

GIFT TO THE GARDEN CENTER:

Upon recommendation of the Board and unanimous endorsement by the members present at our February meeting, a check for \$25 was presented to the Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs for use toward the installation of a public address system in the Center. This is a necessary addition to the Center that must be installed before October so that the Audubon Screen Tours can be shown. Another Garden Center member has contributed the projector and screen and it now remains for this last addition to be made. All contributions, large or small, will be gratefully received and should be made directly to the Council. Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs, Inc. is a non-profit organization and gifts to the Amarillo Garden Center are tax deductible under a ruling of the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS:

The following members were appointed to serve on this year's committees:

Membership Committee:

- Sharon Pedersen, Chairman
- Mary Griffith
- Mrs. W. E. Harrison

Conservation Committee:

- Jim Jokerst, Chairman
- Armon Mays
- Tol Settle

Field Trip Committee:

- Peggy Acord, Chairman
- Esther Waddill
- Rena Ross

Publicity Committee:

- Vera Deason, Chairman
- Charles Pedersen
- Lucile Fiedler

Refreshments Committee - Thelma Fox

In addition, Thelma Fox was appointed to continue representing the TPAS at the meetings of the Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs.

IT'S OFFICIAL: A RECORD 217:

San Diego's record-smashing 217 species in the Christmas bird count is now official. That compares with 203 for the runner-up, Cocoa, Fla., putting San Diego ahead for the second year, in what has become a traditional rivalry. It bears repeating that there aren't necessarily more birds now -- just more and better bird watchers. The rest of the top ten:

- Tomales Bay, Calif.....188
- Freeport, Texas.....179
- Coot Bay, Fla.....170
- Monterey Peninsula, Calif...168
- Crystal Springs, Calif.....165
- Santa Barbara, Calif.....165
- Drake's Bay, Calif.....164
- West Palm Beach, Fla.....164

(Leader's Conservation Guide)

TEXAS WATER PLAN:

Free copies of the Texas Water Plan can be obtained by writing to the Texas Water Development Board, P. O. Box 12386, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas 78711.

NESTING CARDS:

As reported earlier, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology is now able to begin the process

of transferring all their nesting data onto IBM cards for computer analysis. This has made it necessary for them to have a new format of nest-record cards printed. These are now available and we have been requested to place our order for the coming year. Please let our Recorder or President know the number of cards you need so that our order can be sent in promptly.

BIRD NOTES:

This is the time of year when birders strain intently to pick up the first thin trickle of returning migrants. Few ducks and geese are left on Buffalo Lake; they have either started back north or are scattered about on the prairie playas. Our Elysian Fields now hold several thousand ducks, mostly Pintails, Widgeon, Gadwalls, Green-winged Teals, and Mallards, with a few Redheads, Lesser Scaup, Canvasbacks, Ruddy Ducks, and Common Mergansers. There is a large flock (or is it skein?) of Canada Geese and among them 50 or more Snow Geese. The longspurs have been scarce all winter but on 3/4 Rena Ross and Peggy Acord reported seeing several thousand along the back roads and also a Lark Bunting feeding among a flock of House Sparrows. Thelma Fox, Esther Waddill, Mary Griffith, Peggy Acord, Rena Ross, and Margarette Hollar went birding at Lake Tanglewood on 3/7 and saw the year's first Say's Phoebe. They reported large flocks of singing juncos along with Western and Mountain Bluebirds, and on the water, Coots and a Pied-billed Grebe. Peggy Acord reported seeing a flock of 25 Sandhill Cranes. This bird is one of the very first to head back north and a newspaper report of about a month ago stated a flock of 300 had already arrived in Nebraska. Following the cold front that moved through our area on the night of 3/7-8 in which the temperature dropped to 12 degrees F., Kenneth Seyffert saw approximately 150 cranes flying due south at a rapid speed. Perhaps some of the earlier migrants have been turned back.

HOUSE BILL NO. 368:

This is a bill introduced in the Texas State legislature by David Finney and referred to the Parks and Wildlife Committee. In summary, it provides restrictions on government approval of programs or projects requiring the use or taking of public land devoted to public use, "as a park, recreation area, scientific area, wildlife refuge, or historic site" without first holding a public hearing to determine "that there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use or taking of such land" and if "such program or project includes all reasonable planning to minimize harm to such land." Details are spelled out as to the degree of notice that must be given the public prior to the hearing. This piece of legislation is aimed at correcting such abuse of the disposition of public lands without public hearings as took place when private interests were granted permission to make private use of a part of Meridian State Park.

