

## THE RESPONSIBILITY TO WRITE:

The recognized need to write our congressman urging him to vote for or against pending legislation that we consider of vital importance is too often overcome by a contrary feeling of futility and ineffectuality, the feeling of "It-will-take-someone-with-a-bigger-stick-than-mine". The following editorial from the Sierra Club Bulletin is as pertinent as any I know concerning the quandry:

"Congressional attitudes toward gun control legislation changed profoundly in June, then changed again in July. The causes of these turnabouts in attitude are interesting, whatever one may think of the gun control issue itself. Immediately after the murder of Senator Kennedy shocked a nation that was still recovering from the shock of Dr. King's murder, commentators said that the prospects for gun control legislation were poor. But a wave of pro-control letters and telegrams washed up on congressmen's desks, and almost overnight, the prospects for such legislation were said to be good. This worried the opponents on controls, and a second (predominantly anti-) wave of correspondence reach congressmen. The prospect that had so swiftly shifted from 'poor' to 'good' just as quickly shifted again to 'doubtful.' This proves two things, it seems to us: that congressmen are sensitive and responsive to public opinion when it is clearly expressed, and that it does pay to write public officials when you feel strongly about an issue. Can you blame your congressman for voting 'wrong' if you never let him know how you would like him to vote? Does your congressman know how you feel about a Redwood National Park, or about the Nort Cascades?"

## SOME COMMENTS ON THIS SUMMER'S NESTING BIRDS:

Acting on a suggestion made by Carroll Littlefield, Ken Seyffert made several visits to a certain area of the Palo Duro Canyon during the spring and summer seasons in the hopes of finding a colony of nesting Scrub Jays. These jays have been seen by Carroll at this particular location during the last three Christmas Bird Counts and he was of the opinion they probably nested there. Individual birds were seen by KS during late May and early June, and then on July 20 seven were observed. No nests were found but three of these birds appeared and behaved as though they were young of the year. This area of nesting is at the base of the eastern wall of the canyon upstream from the riding stables. More birds than seven may have been around as some remained on the upper level overlooking the canyon and did not descend, departing eastward instead. This area needs to be kept under closer observation in the future in the hopes of finding actual nests as the Scrub Jay is not reported often by members and then only during the winter months.

For those with the time, patience, and inclination for it much valuable field work could be done at Buffalo Lake in gathering data on the courtship and nesting behavior of the Snowy Plover. As reported in a recent issue of the Audubon Magazine by Mr. Pettingill, there is alot we don't know

about this species and we of this organization have the opportunity, more or less in our back yards, to fill in some of the gaps. When the water level is down, the "flats" at the extreme southwestern end of the lake are usually occupied by these birds. By July 21 of this year 18 were observed with some of them engaged in frantic distraction display. Unfortunately, no amount of looking revealed a single nest.

Once again a pair of Barn Swallows nested at Buffalo Lake. In the same culvert as was used last year, but in a new nest built on the opposite wall, five young were fledged and away by the third week in August. Two broods of five each were successfully raised last year and may have been again this year as it was late in July before the culvert was ever checked.

The Dickcissels remained at Buffalo Lake all summer and presumably nested. Three males were observed singing in mid-July, and females and young were seen as late as early September.

## A GIFT FROM A MEMBER:

The next time you are in the Garden Center building go by the secretary's office and look at the lovely picture on her wall. This was painted and given to the Center by Mrs. Tol Settle and is as nice a gift as one could wish.

## THE TEXAS PARKS &amp; WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT AND CONSERVATION:

The Department's recent news release states that "with the annual whitewing dove count in the lower Rio Grande Valley a little more than three-quarters complete, wildlife biologists...are predicting a valley population of more than 600,000 birds for the hunt which begins at 1 p.m., Sept. 1. Department biologists are predicting this year's harvest well below last year's record kill... Biologists have reported a heavy August hunting season in Mexico."

White-wing Doves were not the only things that were shot down in last year's hunt. Witness the following excerpts from an article in the Newsletter of the San Antonio Audubon Society for November, 1967: "On Sept. 6, 1967, Luhe McConnell, for 10 years Park Superintendent of Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, was dismissed from his job and asked to vacate his residence by the next afternoon. The reason for this sudden move was given as interfering with the White-wing dove hunt. This 'interference' consisted of leaving the park and requesting that hunters not shoot toward his home where his wife and several small children had taken refuge from the rain of pellets. Some 100 hunters were within 30 feet of his front yard and from 750 to 1000 were within 300 feet of the park proper. This action cost him his job.

"The actual 'shoot', as Luhe called it, cost not only an enormous number of white-wings but 4 Harris' hawks, 1 White-fronted Dove, 5 Red-bellied Pigeons, and 1 Ringed Kingfisher which was shot simply because it was a bird. One woman shot at white-wings just to watch them fall into the lake.

"Mr. McConnell was an avid conservationist and a great friend to all birders. His love

of the Valley helped to make Bentsen one of the best birding areas in Texas..."

I have an idea that the White-winged Dove exists for some other reason than to be shot by white hunters. I have another idea that there are an enormous number of people in the world that would rather see a live bird than a dead one. I have a darned good idea that the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department can ill afford to lose such a man as Mr. Luhe McConnell.

