

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT:

Contrary to what the layman might think, Dec. 20 thru Jan. 1 is the most exciting time of the year for the birder. This is so because the annual Christmas Bird Counts are held throughout the N. A. continent during this period. This event was begun by the National Audubon Society sixty-nine years ago to replace the then popular sport of spending the holidays shooting birds. Besides setting the dates within which the Count must be held, the rules state that the Count must last from dawn to dusk; the Count shall be made within an area which is a circle with a 15-mile diameter; all birds in the area shall be counted and the count reported to the National headquarters by Jan. 15. In 1967, 839 counts were accepted and published in Audubon Field Notes. Each participant must pay \$1.00 for each Count which they make as this helps pay for the expense of printing the results.

This year the TPAS will gather once again at 8:00 a.m. sharp at the first water crossing in the Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Some of us will be out earlier, but this spot will be the one from which each group will leave for its assigned area. The more people there are the larger will be the area that can be covered with the consequence of more species and numbers being counted. We need all the help we can get! The Count date has been set as Saturday, Dec. 28.

The best answer I've ever read to the question "What is a Christmas Count?", was written by the editor of The Phalarope, the newsletter of the Midland Naturalists:

"Most all, it is a very special way of celebrating the holiday season - days in the open country, away from the depressing news of the day, away from the tensions that come with responsibility, away from the commercial hullabaloo that seems to mean Christmas now; days spent with dear friends enjoying the beauty and wonder of nature in the midst of the winter season. To MIDNATS who have adopted the custom, Christmas Counts are just as much a part of Christmas as the Christmas tree, and the discovery of a bird rarely seen before is much more exciting than the most elaborately wrapped package."

To help our birders in knowing what to expect to see on Count day, the following is a list of all the birds thus far recorded including those seen during the Count period as well as those seen on Count day, along with the high count for each species:

Pied-billed Grebe (4); Whistling Swan (7); Canada Goose (182); Mallard (43); Gadwall (74); Pintail (25); Green-winged Teal (10); American Widgeon (22); Shoveler (6); Redhead (4); Ring-necked Duck (3); Canvasback (43); Lesser Scaup (2); Common Goldeneye (4); Common Merganser (3); Red-tailed Hawk (5); Rough-legged Hawk (2); Ferruginous Hawk (3); Golden Eagle (4); Bald Eagle (4); Marsh Hawk (8); Prairie Falcon (2); Pigeon Hawk (1); Sparrow Hawk (21); Bobwhite (30); Scaled Quail (164); Turkey (12); American Coot (38); Killdeer (1); Common Snipe (1); Mourning Dove (87); Roadrunner (5); Great Horned Owl (4); Belted Kingfisher (4); Yellow-shafted Flicker (5); Red-shafted Flicker (49); Golden-fronted Woodpecker (29); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (6); Williamson's Sapsucker (1); Downy Woodpecker (1); Ladder-backed Woodpecker

(15); Horned Lark (289); Scrub Jay (5); Common Crow (4); Black-crested Titmouse (8); Verdin (1); Common Bushtit (29); White-breasted Nuthatch (1); Brown Creeper (1); Bewick's Wren (19); Long-billed Marsh Wren (1); Canon Wren (5); Rock Wren (7); Mockingbird (44); Brown Thrasher (1); Curve-billed Thrasher (1); Sage Thrasher (3); Robin (1258); Hermit Thrush (1); Eastern Bluebird (126); Western Bluebird (4); Mountain Bluebird (514); Townsend's Solitaire (25); Golden-crowned Kinglet (9); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (3); Cedar Waxwing (25); Northern Shrike (1); Loggerhead Shrike (3); Starling (301); Myrtle Warbler (5); Audubon's Warbler (1); House Sparrow (162); Western Meadowlark (263); Red-winged Blackbird (2000); Brewer's Blackbird (3); Cardinal (69); House Finch (6); Pine Siskin (90); American Goldfinch (193); Green-tailed Towhee (3); Rufous-sided Towhee (27); Brown Towhee (2); Savannah Sparrow (1); Baird's Sparrow (1); Rufous-crowned Sparrow (42); Black-throated Sparrow (2); Slate-colored Junco (144); Oregon Junco (317); Gray-headed Junco (1); Tree Sparrow (9); Field Sparrow (20); Harris' Sparrow (12); White-crowned Sparrow (196); White-throated Sparrow (13); Fox Sparrow (1); Lincoln's Sparrow (8); Song Sparrow (74); McCown's Longspur (405).

