



# Rustlin's

*Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society*

**Oct/Nov 2007**

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

## ***Donate -***

It's against my nature to ask, but the reality is that our chapter needs money. This is true of all nature-oriented non-profits; so you probably get lots of requests to donate. From PTAS you should receive a mailing during November that requests your annual donation. Please respond as generously as you can. And if you don't get the letter, just go to the back page of this newsletter for the address for your check. We don't take credit cards, but cash or checks work just fine!

Why should you donate? It's all about wildlife habitat. With the human population growth in the world compounded by the increase in wealth, wildlife habit is rapidly being converted either into large, clean farms or urban areas. I think you should focus your donations on either maintaining already preserved habitat or on preserving more. Organizations, like PTAS, that do one of those two things deserve your attention.

A word about maintenance. Open areas don't just return to their natural state when they are abandoned. Many of the prehistoric forces, like fire and millions of grazing animals are no longer present. Today's alternative is to actively maintain wildlife preserves. That activity, like at the Heard Museum, requires funding. Given proper restoration and maintenance, excellent habitat for a diversity of species can be preserved.

At PTAS our operational expenses are very low; so almost everything you give will go to improving habitat. Please send us a check!

Gailon Brehm, President

## ***Upcoming PTAS Program***

**Tuesday, Nov 27: "Prairie Management for Avian Species" by Heather McWilliams.**

Heather McWilliams, currently doing research work on Prairie Management in South Dakota, will give a general overview on prairie management for avian species.

**Tuesday, Feb 26, 2008: "It's For the Birds" by Marc M. Friedland.**

Marc M. Friedland, one of the long-term members of the Heard Nature Photographers Club since the 1980's, will be presenting his digital slide show at our February 26th meeting. You will not only experience the beauty and artistry of his bird photography, but also Marc will show you the actual equipment setup he uses to capture the images and he will explain *how* he does what he does. You won't want to miss this meeting.

Marc's Slide Presentation features both classical music selections and unique slide transitions. The bird images span numerous locations including the San Diego/La Jolla area, the Upper and Lower Coast of Texas, the Ft. Worth Botanical Garden/Japanese Garden, the Southwestern Medical School Rookery, the Dallas Aquarium, White Rock Lake, his own backyard, Oklahoma City and several areas in Florida including the St. Augustine Alligator Farm/Rookery, Venice Rookery, Cape Coral, Marco Island, Corkscrew Swamp and Sarasota/Ft. DeSoto Park. Join us at our February meeting.

## ***Field Trips***

Check website field trip page for updates

**Sunday, Dec 16:** White Rock Lake Fish Hatchery, 8:00am Leader: Chris Runk. Meet at the parking lot (dirt) on Winstead just off Garland Road .

**Sat, Dec 8:** 2nd Saturday at the Heard Bird Walk. 9:00 am. Leader: Gailon Brehm

*Sat, Jan. 19:* Rowlett Greenbelt, Rowlett Trail & Springfield Park Woods, Start at 8:00 am.  
Leaders: Carla Morey & Jerri Kerr

*Sat, Jan. 26:* Heard Museum Gailon Brehm  
Start at 8:00 am  
Leader: Gailon Brehm

*Sat, Feb. 2:* Southside Water Treatment Plant Start at 7:00 am  
Leader: Bob Stone  
Check website field trip page for registration requirements.

*Sat, Feb. 16:* Hagerman NWR  
Start at 8:00 am.  
Leaders: Karl Haller/Thomas Riecke

## ***Kingfishers***

Out of the 3 species of Kingfishers, we see the Belted Kingfisher here in North Central Texas and it is the only kingfisher seen north of Texas & Arizona.

They are fish-eating birds that look for food while perched over water on tree branches or wires and are sometimes seen hovering over water. Kingfishers and terns are the only small bird which plunge-dives headfirst into the water in pursuit of their food.

Sometimes they will eat small frogs and insects for some variance in their diet. If you've ever seen a kingfisher catch and eat its' prey, you'll understand why their head seems much larger than their body while they pound it on a branch to kill it; then eat it whole.

