

May, 1968

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

Vol. V, No. 5

## A GRAND FIELD TRIP:

It can be positively asserted that the 10 members of the Society who made the trip to the George Ross's farm in Roger Mills County, Okla. in search of the Lesser Prairie Chickens enjoyed one of the most successful and entertaining field trips we have had. Mr. & Mrs. I. D. Acord, Mr. & Mrs. Joe Deason, Mrs. Grady Fox, Mr. & Mrs. George Ross, Kenneth Seyffert, and Dr. & Mrs. George Waddill were present. Everyone arose at 4:00 a.m. sharp on Sunday morning, April 21, and were on the chicken's "booming" grounds by 5:15. This early rising was preceded by a still earlier awakening of most as two Great Horned Owls serenaded the group from a nearby locality. 12 male chickens were on the grounds when the group arrived and as the morning began to lighten their dim silhouettes could be faintly seen against the skyline as they jumped about in mock combat. The birds evidenced no fear of the 2 cars parked near them and as the sun rose the group found itself in ringside seats for the day's performance. Closely and at length the almost ritualized and stylized encounters were observed -- erect "ear" feathers and stamping feet, spread and jerking tails, with the brilliantly colored yellow-orange striped heads bowed and the bright pink air sacs on the throats expanded and deflated as the birds gave forth with their strange "warbling" or "gobbling" sounds. There was hardly a let up in the activity from the time the group arrived until they left two hours or more later. As the fantastic dances went on, other chickens on the high ground in the rear of the group could be heard and Grasshopper Sparrows and the mingled songs of Western and Eastern Meadowlarks were heard from nearby, while 6 Upland Plover called as they passed low overhead.

To name all the birds seen on the two day trip would be too lengthy but there are some worth noting. For example, sitting on the porch after the early morning trip the group watched 2 Pectoral Sandpipers feeding along the lake shore while 2 Yellow-crowned Night Herons, 2 Forster's Terns, 1 Franklin's Gull and many Rough-winged Swallows flew above the lake. All in all, over 90 species were recorded, including Eared Grebes in breeding plumage, many Pied-billed Grebes, Cinnamon Teal, Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and an Osprey. The latter was observed as it plummeted downward from a considerable height, struck the water, and emerged and flew off with a nice sized fish.

Stopping by Lake Marvin on the way back, Ken Seyffert reported a Horned Grebe and 50+ Eared Grebes in breeding plumage, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, a Peregrine Falcon, Turkeys, 2 Barred Owls, a Great-crested Flycatcher, a Warbling Vireo, and Connor Grackles.

The Society and the fortunate members who made the trip wish to thank Mr. & Mrs. Ross for inviting them to their farms and for the gracious hospitality they received while there. The Editor wishes, also, to thank the ladies for a most sumptuous and delicious turkey dinner and soul-satisfying breakfast.

## RESULTS OF A SCOUTING TRIP:

Preceding our field trip, Rena Ross and Peggy Acord scouted the area to pinpoint the

location of the prairie chickens. In doing so, they stopped by Lake Marvin on 4/10 to view its offerings and reported some very unusual birds, viz.: a Surf Scoter, a male Wood Duck, a Harlan's Hawk, a Double-crested Cormorant, a Horned Grebe, and 2 Barred Owls.

## WORD FROM THE "WANDERING TATTLER":

For those of you who have been wondering if the Galloways have given up birding we are happy to say, "Not so!" Postmarked Point Arena, Cal., April 12, a card has been received from Leo and Ruth reporting a lifer for them, the Pelagic Cormorant. Ostensibly the trip to the west coast was for the purpose of collecting specimens of the plant species Abronia, but Pelagic Cormorants and Black Brants along the way indicate eyes were searching the horizon as well as what was underfoot.

