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The Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

September 2023



Wilson's Phalarope ©Mike Cameron

Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society Invites You to Enjoy Birds

Although it doesn't feel like it, summer is transitioning to fall, and it is time for a new season of activities with the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society (PTAS). For those of you new to our organization, PTAS is a local 501(c)(3) organization affiliated with National Audubon and dedicated to birding, habitat conservation, and education. Our board members and committees have been busy over the summer break, preparing a great set of educational meetings and field trips, and I hope you find them entertaining and informative.

Our first meeting of the 2023-2024 year will be on September 26th and will feature Dr. Wayne Meyer discussing "The State of the Bird." You can attend in-person at the Heard Museum's Science Resource Center (SRC), or you can join the live Zoom session via the internet from the comfort of your own home. We previewed this meeting format in the spring and received very enthusiastic support, so we are excited to make it our permanent format this fall.

Our educational field trips will continue at Connemara Meadow on the first weekend of the month (all year) and at the Heard Museum on the second Saturday of the month (September-June). There will also be additional birding trips around the DFW area to explore local birding hotspots and help you hone your skills. The first of these trips is planned for October 28th to the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA) to view fall migrants in a mixture of grassland and riparian habitats.

As always, our programs and events are free and open to anyone interested in birds, the natural world, and conservation. We do encourage people to become Supporting Members of PTAS with a donation of \$15 or greater, which can be done online (<http://prairieandtimbers.org/join.htm>) or in person at our monthly meetings. All funds raised by PTAS go to support our conservation activities, educational programs, and our grant programs for nature-related organizations, as detailed elsewhere in this newsletter.

I hope you enjoy the activities that have been planned for this year. Please let us know how we are doing, and consider volunteering to help make this a great organization.

Mike Cameron
President, PTAS

Birding Activities

- Bird ID 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



Razorbill and Common Murre
Pelta Heller
Audubon Photography
Awards

Monthly Meetings With Presentations and Bird ID Session

- Sept 26
- Oct 24
- Nov 28
- Jan 23
- Feb 27
- March 26
- April 23
- May 21

All meetings are at the
Science Resource Center
Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary
1 Nature Place,
McKinney, TX 75069

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

Agenda

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

Fall Bird ID Classes

A Focus On North Texas Birds

- Sept: Three Peeps: Our Smallest Shorebirds
- Oct: Migrating Raptors: Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks
- Nov: What's This Bird? Can you ID these birds from less-than-stellar photos?

September's Presentation Dr. Wayne Meyer

The recent U.S. State of the Birds Report highlights two contrasting trends. Positive news emerges from improved waterfowl populations due to wetland conservation efforts. However, a concerning picture emerges as bird populations decline in various habitats such as forests, grasslands, deserts, and oceans. Published by 33 prominent science and conservation organizations, the 2022 report is the first comprehensive analysis of U.S. bird populations since a significant 2019 study revealed a loss of nearly 3 billion birds in North America over five decades. Join Dr. Meyer to explore thriving species and those teetering on decline, along with vital conservation endeavors for species recovery.

State of The Birds



Dr. Wayne Meyer, an Associate Professor at Austin College's Biology department for 30 years, realized his birding passion at 13 in Connecticut. In 1993, he fulfilled his dream by joining Austin College's faculty. With extensive birding along both U.S. coasts, he has spent 25 years birding in Texas and Oklahoma. He's a respected speaker for Master Naturalist groups and often presents at Friends of Hagerman NWR Second Saturday programs.



Dr. Wayne Meyer

October's Presentation

Alejandra Gage

Jim Bednarz

Monogamy mythology: a close look at the breeding ecology of the Painted Bunting

Scientists have long considered Painted Buntings (*Passerina ciris*) mostly monogamous or occasionally polygynous, but recent evidence from the work done at the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA) suggests that this might not be true. Based on the limited amount of parental care provided by the male of the species and our recent female home range data, we suspect that female Painted Buntings are mating with more than one male. Our presentation describes the unique ecology of the Painted Bunting, our efforts to solve the mystery of the green birds, the life history of the Painted Bunting, some of our recent findings, and the work currently taking place at LLELA by the UNT Painted Bunting Project.



