



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

January 2012 Program

Latest Whooping Crane Report Mostly Good--

Source: Whooping Crane Conservation Assn., 12/18/11:

Most of the estimated 300 whooping cranes of the Aransas-Wood Buffalo population have now arrived on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas coast. The whoopers began arriving on the Texas coastal bend and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge wintering grounds in late October according to Dan Alonso, Refuge Manager.

Aransas biologists made their initial plane flight of the season on December 8 to check out the first whooping crane mortality discovered on Aransas according to a refuge report. One juvenile crane was found dead from unknown causes. The carcass has been sent to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI for disease testing.



Aransas officials say the goal of the first flight was also to assess the general distribution and condition of the whooping crane population. During the flight, biologists observed a

significant number of cranes in the uplands, as opposed to marshlands where they are typically found. Field observations have resulted in biologists finding evidence of wolfberry and blue crab remains in crane scat. It appears that cranes are utilizing some resources within the marsh. A second flight to estimate the crane population will be scheduled for January 2012 according to refuge personnel.

The Association believes that Aransas officials are doing everything within their capabilities to compensate for the "challenging" habitat conditions on the refuge. Mother Nature has dealt Aransas Refuge and most of the state of Texas a serious blow with the long term drought. After a successful nesting season, with approximately 37 chicks fledging from a record of 75 nests in August 2011, biologists anticipate that the flock size could reach record levels this winter, possibly 300. The large whooper population will now face degraded habitat conditions, and hopefully they will overcome the taxing situation.

Texas Parks Biologists Return to Assess Effects of Fires on Area Wildlife

Meredith Longoria and Roxanne Hernandez, the county biologists assigned since the Labor Day fires to the Lost Pines Recovery Team, will join our meeting for the second half of the wildfires-effects topic, the loss assessment and outlook for recovery of wildlife. In November, they summarized the overall findings from the various agencies serving on the Recovery Team.

Longoria is the lead member for the Wildlife Subgroup of the Recovery Team. Hernandez is the overall lead for the Lost Pines Recovery Team. Longoria has served as Wildlife Biologist for Bastrop and Caldwell Counties for six years. Hernandez has been administrator of Bastrop County's Lost Pines Habitat Conservation Plan, a program designed to further Houston Toad conservation, since November of 2008.

from Bastrop State Park web page:

"Hundreds of defenders, including more than 140 TPWD employees comprising 55 certified wildland firefighters, law enforcement staff, and Incident Command personnel, together with firefighting partners from all over the country, battled the fiery monster, which eventually lost strength but wasn't 100 percent controlled until October 10 following a long-awaited rain shower. The historic structures and about 250 acres of the park were spared with the assistance of heavy equipment and resources that were on loan from commercial donors.



"Because 96 percent of the park was affected by fire in some capacity, Bastrop State Park has been drastically altered. The unique Lost Pines ecosystem containing the southwestern-most cluster of loblolly pines will take decades to recover. Park staff is assessing impacts to natural resources, including the endangered Houston toads, whose main remaining stronghold has been the sandy soils of Bastrop County's Lost Pines."



Gift exchange at the Solstice Celebration: l to r, Carol Wellso, Jackie Fisher, Roy Smallwood, Betty Dunkerley, Priscilla Jarvis.

Bad Rap for Dandelions Undeserved

According to Anita Sanchez in her new book the *Teeth of the Lion*, "Dandelions inspire strong emotions -- mostly negative in the modern world.

"But until the rise of the lawn in the early 1900s, the plants were so valued that prize specimens were exhibited at county fairs. Gardeners would weed out grass to make room for dandelions.

"Native to the Middle East, dandelions were such important medicinal plants that the Pilgrims apparently carried seeds to North America. The plants pack more vitamin C than tomatoes, more vitamin A than oranges and were used as a liver tonic to help cleanse the blood.

"One thing they can't tolerate is shade. Letting your lawn grow three to four inches tall will eliminate dandelions.

"But Americans want perfectly manicured grass. We apply nearly 80 million pounds of insect- and weed-killing chemicals to our lawns and gardens annually, according to the [National Audubon Society](#). Much of that barrage is directed at dandelions. Sanchez said her book was inspired by Audubon's estimate that **seven million birds are killed** every year by homeowners' use of pesticides and herbicides.

"Her own rule of thumb for a healthy, chemical-free lawn is one that's dotted with dandelions -- which makes my yard a champion. 'If you see dandelions, you can be pretty sure that lawn is good place to let your kids run barefoot,' she said."

--excerpted from *Audubon Newswire*

Brubaker Resigns

BCAS President Sue Brubaker announced at the Solstice Celebration December 20 she is stepping down as president due to personal priorities at this time. She served as president since June, 2009, which is more than the normal two year term. Members gave her a round of applause in appreciation of her leadership.

Margie Crisp as vice president now becomes president.

BCAS Membership Application/ Renewal

- Individual \$20
- Family \$35
- Supporting \$75
- Youth \$10

Name _____

Street _____

City, State Zip _____

Please make checks payable to:
Bastrop County Audubon Society

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

Or join with PayPal at:
bastropcountyaudubon.org

"For the first time in a century, salmon will once again swim up Washington's Elwha River to spawn in its headwaters and tributaries. The largest dam removal in U.S. history began in mid-September. 'This project is restoring an ecosystem within a national park from the mountains to the sea,' says Brian Winter, of the National Park Service." *Audubon Magazine*, January-February, 2012



Red-winged Blackbird - by Daniel S. Kilby



Field Trip Report

November 14: Granger Lake, North Shore Lake Bastrop and Steiner Ranch provided some interesting sightings. Some of the more notable birds we sighted were: American Avocets, Golden Plovers, Pintails, Long billed Dowitchers, Pileated Woodpecker, and several species of sparrows. There were probably more species of ducks on Granger Lake than we identified, but the receding shore line and rather strong winds (greater than 30 mph) caused the ducks to be far away.