## PROGRAM FOR MAY MEETING:

There will be a showing of color slides on Wild Flowers by Peggy Acord at our May meeting. Slides and films always prove to be of particular interest to our members, so we urge everyone who can to be there. Also, as customary, this will be our last meeting until we reconvene in September. A bird walk and breakfast at the Palo Duro Club, courtesy of the Waddills, has been scheduled for July 14, at which time we can swap mid-year bird stories and observations as well as enjoy a most delightful locality.

The May meeting will be held in the new Garden Center building at 1400 Streit Drive. This is an added reason to be there to help inaugurate this society's presence in the new quarters.

## OUT OF TOWN GUESTS:

On 5/1 and 2 Tiny De Kay of Carmel, Calif. and Mary Glenn of Washington, D. C. were the guests of our lady birders who conducted them through the wonders of bird life at the Palo Duro Club and at Buffalo Lake. This was only just and fitting as Mrs. De Kay had shown them around the San Francisco area a few years back and Mrs. Glenn is the daughter-in-law of the Glenn Ranch Glens who permitted us to hold a field trip on their land earlier this year.

## INTEGRATED AVOCETS:

On 5/6 Ken Seyffert was startled by the presence of a black American Avocet at Buffalo Lake who was in the company of a normally plumaged one. He couldn't get very close to it but looking through a scope he could see that the neck, head, wings, and legs were of the usual colors, while the rest of its body was black or very dark brown. The next day Peggy Acord and Rena Ross were able to scrutinize it much more closely and observed that the breast and belly feathers appeared to be somewhat matted. This would indicate that the bird's body had crude oil on it, which was something of a relief as it could otherwise have been the beginning of a chocolate-colored race of Avocets.

## THE CEDAR WAXWING:

"Drunk on sour cherries, the harlequin of birds

Lurches through the branches and lips  
in bleared content,  
While a Temperance Union Catbird shrieks  
her words  
In a scathing, scolding lecture he's too  
happy to resent."

....William Matchett

#### WARBLER OASIS:

"The view from the highway between Seminole and Andrews presents the eye with flat, mesquite-covered land, reddened as if sun-burned for lack of shade. Stationed furtively in the mesquite are bobbing, black iron grasshoppers pumping oil from this dry uncultivated soil.

It came as a shock to see rising on the horizon a cluster of tall, green giants midst this vast midget growth. We needed to reach Odessa, but could not pass by without investigating these trees about 1½ miles east of highway 82.

Old Florey is an oasis. It is an area of about five acres covered with Chinese Elms uniformly spaced and in rows. They had not been topped (as most are in this area) but pruned from below. As a result they were all about 35' tall. The grass beneath them was not thick but provided adequate cover. It had been watered that morning.

A historical marker in front of one of several scattered buildings told the storey of the Old Florey oil field and of the camp later established in 1930 by the Humble Oil Co. In 1958 the camp was closed, the homes moved off, and the land given to Andrews County, Texas, for a park.

But it was not only an oasis for people, it was an oasis for Warblers. From the time of our arrival at 2:00 p.m. that April 26th, until we reluctantly left at 3:00 p.m. we observed 25-30 Audubon Warblers, 10-15 Wilson's Warblers, and 3 Northern Waterthrushes. Warblers were everywhere!

The Audubon Warblers and the black-capped Wilson's were busy feeding on the abundant crop of gnats this warm moist day had stirred into life. At first we thought we observed Myrtle Warblers but realized we were seeing the female Audubon Warbler who looks similar except for her yellow throat.

The Northern Waterthrush was walking and teetering along the edge of a puddle on the park road, suddenly flying to a tree branch, then returning to the water. Nearby a lone Killdeer stood unmoved and unmoving. White-crowned, Rufous-crowned, and English Sparrows and Mourning Doves, however, seemed in continual movement.

To complete this unexpected encounter with a final surprise, we saw two gray squirrels feeding under a distant picnic table.

As we drove away, we were grateful that people had planted this grove and that people still cared for it."

....Charles and Sharon Pedersen

#### THE T.O.S. GOES TO THE GUADALUPES:

"The spring meeting of the Texas Ornithological Society was held this year in the area of White City, New Mexico, near Carlsbad Caverns. Birding in the desert scrub and mountains around White City was excellent. We hit the peak of spring migration and many summer residents were already in.

