



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

We Can Help the Whoopers: Urgent Invitation (10/18)

Endangered whooping cranes have begun their annual 2,400-mile fall migration from Canada to Texas. As the rare birds approach Texas, a new citizen science initiative is inviting Texas residents and visitors to help collect sightings of whoopers.

Texas Whooper Watch (<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/whoopingcranes/>) is a new volunteer monitoring program that is a part of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Texas Nature Trackers program. According to Lee Ann Linam, biologist in the Wildlife Diversity Program, Texas Whooper Watch is being developed to keep track of an ever-expanding population of whooping cranes.

Since beginning their slow recovery from a low of 16 birds in the 1940s, whoopers have, with few exceptions, always wintered on the Texas coast on and near Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. However, in the winter of 2011-12, several groups of whooping cranes expanded their wintering areas to include more coastal areas and even some inland sites in Central Texas [Granger Lake]—patterns that surprised crane biologists. "Texas Whooper Watch is a program that asks the public to help us discover more about where whooping cranes stop in migration and to be ready to learn more about these potential new wintering areas."

This year biologists expect about 300 whooping cranes to start arriving in Texas in late October or early November. According to surveys on the nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo Park in northwestern Canada, the flock may contain as many as 34 chicks. Linam notes that Texas Whooper Watch will also help improve the accuracy of surveys on the wintering grounds, as the growth of the flock has made traditional census methods more difficult.

Whoopers usually follow a migratory path through North and Central Texas that includes cities such as Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, and Victoria. During migration they often pause overnight to use wetlands for roosting and agricultural fields for feeding, but seldom remain more than one night. They nearly always migrate in small groups of less than 6-8 birds, but they may be seen roosting and feeding with large flocks of the smaller sandhill crane. They are the tallest birds in North America, standing nearly five feet tall. They are solid white in color except for wing-tips that are visible only in flight. They fly with necks and legs outstretched.

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November Program

Cleaner Air vs. Coal-burning Power Plants

Lydia Avila, Associate Organizing Representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign, will define the issue and progress of the Sierra Club's priority effort concerning coal-burning electricity producing power plants.

On Tuesday, November 18, at **7:00 p.m.**, she will be speaking on the work Sierra Club does around the country, with a particular emphasis on the local aspects of the coal-to-clean energy campaign.

Especially local and obvious to us is the Sam K. Seymour, or Fayette Power Plant, just outside of LaGrange. The power plant is the largest producer of any in Texas and is fueled by coal from the Powder River Basin of Wyoming, which reportedly burns cleaner than other types of coal or lignite. The LCRA site says: "Delivered by rail, this low-sulfur coal is one of many steps FPP staff takes to minimize air and water pollution from this plant."

Sierra Club maintains, however, that "Pollution from coal plants has been linked to asthma attacks, toxic mercury, and more. Solar and wind power, on the other hand, are ready to provide clean and affordable energy across the county, particularly in Texas. Sierra Club is hoping to work with local folks to move beyond coal by urging decision makers to phase out the Fayette coal plant and instead invest in a clean energy future for our community."

With 1.4 million members and supporters, the Sierra Club is the largest and oldest grassroots environmental organization in the country. Established in 1892 by John Muir, the Sierra Club's motto is "Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet." Sierra Club has multiple campaigns that address habitat conservation, climate change, energy consumption, water quality and quantity, and getting folks outdoors.



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Taken 1/14/2012 at Aransas NWR from *The Skimmer*. (In memory of Arthur David Belden - Naturalist & BCAS member.)

Whooping Crane Citizen

Science: from page 1:

Citizens can help by reporting sightings of whooping cranes and by preventing disturbance of cranes when they remain overnight at roosting and feeding locations. Sightings can be reported to whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us or 512-389-TXWW (8999). Observers are asked especially to note whether the cranes have colored leg bands on their legs. Volunteers interested in attending training sessions to become "Whooper Watchers" in order to collect more detailed data may also contact the TPWD at whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us or 512-389-TXWW (8999).

