



Rustlin's

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

September 2011

A New Season For Prairie and Timbers

The summer is over, the fall migrants are coming, and Prairie and Timbers Audubon (PTAS) is starting up activities for the new season of birding. This is your invitation to join us whether you are veteran member or do not know who we are. This newsletter is first and foremost to make you aware of our upcoming activities so you can participate. If you know all about us skip to page 2 to learn what we are planning for the new year. Keep reading this page to learn who we are.

Organized in 1980, Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society serves Collin and surrounding counties with a wide range of birding-oriented activities, programs and field trips. We also advocate and promote a healthy habitat for north Texas birds, wildlife and ourselves.

If you were mailed or notified of this newsletter you are in our database by one of the following means:

- 1) Joining PTAS
- 2) Requesting to be in our database
- 3) Joining National Audubon and living in a zip code assigned to PTAS as your local chapter.

PTAS members have a variety of interests that are centered around birds and nature. To better understand nature and the environment we have a featured speaker at each of our meetings. On page 2 you can see that Carolyn, our program chair, has arranged three very knowledgeable speakers for the fall all talking about birds. She is working on the Spring program as well when we hope to have a speaker from the Nature Conservancy and a bird rehabilitator who may bring live birds.

Many of our members enjoy field trips and are focused on birding (identifying and monitoring bird populations). For many this is a way to relax and recoup in the natural environment. A simple way to start for the inexperienced birder is our 2nd Satur-

bird walks at the Heard Museum. See details on page 6. For more intensive birding try one of our local day field trips. Organized and arranged by Linda Ergonis, our field trip chair, they represent a wide variety of locations and birds. You can read about them on page 3-4. For intensive birding (get up at 4 am birding and bird all day for a week) look into our Colorado trip on page 5. On all our field trips, leaders are happy to have all levels of experience and to teach the skills of birding. Learners can also check out our bird identification classes on page 6.

The active members of PTAS participate in our birding activities because we enjoy being in and learning about nature. However, the very nature of our activities has benefits that help keep the world healthy if we take the time to report what we see. By monitoring birds and keeping the environment safe for them, we help provide a sustaining environment for ourselves and the rest of the world's flora and fauna as tracking the changes is a critical monitor of the health of our ecosystem. This is one of the reasons that we report via eBird to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and other researchers the results of our field trips and participate in the Christmas Bird Count and Backyard Bird Count.

Some of our members are focused on conservation activities. Besides being part of National and State Audubon efforts, we also work with a number of North Texas organizations. We have fun and Texas benefits. Organizations we traditionally support are:

Heard Museum: Prairie restoration and native gardens.

Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge: Prairie Restoration

Heard Bird Banders: Training, Supplies and shared members

Southeastern Oklahoma State University: Scholarships to defray the cost of field studies.

Blackland Prairie Raptor Center: Raptor program support and native garden support.

Wind Turbines, Ecuador and Sparrows

Carolyn has lined up a great set of fall programs for us with excellent speakers. Tim Stevens, a doctoral student at TCU, is first in September with a very timely topic. Tim is doing basic research on the impact of electricity generated by wind turbines on the breeding success of the surrounding bird populations. Tim is studying birds at varying distances from wind turbines at Wolf Ridge, a commercial wind facility with 75 1.5 MW GE wind turbines that generate enough energy to power 34,000 homes. It is located northwest of Muenster. The area draws Eastern Meadowlarks, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Dickcissels, and Grasshopper Sparrows. Here is our chance to learn from a grassroots researcher the tradeoffs behind renewable wind energy generation and the health of our native birds and ecological system.

Next up in October is Dr. Doug Wood of Southeast Oklahoma State University one of our most popular speakers as his scientist/birder mentality always translates to a fun and informative program. Last January he presented an excellent talk on the birds of the Panama Canal Zone. This time he is back from Ecuador and will be presenting on the birds and tropical habitat there. Dr. Wood's talks go beyond the photo and bird identification into the unique facts and behavior traits of the birds he focuses on. PTAS supports Dr Wood's college students at SOSU by giving scholarships to help fund their field studies. Recently these studies have focused on the nesting success of tree swallows and prothonotary warblers. This is an excellent opportunity to see who our donations support.