Several field trips were offered both

Saturday and Sunday (May 4 & 5) under the capable leadership of the Midland birders. A brief business meeting Saturday evening was followed by a private tour of the Caverns. Disappointingly enough, the bat flight had not materialized for several nights, much to Bruce's disgust (and mine, too).

The field trip most interesting to me was to McKittrick Canyon, the 6,000 acre area donated to the National Park system by Mr. Wallace Pratt. An adjoining 70,000 acres has been offered to that agency for \$1,000,000 but so far the offer has not been accepted. Access to these areas is by keys provided by the Ranger at Carlsbad Caverns. We lined up our cars behind John Galley and Walter Arxon, two geologists who are both fine birders. We drove back into Texas and stopped before a gate. To our right were the beautiful Guadalupe Mountains over which the perpetual mystic blue haze hovered. "Take food and water for the day. Do not leave your car between the gate and the parking area - the ranchers whose land we cross are hostile. Be sure and be at the gate by 1:30 p.m. for the half day group or by 5:00 p.m. for the all day group. Any laggards will be locked in for the night!" I would have stayed locked in for a month. This is a beautiful canyon. My companions and I didn't take the all day tour, nor did we see the upper canyons. We spent a morning of pure bliss not over two miles from the car. We walked up the road, meandered into the scrub on the sides and boulder-hopped up the creek.

White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows cut through the blue haze above us. A host of desert birds surrounded us, and I became entranced with Madrone trees.

The single track of roadway which goes as far as the fork leading to the upper canyons is to be the only improvement. This mountain formation is the longest exposed fossil reef in the world. The ranger told us it is to be used as a research area - not to be 'improved'. I do hope he is right.

The birding was the most exciting I've ever had, except for Rockport in the spring. Margaret Roddy had 25 lifers, Ada Henderson 10, Norma Stillwell who couldn't walk with us missed the Gray Vireo which would have been the single lifer for her. I had three lifers. It was a glorious morning. I hope the TPAS can make the trip. I'd go back in a minute - just to wash up that canyon called McKittrick."

....Peggy Acord

#### WHAT SPRING HAS THIS FAR BROUGHT US:

While the migration this spring has not been quite as fantastic as it was last year, still many rare and unusual birds have come our way. We have only had to work harder for them. The following are some of the more exciting ones that were reported:

- 4/14: One Long-eared Owl at Buffalo Lake (by Ken Seyffert). Both Thelma Fox & Rena Ross reported seeing them in town (dated not given).
- 4/29: A Snow Goose, 2 Brewer's Sparrows, a Green Heron, a Prairie Falcon, and a Solitary Sandpiper at BL (by KS).
- 5/1 :A Virginia's Warbler in the Palo Duro Canyon (by KS).
- 5/2 :A Yellow-breasted Chat, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a Solitary Vireo,

