



Rustlin's

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

January/February 2011

Into Spring

The fall fundraising is over and the effort was a success this year. The book sale we had at our November meeting and the contributions raised by our e-mail/ mail campaign raised \$2631 to help us fund the efforts to improve the north Texas ecosystem through education, conservation, habitat restoration and habitat preservation. To each of you who donated through the book sale and/or direct contribution, the board wishes to heartily thank you for supporting the area's wildlife. You are the important part in funding the continuing conservation of precious habitat and wildlife for future generations which has been an Audubon tradition since the founding of the first chapters in the 1890's. In addition you are funding it in your own local community through your local chapter.

For members for which we had an email address, the board elected to send the fund raising request via email instead of postal mail. This saves \$0.50 per email address which is the cost of printing and posting the letter using the US postal system. In a way each of our members who give us their email contribute \$.50 to our conservation activities per year.

At the January meeting, the board approved multiple grants to put the funds to use. \$500 dollars was granted to the Heard Bird Banders to replace mist nets and poles. Monitoring the birds at the Heard is important part of tracking the changes in the health of our local biome. To learn more about the Bird Banders check out our centerfold by Victoria Gandy in this newsletter.

A grant of \$500 dollars was given to continue research of Tree Swallows and Prothonotary Warblers under Prof. Woods of Southeastern Oklahoma State University. This is a continuation of the work presented at

our November meeting by Ross and Tina. Not only do we support local research on the health of birds but we also help support future naturalists.

A \$1000 grant was given to the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge near Lake Texoma. This supports the continuation of the native habitat restoration in the refuge. Our grants are used to buy native seeds including wildflowers to restore the prairies. Our January field trip was to Hagerman.

A grant of \$500 was given to the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center to continue the sponsorship of Miki, a Mississippi Kite, and Hunter, a Great Horned Owl. The purpose of these educational birds is to inspire local audiences to think about and actively participate in helping preserve raptors and their environment for generations to come. PTAS was one of those audiences at our September meeting.

A portion of our grant budget was withheld in anticipation of a grant request from the Heard.

- Merrick Darley



Snow Geese at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge
Photo by Tom Heath on January Field Trip

Chapter Meeting Schedule

February 22 – “Birding by Ear”

Wayne Meyer, Associate Professor of Biology. Austin College

Before joining the Austin College faculty in 1993, Dr. Meyer taught field biology courses at Sierra College and Ornithology. His research investigates the role of light in stimulating reproduction of photosensitive birds. He has established a research flock of Japanese Quail on campus and is conducting research with Austin College students on this topic.

March 22 – “PTAS goes to Alaska”

Gailon Brehm, Paula Brehm, Jerri Kerr, Linda Egonis and Carolyn Oldham

Hear our own members describe their trip to Alaska with TOS as they birded Anchorage, Seward (pelagic), Nome, Barrow and the Denali Highway. They visited during the height of the northward migration period and the beginning of the summer nesting season

April 26 – “Exploring the Birds and Forests of New Guinea”

Bruce Beehler, Vice-president of Conservation International's Melanesia Center for Biodiversity Conservation (CBC)

(see article this issue)

May 24 – Social/Bird walk at the Heard

Roger Sanderson

Join us in a casual meeting with time to socialize and explore the Heard Museum

Meetings start at 7:00 pm. There is a bird identification class from 7:15 to 7:40. The main program follows a short business meeting starting at 7:45. Please contact Carolyn Oldham with any program or speaker suggestions for next year.

Field Trip Schedule

Sat, Feb 12 – 2nd Sat. at the Heard Museum, 9:00 am

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Length: 1.5-2 Hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum

Notes: Register in advance at 972-562-5566

Sat, Feb 19 – McInnish Park & Elm Fork Nature Preserve, 8:00am

Leader: Jim Varnum

Expected Birds: Wintering ducks and other water birds, sparrows, woodpeckers, raptors

Length: 3 Hours

Meeting Place: McInnish Park

RSVP: To Karen, 972-824-2878

Sat, Mar 12 – 2nd Sat. at the Heard Museum 9:00 am

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Length: 1.5-2 Hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum

Notes: Register in advance at 972-562-5566

Sat, Mar 19 – Village Creek Drying Beds, 8:00 am

Leader: Charley Amos

Length: 3 Hours

Meeting Place: Village Creek Drying Beds

RSVP: To Karen, 972-824-2878

Sat, April 9 – 2nd Sat. at the Heard Museum 9:00 am

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Length: 1.5-2 Hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum

Notes: Register in advance at 972-562-5566

Sat, April 9 – John Bunker Sands, 7:00 am

Leader: Chris Runk

Length: ?

