Grass –

I’m a real novice when it comes to identifying plants, but I’ve developed an interest in native grasses. I’ve spent a little time on walks by guys like Jim Varnum and Rich Jaynes; so I can pretty well identify the big four native tall grasses when they have complete seed heads, like during the fall. These are, of course, Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Switchgrass, and Yellow Indian Grass. I’ve also learned to tell the difference between Johnson Grass and Switchgrass by the heavier seed heads and the presence of a light stripe in the center of the leaf on the Johnson Grass. I can also identify Sideoats Grama, a neat shorter grass. I know that another highly desirable grass is Eastern Gammagrass, but I can’t consistently identify it.

So that’s one thing I notice nowadays as I visit open areas this fall. The tops of the bluestems have turned a beautiful copper color this time of year and near the ground a lush of blue-green new leaves are developing. To see a bit of native tall-grass prairie is not only interesting, but exciting. I’ve read how drought tolerant these deep-rooted plants are and how much forage they provide for grazing animals. I also realize that they do not survive under conditions of either plowing or overgrazing; so we have systemically eliminated them from most of their native range. Now, however, as people let more and more farmland go back to nature, it’s great to see when people restore the native prairie grass.

And by the way, native grasses provide great habitat for birds and wildlife.

Gailon Brehm, President

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. Programs scheduled this year are:

November 25, 2008
Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Ducks
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m.
Main Program: – Charley Amos, “Identifying Ducks”

December 26, 2008
McKinney Christmas Bird Count - 7:00am

January 27, 2009
Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Sparrows
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m. –
Main Program: Ron and Tal, “In Alaska”

February 24, 2009
Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Woodpeckers and Woodland Birds
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m. –
Main Program: Lynn Barber, “A Year of Birding”

In Memoriam – Dave Oldham
We were all saddened to learn of the passing of Dave Oldham, a member of PTAS, a great birder and golfer, and a friend to many of us. He will be greatly missed. Our best to Carolyn and the rest of Dave’s family.
March 24, 2009
Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Doves, Quail, Dickcissels, ground nesters
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m
Main Program: TBD

April 28, 2009
Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Warblers
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m.--
Main Program: Jan MacLaughlin, “Bats”

May 26, 2009
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m.
A visit to the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center (tentative)

Duck Stamps

What is the federal Duck Stamp? They are a wonderful way to help our feathered friends by protecting and conserving the land and habitat they need to exist.

For only $15 you can feel good about helping birds as well as knowing that 98 cents of every dollar goes to fund future purchase or lease of wetland habitat. More than $700 million from sales of the stamp has protected more than 5.2 million acres in the National Wildlife Refuge System. One third of America’s threatened species make their home in wetlands.

Not only will showing your Duck Stamp at National Wildlife Refuges gain you free admission from July 1 through June 30th, you will be helping birds as well as other wildlife (many of which are endangered) throughout the entire country by protecting their habitat!

You can find Duck Stamps at your local post office or purchase online at www.duckstamp.com. Get yours today!

Karen Carbiener

Northern Pintail
Photo by Carl Stangeland

Upcoming PTAS Field Trips

Sat, Dec 6 Hagerman NWR, Sherman, 8:00am
Leader: Carolyn Oldham and Jerri Kerr
Length: 4 hours (Longer for those that can stay)
Expected Birds: Wintering ducks, sparrows, woodpeckers, raptors
Car pool: Depart from Kohl's at 6:30am; arrive 10 minutes before. Kohl's is located between Park and Parker on east side of Hwy 75 in Plano. Meet at end of parking lot closest to service road. -OR- Meet leaders at Hagerman headquarters at 8:00am.
Notes: We plan to bird to early/mid afternoon, with a break for picnic lunch. Bring drinks/snacks/lunch to last. There will be a rest-stop when we exit Hwy 75 on the drive up. If meeting at headquarters, keep in mind the office/restrooms there might not be available. There is a restroom at picnic area, for later in the morning. This trip is caravan-driving in refuge, with stops to walk/scope. Bring scope if you have one. Please bring walkie-talkies to share, if you have them.

