



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

September 2003

Amphibians & Reptiles of Central Texas: A Conservation Perspective

Andrew H. Price, Ph.D.

**Tuesday, September 16, 2003
7:30 PM**



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From the Houston Toad to the Barton Springs Salamander — not only does our speaker have a comprehensive knowledge about these critters and their life histories, he also monitors the status of rare and endangered fauna of Texas and works on the development and review of conservation policy for the state of Texas. His program will focus on the Houston Toad and the highly specialized *Eurycea* salamanders of the Edwards plateau including the Barton Springs Salamander and Comal Blind Salamander. He will also discuss horned lizards, rattlesnakes, and working as a field biologist. In addition to being a dedicated scientist, Andy is an award-winning author (his most recent book was “The Poisonous Snakes of Texas”).

Andrew H. Price, Ph.D. has found employment that allows him to indulge his life long fascination with reptiles. As a Natural Resource Scientist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, he does everything from research (he has been studying Houston Toads in Bastrop State Park for over 14 years) to answering the phone about what kind of snake someone just found in their backyard. His research over the course of his career has covered a wide variety of subjects: from mammal populations in New Mexico, to the endangered Concho Water Snake to parthenogenesis in Whiptail lizards (females only populations), to the status of the Comanche Springs Pupfish.

When asked what the most unusual thing that has happened to him while conducting research, he replied, “Scaring the heck out of a Girl Scout Troop camped near one of my study ponds in Bastrop State Park during a severe storm comes to mind . . .”

Join us for what is guaranteed to be an interesting program.

Everyone is invited to join the speaker and BCAS board members for dinner before the meeting. Six PM at Jalisco’s Mexican Restaurant (on Hwy 71, near Tractor Supply).

Bastrop County Audubon Society chapter meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month (except July, August & December) at 7:30 PM in the Long Community Room of the First National Bank of Bastrop, 1028 Main Street, Bastrop. Everyone is invited to stay for refreshments after the program.

BCAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS



SEPTEMBER 2003

September 14 – Board Meeting at Alan & Vera Jaeger’s home, Bastrop, 581-7451

September 16 – Chapter Meeting: Reptiles & Amphibians of Central Texas: A Conservation Perspective, Andrew Price, Ph.D., Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

OCTOBER 2003

October 4 & 5 – Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo

October 19 – Board Meeting at Priscilla Jarvis’ home, Elgin, 281-2762

October 21 – Chapter meeting: The Nature Conservancy and the Barton Creek Habitat Preserve, Nurani Hogue, Preserve Manager and Education Coordinator Barton Creek Habitat Preserve

October 25 – Hogeeye Festival, Elgin. Visit with friends old & new and help with BCAS’s fund raising booth.

NOVEMBER 2003

November 16 – Board Meeting

November 18 – Chapter Meeting: Endangered Species Watches; Marsha Reimer, Texas Nature Trackers, Wildlife Diversity Branch, TPWD

DECEMBER 2003

Solstice Party! Time and place TBA. Don’t miss the best party of the year.

JANUARY 2004

January 18 – Board Meeting

January 20 – Chapter Meeting: Birds of the Antarctic, Greg Lasley, birder, photographer, tour guide.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW—CHECK OUT OUR UPCOMING PROGRAMS!

Visit our Web site for updates and additional information on field trips and events.

www.bastropcountyaudubon.org

BECOME A FRIEND OF BASTROP COUNTY AUDUBON and all of your dues will be put to use supporting local conservation and education. You may also join both Bastrop County Audubon and the National Audubon Society through the BCAS Web site <bastropcountyaudubon.org>. As a member of National Audubon, you enjoy BCAS chapter membership, receive the *Audubon* magazine, and a portion of your dues supports national programs. For more information contact Priscilla Jarvis at 281-2762.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Friend of Bastrop County Audubon \$20

Includes membership in BCAS, a subscription to the newsletter, *Bird Calls*, and invitations to all BCAS programs, events, and field trips.

