

Rustlin's

Newsletter of the Prairie Timbers Audubon Society

September 2025



Whooping Cranes

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
- Advocacy

Welcome

Cooler weather has finally reached North Texas, bringing fall migration and a new season for Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society. Many birds on our checklist are here only briefly in spring and fall, and they are now passing through our favorite hotspots. We're excited to welcome you back with a full lineup of programs, Bird ID classes, and field trips for 2025.

Our first speaker for the year is David Sarkozi presenting

"Beyond the Birds of Texas – Interesting Things that Won't Fit in a Field Guide" on September 23. Ben Sandifer will inform us about Big Spring and Joppa Preserve at our October meeting, and in November the Dallas Zoo Conservation Team will update us on the Whooping Crane Center of Texas.

Our fall field trips include Joppa Preserve on September 20 with Ben Sandifer, Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center on October 25 with Scott Kiester, and Chalk Hill Farm on November 22 with Rodney Thomas. These outings are a great way to enjoy both birding and fellowship.

PTAS is a local 501(c)(3) organization that is affiliated with National Audubon and is dedicated to birding, conservation, and education. Our activities are open to all, whether you're new to birding or a longtime member. All PTAS programs are free, but please consider becoming a Supporting Member with a \$15 donation — online at prairieandtimbers.org or at our meetings. Your support funds conservation, education, and grants for nature-related organizations.

I hope you enjoy the season ahead -- Please share your feedback on our activities so we can improve in the future. If you can, volunteer your time and talents to keep PTAS thriving. Here's to crisp mornings, good friends, and great birds in 2025!

Mike Cameron
President, PTAS

Monthly Meetings

With Presentations and Bird ID Session



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: Shorebirds II: The Tringa Sandpipers (Greater+Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Willet)
- Oct: Woodpeckers of North Texas
- Nov: Bird Quiz

All in person meetings are at the

Science Resource Center
Heard Natural Science Museum
1 Nature Place,
McKinney, TX 75069

Some meetings are Zoom only. Zoom option always available. If you are not on the invitation list send a request to ptaszoo@gmail.com

Mark Your Calendar! This fall's programs feature three inspiring presentations: field guide stories and birding adventures with David Sarkozi, the cultural and ecological treasures of the Trinity Forest with Ben Sandifer, and the future of Whooping Cranes with the Dallas Zoo team. Don't miss this lineup of knowledge, storytelling, and conservation action!

September 23, 2025

Speaker: David Sarkozi
Topic: Beyond the Birds of Texas

February 24, 2026 (Zoom Only)

Speaker: Nathan Pieplow
Topic: The Language of Birds

October 28, 2025

Speaker: Ben Sandifer
Topic: Beyond the Skyline: The Great Trinity Forest

March 24, 2026

Speaker: Terry Masear
Topic: Rescuing Hummingbirds

November 25, 2025 (Third Tuesday)

Speakers: Dallas Zoo Conservation Staff
Topic: Update on the Whooping Crane Center

April 28, 2026

Speaker: Dr. R. David Baker
Topic: TBD

January 27, 2026 (Zoom Only)

Speaker: Dr. Carly Aulicky
Topic: Leks and Greater Prairie-Chickens

May 26, 2026 (Tentative)

Speakers: Blackland Prairie Raptor Center Staff/
Volunteers

September's Presentation

Beyond the Birds of Texas - Interesting Things that Won't Fit in a Field Guide



The new Birds of Texas spans 614 pages, but even that can't tell the full story of Texas birds. Some of the most fascinating details don't fit into a field guide—like how one of the state's most common ducks is mostly nocturnal, or the surprising connections behind Rivoli and Anna of hummingbird fame that tie into James Bond. In this talk, David Sarkozi goes beyond the guide to share fresh insights, unexpected stories, and behaviors that deepen our appreciation of Texas birdlife.

David Sarkozi began birding as a teenager in central Texas and never stopped—he still owns his first field guide. He has served as Chairman of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club - Ornithology Group, President of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge, and President of the Texas Ornithological Society, serving 16 years on its board.



David Sarkozi

Retired after 35 years with the University of Houston, David has completed two Texas Big Years (500 species in 2015, 509 in 2017) and invented the Texas Century Club challenge. In 2019, he accomplished the feat of birding in all 254 Texas counties. His latest achievement is the new Birds of Texas field guide, published by Timber Press in July 2025.

October's Presentation

Beyond the Skyline: Discovering Historic Big Spring & Joppa Preserve

Naturalist and conservation advocate Ben Sandifer brings us into the heart of Dallas' Great Trinity Forest to highlight the cultural and natural heritage of Big Spring and the Joppa Preserve. This program blends history, ecology, and community as Ben shares stories of habitat restoration, cultural significance, and the incredible wildlife that thrives in these green spaces just minutes from downtown Dallas. Attendees will learn about the challenges and successes in protecting this special urban forest and how community partnerships have played a vital role in preserving it.