They have large heads with a shaggy-crested appearance and long, heavy bills, short tails and legs. They are approximately 12" with a 20" wingspan. Their flight is deep, irregular and "pumping" in style. Often you'll hear them in flight before seeing them with their rattling call.

This is one of the few species that the female is more colorful than the male; she has a rust-colored belly band in addition to the markings of the male: a dark blue-gray head, back and chest band with white around the neck and belly.

They are solitary birds which defend their territory against one another, the males and females coming together only to breed. They dig a burrow nest into a sandy bank near water which can extend up to 8'. They lay 5-8 white eggs, incubate for around 23 days



Male Kingfisher

Photo by: Gus Stangeland

and fledge in about the same time length.

Belted Kingfishers are found here in North Central Texas year round. So next time you're birding near water, keep your eyes and binos focused along the banks for these handsome birds.

-Karen Carbiener

## ***Join The Board***

At the October board meeting a nomination committee was formed to find candidates for the PTSA board. Four positions will be elected at the February monthly meeting including Treasurer. The nomination committee consists of Gailon Brehm, Paula Brehm, Carolyn Oldham, and Jerri Kerr. If you would like to be on the board, talk to one of committee members above about the position.

## ***Opportunities to Make a Difference to North Texas Wildlife***

If you are interested in becoming more active in supporting PTAS activities to help the birds of North Central Texas, there are numerous opportunities available. Additional chairpersons are needed for birdathon, fundraising, newsletter, membership, and programs. Chairpersons attend and participate in board meetings. Please contact our President Gailon Brehm, 972-517-2542, g-brehm@msn.com

## ***The Christmas Bird Count – It's Fun***

The McKinney CBC will be held on December 26th at the Heard again this year. I strongly encourage you to participate. All adults and older children are welcome. Those with good birding skills may be asked to lead teams and those with little or no birding expertise will accompany them as spotters and recorders. It's a great way to do something meaningful and learn as you go.

The CBC really is fun. It's a great way to get out and walk off the big dinner. It's a great way to hone your birding skills. It's a great way to feel useful. It may even be a good chance to prove your ability to function in some really nasty weather! Who knows – just join us.

Get out there!

Gailon Brehm

## ***HERMAN BAKER PARK TRAIL/PICKENS LAKE AND HAGERMAN NWR Field Trip Report***

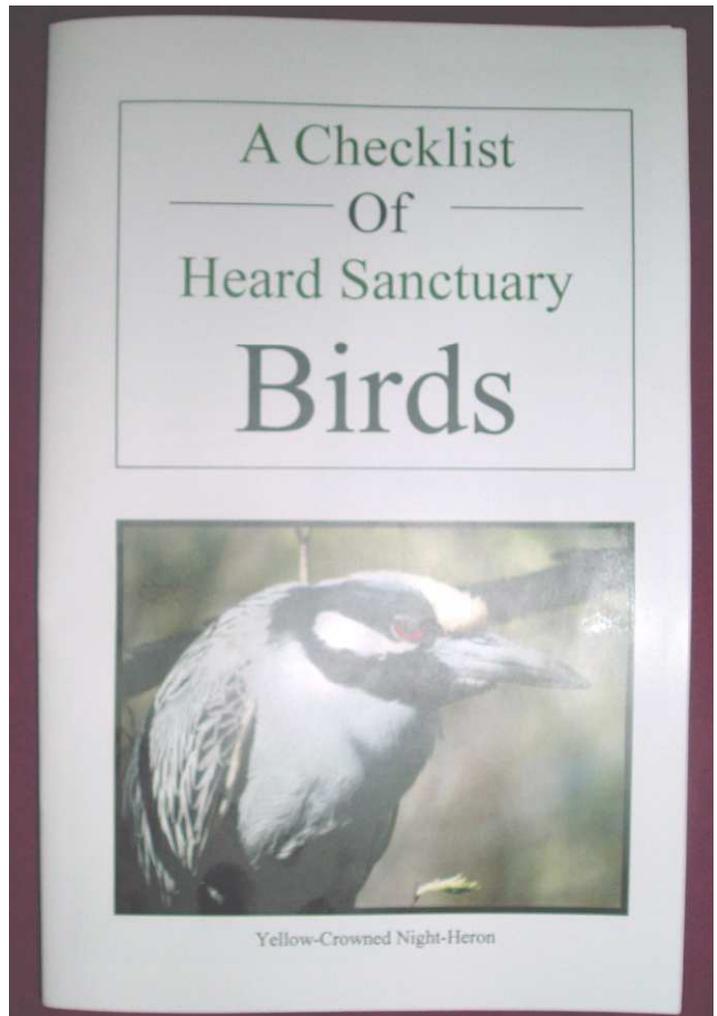
On October 20<sup>th</sup>, 7 birders met at Herman Baker Park Trail in Sherman to see what avian specialties fall had brought so far. We came away with 19 varieties and a family of coyotes was heard nearby.