Katie Ceynar

Jim Bednarz

Alejandra Gage

Alejandra Gage is a graduate student pursuing her master's degree in biology at the University of North Texas. Her research is focused on exploring the mating system of the Painted Bunting and the possibility of multiple paternity in the broods.

Jim Bednarz, with a B.Sc. in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology, M.S. in Animal Ecology, and a Ph.D. in Biology, has 40+ years of experience researching avian population ecology and conservation across six continents. He's published 100+ peer-reviewed papers. He teaches at the University of North Texas focusing on Harris's Hawks, Painted Buntings, and American Kestrel ecology and demography.

November's Presentation

Constance Sidles

Crows, The Avian Einsteins



Crows are among the smartest of all birds. They can recognize human faces, pass knowledge along to new generations, work together to protect each other, set up sentries to watch for danger, even use tools. Indeed, all members of the crow family (called corvids) are intelligent, including ravens, jays, and magpies. If you'd like to learn more about these geniuses of the avian world, join master birder and author Constance Sidles as she takes you into the secret world of crows.



Constance Sidles

Constance Sidles is a master birder, a former board member of Birds Connect Seattle (formerly Seattle Audubon Society), a current member of the society's Conservation Committee, chair of the Publications Committee, an environmental educator, and an author who has written four books about nature. Connie graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in Egyptology, which proved to be enlightening but not lucrative. Instead of working on ancient cultures, Connie now works on current issues, especially habitat preservation.

Monitoring Birds

PTAS Guided Bird Walks at the Heard and Connemara Meadow

Continuing our tradition, PTAS volunteers will lead monthly bird walks at Connemara Meadows on the first Saturday or Sunday of the month and at the Heard Science Museum on the second Saturday. These walks offer a unique chance to observe birds in North Texas' natural environment amid ongoing urbanization. Guided walks last around three hours, but participants' may adjust their schedules to meet their needs. Catering to beginners and intermediate birders, these trips provide tips while allowing birders of all levels to enjoy seasonal diversity. The route covers various habitats. Birding techniques are explained on the go, and questions are welcome. Typically, 40-60 bird species are spotted. Efforts focus on both seeing and hearing the birds. Our observations are logged into the eBird database for global research. Join us as we await southbound migrant birds in fall, northern nesting species in winter, and the return of migrants in spring.



PTAS Field Trips

Birding field trips are at the heart of our passion. Our monthly birding excursions provide enjoyable experiences that foster community science and environmental awareness while allowing participants to de-stress in nature.

However, we currently face challenges in organizing these outings due to the departure of our trip coordinators. To ensure that we can continue offering these enriching experiences, we are reaching out for assistance. If you can step in to help organize one or more of these trips, we can carry on with this cherished tradition.

Seasoned birders can certainly contribute their wealth of knowledge, but even if you are new to birding, we enthusiastically welcome your enthusiasm and fresh ideas. Rodney and Mike will be overseeing this effort. Whether you can assist with just one trip or multiple outings, your contributions are invaluable.

Below are the dates and locations for planned trips:

- Oct 28: Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA)
- Nov 18: Breckenridge Park, Richardson, TX Guide: Mike Cameron
- Dec: Join a Christmas Bird Count
 - Dec 17: Lake Ray Hubbard CBC (likely date, not confirmed) Count Compilers: Peter Assmann and Mike Cameron
 - Dec 26: McKinney CBC Count Compiler: Mike Cameron
- Jan 20: Hagerman NWR
- Feb 24: Caddo National Grasslands (Fannin Co)
- Mar 23: Village Creek Drying Beds
- Apr 27: Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center
- May 18: Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center (Denton)

Your willingness to contribute to these birding field trips will significantly enhance our ability to continue offering them to our members.

PTAS Environmental Monitoring and Advocation

eBird

The Cornell Lab

Audubon

Christmas Bird Count



Climate Watch



PTAS members participate in community science projects through out the year. We submit are checklists to the eBird database maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in order to support environmental monitoring and impact environmental action. As a couple diverse examples, the National Audubon Society is utilizing eBird data to inform the placement of wind turbines and transmission lines. Additionally, the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center, a local non-profit supported by PTAS, relies on eBird data to make informed decisions about the optimal locations for releasing the Mississippi Kites they rehabilitate.



