



Rustlin's

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

Volume XXIII

Number 9

March/April 2004

MEETINGS AND SPEAKERS

March 23, 2004 - Warbler Warm-Up.

Carolyn Oldham will present a slide presentation on warblers.

March 27, 2004 – Birding Day at the Heard Museum.

More information in this newsletter

Winnie Burkett, who is in charge of the wetland areas for the Houston Audubon Society chapter, will be our speaker for Birding Day.

April 27, 2004 – The Bees and Birds and Other Good “Information.”

John Talbert of the Collin County Beekeeper Association will present.

May 25, 2004 – What Was That? Did You Hear Something?

Night Walk at the Outdoor Learning Center in Plano
Address - 3100 Shiloh Road, Plano, TX

PTAS Meetings are the fourth Tuesday

7:00 p.m. at the Heard Museum • Call 972-562-5566 for directions

**CHECKOUT OUR NEW
PRAIRIE & TIMBERS WEBSITE:
www.prairieandtimbers.com**

MORE GREAT WEB SITES

Texas Bluebird Society

<http://www.texasbluebirdsociety.org/>

The North American Bluebird Society

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>

a non-profit conservation, education and research organization, promotes the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species.

The Bluebird Box

<http://audubon-omaha.org/bbbox/>

The Bluebird Box is the starting point for finding information about bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. Articles, Nest box drawings, the Best of Bluebird Mailing Lists Classified, and more are all available right here and for the most part only here.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

How soon the uncommon seem common.

Birders notice birds everywhere they go, and along the way some really common birds make us stop. For example, the Slate-colored Dark-eyed Junco, seen in New England, is an eye-popping dark gray with a pure white belly. Even more dramatic are the Oregon Dark-eyed Juncos of the Pacific Northwest with their bright reddish sides, almost like a Towhee.

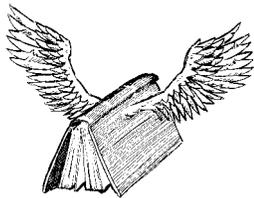
When a birder goes to the lower Rio Grande valley and sees his first Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, Harris's Hawk, or even a Chachalaca, it's exciting. But, after a couple of days, these birds are so commonly seen that the excitement is gone. You might be looking intently through binoculars at your first Great Kiskadee, as I was, when someone walks up and asks what you are seeing. Trying to contain your excitement, you tell him and hear his reaction – “Uh.” Until a few days later, after you've seen that bird everywhere you go, you can't understand why he did not even bother to look through his binoculars.

So, if you're out to see the latest rare bird, the common ones won't impress you much, but on an ordinary day, they enrich our lives. For me, I can't imagine a prettier sight in nature than a pair of Cardinals, no matter how many times I see them.

Gailon Brehm, President

LEARN THE BIRDS AT THE HEARD

Collin County is rich with opportunities to observe birds. Again this year your Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society is offering an outstanding opportunity to birders of all levels of experience and knowledge. This birding class meets at 7:00 p.m. just prior to the chapter meetings which are at 7:30 p.m. Come in through the back door off the parking lot and you will be directed to the basement amphitheater where the class will be taught. Teachers are experienced members of the local chapter. The class format is an informal discussion teaching keys to identification of a small number of local birds each month. All you need to bring is your favorite field guide. Upcoming classes include:



Tuesday, March 23 - 7:00 PM

Backyard friends - Mourning Dove, White-Winged Dove, Rock Dove (Pigeon), Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, American Goldfinch, Eastern Bluebird

Tuesday, April 27 - 7:00 PM

Warm-weather birds - Green Heron, Yellow-Crowned Night Heron, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike



Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society 4th Annual Birding Day

Saturday, March 27, 2004
Heard Museum
McKinney, Texas

Featuring Winnie Burkett of the Houston Audubon
"Special Measures for Special Places What Makes Bolivar Flats so Important"

Please make reservations by **March 23**
with one of the following:

Sally Evans
972-248-6283

svevans@sbcglobal.net

Karen White
972-424-9786

kawhite@att.net

Cost - \$15 per person to cover lunch, drinks, speaker.
Make checks payable to P&T Audubon Society

Agenda:

8:00 - 10:00 a.m.	Registration
8:45 - 11:30 a.m.	Birding on the sanctuary, visiting the Museum exhibits and gift shop
11:30 - 12:20 p.m.	Lunch
12:20 - 12:45 p.m.	Introductions
12:45 - 1:30 p.m.	Speaker Winne Burkett
1:45 - 2:00 p.m.	Raffle Winners
2:00 - 2:10 p.m.	Wrap-up, directions to Raptor Center

2004 Field Trip Schedule

Saturday, March 20

Caddo Grasslands near Bonham

Depart Kelly-Moore Paint Store 7:00 a.m.