After our loop around the lake we caravanned up to Hagerman NWR to find 22 species. It was a bit early for some wintering birds, but we managed to see a Vesper Sparrow, Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teal, Yellowlegs, Gadwall, American Avocets, Redheads and a few Greater White-fronted Geese. No Ross's or Snow's yet.

Thanks go out to Gailon Brehm, our field trip leader for the day!

Please join us on our next field trip excursion to Spring Creek Preserve, then on over to 111 Ranch, both in Garland on Saturday, November 17<sup>th</sup>.

Karen Carbiener



## ***PTAS Provides Funds For Publishing Heard Bird Checklist***

At the October meeting of the board, funds for publishing a checklist of Heard Sanctuary Birds were approved. The records from bird banding, nest box monitoring, migration census reports, historic sanctuary manager notes and Christmas bird counts have been used to create this updated bird checklist. Thus it results from many years of work of numerous groups and people.

A total of 233 species are listed complete with abundance and habitat information following the order of American Ornithologist's Union's Check-list of North American Birds.

It is now available at the Heard Museum's Nature Store so check it out.



Hog Island Camp

## *Leadership Week at Hog Island*

In late August, my father and I spent a week at historic Hog Island Audubon Camp in Muscongus Bay off the coast of Maine. Hog Island is part of the Todd Audubon Sanctuary and has been offering camps for adults and youth since 1936. A variety of camps are offered throughout the summer including field ornithology, family camp, naturalizing by kayak, and workshops for both educators and leaders. My dad suggested attending the leadership camp as a way to develop and hone the skills needed in his role as Vice President of Prairies and Timbers Audubon. I was happy to tag along for the nature, the birds, the food, and of course some interesting and useful information on leadership and Audubon.

The camp did not disappoint. The island is only a short boat ride from the coast but feels wonderfully isolated. The 330 acres consist primarily of undisturbed mature spruce forests with a few fern-filled meadows. Campers eat, sleep, and meet in the rustic and authentic buildings. A warning to those who like to travel in luxury: as one might expect from a historic camp, the rooms are quite small with common bathrooms. The food, however, is fabulous! The camp chef is a master of making the most of every dish and much of our conversations revolved around the menu for the next meal.

The programs and speakers provided for leadership week were also top notch. Many of the speakers were National Audubon staff members and provided insight on the role of the National Office. Throughout the week, we reviewed the history of the Audubon Society and the changes over the years that have led to the current mission and conservation goals. We found out that fundraising can be fun and learned about building chapter volunteer and board participation. We learned about conservation projects around the country including the important bird areas and the

amazing Project Puffin in Maine. We heard about the Audubon at Home program with its goals of bringing conservation to the level of individual yards, neighborhoods, and communities. We even found out how to influence Congress and advocate for important conservation issues (it's not nearly as scary as everyone thought!).



Atlantic Puffin



Osprey nesting in Camp

In addition to the workshops and presentations, we enjoyed outdoor and birding activities at various times during the week. Mornings typically started with a pleasantly chilly bird walk. Although many birds had already left for the fall migration, we commonly sighted a variety of warblers (black throated green, yellow, cape may, and yellow rumped), northern parula, hairy woodpecker, American goldfinch, and red breasted nuthatch. We explored the tidal pools in the intertidal zone and learned about a variety of sea life (including a young lobster). A memorable all day boat trip later in the week included amazing views of Atlantic puffins at one of the Project Puffin recovery sites as well as a picnic lunch and hike on a private island.