Name _____

Address _____

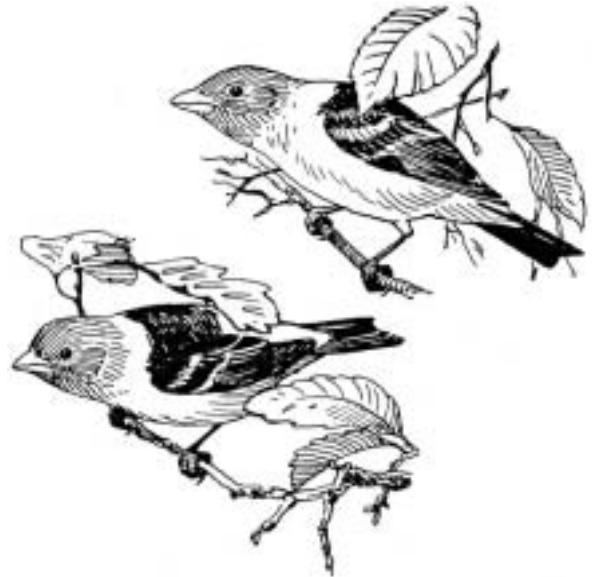
City, State, Zip _____

email _____

Please make checks payable to :

Bastrop County Audubon Society

Send to: Alan Jaeger, Treasurer
117 Kaelepulu Dr
Bastrop 78602



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 • *Bird Calls* is published by the Bastrop County Audubon
 • Society. It is edited and produced by Margie Crisp,
 • Maggie Lambert & Priscilla Jarvis. Contributors for
 • this issue include Alan Jaeger, Bill Montgomery, Mary
 • Ellen Branan, Loretta Hennard, & Priscilla Jarvis.
 • Deadline for next issue: **September 30**
 • PO Box 656, Elgin, TX 78621
 • Margie (512) 281-5667 or Maggie (512) 321- 2569
 • e-mail: Tiliqua2@earthlink.net

Message from the President



Greetings members and friends!

I hope all of you have had a wonderful and productive summer. Margie and I have spent some wonderful mornings this summer on the Colorado River in our kayaks. For those of you who don't know, there is a new kayak and canoe livery in Webberville, owned by member Neal Cook. Floating down the river is an excellent way to see birds and other wildlife in a beautiful and relaxing setting, and having a shuttle makes it very convenient.

We start this month with some new board members and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome them. I also want to thank our previous board members for all the work they have done in the past year.

This year we have several new projects in our community, as well as ongoing ones. The Elgin High School shop department has volunteered to construct bird houses for us. The birdhouses will be sold at the Hogeys Festival and other events. BCAS is also planning the construction of a bird blind in Bastrop State Park under the leadership of Alan Jaeger. And our annual birdhouse cleaning and installation day will be sometime in January at Bastrop State Park.

Mary Ellen Branan will continue to provide excellent instruction with the Learners' Corner programs and Gary Grief and Dorothy Wells have already lined up an exciting slate of speakers. Plus Loretta Hennard is planning fun field trips for our members and friends.

If you would like to help with any of these projects, or have ideas for speakers, field trips or projects, please contact me or ANY board member. Happy Birding!

Bill Montgomery, President BCAS

www.BastropCountyAudubon.org

Our *Calendar* has been expanded to include other conservation-related events. We will only include events sponsored by other *National Audubon Society* chapters or locally- or nationally-recognized conservation organizations. Check it out. You may find something exciting to do!

FIELD TRIPS For the Birds

Congratulations! You made it through the long, hot, dry summer—

Next month we have something different planned for you. On **September 19**, we're going to do some nighttime bird-watching at Town Lake. Perhaps you read of the incoming flights at dusk in Saturday's *Austin America-Statesman*. The photos reminded me of the awesome sights at the rookery at High Point Island—and so close to home that perhaps more of you will join us. This may become a regular activity for us—

You'll be asked to complete a very short survey for me because I need your help. As we plan our field trips, our goal is to involve more of you in our nature treks. This will be your chance to tell us of your particular interests. Next spring we hope to join other avid Audubon-ites at Rockport, and we will try again to get the weather to cooperate so that we can go to Eagle Lake. You'll have other choices that we hope you will prioritize so that we can complete our agenda for 2003-2004.

