



# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

January Program

## What We Can Do for Bluebirds

What is that flash of blue? Is the upper breast red, and does it have a bit of white? We call it the Eastern Bluebird. Red, white and blue: maybe this should be our national bird.

Pauline Tom, president of Texas Bluebird Society, will be the speaker at Bastrop County Audubon Society's meeting on January 20, 7:30 p.m., at First National Bank Building in Bastrop. Tom will talk about the bluebirds' history and lifestyle and how we can best help these family-oriented little beauties to thrive within our encroaching development. She will discuss the Texas Bluebird Society's concerns and its current campaign entitled 'Bluebirds across Texas.'

Bluebird numbers were in serious decline during the 60s and 70s, but they have made a good recovery due mostly to human assistance in providing nesting boxes. Even so, bluebirds are continuously threatened by the murderous competition of the non-native European Starlings and House Sparrows, who compete for the nest boxes.



BCAS meets every third Tuesday at the First National Bank building, second floor, Hwy 71 at Hasler in Bastrop. The doors open by 7:00, and the meeting is free and open to the public. Learners' Corner begins at 7:00.

### Aransas Whoopers, December 5:

In foggy conditions, air surveillance could only locate 229. Estimates are considerably more. Last year: 266, previous year: 237.

### Eastern Flock Report: November 24:

"Whooping crane pair #11-03 and #12-03 have arrived on their wintering grounds in South Carolina, crane pair #13-02 and #18-02 (along with a third crane) are currently on their wintering territory in Alabama, and possibly four whooping cranes have already arrived in Florida . . ."



--International Crane Foundation



The board is spread. . .



with cates and mead. . .



and then the gifts are given.



# Field Trip Report

**Nov. 22, 2008** to County areas included on the maps of the Bastrop Christmas Bird Count. Count: 53 species.

Pied-billed Grebe	1
American Egret	2
Mallard	2
Gadwall	2
American Coot	300
Red-tailed Hawk	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	1
Cooper's Hawk	1
Crested Caracara	2
Osprey	3
Bald Eagle	1i
Black Vulture	52
Turkey Vulture	13
American Kestrel	9
Great Egret	2
Killdeer	3
Least Sandpiper	8
Rock Pigeon	30
White-winged Dove	5
Eurasian Collared-Dove	14
Inca Dove	1
Red-bellied Woodpecker	4
Downy Woodpecker	1
Pileated Woodpecker	3
Eastern Phoebe	9
Eastern Bluebird	5
Brown Thrasher	1
Northern Mockingbird	24
Loggerhead Shrike	1
Blue Jay	8
American Crow	71
Carolina Chickadee	3
Tufted Titmouse	1
Carolina Wren	2
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4
Orange crowned Warbler	1
Pine Warbler	2
Yellow-rumped Warbler	40
European Starling	
Easter Meadowlarks	1
Western Meadowlark	9
Meadowlarks	100
Brewer's Blackbird	12
Great-tailed Grackle	25
Brown-headed Cowbird	30
House Sparrow	16
Savannah Sparrow	30
House Finch	5
Northern Cardinal	60
Savannah Sparrow	40
Field Sparrow	5
Vesper Sparrow	5
White-throated Sparrow	1
White-crowned Sparrow	9

It was a beautiful cool cloudy morning to observe birds and the fall colors of our trees. We had great looks at three Pileated Woodpeckers in a nearby tree, an Orange-crowned Warbler, and a soaring immature Bald Eagle.

--Stan Wells



## Gleaning in the Field

### 'Gloom and doom for fish': More Info on Hurricane Effects

Up to 20 miles inland, **post-lake** samples showed salt levels as much as 25 parts per thousand in water that usually has no salinity. Water begins to taste salty at 6 parts per thousand, [Jim} Sutherland [Wildlife Management Supt.] said.

"That exasperates everything that needs freshwater," he said. "If we don't get a lot of rain soon, then it's gloom and doom for fish, insects and some mammals. For birds, as soon as the water is freshened, they will move back in."

At this point, there is much concern over the plight of an astonishing variety of birds — from hawks to hummingbirds — that stop along the upper Texas coast on their way south for the winter.

"This will have a huge impact on the birds," said Gina Donovan, executive director of the Houston Audubon Society. "The warblers eat so many berries that the juice gets all over their feathers. It's like watching a child eat ice cream. Without the food to fatten them for a 600-mile journey, the birds will starve and perish."

Among the many rookeries on the Bolivar Peninsula, the Houston Audubon Society's sanctuaries are covered with debris from destroyed houses and boats.

The trees — those still standing — look like toothpicks, and there are fewer birds than usual. *The Houston Chronicle* 9/30/08

### Dead Zone in Gulf of Mexico

NEW ORLEANS — Scientists have issued a report urging immediate government action to reduce urban and Mid-west farmland runoff blamed for feeding an 8,000-square-mile dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, an oxygen-deprived pool of water that has grown alarmingly off the mouth of the Mississippi River.

A report on Thursday by the National Research Council, a scientific and technology non-profit institution created by Congress, exhorted the federal government to take quick steps to avoid a tipping point and avert an ecosystem collapse similar to what has happened in the Chesapeake Bay and Denmark's coastal waters. Scientists say the low-oxygen zone — created by massive algae blooms that consume oxygen in waters off Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas — makes it harder for organisms to survive, robbing them of reproductive energy needed to continue life in those waters. The low-oxygen condition is called hypoxia by scientists.

