



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 17-20: Details p. 4

**The Best Place for BCAS Money:
Helping Bastrop S.P.'s Emergency**



On January 19, BCAS Board Members presented a check to Friends of the Lost Pines State Parks President Jon Pollard, right.

We shortly received the following from Park Superintendent Todd McClanahan.

"I wanted to send along my personal thank you for the generous donation from the Bastrop County Audubon Society. I am continually amazed at the dedication and support from individuals and organizations for the recovery efforts at the park. I understand you have many other ways you could have spent these hard earned funds and am extremely grateful that you chose to support the Friends Group and Bastrop State Park.

"As you heard in my presentation, we are working diligently to get as many areas of the park re-opened for recreation. Erosion is our number one priority currently and these funds will be a tremendous help.

Thank you! Todd"

The planned donation was applauded by the membership when President Margie Crisp announced it at the BCAS January membership meeting.

February Program

Complete Your Skills for the Field: Birding by Ear



"Birding is not just about watching, it is about listening."

Prof. David Scott, the Bastrop County Audubon Society's speaker for this month, has been bird-watching since 1980. He has traveled extensively throughout North America to "watch" or listen to birds. He has identified approximately 250 North American birds by sound.

This January Scott was awarded the prestigious Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt Award for Excellence in Recreation and Park Research. He is a professor in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University.

Scott will give us tips on sorting and remembering songs. "Simply listening to them can give you the same enjoyment" as seeing them. "Learning songs helps you 'sort through' birds you are hearing and adds to your enjoyment of time outside. You also can't see every bird on a walk—that is never practical."

One way to remember a song is to associate the song with some mnemonic device. "The first bird song I learned was 'drink your tea!' the mnemonic for the Eastern Towhee. "Other birds are 'name-sayers,' that is, they say their name. Chuck-will's-Widow, for example."

This program is a "Learners' Corner" offering, such as BCAS promised fans of the late Learners' Corner.

The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, February 21, at the Bastrop First National Bank second floor, Hasler Blvd. @ Hwy 71W. Doors open at 6:30. Visitors are always welcome.

Whooping Crane News: As recently as January 29, the two families consisting of parent Whooping Cranes and juvenile (total six) remain at Granger Lake in Williamson County, the Friendship Park area, as reported by Tim Fennell of Round Rock to Texbirds.

President's Letter

Flora, Fauna...Community

With regret I must report that Sue Brubaker has resigned as President of BCAS. While we shall miss her leadership, she will continue as a Director so we will still be able to depend on her knowledge, skill, and humor.

For those of you who don't know me, I've been part of BCAS since my husband, Bill Montgomery, and I moved to Bastrop County in 1992. Bill has been Conservation Chair, Program Chair, and President. Over the years I've been Secretary, Program Chair, and Newsletter Editor. For several years we gave reptile shows at local schools. Bill is an excellent photographer, and we've given several programs to BCAS about wild life on our travels. Last year I shared my travels along the Texas Colorado River with our members. I'm proud to step in as Acting President until June, the end of the fiscal year.

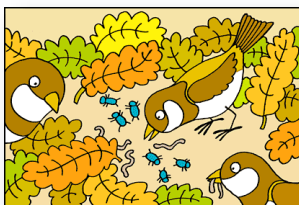
During the time I've been with BCAS, I've watched our group evolve, change, falter, and then renew. While we continue to have a vital core of participants, the devastating wildfires that swept through Bastrop County impacted our group in a number of ways. Some members, including several board members, lost their homes. Others, like Sue Brubaker, put their private lives on hold as they volunteered countless hours organizing relief efforts. Our community and the unique habitat of the Lost Pines has been dealt a crushing blow.

Bastrop County Audubon Society's path seems clear: to support our community in this time of devastation, transition, and restoration. In this pursuit, BCAS donated \$3,000 to the Friends of the Lost Pines State Parks to help them with erosion control in our beloved Bastrop State Park.

So our tech-savvy members can be up-to-date on BCAS activities, the Board has invited member Russell Cole to help us set up a Facebook page. Additionally, our monthly newsletter Bird Calls will be available as an e-newsletter for those that prefer a color electronic version, and we will continue to send out notices of interest to our email list. Our dedicated Board, with the help of our members, will set up an educational booth at the LCRA McKinney Roughs Earth Day celebration in April. The swift tower project (the Judy Ing Memorial) will be presented to the Bastrop Parks and Recreation Board, and if approved, will go to the Bastrop City Council for approval.