#### FOR FUTURE HISTORIANS:

In response to a request made by the Adult Education Director of the Mary E. Bivins Memorial Library, photostatic copies of The Prairie Horned Lark have been placed in their files for the benefit of those people in the future who may be curious as to what we were up to.

#### BIRD NOTES:

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON:** roosting in the back yard of the Grady Fox's during late August. Thelma says a single bird was seen daily for a week or so until the 26th, at which time it was joined by another.

**EMPIDONAX FLYCATCHERS:** 8 seen at Buffalo Lake on Aug. 3 within a hundred yard stretch of woodland (KS).

**WILLET:** A crippled bird on Tradewinds playa for a week or so during late July (Peggy Acord, KS). Whether or not it survived the drying up of the playa is unknown.

**CANADA GOOSE:** 7 weathered the hazards of being near people and survived the summer at Buffalo Lake.

**ROBIN:** In late summer 18 flocked at the Grady Fox's with 12 of them immatures. This species on the increase as a summer resident in Amarillo.

**BLACK-BELLIED FLOWER:** one at Buffalo Lake on 8/11 (KS); several on a playa south of town 8/30 (Peggy Acord).

**NORTHERN PHALAROPE:** 5 at Buffalo Lake on 8/25 (KS); several on a playa south of town 8/30 and 9/3 (Peggy Acord); 1 at Buffalo Lake on 9/7 (KS).

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER:** 2 on the settling ponds at Elysian Fields on 8/31, 1 at Buffalo Lake 9/1, 1 at Tradewinds playa 9/8 (KS).

**PIED-BILLED GREBE:** 2 adults and 1 young at Elysian Fields on 8/31 (KS).

**A GATHERING OF SHOREBIRDS:** following the downpours of rain that fell during late August filling the long dry playas, large congregations of a wide variety of shorebirds were seen, beginning primarily 8/30. Peggy Acord and KS reported Pectoral Sandpipers in numbers seldom seen (40+ feeding in the grass along one one-hundred yard stretch of pasture land at one playa), Least, Semi-palmated and Western Sandpipers in abundance, Black-bellied Plover, Snowy and Semi-palmated Plover, Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Phalaropes, American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Curlew, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Stilt Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Baird's Sandpipers, Upland Plover and Killdeers all over the place, and all of these easily seen from the roads near playas or at Buffalo Lake. The most exciting find was 3 BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPERS seen by Ken Seyffert on 8/31 as they fed in the short grass prairie land near a playa south of town. They were observed from 30-40 yards distance through a scope. As he watched them, two engaged in a "display" performance. One

suddenly raised its wings vertically until their tips almost met above its head and with the flat of the wing facing forward. Stretching its body vertically also, it seemed as though it was walking on tip toes. It then walked with short, jerky steps and in an aggressive manner toward a nearby bird who stood its ground and stretched its body upward in a like manner. The second bird, however, kept its wings folded. The two birds had their breast feathers puffed out and were facing each other so closely they appeared to touch. The bird with the upraised wings then began to circle the other, still taking short and jerky steps, and the second bird kept facing him. How long this would have continued is not known for in circling they ran into some Pectoral Sandpipers who quickly flew upward, disrupting the show. The Buff-breasted Sandpipers resumed their feeding as though nothing had taken place. This is the first record of this species in the Potter-Randall counties area. (KS)

**KNOT:** one at Buffalo Lake on 9/1 (through a scope); one and possibly three near a playa south of town by Peggy Acord and Rena Ross. 9/3 KS was quite gratified to hear the second report of the Knot come in as the Knot has only been seen here once before.

**SANDERLING:** one at Buffalo Lake on 9/2 (KS).

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER:** flew into a window glass on the back porch of the Joe Deason's, knocking itself out. This during the first week of September.

**CAROLINA WREN:** two or three heard singing repeatedly near the Ross's home.

**CEDAR WAXWING:** one at the Acord's home during last week of August.

**VERDIN:** one in the Palo Duro Canyon on 9/1 (KS).

**COMMON TERN:** one on Tradewind's playa on 9/3 seen by Peggy Acord and Rena Ross. It's been a long time since one of these has been seen around here.

**WESTERN WOOD PEWEE:** all reports give unusually large numbers seen. Observed as early as 8/3 (KS).

"There is a bird who by his coat,  
And by the hoarseness of his note,  
Might be supposed a crow;  
A great frequenter of the church,  
Where bishop-like he finds a perch,  
and dormitory too.

.....  
He sees that this great roundabout,  
The world, with all its motley rout,  
Church, army, physic, law,  
Its customs and its businesses,  
Is no concern at all of his,  
And says - what says he? - 'Caw'!

Thrice happy bird! I too have seen  
Much of the vanities of men;  
And sick of having seen 'em,  
Would cheerfully these limbs resign  
For such a pair of wings as thine,  
And such a head between 'em."

....William Cowper

#### CALENDAR:

- Sept. 16 : Monthly society meeting at the Garden Center, 7:30 p.m.
- October : Field trip to the Tom Green ranch north of Vega. Date to be announced.
- Nov. 18 : Monthly society meeting.