Area members of the Parks and Wildlife Committee are Hudson Moyer of Amarillo and Malouf Abraham of Canadian. Letters, telegrams, phone calls to your representatives

are needed. Details of the bill can be obtained from the Editor.

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE:

Though it is only March and the Mississippi Kite does not return to this part of Texas until late April or early May, I think it is never too early to say something about it. I don't propose to write anything like a life history of it, just a few observations that have struck me along the way.

One of the most accessible places in which you can observe the Mississippi Kite closely is in the Palo Duro Canyon State Park. There are generally 3 or 4 nesting pairs in the area of the first water crossing and about the same number downstream from the loop at the end of the park road. Of course, there are scattered pairs all up and down the stream. They nest along Palo Duro Creek, from the Palo Duro Club on down, and an increasing number are reported each year from within the city limits of Amarillo. The more heavily wooded areas of town with open ground around them, such as the parks and the Amarillo Club areas, seem to attract them most. The Boys' Ranch area along the Canadian River is another place where they concentrate. Strictly speaking, the Kite is not classified as a colonial nesting bird; however, where one nest is found you can usually find several others in its near vicinity. In the PDC their nests are generally within a hundred yards of one another.

I suppose the Mississippi Kite is one of the cleanest birds existing. Come to think of it, however, I've never seen one bathe. Maybe this is because it doesn't need to very often. Outside of incubating its eggs and brooding its young it has very little contact with anything that would be contaminating. Some hawks, for example the Peregrine, bathe every day, but then they are fresh meat eaters and get rather bloody while consuming their prey. Not so our Kite. It is almost entirely an insect eater, catching them with its feet while it is flying; so, outside of snipping off a wing or two and maybe a head it can swallow the whole thing in a single gulp and stay clean. All of this is speculation but in hours of watching them I've yet to see one feed on anything but large insects. I did see one flying once with a lizard or very small snake dangling in its talons; so, I suppose that if this bird ate the bloody animal it took a bath afterwards. I have yet to see one on the ground!

There are other facts to support the claim of the Kite's cleanliness. Some birds, particularly woodpeckers, live in filth when raising their young. I've looked into a number of Kite's nest, however, and they have always been as clean as a whistle. About every day they will place a fresh spray of leaves on their nest, why I don't know. Those I have seen have always been cottonwood leaves and perhaps this is on purpose. Cottonwood leaves have a certain astringency about them that may act as a mite repellent. Mr. A. S. Jackson of Canadian, retired wildlife biologist, has handled many of these birds and vouches for their cleanliness. He cinched it with me when he said the odor the bird gave off was of lavender.

This is a very gentle appearing and accommodating bird, in comparison with other hawks, at least, but there are times when it can scare the living daylights out of you. This is so when you walk too near its nest when the eggs or young are still in it. Long before you get near the nest, one or both adults will have been screaming at you to clear out. Not being a really ferocious sound, however, it seldom deters anything that I have been able to see. Surely it works, though, or the species wouldn't have retained that particular way of screaming over eons of time. Being screamed at by so many things during the week, both animate and inanimate, one looks forward to a clear, cool summer's morning when a Mississippi Kite will scream at one in its distinctively sane and pleasurable way.

As I said before, though, it can scare you out of a year's growth. I've been going about my bird-minding business, one eye on that screaming Kite, when a loud "woosh" a few inches above my head has set my heart pounding and my stomach muscles contracting. Picking up the latter and hurriedly replacing it, I've usually recovered in time to at least meet the next attack head on. Not always, though, because if the nesting territories are contiguous you can have four highly dissatisfied birds after you at one time. There is definitely a streak of the fiendish imp about this bird, as belied by its red eyes. After harassing you persistently while you are on or near its nesting territory it will finally cease when you have passed beyond its sphere of influence, and perch itself in the top of a tree. If you think the game is over, though, you are wrong! Time and again I've had one come at me once again, when I had my back turned and had forgotten all about it, and I've gotten to the point where I walk sideways so that I can always keep it within the purview of my interest.

