



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sometimes we just get skunked!

In mid October I had a business trip to Pennsylvania; so I added a vacation day to go to Hawk Mountain, a place famous for viewing of the fall hawk migration in the eastern flyway. This is a good hawk-watching spot because, not only can one see raptors riding thermals from a 270 degree vantage point looking north, but also the continuous ridge of peaks allows the birds to ride the "bump" of wind. It's also a scenic spot.

At Hawk Mountain mid October is great for many raptors, especially eagles and falcons. I had checked the website and, sure enough, good migration counts were being reported. On the day I went, however, the clouds and fog obscured the view and prevented any thermals, plus the wind was out of the south, not the north, as desired. The migrant count during the many hours I was there was zero. Two days later, they were back up and, sure enough, a golden eagle was seen.

Bottom line, nature gives us opportunities but not assurances and thus teaches us patience. It was a pleasant vacation, and I saw many birds, but from the standpoint of migrating raptors, I GOT SKUNKED!

Gailon Brehm, President

Rustlin's

Newsletter of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society

Volume XXIII Number 12 November/December 2004

MONTHLY CALENDAR

November 23, 2004

**Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Ducks
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m. - Pelagic Birds**

Returning speaker Steve Carlson travels extensively with his work and has seen some wonderful birds. His presentation will be on pelagic birds. He has over 700 life birds and is still looking for more.

December 26, 2004

Christmas Bird Count

The 2004 McKinney, Texas, Christmas Bird Count, will be held Sunday morning on December 26th. The count has been a successful joint venture between the Heard Museum and Sanctuary, and the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society since 1976. What a wonderful synergy this relationship has become over the years! (Cont. p 3)

January 25, 2005

**Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. - Sparrows
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m. - Relationships; You
and Birds and Native Plants**

David Ilfrey, Jr of Native Texas Garden Designs will explain how you, birds and native plants can co-exist in the suburban neighborhood.

February 22, 2005

**Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. –
Woodpeckers/Woodland Birds
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m. - TBA**

<p>PTAS Meetings are the fourth Tuesday 7:00 p.m. at the Heard Museum Call 972-562-5566 for directions</p>

LEARN THE BIRDS AT THE HEARD

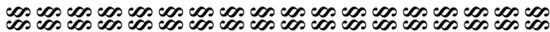
Collin County is rich with opportunities to observe birds. Again this year your Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society is offering an outstanding opportunity to birders of all levels of experience and knowledge. "Learn the birds" is a birding class that meets at 7:00 p.m. just prior to the chapter meetings which are at 7:30 p.m. Gailon Brehm and Sid Dunkle, experienced members of the local chapter, will be offering these identification classes. The class format is an informal discussion tailored mostly for beginning birders but a few rare species will be mixed in to pique the interest of more experienced folks. Featured during each class are bird specimens provided by the Heard Museum and a few recordings of bird sounds. All you need to bring is your favorite field guide.

**THE PTAS WEBSITE
NOW AT ".ORG"**
<http://prairieandtimbers.org>
Check It Out!

Did you know that back issues of the Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society's newsletters for years 2003 and 2004 are now available on the PTAS website, <http://prairieandtimbers.org>

LEARN THE BIRDS AT THE HEARD

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.



2004-2005 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

Saturday, November 20 - Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area, Lewisville
Leader: Ken Steigman

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Car Pool - Depart Paint Store at 7:15 a.m.

Length: ½ day

Directions: Take I35, exit 453, Valley Ridge, go east on Valley Ridge and turn left (north) onto Mill Street; turn right at the next red light onto Jones Street. The entrance to the LLELA is at the end of Jones St. Meet at the gate entrance.

Expected birds: Ospreys, American kestrels, winter sparrows, Cooper's hawks, Bewick's wrens, and many others. Note: This trip is arranged through Ken with LLELA. LLELA is currently closed to the general public.

ARE YOU READY FOR FIELD TRIPS?

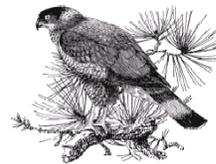
RSVPing is most important!

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 the chairman: Tom Heath, 972-867-8648 or email at: heathwtom@netscape.net

Second: Be on time. So be at the location noted. **Don't be late.** 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.

