



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

Drawing by David D'Amato

September Meeting



Barn Swallows

usually gather in great flocks along the wires in September, preparing to leave Bastrop County until next Spring.

Inside:

- Stan Wellso's Field Report
- Airport Proposal Issue
- Matagorda's Hot Birding
- Bastrop Springs Report
- Sabal Palms Audubon Ctr.

Learners' Corner:

Bill Brooks' talk: "Of a Feather, a History of American Birders and Early Naturalists," reviewing Scott Weidensaul's book *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, and other books and stories on the subject. L.C. meets at 7:00, just before the General Meeting,



Bill Montgomery, artist and herpetologist,

will show slides and speak about snakes and other reptiles in Central Texas and, in particular, how the drought is affecting them.



Bill is known in the international herpetological community for his reptile etching and lithographs that combine exact scientific depiction with the animal's innate sensuous beauty. He is a past president of BCAS, an explorer of southern regions, who searches out reptiles and amphibians to photograph, and an exciting lecturer.

BCAS meets Tuesday, September 15th. Doors open at 7:00 p.m., and Learners' Corner begins at that time. The general meeting and lecture on reptiles will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the 2nd floor training room at the First National Bank on Hwy. 71 and Hasler Blvd. in Bastrop. The public is invited and the lecture is free. Refreshments will be served after the lecture.

Election Results

At the BCAS Annual Meeting in June, members elected **Sue Brubaker** as president for fiscal year 2009-2010, ending next June. She was elected by acclamation.

Also, Steve and Denise Ligon were elected to serve on the board as co-chairs of Special Events. Special Events involves managing our participation, sales, and booth management at various events related to Audubon's conservation, fund-raising, and educational objectives. Denise Ligon served on the board in 2007 as the Hospitality Chair. The Ligon's are highly knowledgeable on birding and conservation issues.

Those present in June enjoyed the 20-minute DVD slide show, "The Year Book," produced by Mary Ellen Branan, which covered the September to June events for the chapter. A number of our photographer members also contributed to the slides, including Pam Hohman, Stan Wellso, Michelle Belden, Alan Jaeger, Judy Ing, and Sharon Finlay,

Members participated as a "think tank" addressing fund-raising ideas for this new fiscal year. Finally, we had a "picnic spread" at refreshment time designed artfully by Judy Walker, Hospitality Chair..



Field Report

For the last two summers, it's as if we live in a desert. I find as I drive around Central Texas, there are no insects committing suicide on my windshield.

The only place where I can find a few insects in the middle of the day is near our lakes and rivers. Sorry, the Gulf Coast does not count as few insect species live in salt water.

Central Texas usually has some interesting birds in summer, ie. flycatchers and swallows, which feed primarily on insects. Without a dependable food supply, however, many of these birds have moved to other locations with more flying insects. I believe that our bat populations also are having trouble finding enough food. The good news is that the migration of birds from the North through our area is gaining momentum daily. Hornsby Bend now has even larger mud flats, and with these come many shorebirds. There have been almost 20 species of shorebirds seen there recently: for example: Snowy Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, American Avocets, Semi-palmated Sandpiper and Semi-palmated Plover, Western Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Phalarope, and Long-billed Dowitcher.

Last Saturday there were about 100 barn swallows flying over the ponds. The ponds near Hunters Crossing (behind Home Depot) recently have had several species of egrets and a Roseate Spoonbill. Hawks are also suffering from the drought, as fewer grasses and plants are producing seeds that sustain rodent populations, and thus, the hawks.

Don't go to Shipp Lake near Smithville to look for Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills that were abundant there last year, as the Lake is now totally dry.

Warblers have recently been reported hereabouts, including a Redstart and Yellow Warbler. With migration started, it's time for all of us to start thinking about cooler weather, more rain, and the return of migrants and our winter resident birds.

Stan Wellso, Field Trips Chair

Calendar

September 13: Board Meeting, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m., Judy Walker's home, 157 Murchison Dr., Cedar Creek, with potluck supper. 308-1162

September 15: General Meeting/Program, Doors open 7:00 p.m., 1st Natl Bank, Hasler @ 71W, in Bastrop.



Gleaning in the Field

Matagorda: The secret's out

I've been to Galveston and Corpus Christi, but until recently never explored the coast in between. What I found surprised me: abundant wildlife and miles of white sand pounded by surf and backed by graceful dunes.

"We've been a well-kept secret for a long time, but the secret's out," said Sue Milberger, the energetic proprietor of Karankawa Village.

Matagorda Bay long has been a destination for anglers and birders; Matagorda County repeatedly ranks No. 1 in the National Audubon Society's annual bird count. . . .

"We're not Galveston; we're not Padre Island," said Mitch Thames, Chamber of Commerce president of Bay City, the county seat. We're a little more quiet, more bent on education and the nature experience."

8/16/2009. Tracy L. Barnett, special to *The Houston Chronicle*

[BCAS made a field trip to Matagorda Island in April, 2003, with Loretta Hennard, Field Trips Chair.]

Bastrop City Council

voted in September 2008 to designate **Bastrop Springs** located at the foot of Pine Street and near the River Walk as a Significant Landmark after the Bastrop Historic Landmark Commission submitted a request in order to protect the springs. By May, 2009, a planning group was preparing a detailed plan to propose to the Bastrop Parks Board for restoration and enhancement of the springs, presently just the flow from a pipe. With signage and a pool, the site will inform visitors of the history and ecological significance of the springs. "Early travelers stopped to water at the springs as they traveled the El Camino Real Trail which passed through Bastrop crossing the Colorado River."