Look for all the details about and registration forms for Town Lake on September 16—

Loretta Hennard, Field Trip Chair

2003-2004 BCAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice-President	Judy Ing	303-9599
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State Alternate	Alan Jaeger	581-7451
Web site	Alan Jaeger	581-7451

**NAS Board of Directors SW Representative:
John A. Whittle**

whittleja@hal.lamar.edu
(409) 880-8276 work; (409) 722-4193 home

The Birds of Summer

Or One Flew Over

Mary Ellen Branan

I no longer deplore the web worms, or tent worms, in the pecan trees of the Bastrop Historic District. Some of you know I live at the corner of Pecan and Austin Streets, three blocks from 71, two blocks from the river. Almost every day this summer I've been lazily bird-watching, pre-noon or towards sunset, sometimes both, from my Yucatan hammock in the back yard.

In early June or so I began to hear a staccato rattle (a Downy Woodpecker? a Great Crested Flycatcher?) and to glimpse an unknown not-small bird overhead. Realizing this strange bird was staying around, I consulted my Kaufman and shortly solved the mystery.

Kaufman definitely captured the bird's vocalization: "staccato clatter, slowing down: kakakakakah-kah-kowp kowp kowp, Also mellow, cooing koowp, koowp, koowp."

Have you noticed the pics in Handbooks give you a nice side view of the bird, sometimes a three-quarter looking down on the back area? If one is prone in one's hammock or chaise one needs an album of views looking UP at the belly and under the wings, right?

Kaufman, however, gave me this: "From below, long tail looks black with big white spots. Rusty red in wing is obvious in flight." Thus, whenever I saw an elegantly slender bird about a foot long, with a white belly, darkish tail, and orange wings, that was the



Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and nothing else looked like that!

Through the summer I've been lucky enough to view the bird clearly, yellow-lower beak, spotted tail, and all. Once, I saw three of them moving around within a yard of each other. I find they seem not so "easily overlooked, hiding in foliage" as they say. Maybe if the bird-watcher stayed put in a hammock, patient and ready, the cuckoo would not seem so "secretive."

The tent-worms in our pecans and red buds are exactly what the New World Cuckoos eat. They came all the way from wintering in Argentina to find them.

They don't deserve any connotations earned by the Old World Common Cuckoo, who inspired the clock and the term for mental aberration.

Once more I'm astonished with my beloved of bird-watching hobby. Were they here last summer and the summers before and I never knew?

To conclude my non-scientific treatise, I must report they seem to have departed around the middle of August. The handbooks say they winter in Argentina, but not when they actually come and go. To know that you have to keep watching, yourself.

FUNDRAISING NEWS

Special Events chair Linda S. Presto is always looking for a helping hand with our fund-raising and community projects. Upcoming events include the HOG EYE Festival in Elgin on Saturday, October 25th. If you have time to join in the fun, give her a call! 321-0944



FINE ART PRINT AVAILABLE FOR A GOOD CAUSE!

Artist Margie Crisp has donated several prints of this limited edition, 12-color silk-screen for BCAS to sell as a fund raiser.

The prints cost \$270.00 (includes \$20.00 for shipping and handling), and this amount is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Simply visit our web site for an order form or call Margie Crisp at 512-281-5667.

Pond Cycle

12 color silkscreen with hand coloring

Image size 14" x 22"

Paper size 22" x 29" 100% cotton, acid free

LEARNING THE HARD WAY



Margie Crisp

I consider myself an “advanced beginner” birder. I can usually recognize types of birds; for instance, I know a flycatcher when I see one. Likewise I can usually tell the difference between a vireo and a warbler; but I am completely clueless when it comes to the subtle differences between species of flycatchers and species of vireos.

In August, while in the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona, I picked up a copy of the local checklist (a printed list of the birds found in a particular area) for a paltry \$.25 at the local Forest Service Station. I bought it because I know that “real birders” use checklists but one look at the illegible combination of minuscule type printed in brown ink on tan paper and I dutifully tucked it away in the back of my field guide to be ignored.