## WHAT MAGPIES?

If there were any Magpies around Texline on Nov. 10 they were smart enough to stay under cover. This is more than can be said for Peggy Acord, Thelma Fox, Rena Ross and her niece, Dr. & Esther Waddill, Mrs. T. A. Hollar, Mrs. Lawrence Griffith, and Kenneth Seyffert. This group gathered at the Lair Ranch as planned but had to call off exploring the place for Magpies as the wind was out of the north at a very high velocity, and it was cold. The soil in that particular locality is sandy and the wind was whipping it about so violently it was extremely uncomfortable to remain exposed to it for very long. It was not a fruitless day, however. Just south of Texline where a bridge crosses a dry arroyo, the party stopped to do some birding. A lone Pine Siskin was flushed from the ground and it remained clinging to a low tree limb for a long time letting everyone have a very close look at it. Danger lurked there too, as it was the second day of the quail season and the hunters were out. As the party was returning to its cars, three hunters came toward them flushing the Scaled Quail ahead and shooting rapidly at them as the high winds carried the birds swiftly into the draw. These hunters were shooting toward the nearby highway and totally disregarded some of the ladies who were still in the arroyo. Some of the shot passed closely over their heads. Giving up any further exploration, the group headed south and ate their lunch in the lowland protection of the Canadian River upstream from Boys' Ranch. Here the wind was relatively calm and everyone had a wonderful time hiking upriver to the railway bridge. Chickadees were heard and a Cooper's Hawk flew by, two deer were jumped, and lots of dried plants were collected. As the group was leaving in their cars, Kenneth Seyffert witnessed an event he wished all could have seen. To the right of the road and between

him and the car moving ahead of him there swiftly flew a Pigeon Hawk in hot pursuit of two meadowlarks. It quickly struck one of the birds and immediately lit on top of it. It remained there for two or three minutes looking carefully about while squeezing the life out of the meadowlark with its powerful feet. When satisfied no life remained, it began plucking the breast feathers from the dead bird.

"All Nature is but Art unknown to thee;  
All chance direction, which thou canst  
not see;  
All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And spite of Pride, in erring Reason's  
spite,  
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is  
right."

....Alexander Pope....

**BIRD NOTES:**

Tree Swallow - one at Buffalo Lake 11/15 by Rena Ross and Peggy Acord - a late date.

Common Loon - one at Buffalo Lake 11/15 by above party.

Say's Phoebe - one in the yard of the Grady Fox's 11/13 by Vera Deason.

Grey-cheeked Thrush - one in the yard of the George Ross's 11/7.

Lapland Longspur - several in the yard of the W. E. Harrison's in the 2nd week of Nov. One was captured. It is very unusual to find longspurs in the residential parts of town, and particularly so the Lapland, and at such an early date.

Blue Heron - an immature over the house of the T. A. Hollars in early November.

Steller's Jay - one at the feeder in the Grady Fox's yard 11/23 and later.

Purple Finch - several around town during the last week of Nov. and first week of Dec. by our lady birders.

Myrtle/Audubon Warblers - 9 to 10 at one time at the bird bath in the yard of the Charles Pedersens in Canyon 12/4. Most of the birds were Myrtles.

Western Bluebird - 5 in the Palo Duro Canyon 11/24 by KS.

Verdin - one in the Palo Duro Canyon 12/8 by KS.

**RECORD KEEPING:**

It is to be hoped that all members have been keeping up their records of the birds seen in Potter and Randall counties during the past year. Now is the time to be diligently working on them so that the year's results of all our records can be compiled and published early next year showing the early and late dates, both Spring and Fall, of all the species we have seen. This is a tedious task but one that is of value.

