

Rustlin's

Newsletter of the Prairie Timbers Audubon Society
September 2026

Birding Activities

- BirdID Walks
- Local Field Trips
- Multi-day Field Trips

Environmental Education

- Monthly Presentations
- Bird Identification Classes
- Scholarships

Support for our North Texas Habitat

- Bird Banding
- Prairie Restoration/Landscaping
- College Student Avian Research
- Raptor Education
- Butterfly/Native Gardens
- Bird Rehabilitation
- Advocacy



Red-tailed Hawk

Welcome to Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society!

Summer is almost over according to the calendar — September 22 marks the first day of fall, although the weather seems oblivious to this fact. Record-setting heat in the months of August and September and one of the longest dry spells on record have made for a brutal end to summer. But bird migration continues unabated: North Texas birders have been blessed with an abundance of fall warblers, shorebirds, and interesting vagrants over the past two months, and our winter visitors will be arriving in the coming weeks.

We are excited to welcome everyone to a new season of activities. Our popular lineup of programs and field trips is detailed below, and I hope you take advantage of them. Our kick-off meeting for the 2026–2027 season coincides with the first day of fall (9/22), and I hope to see everyone either in person or via our online Zoom meeting. Our monthly meetings are held in the SRC building of the Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary in McKinney, TX, on the 4th Tuesday of the month. If you wish to participate via the online Zoom session, please sign up with an email to ptaszoom@gmail.com.

PTAS is a local 501(c)(3) organization affiliated with National Audubon and dedicated to birding, conservation, and education. Our activities are open to all, whether you're new to birding or a longtime member. PTAS does not charge a membership fee for these activities in order to reach the broadest possible audience, but we do depend on donations to fund our conservation grants and programs. If you have the means, please become a supporting member of PTAS with a \$15 or greater donation (<https://www.prairieandtimbers.org/support-ptas>). You can also contribute to us via the North Texas Giving Day Foundation through Sept. 17 (<https://www.northtexasgivingday.org>).

I hope you enjoy the season ahead — please share your feedback on our activities so we can improve in the future. If you can, volunteer your time and talents to keep PTAS thriving.

Mike Cameron
President, PTAS

Monthly Meetings

With Presentations and Bird ID Session



Agenda

- 6:45 Meetup - Check in and chat
- 7:00 Bird ID Class
- 7:25 General Meeting
- 7:45 Presentation
- 8:30 Adjourn

All in person meetings are at the

Science Resource Center
Heard Natural Science Museum
1 Nature Place,
McKinney, TX 75069

Some meetings are Zoom only. Zoom option always available. If you are not on the invitation list send a request to ptaszoom@gmail.com

PTAS BIRDING ID CLASSES WITH A FOCUS ON NORTH TEXAS BIRDS

With the help of our own expert birders, you can learn to identify local birds by attending our monthly birding class. Classes are from 6:50 to 7:15 PM at the Heard Museum, just prior to our monthly meeting and program. No need to register. Just come! Typically, it is a slide presentation focusing on identifying north Texas birds from a family group. The birds discussed are ones that would be typically seen by active bird watcher in the north Texas area. Audio bird calls are used for help identifying by sounds. Class is informal with group discussions and questions. Informal quizzes are often featured.



Birding ID Schedule

September 22, 2026

Shorebirds 3 - Bigger than Peeps (Dunlin, White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-necked Stilt, Buff-breasted Sandpiper)

October 27, 2026

Bird Quiz

November 24, 2026

Uncommon Winter Birds - Irruptive and rare winter birds (Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Red Crossbill, Mountain Bluebird, ...)

January 26, 2027

Red-Tailed Hawk - Our most variable raptor (Eastern, Western, Harlan's, Krider's, Fuerte's, Light and Dark morphs, ...)

February 23, 2027

Dabbling Ducks (Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Teals)

March 23, 2027

TBD

April 27, 2027

Vireos (Red-eyed, Warbling, Blue-headed, Philly, Bell's)

May 25, 2027

TBD

September's Presentation

Pollinators 301: A Deeper Dive into Plant-Pollinator Pairings



Maybe you have mastered the basics of butterflies, have learned a bit about bees and know the hummers hover. You are ready for a deeper understanding and appreciation for nature. Come learn the surprising ways certain pollinators are specifically suited for the plants they pollinate—especially our native bees and native flowers. This talk is known for the photography and video it contains. The talk also contains recent research on the co-evolution of hummingbirds, bees, and salvias.