Gadwalls 10; Northern Shoveler 7; Northern Pintail 36; Blue-winged Teal 10; Redhead 35; Double-crested Cormorant 37; Great Blue Heron 4; Snowy Egret 1; Great Egret 4; American Avocet 14; Least Sandpiper 4; Black-necked Stilt 2; Northern Harrier 1; Red-tailed Hawk 6; Black Vulture 52; Turkey Vulture 15; Crested Caracara 2; American Kestrel 13; American Coot 21; Killdeer 4; Golden Plover 2; Greater Yellowlegs 1; Lesser Yellowlegs 2; Ring-billed Gull 20; Long-billed Dowitcher 2; Rock Dove 150; Pileated Woodpecker 1; Loggerhead Shrike 1; Blue Jay 2; American Crow 39; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 3; Eastern Bluebird 1; Northern Mockingbird 12; European Starling 20; American Pipit 5; Chipping Sparrow 7; Field Sparrow 1; Vesper Sparrow 4; Savannah Sparrow 50; Longspur 1; Northern Cardinal 6; Red-winged Blackbird 4; Eastern Meadowlark 1; W. Meadowlark 1; species Meadowlarks 135; Brewer's Blackbird 20; Brown-headed Cowbird 375; Great-tailed Grackle 40; and House Sparrow 5.

On December 7 the weather was good and we birded at Hunter Crossing Ponds, Tahitian Village, LCRA North and South Shore Parks, and Steiner Ranch from 8:30 a.m. till 4:00 p.m., less 1 hour for lunch.

Two of us from BCAS led Nina Rach traveling from Houston (The Ornithology Group), and nine from the Wimberley Birding Club: Larry and Donna Lehn, Glenda Janca, Tom Toporowski, Thomas Urbanosky, Peggy Hayes, Jerry and Dotty Hall, and Connie Fandrich around birding areas, avoiding the burned areas. We counted 60 species.

Highlights included unusual flocking together of 24 Northern Mockingbirds and a flotilla of 22 Pied billed Grebes swimming together, a Redhead Duck, **Harris's Sparrow**, and a Cinnamon Teal pair.



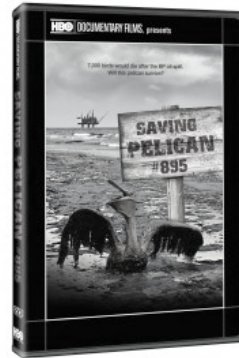
The next field trip is a week-day, Monday, January 9, meeting at the Bank parking lot. Call 321-0122.

Stan Wellso, Field Trips Chair

Upcoming Programs

February -- David Scott on "Birding by Ear." Scott has identified approximately 250 North American birds by sound. He is a Professor in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University.

March -- "The Texas Environmentalists/Texas Legacy Project," by speaker David Todd. The late BCAS member John Prather is one of the Legacy Project environmentalists as is also our June speaker.



April -- "Saving Pelican #895," a DVD by Emmy-winning film maker Irene Brodsky about the Louisiana rehab group's efforts following the BP oil spill.

May -- Margie Crisp reviews her just-published book *River of Contrasts: The Texas Colorado* (Texas A&M Press).

June -- Prof. Robin Doughty on "Saving the Albatross," a report on international aspects of conservation of the Albatross and fish in the world's oceans.

Suggests five New Year's Resolutions:



1. I resolve to eat healthier. (Shop at a farmer's market.)
2. I resolve to lose weight and get in shape.
3. I resolve to spend more quality time with my family and loved ones. [Everyone go birding.]
4. I resolve to manage my money and spend less. (See Conscious Consumer online.)

Bird Calls is published seven times per year September through June by the Bastrop County Audubon Society (BCAS). It is edited and produced by Mary Ellen Branan, PhD. We invite letters, articles, poems, news tips, calendar items, reviews, and photos by mail or email. Deadline for submissions is the first of the month. Birds Calls is a membership benefit.

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Return Service Requested



Gadwall

January Calendar

January 9, Monday, BCAS Field Trip -- Meet at Bank parking lot in Bastrop, 8:00 a.m., local sites: ducks and winter birds. Stan Wellso: 321-0122.

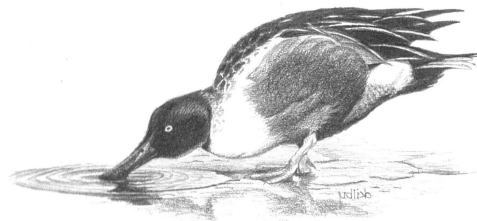
January 14, Saturday, Volunteer Work, Bastrop State Park -- for erosion control, reservation req'd by Friday eve, call Katie Raney at 718-0211 or katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us.

January 15, Sunday, BCAS Board Meeting -- 4:00 p.m., 189 Wailupe Circle, Bastrop, Tahitian Village. Stan Wellso, host.

January 17, Tuesday, General Meeting & Program -- Doors open 6:30 p.m., First National Bank Bldg. meeting room, Hasler Blvd. @ H.71w, in Bastrop.

January 19, Thursday, Friends of Lost Pines State Parks Meeting -- 7:00 p.m., Bastrop S. P. Refectory.

January 29, Saturday, Hornsby Bend Center for Environmental Research, Ecological Literacy Day -- 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Wear work clothes for a few hours outdoor work, then one hour educational lecture.



Northern Shoveler - by Steven D'Amato