



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

January 2006

Cavity Nesters of Central Texas

Mark Klym

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

**Tuesday, January 17
7:30 P.M.**

While birds nest in a variety of different locations, one group of birds that most of us can easily provide nesting quarters for are the cavity nesters - the birds that used to nest in snags, old fence and telephone posts and other wooden structures that were hollowed either by their efforts or by a previous tenant. These birds can often be encouraged to use a nest box, a simple structure that should be part of any wildscaping effort. The January program will look at some of the common cavity nesters in central Texas and how we can enhance the probability of them occupying a box we put out.

Mark Klym is the coordinator of the Texas Wildscapes and Texas Hummingbird Roundup programs for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. A former member of the board of the Texas Bluebird



Pileated Woodpecker by Margie Crisp

Society, he has edited and published the booklet "Bluebirds in Texas" for the department in recent years and has adapted many of the guidelines and suggestions TBS has made to the information on cavity nesters in the Wildscapes materials. Most recently, Mark has coauthored the book "Hummingbirds of Texas" which will be available at the meeting.

Everyone is invited to join BCAS board members and Mark and Nancy Klym for dinner before the meeting. We will meet at 6 P.M. at Cartwright's Barbecue, 490 Hwy 71 West.

Bastrop County Audubon Society meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month (except July, August & December) in the Long Community Room of the First National Bank of Bastrop, 1020 Main Street, Bastrop. Everyone is invited to stay for refreshments after the program.

9th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count

Count for the Birds in America's Great Backyard:

February 17-20, 2006

- * No Fee or registration required
- * All ages and skill levels welcome
- * Track results in real time online
- * Count in your backyard, balcony, schoolyard, park, wildlife refuge
- * Be a part of the network

Join with thousand of others to find out how many birds are being seen in your area and across the continent this winter. By participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, you help document where birds are, and track changes in their numbers compared to previous years, helping scientists paint a picture of the state of birds this winter.

For more information, or to get started, go to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

4TH ANNUAL FEATHER FEST

March 30 to April 2, 2006

Come flock to historic Galveston Island, Texas, for the 4th annual FeatherFest, a four day celebration of nature, when the area abounds with hundreds of species of resident and migratory birds. This trip is only at most a 3-hour trip for most of us and Galveston accommodations and food are rather inexpensive. Those who have never been to High Island, Texas, can sign up for the Feather Fest field trips to that area. The rookery at High Island should be amazing then.

While traveling by van, bus, kayak and harbor cruisers, participants will enjoy field trips to some of the top birding areas in the nation. Expert naturalists will lead field trips and conduct workshops on photography, butterflies, dragonflies and birds. A variety of Galveston's signature social evenings will guarantee a unique experience!

FOR MORE INFORMATION or to register, visit www.galvestonfeatherfest.com or call 1.888.GALISLE

*Highly Recommended by 2005 Field Trip Chair,
Mary Ellen Branan*

Sparrows

Mary Ellen Branan

*A flock follows instantly the most vigilant and wary bird.
At the first twitch of his wing, they rose as one
as we appeared on the path in the distance.*

*They made a smoky tower, then banked in mid-air,
as Blue Angels do after years of practice. Swooping
at pitched angle from where they were scattered about*

*on the ground, they settled on a bush, like ashes.
Some mistook at first wind and twig, and fell to another twig
below or across, hammerlocked by the wind, but holding on.*

*We marveled at the uncommon sight, the instant,
concerted physicality. We thanked them as if
they had performed for us, and, in a way, they had.*



MARVELOUS MARVEL-MEAL

By BCAS member Lee Graham

For years my husband Bob and I have delighted in attracting birds to various types of feeders on our property. Now that the “colder” months are here, we are once again offering the birds a peanut butter/cornmeal concoction that I first read about in a BCAS newsletter. It was submitted by David and Barbara Carson, founding members of BCAS. Since then, I have discovered the recipe has a name, “Marvel-Meal”. It was created in the early sixties by John K. Terres, author of the book, Songbirds In Your Garden.

I know many of you are already familiar with the recipe, but I thought I’d submit it for the newer members, and to jostle old timer’s memories, so we can all do our part in helping out our precious songbirds. Considering the environmental peril and loss of habitat our feathered companions face every day, they need all the help they can get—especially during the winter months and freezing temperatures when food is scarce.

