Since the January meeting was canceled because of the ice storm, we have rescheduled the “Birding In Alaska” program to the March meeting.

The program presented by Ron Baltzegar and Tal Roberts is a photo guide to their Texas Ornithological Society trip last summer. Ron and Tal are both avid Texas birders who have travelled far and wide to observe birds, longtime Audubon members and all-around nice guys. Ron is a member of PTAS and great field trip leader.

Jan MacLaughlin will be presenting a program “All about Bats” at our April meeting. Jan was an early volunteer with Bat World Sanctuary and has been a long time bat enthusiast and rehabber.

In 1989, on a family vacation to Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, she picked up a small book at the gift shop titled “America’s Neighborhood Bats”, and that was the starting point of my love affair with bats. She started reading everything she could find about them, though in those days there wasn’t a lot of information available. As it turns out, that’s the same summer that Amanda Lollar, the founder of Bat World Sanctuary, found a bat on the sidewalk which began her love affair with bats, though it would be a few more years before the two would meet. Jan meet Amanda at a book signing for Amanda’s book, “The Bat in My Pocket”, published in 1992.

Amanda had formed an organization called “Bat World” which in those days was centered in a small room at the back of her furniture store. Jan became a volunteer and helped in as many ways as she could in those early years, and along the way trained to be a rehabber. Although hesitant to take on the additional commitment of rehabbing, Jan jumped in and scrambled to set up a rehab room when one summer there was an urgent need for rehabbers to care for a large number of orphaned Big Brown bats from east Texas.

Jan loved the work and rehabbed for many years, but it was akin to having 2 full-time jobs so she gave up full-time rehab a few years ago. However, she is still committed to helping bats and you’ll still find her listed on the rescue pages of emergency contacts, though now she assists callers with advice, treats and releases the ones that are releasable, and passes on those that need longer term care to other rehabbers. Thankfully, due in large part to the success of Bat World, there's now a much larger network of Bat rehabilitators.
May Program: Hummingbirds

Ruby Throated Hummingbird
Interested in getting hummingbirds into your backyard, then come hear our fellow member Carolyn Oldham in May. She will be presenting the main program in May "The Top Ten Tips To Attract Hummingbirds". The talk will primarily focus on plants that will draw hummingbirds to the backyard garden. She currently has her own landscape business called "Natural Habitats" and focuses on natives, perennials and habitat gardens. So get some expert advice on how to go native and at the same time attract hummingbirds.

Upcoming PTAS Programs

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.

Upcoming PTAS Field Trips

Sat, April 11: 2nd Sat. at the Heard Museum, 9:00am
Leader: Gailon Brehm
Length: ~2 hours
Please register with the Heard in advance.

Sat, April 25: Fort Hood
Leader: Rich Kostecke
Length: ~5 hours, starts at 6:45 am
Expected Birds: Black-capped Vireo and the Golden-cheeked Warbler
RSVP: To Karen, 972-824-2878 or karen.carbiener@prairieandtimbers.org -- Limit of 16 participants
Car pool: TBA am but we need to be there by 6:45 am. Please arrive at least 10 minutes before. Some may be going the night before.
Directions: Coming from intersection of I-35 and HWY 190, turn right onto Loop 121 and drive north. Go 2.4 miles and turn left onto Sparta Rd at the second traffic light. Continue driving west, going through a stop sign at 5.4 miles. At a distance of 7.4 miles you will drive over a cattle guard - you are now on Fort Hood (Sparta road is now called North Nolan Road). Continue driving on the same road and past a sign to Belton Lake Outdoor Recreation Area (BLORA) at 7.5 miles. After 12.9 total miles you will come upon an intersection with a tank trail/improved dirt road. Turn right. There is a large concrete pad there where we will meet.

March 24, 2009
Bird Identification Class – 7:00 p.m. – Doves, Quail, Dickcissels, ground nesters
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m
Main Program: Ron Baltzegar and Tal Roberts: “Birding In Alaska”

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
7:00 p.m. – Social/snack time
Monthly Meeting – 7:30 p.m.--
Main Program- Carolyn Oldham “The Top Ten Tips To Attract Hummingbirds".
The field trip to Fort Hood was such an exciting time last year it was scheduled again this year despite the long drive. Now is your chance to search for the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo who are protected by the US Army although the base is also used for training. Are these two birds on your life list?

The trip will again be lead by Richard Kostecke with the Nature Conservancy and Gil Eckrich with Fort Hood Army Base. Last year they gave us loads of informative avian knowledge of the local and migratory birds.

We will try to better are sighting of 33 species last year. Besides the Golden-crowned Warbler and Black-capped Vireo, some of us got a good fly-by look of a Merlin and all of us saw beautiful views of Spotted Towhees out in the open in the morning sun.