Leaders: Carolyn and David Oldham

Length- 3/4 day

Expect to see early spring migrants, East Texas specialties (Pine Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Northern Parula, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, 2 kinds of Nuthatches), raptors and late winter visitors Bring water, snacks and/or lunch

Saturday, March 27

Birding Day at the Heard

More information to follow

Saturday, April 17

"The Forbidden Zone" Arlington & Village Creek Drying Beds

Depart Kelly-Moore Paint Store 7:00 a.m.

Length-3/4 day

Expect to see early migrants, shore birds, ducks, raptors, and sparrows



Saturday, May 8

"Prairie Creek Park in Richardson"

Carolyn and Dave Oldham

Expect to see Spring Migrants- Warblers, Vireos, etc.

Length: 1/2 day

Meet at the Park at 7:30 am

Saturday, May 15

"Whatever Place is Hot for Migrants"

We will select a local park and post it on the web

Meet time of 8:00 am – come see what is passing through!

ARE YOU READY FOR FIELD TRIPS?

RSVPing is most important!

One of the most satisfying experiences of being an Audubon member is attending a successful field trip. As you consider joining a field trip, be sure to keep in mind these following tips:



First: RSVP the week of the trip to one of the co-chairmen:

Carolyn Oldham at 972-517-8987

email carolyn.oldham@verizon.net

OR

Tom Heath at 972-867-8648

email heathwtom@netscape.net

Second: Be on time. When it says the trip will meet, that means *DEPART!* So be at the location noted. Our carpooling site is the parking lot of the Kelly-Moore Paint Store at the northwest corner of Spring Creek Parkway and Hwy 75 in Plano. - ***DON'T BE LATE.***

Third: Bring water and snacks for yourself.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Hagerman NWR Trip Report -- Jan 24, 2004

Once again the weather forecast was rather discouraging, and it was raining in Dallas/Plano as people for the field trip. However, 15 crazy birders had the confidence to come and were richly rewarded. Even though the skies were gray and dreary all day, there were no more than a few drops of rain that fell on us until we started for home at 4:00pm. The temperature was incredibly mild, and the birding proved to be great, with a total of 66 species seen.

Everyone was eager to try to find a LeConte's sparrow, since one had been reported recently on TexBirds. So we checked the field above the Goode picnic area, and almost immediately flushed one up into a small tree, and everyone got a pretty good look. As we progressed, there was another and another and another one, with better and better looks, at closer and closer range ... until soon LeConte's sparrow became a junk bird!

In that same area and then again at nearby Dead Woman's Pond, we heard Pileated woodpeckers calling in the distance for quite some time, but it was another exciting moment for all when one did a fly-over as we stood in a wide open area.

Other highlights included a nice variety of sparrows throughout the day, great looks at geese, and an amazing gathering of 36 Great-blue herons in one pond, along with the out-of-season Great egret.

As a Grand Finale we went to Dennison Dam where we spotted 3 Bald eagles in trees below the dam -- what a sight! Then to top it all off we witnessed quite a spectacle just above the dam of a Common loon trying to swallow a very sizeable fish -- perhaps 10" long. We watched spellbound for 10-15 minutes while he worked again and again to get it positioned just right to swallow -- it looked impossible. But finally, down it went in a flash, with a huge bulge in his throat as it slowly moved down -- talk about a scratchy throat! Then he rose up in the water and fluttered his wings to help it move on down a bit. Another fascinating sight and one we will long remember. **Mike Mizell**

Greenville City Lakes -- February 28, 2004

Having been snowed out for the originally scheduled trip on Valentine's day, 13 PTAS birders and guests showed up for a second attempt to bird the Greenville City Lakes and tallied a total of 56 species for the day. Thanks to the greatly appreciated hospitality of Jennifer Maxwell, we began the day at her well-managed backyard habitat, where we were able to enjoy the fruits of her labor. From the comfort of her sun room we observed Wood Ducks, Mallards, Brown Creepers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Rusty Blackbirds, American Goldfinches, Tufted Titmice, Carolina Wrens, Carolina Chickadees, Mourning Doves, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Cardinals and Dark-eyed Juncos. A short walk through the woods to an open field gave us great looks at several LeConte's Sparrows. Although she also has Hairy Woodpeckers that frequent her yard, we unfortunately failed to see any on this day.