Third: Bring water and snacks for yourself.



Do you know a good place to bird, a good birding book or have you added a bird to your life list? If so, report it to Ann Reynolds, newsletter editor at annmreynolds@earthlink.net and it will be published in the newsletter.

Christmas Bird Count (con't)

There are 9 zones in the count, including the Museum grounds. If you wish to participate, but are not familiar with the zones or are new to a Christmas Count, just email-mail your name and number of people with your party - you will be assigned a zone on the morning of the count or before.

If you are planning to participate in this year's count, or know of others who have indicated to your their intent to participate, please contact me by email at: DAN SMITH asmithfamily@comcast.net .

The count begins at 7:00 AM, at the Heard Museum with coffee and donuts. Maps of the count area, the zones, and a listing of birds observed on pervious counts will be available the morning of the count.

Dan Smith, Count Coordinator Home: 972-516-2297, Cell: 214-208-6087

Notes from the Field

Lake Tawakoni Trip Report

Thirteen Audubon members from the Metroplex participated in the Lake Tawakoni field trip lead by Richard Kinney on September 25. Sixty-three species were seen or heard. Probably the best birds of the day were a pair of Pine Siskins. As most of you know they have been absent for the most part from our area for the past two years. Let's hope this very early sighting (a month early) means they will be returning this winter. First of the season Wilson's Snipe, House Wren, Northern Flicker and American Coot were observed by all. Due to the partly cloudy conditions Broad-winged and Sharp-shinned Hawks were seen kettling overhead in a couple of locations. Other species worth noting were Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Osprey, Crested Caracara, Pileated Woodpecker, numerous Brown Thrashers, a late Yellow-billed Cuckoo eating a giant caterpillar, a bright red male Summer Tanager, and several types of shorebirds-Avocets, hundreds of Forster's Terns and various Sandpipers including Baird's, Western, Pectoral and Least.

We began birding at the new Lake Tawakoni State Park office. The park is wonderful and very clean. The trails along the shoreline are well laid out taking advantage of the natural habitat. It is well worth the hour plus drive to bird at this location.

Georgette Guernsey

GIFT IDEAS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The Great North American Bird Watching Trivia Game. This board game is a winner reports PTAS member **Sid Dunkle**. Box contents include the Game Board, 8 marking pieces of different colors, 360 Question Cards, and 30 Life List Cards. The game board and the box have printed bird silhouettes and a map of birding locales that apply to some of the questions. The goal of the game is to advance, by answering questions, around the 36 perimeter squares of the board to return to the starting point. The 8 "Life List" squares accelerate or impede your progress around the board. An example of a Life List card is: "While trying to get a better look at a Chestnut-sided Warbler, you trample some rare wildflowers * Miss Your Turn." The game is ingeniously so arranged that practically any number of people, at any level of birding expertise, can play. Each of the 360 Question Cards has 6 questions, for a total of 2160 questions - plenty to keep you guessing for a long time. The questions are at 3 levels: Beginner, Intermediate, and Expert. A question card drawn at random had these questions: Beginner: "Is it true that the American Robin can catch worms by hearing them move underground?" Intermediate: "Which part of the following is false? The Gray-cheeked Thrush, known for its boldness around humans, nests in northern Canada and the northeastern U.S." Expert: "Which Thrush can be identified by its habit of slowly raising and lowering its tail: American Robin, Hermit Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire, or Western Bluebird?" Arguing over the choice of question or the answer adds spice to the game. The game was developed by Outsetmedia.com in Canada and the website lists our own Heard Museum Store as a source. One improvement that you could make would be to substitute small bird Christmas tree ornaments from the Wild Bird Center for the generic marking pieces presently supplied with the game. I highly recommend this game because it's fun, you'll learn a lot, and it's a way to bird when it's raining!