Additional information, including photos of whooping crane look-alike species, can be found at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/whoopingcranes/> and at <http://www.whoopingcrane.com/report-a-sighting/>

As reported by the Texas Hunting and Fishing Network

BirdCalls: published six times per year September through June by the Bastrop County Audubon Society. It is edited and produced by Mary Ellen Branam, PhD. We invite letters, articles, poems, news tips, calendar items, reviews, and photos by mail or email. Deadline for submissions is by noon the last of the preceding month. Ph.: (512) 303-2734. Email: editor@bastropaudubon.org

Note: The editor is seeking an assistant interested in desktop publishing, photography, etc., to help in the production of Bird Calls and other media.

President's Letter: Susan Leslie

I am sitting cross-legged in the top level of the Observation Tower at Aransas Wildlife Refuge, typing away. Am hoping that someone with better eyes than mine will come along and help identify that very tall, white bird with black legs about 200 yards away! Yes, the ranger said a "handful" of whoopers have arrived. If this one would just fly a little! I drove to the Gulf on the heels of that "norther," and it is wonderfully cool, dry and clear.

Maggie Lambert suggested last week that we plan an Audubon trip down here "like we used to do...great birding, great company, great fun." I think Maggie is onto something--so I scouted some likely motels and activities, and will solicit your ideas in the near future. The Refuge has some areas closed off for renovations right now, but the ranger thought everything would be open by January. Took me four hours to drive the 16-mile Loop, there was so much to see.

Thank you to Alan and Priscilla, who gave up a beautiful fall morning to put heads together over a hot computer and produce our Annual Report to National Audubon.

We still need to fill one Board position: Recording Secretary. This is the person responsible for taking accurate meeting minutes, sending out an email draft, and getting the final version of the one 90-minute meeting per month into cloud storage. If you would like to try a sample before committing yourself, the December meeting is Thursday, Dec. 6, at 6:30 p.m. in the Bastrop Library. And, as a reminder, any member is welcome at YOUR Audubon Board meetings. Sometimes they are (unintentionally) very entertaining.

See you on the 20th, and bring a friend! P.S., several birders with scopes showed up - that is definitely an adult whooping crane!!!



Field Trips

September 22, 2012:

Sites visited= Earhart Road, Webberville Park, and Hornsby Bend. The wonderful blue cloudless sky made it impossible to find migrating hawks. Most interesting finds were the Merlins, Scissor tailed Flycatchers, Loggerhead Shrikes, and two species of Ibises at Hornsby Bend. It was a fun day for BCAS members including: Mary Ellen Branam, Mike & Jan Goebel, Jackie Fisher, Sandy Simon, Roy Smallwood, and Stan Wellso, Field Chair. Hope to see you on the next field trip.

Total species 41

Snowy Egret	2
Cattle Egret	153
White faced Ibis	4
White Ibis	1
Blue winged Teal	22
Northern Shoveler	48
American Coot	24
Red-tailed Hawk	1
Crested Caracara	5
Black Vulture	3
Turkey Vulture	14
Merlin	2
American Kestrel	3
Killdeer	21
Least Sandpiper	21
Spotted Sandpiper	3
Greater Yellowlegs	2
Solitary Sandpiper	1
Mourning Dove	93

Rock Pigeon	12
White-winged Dove	2
Eurasian Collared-Dove	8
Inca Dove	1
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	1
Belted Kingfisher	2
Red-bellied Woodpecker	4
Couch's Kingbird	1 (??)
Scissor tailed Flycatcher	38
American Egret	1
Northern Mockingbird	10
Loggerhead Shrike	5
Blue Jay	2
American Crow	6
Cliff Swallow	1
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	2
Bewick's Wren	1
European Starling	155
Red winged Blackbird	22
Great-tailed Grackle	95
Northern Cardinal	9
House Sparrow	3

Field trip October 27, 2012

We birded from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., at El Camino Real, Tahitian Village, LCRA South and North Park, and XS Ranch. Although the north wind gusted, and bird numbers were somewhat low, everyone enjoyed the field trip, especially seeing the return Of the sparrows, Red breasted Nuthatches, and American Pipits. Those BCAS members who knew how to set their alarm clocks were: Mary Ellen Branam, Mike and Jan Goebel, and yours truly, Stan Wellso.