Nancy Wilson

Nancy Wilson says she is a proud student of the Horticultural School of Trial and Error. She has been gardening for the benefit of birds, bees and butterflies for many years. After first embracing the concept of drought tolerant native plant landscaping in 1998, small gardens have expanded to replace almost the entirety of expansive lawn with native groundcovers, flowers, shrubs, understory and canopy trees.

Nancy is a Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and active Native Plant Society volunteer. Her training includes Advanced Entomology training and Advanced Vegetable training with AgriLife and all 5 levels of Native Landscape Certification training developed by the Native Plant Society of Texas ("NPSOT") which includes landscaping for birds. Nancy currently serves as coordinator for the Dallas Native Landscape Certification Program. Her particular interests are native plants, pollinators, and creating habitat.

October's Presentation

Floods, Fires, and Forward Progress: Report from the UN Climate Conference in Brazil



Every year, diplomats from nations around the world gather at the United Nations Climate Change Conference to negotiate international climate policy. Known as the Conference of the Parties (COP), this conference is hosted by a different country each year. In 2025, Brazil hosted the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP 30) in the city of Belém in the Amazon rainforest.

A Panel Discussion by Austin College Climate Ambassadors moderated by Dr. David Baker

Austin College serves as an official observer at the UN COP conferences. While observers cannot speak during the negotiations, they can influence climate change policy by providing expertise and transparency in the process. Austin College sends a student delegation, known as Austin College Climate Ambassadors, to represent our campus and local communities on the world stage.

In this interactive panel discussion, Austin College Climate Ambassadors will provide background on the UN Climate Change process and share their direct observations at COP 30. Topics such as biodiversity, nature-based solutions, and conservation will be discussed. A significant portion of the presentation will be dedicated to the Question and Answer section, where Climate Ambassadors will address your specific questions and learn what climate issues are important to you. This dialogue will allow Climate Ambassadors to better represent you at COP 31 in Türkiye in November 2026.

Monitoring Birds and the Environment

Monthly Bird Walks

Prairie and Timbers Audubon volunteers will again lead monthly bird walks at Connemara Meadow Preserve on the first Saturday or Sunday of each month, at the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center on the first Saturday of each month, and at the Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary on the second Saturday. These walks offer a chance to experience North Texas birds firsthand while also contributing to long-term monitoring that supports conservation.



Walks last about three hours, though participants may come and go as needed. Designed for beginners and intermediate birders, they provide identification tips, explore a variety of habitats, and encourage questions throughout. Typically, we record 40–60 species, using both sight and sound. All observations are logged into eBird, adding to a global database relied on by scientists and land managers. This record helps track migration patterns, habitat shifts, and population trends—turning a morning of birding into a valuable act of citizen science.

Check on the Prairie and Timber's website (prairieandtimbers.org/activities/bird-walks-and-trips) for description and details on time and location for these trips.

Field Trip Schedule

September 26th

Destination — Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge
Leader — Jack Chiles
Target Species — Shorebirds, gulls, and terns

October 17th

Destination — Tyler State Park
Leader — Junior Rodriguez
Target Species — Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers

November 21st

Destination — Chalk Hill Farm
Leader — Rodney Thomas and Bill Woodfin
Target Species — Sparrows, winter residents

January 23rd

Destination — John Bunker Sands Wetland
Leader — Grayson Almond
Target Species — Bald Eagles

February 20th

Destination — Bonnie Wenk Park
Leader — Grayson Almond
Target Species — Hooded Mergansers, winter residents

March 20th

Destination — Bois D'Arc Lake (Fannin Co.)
Leader — Mike Cameron
Target Species — Waterfowl, wading birds, Bald Eagles

April 24th

Destination — UT Southwestern Rookery
Leader — TBD
Target Species — Black-crowned Night Herons, and Anhingas

May 15th

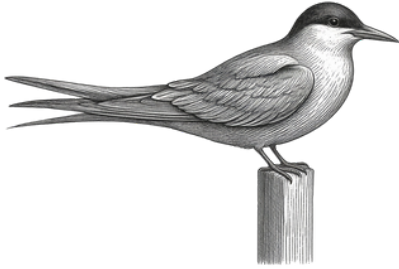
Destination — Old Sabine Bottoms WMA/Mineola Nature Preserve
Leader — Keiko Inagaki
Target Species — nesting warblers: Hooded, Pine, Yellow-throated, and Northern Parula.

Our trips are designed to take birders to a variety of habitats, allowing them to observe a wide range of bird species both in our local area and across Texas. The public is welcome to join. Please remember to bring binoculars, sunscreen, water, and snacks.