In November, Dr. Wayne Meyer, Biology Professor at Austin College, will present a sparrow identification class to help us with those puzzling "little brown birds" that spend the winter in Texas. Last February, Dr.

Meyer presented a lecture at PTAS on "Birding by Ear" which was very different and very informative. His research investigates the role of light in stimulating reproduction of photosensitive birds. He has established a research flock of Japanese Quail on the Austin campus and is conducting research with Austin College students on this topic. Dr. Meyer teaches "Anatomy & Physiology," "Cell Biology," "Systemic Physiology," and "Birds, Humans, and the Environment."

Program Schedule

Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society meets the fourth Tuesday of the month, September through November, and January through May at the Heard Natural Science Museum in McKinney. At each meeting Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society features an informative and interesting program with exceptional speakers and slide shows to teach and thrill members and guests. The board diligently pursues a full array of interests to promote better understanding of the birding world and to have entertaining yet educational programs. Meetings start at 7:00pm, there is a bird identification class downstairs for those who wish from 7:15 to 7:40. A short general business is held from 7:45 to 8:00. The main programs starts at 8:00.

Programs scheduled this fall are:

Tuesday, September 27 - 7:00 pm

Bird ID class: Waders – Egrets, Herons, etc.

Main Program: "The Effects of Wind Turbines on Breeding Grassland Birds" Tom Stevens of TCU

Tuesday, October 25 - 7:00 pm

Bird ID class: Raptors – Hawks, Owls, Flacons, Kites

Main Program: "The Birds of Ecuador" Dr. Doug Wood of Southeast Oklahoma State University

Tuesday, November 22 - 7:00 pm

Bird ID class: Winter Sparrows

Main Program: "Identifying the Wintering Sparrows of Texas" Dr. Wayne Meyer of Austin College

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2011 Fall Field Trips

One of the most satisfying experiences of Audubon members is the successful field trip. The objective is to see many different bird species and develop a familiarity with each, learning about its behavior, field marks and physiology. To accomplish this, the pace is slow and relaxed. Anyone that can walk along a nature trail can participate. Field trips allow you to get away from modern life, participate in a green activity, enjoy and relax in the world of nature. This is actually quite therapeutic.

Field trips are open to all, members and nonmembers, beginners to world-class birders. We especially want to encourage and welcome first time birders to come on our local trips in the north Texas area. All trips have an experienced leader eager to help beginners see and enjoy new birds. These trips are an excellent way to get started learning the birds and the best locations and seasons to find them.

Field trips are typically scheduled on Saturdays, unless otherwise noted and last half a day. We schedule at least one field trip each month Sept through May. Send an email to Tom at heathwtom@netscape.net to get on the email distribution list announcing field trips and updates.

For “2nd Saturday at the Heard” trips register with the Heard in advance, 972-562-5566

For all other field trips RSVP to Linda Ergonis at lindaergonis@yahoo.com or Tom Heath at 972-867-8646 or heathwtom@netscape.net

The trip schedule is:

Sat, Sept 10 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, Sep 24 — Village Creek Drying Beds & River Legacy Park

Leader: Charley Amos

Time: 7:30 AM 3 hours

Meeting Place: Parking lot across the street from the entrance to Village Creek Drying Beds

Target: In search of migrants

Sat, Oct 8 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sun, Oct 30 — Red Slough, OK

Leader: David Arbour

Time: 7:30 AM Length TBD

Meeting Place: Parking lot at Red Slough.

Target: Migrants, winter residents and dragonflies (note this trip is on a Sunday)

Sat, Nov 12 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, Nov 19 — Collinwood Farms

Leader: Linda Ergonis

Time: 7:30 Length TBD

Meeting Place: 5400 Windhaven Rd, Plano

Target: Survey of private land prior to transformation to city park.

Sat, Dec 10 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, Dec 10 — Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA)

Leader: Ken Steigman

Time: 6:30 AM Length TBD

Meeting Place: Gate to LLELA (Be prompt — There will be no one to let stragglers in) \$5.00 Entrance fee.