We moved on to the Greenville City Lakes where we began with a short walk along a wooded edge and had good looks at several brightly colored Fox Sparrows. We also picked up Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Phoebe, Great Blue Heron, and White-throated Sparrow. Noticeably absent were Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warbler, and Golden-crowned Kinglet which had been plentiful throughout the winter.

Drives around two of the larger lakes produced Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, more Wood Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup and lots of American Coots. We had good close looks at a Horned Grebe, but failed to find Eared Grebe which are usually present throughout the winter. We also missed the Hooded Mergansers and Bald Eagle that had been resident all winter but apparently headed north the prior week.

The brush piles and wooded areas around the lakes were productive for American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, Brewer's, Rusty, and Red-winged Blackbirds, Swamp, Song, and Savannah Sparrow, Blue Jays, and other common small birds. A Red-shouldered Hawk posed on a snag about 40 feet from the road, allowing great looks. Overhead we had a Red-tailed Hawk, the ever present Turkey and Black Vultures, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls, and Forster's Terns.

The group ended the day by sampling some local Chinese cuisine, putting a tasty finishing touch on a great day of birding. **Ron Baltzegar, Greenville TX**



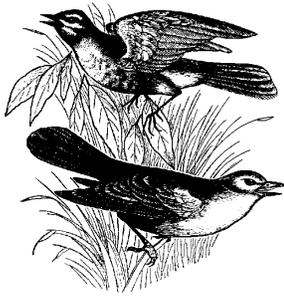
OTHER BIRD SIGHTINGS

American Woodcock in East Texas

A small group of PTAS members went on an exploratory trip Saturday evening, February 7 - to see if we could find a displaying American Woodcock. We were given good directions by a local Longview birder to a spot reliable in the past. We arrived shortly before sundown, and soon had a male bird sounding his "peent" call from the field in front of us. After ten minutes, when he did not fly up into his mating display flight, I decided to play a short tape of the call that I had taken on a cassette recorder. We did not know how, or even if, the bird would respond. After just a few seconds of the tape, though, we found out!

The Woodcock appeared "out of nowhere", facing us while he hovered about 5 feet above our heads, with the rosy glow of the sunset behind him. We could all hear the air rushing under his beating wings, "whomp, whomp, homp". Some of us heard a "clicking" sound coming from the bird, but we were not sure if he was making it with his voice or his beak. This was clearly an aggressive, defensive reaction by the bird, intended to intimidate and run off the rival (my tape recording) he thought was challenging him along the roadside.

Continued on page 4



Our group of six had the Woodcock pass very low over our heads a total of four times, and he hovered twice above us, making sure to keep the sunset to his back. We all got great looks of the silhouetted profile and long beak of this elusive East Texas bird. **Jerri Kerr**

On a recent outing to the shores of Lake Lewisville, the most numerous bird of the day was probably the Carolina Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglets came in a close second, followed by many White-throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Field Sparrows, and even a Dark-eyed Junco.

It turned out to be a very pleasant morning for birding. We went in the back door of Pilot Knoll Park, along the equestrian trail, where it was somewhat muddy, but where the habitat of low scrubby brush made for excellent bird watching. The rains of earlier in the morning had dissipated by the time we started the walk so the birds were pretty active. Even though all the

winter sparrows, Harris's, Fox, etc., were not evident, none of us were disappointed with the birds we did see. The highlight birds of the 43 species we counted were the Blue-headed Vireo and the Brown Creeper. But the four woodpecker and two wren species, coupled with excellent looks at a Brown Thrasher, Eastern Kingfisher, and the crows mobbing a rather damp Red-tailed Hawk all went in the books as good birds for the day. I learned about this location while on a butterfly walk earlier in the summer and couldn't wait for fall to arrive. Then I saw a posting on TEXBIRDS two weeks ago, I knew the time had come to schedule a visit. For all the time involved in the drive over there, it was well worth the trip and definitely a place I will revisit again. **Mike Moore**

A walk at White Rock Lake was quite successful, both in terms of the birds. We surveyed parts of the lake, the dam spillway, and the woods of the Old Fish Hatchery, to tally 37 different species of water birds, shorebirds, and passerines.