When you are in a new place even the common birds are new and exciting. My husband, Bill, and I spent hours every day peering through our binoculars at the local fauna and then fumbling through the pages of our field guide trying to figure out just what those dinky little gray birds rumbling with the chickadees and nuthatches were. I always look at the range maps but, as you know, birds don’t read maps. So we were stumped over and over again. We poured over the differences between the Bell’s Vireo and the Gray Vireo while the bird in question politely waited on a nearby limb until we gave up. We convinced ourselves that the dinky gray birds were Ruby-crowned Kinglets, or possibly Bushtits.

Until I finally looked at the checklist. One of those rare “Ah Ha!” experiences. All the answers to my questions were there in black and white (actually brown on brown). What was that peculiar warbler? We thought it might be a Grace’s Warbler by the picture and sure enough, Grace’s Warblers are “c” (common) in “P” (Ponderosa pines above 7000’). Eureka! I believe the vireo was a Bell’s since Gray Vireos are listed as rare in that area and we saw the same species over and over. And the dinky birds probably were Bushtits, a species I’d never identified before but are listed as abundant. Now I wish that I had looked at the checklist sooner, I would have known that I was seeing rare Mexican Chickadees, that the nuthatches could very well have been Pygmy Nuthatches as well as White-breasted Nuthatches. The Nighthawk we watched hunting over a desert water-

hole was actually a Lesser Nighthawk—I’d have never of thought to check to see what species of Nighthawk I was seeing. Bill and I struggled with a Thrasher. We couldn’t decide if we were seeing Curve-Billed or Bendire’s; but the checklist clearly indicated that we were likely to see Curve-Billed Thrashers in that area and habitat.

So the moral of this story is that checklists, while seeming complicated, are really handy tools for all levels of birders. They can help the novice birder identify new birds by narrowing down the possibilities of what species are common. Most checklists list the abundance of a species for each of the different seasons. A checklist can also verify whether a species is an unusual visitor or a nesting resident in the area. Some checklists also list habitats and you can learn a great deal by paying attention to where different species are commonly found. In the past I’d regarded checklists with their small, scrunched type, obscure notations and peculiar abbreviations as weapons to be wielded only by advanced birders with jumbo magnifying glasses but now I’m a believer.

So, If I could only figure out a way to juggle my reading glasses, binoculars and field guide all at the same time . . .



Did you know that Common Loons are occasional visitors to Bastrop County in spring and winter? Would you believe your eyes if you encountered a Blue-footed Booby on Lake Bastrop? This excerpt from the “Checklist for Bastrop County’s State Parks” (available on the BCAS web site) compiled by Brush Freeman breaks down the year into the four seasons, then indicates the abundance of the individual species.

SPECIES	Sp	S	F	W	Check
Common Loon	O		Acc	O	
Pied-Billed Grebe*	C	F	C	C	
Horned Grebe	O		Acc	O	
Eared Grebe	U	O	U	U	
Blue-footed Booby	Acc			Acc	
American White Pelican	U		U	R	
Double-crested Cormorant	C		C	C	
Neotropic Cormorant	U	U	U	R	
Anhinga	R	I	R		

A = abundant; C = common; F = fairly common; U = uncommon; R = rare; O = occasional; I = irregular and unpredictable; Acc = accidental – out of normal range

THE LEARNERS CORNER

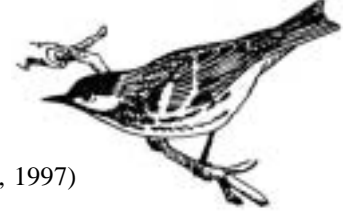
Start the new season with a chapter from the video, "How to Start Bird Watching." Lead by Mary Ellen Branan.

The Learners' Corner meets at 7:00 PM before the general meeting.



Best of any song
is bird song
in the quiet, but first
you must have the quiet.

Wendell Berry
A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath
Poems 1979-1997 (Counterpoint, 1997)



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Audubon Texas is recruiting volunteers for their booth at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Expo on October 4th & 5th. The Expo begins at 9:00 AM and lasts until 5:00 PM both days. They are recruiting volunteers to work in 3 hour shifts on either or both days. Those that are interested in volunteering, please contact:
LK Loflin at 512-306-0225 Ext. 16

SEPTEMBER REFRESHMENTS:

Margie Crisp & Linda Presto



Thank You

to Powell's Printery in Elgin for their support.



R. G. Bell

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c/o Jarvis
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