Also, a National Park Service "Preserve America Grant" has been awarded to the City of Bastrop, applicant, for \$70,000, matching for a \$140,000 projects total, "to promote cultural and nature tourism in and around Bastrop." Material from environmentalstewardship.org web site.

Conservationists say, 'We'll take the trees, but no thanks to the border fence.'

On the outskirts of Brownsville, where subdivisions and strip malls give way to rust-tinted fields of sorghum, two environmental conservation non-profit organizations are welcoming what they call a "small positive in a sea of negative." *See Gleanings, p. 4*



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Open Letter to BCAS Bird Calls:

Thursday, June 11, 2009 8:56 PM

I just wanted to congratulate everyone involved with the Bird Calls BCAS newsletter. The news and the articles have been great. I have really enjoyed every issue.

I was spurred to write because of the Summer Reading article in the June edition of our newsletter. When the newsletter came out, I was reading "Of A Feather: A Brief History of American Birding" by Scott Weidensaul. Before I even finished the book, I was recommending it to others.

If you consider yourself a birder, you should know the rich history of our sport (not the right word), hobby (seems a bit flippant),... passion. This is an excellent book and I believe all birders should put this on their "to read" list.

My very best to all. - Bill Brooks

President's Letter

A Wake Up Call via the Weather

This has been the worst summer on record for many things, not the least of which is the number of consecutive 100 degree-plus days and the seemingly unending drought. No hay crop to speak of. Water tanks dried out. Forget the grass. It dried up weeks ago. The livestock are barely surviving in some cases. In other words, this has been a horrible summer for our wild and domestic animals, birds, frogs, snakes, insects, trees, shrubs, wild flowers, and grasses.

This summer has been a wake up call for me to the effects of extreme climate change. Reading about the effects of global warming and experiencing them are two different things. I have seen seemingly healthy trees succumb to the drought and lose large branches that have no moisture at all in their limbs.

Snakes have moved nearer to human habitats in search of relief from the heat. These encounters generally do not go well for the snakes.

The searing heat combined with the lack of rain has had its impact on the birds in the area. I have even seen piliated woodpeckers, crows and an occasional black vulture cooling off in my small make shift bird bath.

Insects? The shortage of blooming wild flowers appears to have reduced the number of butterflies and dragonflies. There are fewer mosquitoes so bats have not had an adequate food supply. Wild bees, with fewer wild flowers, make do with cultivated flower and vegetable gardens.

This year's abnormal weather patterns should remind us how fragile our magnificent environment is—how interrelated all life forms are. Three more years like the one we have just endured and "lost pines" will take on a whole new meaning.

It is time for a new year and a new commitment by BCAS to activities that enhance our own knowledge and can inspire ourselves and others to safeguard the environment for birds and all who live here. **Sue Brubaker**

Join or Renew Annual Membership

Benefits include Bird Calls, field trips, social events, continuing education, public influence, good feelings and fun. Membership Chair: Priscilla Jarvis at (512) 281-2762.

Dues are used to support local conservation and education concerning bird and other wild life, habitats, and ecology. You may join at our web site or at any meeting. Please consider the Supporting Membership category. www.bastropcountyaudubon.org

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**September Refreshments
by Sue Brubaker & Betty Dunkerley**

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BCAS Opposes New Airport

Developer Jim Carpenter has not yet convinced Bastrop authorities that we do need an airport across the river from the Hyatt Lost Pines to be called Central Texas Airport. Carpenter plans to finance this venture by forming a Municipal Utility District. According to the Bastrop Advertiser, the airport is to include general aviation services including aircraft sales, leasing, maintenance and inspection certification, as well as extensive commercial services onsite. The "green" component includes solar energy operations, geo-thermal climate control and advanced computer networking ability. Carpenter estimates the airport will bring \$85.1 million to local taxing entities.

In July Bastrop County Audubon sent a letter to the editor of the *Bastrop Advertiser* opposing the construction due to environmental impact. We felt it would encourage urban sprawl and habitat degradation since it is located in one of the county's more unique and environmentally sensitive areas. We argued that the airport will increase activity at the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort, which already significantly impacts the local habitat. Since Austin-Bergstrom Airport is only 30 minutes away, this project is detrimental to the local community, including the Hyatt, and is not in the spirit of the LCRA McKinney Roughs Nature Park nor the Bastrop County Audubon Society.

--by Judy Ing

Gleanings, continued

About 300 native sabal palm trees are being scooped out of the path of the border fence and transferred to the Nature Conservancy and **Sabal Palm Audubon Center** in Brownsville. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is moving the trees, the only palm species native to South Texas, off of what is now government-owned property at no cost to the nature centers.

Bob Benson, executive director of Audubon Texas, says his organization is concerned about the environmental impact of the border fence, but that the preservation of these trees is a "bright spot."

Since the Sabal Palm Audubon Center is slated to be entirely behind the border fence once it is built, the center must have a reliable access gate to remain open to the public.

"We've been acting on good faith that we would have these access gates," Benson said. "We're happy to get the trees, but our main concern is those gates. We have to have access to our property."

Because the sabal palm sanctuary is entirely behind the planned path of the border fence, the organization never had to sell land to the Department of Homeland Security to make way for the path of the border fence.

The ongoing border fence debate has depleted tourism to the sanctuary by about 25 percent, Benson said, and he's concerned once the structure goes up the public might not realize they can still visit. . By Laura Tillman, *The Brownsville Herald*, 6/11/09