Meeting Place: Church of the Rock located on US175 at Combine Road Exit

RSVP: To Karen, 972-824-2878

Birdzilla.com

Over 4000 pages of information.
10,000 images of wild birds
Fun and Games

Noted Ornithologist to Present Program in April

Ever wonder what it would be like to bird a remote old growth tropical forest where no birder had previously visited? If so come to our April meeting when Dr. Bruce Beehler will present on the topic "Exploring the Birds and Forests of New Guinea". A renown expert on the birds of New Guinea, Bruce has been exploring the birds there since 1975. He has visited many a remote tropical forest site but none so remote as the Foja Mountains. With no known visitation from man prior to his trip, the campsite was reached by helicopter. Otherwise it would have been a two week hike through the jungle to the nearest village in the lowlands. That village of indigenous forest people was accessible only by a small plane using a grass airstrip. The Foja are an isolated range with no roads, no trails, and no hunting but rich in undescribed species. Depending on the birder it is either a paradise or a nightmare!

But what birder wouldn't enjoy a job that involved waking up to discover that a bird previously thought lost to science had casually wandered into your camp? That's exactly what happened in the Foja Mountains, one morning in December 2005. On their second day in the jungle, a male and female of a "lost" bird of paradise (*Parotia berlepschi*) appeared in camp, the male dancing and displaying spectacularly for the female. "I was too spellbound to go get my camera," says Bruce. "It would have been a stunning series of photographs." The group did manage, however, to capture the first photographs of the golden-fronted bowerbird (*Amblyornis flavifrons*) displaying in front of its bower.

While on this particular trip to the Foja Mountains, Bruce's team identified a previously undescribed species of honeyeater, which he later named after his wife. Amazingly, it was virtually the first bird they encountered upon entering the Foja Mountains. The trip produced forty species new to science. Bruce's expedition was, in his words, "way beyond expectations".

While the team enjoyed a good amount of luck on its three-week expedition, the rainy conditions in the forest made life in the mountains challenging. "The camp itself became a horrible festering bog of mud and muck. The only time we felt even close to clean was when we were asleep in our sleeping bags." But being in the jungle, a place filled with wildlife and pristine beauty, was paradise. "I have never been to a place like this."

Less than two years later, Beehler returned to the Foja



Ornithologist Bruce Beehler with a female Berlepsch's Six-Wired Bird of Paradise, discovered in 2005

Mountains, this time with the CBS *60 Minutes* crew to capture the first-ever video footage of the Fojas. CBS was able to film various species and courtship displays of the Golden-fronted Bowerbird, Black Sicklebill, Berlepsch's Bird of Paradise, and the Wattled Smoky Honeyeater. The team also encountered a probable new species of *Mallomys* giant rat – a full 1.4 kilograms and almost two feet long!. On the small size they discovered a tiny pygmy possum (*Cercartetus* sp.)

Dr. Bruce Beehler (born October 11, 1951 in Baltimore) is an ornithologist and vice-president of Conservation International's Melanesia Center for Biodiversity Conservation (CBC). Bruce wrote his undergraduate honors thesis on birds at Williams College and earned his Master's and Ph.D. at Princeton, writing his dissertation on the ecology and behavior of four species of bird of paradise in New Guinea. He has been an authority on New Guinea birds for several decades, having authored or co-authored several major works on the avifauna of this island, including *Birds of Paradise* (1998), *The Birds of New Guinea* (1986) and the two-volume *The Birds of Papua New Guinea* (1985). His current research focuses on the impacts of ongoing climate change on wildlife, forests, and subsistence agriculture in Papua New Guinea.



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Banding at the Heard

a photo essay by Victoria Gandy



Judy Woods, the master permit holder, examines a **Common Yellowthroat**. Each bird must be sexed and aged which is often determined by the smallest details in plumage.