We encountered one raptor, a Red-shouldered Hawk, and one recently arrived Song Sparrow, and several lingering Nashville Warblers. Our attempts to locate the Green Parakeet among all the Monk Parakeets were, unfortunately, unsuccessful. There were lots of small shorebirds on the spillway, but the back lighting silhouettes made much of the identification problematic. The Spotted Sandpiper, however, was easily recognized by its ever-bobbing tail. Of special interest, were the several Ring-billed Gulls on and around the spillway. We could actually see the different plumage sequences among the variously aged birds. All in all, an interesting and satisfying morning of bird watching. **Mike Moore**

Ben Franklin may have been correct in suggesting the Wild Turkey as our national symbol. In his day, I might have even agreed with him. However, there is probably no bird quite as regal and spectacular as our Bald Eagle. Fortunately, our group was able to scope four of them, one great looking adult and three sub-adults, along the Texas side of the Red River below Denison Dam last Saturday. But, it gets better.

On the lakeside, we found a dozen Common Loons as well as several rather phalaropish-acting Bonaparte's Gulls. While on the Hagerman refuge grounds, we added several Red-breasted Mergansers and a pair of Tundra Swans. The swans were remarkable in that they are listed as an accidental species on the refuge checklist. I don't believe I have ever seen as many Red-shouldered Hawks as seemed to be around either. Even though we did not spend a great deal of time chasing the many small birds known to be around, we still managed to identify 59 species for the day. **Mike Moore**

SHOT WHOOPING CRANE UPDATE

On November 14, Donald W. Jones shot and killed a whooping crane that had been part of a group of four migrating cranes that had stopped to rest and feed around Lake Bardwell. Jones, who did not have the required reservoir-hunting permit from the Corps of Engineers, performed this act during a closed waterfowl season and closed Sandhill crane season. He stuffed the crane in a bag along with a Gadwall, Blue-winged teal, and a northern shoveler. In other words, there is absolutely no excuse for his action regardless of "mistaken identity" or not.



On Friday, February 13th, Jones pleaded guilty on a plea agreement. He will be sentenced May 14. We now have a date and a place where we can have our voices heard. As wildlife conservationists and birders we need to let Donald W. Jones and all other ignorant hunters but also Judge Buchmeyer, Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark McBride, and all other influential court officials, to know how important our natural resources (including the endangered species, the whooping crane) are to us and future generations. If you are interested in expressing your opinions to this case here are some addresses:

Senior Judge Jerry Buchmeyer
1100 Commerce St., Rm. 1544 • Dallas, TX 75242

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark McBride
1100 Commerce St., 3rd Floor • Dallas, TX 75242

On the flip side congratulations should be extended to Texas game warden Jeff Powell, assigned to Ellis County, Texas, who cracked this case. Write Colonel James Stinebaugh, Director of Law Enforcement, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas, and let him know that we appreciate Jeff and all of the other fine staff who are out in the field everyday protecting Texas' natural resources.



ADOPT A NEST BOX – The Heard Museum has created a great nest box trail program. These boxes are used by the cavity nesting species on the sanctuary

(bluebirds, prothonotary warblers, titmice, chickadees, wrens, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, screech owls, great-crested flycatchers and American kestrels). Duties include installing the boxes, monitoring the boxes, entering and retrieving data and assist with the prothonotary study. Participating by adopting a nest box would be a great educational opportunity for the entire family. If you are interested in this fun and beneficial activity, please contact Jennifer Maxwell at 903-454-3358.

COMMENTARY by Ann Reynolds

PTAS SPONSORS BIRD WALKS AT THE HEARD MUSEUM

The Heard Museum and Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society is now offering guided bird walks on the Heard Museum and 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 walks are for beginning and intermediate birders and will last 1.5 hours with plenty of opportunity for Questions and tips on birding techniques. Attendees who have binoculars and field guides should bring them.