Christmas Bird Count: Organized by the National Audubon Society, this annual event involves bird enthusiasts counting and identifying birds within a designated circle around Christmas time. The data assists researchers in studying bird population trends over time. PTAS sponsors the McKinney CBC where the circle is centered on the Heard Museum. PTAS also supports a second count centered around Lake Ray Hubbard and held before Christmas.



PTAS participates in Audubon's Climate Watch and Audubon Foundation of Texas Bird Squares Activity by monitoring 10 squares. The program focuses on monitoring and tracking the impact of climate change on bird populations across North America. Birds are highly sensitive to changes in temperature and habitat, and shifts in their migration patterns, breeding behaviors, and distributions can provide valuable insights into the broader effects of climate change on ecosystems.

PTAS encourages it members to participate in the following community science programs.

- Project FeederWatch: Also by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, this project encourages individuals to set up bird feeders and document the birds that visit during the winter months. The data collected helps researchers track changes in bird populations and movements.
- NestWatch: This project focuses on monitoring bird nests, including when eggs are laid, when they hatch, and the success of the young birds. Managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the data helps scientists understand nesting success and potential threats.
- Great Backyard Bird Count: A joint effort by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this event invites people to count birds for at least 15 minutes in their own yards, parks, or other locations and report their observations online.

PTAS Supports Local Environmental Education, Restoration, and Student Research Through 7 Grants in 2023



In memory of Gailon Brehm, PTAS members have donated to establish a memorial in his honor at the Heard Museum. This grant will facilitate improvements to the museum's boardwalk and trails, where Gailon enthusiastically led our 2nd Saturday walks. The memorial will stand as a poignant tribute to Gailon's passion for nature and will enable future visitors to connect with the beauty he held so dear.



PTAS has provided a grant for replacement mist nets to support the work of the Heard Banders. Over 29,000 birds have been banded since 1978. Bird banding imparts crucial habitat knowledge and tracks migrating songbirds each spring and fall. The station submits data with the U.S. Geological Survey and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The Heard bird banding data has been the basis for 3 bird related journal articles by Dr. Doug Wood and associates of Southeastern Oklahoma State University.



PTAS has granted Connemara Meadow a grant for procurement of supplies and maintenance to support the ongoing effort of eradicating invasive plants and establishing native prairie grass. The investment made in the preceding year has been significant. This includes the expansion of irrigation areas and a twofold increase in the "grass from seed" initiative compared to the previous year. This positive trajectory is poised to persist, further enhancing the habitat available for migrating and wintering birds. The grant also provides financial support to strengthen Bobwhite populations through efforts with the City of Plano, Blackland Prairie Master Naturalist, and the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center.



The PTAS has funded an initiative that brings Outdoor Learning Experiences to under-resourced schools at the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center. This program is designed for various age groups and includes activities aligned with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) objectives. The curriculum includes activities like live raptor programs, guided trail walks, scavenger hunts, owl pellet dissections, angler education workshops, raptor research/observation activities, and interactive conservation/prairie activities. The main goals of this initiative are to expose more young people to nature and help them understand the importance of conservation. The plan is to support at least 15 schools for on-site field trips and involve around 900 students by December 2023.



The LLELA Bird Banding Station, overseen by the University of North Texas Institute of Applied Science, received funding from the PTAS for mist nets. Established in 2006, the station operates under the LLELA Director's management and aims to track the movement of spring and fall migrants along the Central Flyway, documenting species diversity and abundance trends. This data aids in understanding environmental changes, particularly the effects of habitat fragmentation and destruction on bird populations. Additionally, it assists in evaluating local habitat usage by bird species, offering insights into the effectiveness of LLELA's restoration and management strategies. Bird populations serve as crucial indicators of environmental shifts and impacts.



PTAS provided funding to cover student field expenses and necessary equipment for a research project titled "Comparing Bird Species Richness Using Automated Recording Units." This study is led by Doug Wood at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. By employing automated recording units (ARUs), ornithologists can assess factors like species richness and occupancy. The research will involve two ARUs placed in suburban woodlots, recording bird calls and songs. The files will be analyzed to determine species richness in each woodlot, and to compare morning and afternoon detection rates. Additionally, the study will evaluate the efficiency of the Merlin app by comparing its results with the audio files.