In summary, if you are interested in experiencing a little bit of the history of the Audubon Society in a beautiful setting, meeting some interesting people, seeing some great birds, and eating some wonderful food, all at a very reasonable cost; then the Audubon Camp at Hog Island is the place for you! If you would like to learn more, check out their website at [www.maineaudubon.org](http://www.maineaudubon.org) (click on programs and camps).

Laura Darley



Dining at Hog Island



East Bullfrog Pond Prairie

## ***PTAS Board Approves Grant For Prairie Restoration***

Last year the Board of PTAS recognized the need for appropriate native prairie habitat for grassland birds. The natural habitat of our local area has been devastated first by agriculture development and then by suburban development. Now less than 1% of the original prairie remains and as a result much of our native wildlife has lost their home on the prairie. To help provide more of this habitat the Board decide to work with the Heard Museum in restoring and maintaining the prairie habitat at the sanctuary.

Last year, a grant of \$2000.00 was approved with a commitment to renew it yearly if the terms of the grant were satisfactory executed. The staff at the Heard exceeded the expectations of the board in what they accomplished in restoring East Bullfrog Pond Prairie.

At the October meeting of the Board, a new grant of \$2000.00 for the current year was approved extending the partnership.

### ***To the members of PTAS,***

Thank you so much for the generous donation of \$2000 to the Heard Museum for habitat enhancement. Let me share with you how your funds were used. We planted native grasses in six different areas on the Heard Wildlife Sanctuary. These areas prior to planting were either low in plant diversity or were dominated by nonnative vegetation.

Before we were able to start the restoration efforts, we needed some planting equipment. This is where the funds really helped. We were able to buy a chain harrow and a chisel. Both tractor implements help to prepare the seed bed. Another purchase was the actual seed. Many varieties of native grasses were bought (Indian Grass, Eastern Gamma grass, Sideoats Grama, Buffalo Grass, Switch Grass, and Big Bluestem).

The remaining funds were used to purchase a measuring wheel and weed abatement torch. The measuring wheel was used to determine area and help determine seed dispersal rates. The weed abatement torch was used to control invasive plants organically. The heat from the pinpoint flame kills the plants' tissue. This methodology lowered our dependence on herbicides.

Now for the results. Some of the plantings failed primarily due to annual plant competition after planting. But I won't give up. I gained a lot of experience last season which will make restoration more and more successful in the future. Other plantings were very good and we now have some new stands of prairie grasses. I am thankful for last year's funds and the \$2000.00 approved for 2008. Your group is really helping to improve the Heard's habitat for the wildlife and the enjoyment of our visitors.

Thank you!

Chuck Jones  
Sanctuary Manager



Tommy Davis loads native seed for prairie restoration

## **WILD BIRD CENTER**

1601 Brinker Rd., at Loop 288 (by Wal-Mart),  
Denton

940 / 484-BIRD [2473]

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



# Project FeederWatch

*An annual survey of birds that visit feeders in winter*



CORNELL LAB of ORNITHOLOGY



BIRD STUDIES  
ETUDES D'OISEAUX CANADA

Join over 16,000 other citizen scientists who periodically count the birds that visit their bird feeders from November to April. Your counts will help scientists track the distribution and abundance of birds in winter. Anyone can participate in Project FeederWatch – via internet or US mail.

- Register for the program (go to <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>).
- Put up a feeder and count the birds that visit two days a week for as little as 15 minutes per day.
- Send in your data via internet or US mail.

The project is 20 years old and through contributions of thousands of individuals across the US and Canada has resulted in the largest database of North American feeder-bird populations in the world. Most of the data is accessible over the Internet at the click of a button. The data allow scientists to investigate questions relating to population dynamics of feeder birds and to examine the factors, such as House Finch eye disease or weather, which affect these birds. In addition, your support of this project ensures that someone will always be looking

out for our common feeder birds, so that they will remain forever common.

