



# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

12<sup>th</sup> Annual

## *Citizen Science: Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 13-16*

Every year on Presidents' Day weekend we have another opportunity to contribute crucial information about birds.

Anyone, any age, can count and report via the internet to [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). You can do so once or once each day for the four days. For a minimum duration of 15 minutes, you can count the visitors to your own feeders, visit a promising site, or count while



taking walk.

The count is sponsored jointly by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Photographers can submit their photos at the same web site.

This massive effort gives to ornithologists and conservationists documentation for recovery, declines, ranges, trends, breeding success, food supplies, effects of disease and climate changes on avian populations. Without Audubon's Christmas Bird Count and this February (GBBC) count, scientists would have no such data.

Last year there were over 85,000 observations of 9,805,216 species.

Bastrop County had 21 observers reporting 59 species. Austin had 129 counters reporting 111 species.

The results from the various regions are updated at the web site throughout the count, along with maps, tips and easy instructions

February Program

## ***The Drought and Our Water Supply***

How are extreme drought conditions affecting our aquifer? Why has the ground water district turned down Aqua Water's application for new wells? Will the wells run dry and Bastrop run out of water?

Joe Cooper, director and Ann Mesrobian, president, of the Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District along with Phil Cook of Sierra Club will address these crucial questions at the next meeting of Bastrop County Audubon Society.

We meet at the First National Bank in Bastrop at Hwy 71w and Hasler Blvd. The general meeting starts at 7:30 in the training room. Learners Corner starts at 7 PM.

In previous meetings we have explored both how to conserve water and the condition of the Colorado River. Now it is time to learn about underground water sources and how they are replenished. If you have heard that Bastrop sits on an ocean of underground water and would like to know more about the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer that runs beneath Bastrop, come hear a panel of experts. The public is welcome and the meeting is free.

## ***Aransas Whoopers, January 8:***

Estimated at **268** (232 adult, 36 juveniles)

2008: 266

2007: 237,

## ***Learners' Corner:***

Alan Jaeger's "General and Comparative Analysis of Various Field Guides": 7:00 p.m. (before the Gen'l Meeting). Bring your own Field Guide also.



----Book Review

## Roger Tory Peterson's Life, 1908-

1996, covers most of the 20th century, and being such a consequential life covers therefore a history of conservation and birding, national and international. Elizabeth Rosenthal's new biography *Birdwatcher: the Life of Roger Tory Peterson* (390 pp) weaves together famous names I've heard in discontinuous and accidental fashion and the foundings of eminent organizations I had taken for granted due to my ignorance.

We have the evolution of various programs of the National Audubon Society because Peterson's early employment was at the NAS headquarters where he brilliantly developed the tenor of its lecture programs and use of photography. As a teen-ager in Jamestown, New York, he was a member of a Junior Audubon Club and discovered field photography. Artistically talented, he studied bird illustration on his own and by meeting leading bird illustrators at a convention of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1925. There were books and museum skins in his boyhood which helped him identify species, but not the helpful genre of the field guide. The reader has the appeal of biography, the story of how a young person begins and becomes and achieves his human life, but moreover in this instance, within the field of bird-watching, our own favorite pastime/avocation.

Peterson became the Big Man in birding, bird painting, field guides, lectures, and burgeoning events and venues, all over the world. He knew all these ornithologists, board members, artists, explorers, photographers, writers and earnest students, all fellow-travelers in the beloved, obsessive pursuit of birds.

His scarce home-time was spent in studio and residence in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Naturally, the biography explores his personal life with wives and children and collaborators and rivals. You'll find details of his visits to Texas. In his eighties, he spoke at the opening of the Connie Hagar Cottage in Rockport, and collapsed from dehydration, after not drinking enough in the preceding hot days birding the King Ranch and other Valley sites.

His skills, birding by ear and eye, were unparalleled. When he led the team to produce the first ever field guide to European birds in 1954, "Birdwatching in Europe changed forever." Said Keith Shackleton of his illustrations: "Roger was probably the best bird illustrator that's ever been, in that he knew exactly how much detail to put in, and what to leave out."

