

April, 1969

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

Vol. VI, No. 4

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING:

There will be a meeting of the Board of Directors fifteen minutes prior to our regularly scheduled meeting on April 21. Therefore, be at the Garden Center at 7:15 instead of 7:30.

PROGRAM FOR APRIL:

Dr. Derl Brooks of WTSU will present a program on Birds and their Parasites at our April meeting. Dr. Brooks was born in Littlefield, Texas. He received his B.S. and M.S. degrees from Texas Tech, and his Ph.D from Iowa State University in 1965.

Dr. Brooks is Associate Professor of Biology at West Texas State University. His special field of interest is in Acarology, the study of mites and ticks. He has published a paper, together with R. W. Strandtmann, on The Nasal Mites of Some West Texas Flycatchers.

"So, naturalists observe, a flea
Hath smaller fleas that on him prey;
And these have smaller still to bite 'em;
And so proceed ad infinitum."

...Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

CHILDRESS COUNTY REPORT:

It is always interesting to receive reports from members who live out of town. Don Gage of Childress wrote recently of a field trip he made down the South Pease River in search of wild turkeys. While he didn't say whether or not he found any, he and the three youngsters who were with him did come upon a Whistling Swan on a pond about 12 miles south of town.

Don has also reported on the return of the Purple Martins to Childress. Usually they arrive in the second week of March but this year they were delayed by a snowstorm. As far as can be determined the first nesting in Childress took place four years ago when the first martin house was erected. The interest and desire in having martins around has caught on and now a dozen or more houses have martin boxes in their yards.

BIG DAY:

Our annual "Big Day" count has been set for Saturday, May 10. This count is similar to our Christmas count in that it is a dawn to dusk search for as many species as can be found, along with a recording of the numbers seen. It differs in that the count includes all of Potter and Randall counties whereas our Christmas count is confined to an area 15 miles in diameter. The date for the "Big Day" is selected on what we hope will be the day that produces the largest variety of birds at the height of the Spring migration. All those who plan on participating should contact our Recorder, Peggy Acord, so that we can get an idea of how many people will be available to cover what areas. If you cannot get out in the field your observations from within the city can be of great value as the parks, cemeteries, and back yards are highly productive during this season. Please jot down your findings and phone them in to Peggy. This day of concentrated effort always produces species of great rarity or unusual occurrence. For example, we have

found the only instance of an Acorn Woodpecker for our area and have recorded the Scarlet Tanager, Black Swift, Blackburnian Warbler, and Black-necked Stilt. Our high count was 143 different species seen in one day in 1967. Last year we had 117 despite a morning of continuous rain. I would like to encourage members who live out of town to conduct their own "Big Day" count and to send the results in to the Editor for subsequent inclusion in this newsletter.

"The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived but when the last individual of a race of living things breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can breathe again."
...William Beebe

HOUSE BILL 745:

There is now a House Bill 745, introduced by R. H. "Dick" Cory in the Texas State House of Representatives, which would protect the food supply and habitat of the Whooping Cranes in Texas. It would set up a Texas Marine Sanctuary immediately adjacent to the Aransas Wildlife Refuge.

Our information is that without this bill, the shell dredgers will move across the shallow flats and completely ruin the habitat both by deepening the waters and by covering the shallows with a screen of black impervious organic sediment which will kill off the food supply of the small fishes and crabs, which are in turn the food supply of the cranes.

The future of the Whooping Cranes may depend upon House Bill 745 passing the the Texas State Legislature in the next few weeks. One member of the Parks and Wildlife Committee you can write is Representative Hudson Moyer of Amarillo.

BIRD NOTES:

As Winter passed into Spring the tempo of birding increased. The following observations are noteworthy:

Eagles - Ken Seyffert reported 11 at Buffalo Lake on 3/9 (? Balds and 2 Golden).

Snow Goose - 400+ at Buffalo Lake on 3/9 by same observer. This is an unusually large concentration for us. There were 2 Blue Geese in with them.

Long-eared Owl - 3 at Buffalo Lake on 3/16 by KS.

Northern Waterthrush - 2 along Palo Duro Creek near his home by Jim Jokerst on 3/12. This is an unusually early date.

Northern Shrike - an immature at Buffalo Lake on 3/18 by Thelma Fox and Peggy Acord. Up until 4 or 5 years ago this species was seldom if ever reported from this area. Now a few are seen every winter.

Scrub Jay - reported by Jim Jokerst in mid-March as near his place. This is a new sight location and it is hoped they will remain in the area and nest. No nest has been reported for this species from our area.

Brant - one bird reported as seen northwest of Hereford in mid-March by two Fish & Wildlife personnel. These were competent observers who are familiar with the species.

Whistling Swan - an immature feeding in a field at Elysian Fields (Southwest Amarillo Sewage Disposal Plant) by Peggy Acord, Thelma

Fox, Rena Ross, and Rena's niece, Glenda. Date reported but piece of paper on which written down lost! March ???

White Pelican - eleven at Buffalo Lake on 3/30 by KS.

Chukar - one in neighborhood of the Tol Settles at 1212 W. 11th on 4/1.

Black-throated Grey Warbler - one male at Lake Tanglewood on 4/10 by Peggy Acord.

ROCKPORT, TEXAS IN EARLY APRIL:

There is a special attraction in birding on the coast in the spring. Birds are abundant and so available. From our lodgings on Fulton Beach to the small town of Rockport it is only a couple of miles. In that short space, while dodging traffic on the narrow shore road one may see three species of gulls, 4 or 5 terns, Long-billed Curlews in the grass on the shoulder and a variety of ducks, grebes and coots on the lagoon. Every dock has a few Willets trotting up and down or sunning on the planks; every pole has a drying cormorant atop it; herons wade in the shallows and at the edge skulks a Clapper Rail and chatters a Long-billed Marsh Wren. Overhead is a continuous flight of incoming swallows and cruising Laughing Gulls. Boat-tailed Grackles feed everywhere. Savannah Sparrows hop on the bits of sandy beach where a variety of shorebirds feed.