Marvel-Meal is a quick and easy recipe using cheap ingredients that can be thrown together in a matter of minutes. I hope this article inspires you to round up the kids, grandkids, neighbor’s kids, etc., and make this a fun winter project. What a great way to teach children about the importance of caring for our songbirds: Spend an afternoon with them constructing peanut butter logs and mixing up a batch of Marvel-Meal.

Marvel-Meal. Now there’s a snappy name. (Reminds me of other gems such as Malt-O-Meal, Bug-B-Gone, Bac-O-Bits, and Gas-X). Terres named the mixture Marvel-Meal “. . . because of its marvelous attraction for birds and for its basic cornmeal so relished by them.” He also thought of naming the mixture the “Bluebird Special” because of its “. . . extraordinary attractiveness to bluebirds.”

Marvel-Meal is an important supplemental nutrition source for birds this time of year since insects and worms

are scarce. The concoction appears to be a quick source of heat and energy for insect-eaters and seed-eaters as well.

It is especially delightful for us to observe the Pine Warblers that feed regularly on the mixture as well as Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. We have never attracted Eastern Bluebirds with it but it would certainly be a thrill if we did since it is a species struggling for survival. Other birds seen nibbling from our log and suet feeders are Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, and in years past, Red-breasted Nuthatch.

I have smeared it directly into the nooks and crannies of our Loblolly Pines and Post Oaks for the benefit of Downy and Pileated Woodpecker and made a hopeful attempt at re-attracting a Brown Creeper that I spotted one winter.

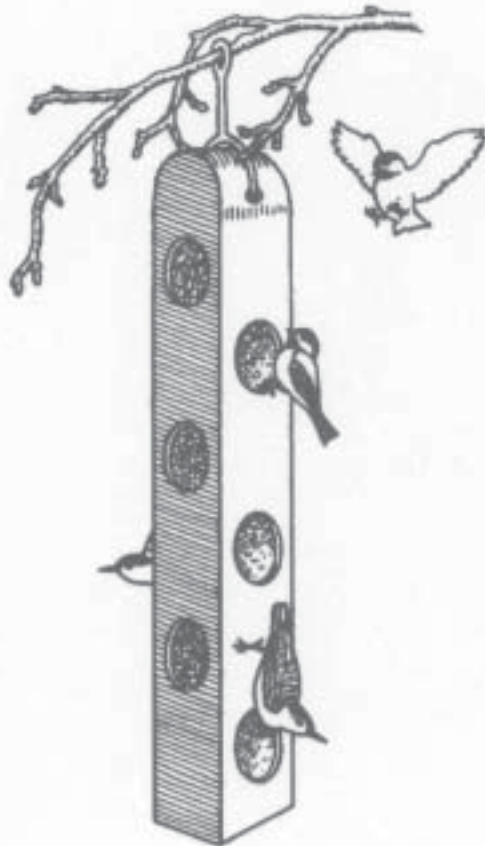
However, the squirrels usually find it before the birds when smeared directly onto a tree. I have read about a homemade suet feeder that can be nailed onto a tree, but I don’t see the point—our squirrels would empty it in a matter of minutes and damage the cage beyond repair in the process. Besides, I don’t relish the idea of hammering a nail into one of our trees.

I do have to confess, though. For the past several weeks, I have been smearing Marvel-Meal onto the Loblolly Pine home of Speedy, our terribly odd, terribly slow “pet”

squirrel. We’re not sure what’s wrong with Speedy. There appears to be a problem with his hips or spine—or a possible nervous system disorder. Instead of running from us, he ambles over to his pine tree as fast as he can and struggles up the tree at a snail’s pace.

I began worrying Speedy wasn’t getting enough to eat, so I started smearing Marvel-Meal on his pine tree. It took him forever to find it, and when he did, he ate it very slowly. He even chews slowly—but who knows, maybe he’s savoring every bite.

Other birds that are purportedly attracted to Marvel-Meal are Northern Mockingbird, Blue Jay, Pine Siskin,



continued on next page

MARVELOUS MARVEL-MEAL *continued*

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Goldfinch, Purple Finch, and Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warbler.