This bird can surely put two and two together and get four: it has intelligence, and I'll tell you why. There is a 30-acre tract of land at the first water crossing in the PDC that I have set aside as a study area for both the breeding birds in the spring, and for the wintering birds. I spend a couple of hours there each week. This area includes a camping ground that is heavily used in the spring and summer -- lots of people milling around day and night, kids yelling at all times. There is one pair of Kites that have nested the last few years in a tree in the big middle of this chaos. They have done quite well and have usually brought off at least one fledgling each year. The intelligent thing about this pair is that they pay no attention to anyone but me. The minute I step onto the study area they are immediately aware of me and begin screaming at me or chasing me. Up to that time they have been going about their business and ignoring all the human hubbub below. They know I'm aware of them in a way the rest of the people are not. I'm real sorry they have made a malignant presence out of me but they do have the intelligence to make distinctions in people and what people are up to. I don't quite understand it, though, because I've never done anything to them except stare at them.

The Mississippi Kite in flight is a thing of beauty and a joy forever. This is par-

ticularly so when it is feeding. The pursuit and capture of its insect prey is so swift and deft the act can hardly be seen and one is unaware that it has made the seizure with its talons until one sees it bend its head down to its forward thrust foot and begin feeding. Someday, when I have the time and the circumstances are favorable, I'm going to concentrate on these birds while they are feeding and find out if they grab their prey with both feet or with one foot only and, if the latter, if they are predominately right-footed or left-footed.

You can get into some might silly arguments when you start discussing which bird is the best flier. Everyone has his own viewpoint on the matter and I suppose it will remain that way until some objective criteria is formulated whereby one can rate flight. In the meantime, if a bird can get from where it is to where it wants to go by means of flight then I suppose it can fly well enough. The Mississippi Kite, however, makes the passage with considerably more grace and ease than most.

T.O.S. OFFICERS:

At the last election held by the Texas Ornithological Society two TPAS members were elected to office. Peggy Acord was chosen to serve as Treasurer and Kenneth Seyffert as Region I Director. The principal objectives of this organization of some 800 members is to "promote the discovery and dissemination of knowledge of birds; to encourage specifically the observation, study, and conservation of birds in Texas; to encourage the formation of local groups of ornithologists; to stimulate fellowship among ornithologists of Texas and the Southwest by an Annual Meeting, by field trips, and by other suitable means; and to establish a library and such wildlife sanctuaries as the Society's means permit."

The yearly cost for Active Membership is \$3.00 and for Sustaining Membership \$5.00. Remember, after March 31 application for membership must be made through Mrs. I. D. Acord at 1911 Cherry, Amarillo.

BEWARE THOSE EMPTY "OIL" DRUMS:

The Tennessee Valley Authority has found something new to add to the sources of lethal pollution: some so-called empty "oil" drums used to float docks and boat-houses along a lake shore.

During five days in July more than half a million dead fish piled up on a 13-mile stretch of shoreline along Boone Lake in upper east Tennessee.

TVA's health and safety people had to do considerable detective work to come up with the poison source. Finally they found it: This area of the lake contains hundreds of metal drums once used as floats but now abandoned and drifting in the lake. They may be called "oil" drums but, in this case, two-thirds of them contained residues of a mercury compound used to control slime growth in industrial processes. The drums may have seemed "empty" but just one of those salvaged contained enough poison to kill fish even when diluted with a quarter of a million gallons of water.

ON BIRD SONG:

"Bird voices can utter as many as four different notes simultaneously, and produce a rapid sequence of separate sounds faster than any human ear can follow. By use of tape recorders it is now possible to play back bird calls slowed to a quarter or an eighth of their normal speed, and to marvel at the performance. A winter wren sings 130 notes in a song lasting just over seven seconds, repeating this performance endlessly with almost no variations. The wood thrush provides innovations in its three-part song, and ranges widely and rapidly through pitches from 1,640 to 8,900 vibrations per second. One individual wood thrush, from which fifty-five songs were recorded, did not repeat itself a single time. The ever-fresh melody combined two variants in the first part of the song, five versions of the second part, and nine of the third part. Some of the notes were slurred smoothly over nearly an octave within a two-hundredth of a second."

...The Senses of Animals & Men" - the
Milnes

CALENDAR:

March 17: Monthly society meeting.
Topic: "Fossils of the Panhandle"
Speaker: Dr. Gerald Schultz,
Associate Professor,
Geology Dept., WTSU.

April 21: Monthly society meeting.
Topic: "Birds and their Parasites".
Speaker: Dr. Darl Brooks,
Associate Professor,
Biology Dept., WTSU.

May 19: Monthly society meeting.
Topic: Wild Flowers of the
Rocky Mountains".
Speaker: Dr. John Denko,
Pathologist.