In addition to his work in the field, Ben serves as the naturalist for the historic Dallas Hunting and Fishing Club. He is an Honorary Lifetime Texas Master Naturalist (2016), recognized for his substantial contributions to conservation. Professionally, Ben is an accountant, but his free time is devoted to conservation, photography, and public outreach, where he continues to inspire others to care for Texas' unique ecosystems.



Ben Sandifer

November's Presentation

Update on the Whooping Crane Center



Speaker TBD



Whooping Crane

Representatives from the Dallas Zoo will provide an in-depth update on the Whooping Crane Center of Texas, one of the most critical facilities in safeguarding this iconic endangered species. This program will highlight the zoo's role in captive breeding, field conservation, and research that supports the global effort to save Whooping Cranes from extinction. Attendees will gain insights into the cranes' life cycle, the challenges of conservation, and how collaborative efforts between zoos, scientists, and conservation groups are making a difference.

The Dallas Zoo's conservation staff bring years of expertise in avian conservation and endangered species management. The Zoo is recognized internationally for its leadership in wildlife conservation, habitat restoration, and species survival programs. The Whooping Crane Center of Texas is at the forefront of efforts to protect these majestic birds, and the Zoo's team continues to innovate with new strategies for breeding, research, and education. Their work helps ensure a future for Whooping Cranes both in captivity and in the wild.

Monitoring Birds and the Environment

Prairie and Timbers Audubon volunteers will again lead monthly bird walks at Connemara Meadow Preserve on the first Saturday or Sunday of each month and at the Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary on the second Saturday. These walks offer a chance to experience North Texas birds firsthand while also contributing to long-term monitoring that supports conservation.

Walks last about three hours, though participants may come and go as needed. Designed for beginners and intermediate birders, they provide identification tips, explore a variety of habitats, and encourage questions throughout. Typically, we record 40–60 species, using both sight and sound. All observations are logged into eBird, adding to a global database relied on by scientists and land managers. This record helps track migration patterns, habitat shifts, and population trends—turning a morning of birding into a valuable act of citizen science.

Walks at the Heard meet on the main museum balcony. Connemara Meadow walks begin inside the mid-meadow gate at the intersection of Hedgcoxe and Greensboro Drive in Plano



Field Trip Schedule

Sept. 20, 2025

Destination — Joppa Preserve (South Dallas)

Leader — Ben Sandifer

Target Species — Neotropics

Oct. 25, 2025

Destination — Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center

Leader — Scott Kiester

Target Species — Passerine migrants

Nov. 22, 2025

Destination — Chalk Hill Farm

Leader — Rodney Thomas

Target Species — Winter residents

Jan. 25, 2026 (Tentative)

Destination — LLELA

Leader — Linda Ergonis

Target Species — Short-eared Owls, Winter Sparrows

Feb. 20-22, 2026 (Tentative)

Destination — Port Aransas

Leader — Grayson Almond

Target Species — Whooping Cranes and Shore Birds

March 28, 2026

Destination — Breckenridge Park

Leader — Mike Cameron

Target Species — Early Migrants and Late Winter Residents

April 25, 2026 (Tentative)

Destination — Residence of Rick Wilder

Leader — Rick Wilder

Target Species — Golden-cheeked Warbler, Black-capped Vireo

May 15-22, 2026 (Tentative)

Destination — Magee Marsh, Ohio

Leader — Jacob Drapkin

Target Species — Migrants

Our trips are designed to take birders to a variety of habitats, allowing them to observe a wide range of bird species both in our local area and across Texas. Special thanks to Linda Ergonis, our field trip chair, for organizing these outings. The public is welcome to join. Please remember to bring binoculars, sunscreen, water, and snacks.

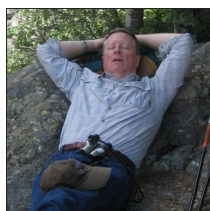
To participate, regularly check the field trip page on our website (prairieandtimbers.org). Tom Heath maintains an email list to keep members updated on field trip details and any changes. If you'd like to be added, please send your name and email address to Tom at heathwtom@netscape.net.

October's Field Trip



Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center

Join us for an autumn morning of birding at Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center, a remarkable 2,900-acre site along the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. The property features bottomland hardwood forest, upland prairie, and wetlands—habitats that provide a rich stopover for sparrows, warblers, thrushes, and other migrating songbirds. With its winding trails and varied landscapes, Clear Creek offers excellent opportunities to observe the diversity of fall migration.



Scott Kiester

Our leader, Scott Kiester, is a Texas Master Naturalist with the Elm Fork Chapter and serves as the Volunteer Project Manager of the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Center. His expertise and enthusiasm will help participants of all experience levels enjoy a rewarding morning in the field.

Advocating for the Birds We Love

Many birders were surprised and saddened to learn of the recent and unexpected **closure of the Village Creek Drying Beds (VCDB) in Fort Worth**. For nearly 50 years, VCDB has been a premier birding destination, recognized as one of the top sites in Texas for avian diversity with over 323 species recorded. Generations of birders, naturalists, and outdoor enthusiasts have enjoyed its unique mix of wetlands and open space, making it both a local treasure and a statewide hotspot.