Jan. 17, 2009 Lake Tawakoni
Feb. 21, 2009 Ft Worth Nature Center
March 28, 2009 Caddo Grasslands
April 25, 2009 Ft. Hood
May, 2009 - TBA
Last spring, Prairie and Timbers Audubon applied for a $1000 grant from National Audubon to give to the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center for the improvement of habitat. The BPRC leased Brockdale Park in Lucas from the U.S. Corps of Engineers and is in the process of converting the park into a raptor rehabilitation center.

One part of the plans for the new center is to establish a bird friendly environment along a trail for visitors. The trail will include beds of native and/or well adapted plants and shrubs as well as having indigenous trees that are important for the support of wildlife identified.

So far, PTAS members David Griffith and his wife, Marget, have been contributing time and help along with Erich Neupert and Mary Schoeffel of the BPRC along with Laura Mowrey a Dallas Master Naturalist, Vickie Hamrick of the City of Plano, Leean Killmey of Rockwell-Collins and Mike Moore. The total of the grants from the various organizations amounts to just about $5,000.

The overall plan is to have small beds along a trail with one bed for hummingbirds, another for butterflies, a bed in a shady area and a final bed yet to be determined. The shrubs will be identified and labeled. Large signs at the beginning of the trail will explain the purpose of the gardens and the need to use water-wise landscaping.

So far, the trail and beds have been cleared and marked. Two troops of Boy Scouts on separate weekends also volunteered help. The first troop removed the cedar trees which were cut down and the stumps that were left. The second troop turned the beds to remove any additional roots which would have impeded roto-tilling.

The next step is to roto-till in about 1 inch of compost along with dry molasses at about 20 pounds per 1000 sq.ft. The beds as laid out total just over 1,100 sq.ft. A layer of 2-3 inches of hardwood mulch will then be used to cover the beds to prevent airborne weed seeds from contacting the ground and germinating over the winter. The mulch will also help conserve the need for water during the summer months.

During the next several months over the winter, the compost should be kick started with the dry molasses getting all sorts of microbes going in the soil. The use of these amendments may be a little overkill as the native plants do not really need them. But, it will give them a good start so that they will be well established by the summer when rainfall typically ceases. This is important as there are no water lines near the beds.

About mid-March, after the last hard freeze, we plan to plant the beds and add signs. Then in April, there will be a dedication. And by next summer, we all should have a place to visit and observe birds, butterflies and other wildlife plus learn about establishing a native garden which helps our personal environment.
Many thanks to Andrea Offner for offering Prairie and Timbers a tour of her personal certified Wildscape property in Gainesville Saturday afternoon, Nov 8. She welcomed 6 birders with open arms to sit and do some armchair birding while discussing her wildlife management practices and her target population; neotropical songbirds. Andrea supplied us with walking maps and bird check off sheets.

We saw & heard the following:
Red-tailed Hawk
American Crows
Northern Cardinals
Eastern Towhees
White-crowned Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Mockingbird
Carolina Chickadees
Tufted Titmouse
Eastern Phoebe
Ring-billed Gulls
Eastern Bluebirds
Cormorants

On October 18, a great turnout of 20 birders and naturalists joined the very knowledgeable Dr. Ray Chancellor in Grapevine at the Southlake Cove Ecosystem. There are many miles of trails and birding is wonderful throughout the entire year. An impressive 285 species have been documented here. It borders the northern shoreline of Lake Grapevine and has a diverse habitat so there is a great variance of species.

We came away with 37 species and if we hadn’t seen enough birds, we also ran upon a hog wallow!

Here’s our list:
Mallard 2
Double-crested Cormorant 6
Great Blue Heron 6
Great Egret 3

Some of our Texas birds’ names have changed with the American Ornithologists’ Union. (www.aou.org)

Bird Name Changes

Clay-colored Robin is now Clay-colored Thrush
White-throated Robin is now White-throated Thrush
Greater Flamingo is now American Flamingo

Also a spelling change: Green Violet-ear is now Green Violetear

Karen Carbiener
Changing of the Gulls

The first week and a half of November, we had a number of migrating Franklin Gulls along the shorelines. The following week, with rare exception, they are gone and the Bonaparte's Gull will begin to arrive. For the beginner, the identification can be very confusing. Here is a quick little guide if you are interested in watching this almost clockwork changing of the small Gulls.