Audubon 2005 Calendar Collection. This collection offers a beautiful sampling of our great natural heritage. From the colorful close-up photos of our backyard friends in the *Songbirds & Other Backyard Birds Calendar*, to the stirring images of *Water's Edge* and the elegant beauty of the *Audubon Engagement Calendar*, all of the titles are filled with quality and commitment and are printed on recycled paper. Available at most national and online book retailers. For more information contact: (800) 722-7202 or www.workman.com

GIFT IDEAS FOR THE HOLIDAYS (cont'd)

***The Song of the Dodo* by David Quammen.** This book is one of the most important books of the decade (first published in 1996) to be written explaining the current status of conservation biology and the mechanisms of evolution and how we as humans have impacted the planet. Everyone should read this book; although it's some 700 pages seem like a daunting task, it is worth every minute of the time one invests. Please go to the websites listed under "Quammen Dodo" as search words for more cogent information about the book and author. It is an incredible book.

Ken Steigman, Conservation/Armchair Activist



CHAPTER CHATTER

A mandate from the National Audubon Society for chapters to be actively involved in wildlife conservation initiated a preliminary investigation of additional habitat that might be acquired or protected adjacent to or near the Heard Sanctuary. There appears to be property that could be acquired for such purposes.

Mr. John Powell, who owns 75 acres across Wilson Creek from the Heard Sanctuary, is interested in having his property purchased to protect it from development. His property contains both upland prairie and bottomland forest. This property has been used primarily for grazing for the last 50 years. Some exotic vegetation coexists with native species where planted pastures were tilled.



The City of Fairview has purchased some acreage adjacent to Mr. Powell's property for the specific purpose of preserving parkland. During an informal conversation with the City Manager of Fairview, he seemed very interested in working together with groups toward similar goals for the community. On a site visit to the Fairview property, it was noted that the property contains a very unique and rare woodland plant community. A complex of oaks (*Quercus breviloba*, *Q. shumardii*, *Q. muhlenbergii* and *Q. macrocarpa*) that is found no where else in the county, lines the margins of the escarpment. It is complemented by a rich native understory of both woody and herbaceous plants including Trout lilies.

I have met a few other neighbors who own acreage along Wilson Creek and they seemed very interested in maintaining their properties in natural condition. Further investigations are planned for neighboring properties to gain more knowledge of the neighborhood.

Inquiries have been made with the City of McKinney as to the time table for the closure of the regional landfill by the North Texas Municipal Water District, and its future use by the City of McKinney. This information will be important in developing a plan to protect additional wildlife habitat around the Heard Wildlife Sanctuary and along the adjacent Wilson Creek corridor.

Ken Steigman, Conservation/Armchair Activist

CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY FEEDER WATCH PROGRAM

Join over 16,000 other citizen scientists who periodically count the birds that visit their bird feeders from November to April. Your counts will help scientists track the distribution and abundance of birds in winter. Anyone can participate in Project FeederWatch – via internet or US mail. Register for the program (go to <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>).

Put up a feeder and count the birds that visit two days a week. Send in your data via internet or US mail. The project is 18 years old and through contributions of thousands of individuals across the US and Canada has resulted in the largest database of North American feeder-bird populations in the world. Most of the data is accessible over the Internet at the click of a button.

The data allow scientists to investigate questions relating to population dynamics of feeder birds and to examine the factors, such as House Finch eye disease or weather, which affect these birds. In addition, your support of this project ensures that someone will always be looking out for our common feeder birds, so that they will remain forever common.

For more information on the project and instruction on how to join, go to <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>. Click on "Helping birds is as easy as" then click on any FAQ for more information or click on "Join or Renew here" to join. **Tom Heath, Field Trip Co-Chair**

BREAKING NEWS Oct. 20, 2004 Uvalde Scientists Prove Cedar Infestations Are Major Water Thieves

UVALDE – Edwards Plateau municipalities in heavily infested juniper country lose much of their annual rainfall before it ever hits the ground, according to two Texas A&M University scientists. "Thick stands of mature juniper (commonly called cedar trees) can actually intercept 40 percent of an area's natural rainfall," said Dr. Keith Owens, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station range researcher at Uvalde. "The percentage lost increases dramatically

if the rainfall is light." Owens and colleague Dr. Robert Lyons, Texas Cooperative Extension range specialist at Uvalde, spent three years studying the evaporation and interception water loss from juniper trees across the Edwards Aquifer Recharge area. "We found that all the rainfall from storms of 0.3 inch or less is intercepted by the trees' canopies where it evaporates back into the atmosphere. So moisture from these light rains never even reaches the ground once it falls on the tree. Most of the rains over the Edwards Aquifer recharge area are a half-inch or less.