Target: Short-eared Owls

Sat, Jan 14 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, Jan 21 — Lake Tawakoni

Leader: Richard Kinney

Time: TBD

Meeting Place: TBD

Target: Smith's Longspurs

Sat, Feb 11 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

For updates check the PTAS Website

<http://prairieandtimbers.org>

Field trip schedule continued:

Sat, Feb 18 — Jennifer Maxwell's Property

Leader: Jennifer Maxwell

Time: TBD

Meeting Place: TBD

Target: Henslow's Sparrow and American Woodcock

Sat, Mar 10 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, Mar 24 — Heard Museum Bird Banding Station

Leader: Banding Station Members

Time: TBD

Meeting Place: TBD

Target: We will do a prairie survey and banding of birds by setting up nets in the field and bird dogging the field, pushing the birds towards the nets. This will be group participation.

Sat, April 14 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, April 14 — Oak Point Park

Leader: TBD

Time: TBD

Meeting Place: Parking lot off Los Rios

Target: In search of Migrants

Sun, April 22— Colorado Lek trip

Leader: Mike Flieg

Time: 1 Week Trip

Meeting Place: Denver, Colorado

Target: Chestnut-Collared Longspurs, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Lesser and Greater Prairie Chickens, Greater and Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and (Blue) Dusky Grouse

Sat, May 12 — 2nd Saturday at the Heard

Leader: Gailon Brehm, Rodney Thomas

Time: 9:00 AM 2 hours

Meeting Place: Heard Museum Reception area

Target: Monthly survey of the birds of the Heard

Sat, May 19 — John Bunker Sands Wetlands

Leader: Bob Stone

Time: TBD

Meeting Place: TBD

Target: Migrants and nesting birds

Red Slough Wildlife Management Area Trip

If you have never been to Red Slough, I hope you can join us in October to see this unique wildlife area of nearly 8,000 acres.

It is located in southeastern Oklahoma, where riparian, wetlands, lakes, and prairie all converge to create an enticing habitat that lures many species of birds, insects, plants and amphibians normally found only along the gulf coast. Neo-tropic Cormorants, Purple Gallinule, White Ibis, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks and American Alligator are just a few of the many species that nest there. Over 45 species of Odonates (dragonflies) and more than 300 species of birds have been documented there. Thousands of ducks winter there not to mention the many migrants and vagrants it entices to visit.

Originally it was a flood plain and bottom land of the Red River but was farmland and then rice fields from 1960 to 1996. It then it became a wetland project to restore hydrology and re-establish bottomland hardwood trees. Nothing has been planted yet but it is quickly reverting to it's natural state.

David Arbour is the manager and an excellent host and guide. He scouts the area regularly and will take us directly to sightings of special interest. He knows all the scientific and common names and all about species found there. You can check his survey list weekly at "birdingonthe.net" Click on "Regional/Specialty" then scroll down to Oklahoma and click on it.

In Oct we should find migrants and winter residents and numerous dragonflies. It is a short 3 hour drive east on HWY 30 and north on 259, just over the Red River. Well worth the drive!



Halloween Pennant, one of over 45 species of dragonflies . Photo by Linda Ergonis

Please, e-mail me, Linda Ergonis, at "lindaergonis@yahoo.com" for detailed directions, car pooling and any change of plans. Google "Ouchita National forest-Red Slough Wildlife Management Area" for more information. — Linda Ergonis



David Arbour, Red Slough manager, showing us a plant named Alligator Flag

"A LEK A DAY"

In April 2012 I have planned an exciting adventure for you hearty birders!! Perhaps you have seen Prairie Chickens and Grouse but, have you see them on their Leks.....drumming and displaying? This trip is scheduled with Mike Flieg of Ornifolks and will be in Colorado.

Ornifolks is noted for it's no frills serious birding trips. The trip is 6 days from April 22 to April 28 and costs \$1282.00 per person which includes guide, lodging and transportation. A deposit of \$250 is required to hold your spot and the balance is due by Feb1. You pay your way to and from Denver and all meals.

Mike calls the target species his "Lucky 13". We will MOST LIKELY see all 3 Rosy Finches, McCown's and Chestnut-Collared Longspurs, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Lesser and Greater Prairie Chickens, Greater and Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Blue Dusky Grouse.....all of which will be dancing on their Leks. There will be other species, also. Mike has never missed his lucky 13 but, as you know...with our favorite pastime.... there are no guarantees.

Mike has done this tour for over 20 years usually three times a season. He knows it all, is a good story teller, and has good contacts to keep him updated on conditions.