2008 was the centennial of Roger Tory Peterson's birth.

*Birdwatcher* is available at Borders and Barnes and Noble stores and at many links listed at [www.petersonbird.com](http://www.petersonbird.com), for \$29.95 or less. (Publisher: Lyons/Globe Pequot Press, Guilford CT, 2008.)

--Mary Ellen Branan, editor

--Letter from the President

## Happy Birthday Charles Darwin!

The Father of Evolution was born February 12, 1809 – 200 years ago. His seminal work *The Origin of Species* was published fifty years later. February 12 is celebrated internationally. "...Darwin Day expresses gratitude for the enormous benefits that scientific knowledge, acquired through human curiosity and ingenuity, has contributed to the advancement of humanity." ( [www.darwinday.org](http://www.darwinday.org) ) In his land of birth, the official celebration is in July [www.darwin2009.cam.ac.uk](http://www.darwin2009.cam.ac.uk)

Charles Robert Darwin's writings were controversial from the start. His beloved wife, Emma, was his confidante and his most trusted editor as well as a devout Christian. Darwin was following his family's footsteps. Until his work was published, Darwin's own grandfather was the accepted expert in this field of science and Darwin's descendants continue to be scientists.

For some, *The Origin of Species* continues to be deeply controversial. For others, including many devout Christians, there is no conflict between their spirituality and Evolution. Still others focus strictly on science. As in so many things, we need not agree, but we need to honor all views with respect.

There are many celebrations of Charles Darwin this month, and this year. We have opportunities to listen to special educational shows on public radio and to watch them on public TV. We can learn more about this man, Charles Robert Darwin, and his life – devoted to science and his family. Deborah Heiligman, author of *Charles and Emma, the Darwins Leap of Faith* explains: "Through the years, the two continued to talk and listen to each other about this 'Most Important Subject' as Emma called it. .

"Charles and Emma were married for 43 years...Although they were never able to see eye-to-eye on the question of religion and God, they were able to reach their hands across the gulf. In the end each of them accepted and, it seems, truly understood what the other believed.

"If it is a sign of intelligence to be able to hold opposite thoughts or opinions in your head, then it is a mark of a successful marriage to be able to see the other person's point of view. It's also the mark of a successful society."

Thanks, Ms. Heiligman. I couldn't have said it better myself. I'm looking forward to reading your book. Part of my personal effort to Boost the Economy is buying more books. That fits nicely with my New Year's resolutions to read more books, as well as to celebrate more birthdays and – of course, to watch more birds with even greater appreciation.

Mary Beth Gradziel, President



## *Gleaning in the Field*

### More on Vicious Ant Threat

"Today I met with entomologists from Texas A&M, the urban biologist for Houston, the local county extension agent, and Tom Raspberry, pest control professional who first found the ant in east Houston in 2002. Even though it was cold and raining and the ants are inactive in cold weather and at an annual population low, we ventured out to see a (hopefully) isolated outbreak. . . .

"Tom just reached down and picked up a small piece of rotten wood. The underside was swarming with tiny blackish ants. His hand quickly became covered. He said that in summer everything in the area was covered just as his hand was at that moment. I'm talking about an ant in every square one eighth of an inch. One of the local residents harvested hay for sale. We turned over a rectangular bale that had been on the ground there for quite some time. Underneath the bale and ground were covered with the RBAs. We rolled over some of the large circular bales that had only been there since October or November. Each one had a small colony of ants. They were always in spots where there were damp areas on the bale. Tom said that each bale that was sold and taken to a different location would start a new infestation.

**"The potential problems to birds and other wildlife cannot be overstated.** The ants exist in the millions per colony and have multiple queens (Tom had counted 96 queens in one small colony). All present were very concerned about yet another gift from Hurricane Ike. In the weeks following Ike people cleaned their property of downed trees and limbs and piled them out by the road where they could be picked up and mulched. The mulch is then distributed free to the public for landscaping. Ants have probably been widely dispersed by this practice, much of southeast Texas, including all the counties bordering Louisiana on its southwestern parishes and almost surely in southwestern Louisiana proper.