Book Report - *The Western Bird Watcher, and Birding in the American West*, by Kevin Zimmer. This is one of the best birding books that I

have ever read * if only I could remember it all! I say "this," singular, because although Zimmer never says so, the second book of 402 pages, published in 2000 by Cornell Univ. Press, is an enlarged second edition of the first book of 278 pages, published in 1985 by Prentice-Hall. Both books cover North America from Texas and North Dakota westward, and that includes us! I am not throwing away the first book because it contains vignettes of birding in special places of the west, such as the Rio Grande Valley, Texas Gulf Coast, and the Big Bend. It is also illustrated by black-and-white photos of side-by-side bird skins, which are remarkably effective in illustrating subtle differences in shading and structure between species, plus some nice pen-and-ink drawings. The second book is illustrated by more aesthetic black-and-white photos from life, along with the pen-and-ink drawings, but the photos in the first book do have their advantages. Both books have chapters on Techniques of Finding Birds, Identifying Birds, Keeping Field Notes, and species-by-species hints on Finding the Western Specialties. The most interesting chapter though is "Difficult Identifications: Beyond the Field Guides." Here lots of good hints are given on how to separate similar species in the field. It is interesting to see what Zimmer considers "difficult" as applied to the Dallas area. He discusses, among others, Non-breeding Loons, Horned vs. Eared Grebes, Cormorants, immature Night Herons, Ross's vs. Snow Geese, female Teal, Scaups, female Goldeneyes, immature Eagles, Accipiters, Buteos, Shorebirds, Terns,

Myiarchus and Empidonax Flycatchers, brown-backed Swallows, female Bluebirds, Wing-barred Vireos, some Sparrows, winter Longspurs, Meadowlarks, and Carpodacus Finches. The discussion of Dowitcher identification is what really sold me when I first picked up this book, but even Zimmer basically gives up on winter Dowitchers, most Gulls, and female hummingbirds! Nonetheless, I highly, highly, recommend this book.

Sid Dunkle



Eastern Bluebirds are monogamous. Pairs generally stay together throughout the breeding season, and pairs may breed together for more than one season. Some birds, however, may switch mates during a breeding season to raise a second brood. Both sexes defend territories; however, the males tend to defend territory edges while the females primarily defend the nest site. Eastern Bluebirds are sexually dimorphic; that is, males and females look quite different. Males have bright blue heads, tails, backs, and wings. The sides, flanks, and throat are chestnut red. The underparts are also chestnut red from the chin down to the belly, but the belly is white.

Although there is much variation in their plumage, females are generally less colorful than males. They have light gray-blue heads, dull brown backs, and blue tails and wings. There is a slight white ring around the eye. In winter, the female's upper breast turns a pale reddish-brown. Eastern Bluebirds eat a variety of invertebrates, including caterpillars, butterflies, moths, grasshoppers, katydids, and spiders. They also feed on wild fruits. Primarily ground feeders, they prefer feeding and nesting in areas with short, sparse vegetation, which affords a clear view of ground-dwelling insects.

Get Meeting & Field Trip information at the speed of the internet!

Did you ever want the news before anyone else? Well, now here is your chance. If you would like to receive an email letting you know the latest and greatest version of the newsletter is available on the website, just let us know! Contact Membership Chairman Jerri Kerr by email at Jerri.Kerr@mci.com, by phone 972-578-3146 or by snail mail at 1719 Mimosa Avenue, Plano, TX 75074 and she will put your email on the P&TAS distribution list. Once you receive the email you can check the website – www.prairieandtimbers.com for all the happenings.

Won't you help us better the habitats for our birds by using the Internet for your newsletter? By doing so, we can work together to fulfill the Audubon mission of conserving native plants and animals and their habitats, using land and water wisely, seeking solutions for global problems involving the interaction of population, resources, and the environment, promoting rational strategies for energy development and use, and stressing conservation and renewable sources.



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* = Board Members

Membership Application

NOTE: Existing members should respond directly to National Audubon when they receive renewal notice.

Please enroll me as a NEW member of National Audubon Society and Prairie & Timbers Chapter at the special introductory price of \$20.00. Enclosed is my check made out to: National Audubon Society

I do not wish to be a member of National Audubon Society. However, I would like to receive Prairie & Timbers Rustlin s Newsletter. Enclosed is my check for \$8.00 made out to: P&T Audubon Society

Name: _____

Address _____

City _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

Email: _____

How did you hear about Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society?
 From a member of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society.
 From the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society web site.
 From the National Audubon Society.
 Other

Mail to P&T Audubon Society
c/o Mike Mizell 800 Edgewood Denton, TX 76201

Audubon Code 7XCH PTAS Chapter Code W15

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