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Continued from p. 2, 10/27 Field:

Total Species: 43

Pied-billed Grebe	2	
Great Egret	4	
Great Blue Heron	2	
Gadwall	3	
Turkey Vulture		18
Black Vulture	15	
Osprey	1	
Red-shouldered Hawk		2
Red-tailed Hawk		2
American Kestrel		9
Crested Caracara		1
American Coot		35
Killdeer	4	
Rock Pigeon	3	
Mourning Dove		8
White-winged Dove		1
Belted Kingfisher		2
Red-bellied Woodpecker		3
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		1
Pileated Woodpecker		1
Eastern Phoebe	2	
Loggerhead Shrike	1	
Blue Jay	2	
American Crow		28
Tufted Titmouse		1
Carolina Chickadee		7
Red-breasted Nuthatch		2
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		1
Eastern Bluebird		14
European Starling		7
American Pipit		6
Pine Warbler		1
Yellow-rumped Warbler		1
Chipping Sparrow		14
Clay-colored Sparrow	1	
Lark Sparrow	2	
Savannah Sparrow		9
Northern Cardinal		32
Eastern Meadowlark		1
Western Meadowlark		1
meadowlarks	80	
Great-tailed Grackle	75	
Brewer's Blackbird	3	
Brown-headed Cowbird	13	

New: Preventing Bird Collisions with Windows

Bioengineering is huge these days. Scientists are looking at designs in nature and turning them into solutions for problems. Every year, perhaps a million birds die because they crash into glass windows.

We all have seen the big black and yellow garden orb spiders and their webs. Researchers have taken a cue from the large white (to our eyes) "zipper" pattern near the center of their webs. This thick web pattern reflects UV light and warns birds not fly through the spider's web.

A German company, Arnold Glas, studied orb spider webs and developed an insulated glass with a reflective UV coated pattern that is almost transparent to humans. Experiments have shown that 78% of birds avoided the Ornilux glass panels.

Ornilux glass is now being used in buildings and wildlife exhibits around the world.

Conservation Magazine, Fall 2012, p. 52

Latest Education Report-- Bill Brooks

After I accepted the job of Education Director for the Bastrop County Audubon Society, it didn't take me long to realize I was stepping into the shoes of an Ed Director Superstar. Susan Leslie worked long and hard getting Audubon programs into our local schools.

Unfortunately mostly because of student testing, it is harder and harder to get volunteer programs into public school class schedules, so I've taken a different approach.

For several years now I've been helping with home school nature programs with the Pines and Prairies Land Trust. So on Thursday, September 24th, Louise Ridlon (a real birder) and I taught a PPLT class called Birding 101. Forty-nine kids and nineteen parents attended!

We gave an overview of birding history, field guides, field marks, common birds in the area and migrants, and how to use and choose binoculars. Students learned how to adjust the binoculars to fit their faces and their eyesight. We promoted local bird counts and used Audubon educational handouts.

Such classes used to meet in the Tahitian Village Water Board Offices for the first hour and then drive to the Colorado River Refuge for the second hour. These days we usually spend the whole two-hour class at the refuge. A wonderful group of mostly Master Naturalists, who call themselves the Bridge Maniacs, have built us tables and benches, and maintain the outdoor classroom and trails at the refuge. The second hour of our class we went bird watching with the good binoculars BCAS purchased last year.

Our list that day was pretty good. We saw Great Blue Heron, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Mississippi Kite, Red-tailed Hawk, a hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Northern Cardinal.

Not too bad for our first outing. I intend to have more Audubon-inspired classes with these kids. They are a great group, and I really enjoy reaching out to kids for the BCAS and the PPLT's Colorado River Refuge at the same time.

