



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

Aransas Whooping Crane Report Released Nov.20

The final report from Wade Harrell of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge for the winter of 2017 claimed a record breeding year, with 63 fledglings in Canada for the only flock of America's wild Whooping Cranes.

And we know for sure some stopped along the way to the Texas Coast in Bastrop and Gonzales Counties.

Each late October to mid-December the whooper families migrate 2,500 miles from Wood Buffalo, Canada, to the Aransas NWR. It takes great care to count with 95% accuracy the wild birds in an area of over 80 Kilometers of coast. They estimate the flock for now numbers 431.

For this migration, scientists in Canada managed to tag a chick with a cellular-based telemetry unit in order to follow the trip of family "7A," which took off on September 26. After sojourns in Saskatchewan, it crossed into the U.S. on October 29.

"With a strong tailwind, they were able to cross South Dakota in about three hours, without stopping. They continued through Nebraska that day, crossing the Platte River just east of Gibbon, Nebraska. They did not stop in Nebraska either, traversing the state in about four hours." They rested and fed for about two weeks in Quivira NWF in Kansas.

After three days in Oklahoma, they crossed into Texas just east of Wichita Falls. On the morning of November 16, the family "continued south through Texas, stopping briefly in southern Bastrop County and then northern Gonzales County."

The 7A family took 52 days to complete the trip.

Concerning the impact of Hurricane Harvey in August, Harrell notes "natural habitats often quickly recover after this type of event, and the freshwater inflows associated long-term with the hurricane's rain event will improve coastal marsh conditions."

The Editor and fws.gov

March Program

Birding the Upper Texas Coast in Spring:

Beaches, Wetlands, Tall Trees

BCAS Program Chair David Mitchell contacted Jason Leifester of Elgin to be the perfect speaker for the meeting on March 20th after seeing Leifester's photos on Flickr.

A water quality specialist for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Leifester's birding and nature photography are serious "spare time" pursuits. "I've been an avid birder since a chance encounter with a Phainopepla when I was 12."



Leifester is a life long Texan. He has degrees in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M University. While he sometimes travels the world to bird and photograph, his favorite birding spots are in Central Texas and along the Texas coast.

"My usual spring trip now lasts about three days and typically includes visits to spots in Galveston, the Bolivar Peninsula, High Island, Anahuac NWR, Sabine Woods, and the Big Thicket." He plans to complement the slide show with the essentials on locations, timing, the influence of weather, and habitats such as "mudflats, beaches, and migrant traps," especially to touch on the strategies he uses for an optimum experience.

This is a regular third-Tuesday General Meeting at the First National Bank Building in Bastrop, fronting SH 71W at Hasler Blvd. The public is invited. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

Prior to the meeting, we gather for dinner with the speaker at 5:00 p.m. at Cedar's Grill, RSVP Ssimon1221@yahoo.com.

Highlights of 2018 GBBC

The data on the last day of the 2018 Great Backyard Bird Count on February 19 (U.S. President's Day) showed the number of checklists was 2% over last year's record: 111,000 counts reported more than 5,600 species throughout the world.

Ranked by number of species, the top five were Brazil (814), Colombia (772), India (763), Mexico (726), and Ecuador (675). The U.S. spotted 653 species.

Ranked by number of checklists, the top ten include USA (106,251), India, Canada, Australia, Spain, Mexico, UK, Portugal, Taiwan, and Costa Rica.

With the deadline for all checklists March 1, the numbers will rise.

Locally, 99 Bastrop County checklists so far counted 103 species. In Travis County, 347 checklists, reported 157 species. (General wisdom finds that the more eyes observing, the more species are spotted.)

Eagle Family Returns to Loop Road, Smithville

The Bald Eagles rebuilt their nest this winter just a few hundred yards from where the old nest was before that tree fell down in one of the storms in 2017. It is located off Loop Road in Smithville and you can see it from the road about 500 yards out in a big Sycamore tree.

Take Loop Road off Hwy 71 and cross the railroad tracks, go down the road until it takes a sharp turn to the left then go 0.2 mile (pass the large Oaks but before the creek) and look to the right. You'll have to pull off and get out of the car to see.

Mike and I scoped one of the Eagles sitting on the nest Jan 22 (see photo at our facebook page) and then on Feb 17 saw the adult pair together in a nearby tree with two eaglets in the nest. Stay tuned!

