



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

This year marks 35 years since our founding in 1982—See story page 2



Bastrop Chamber of Commerce Chooses 2017 ‘Man of the Year’

BCAS President Mike Goebel was named Man of the Year on February 18 at the Bastrop Chamber’s 79th Banquet and Annual Meeting held at the Bastrop Convention Center. The appellation recognizes a Chamber member’s service to the greater good of the area. Mike serves on the boards of a number of non-profit organizations.

Yet we know his hobby, perhaps avocation, is birding, which restores the energy for his volunteer service.

Earth Day, 2017

A march on the National Capitol is planned for Earth Day, April 22, 2017, as a **march for Science**.

Earthday and the March for Science organizations are cohosting a rally and teach-in on the National Mall that day. There will be music and speeches. They will focus on “the need to hold our leaders – both in science and in politics – accountable to the highest standards of honesty, fairness, and integrity. The vital role science plays in our democracy must be preserved.”

A huge family-friendly celebration of Earth Day is planned in Austin at Huston-Tillotson University campus, with food, exhibits, music, speakers, etc. 8,500 attended the 2016 Earth Day in Austin.

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

April Program

David Mitchell in Ecuador

For the April 18 meeting, David Mitchell, expert Birder in Bastrop County and in various world birding meccas, will present a program of his photographs and commentary on the Mitchell’s 2016 birding trip to Ecuador.

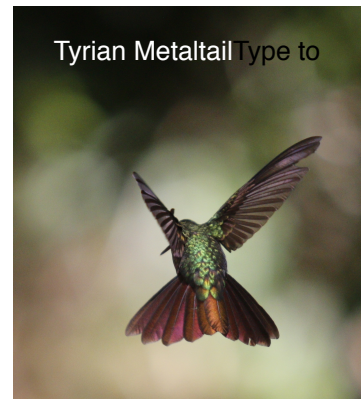
David and Judy Mitchell took the “Magic Birding and Photography Circuit of Ecuador” offered by San Jorge Eco-Lodges and Botanical Reserves, which owns six preserves and four Eco-lodges within a two-hour radius of Quito. The preserves include fifteen waterfalls and several running rivers.

With a number of distinct climates, Ecuador embraces more than 1600 of bird species and claims 20% of the world’s bird population. This means more bird diversity in less space than any other nation.

The tour took them to the High Barren Plains of the Andes, a High Land Rainforest, Cloud Forest, and Upper Tropical Rainforest. David has photographs also of general wildlife, including mammals, plants, and insects, which he found fascinating.

David is currently Education Chair on the BCAS Board. Having finally retired from his research career at M. D. Anderson Cancer Research Park outside Smithville, he has more time for travel and photography. He gave BCAS a program in October, 2016, on their trip to Borneo. Note that Dr. Mitchell is the founding president in the article “A Brief History” on page 2 of this issue of *Bird Calls*.

We meet at First National Bank Building in Bastrop at Hasler Blvd. at 7:00 p.m. Doors open at 6:30. Free and open to the public.



A Brief History of BCAS' Founding: Two Motives

Wearing two hats—a tradition embodied in how Bastrop County Audubon Society was founded in 1971-72. Wearing the Naturalist Hat, we're interested in ornithology, ecology, and the geography of Bastrop County. The Environmental Hat follows naturally, as we pursue practical ways to enhance and protect the outdoors, supporting our mission.

I recently interviewed founders Susan Leslie, Megan Lowry, and David Mitchell, who was the first president, and consulted Margie Crisp, whose mother Margaret Phillips was a founder. I re-read the 2003 Texas Legacy interview of the late John Prager, in which he said: "... Bastrop County, which I dearly love."

I learned that founding a new organization is not casual. The achievement takes both fervor and dedication to make something that will endure and whose words have influence, where there was no such organization before.

Bastropians from two "camps" gathered into one place on a September evening in 1981. Birders had been meeting casually and birding together since 1975. Simultaneously, an activist group, the Central Texas Lignite Watch had organized around 1979, to more formally oppose land-leasing moves for the purpose of strip-mining in the Camp Swift and Steiner Ranch area of thousands of acres. Strip-mining is a particularly ugly method of digging for coal, and lignite is a low-quality coal.

The opposition included a group called Texas Utilities and the LCRA, supported by governors and the politically powerful. Their years of persistence should be viewed in the context of the Arab Oil Embargo and crucial fuel shortages of the era.

The Watch testimony before State authorities including the Texas Supreme Court was turned aside persistently as "inadmissible evidence." If they cited federal law protecting eagles, well, the testifiers technically were from Travis County. When prehistoric Indian burial sites were pointed out by the Elgin Historical Society, evidence again was declared inadmissible.

Leslie tells of the Sundays Lignite friends met at the Bucking Hill Saloon near old Sayersville. They formed a Sayersville History Society mostly to study Indian relics and put out their "Sayersville Bulletin" 1981-91. One Sunday, Leslie recalls, someone remarked that an Audubon group should be organized

for Bastrop County, which would challenge the "inadmissible evidence" label.

Simultaneously, David Mitchell and avid birders were open to formalizing their years of activities into a bona fide chapter of National Audubon.

Prager said in his Legacy interview: "We became the Central Texas Lignite Watch, and then we went about organizing the bird watchers and the historical people, and the Audubon Society. We primarily did that to get some substance behind our things. . . , so saying it was the president of Bastrop County Audubon Society, it carried more weight."