To participate, regularly check the field trip page on our website (prairieandtimbers.org). Tom Heath maintains an email list to keep members updated on field trip details and any changes. If you'd like to be added, please send your name and email address to Tom at heathwtom@netscape.net.

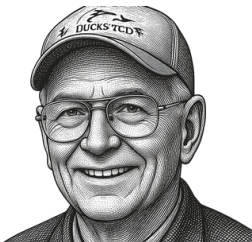
September 26, Field Trip

Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge



Black Tern

Located on the shores of Lake Texoma near Sherman, Texas, is one of North Texas's premier birding destinations. Spanning over 11,000 acres of wetlands, grasslands, and bottomland forest, the refuge sits along the Central Flyway, making it a magnet for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds throughout the year.



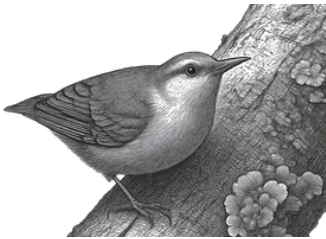
Jack Chiles

Our leader, Jack Chiles is a Texas Master Naturalist and a familiar face to birders at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, where he leads the popular Early Bird Guided Walk.

Jack's outings are known for sharp, detailed birding — his recent walk on Sept. 8 tallied 75 species, including 213 Forster's Terns, 48 Least Terns, and 3 Black Terns. He was surprised to see a couple of immature Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. He often leads alongside fellow Master Naturalists, sharing identification tips and seasonal insight into the refuge's more than 270 regularly recorded bird species.

October 17, Field Trip

Tyler State Park



Brown-headed Nuthatch

Tyler State Park is 985.5 acres, about 16 minutes from Tyler, TX. There is a lake in the center of the park. This park is a great representation of birds out in the Piney Woods of East Texas. Over 200 species of birds have been identified in the park. Some of our regulars (such as the pine warbler and the brown-headed nuthatch) can be seen year-round. Park entry fee is \$6 per person, and free with a State Park Pass.



Junior Rodriguez

Junior Rodriguez is the newest Park Interpreter at Tyler State Park, where he blends storytelling with science to help visitors connect with the natural world. A Fort Worth native, he grew up fishing and hunting with his grandparents and later earned a degree in Wildlife, Sustainability, and Ecosystem Sciences from Tarleton State University. Before joining Tyler State Park, he worked at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. Known for turning trail-side clues like tracks and landmarks into vivid stories about wildlife and history, Rodriguez is passionate about building community connections through hands-on outdoor education, and he brings that same enthusiasm to every group he leads.

Advocating for the Birds We Love

Community Involvement



PTAS held educational programs at the John and Judy Gay library in McKinney on "Backyard Birding", September 9th and the "Basics of Bird Photography", September 10th. Overall we had a total of 36 attendees for both programs - there was a lot of interaction and interest. Many planned to join us on some of our monthly walks.

SpaceX Land Swap Moves Forward Despite Opposition



Ocelot



Bush Habitat

Our comments did not support the land swap, but big money won out. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved a land exchange giving SpaceX 715 acres of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Cameron County to expand its Starbase facility. In return, the federal government receives 683 acres of private land SpaceX owns near Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

The refuge, established in 1946, protects habitat for endangered species including the ocelot and jaguarundi along the final stretch of the Rio Grande before it reaches the Gulf. During the public comment period, USFWS received more than 25,000 comments, most of them opposed to the swap. Critics argue the exchanged habitat has already been degraded by SpaceX's expanding operations and failed rocket launches, and that the deal fails to provide the conservation benefit required by law.

In response, the Center for Biological Diversity, Save RGV, the South Texas Environmental Justice Network, and the Carrizo/Comecrudo Nation of Texas have filed a federal lawsuit to block the transfer, alleging violations of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. The case is ongoing.

Lights Out for North Texas Birds This Fall

As summer fades, North Texas becomes a flight path for millions of songbirds heading south along the Central Flyway. Warblers, thrushes, orioles, and buntings travel by night, navigating by starlight toward wintering grounds in Mexico, Central America, and beyond. Our glowing skyline works against them—artificial light disorients migrating birds, drains their critical energy reserves, and leads to deadly collisions with glass and steel across Dallas-Fort Worth.

The solution is simple. From August 15 through November 30, turn off non-essential lighting between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. Decorative façade lighting, empty office floors, and unused porch lights are the easiest places to start.

You don't need a skyscraper to make a difference. Dim what you can at home, ask your workplace or HOA to join in, and spread the word to neighbors. Every dark hour helps give fall migrants the safe passage they need to complete their journey south.