Unlike other suet or lard-based recipes I have worked with, the Marvel-Meal retains its soft consistency and ease of handling when pressed into the holes of a peanut butter log or similar feeder. I know many people simply use a combination of corn meal and peanut butter, but I find that combo too sticky to work with. With Marvel-Meal, the stickiness is minimal and it doesn't crumble apart and make a huge mess. Terres added the Crisco and white flour to decrease the stickiness and increase adherence.

Now for the delivery system: At a recent BCAS Winter Solstice party, I was fortunate enough to return home from the nature gift exchange with a peanut butter log. I first saw one of these years ago at one of David and Barbara Carson's Winter Solstice parties, crafted by David himself, and I remember thinking what a great idea. For those of you that don't know, it is a rough-hewn log about a foot in length, with one-inch holes drilled into the sides and an eyebolt at the top for hanging. (See "Make Your Own Peanut Butter Log" for more information). This is a perfect type of bird feeder for using the Marvel-Meal.

Prior to receiving my own log, I took handfuls of Marvel-Meal, rolled them into balls, and placed them inside a store-bought, wood-framed, wire cage suet feeder. The birds cling readily to the exterior wood frame and peck at the Marvel-Meal with their beaks. I discovered the birds seemed to greatly prefer the homemade Marvel-Meal to the expensive, store-bought suet blocks that are sold alongside the wire feeders.

I am firmly convinced the Marvel-Meal is healthier and safer for the birds as far as spoilage. The commercial suet blocks mold much faster, even the so-called "year round" suet blocks. The lard-based recipes I have experimented with molded quite quickly, as well. Of course, it could be because the birds ate it much slower than the yummiest, homemade Marvel-Meal. Our winters are so warm and sunny I'm not sure suet and lard are safe to use anytime of year, even during our coldest months.

The Marvel-Meal will eventually mold if you leave it out too long. We continue to offer the concoction well into the spring months to provide calories and extra

nourishment for insect-eaters busily raising their young in the spring.

Year after year, we have witnessed our Carolina Wrens take frequent nibbles between feeding their chicks.

They don't appear to feed it directly to their little ones. They eat it themselves and then provide their chicks with insects and worms. Considering what voracious eaters their little ones are, I'm glad we are able to help nourish the adults with Marvel-Meal.

OK, now that I have you all fired up and rushing into your kitchen to make up a batch of Marvel-Meal for our wonderful songbirds, you have yet to face your greatest challenge: Keeping your Marvel-Meal out of the clutches of squirrels, raccoons, possums, and very naughty canines.

Editor's Note: Lee Graham has graciously promised to write another entertaining and informative article for Bird Calls. The working title is "The Ultimate Oxymoron: Outwitting Squirrels."



R. G. Bell

MARVEL-MEAL RECIPE

Ingredients:

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup Crisco or other shortening
- 4 cups cornmeal (white or yellow)
- 1 cup white flour

Mix all ingredients together. No cooking is needed. It should have the consistency of putty after it is thoroughly hand-mixed as one would mix a cookie dough.

Yield: About 2 pounds. Refrigerate until needed. As all ingredients are measured in cups, this recipe is easily scaled up or down as desired.

Source: Songbirds In Your Garden, Fifth Edition, by John K. Terres. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1994.

Remember: Only offer birds peanut butter as one ingredient among others in a bird food mixture. I know this is highly debatable, but it is possible peanut butter offered alone can be a choking hazard for birds. Why take chances?

MAKE YOUR OWN PEANUT BUTTER LOG

Excerpt from *Feed the Birds*, by Helen Witty and Dick Witty. Workman Publishing, New York, 1991.

One of the easiest, and in many ways most satisfactory, of bird-feeding arrangements is the feeding log, known to generations of bird-befrienders but worth describing again for any new members of the club. It's a favorite dining spot for all the tree-clinging birds, and some others will also drop in for a bite.

A drilled log is simple to prepare; even better, it looks like part of the natural setting. Raid your own woodpile or a firewood dealer's for a log or tree limb with rough bark so the birds can hang on readily.

