the past 24 years. Northern Flickers are numerous. Brown Creepers, Winter Wrens, and sparrows are seen easily along the new boardwalk that is now open to the public. Golden-crowned Kinglets are more numerous than Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Eastern Bluebirds are in their brightest blue feathers now and calling for a mate. American Crows have reestablished their family group. Two parents and three former offspring are now guarding the nest near the impoundment. Once the eggs hatch, all will help raise the newest brood. The sparrows are plentiful. The best places to look for them are along the hedge row next to the golf course and by the boardwalk. Sparrows present are Field, LeConte's, Savannah, Harris's, White-throated, White-crowned, Fox, Song, Lincoln's, Swamp, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Rusty Blackbirds have been more plentiful this year with as many as twelve being seen at one time. When I take the weekly census, I see an average 44 species per trip. The wintering birds are starting to leave at this time. Take some time and bird along the paths

at Heard to see our winter guests and watch for spring arrivals.

Georgette Guernsey

### News from the Heard Banding Team

Interesting recent activities of the Heard banding team, led by Sandy Polcyn:

One very cold night some of the team members waited in the dark with 6 nets open and audio cassettes hung in nearby trees playing screech owl calls. On the final check of the nets, close to ten o'clock, a beautiful red phase screech owl was found in a net, banded, posed for photos, and then released.

On two mornings in January and February, with help from several volunteers, wintering sparrows were located in three of the sanctuary prairies, trapped in mist nets, banded, and released. Song sparrows were the predominant species in the area near the Science Center, with LeConte's and Savannahs found in the bottom land prairies.

The team has also been digging through old photos and reports to assist the museum staff with the new birding exhibit. The display is scheduled to open in late March and should be of interest to everyone. The display will feature birding on the sanctuary, the Christmas counts, the bird box program, and banding.

The team will continue sending feathers to UCLA for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Genetics Project, which is investigating the DNA in migrating populations of birds to match populations in both their breeding and wintering grounds. Through this program, they should be able to study declining populations year-round and identify / reverse the causes behind the declines.

The team has also been invited to join a new project that will involve taking swab samples from migratory birds to check for avian flu. Samples will be sent to UCLA for a study in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University, giving the banding team

# WILD BIRD CENTER

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940 / 484-BIRD [2473]

[www.WildBird.com/Denton](http://www.WildBird.com/Denton)

**High quality birdseed, feeders, birdhouses, CDs, books, binoculars, idea exchange and local advice**

an opportunity to provide an important public service. Protocol is being established and banders will be trained in proper procedures.

Migration banding begins in early March, and the team will continue to have demonstrations for the PTAS second Saturday birdwalks.

Volunteers are always welcome. Call Sandy Polcyn for more information. 972-727-8227

Karen White

### The Heard Wetlands Boardwalk Loop Trail

To get to the new trail walk out the Bluestem Trail to Bullfrog Pond, look for a new trail map at the visitor center. Just before reaching Bullfrog Pond, turn right onto the new trail. It is still under



construction in several places. Once you cross the road and are up on the new boardwalk, watch for the PTAS plaque. Through the



generosity of a number of our members, PTAS funded part of the building materials and sponsored Eagle Scout Billy Collins, who constructed part of the boardwalk.



The wetland is a “dryland” until Wilson Creek floods again. But that just means you can stand on the boardwalk and watch sparrows and woodpeckers instead of wading birds and ducks. There are a couple of places to sit and watch birds or just enjoy the view.

After passing through the wetlands, the trail takes you along the edge of the prairie, then bends around to cross the creek that feeds Bullfrog Pond. The trail ends back where you started at the boardwalk leading to Bullfrog Pond. The total round trip distance from the visitor center is about 1 mile.



Bullfrog Creek Pond



Morning on the Sycamore Trail

**Note: If you would like to receive email notifications when the newsletters are available, or to update your email address, please contact Merrick Darley at [hmdarley@comcast.net](mailto:hmdarley@comcast.net).**

**PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Officers, Chairpersons and Board Members**

- President:** *Gailon Brehm\**..... 972-517-2542
- Vice President:** *Open*
- Secretary:** *Paula Brehm\** ..... 972-517-2542
- Treasurer:** *Mike Mizell\**..... 940-382-8551
- Birdathon:** *Mike Bedford\**.....214-692-7137
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- Georgette Guernsey\**..... 972-542-8089
- Newsletter:** *Rebecca Hughes*..... 972-747-5111
- Field Trips:** *Georgette Guernsey\**..... 972-542-8089
- Tom Heath\**.....972-867-8646
- Education:** *Gailon Brehm\**..... 972-517-2542
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- Willie Meyers*.....972-596-3827
- Publicity:** *David Van Winkle\**.....972-562-7174
- Bobette Mauck\**..... 972-540-5646
- Regional Delegate:** *Reba Collins*
- \* Board Members*

**Membership Application**

I would like to be a member of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society (PTAS), knowing that my annual membership dues will be used to support local bird-related projects and habitats. Enclosed is my check for \$12 (includes all family members at a single address) made out to: **PTAS**. PTAS is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization; your membership fee and any donations made to PTAS are tax deductible.

I would also like to support the National Audubon Society, where my annual membership dues will be used nationally and globally. Enclosed is my check for the special new-member introductory price of \$20, made out to: **National Audubon Society**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

(E-mail addresses are used to notify members of updated website newsletters, upcoming field trips, and important local bird-related issues. E-mail addresses are NOT shared with, or forwarded to, any other source.)

**How did you hear about Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society?**

- From a member of PTAS
- From the PTAS website
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:** Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society  
c/o Mike Mizell, 800 Edgewood, Denton, TX 76201

**Audubon code:** 7XCH

**PTAS Chapter Code:** W15