- : a singing Tennessee Warbler (new for the Potter-Randall counties check list), a Summer Tanager, and a Green Heron, at BL (by KS).
- 5/4: Two singing Tennessee Warblers, a Summer Tanager, a Winter Wren, a Willet and a Pectoral Sandpiper, at BL (by KS).
- 5/1: A Common Loon in breeding plumage and a Black-bellied Plover at BL (by Peggy Acord, Esther Waddill & Thelma Fox). An Osprey, a Cooper's Hawk, 3 Hairy Woodpeckers, a Lazuli Bunting at the Palo Duro Club (by our lady birders).
- 5/2: A Magnolia Warbler at Memorial Cemetary (by Peggy Acord).
- 5/4: A Gora and a Black-throated Green Warbler at Memorial Cemetary by Rena Ross.
- 5/6: A Common Gallinule, a Townsend's Warbler a Scarlet Tanager, a Hooded Merganser, 2 Western Tanagers, a Little Blue Heron, a Northern Waterthrush, and a Black-throated Grey Warbler at BL (by KS). A Poor Will remained all afternoon in the backyard of his home in the city.
- 5/7: 3 Worm-eating Warblers, 2 Blackpoll Warblers, a Chestnut-sided Warbler (male) a Summer Tanager, a Townsend's Warbler, and a Common Gallinule at BL (by Rena Ross, Esther Waddill, Vera Deason, and Peggy Acord. A Scrub Jay in the Palo Duro Canyon by KS.
- 5/8: A Red-eyed Vireo at the Palo Duro Club (by KS and Esther Waddill). A Grasshopper Sparrow near the PDC by Peggy Acord.
- 5/9: A Catbird, a Veery, a Northern Waterthrush, a Red-eyed Vireo, 7 Black-headed Grosbeaks at Llano & Memorial Cemeteries (by Peggy Acord, Rena Ross, Esther Waddill).
- 5/10: A Blackpoll Warbler, a Black & White Warbler at Llano Cemetary (by KS, Rena Ross & Esther Waddill). A Kentucky Warbler at Llano Cemetary (by Esther Waddill). A Veery at Memorial Cemetary (by KS). A Golden-winged Warbler (male), a Pine Warbler (female), a Blackburnian Warbler (male), a Ovenbird, a Summer Tanager (male), 2 Poor Wills, a Blackpoll Warbler, a Winter Wren, and a Least Flycatcher at BL (by KS).

In addition, Esther Waddill reported Purple Finches in her yard, and what is most unusual, a Black-crested Titmouse. This is the first instance in which this species has been reported seen outside of the Palo Duro Canyon and no doubt represents a first for Potter County. Jim Jokerst reports 2 female and 1 male Black-headed Grosbeaks in his yard on 5/9 and states that a Hairy Woodpecker is still coming into his feeder.

#### AT LONG LAST:

Birders in this area make a practice of lumping all the empidonax flycatchers they see under the single heading of "Empidonax, species". It is well nigh impossible to break them down into the various species while in the field as their distinguishing characteristics blend into one another preventing positive identification. Each has a distinguishing song, however, but since they are seldom heard singing until they reach their nesting grounds farther north, we in the Panhandle cannot pin down their identities. Once in a while a particularly ebullient individual cannot wait until it

reaches its nesting territory and it is at this time that a lucky birder can claim he has made an identification. On 5/10 this happened to Ken Seyffert. While at Buffalo Lake he listened to one as it repeatedly gave "a sharply snapped dry 'che-bek'; very emphatic", and he concluded it was a Least Flycatcher.

#### DID YOU KNOW?:

Pigmented feathers are always more resistant to wear than unpigmented ones. With this fact in mind it is not surprising that the wing-tip primaries of many otherwise white birds are heavily pigmented; for example, storks, gulls, flamingoes, herons, and pelicans.

Pigments absorb radiant heat, which at times is useful to the bird. Pigmented feathers stop the harmful ultra-violet rays of the sun, preventing sunburn of the bird's delicate skin. The Fairy Tern has thin translucent white feathers, but a black skin; whereas its close relative the Noddy Tern, has dark, opaque feathers, but a light colored skin.

The Woodcock and other longbilled shorebirds have the ability of raising only the tips of their upper mandibles. This adaptation permits the Woodcock to seize an earthworm deep in the ground without expending the energy needed to open its entire beak and push aside the soil for the whole depth which the beak penetrates.

#### THE YELLOWTHROAT:

"I hear a voice that seems to say,  
Now near at hand, now far away,  
'Witchery-witchery-witchery.'

There's magic in that small bird's note--  
See, there he flits -- the Yellowthroat,  
A living sunbeam, tipped with wings,  
A spark of light that sings and sings,  
'Witchery-witchery-witchery.'"

....Van Dyke

#### CALENDAR:

- May 18: Bird walk at Llano Cemetery at 8:30 a.m., led by the Pedersens.  
May 20: Monthly society meeting.  
July 14: Breakfast and bird walk at the Palo Duro Club.  
Sept. 16: Monthly society meeting.