Jan Goebel, Conservation Chair

President's Perch

by Mike Goebel

As Audubon members, we pretty much think every year is all about the birds, but 2018 truly is "The Year of the Bird." The National Audubon Society, National Geographic, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and BirdLife International have joined together to declare 2018 (appropriate music please) **"The Year of the Bird."**

The year 2018 is significant because it is the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This Act, between the U.S. and Canada, put in place protections for our glorious birds. Centuries of unrestricted hunting and habitat destruction had taken their toll, and resources that once were thought to be limitless, were now seen to be finite and threatened. The extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, once one of the most numerous species on earth and the near extirpation of the North American Bison finally made people realize we had to protect our environment or risk losing it forever. It's hard to imagine today, but Whooping Cranes were down to 16, Roseate Spoonbill numbers dipped to a few hundred, and Snowy Egrets, of hat plume fame, practically extinct.

Throughout 2018, each of these organizations and many more will be bringing us new content about our birds and how we can help them. Not just a celebration, it is a call to action. We have accomplished much, but threats old and new continue to endanger our birds and our environment. Habitat destruction, harmful chemicals, and the new gorilla on the block, global warming, are issues we must continue to confront.

Large streams from little fountains flow, tall oaks from little acorns grow. Through organizations like Audubon we can become that large stream, and we can each plant an acorn, our individual actions magnified to accomplish change. There is much each of us can do to help. It can be as simple as making our yards more bird friendly, or how about an entire community. We can get involved in citizen science, helping to generate the data that tells scientists what is happening to our birds and our environment. We can support organizations and individuals that are trying to protect our birds and our environment with our funds, our actions, and our votes.

So, in 2018 ground zero is the website **birdyourworld.org**. Check it out frequently to learn more about our birds, our environment, and how we can help.

Mike Goebel, President, Bastrop County Audubon Society



In the Field

We welcome the monthly census report from Claude Morris of the Austin Bastrop River Corridor Partnership and his photo of a wintry view of the Colorado River from his boat.

Austin Colony, Webberville, Travis

Feb. 3, 2018 9:15 AM - 2:30 PM
Protocol: Traveling: 8.0 miles



Chilly, gray, and rainy did not keep us from finding 49 species. Bald Eagles and Pileated Woodpeckers were great to find. Belted Kingfishers and Osprey were plentiful. However, two Ringed Kingfisher were the highlight.

In the other critter department we found a few turtles coming out to sun. Some squirrels were running around. We found some Beaver gnawings. Also we had a deer swim the river in front of us. All interesting stuff

Our small but hardy crew included Wilda Campbell, Bobby Hughes, Jacob Eickstead, and John Barr. 45 species (+4 other taxa).

Gadwall 150	Downy Woodpecker 2
Mallard 4	Pileated Woodpecker 3
duck sp. 50	Crested Caracara 7
Double-crested Cormorant 12	Eastern Phoebe 9
Great Blue Heron 6	Blue Jay 7
Great Egret 5	American Crow 21
Snowy Egret 3	swallow sp. 8
Little Blue Heron 2	Carolina Chickadee 17
Black Vulture 32	Tufted/Black-crested Titmouse 4
Turkey Vulture 5	Carolina Wren 14
Osprey 8	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 6
Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk 1	Northern Mockingbird 1
Bald Eagle 3	European Starling 35
Red-shouldered Hawk 7	American Pipit 3
Red-tailed Hawk 3	Orange-crowned Warbler 2
Killdeer 24	Yellow-rumped Warbler 100
Least Sandpiper 21	White-crowned Sparrow 4
Wilson's Snipe 1	Lincoln's Sparrow 12
Spotted Sandpiper 5	Northern Cardinal 43
Greater Yellowlegs 15	Red-winged Blackbird 150
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2	Brewer's Blackbird 20
White-winged Dove 6	Common Grackle 33
Ringed Kingfisher 2	Great-tailed Grackle 100
Belted Kingfisher 9	House Sparrow 3
Red-bellied Woodpecker 8	

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

Audubon Guide to Ethical Bird Photography

The first essential element in bird photography is a sincere respect for the birds and their environment. In any conflict of interest, the well-being of the birds and their habitats must come before the ambitions of the photographer.

Here are some basic guidelines.

Avoid causing unnecessary disturbance or stress to birds.

Use a telephoto lens or a blind for close-up shots. If your approach causes a bird to flush (fly or run away) or change its behavior, you're too close.

- Some birds may "freeze" in place rather than flying away, or may hunch into a protective, aggressive, or pre-flight stance. Watch for changes in posture indicating that the birds are stressed, and if you see these, back away.