Refreshments for January:

Jackie Fisher & Jan Goebel



Refreshments for February:
Sue Brubaker & Betty Dunkerley

While we adjust to the dramatic changes inflicted on our lives and the local environment by the fires and the ongoing drought, remember that Bastrop County Audubon Society is more than birds and birdwatchers. We are flora, fauna, habitat, and above all, community.

Margie Crisp, Acting President

Two Christmas Bird Counts in Bastrop County

This year I participated in both National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Counts. The new Lost Pines CBC incorporates the LCRA's McKinney Roughs, miles of Colorado River and bottomlands, Post Oak Savannah, croplands, and rangelands in Bastrop and Travis Counties. The BCAS-sponsored Bastrop-Buescher State Parks Christmas Bird Count centers on the state parks and includes the Lost Pines habitats, Blackland Prairie, and the City of Bastrop. I believe this is the 35th year for the Bastrop-Buescher CBC!

For the Lost Pines CBC my husband Bill and I joined up with LCRA Natural Science Program Coordinator Nicholas Cowey to kayak the Colorado River from Big Webberville Park to the LCRA take-out near McKinney Roughs. The morning was a little nippy but soon the sun was shining and we had a delightful day on the river. The highlight was hitting the Kingfisher Trifecta: we saw a Ringed Kingfisher, a **Green Kingfisher**, and several Belted Kingfishers. The Lost Pines CBC had about 40 people participate and a final species total of 112. Thanks to Beth Banks and her team for organizing the

Lost Pines CBC.



For the New Year's Day Bastrop-Buescher CBC I dragged myself out of bed to get to the traditional meeting place at the Texas Grill to meet my section team members. I was fortunate enough to get on a team with some really excellent birders. (On both bird counts I kept the tally of species and individual birds so the more expert birders could

spend their time spotting birds.) We birded Fisherman's Park, Bob Bryant Park, the streets of Bastrop, and the county roads northeast of town. Another gorgeous day and a great way to start 2012. Our team saw 73 species and the expected CBC total is 120 species. Thanks to Dr. David Mitchell who has coordinated the Bastrop-Buescher CBC for the last 34+ years. With the fires of 2011, the data collected by both CBCs will be important.

One of my goals for 2012 is to spend more time birding. I'm off to a great start!

by Margie Crisp

Bird Calls is published seven times per year September through June by the Bastrop County Audubon Society. 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 by noon the first of the month. Editorial office: 216 Schaefer, Blvd, Bastrop 78602 Ph.: (512) 303-2734. Email: editor@bastropaudubon.org

7 Tips for Great Bird Photography—by *Jeff Parker*

1. GO WHERE THE BIRDS ARE.

If herons act skittish at your local pond, go where they're not so nervous (i.e. fishing docks). Need your spirits to soar with bald eagles? Check out the yearly nest near Burnet, Texas. Roaring to ride the wind like a raptor? Glide to El Paso for Golden Eagles, Corpus Christi for its annual Hawk Watch, or Pennsylvania's Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. Seeking the serenade of a Red Crossbill? North Georgia's Cohutta Wildlife Management Area provides homes to these finch-family birds. Crave dramatic Snow Geese and Sandhill Crane sunrise silhouettes? Set up your tripod at New Mexico's Bosque del Apache. Antsy for the antics of Burrowing Owls and the sweet song of meadowlarks? Run for the Rita Blanca Grasslands. Long for the luck of bluebirds? Take the Northeast Texas Bluebird Trail in Titus County. Want wonderful Whooping Cranes? Head toward Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Vociferous Green Jays and kiskadees? South Texas provides haven for these colorful birds. Melodic Golden-cheeked Warblers? A limited number of Hill Country ranches offer specially-built photo blinds within this species' habitat.

2. FIND KNOWLEDGABLE HELP.

Along with tip #1, hiring a guide or taking part in a tour gets you in the right place at the right time. For example, South Texas' photo ranches offer exceptional opportunities for gathering high quality images of dramatic scenes like Crested Caracaras duking it out, but you need a guide to gain access. And, if it's good photographs--rather than distant sightings--of endangered Whooping Cranes you're after, you'll need to take a tour. In addition, someone who not only knows the local avian species, but is also an expert photographer will understand when and where the animals and the lighting suit your lens best.