The Franklin Gull has a **black patch on its head surrounding its eye**. The wingtips will show distinct white spots on each feather and the secondary feather tips will be white. The real marker is the **legs which will be dark to black**. If it has the black head patch and dark legs it will be the Franklin's Gull on our shorelines.

The Bonaparte's Gull is the Gull we have all winter. It is almost identical in size to the Franklin's Gull. They have a **different black mark** on the head but a bird that has not molted (like some early arrivers) can look very much like a Franklin's Gull. Note, they do not have distinctive white spots on the primary feathers and do not show much white, if any on the secondaries. The gray of the back is lighter than the Franklin's. Again, the key marker is the **legs—they are light to a dark red**.

Always double check the gulls. There are many and we occasionally get some real gems that show up out of their normal ranges. I hope this will give you a chance for some new IDs as this migration continues.

Ray L. Chancellor
As in years past, the Heard Museum will host this area’s Christmas Bird Count the day after Christmas. What better way to work off all those excess Christmas calories and have a blast bird watching at the same time! And don’t think that just because you’re not a very knowledgeable birder that you’re not needed. On the contrary, here’s an opportunity for a new birder to go out with more experienced birders and learn. The only drawback is that we start out very early (at dawn) and usually count till almost dusk. However, if you can only give us part of the day, we’ll take it! The Christmas Bird Count is the oldest citizen science event in the world, started in 1900 by Frank Chapman. It is also the largest, growing from the original 27 observers doing 25 counts to about 2000 counts and over 50,000 participants! The objective is to monitor the status and distribution of bird populations, and the data collected is extremely useful to both scientists and other interested parties. It has proven vital for conservation, indicating local trends like habitat fragmentation or an environmental threat.

Once people arrive, they are assigned to sub-sections of our assigned area (Some will search here at the Heard while others will drive to various parts of the county). I hope those that have historically always been responsible for “their” sections will again assume those responsibilities, but it would be wonderful if we can attract numerous new volunteers to help this year. This is especially true now since Dan, who has been responsible for the event for several years has moved, and I will attempt to take over his duties. Like him, I will provide a nice hot lunch to ward off the chills – we have had some cold, wet CBC’s in years past! Hope to see you there!

Roger Sanderson

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Interested in joining your fellow bird enthusiast helping birds by tallying them in February? Last year there were 19 checklists submitted from McKinney that counted a total of 2529 birds of 75 different species. Birders in Plano reported on 22 checklists a total of 1183 birds of 59 species. If we can get the birders of North Texas enthusiastic it should be easy to beat those numbers in 2009.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It’s free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period, Feb 13-16. Participants count birds anywhere: in their backyard, at a local park or wildlife refuge, or wherever you like to watch birds. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time.

To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at the website (www.birdsource.org/gbbc) maintained by the sponsors of the event, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see. A selection of images is posted in the online galley. Three judges each from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society will review all the entries. Winners in each category will be notified by email and prizes awarded. All winners and finalists will be posted on the GBBC web site.

In 2008, participants reported more than 9.8 million birds of 635 species. They submitted more than 85,000 checklists, an all-time record for the count.
PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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*Board Members

Membership Application

I would like to become 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 Mike Mizell, 800 Edgewood, Denton, TX 76201

When shopping at our advertiser’s stores please let them know you saw their ad in the PTAS newsletter.

SEND US YOUR UPDATED E-MAIL ADDRESS

Email is the most efficient way for us to let you know about events, meetings and last minute changes. We send only 1 or 2 emails per month, and we do not share our mailing list with anyone. If you are not on our email distribution list, or if your email address has changed recently, please contact Merrick Darley at hmdarley@prairieandtimbers.org

Rustlin’s - 7