Banding has proved an extraordinary tool for conservationists. With the data collected, scientists can track migration routes, monitor population stability and genetic diversity, follow the spread of avian diseases, as well as better understand the breeding and feeding patterns of different species. Although the banders must obtain an immense amount of data, they process each bird with striking gentleness and swiftness. The birds' welfare is always the primary concern, and hopefully their species will see pay back for the small amount of discomfort that they experience through conservation efforts birthed from the analysis of banding data.



Above: Tom Heath erects a mist net.

Top Right: A **White-eyed Vireo** is given a unique band. The bird will also be weighed, sexed, aged, have its wing and tail feathers measured, and two feathers will be removed for DNA testing. The data collected will be submitted with the band number to the Bird Banding Laboratory for analysis.



Bottom Right: Many birds that are banded are not recaptured, however this **Swamp Sparrow** had been banded previously at the Heard. Its recapture will help scientists determine life expectancy, site fidelity, and wintering patterns. Of all the recaptured birds, virtually all of them were originally captured at the Heard. A bird is usually recaptured in subsequent years within a few days of its original capture date and often in the same net.



Bob Adams and Some of the Budding Birders from Trinity Christian Academy

PTAS Supports High School Senior Field Trips

Bob Adams, a science teacher at Trinity Christian Academy, has been teaching his classes to identify the winter birds of our area since last fall. He asked us to help supplement that class work with field trips led by knowledgeable birders; so on January 25 and 26 PTAS volunteers Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas, and Art MacKinnon led four groups of 14 or 15 students and their teachers, Bob Adams and Sara Fusco in bird walks at the Heard. Afterwards, Roger Sanderson, PTAS member and Heard employee demonstrated live reptiles and bird skins. The January 26 group had the additional treat of visiting the bird banders while they were actively banding birds.

Great Backyard Bird Count February 18-21

What is the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)?

The GBBC is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell

Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited. Please visit www.birdcount.org for all the details.

How to Participate

1. Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count – Friday to Monday, February 18-21. You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like—one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day. You can also submit more than one checklist per day if you count in other locations on that day.
2. Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time. You may find it helpful to print out your regional bird checklist (<http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/checklist>) to get an idea of the kinds of birds you're likely to see in your area in February. You could take note of the highest number of each species you see on this checklist.
3. When you're finished, enter your results through the web page (<http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/input>). You'll see a button marked "Enter Your Checklists!" on the website home page beginning on the first day of the count. It will remain active until the deadline for data submission on March 1st.

Why Count Birds?

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic;

they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

We need your help. Make sure the birds from your community are well represented in the count. It doesn't matter whether you report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 75 species you see during a day's outing to a wildlife refuge.

Your counts can help answer many questions:

How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations?

Where are winter finches and other "irruptive" species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?

How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years?

How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?

What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

Are any birds undergoing worrisome declines that point to the need for conservation attention?

Scientists use the counts, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to give us an immense picture of our winter birds. Each year that these data are collected makes them more meaningful and allows scientists to investigate far-reaching questions.

Professor Warren Pulich

Professor Warren Pulich of Irving passed away peacefully on Nov 27, 2010. Long term members of PTAS remember and respect Professor Warren Pulich as an excellent ornithologist and very avid birder. He was active in the establishment of the Dallas Audubon Society. If Dr. Pulich accepted your sighting you knew you had a correct identification. Following is an excerpt from an email sent by University of Dallas.

Warren was a member of the University of Dallas faculty since the university's beginning in 1956. He taught courses across the department's curriculum,

from developmental biology and anatomy to avian ecology and ecology. Warren helped to begin the university's science program and helped order the first materials to supply the laboratories (at that time in upstairs Carpenter). Warren's students included many who went on to become nurses and physicians, as well some who like Warren continued in careers in ecology and ornithology. His avian ecology course for years was a popular option for nonmajors, and many of these non-majors recall the course fondly and continue to study bird diversity as an ongoing hobby.

Birds were Warren's primary research interest, and in his career he completed studies on avian distribution in American Samoa, was the leading expert on the endangered Golden-Cheeked Warbler, and wrote four books including *The Birds of North Central Texas*. At the time of its publication *The Birds of North Central Texas* was the first to recognize the importance of this region to bird diversity in Texas, and this book has remained as the standard for both scientists and birders throughout Texas. With his expertise Warren was a well-known authority in the local birding community and one of the only ornithologists in the region, and he annually taught birding classes to adults in the labs at UD. Upon his retirement in 1990 Warren continued to work and teach part-time in the department, and pursued data collection for an update to *The Birds of North Central Texas*, which involved maintaining bird record data for the region and staying in touch with the local birding community. As part of his academic work Warren maintained specimens for a museum collection of over 3,000 birds, some of which were donated to the Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology in 1995.