**NEW REGIONAL DIRECTOR:**

John L. Spinks, Jr., 26, a native of Crockett has been named the Southwest Field Representative for the National Audubon Society with headquarters in Austin. Prior to coming to work for Audubon, he as head of the Information-Education Division of the South Carolina Wildlife Resources Department. He holds a degree in wildlife science from Texas A & M University. Mr. Spinks has accepted an invitation to speak before the TPAS at our annual dinner on January 20, 1969, at 6:30 p.m. Details of

this meeting will appear in the January newsletter. We look forward to having Mr. Spinks with us in what we hope will be a long and fruitful relationship.

**A COURSE IN ORNITHOLOGY:**

We are very happy to announce that beginning in January a course in Ornithology will be offered at West Texas State University. To our knowledge, this is the first time such a course has been offered in this area. It will be taught by Dr. Charles Smith and will be held on Monday-Wednesday-Friday at 11:00 a.m., with an additional lab on Tuesday from 2-5:00 p.m. This is an opportunity for those of us more adept in field work to lay firmer foundations to our interest by submitting to a scientific discipline. Ten students must be enrolled to get the program going; so, if you can, sign up! More information concerning the course will be passed on as soon as received.

**WHY MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR?:**

Why certain birds are given certain names can be a subject of fascinating interest. Some names are so appropriate that one finds it difficult to imagine the bird called anything else; for example, the Bobwhite. This species more or less named itself and for the life of me I can't imagine what else one could call it. Other birds possess such outstanding physical characteristics that their namers had little trouble deciding what to call them - - the Long-billed Curlew, the Red-headed Woodpecker, and the Snowy Owl. But for those birds endowed with men's names the reasons they are called what they are is somewhat more obscure. A case in point is the McCown's Longspur. Who was McCown?

John P. McCown was a Captain in the U. S. Army. Around about 1851 while out hunting, and quite by accident, he "fired at a flock of Shore Larks and found this bird among the killed". Reading McCown's published description of the bird, George N. Lawrence announced, "It gives me pleasure to bestow upon this species the name of my friend Capt. J. P. McCown, U.S.A.", adding, "two specimens were obtained...on the high prairies of Western Texas."

One can only wonder why so numerous a species remained so long unmentioned and unnamed in the literature. Its breeding range extended from the Canadian prairie provinces down to eastern Colorado and to Oklahoma. The historical evidence indicates that it actually had been seen quite a few years earlier, namely, in June of 1804. Its viewer was Capt. Meriwether Lewis and he saw it along the Marias River near Loma, Choteau County, Montana. He was a mighty fatigued man when he saw it, however, and his written description of it suffered accordingly. Customarily he was quite precise in describing what he saw but in this instance he and six of his men had undergone a difficult day's march over an extensive "plains" where prickly pear tore his feet through his "Mockersons", where rain soaked, and a windstorm chilled them. They were in a hurry, they feared an Indian attack, and there were more bear, deer, elk, and "barking squireels" to shoot at than they knew what to do with. One is amazed that he still had enough energy to sit down that evening before a camp fire and write this about a small,

unknown bird:

"Also a small bird which in action resembles the lark; it is about the size of a large sparrow of a dark brown color with some white feathers in the tail; this bird or that which I take to be the male rises into the air about 60' and supporting itself in the air with a brisk motion of the wings sings very sweetly, has several shrill soft notes rather of the plaintive order which it frequently repeats and varies, after remaining stationary about a minute in his aerial station he descends obliquely occasionally pausing and accompanying his descension with a note something like twit twit twit; on the ground he is silent. Thirty or forty of these birds will be stationed in the air at a time in view. These larks as I shall call them add much to the gayety and cheerfulness of the scene. All those birds are now setting and laying their eggs in the plains; their little nests are to be seen in great numbers as we pass. there are meriads of small grasshoppers in these plains which no doubt furnish the principal aliment of this numerous progeny of the feathered creation."