#### BIG DAY:

Big Day 1968 had all the ingredients to produce the worst one in our 4 year history. It had been preceded by three days of rain and it dawned cloudy and the temperature 46 degrees F. By 8 o'clock it was raining steadily and did not let up until noon. Nevertheless, 5 birders made the count (Peggy Acord, Esther Waddill, Kathryn Whipple, Thelma Fox, and Ken Seyffert) and by nightfall they had tallied 117 species. This compares to the 114 seen in 1965, 108 in 1966, and 145 in 1967. Two of the outstanding birds they found were the Red-breasted Grosbeak in Llano Cemetary, and the Blackburnian Warbler at Buffalo Lake. On the next page is a complete list of all the species seen.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN ON BIG DAY, May 12, 1968, IN POTTER AND RANDALL COUNTIES, TEXAS:

Green Heron  
 Black-crowned Night Heron  
 Mallard  
 Green-winged Teal  
 Blue-winged Teal  
 Shoveler  
 Ruddy Duck  
 Turkey Vulture  
 Mississippi Kite  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk  
 Red-tailed Hawk  
 Swainson's Hawk  
 Golden Eagle  
 Marsh Hawk  
 Sparrow Hawk  
 Bobwhite  
 Scaled Quail  
 Ring-necked Pheasant  
 Turkey  
 American Coot  
 Semi-palmated Plover  
 Snowy Plover  
 Killdeer  
 Spotted Sandpiper  
 Pectoral Sandpiper  
 Baird's Sandpiper  
 Least Sandpiper  
 Stilt Sandpiper  
 Semi-palmated Sandpiper  
 American Avocet  
 Wilson's Phalarope  
 Ring-billed Gull  
 Franklin's Gull  
 Black Tern  
 Mourning Dove  
 Great Horned Owl  
 Burrowing Owl  
 Poor-will  
 Chimney Swift  
 Belted Kingfisher  
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker  
 Red-headed Woodpecker  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
 Eastern Kingbird  
 Western Kingbird  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher  
 Say's Phoebe  
 Empidonax  
 Western Wood Pewee  
 Olive-sided Flycatcher  
 Horned Lark  
 Tree Swallow  
 Bank Swallow  
 Rough-winged Swallow  
 Barn Swallow  
 Cliff Swallow  
 Blue Jay  
 Common Crow  
 Black-crested Titmouse  
 Common Bushtit  
 House Wren  
 Bewick's Wren  
 Canyon Wren  
 Rock Wren  
 Mockingbird  
 Brown Thrasher  
 Robin  
 Hermit Thrush  
 Swainson's Thrush  
 Veery  
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
 Cedar Waxwing

Loggerhead Shrike  
 Starling  
 Orange-crowned Warbler  
 Nashville Warbler  
 Yellow Warbler  
 Myrtle Warbler  
 Audubon's Warbler  
 Blackburnian Warbler  
 Ovenbird  
 MacGillivray's Warbler  
 Yellow-throat  
 Wilson's Warbler  
 American Redstart  
 House Sparrow  
 Western Meadowlark  
 Red-winged Blackbird  
 Orchard Oriole  
 Bullock's Oriole  
 Boat-tailed Grackle  
 Brown-headed Cowbird  
 Summer Tanager  
 Cardinal  
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
 Black-headed Grosbeak  
 Blue Grosbeak  
 Lazuli Bunting  
 Painted Bunting  
 House Finch  
 Pine Siskin  
 American Goldfinch  
 Lesser Goldfinch  
 Green-tailed Towhee  
 Rufous-sided Towhee  
 Lark Bunting  
 Grasshopper Sparrow  
 Lark Sparrow  
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow  
 Cassin's Sparrow  
 Chipping Sparrow  
 Clay-colored Sparrow  
 White-crowned Sparrow  
 Lincoln's Sparrow  
 Song Sparrow