Sign Up: Two Audubon Christmas Bird Counts in Bastrop County

Bastrop-Buescher State Parks Christmas Bird Count: The BBSPCBC will be held as usual on January 1, 2013. Participants are asked to contact David Mitchell at 512-303-9246 or via email at dmitchell@mdanderson.org.

We will be meeting as usual at the Texas Grill on Highway 71 in Bastrop. We will begin birding by 7:30 a.m. at the latest so please come earlier if you wish to have breakfast. The countdown will be held back at the Texas Grill at 5 p.m..

Note: for the first time the National Audubon Society is waiving fees (\$5) for participation.

We had an exceptional count last year due to the robust turnout. The effects of the Bastrop fire on the avian population will probably take several years to evaluate, so please participate if you can and help us with this important project. We hope to see you there. --David Mitchell

Lost Pines Christmas Bird Count: Hello Fellow Birders! Please mark your calendars for the on Saturday, Dec. 29, 2012 from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

This year marks the 113th CBC and the 2nd year for a new regional count circle: the Lost Pines (LOPI) CBC, a collaborative effort between the Lower Colorado River Authority's McKinney Roughs Nature Park the Hyatt Lost Pines Resort, Bastrop County Audubon Society, and the Lost Pines Master Naturalists.

The count encompasses McKinney Roughs; Hyatt LostPines; the towns of Webberville and Uteley; numerous rural areas around Elgin; various county roads and neighborhoods, including 35 miles of the lower Colorado River.

We can't do it without "friends of a feather." Please let us know if you will be able to volunteer for this year's Lost Pines Christmas Bird Count by pre-registering at visitlostpines.com. We are in need of birders of all skill levels,

Continued: See CBCs, page 4

B.C.A.S
c/o Priscilla Jarvis
783 Lower Elgin Road
Elgin TX 78621

Return Service Requested



Red-Breasted Nuthatch

November Calendar

Nov. 1, Thursday, BCAS Board Meeting: 6:30 p.m. Bastrop Public Library.

Nov. 7 - 11, Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival.

Nov. 17, Saturday, BCAS Field Trip: Destinations will depend on current reports of sightings from Texbirds, etc. More info available at the BCAS meeting and later emails.

Nov. 17, Saturday, LOPICBC Workshop: 9:00 a.m. - noon, McKinney Roughs. Pre-register online: visitlostpines.com

Nov. 20, Tuesday, BCAS General Meeting: Earlier time 7:00 p.m., First Nat'l Bank in Bastrop, Hasler @ H. 71W.

Nov. 22, Thursday, Thanksgiving.

Dec. 1, Saturday, LOPICBC Workshop: 9:00 a.m. - noon, McKinney Roughs. Preregister.

Dec. 2, Saturday, PPLT Yegua Knobbs Field Day. →

Dec. 29, Saturday, Lost Pines Christmas Bird Count: 7:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Jan. 1, Tuesday, State Parks Christmas Bird Count: 7:30 a.m.



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We are offering two free birding workshops, in Nov. and early Dec., to help brush up on birding skills and learn new tricks for identifying birds common to Bastrop County. This workshop will help birders of all experience levels learn to identify various local species in preparation for the CBC. Birding beyond the use of field marks, we will explore other clues like habitat, foraging behavior, flight patterns, silhouettes and vocalizations. Register online for the free birding workshops.

At the end of the field count, we'll have a chili and cornbread supper. --Nicholas Cowey (nicholas.cowey@lcra.org)

The YKP Fall Field Day and Bird Census will take place Sunday, December 2, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Members of the Travis Audubon Society and Bastrop County Audubon Society will be helping with the bird census. Members of Travis Audubon will meet at the Post Office in McDade at 7:30 a.m. and carpool to the YKP. You may join them there or go straight to the YKP. More info: (512)922-2912, 925-2437, 281-2762 for Priscilla and Jeremiah Jarvis or Pines and Prairies Land Trust..