The trip covers over 1000 miles with altitude changes from 3000 ft (Wray) to 11000 ft (Loveland Pass). The altitude is an adjustment but there is not much hiking. It is a full day of birding with 4 am wake up calls. Transportation is via passenger van.

Contact Linda Ergonis at lindaergonis@yahoo.com for details and sign up. — Linda Ergonis

Send your email address to get PTAS benefits

We need your email address to keep you informed of the latest news, chapter meetings, educational programs, field trips, bird sightings, other local birding activities and conservation issues through our newsletter postings. To minimize expenses allowing more money to go directly to the birds, our quarterly newsletter is only distributed once a year by US mail. (Yes this is the one for 2011) Otherwise the newsletter is posted on the internet and we send an email with the link to our members. We also send emails reminding you of our meetings. We average 1 to 2 emails a month so we will not overload your inbox.

Your email address will only be used by us to keep you informed of the PTAS newsletters and meetings. It will not be sold or given to anyone.

If you were not informed via email when this newsletter was posted to our website, then you are not on our list. Please send your email address to PTAS at hmdarley@prairieandtimbers.org.

If you want to be reminded of field trips that is a separate email list to minimize email to our members not interested in field trips. Send your request to be included to Tom Heath at heathwtom@netscape.net.

If you do not have access to email send Merrick Darley a note at 3713 Wood Rail Dr., Plano, TX 75074 and he will get in touch with you about other options.



LEARN BIRDS FROM THE EXPERTS

Monthly Bird Identification Class

At the beginning of each monthly meeting, Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society is offering an outstanding opportunity to learn bird ID techniques. Birders of all levels of experience and knowledge will find it easy and enjoyable to sharpen bird identification skills in this informal class format, combining discussion, viewing of bird specimens and bird sound recordings. The birds to be discussed are those commonly seen in season within Collin County. Gailon Brehm and Rodney Thomas, experienced birders, will be teaching. The class focuses on structure -- size, shape, and overall appearance -- prior to observations of detailed plumage patterns and colors. For this season we plan to emphasize bird sounds as well as our traditional usage of skins to teach structure and plumage color. All attendees are encouraged to bring their own favorite field guide as a reference. For the balance of 2011 we will teach the following: September – Waders – Egrets, Herons, etc, October – Raptors – Hawks, Owls, Falcons, Kites, and November -- Winter Sparrows.

Second Saturday Bird Walks

Heard Museum 9:00 – 11:30 am

These monthly field trips target beginners and intermediate birders who are looking for birding tips and guidance. However, they also provide an opportunity for birders of all levels to see the birds of the Heard Sanctuary throughout the season. Gailon Brehm and Rodney Thomas will co-lead these trips with occasional guest leaders. The route will traverse varied habitats including areas not open to the general public. Birding techniques will be explained on the go and all questions are welcome. Past trips have attracted a mix of people new to birding at the Heard and sometimes new to birding entirely mixed with “old-timers”. Typically 40 - 60 species of birds are tallied. All observations are logged into the Cornell eBird database for use by researchers worldwide. Attendees should dress appropriately for the weather with close-toed shoes and long pants and should bring binoculars and a favorite field guide.

These PTAS-guided bird walks are co-operatively

sponsored by the Heard Museum and Wildlife 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 walk is free although the Heard Museum charges an admission fee for non members of the Museum. The Heard Museum website is www.heardmuseum.org.

PTAS volunteers also guide walks at the Connemara Meadow Preserve at the Allen/Plano border. The Connemara Meadow Preserve is 72 acres of north Texas prairie containing native grasses and wildflowers and is maintained by the Connemara Conservancy, non-profit land trust. All walks start at the parking lot off Alma and Bethany Roads in Allen. To find the walk schedule visit their website at www.connemaraconservancy.org

Earth Share

September marks the start of workplace campaigns for Earth Share of Texas and other charitable organizations. If your workplace offers the Earth Share option, that's where we'd like to urge you to direct your contribution.

And specifically, we'd like to encourage you to contribute to the Audubon Foundation of Texas (AFT), one of Earth Share's member organizations. AFT's mission is to support the National Audubon Society's 20 Texas chapters.