Leslie knew David Mitchell, who had arrived to work at M.D. Anderson Research outside Smithville, as a serious birder and one who "cared about habitat." His colleague, Dr. Ken Riddle, the veterinarian at M.D. Anderson, Mitchell credits as the real mover behind the first meeting and founding. As reported in the Bastrop Advertiser: "Some 40 potential members of a local chapter. . . gathered Monday to lay plans for the new group." Mitchell presided as they "voted to organize formally as part of the conservation-minded bird-watching Audubon society."

The attendees "ranged from school age youngsters to senior citizens; drawn from Bastrop, Smithville, Elgin, Rosanky, Red Rock and Rockne."

Ken Riddle was known locally as "Bird Man." He was a falconer and local rehabber. Riddle and Mitchell believed, "We live in a beautiful place full of birds, so we need a club." While Mitchell was not one of the activists, he does recall that he gave ten minutes or more each meeting to monitoring the lignite news.

Dr. Riddle today is revered in United Arab Emirates falconry and international falconry. He left Texas some 30 years ago.

The first meeting was held at the same First National Bank meeting room on Bastrop's Main Street, where the chapter continued to meet until 2008. The "first outing" afterwards was lavishly reported in the Bastrop County Times in Smithville (September 24, 1981). Wrote the reporter: they saw a "Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and a redheaded Woodpecker, a Yellow Warbler and a Loggerhead Shrike. The woods are full of life."

National Audubon chartered the chapter in 1972.

Mary Ellen Branan, Editor

Calendar

Thursday April 6 - Sunday, April 9: 15 Annual Feather Fest in Galveston. Beaches to wetlands to High Island.

Thursday, April 6: BCAS Board Meets, 6:00 p.m., Bastrop City Library.

Tuesday, April 18, BCAS General Meeting, 7:00 p.m. First Nat'l Bank Meeting Room. Doors open 6:30. Dinner at 5 p.m. at Cedar's Mediterranean. RSVP: ssimon1221@yahoo.com.

Saturday, April 22: Earth Day

Wednesday, April 26, Birthday of John James Audubon, b. 1785 in Haiti.

Saturday, May 6, The Big Sit: McKinney Roughs,

Saturday, May 6: Join the Big Sit Team!

Nicholas Cowey of McKinney Roughs invites Bastrop birders to join the McKinney's Roughs Team to participate in Texas Parks and Wildlife's annual "Great Texas Birding Classic," a statewide month-long program of events, tournament, and fund-raising. LCRA pays all registration cost for the team, so it's no cost to you to come sit under the shade tree in a 17-foot diameter circle and identify and count birds.

Cowey would like his McKinney Roughs team to do well against others in the Heart of Texas East region, within the competitive aspect of the Classic. This is the third year for this team.

Cowey writes: "This informal Birder's Tailgate Party will start at **7 a.m. on Saturday, May 6** at the McKinney Roughs Highway Equestrian Trailhead. We usually wrap up about 4 p.m. Learn birding tips, test out various optics and browse through the birding library at the "Bird Nerd Nest"—our birding circle."

To register soon, email ncowey@lcra.org with BIG SIT! in the subject line. The first 20 participants to register receive a free t-shirt. He asks you to include in your email your shirt size and the amount of time you plan on birding.



March Bird of the Month—

Mike Goebel's "Bird of the Month" for the March 21 meeting was the Prothonotary Warbler, which is back home in Bastrop County now for the breeding season. See? no wing-bars, black, beady eye, white undertail. (Photo from Allaboutbirds)



Nat'l Audubon David Yarnold Cautiously Hopeful

From the Spring 2017 Audubon Magazine:

"At a time when American politics seem to have hit a divisive low, we know that Audubon and birds create common ground.

We are community builders, not community dividers. And at this political moment, building on our unique membership base and our history of looking for solutions rather than political points, we will step up to protect birds and the places they need." David Yarnold, CEO/President.

Bird Calls. as four-page newsletter or post card, is published 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. The deadline for the next issue is noon on the penultimate day of the preceding month. Material submittable at [Contact, bastropcountyaudubon.org](mailto:Contact@bastropcountyaudubon.org). Or send by mail to Editor, 216 Schaefer Blvd., Bastrop TX 78602, ph. (512) 303-2734. Editor, Mary Ellen Branan, PhD.



Mike Goebel, Mary Ellen Branan, and Priscilla Jarvis plant a loblolly seedling as they volunteer with Bastrop State Park on February 4. Jan Goebel also planted and took the photo.



Mallard in Eclipse: a Haiku

Feathers discomposed
Mallard painted on the pond
sleeps, one eye open

Mary Ellen

Glenn Whitehead: 1940-2016



Whitehead and Ing

From his obituary: *"I loved the absurd. That explains why my one splash was as the first cartoon artist who popularized the armadillo, a creature I found amusing, even ridiculous, one which, to my surprise, became a potent symbol for Texas."*

Glenn Whitehead, artist, lived in Smithville from 1984 to 2011 and joined Bastrop County Audubon Society. His widow, Wanda Gambell, artist, still lives in Smithville. Glenn died July 14, 2016.

At one time he was co-editor of *Bird Calls*, along with Judy Ing, and embellished it with his consummate cartoons. Whitehead and Ing won a National Audubon Award for *Bird Calls*, as best among newsletters of smaller chapters.

"I never believed I should seize the day. I always said 'Squander the day'. Our days are not to set the world on fire but to make a good bacon and tomato sandwich."

He wrote constantly, making notes, long letters and piquant musings on life and the human condition. "frittered away a lot of time writing ...playing with words, beautiful words, whimsy, observations, letters, stories, poems, minutia all."

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