"The ants have not been studied in their effects on birds and other wildlife and we are preparing a proposal to do just that, but the entomologists say that **they wipe out virtually all insect life in an infested area which will eliminate the prey base for both adults and nestlings.** The ants are stingless and overcome their prey by sheer mass numbers. They also attack larger vertebrates by attacking eyes and airways, causing suffocation from the latter. Most motile animals flee to ant-free areas if they can find one. The ants ascend high into trees, so not only terrestrial nesters and other animals are at risk. Tom has been experimenting with various baits in which to deliver pesticides. He filled three one gallon water jugs with sugar water and placed them into an industrial building that was infested. The ants drank them dry in two days. When presented with a chemical barrier the initial ants are killed and pile up. The piles become bridges for millions of oth-

ers to cross over the barriers. An outbuilding at the site we visited which had been treated with such a barrier had a 'skirt' of dead ants 5 to 6 inches deep all the way around.

"The ants also annoy and cause financial problems for people by invading buildings in massive numbers, covering the floors, walls, and ceilings. They are attracted to electric energy fields and infest transformers, computers, air conditioner units, lighting fixtures, and generally any kind of electronic device shorting them out, burning out circuitry and causing whole apparatuses to have to be replaced. Some may take comfort from the fact that they wipe out fire ants. All present agreed that anyone who had the Crazy Ants would welcome fire ants back with open arms. In fact infested areas can usually be identified by fire ant mounds that have become abandoned and inactive. Where active fire ant mounds are still present the RCAs have not yet arrived. . . .

"The only effective control found so far is only licensed to be applied by professionals in urban environments. It cannot be applied to natural areas or agricultural lands. The off-the-shelf pesticides are ineffective, and the effective substance must be applied around 4 times a year to achieve partial control (or 'keep them knocked back to a tolerable level' as Tom Raspberry says). Needless to say these applications are costly." *John C. Arvin, Research Coordinator, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson*

## Members at Work



**Br-r-r-r:** On a cold morning we turned out for annual maintenance on BCAS bluebird boxes in Bastrop State Park. Here, Mary Ann Casey, Alan Jaeger, Priscilla Jarvis, Jeremiah Jarvis; with five others plus two from Bastrop Girl Scouts.

**In-box: 1.** "On behalf of the officers and board of directors of *Texas Ornithological Society*, thank you for your continued, generous support of this organization (\$385)."

**2.** "Your valuable \$285 contribution will allow us to clear the debris and fallen trees, repair and replace damaged fences and boardwalks and replant and restore the natural habitat." *Houston Audubon*

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



## Calendar

**February 12 (Thursday):** TP&W documentary on all PBS stations, 8:00-9:00 p.m., "Texas: the State of Flowing Water."

**February 13-16:** Great Backyard Bird Count.

**February 14: Bastrop Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Banquet,** Hyatt-Regency Lost Pines Resort Hotel. 303-0558 for reservations.

**February 15 (Sunday): BCAS Board Meeting,** 4:00 p.m., at the Brubaker's, 417 Akaloa, 308-9974, with pot-luck supper.

**February 17: General Meeting and Program,** 7:30 p.m., First Natl Bank Bldg, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Hasler @ H. 71w, Bastrop. Doors open at 7:00

**February 21: Field Trip, Saturday.** 8:00 a.m., Boat ride at South Shore Lake Bastrop. Meet at Bank parking lot or at boat launch. (Capacity limited, call 303-2734.)

**March 3: Lost Pines Native Plant Society Meeting,** 7:00 p.m., First Natl Bank, Smithville.

**March 7: Women's Day Celebration,** BCAS booth.

## February Refreshments by Judy Walker and Zaina Farrar



When the economy is down, many of us cut back on indulgences like a morning latte or lunch with colleagues. This month, EarthShare gives you a few tips for enjoying life's simple pleasures while going green—and saving green.

See [www.earthshare.org](http://www.earthshare.org).

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