"This project proves what many have long suspected – too much juniper exacts a heavy toll on the Texas water supply." Look closely at a juniper tree sometime. They are ideally made to catch rainfall and redirect it to the base of the tree. The water actually hits the tree and runs back toward the trunk. Often no moisture gets to the ground until the tree is hit by a hard rain of an inch or more."

The two scientists conducted the study in areas averaging 24 to 34 inches of annual rainfall. They wanted to find how much rainfall is intercepted by individual juniper trees on the eastern part of the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Area. The project was supported by the Experiment Station and Extension, in cooperation with San Antonio Water Systems, the Upper Guadalupe River Authority, the San Antonio River Authority, the Lower Colorado River Authority and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board.

The project was conducted at 10 locations in eight counties (Bexar, Blanco, Comal, Hays, Kendall, Kerr, Medina and Uvalde). The test area stretches across the Edwards Aquifer recharge and drainage area. Extension agents in these counties assisted in locating and establishing the test plots. Owens said each site was equipped with an electronic data logger that continually recorded information. A self-emptying rain gauge was also at each site. Two trees at each location had four rain gauges under them. The gauges were connected by tubing to a storage container outfitted with equipment to measure the water passing through the canopy. Water caught by the canopy and transferred to the ground by flowing along the stems to the trunk was also measured. When the precipitation stopped, small switches drained each container to ready them for the next rain. Water loss to the litter or "duff" layer under the trees was determined by moisture probes stuck in the litter. Water losses were calculated on a per storm and annual basis. "During one year of observation, the Hays County site received over 36 inches while the Kendall County site got just 10.12

inches," said Owens "But no matter how much or how little fell, the amount of rain falling and the percent intercepted by the trees were about the same across the board.

"At the end of the three-year study, we averaged all of the 2,700 total rain events, both heavy and light, that fell over the 10 sites. We found that 35 percent of all the precipitation that falls on juniper trees hits the canopy and evaporates, 5 percent is intercepted by the litter beneath the trees and 60 percent actually reaches the ground surface. Of that 60 percent, much is taken up by the tree for growth which leaves little or no water left for aquifer recharge in the heavier juniper-infested areas.

"This research shows that in an area which receives 30 inches of rain in a year, only 18 inches of that total actually reaches the ground surface under a juniper tree. That means 12 inches of rain a year does not reach the ground for either plant growth or potential aquifer recharge." Individual storm data generated from this study is available at: <http://uvalde.tamu.edu/intercept>. For more information contact Owens or Lyons at (830) 278-9151. Writer: Steve Byrns, (325) 653-4576, s-byrns@tamu.edu

BOOK REVIEW

Insects Of The Texas Lost Pines

This is one of the best insect books that I have read. The authors are Stephen Taber and Scott Fleenor, and the 283 page book was published in 2003 by Texas A & M University Press at College Station. The book is the result of several years of study in an isolated Loblolly Pine forest, done, I gather, mostly in Bastrop State Park, Bastrop County, about 40 miles east of Austin. The writing is in a narrative, natural-history style which is easy to read, and describes or mentions at some level the habitat and all of the invertebrates encountered in the study, including not only Insects, but some Millipedes, Centipedes, Arachnids, Mollusks, and Earthworms. The book is illustrated with 210 photos, which unfortunately are in black and white, and often of pinned specimens. The aquatic habitats in the Lost Pines are mostly man-made ponds, with the Colorado River about a mile away. The Houston Toad, Attwater's Pocket Gopher, and nine species of insects (listed in an Appendix) are known only from the Lost Pines area. Another Appendix lists eight exotic or introduced invertebrates known from the Lost Pines, including unfortunately the Imported Fire Ant. Overall, I thought this book would be exceptionally valuable for the general naturalist, even without colored pictures. **Sid Dunkle**

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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

— Please enroll me as a member of Prairie & Timbers Chapter ONLY. Enclosed is my check for \$12.00 made out to P&T Audubon Society

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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How did you hear about Prairie and Timbers Audubon?

- _____ From a member of Prairie and Timbers Audubon.
- _____ From the Prairie and Timbers Audubon web site.
- _____ From the National Audubon Society.
- _____ Other

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

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