



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

March Program

Sergio Ayala

“Latest Insights from the Oldest Stone Tools of Prehistoric Texas”



Sergio J. Ayala is a PhD candidate at the University of Exeter, UK, and is a prehistoric and experimental archaeologist. He works at the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory at the University of Texas in Austin and has been a part of the Gault School of Archaeological Research (GSAR) since 2010 under the direction of Michael B. Collins. At GSAR Sergio is heavily involved in field work, lithic analysis, and experimental studies in stone tool technologies of prehistory.

Recently published in Science Advances (2018) by the research team at the Gault School of Archaeological Research (GSAR), discovery of ancient stone tools at the Gault site (41BL323) have

been dated between 16,000 - 20,000 years old. These findings have helped shaped the current debate concerning the earliest people in the Americas. From his analysis and experimental work at GSAR, at the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, Sergio will discuss his key insights about these ancient stone tools and the implications for the human story in this hemisphere.

Meeting Details

Due to concerns about the Covid-19, and in particular the virulence of the Delta variant, the BCAS Board voted to conduct this meeting by ZOOM. At our next board meeting (and following ones as necessary) this policy will be re-evaluated to ensure the best, safest approach for our members.

As a member you should have received a prior email detailing how to join the meeting. If you did not or require a “refresher” please [contact us](#).

The President’s Perch

Welcome to Marvelous March! Our meeting will be a Zoom again this month (learn about the oldest stone tools in Texas), Tuesday March 1st, which is also Mardi Gras day. Laissez les bon temps rouler! Translated it means “let the good times roll”, which is not perfect classic French, but that’s how they roll in Louisiana. Mardi Gras is French for Fat Tuesday. It’s also called Shrove Tuesday, Carnival Tuesday or Pancake Tuesday depending on where the celebration is. It’s the last big blowout before Ash Wednesday and the forty days of fasting season known as Lent.

What does this have to do with birds you ask? Uhhh...” Google search”...hah, got it. Well, it turns out our own John James Audubon lived and worked in New Orleans on and off for nine years. So it was in

Our Mission: To promote the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of natural resources and habitats for birds and other wildlife

New Orleans that he completed many of the 435 illustrations for “The Birds of America”. Fun fact, some of the birds he painted were purchased in the French Market, which is located downtown near the Mississippi River in the French Quarter. The French sure have a lot of places named after them. But our John James blows them away. There are schools, streets and Audubon Park named after him. There is an Audubon neighborhood, Audubon Park Lagoon, Audubon Zoo, and an aquarium and insectarium named for him. I’m pretty sure that in nine years JJ attended some Mari Gras celebrations, he just looks like a party guy. Oh, and there’s more. In 2018 Mardi Gras celebrated the 300th anniversary of the founding of New Orleans. The Rex krewe (spelling correct, that’s how they roll) had a parade float with a giant statue of, wait for it...John James Audubon. He was surrounded by magnolias and azaleas and painted around the float were various Louisiana birds including Tricolored Heron (once known as Louisiana Heron), Mallards and pelicans.



Why is March so marvelous, well Mardi Gras is a pretty good start I think, but there’s more. First day of spring, why it’s March 20th, looking forward to that, and it’s a great bird month in Bastrop. Our winter ducks are still with us for a few more weeks, as are our winter sparrows. But March begins what I think of as the real Migration (yes, I know, swallows and sandpipers have been arriving for weeks, but I’m talking about the pretty birds). March heralds the arrival of our hummingbirds, get those feeders up now. Great Crested and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers are back, as well as Painted and Indigo Buntings. We will soon be seeing Eastern and Western Kingbirds on fences and powerlines, and all our swallows and

Martins will be back (well not the first year birds, that could be another month or so). But what really gets me out in the field, and Googling (is that really a word? yep, it’s a gerund or present participle, trust me, I’m your president) hotels near Corpus Christi and High Island, it’s “Warblers”. Capital “W” deserved. These colorful beauties have spent the winter in Central and South America and are back to delight and amaze us. Get out and enjoy them frequently. I will close with a Bastrop Audubon insider tip. If you want to see one of the most beautiful warblers in America, the Prothonotary Warbler, here’s what you do. Starting about mid-March through April, go to Buescher State Park over by Smithville. Go to the north end of the lake where they have the large parking lot with camping spots and the brown sandstone facilities. Get out, stop and listen. You will very likely hear them singing, they do so for 4-6 weeks this time of year (get familiar with the song with an app or online, it’s a little sweet-sweet-sweet chip). Walk toward the lake and start scanning the trees with Spanish moss on them. Be patient and you will be rewarded with the sight of little golden yellow warblers darting through the moss, they use it for nest building. Enjoy!

That’s all for this month – stay birdy,

Mike Goebel

President Bastrop County Audubon Society

PUMA Colony Training – RESCHEDULED!!!

Our PUMA Colony training has been rescheduled due to the expected inclement weather! It will now be on Sunday afternoon.

WHAT: BCAS - Purple Martin Colony
Maintenance Training

WHERE: Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory
2210 S. FM 973
Austin, TX. 78725

WHEN: February 27, 2022 at 2:00 pm (weather permitting)

Birding Insight

How Well Do We Really Know Cardinals?

New research provides support for splitting the Northern Cardinal into multiple species.

Few birds are as well-known or beloved as the Northern Cardinal. The quintessential red (and sometimes yellow) species serves as an emblem for seven states and countless sports teams—yet much about it still remains a mystery, as shown by a recent Ecology and Evolution study on a pair of Southwestern populations.