Among other things, it provides funding for new chapters just getting off the ground. And it helps established chapters meet their operating expenses.

The AFT also provides grants to support chapters' special projects. PTAS's grants for the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center native gardens and the prairie restoration a Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge were funded through AFT.

For a complete list of workplaces participating in the Earth Share campaign, visit <http://www.earthshare-texas.org/workplace.htm>.

SEE YOUR ADVERTISEMENT HERE!

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Shorebirds and North Central Texas

When most of us think of our area, wide open mudflats do not come to mind. But about every 5 years when our climate goes through a drought, the mudflats appear in the local reservoirs and lakes. Lake Lavon at this time is at 68% capacity so the water that usually covers the part of the lake north of Highway 380 is gone. We moan and groan about the water restrictions that NTMWD places on us. But this is a blessing for birdwatchers.

During the month of August the shorebirds that migrated through in the spring are returning, having nested in the north. Most years they bypass us because of inadequate habitat for stopovers, but during drought years the mudflats in which they probe for insects and invertebrates are available and we have a great opportunity to study these birds without going to the coast. Some such as Common Snipes and Dunlins arrive already having molted, but many are still in the process of the prebasic molt. Greater Yellowlegs and Long-billed Dowitchers begin the molt on their breeding grounds and suspend it when they leave until they have reached their wintering grounds. The molt takes anywhere from 50 to 130 days to complete. This makes identifying these birds a challenge.

While observing the birds, it becomes apparent that they spend most of the day eating. They are trying to maintain or increase their body weight. This additional fat reserve is necessary for the flight to their wintering grounds. Wilson's Phalaropes will increase their body weight up to 55%.

This year while scoping the lake bottom at Twin Groves Park on Highway 380 east of Princeton, I have seen Killdeer, American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpipers, Willets, Spotted Sandpipers, Upland Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Baird's Sandpiper, Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers, Stilt Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Buff-breasted Sandpipers and Wilson's Phalaropes. In previous drought years I have also observed Western Sandpipers, Wilson's Snipes, Semipalmated Plovers, and American Golden-Plovers. Along with these I have seen many colonial nesting birds that are dispersing from the breeding colonies, such as, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Tricolored Herons, Little Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets,

Green Herons, White Ibises and Roseate Spoonbills. Occasionally Peregrine Falcons will fly overhead as they too head south.

By mid September many of the shorebirds are gone, but not all. One year in October while birding this area I found a Snowy Plover which is a rare migrant in our area. For a week it sat alone at the end of the mudflat facing south. The winds were extremely strong so it ate and waited. When finally the south winds died, it moved on to its winter home.

— Georgette Guernsey

Rare Bird Nesting in Collin County

In early August I observed a pair of Common Moorehens in a marsh on Stonebridge County Club (Hills Course). They had two young that had just hatched and were still in the nest. Both parents were feeding them. A couple days later I saw a total of four young walking in the very shallow water near the old nest. We received about an inch and a fourth of rain on August 13 which raised the water level in the marsh. I am assuming the parents moved the young further back into the reeds closer to the shore because I have not seen them since. This species is rare in our North Central Texas and not previously been recorded in Collin County. — Georgette Guernsey



Lesser Yellowlegs

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@gmail.com.

PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

Officers, Chairpersons and Board Members

President: Merrick Darley*.....972-422-5355

Vice President: Carolyn Oldham*. 972-517-8987

Secretary: Betty Parker*972-618-1130

Treasurer: Georgette Guernsey*.....972-542-8089

Conservation/Armchair Activist:

Roger Sanderson*972-562-5566

Bill Woodfin*.....972-838-9290

Newsletter: Merrick Darley*972-422-5355

Field Trips: Linda Ergonis*.....972-596-6109

Tom Heath*.....972-867-8646

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Rodney Thomas*.....214-533-8756

Gailon Brehm.....972-517-2542

Hospitality: Paula Brehm.972-517-2542

Membership: Merrick Darley*972-422-5355

CBC: Roger Sanderson*972-516-2297

Website/Electronic Communications:

Tom Heath*.....972-867-8646

Programs: Carolyn Oldham*.....972-517-8987

Publicity: Mercy Moffit 214-957-1967

Board Member: Sara Shaffer*.....972-881-0654

* BoardMember

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