See directions to get to Fort Hood on the previous page:

If you are planning on going here are the details by Rich Kostecke:

When driving on the base, signs will state that the speed limit on Fort Hood is 50 mph for sedans and 40 mph for trucks. Regardless of what sort of vehicle you are in (pick-up, sedan, SUV, Van, etc.), you are considered a sedan. Gil and I will be waiting for you and will be in either a red Ford Explorer with government plates, or a white Suburban or black Toyota Tacoma with The Nature Conservancy magnets on the doors.

We urge people to carpool in as few high clearance vehicles as possible. Gil and I can accommodate some people in our vehicles, but maybe not everyone dependent on your group size. High clearance is needed to navigate some of the back roads we will be traversing which can be rocky and rutted. Additionally, the clearance is needed to go through some low water crossings. Please notify us of what vehicles you will be bringing beforehand so that we can plan accordingly if not enough high clearance vehicles will be available.

Other useful info: Dress appropriately. This means shoes suitable for hiking (not sandals) and long pants. In general, I would suggest dressing in layers. Weather conditions can vary quite a bit. Mornings can be a bit chilly, but it can be quite toasty by noon. Rain storms are possible at this time of year. Dependent on when rain events occur, conditions may be muddy. It could be buggy (primarily chiggers with lesser numbers of mosquitoes and ticks). Another reason to wear appropriate clothing and shoes is for protection from prickly/thorny vegetation, poison ivy, and the sun.

We will not be doing any extensive hiking and will never be far from the vehicles. We will be out in some pretty wild country, though. That means if you have a need to use the restroom then you will likely have to use the bushes. Porta-potties may be available (they are put out there for the troops), but the bushes are usually cleaner and way more hygienic.

Tours typically start around sunrise (we have set 6:45am) and go to about noon, maybe a little longer depending on energy and interest of the group, bird activity, and weather (of course, we can come in earlier too if desired). Bring everything you might need for the morning with you (water, snacks, etc.). Cameras are fine to bring. Scopes are usually not much good for viewing the Black-capped Vireo and the Golden-cheeked Warbler, but can be useful if we bird the Belton Lake shoreline.

-Karen Carbiener

Golden-cheeked Warbler
Photo By Ron Baltzegar
Many members of Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society live in zip codes far from our home base in McKinney/Collin County. We have members from Dallas, Lewisville, Denton, Greenville ... and we're glad they're willing to drive a long way to participate with us!

When you join National Audubon, you are automatically assigned for local membership in the nearest Audubon-sanctioned chapter (like PTAS), if one exists. This assignment is done according to your home zip code. But National Audubon allows its members to choose which local chapter they want to join, and to change it. We are happy to have members who choose to be in PTAS when they actually might live in another chapter’s zip code.

National Audubon has recently converted their membership list to new software, and unfortunately, some folks who requested local membership in PTAS have fallen off our list. If you are in one of the far-off counties or Dallas County, this might have affected you. If you should begin to receive mailings or e-mail from another chapter, but want to be counted as a PTAS member, please call National Audubon Membership Assistance at 800-274-4201 and ask to be reassigned to Prairie and Timbers Audubon in McKinney, TX, PTAS Chapter code: W15.

Also please note, that the birding community is a friendly group and you are welcome to attend any of our functions even if you maintain your membership in a different local chapter. You are also free to request to have your name on our email lists. Likewise our local members are welcome by other local chapters. So if you want to attend activities with Dallas Audubon and/or Fort Worth Audubon they will be delighted to have you.

If you have any questions, please look for me, Jerri Kerr at the next PTAS meeting - I'm the one who is always standing behind the "Welcome" marquee at the sign-in table!

Jerri Kerr, Membership Chair

Last year the PTAS board voted to fund research by Michele Diggs working under Dr. Doug Wood at Southeastern Oklahoma State University for her graduate study project on the nesting ecology and site fidelity of Prothonotary Warblers in southeastern Oklahoma.

This year the board has chosen to help fund two more students doing graduate studies under Dr. Wood. The grants are for $200 each, which will help fund travel expenses in conducting the research.

Christina Newman will expand on the study of Prothonotary Warblers by measuring nest microclimate (temperature and relative humidity) and composition of approximately 16 Prothonotary Warbler nests.

Ross Anderson will be documenting the range expansion, population parameters, and nesting success of Tree Swallows at the Red Slough Wildlife Mgt. Area (WMA) in far SE Oklahoma. Behavioral and microclimate data will be collected in addition to nesting outcomes. Adults and nestlings will be banded in order to determine site fidelity in future years and movement of Tree Swallows into/out of the area over time. This research will address a gap in the scientific literature for the southern portion of the Tree Swallow’s range. The project is a collaborative effort involving SE-OSU, U.S. Forest Service, Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation, and Cornell Lab.

The students have been asked to provide a report to PTAS at one of our meetings this fall.