2010 Christmas Bird Count Results

This year 31 birders participated in our annual Christmas Bird Count held on Dec 26. They counted a total of 14107 total birds with a total species count of 107. This was the second highest species count in our records but 6 less than last year. Participants traveled 392 miles by car and 16.0 miles on foot as they scoured the land around the Heard Museum for a radius of 7.5 miles. See their tally on the next page.

Christmas Bird Count Tally

CACKLING GOOSE	48	LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE	11
CANADA GOOSE	174	BLUE JAY	175
WOOD DUCK	3	AMERICAN CROW	591
GADWALL	199	HORNED LARK	4
AMERICAN WIGEON	57	CAROLINA CHICKADEE	208
MALLARD	445	TUFTED TITMOUSE	93
NORTHERN SHOVELER	146	WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	1
NORTHERN PINTAIL	5	BROWN CREEPER	33
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	247	CAROLINA WREN	59
CANVASBACK	50	BEWICK'S WREN	1
REDHEAD	5	HOUSE WREN	3
RING-NECKED DUCK	285	WINTER WREN	14
LESSER SCAUP	90	SEDGE WREN	1
BUFFLEHEAD	6	GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET	31
HOODED Merganser	18	RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET	103
RUDDY DUCK	102	EASTERN BLUEBIRD	141
PIED-BILLED GREBE	52	HERMIT THRUSH	23
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT	159	AMERICAN ROBIN	647
GREAT BLUE HERON	33	GRAY CATBIRD	1
GREAT EGRET	8	NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD	159
BLACK VULTURE	109	BROWN THRASHER	29
TURKEY VULTURE	170	EUROPEAN STARLING	1253
NORTHERN HARRIER	3	AMERICAN PIPIT	171
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	2	CEDAR WAXWING	376
COOPER'S HAWK	7	ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER	13
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK	7	YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER	642
RED-TAILED HAWK	51	PINE WARBLER	4
AMERICAN KESTREL	44	SPOTTED TOWHEE	2
AMERICAN COOT	147	EASTERN TOWHEE	4
KILLDEER	111	CHIPPING SPARROW	114
SPOTTED SANDPIPER	3	FIELD SPARROW	65
GREATER YELLOWLEGS	1	VESPER SPARROW	2
LEAST SANDPIPER	47	SAVANNAH SPARROW	87
LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER	5	LeCONTE'S SPARROW	7
WILSON'S SNIPE (COMMON)	1	FOX SPARROW	53
BONAPARTE'S GULL	40	SONG SPARROW	133
RING-BILLED GULL	638	LINCOLN'S SPARROW	8
FORSTER'S TERN	5	SWAMP SPARROW	11
ROCK PIGEON (ROCK DOVE)	263	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	243
EURASIAN COLLARDED DOVE	8	HARRIS'S SPARROW	148
WHITE-WINGED DOVE	134	WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW	77
MOURNING DOVE	187	DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-CLRD)	394
INCA DOVE	1	LAPLAND LONGSPUR	12
EASTERN SCREECH-OWL	1	NORTHERN CARDINAL	454
GREAT HORNED OWL	2	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	1186
BARRED OWL	3	EASTERN MEADOWLARK	448
BELTED KINGFISHER	7	WESTERN MEADOWLARK	6
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER	85	RUSTY BLACKBIRD	10
YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER	39	COMMON GRACKLE	174
DOWNY WOODPECKER	64	GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE	195
NORTHERN FLICKER (Y-SH)	51	BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD	48
EASTERN PHOEBE	58	HOUSE FINCH	133
		PINE SISKIN	2
		AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	108
		HOUSE SPARROW	72

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.

PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Publicity: *open*

Board Member: *Sara Shaffer*.....972-881-0645

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 Georgette Guernsey, 6405 Oak Hollow Lane
McKinney, TX 75070

Audubon code: 7XCH

PTAS Chapter Code: W15

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