3. DON'T PUT THE BIRD IN THE CENTER OF THE FRAME.

One thing most great bird photographs have in common is that they're interesting. Thus, in the spirit of adding interest, when composing the shot do your best not to place your subject dead center in the frame. Instead, use what pros call the "rule of thirds," a visual trick which breaks the space into, well, you guessed it...thirds. The eye tends to find an object off to one side or the other more pleasing than one sitting smack dab in the middle. (And, just because a bird's breathtaking, don't think you can skip this rule; nope, this one holds true even with such stunners as, say, vermilion flycatchers!)

4. WATCH THAT BACKGROUND!

A messy, jumbled background that distracts from the real object of beauty spoils many otherwise fine photographs. Any background elements need to be far enough away to go out of focus. Also, remember, when you're working at a feeder, that perch can be moved!

5. BE AWARE OF THE LIGHT ANGLE.

Ask pros about the single most important element in photography and most would say, "The right light!" With that in mind, generally speaking, for birds you want front light (light coming from behind you). Back light works for nice silhouettes and on wading birds with plumes (...ah, the elegance this adds to the already-elegant great egret!). Try to avoid side light as it rarely does our winged friends justice.

6. SELECT A PHOTO-WORTHY PERCH.

If you're creating your images at a feeding station, you've got the flexibility of providing your own perch, so get creative! Pick something interesting and make it even more so by adding a little something interesting (i.e. berries, flowers, lichen, etc.). But be careful not to add too much or you'll distract from the beauty of the bird. And keep in mind the size of the perch versus the size of the bird. A dainty painted bunting, for example, will look out of place on a big log.

7. TRY TO CAPTURE A MOMENT.

What pros call "bird on a stick" shots refer to the kinds of photos that, even though they might display birds clearly and follow other tips featured here, tend to be pretty boring overall. Let's face it--we like seeing animals in action! Capturing a behavior makes for a much more interesting image and can still show off the beauty of the bird. Even a small one like an Orchard Oriole chomping on a berry can give great glimpses into species' personality. (Sure, a spider would be better, but don't underestimate the power of a berry!)

There's certainly more to learn about each of these topics, but put these tips to work and you'll immediately take better photos of the birds within your focal point. And the more often you put these pro-pointers to use, the better you'll get. Just remember: prep and prepare beforehand for great bird photographs because one bird in focus is better than two...um... you get the picture!

For your further information, I will be coaching an Images for Conservation Pro-am Tournament near the Rio Grande Valley, May 17-21, just in time for spring migration. My web site: www.JeffParkerImages.com.

B.C.A.S
c/o Priscilla Jarvis
783 Lower Elgin Road
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Return Service Requested



Eastern Towhee

February calendar

Feb. 11, Saturday: Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Survey. Hiking and counting during two sessions, 7:00 a.m., with donuts and coffee, and/or 4:00 p.m. Eric Carpenter.

Feb. 17--20: Great Backyard Bird Count. Info p. 2.

Feb. 17, Friday: Whooping Crane trip. Join Texas Audubon at "Skimmer" boat dock in Rockport, 7:00 a.m. to see Whooping Cranes and other bird islands. Danielle Madrid (512) 782-0898 or dmadrid@audubon.org.

Feb. 19, Sunday: BCAS Board Meets, 4:00 p.m., Alan Jaeger, host, 117 Kaelepulu, Bastrop, 308-1991. Pot-luck supper.

Feb. 21, Tuesday: General Meeting & Program, 7:00 p.m. 1st National Bank in Bastrop, Hasler Blvd. @H. 71W. See page 1.

Feb. 23-26, Thursday.-Sunday: Whooping Crane Festival, Port Aransas.

GBBC:It's as easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. **Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes** on one or more days of the count. You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like—one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day. You can also submit more than one checklist per day if you count in other locations on that day.

2. **Count the greatest number of individuals of each species** that you see together at any one time. Take note of the highest number of each species you see on this checklist.

3. When you're finished, **enter your results** at birdsource.org/GBBC. You'll see a button marked "Enter Your Checklists!" on the website home page beginning on the first day of the count. It will remain active until the deadline for data submission some days later.

You can count looking out your window at home, or taking a walk and counting, or going further afield and counting at a favorite site.

Locally, the data we record will be important for tracking the restoration of the burned areas since results of area bird counts are preserved on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site.

GBBC is jointly sponsored by Cornell Ornithology Laboratory and National Audubon Society. Its data is of huge importance and has no parallel.