Materials:

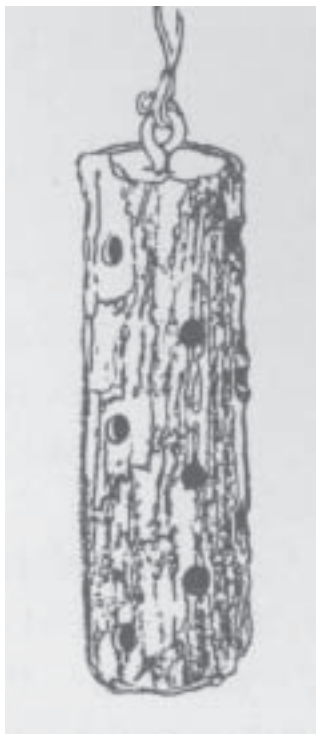
- Length of rough-barked log or tree limb, 3-4 inches in diameter and 16-20 inches long.
- Eye screw.
- Hanging wire.

Directions:

1. Drill some holes in the log, each at least an inch in diameter and an inch (or a little more) deep, spaced about 3 inches apart. If making 1-inch holes seems a problem, it isn't, if you have an ordinary 3/8-inch electric drill; hardware stores sell a 1-inch drill bit that will fit it and will make five or six holes in five or six minutes. (Alternatively, if you have a saw but no drill, make a number of coarse diagonal cuts into the bark of the log, making them as wide as you can). Finally, insert an eye screw into the top end of the log and add a wire for hanging it up; or drive nails into opposite sides of the log near the top and rig a hanging wire between them.
2. Pack a peanut butter/cornmeal combination (or Marvel-Meal) into the holes or gashes and hang the log.
3. To refill: Simply unhook the log and repack it with fresh food, using a rubber spatula or your fingers.

IMPORTANT: Please do not use treated lumber!

Articles & illustrations submitted by Lee Graham. Thank You!



BCAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS



JANUARY 2006

Januray 15 – Board Meeting at the home of Dorothy Wells & Gary Grief, 4 PM with potluck dinner following. 303-2372.

FEBRUARY 2006

February 19 – Board Meeting at the Bastrop home of Sue & Stew Brubaker, 4 PM with potluck dinner following, 303-0440

February 21 – Chapter Meeting: Pati Jacobs, Open Spaces Project of the Envision Texas Group.

MARCH 2006

March 19 – Board Meeting at the Bastrop home of Barbara & Jerry Harp, 4 PM with potluck dinner following, 581-0835

March 21 – Chapter Meeting: To be announced

Visit our Web site for updates and additional information on field trips, BCAS events, and other events of interest.

www.bastropcountyaudubon.org



Bird Calls is published by the Bastrop County Audubon Society. Submit information to:
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APACHE BLESSING

- May the sun bring you new energy by day,*
- May the moon softly restore you by night,*
- May the rain wash away your worries,*
- May the breeze blow new strength into your being.*
- May you walk gently through the world and know its beauty all the days of your life.*

THE LEARNERS' CORNER

Please join us Tuesday, January 17th at 7:00– before the regular meeting—for a demonstration and discussion of wood carving and painting birds by Bob Thomas of Elgin.



Attention all you fellow wildlife watchers!

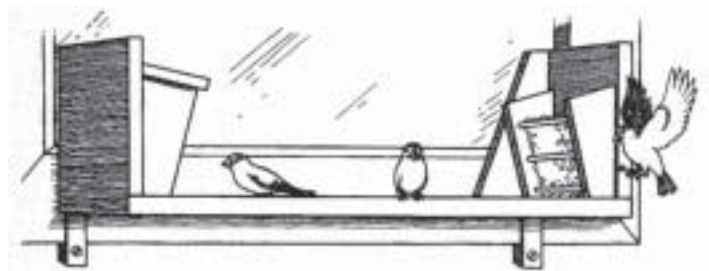
With the unseasonably dry weather we are having, please help your feathered friends by keeping a supply of fresh water available at all times. Bird baths, sprinklers, drippers, and shallow pans are all important as local ponds and streams go dry.

Food is also scarce so keep those feeders filled. Remember that in February it is recommended that we all switch to feeding black oil sunflower seeds to discourage Brown-headed Cowbirds from parasitizing songbird nests in the area.



Earth Share
OF TEXAS

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@earthsharetexas.org or call 1-800-GREENTX



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Return Service Requested