- Never advance on a bird with the intention of making it fly.

- Use flash sparingly (if at all), as a supplement to natural light. Avoid the use of flash on nocturnal birds at night, as it may temporarily limit their ability to hunt for food.

- Before sharing locations of specific birds with other photographers or birders, think carefully about potential impacts to the birds or their habitats.

- Concern for birds' habitat is also essential. Be aware of your surroundings. Avoid trampling sensitive vegetation or disturbing other wildlife.

Nesting birds are particularly vulnerable and need special consideration

- Keep a respectful distance from the nest. If you're using a macro lens or including the nest as a focal point in an image with a wide-angle lens, even if you're operating the camera remotely, you're probably too close. Telephoto lenses of at least 500mm are

recommended.

- Avoid flushing the adults, scaring the young, or doing anything to draw the attention of predators to the nest. For example, repeatedly walking to a nest can leave both a foot trail and scent trail for predators.

- Do not move or remove anything around the nest, as it may be providing both essential camouflage and protection from the elements.

- Never use drones to photograph nests, as they can cause injury and stress to the nestlings and parents. Luring birds closer for photography is often possible but should be done in a responsible way.

- Birdfeeding stations, whether or not they're used for photography, should be kept clean, stocked only with appropriate food items, and positioned with the birds' safety in mind.

- Never lure hawks or owls with live bait, or with decoys such as artificial or dead mice. Baiting can change the behavior of these predatory birds in ways that are harmful for them.

- Playback of bird voices to lure them close for photography should be used sparingly, and not at all in the case of endangered birds, or birds at critical points in their nesting cycle.

Show respect for private and public property and consideration for other people.

- Enter private land only with permission. On public property such as parks and refuges, be aware of local regulations, hours, and closed areas.

- In group situations be considerate of other photographers and birders who may be watching the same bird. Remember that your desire to photograph the bird doesn't outweigh the rights of others to observe it. Remember also that large groups of people are potentially more disturbing to birds, so it may be necessary to keep a greater distance.

Audubon Announces Annual Photography Contest

—Every year the prestigious Audubon Photography Awards showcase the best in bird photography. Winning photos are published in Audubon magazine and Nature's Best Photography magazine and displayed within the Nature's Best Photography Exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in D.C. Entry details for this year's contest can be found at audubonphotoawards.org.

Bird Calls 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 first day of the month. Material is submittable at [Contact, bastropcountyaudubon.org](http://Contact.bastropcountyaudubon.org) or by mail, to the Editor, 216 Schaefer Blvd., Bastrop TX 78602, ph. (512) 303-2734, or mbranan@austin.rr.com. Editor, Mary Ellen Branan, PhD.

March & April Calendar

March 20, Tuesday: 7:00 p.m., BCAS Meeting & Program. See p. 1.

March 23-24, Friday-Saturday: Plant & Book Sale, Bastrop Public Library, quilt raffle, hard-to-find plants. Lost Pines Garden Club.

April 17-22: Galveston Feather Fest, photo contest, workshops, field trips. galvestonfeatherfest.com

April 19-22, Corpus Christi, field trips, raptors, CC Botanical Gardens. BirdiestFestival.org to register.

April 21, Saturday, 10 - 2: Kids Nature Fest, Fisherman's Park, Bastrop. KeepBastropCountyBeautiful.org

April 27-29: 1st South Llano River State Park Birding Festival. Golden-cheeked Warbler, Black-capped Vireos nesting, photography sessions, and a "Big Sit." Info at facebook.com/slsbirding festival, limit: 80 participants.

New Executive Director for Audubon Texas

In January, the National Audubon Society announced the appointment of Suzanne Langley as executive director of Audubon Texas. Langley comes to Audubon Texas after five years as executive director of Birmingham Audubon Society, a staffed chapter with has coastal programs as Texas has.



As head of Audubon Texas, she will oversee the organization's programs in urban conservation, coastal, grasslands and prairie conservation, and the Audubon nature centers, Trinity River, Dogwood Canyon, and Mitchell Lake.

Langley replaces Brian Trusty as executive director. Trusty, now National VP of the Central Flyway, stated, "We're tremendously lucky to have such a talented person step up and take the wheel of one of Audubon's largest state offices."

Audubon Texas holds a meeting of all the state chapters every two years. In 2014 and 2016, the meeting was in late March at the McKinney Roughs LCRA Nature Center. BCAS co-hosted the meetings with Travis Audubon.

This year the assembly is delayed until the fall.

Editor & Texas Audubon