For more information on the project and instruction on how to join, go to [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/Overview/over\\_index.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/Overview/over_index.html). Click on “Helping birds is as easy as” then click on any FAQ for more information or click on “Join Today/Renew” to receive a research kit in the fall and to start your subscription to BirdScope. There is a \$15 fee. FeederWatch's participant fees pay for the maintenance of this web site, data analysis, participant support, printing and shipping project materials, and dissemination of the information learned from the data. The fees also help cover the cost of publishing a newsletter for project participants-BirdScope.

The survey is conducted each winter from November through early April, you can start feeder watching at any time in this period.

You may join at any time of year and start receiving the quarterly issues of the newsletter.

Tom Heath

## ***Want Birds? -- Plant Lantana!***

My garden is definitely "for the birds". Everything I plant produces nectar, nuts or berries. I've seen Brown Thrashers pounding away at acorns from my Shumard Red Oak trees. I've watched as a Robin, perched on a thin branch of American Beautyberry, bounced as if on a trampoline as it repeatedly reached for berries just out of reach. My biggest enjoyment comes from watching my favorite birds, hummingbirds, come to the many flowers I've planted for them.

I planted native Texas Lantana (*Lantana horrida*) for hummingbirds, butterflies and bees; it is used by many species. My plant is four years old and got very big this year. The flowers produce nectar and then turn into clusters of green berries that ripen to black. Lantana goes through several cycles of flowers-to-berries each year, and blooms from late spring to the first killing frost.

I have observed Mockingbirds, Robins and Brown Thrashers eating the berries of my lantana. This fall has produced the best show ever, with five Mockingbirds trying hard to tolerate each other as they share the berry-covered bush. I've seen four birds in the bush at once, with the fifth sitting nearby. They feed several feet apart and get along for a minute or two, then one bird will fly at another, trying to flush it away from the good food source. This produces an amusing flurry of gray/white wings and tails, with birds flying in every direction, chasing and being chased. In just a few minutes, they all return to try again.

If you don't have native Texas Lantana in your garden, I highly recommend it. You will enjoy a continuous cycle of visiting butterflies, moths, bees, hummingbirds and berry-eating birds. A perfect plant for bird lovers!

Jerri Kerr

**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@prairieandtimbers.org](mailto:hmdarley@prairieandtimbers.org).**

**PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY**

**Officers, Chairpersons and Board Members**

- President:** *Gailon Brehm\**.....972-517-2542
- Vice President:** *Merrick Darley\**.....972-422-5355
- Secretary:** *Paula Brehm\** .....972-517-2542
- Treasurer:** *Mike Mizell\**.....940-382-8551
- Birdathon:** *Open*.....
- Conservation/Armchair Activist:**
  - Roger Sanderson\** ..... 469-767-7242
- Newsletter:** *Merrick Darley\** ..... 972-422-5355
- Field Trips:** *Karen Carbiener\**..... 972-824-2878
  - Tom Heath\**..... 972-867-8646
- Education:** *Gailon Brehm\**..... 972-517-2542
  - Roger Sanderson\**..... 972-333-5671
- Hospitality:** *Carolyn Oldham\**..... 972-517-8987
- Membership:** *Jerri Kerr* ..... 972-578-3146
  - Merrick Darley\**..... 972-422-5355
- CBC:** *Dan Smith* ..... 972-516-2297
- Website/Electronic Communications:**
  - Tom Heath\**..... 972-867-8646
  - Merrick Darley\**..... 972-422-5355
- Programs:** *Joan Snider\** ..... 903-583-5099
- Publicity:** *Bobette Mauck\**..... 972-540-5646
- Regional Delegate:** *Reba Collins, Merrick Darley\**

*\* 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

When shopping at our advertiser's stores please let them know you saw their ad in the PTAS newsletter.

***SEND US YOUR UPDATED E-MAIL ADDRESS***

Email is the most efficient way for us to let you know about events, meetings and last minute changes. We send only 1 or 2 emails per month, and we do not share our mailing list with anyone. If you are not on our email distribution list, or if your email address has changed recently, please contact Merrick Darley at [hmdarley@prairieandtimbers.org](mailto:hmdarley@prairieandtimbers.org)