The research, led by scientists at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, confirms that cardinals from the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts don't interbreed, despite being separated by just 120 miles of plains habitat. While the Sonoran group is already considered a subspecies, these findings hint that it may need to be reclassified as its own species. To put it into perspective, that would mean that the Arizona Cardinals would rep a different bird than the St. Louis Cardinals.

“Everybody thinks, ‘It’s a cardinal, I know what a cardinal looks like,’” says lead author Kaiya Provost, a Ph.D. student at the museum’s Richard Gilder Graduate School. “But when you really start digging in you realize, ‘Oh, maybe they’re not what I thought they were.’”

Ornithologists like Provost have long been aware of a certain degree of cardinal diversity. The IOC World Bird List currently recognizes 19 Northern Cardinal subspecies, most of which were discovered over a century ago. What’s more, in a pair of genetic studies earlier this decade, Provost’s academic adviser Brian Smith identified six reproductively isolated cardinal populations across North America (four of which live exclusively in Mexico).

Smith’s findings propelled a 2014 proposal to split the Northern Cardinal into six species. But the American Ornithologists’ Union checklist committee, the leading local authority on bird taxonomy, rejected it unanimously, citing a lack of vocalization studies and other supporting data.

That’s where this new paper comes in. Through genetic comparisons crunched by complex computer models, Provost, Smith, and a third co-author, William Mauck, determined that the Sonoran population (~150,000) diverged from the Chihuahuan one (~700,000) about a million years ago. They found that some interbreeding may have taken place in the past, but likely not in the last tens of thousands of years.

Part of the reason could be the birds’ unique field marks. Unlike their eastern counterparts, Sonoran males have a pale brick-red look with a taller crest and less black on the face. They don’t sound similar either: Provost loosely describes the songs of the two populations to be as different as Portuguese and German. “The phrases they use have some overlap, but the way they put them together doesn’t match,” she says. (Listen to the “long-crested” clips here.)

Learn more about the cardinal and 800 other species with Audubon's free North American Bird Guide App.

To better learn how vocals fit into the cardinals’ breeding strategy, Provost and her team traveled to the Sonoran Desert near Portal, Arizona, and to the Chihuahuan Desert in Big Bend National Park, Texas, where they played four song recordings for dozens of territorial males: one of a neighboring cardinal, one of a non-neighboring cardinal from the same desert, one of a cardinal from the other desert, and one of a Cactus Wren (the experimental control).

In general, the males acted hyper aggressively with their perceived neighbors, but ignored rivals from the other desert. Previous studies show females reacting tepidly to songs from other populations; so, with that in mind, the authors concluded that any cardinal that survives the flight across the high plains—a treacherous stretch filled with “tumbleweeds, dust storms, and a lot of billboards,” Provost says—would still be unable to flirt and find a mate.

But don’t stamp the species’ divorce papers just yet. Kenn Kaufman, Audubon field editor and bird expert, cautions that the latest study is “suggestive but not overwhelmingly so.” He points out that during the

experiments, the Sonoran cardinals ignored the songs of distant individuals from the same desert, even as the Chihuahuan cardinals didn't. That means there could be more factors at play.

By Jesse Greenspan

Courtesy The National Audubon Society

Miscellaneous News

Field Trips

Our Field trip coordinator, Louise Ridlon, is working on getting us back "out in the field" as pandemic restrictions start to ease. She is working on some exciting opportunities.

Watch this space for upcoming announcements for date, time and locations.

Your Bastrop County Audubon Membership for 2022- Due January 1

This birding year has flown by and it's time to renew your BCAS annual membership for 2022.

You may renew on our website

<https://www.bastropcountyaudubon.org/join-renew-donate>

or pay by check via U.S. mail (address below) or pay directly at one of our monthly meetings with cash, check or credit card.

Our annual dues structure remains the same as years past:

Individual	\$20
Family	\$35
Youth	\$5
Sponsor	\$75

Due to technical issues, we have changed our eCommerce provider for our website. Once you select the Membership level you desire, you will be presented with a page on which to fill in your credit card information.

Thank you for your support of Audubon and the programs, education and conservation projects we

bring to Bastrop County about birds and other wildlife.

Mail any checks to

Bastrop County Audubon Society
c/o Jackie Fisher
127 Colovista Drive
Bastrop, TX 78602

Upcoming Events

Feb 26th, 8:30-10am – Big Sit – Fisherman’s Park, Bastrop

Feb 27th 2 pm: PUMA Colony Training – Hornsby Bend

Mar 1st, Tue, 7:00pm: - BCAS meeting - ZOOM.

Friday, March 14: Little Hike: Lost Pines Nature Trails/Colorado River Refuge – Cottonwood Kings trail (meet at large parking lot)

Saturday, March 26: Big Sit: Bob Bryant Park near the Purple Martin houses

This is YOUR Newsletter!

If you have enjoyed a recent trip that including birding, we would love to publish a report of your trip. Please make submissions to the newsletter through BCAS email address published at the end of this newsletter. We are also always on the lookout for pictures of birds that have been taken in Bastrop County, especially rarities or “lifers”.

Title your email “Newsletter Submission”.

Bird Calls is published online and in paper copy by Bastrop County Audubon Society monthly except during July and August. We invite letters, articles, news tips, reviews of books and events, poems, cartoons and photos appropriate to the mission. Material should be submitted to the Editor at

Bastropcountyaudubon@gmail.com