Mike Mizell

Prothonotary Warbler

Are You Still a PTAS Member?

PTAS Helps Fund Two New Local Research Projects
At the February member meeting of PTAS, elections were held for the officers and six of the ten board positions. Elected to the board for the first time was David Griffith and Rodney Thomas. David was also elected Secretary. Reelected Vice President and board member was Merrick Darley. Reelected as members of the board were Karen Carbiener, Carolyn Oldham, and Tom Heath. Unfortunately no one ran for the position of President so it remains open. Congratulations and thanks for serving to the elected officials.

The five beds for bird habitat improvement have been prepped at the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center site in Brockdale Park just east of Lucas. On Saturday morning, January 31, volunteers from Prairie and Timbers Audubon along with master naturalists and personnel from BPRC met and accomplished this milestone in less than 2 hours.

Members from PTAS included president Gailon Brehm, Jerri Kerr, Merrick Darley, David Griffith and wife Marget Jesness, along with Michael and Marney Peterson from Greenville who brought their roto-tiller. And second roto-tiller was rented by PTAS as part of our contribution to habitat improvement. In addition to the 7 PTAS volunteers, there were 5 Master Naturalists and 3 from the BPRC project.

Work commenced at about 9 am and was finished at 10:58 am. Everybody worked hard though we did take a break at about 10 am. We had just about the right number of people to get the job done so that no one had to wait while someone did something else.

Our plan was to apply 1 inch of Texas Pure compost, some dry molasses, roto-till that into the soil and then cover the beds with about 2 inches of mulch. Previously, two troops of Boy Scouts had hand turned the beds which not only broke the surface, but also allowed them to remove any large rocks, roots or other large debris.

The Texas Pure compost and hard wood mulch was delivered the day before in one truck load. We had 3 cubic yards of compost and 7 cubic yards of mulch. In addition, we purchased one 50 pound bag of dry molasses. Normally, dry molasses is applied at the rate of 20 pounds per 1000 sq.ft. But, we used the entire bag since the sugars would just increase the biological activity of the microbes as opposed to over fertilizing the soil. We chose hardwood mulch for three reasons. First, it is cheaper. And second, it will rot. When it rots, it helps replenish nutrients to the soil. And, finally, it does not repel insects. A lot of people use cedar mulch which is a great product for use around a house. But, it repels insects. One should not use artificial mulch as it does not replenish nutrients nor colored mulch as it contains toxins.

Our goal is to plant our native shrubs around the beginning of April. By prepping the beds at the end of January, that will give the microbes plenty of time to enrich the soil with the compost. Since we will be using native plants which are by definition well adapted to our blackland prairie, we cut back the amount of compost one would normally use. Most places recommend using 3 inches of compost. But, from personal experience, that is way too much!

One other deviation from "standard" practice should also be noted. We have applied the two inch layer of mulch before planting the shrubs. In reality, that is the quickest way to do the job. It is a lot easier to spread the mulch over a bed using a rake if there are no obstructions than to hand spread it around recently planted shrubs. The mulch can be easily moved to the side when we plant the shrubs in April. Not only will the mulch help the beds retain moisture, but it will act like a weed barrier preventing fresh seeds from contacting the soil and then germinating into weeds.
Of the five beds, three were in mostly sunny areas while two were in dense shade along a path in the woods. The furthest bed in the woods was about 200 sq.ft while the other was about 100 sq.ft. Of the remaining beds in the sun, two on opposite sides of the entrance were about 200 sq.ft., each, while the third bed just inside the entrance was about 400 sq.ft. for a total of about 1100 sq.ft.

We started with the furthest bed in the woods, applying compost to a depth of about 1 inch. We must have been pretty good at estimating our coverage as we came pretty close to using all of the compost when we had covered the beds.

As Michael Peterson started to roto-till the first bed, the "bucket" brigade with their wheelbarrows started dumping Texas Pure onto the second bed. After dumping more compost on the two smaller beds outside the entrance of the path into the woods, David Griffith started using the second roto-tiller. Both Mike and Dave finished the largest bed with one going one direction while the other going the other direction.

Once the first bed had been roto-tilled and the compost had been applied to the other beds, the bed was raked smooth and a 2 inch layer of hardwood mulch was then applied. Things worked out extremely well. Just when we finished roto-tilling the last bed, here came the wheelbarrows with the mulch.

All in all, we had just the right number of people, the right amount of material and the right amount of equipment. In just under two hours, we had prepped all five beds. And, that included taking a break midway through our work. It could not have been better.

Of course, afterwards we all took a bird walk around the future site of the Blackland Prairie Raptor Center. What else would you expect.