LIGHTS OUT, TEXAS! bit.ly/Lights-Texas. **PEAK MIGRATION**



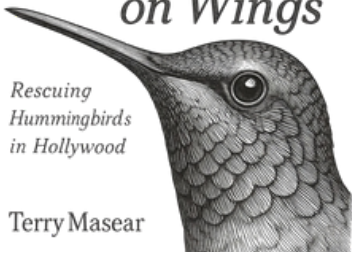
Help PTAS Soar Higher in 2026-2027 Support North Texas Birds and their Habitat



Fastest Things on Wings

*Rescuing
Hummingbirds
in Hollywood*

Terry Masear



This past year has been remarkable for Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society (PTAS). In January 2026, PTAS volunteers partnered with the Heard Natural Science Museum to hand-scatter native seed across roughly 10 acres of freshly burned restoration prairie, drawing multigenerational participation.

Together, we connected people with birds and nature, expanded our conservation impact, and strengthened our role as a voice for North Texas habitats. From a Port Aransas field trip that recorded 145 species (including Whooping Cranes, a rare American Flamingo, and reintroduced Aplomado Falcons) to monthly programs featuring nationally recognized speakers on grouse ecology, bird language, and hummingbird rehabilitation, PTAS inspired curiosity, built community, and advanced science.

We also organized a group trip to Magee Marsh for the Biggest Week in American Birding, and are coordinating a members' safari to Tanzania, giving birders access to premier destinations beyond North Texas.



Your support also made real change for birds. In 2025-2026 we:

- Funded \$8,378 in conservation grants, supporting a new equipment storage shed for the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center (\$2,078), trail maintenance and native grass restoration at Connemara Meadow Nature Preserve (\$2,200), bird banding supplies at the Heard (\$500) and LLELA (\$1,100), and an American Kestrel research project with Dr. Jim Bednarz at LLELA (\$2,500).
- Advocated for habitat protections—rallying members behind a petition and letter-writing campaign to restore public access to Village Creek Drying Beds, and joining the statewide Lights Out Texas campaign to reduce bird-building collisions during migration.
- Mobilized volunteers for two Christmas Bird Counts, Audubon's Climate Watch, and the Great Backyard Bird Count.
- Brought birding to the public, with free monthly bird walks at the Heard Natural Science Museum and Connemara Meadow, feeding observations into eBird for ongoing research



None of this would be possible without our Supporting Members. PTAS charges no participation fees, and everyone is welcome at our activities thanks to their generosity.

Please consider becoming a Supporting Member by contributing \$15 or more to PTAS. All donations go directly toward our programs, activities, and conservation efforts.

- Online: Use a credit card or PayPal account by clicking the Donate button at prairieandtimbers.org/support-ptas
- By Check: A form is available at the same website for those who prefer to mail a check.



Bird Monitoring in Action



eBird

Bird monitoring continues to offer profound environmental rewards by deepening our connection to nature and advancing conservation work. As birdwatchers submit observations to public platforms like eBird, they provide crucial data that helps track bird populations, migration shifts, and habitat health. Over the past year, eBird data played a key role in decisions ranging from optimizing siting for communication towers and wind farms, to enhancing power pole safety to reduce eagle electrocutions, and shifting land management—like adjusted mowing schedules—to benefit grassland birds in multiple states. Locally, PTAS members remained active contributors, logging checklists across North Texas. Each entry not only enriches our collective scientific understanding but also strengthens conservation initiatives.



Audubon



Christmas Bird Count

PTAS proudly sponsors the McKinney Christmas Bird Count, with its circle centered on the Heard Museum, and also supports a second count around Lake Ray Hubbard. These counts are part of the National Audubon Society's continent-wide initiative that brings together birders each holiday season to identify and record all birds seen within designated circles. The information collected contributes to one of the longest-running community science projects in the world, providing researchers with essential data on population shifts, migration changes, and the impacts of habitat and climate on bird species.



PTAS participates in Audubon's Climate Watch program and the Audubon Foundation of Texas Bird Squares activity, monitoring 10 designated squares. These programs focus on tracking how climate change affects bird populations across North America. Since birds are highly sensitive to temperature and habitat changes, shifts in their migration patterns, breeding behaviors, and distributions provide valuable insights into the broader effects of climate change on ecosystems.



Climate Watch

Communicating with PTAS



<https://prairieandtimbers.org/>



Prairie and Timbers Audubon
c/o Heard Science Museum
1 Nature Pl, McKinney, TX 75069



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