PTAS provided funding for a student study focused on Harris's Hawks at the University of North Texas. This study is being conducted under the guidance of Dr. Jim Bednarz, a distinguished senior lecturer, and advisor within UNT's Biological Sciences Department. Dr. Bednarz has conducted research on the social ecology of Harris's Hawks. These hawks are highly social raptors, often found in groups with complex social hierarchies, engaging in cooperative hunting and breeding.



A PTAS grant has been provided to the Whooping Crane Center of Texas (WTCC) to help fund the concluding phase of the center's construction. Our prior support has played a crucial role in contributing to the successes of the WTCC program in recent years. These achievements include the establishment of bonded crane pairs, as well as the observation of breeding and nesting behaviors. As part of its long-term objectives, the WTCC aims to release offspring into the wild in due course.

Help PTAS Fund North Texas Avian and Environmental Activities



Support PTAS During North Texas Giving Day

PTAS charges no participation fees, and everyone is welcomed at our activities thanks to our Supporting Members. Come and join in. Please consider becoming a Supporting Member by contributing \$15 or more to PTAS. All money goes towards our programs, activities, and conservation efforts. Contribute by:

- Using Credit Card or PayPal account:
- Click Donate on prairieandtimbers.org/join.htm

As a member of the North Texas nonprofit community, PTAS participates in the North Texas Giving Day. This platform provides a user-friendly interface that makes it easy for donors to support their favorite causes. See <https://www.northtexasgivingday.org>

Lights Out Texas



PTAS is a strong advocate for Lights Out Texas. Remarkably, approximately 1 in every 3 migrating birds in the U.S. traverses through Texas. These birds predominantly travel at night, causing them to become disoriented by the luminous glow emitted by commercial and residential structures. This disorientation often leads to fatal collisions and exposes the birds to ground-level hazards. To safeguard these migratory birds, it's crucial to minimize light pollution by extinguishing all non-essential outdoor and indoor lighting between 11 pm - 6 am during the migration period from Aug 15 to Nov 30th. This measure is especially critical during Peak Migration occurring from Sept 6 to Oct 29. Gain deeper insights and enroll for bird migration alerts through: <https://tx.audubon.org/urbanconservation/lights-out-texas>

Communicating with PTAS



<http://prairieandtimbers.org/>



<https://www.facebook.com/PTAudubon/>



<https://www.instagram.com/prairieandtimbersaudubon/>



ptaszoom@gmail.com -- use to get invited to zoom meetings, (include name and usps address) or to subscribe to our email address list to receive announcements and news



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

Supporting our Effort



We want everyone to appreciate birds and the environment, and we welcome you to be a member. There are no required dues. We appreciate and recognize a core group of **Supporting Members** who provide the funds to run PTAS and support our work. To become a Supporting Member, donate \$15 or more to PTAS. Also, special thanks for the many volunteers who give their time.



PTAS is a certified chapter of National Audubon and Audubon Texas is the state office. We appreciate the many resources available for our common goals provided by National. National Audubon supplies funding via Base-Line program and collaborative grants. Please consider joining National Audubon and supporting the birding community at a National level.



Thanks to the Heard Museum and Sanctuary for providing the facilities we use for our meetings and the sanctuary for birding. Our Second Saturday bird walks are in cooperation with and at the Heard.



Audubon Foundation of Texas (AFT) provides collaborative grants opportunities, Texas Bird Squares funding and EarthShare Texas funds to PTAS. AFT's mission is to support Texas Audubon organizations.



EarthShare Texas supports environmental organizations statewide. AFT is a member of EarthShare and receives funding from EarthShare Texas.



Texas Instruments matches PTAS TI volunteers' time and TI employees'/retirees' gifts with matching donations.



Reliant supports Earthshare Texas through its EcoShare program. Consider joining Reliant's EcoShare plan to supply your energy needs.



Kroger supports PTAS through its Community Awards program. Consider signing up PTAS as your designated charity.



Central Market (H-E-B) supports Earthshare Texas through its charity tear pad campaign in April. Consider giving to EarthShare Texas, AFT and PTAS