David Griffith

**February Second Saturday Walk Results**

We had a great walk. Nice crisp winter temperatures with lots of people. About 28 attended, probably boosted by the cancelling of the other PTAS walk scheduled today. We saw a good cross section of sparrows, although not large numbers and not close looks in most cases. The Roughwing Swallow was a little surprising this early. When we first saw it we thought it had to be a Martin, but as it kept flying by we identified it.

Gailon Brehm
America’s Birds Face New Dangers This Spring

More than half of America’s migratory birds will face an emerging threat to their survival when they flock to Canada’s boreal forest to nest this spring. The vast northern forest, one of the planet’s largest bird nurseries, is being overrun in the West by major oil companies seeking to extract petroleum from its sandy soils for export to the United States. If tar sands oil development continues unchecked, anywhere from 6 million to 166 million birds could be lost over the next 30 to 50 years, according to a new report just released by NRDC and its environmental partners. NRDC Senior Attorney Susan Casey-Lefkowitz, who contributed to the report, sums up its findings: “The loss of millions of birds is a wholly unacceptable price to pay for America’s addiction to oil. There are better energy options available that do not foul our air, poison our waters or kill our backyard birds.”

The populations of many of America’s best-loved birds have already plummeted by as much as 80 percent. Now, their fragile breeding grounds are being turned into hard-hat zones. Tar sands mining and drilling operations in Alberta are industrializing the landscape with pipelines and refineries, creating toxic holding ponds and destroying critical habitat. A once common backyard bird, the Evening Grosbeak, that is now rarely seen in the United States, could soon lose its nesting grounds as clear cutting of the boreal forest makes way for drilling projects. The Whooping Crane, which has been recovering after the population plummeted to just 15 birds, is now threatened anew because its migrating population breeds downstream from toxic tar sands mines. Some 8,000 to 100,000 birds of various species die each year in ponds containing toxic mining waste. In one tragic incident last year, 500 ducks died after landing in one of the polluted storage lakes.

This disastrous new form of energy development threatens more than North America’s birds. Tar sands mining is also Canada’s fastest growing source of global warming pollution, putting humankind and wildlife all across the planet at risk. To head off further environmental destruction, NRDC is ratcheting up pressure on Alberta’s government to rein in the province’s tar sands operations.

Earth Share of Texas represents the Audubon Foundation of Texas and the National Audubon Society in payroll deduction plans for charitable giving. For information, E-mail estx@earthshare-texas.org or call 1-800-GREENTX
Everyone in Washington seems to have their own idea of how to stimulate the economy. And while they speak in terms of hundreds of billions of dollars, there are ways that each of us can put money back into our economic engine as well (albeit on a much smaller scale). Plus, there’s an additional bonus – you can help out your own backyard nesting feathered friends (I’ll bet you won’t find that in the stimulus bill). Think about adding a nest box (birdhouse) as well as some specialty seed (birds love nuts and fruits mixed in with their seed). Pick up some peanuts for your woodpeckers, blue jays, titmice, wrens, chickadees as well as many others – they will love you for it!

Here are some birdhouse tips:

To help discourage house sparrows, remove any perch your birdhouse comes with—it is unnecessary.

While there are some really cute decorative birdhouses available, they may not be functional. They need to be made of at least ¾” thick material to handle all sorts of weather as well as to insulate.

Be sure there is at least 1 opening (for cleaning when nesting season is over) and also it will need a drainage hole and a ventilation hole near the top helps offer “air conditioning” in the Texas heat.

If you hang a birdhouse, keep the chain short to minimize swinging.

Mount your birdhouses at least 6’ from each other as well as away from feeders. (Give your birds some privacy!) Also place away from prevailing winds and not directly facing midday or afternoon sun. Keep safe from cats or other predators by mounting them on a metal pole.

In order to attract a specific species, the nest hole size must be the correct dimensions – the friendly folks at Wild Bird Center can help you with this.

When to put them up? NOW! Even if birds don’t build nests for another 2 months, they are checking out possible locations right now!

Check out some of the new birdhouses and feeders made from recycled plastic bottles at Wild Bird Center in Denton! www.WildBird.com/Denton

-Karen Carbiener
PRAIRIE & TIMBERS AUDUBON SOCIETY

Officers, Chairpersons and Board Members

President: Position open..............................
Vice President: Merrick Darley*.................972-422-5355
Secretary: David Griffith*.........................972-423-4344
Treasurer: Mike Mizell*.............................940-382-8551
Conservation/Armchair Activist:
Roger Sanderson*.................................469-767-7242
Newsletter: Merrick Darley*......................972-422-5355
Field Trips: Karen Carbiener*....................972-824-2878
Tom Heath*...........................................972-867-8646

Education
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Website/Electronic Communications:
Tom Heath*..........................................972-867-8646
Programs: Carolyn Oldham*....................972-517-8987
Publicity: Bobette Mauck*.......................972-540-5646
* Board Members

Membership Application

___ I would like to be 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 - 9