On May 6, 2025, a crude oil spill of approximately 2,600 gallons occurred at a nearby water reclamation plant about five minutes from VCDB. In the following weeks, cleanup materials were reportedly deposited at VCDB. Soon afterward, the city installed fencing and No Trespassing signs, effectively revoking long-standing public access. Despite multiple inquiries, officials have provided little explanation about either the spill's impact on the site or future plans for reopening.

This abrupt closure has raised serious concerns. If safety or operational issues require changes, the community believes the City should explore managed access solutions rather than permanent exclusion. VCDB has been responsibly enjoyed by birders and families for decades, and its importance as a public green space and wildlife habitat cannot be overstated.

How You Can Help

The first very easy step is to sign the petition at <https://chnng.it/JrQbbDfGvt>.

The website also gives further advice on contacting the City of Fort Worth officials to express concern and advocate for a transparent, collaborative process. Even a brief message helps demonstrate how strongly the community values this remarkable site.

VCDB is more than a birding hotspot—it is part of North Texas's natural heritage. With a unified voice, we can encourage the City to protect this habitat while ensuring it remains open for future generations to enjoy.



Each spring and fall, millions of birds migrate through Texas on their way between breeding and wintering grounds. Many travel at night, navigating by the stars. Bright city lights can disorient them, leading to collisions with buildings and unnecessary loss of life.

Lights Out, Texas is a simple yet powerful way to help: turn off non-essential outdoor and indoor lights between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m., from March 1 through June 15 and again from August 15 through November 30. By dimming our skylines during these peak migration periods, we provide safe passage for the countless warblers, thrushes, orioles, and other species that depend on the Central Flyway.

Prairie and Timbers Audubon members can make a difference right from home—switch off decorative lights, encourage neighbors and businesses to join in, and spread the word. Together, we can give migratory birds the dark skies they need to survive their long journey. Learn more and find resources at: Audubon Texas – Lights Out

Help PTAS Soar Higher in 2025–2026 Support North Texas Birds and their Habitat



This past year has been remarkable for Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society (PTAS). Together, we connected people with birds and nature, expanded our conservation impact, and strengthened our role as a voice for North Texas habitats. From field trips to High Island that recorded 183 species (including a rare Surfbird) to monthly programs featuring nationally recognized speakers, PTAS inspired curiosity, built community, and advanced science.

Your support also made real change for birds. In 2024–2025 we:

- Funded \$13,400 in conservation grants, supporting prairie restoration, bird banding, youth programs, and research on Painted Buntings.
- Advocated for habitat protections—from helping McKinney apply for Bird City Texas status to urging bird-safe design in South Padre and pressing for public access at Village Creek Drying Beds.
- Mobilized volunteers for Christmas Bird Counts, Lights Out Texas, and Audubon’s Climate Watch.
- Brought birding to the public, with Birding 101 classes at McKinney and Frisco libraries.

None of this would be possible without our Supporting Members. PTAS charges no participation fees, and everyone is welcome at our activities thanks to their generosity.

Join Us!

Please consider becoming a Supporting Member by contributing \$15 or more to PTAS. All donations go directly toward our programs, activities, and conservation efforts.

- Online: Use a credit card or PayPal account by clicking the Donate button at prairieandtimbers.org/support-ptas
- By Check: A form is available at the same website for those who prefer to mail a check.

Every gift matters. Together, we can ensure that warblers, buntings, herons, and eagles continue to enrich our lives — and that future generations inherit a Texas where birds thrive.

Bird Monitoring in Action



eBird

Bird monitoring continues to offer profound environmental rewards by deepening our connection to nature and advancing conservation work. As birdwatchers submit observations to public platforms like eBird, they provide crucial data that helps track bird populations, migration shifts, and habitat health. Over the past year, eBird data played a key role in decisions ranging from optimizing siting for communication towers and wind farms, to enhancing power pole safety to reduce eagle electrocutions, and shifting land management—like adjusted mowing schedules—to benefit grassland birds in multiple states. Locally, PTAS members remained active contributors, logging checklists across North Texas. Each entry not only enriches our collective scientific understanding but also strengthens conservation initiatives.

 Audubon



Christmas Bird Count

PTAS proudly sponsors the McKinney Christmas Bird Count, with its circle centered on the Heard Museum, and also supports a second count around Lake Ray Hubbard. These counts are part of the National Audubon Society's continent-wide initiative that brings together birders each holiday season to identify and record all birds seen within designated circles. The information collected contributes to one of the longest-running community science projects in the world, providing researchers with essential data on population shifts, migration changes, and the impacts of habitat and climate on bird species.



PTAS participates in Audubon's Climate Watch program and the Audubon Foundation of Texas Bird Squares activity, monitoring 10 designated squares. These programs focus on tracking how climate change affects bird populations across North America. Since birds are highly sensitive to temperature and habitat changes, shifts in their migration patterns, breeding behaviors, and distributions provide valuable insights into the broader effects of climate change on ecosystems.



Climate Watch

Communicating with PTAS



<https://prairieandtimbers.org/>



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



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