"The existence of gulf hypoxia is a national-level water quality problem that has been persistent, has become larger over time, and will require decisive actions to remedy," the report warned. --Cain Burdeau, AP, 12/12/08

## Aren't we lucky we live in Texas?!

While most of the country hunkers down to make it through another blizzard, it's time for us to do Spring Cleaning before the Bluebirds return to choosing nesting sites. So the Saturday after our next meeting, we'll gather to clean out the Bluebird houses BCAS has placed in Bastrop State Park over the years.

Mid-morning on January 24<sup>th</sup>, we'll meet at the picnic area past the pool, then go off in teams to clean and check the Bluebird boxes we have scattered mostly around the golf course, making all avian homes ready for the Bluebirds of Happiness.

Wikipedia tells us, "The mythology of the [bluebird](#) of happiness has deep roots that go back thousands of years. Indigenous cultures across the globe hold similar myths and beliefs about the bluebird. It is the most universally accepted symbol of cheerfulness, happiness, prosperity, hearth and home, good health, new births, the renewal of springtime, etc."

Let's celebrate! Bring the children! Lure them away from TV and video games to breathe fresh air, gather with others, and help. Like all of us, children need to be needed. Too often, modern life is too busy for us to make time for a child to help us. But even a small child can be held up to clean out debris from a Bluebird house.

Bring work gloves, ladders, a picnic lunch if you have time to linger afterward. Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches eaten at a picnic table in Bastrop State Park beat fast food in taste tests every time.

Let us prepare for the Bluebirds with joy, anticipating their gift of happiness. We will share our happiness with others, as we have done and will continue to do. The youngsters and teenagers who stopped by our BCAS booth at Smithville's Festival of Lights left with smiles, custom decorated BCAS bags, and bird feeders they had made in minutes. Christmas was well celebrated at our December Party and the New Year was welcomed on the wings of birds as we joined together with others for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. We'll share joy again with a Bastrop County Audubon booth at Bastrop County International Women's Day March 7<sup>th</sup> and at the Tri-County Wildlife Management Extravaganza later this Spring.

In the meantime, clean out those dark spaces.

Whisk away those old dusty cobwebs.

Let in fresh air and sunshine. **Mary Beth Gradziel**  
President, Bastrop County Audubon Society

### Learners' Corner:

Linda Presto's "Complete Home Economics of Bird-feeders": placement, maintenance, types, squirrel-proofing, disease-control, etc. She'll have a state-of-the-art feeder to show.



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### HEALING THE PLANET ONE BOTTLE AT A TIME™

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[earthshare.org/green-marketplace.html](http://earthshare.org/green-marketplace.html)



## Nature Education for 1,280 Bastrop County Students With Audubon Adventures

Educational Chairs Jim and Mary Ann Casey report an prompt and unprecedented response to their annual offering of "Audubon Adventures" kits to science classes in our four county school districts and home-school teachers.

Each kit contains newspapers for 32 students on four different natural history topics, a teacher guide, and classroom posters. BCAS offers kits to teachers of fourth, fifth, and sixth grades at no charge in order to foster appreciation of Nature and inspire an attitude of active conservation. BCAS orders the kits from National Audubon at \$45.65 per kit.

The four topics this year are "Migration,"(birds of the American flyways, whales, salmon, monarch butterflies, and others), "Animal Builders," "Animal Defenses" (camouflage, intimidation, playing dead, etc.), and an ecological approach to "Plants."

"The number of kits this year doubles last year," says Mary Ann. Elgin ISD ordered five kits, McDade one kit, Bastrop 28 kits, Smithville ISD five kits, one to a home-schooler, for a **total of 40 kits** paid for by BCAS.

BCAS also secured a kit for its own use when working with children

B.C.A.S  
 c/o Priscilla Jarvis  
 783 Lower Elgin Road  
 Elgin TX 78621



# Members at Work

## Annual Audubon Bird Count

Dozens showed up January 1 for the 15-mile-radius Bastrop County Christmas Bird Count. Many BCAS members were joined by enthusiasts from Austin, San Antonio, Scherz, and other places to make the number of participants the largest in years.

As a consequence, the number of birds counted was the largest in years. The count was also aided by launching Norm Sachnik's boat to cruise Lake Bastrop.

Several teams counted 70+ species. Two Bald Eagles were seen. Chairman David Mitchell was delighted with the turnout and the results.

More detailed data was not yet available at press time.



January  
 Refreshments by

**Carole O'Toole and Sharon  
 Finlay**

## Calendar

**January 15: Friends of the Lost  
 Pines State Parks, Meeting, 7:00  
 p.m., Refectory Bldg.**

**January 18: Board Meeting, 216  
 Schaeffer, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m., with  
 potluck supper, 303-2734.**

**January 20: General Meeting &  
 Lecture, 7:00 p.m., 1st Natl  
 Bank, Hasler @ 71W, Bastrop.**

**January 24: Maintenance of  
 BCAS State Park Bird Boxes:  
 9:30 a.m. See Letter from the  
 Prez.**

*Visitor makes Pine  
 cone bird feeder*



*BCAS Booth: Festival of  
 Lights, Smithville*