While these journals were published in 1814 the version so published was the Biddle edition which is a paraphrase, or popular account, of the most important events of the Lewis & Clark expedition. It wasn't until 1893 that Elliott Coues learned of the whereabouts of the original manuscript which contained the scientific data and zoological material, including this account of the McCown's Longspur. By that time the usage of the name McCown had stuck and no attempt was made to change it to Lewis' Longspur. Thus an obscure captain in the U. S. Army became immortalized by having his name bestowed upon a species of bird.

**NEW MEMBER:**

We are happy to announce that Mrs. Lawrence Griffith has become a member of the TPAS. Her membership brings our total to 42.

**A NEW PARK:**

The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department has signed a sales agreement to buy a 347-acre site on the Paluxy River, Somervell County, which will become Dinosaur Tracks State Scenic Park. The site, 55 miles southwest of Ft. Worth and four miles west of Glen Rose, is the first to be acquired under the \$75 million park acquisition and development program. It was in this area that the first sauropod tracks in the world were recognized. In addition, two other types of tracks are found in the area which were made by the duck-billed dinosaurs and another by a smaller meat eating dinosaur. It is one of the few areas in the U. S. where the three kinds of tracks appear together.

**RAIN AND THE T.O.S.:**

That winter-wonderland for birds, the Rio Grande Valley, was the scene of the Fall meeting of the Texas Ornithological Society from Nov. 28 thru 30. Well over 100 TOSers, headquartered in Brownsville, and including Kenneth Seyffert, braved the rain and cool weather in search of the far southern birds typical of that area. From Friday noon through Saturday it rained almost incessantly. The temperature remained in

the 40's and 50's with a brisk north wind that made this journeyer wish he was back in the warm Panhandle. Despite adversities, however, he found such birds as Lichtenstein's Orioles, White-tailed Kites, Botteri's Sparrows, Black-bellied Tree Ducks, Green Jays, Chachalacas, Kiskadee Flycatchers, Yellow-throated Warblers, and Gull-billed Terns. He helped search for the Mexican Crow, unsuccessfully. This crow, new to the A. O. U. Check List of N.A. birds, was found recently within the city limits of Brownsville by John Arvin, one of the field trip leaders, who, instead of securing a specimen of the bird, took color slides of them instead, backing his find with the further observations of about 20 competent birders. One of the highlights of the meeting was Friday night's banquet in which Dr. Clarence Cottam, Director of the Wedler Wildlife Refuge, gave an informative and chilling talk on "Rare and Endangered Species."

**MORE ON THE N.A. NEST-RECORD CARD PROGRAM:**

An appreciative letter has been received from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology thanking us for the 1968 nest-record cards we sent them. They stated they were now able to go forward on their long projected plan of editing and analysis of the data they have been collecting. Initially they plan to edit and punch the cards of a dozen common species, namely the M. Dove, E. Phoebe, Barn and Tree Swallows, House Wren, Robin, E. Bluebird, Catbird, Yellow Warbler, Red-winged Blackbird, Cardinal, Amer. Goldfinch, and Song Sparrow. They believe that "for these species enough data should be available to give statistically significant information on long-term trends as well as information on important aspects of their breeding biology." They still want cards on as many species as possible but at the present time they are particularly interested in these twelve. They go on to say that even though only one visit is made to a specific nest that information is of value.

New cards will be mailed to us prior to the 1969 nesting season and all who can are asked to participate.

"And as we lengthen and elaborate the chain of technology that intervenes between us and the natural world, we forget that we become steadily more vulnerable to even the slightest failure in that chain.

"The time has long since passed when a citizen can function responsibly without a broad understanding of the living landscape of which he is inseparably a part."

...Paul B. Sears...

**CALENDAR:**

- Dec. 28 - Christmas Bird Count - Palo Duro Canyon State Park - 8:00 a.m.
- Jan. 20 - Annual Dinner - 6:30 p. m. - details and site to be announced.