All around town are shallows or ponds containing herons and egrets. On this trip we found Great Blue and Louisiana Herons abundant, Snowy, Common and Cattle Egrets abundant, while there are always the enchanting Reddish Egrets and a few Little Blues. Several flocks of White-faced Ibis flew over and two flocks of beautiful Roseate Spoonbills. The channel markers, nautical signs and duck blinds along the intercoastal waterways were topped with nesting Great Blue Herons.

A trip on the motor vessel "Whooping Crane" up the Intercoastal canal along the Aransas Refuge was a delight. Herons, shorebirds and various ducks and gulls and terns were seen in a continuous parade. The vessel was nosed into a shell bank where an oystercatcher sat on the nest under the watchful eye of her mate. Large flocks of Black Skimmers and avocets lined the bars and beaches. 31 Whooping Cranes were seen feeding and once doing a little dancing. In another two weeks all will be gone north. Gordon Hansen, formerly at Buffalo Lake, now at Aransas Refuge, says Washington is impressed by the exact records kept on each bird. Hansen also told me that the hunting of Sandhill Cranes has caused a population explosion in a long static population. Deer are so thick on the refuge that they pose a problem. Alligators long persecuted off the refuge are making a fine comeback on the refuge.

On a bright but cool Easter morning I explored the flats around Copano Bay; the shorebirds were increasing after a little norther - almost all species found. A Seaside Sparrow singing in the short vegetation at the edge of the bay was a good one.

A trip to Mustang and Padre Islands produced more hippies than new birds but the people were fascinating in their own way.

The roads from San Angelo down were lined with a variety of beautiful wild flowers as were the coastal prairies and roadsides.

Only a few passerines were in - you have to be there at just the right time to see a

spectacular show - but tiny Inca Doves coo mournfully from the live oaks and migrating Catbirds and Lincoln's Sparrows rested and fed in the brush.

Of course, there is ever increasing clearing, dredging and filling, but still, we had just one thought - how soon can we go back!

....Peggy Acord....

FLOWERS OF TEXAS:

Free copies of the Texas Highway Department's "Flowers of Texas" can be obtained from their Travel and Information Center on east I-40. This beautiful brochure contains pictures of 56 species of flowers to be found in Texas.

Another work that is a valuable aid in identification is "Texas Flowers in Natural Colors" by Eula Whitehouse. This can be purchased from the Dallas Audubon Society at 5421 Drane Drive, Dallas, Texas 75209 for \$5.25 a copy.

SOME THOUGHTS ON POLLUTION FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES:

What this country needs is a beer can that either we or the bacteria can eat.

There are more than 20 tons of DDT 'on the hoof' in this country, 'walking around' stored within the fatty tissues of 200 million Americans.

Dr. John L. Buckley of the U. S. Office of Science & Technology points out that about one-half of the pesticides that are sprayed end up in areas for which they were not intended and affect plants and animals that were not the original target.

The difficulty is that we cannot put price tags on pollution. How much is it worth to look through non-smarting eyes and see the San Gabriel Mountains or Santa Catalina Island from downtown Los Angeles? How much is a redwood tree worth? And how much can we charge pesticide users and manufacturers for a dead bald eagle - particularly if it were the last bald eagle on earth?

This is our hangup. In this country, we are accustomed to solve problems by economic considerations. Yet, pollution problems cannot be solved on economic terms.

Up to now, science and technology have been used to increase wealth. We now have to use science and technology to preserve our environment.

With the global environment rapidly deteriorating, it sounds hollow for the scientist to insist that his only mission is to pursue truth in the cloistered laboratory, or for the engineer to proclaim his development of ever more improved means to ever more unimproved ends.

Rachel Carson was wrong. It is not the spring that is silent. It is the scientists and engineers - the one element in our society that really knows what is happening in the pollution of our environment. The silence from our universities has been deafening.

FIELD TRIP:

A field trip to Buffalo Lake has been set for Saturday morning, April 26th at 8:30. We will go down to the far end of the lake where most of the trees are and look for

warblers, and then walk from there to the mud flats to pick up the shorebirds. This date should be near enough to peak migration time to allow us to see a number of interesting birds.

BREEDING LAND BIRDS IN FLORIDA:

One usually thinks of Florida as a paradise of birds, and in many respects it is. Recent studies, however, have brought out the "depauperate" nature of breeding land birds in peninsular Florida and have set off speculations as to why this is so. Of the 12 breeding censuses taken in peninsular Florida, the average number of species recorded was 9 per 100 acres for an average number of pairs per 100 acres of 117. This compares to averages of 23 and 32-, respectively, on the Coastal Plain north of Florida in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, while in the north-central portion of the eastern U. S. the averages are 20 to 30 species with densities of 200 to 300 pairs per 100 acres. The two studies thus far made in the Palo Duro Canyon show an average of 15 species with a density of 186 pairs.

A twofold explanation is suggested for this relative scarcity, (1) many of the species breeding in eastern North America are not adapted to the climate of peninsular Florida, and (2) those tropical species that could colonize the peninsula have been deterred by physiographic barriers. It is a fact that the southern breeding limits of many northeastern species lie in north-central Florida and there appears to be no physiographic feature to prevent them from ranging farther south. At least four birds, the Sparrow Hawk, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Summer Tanager, which once bred in the pine lands of southern Florida, no longer do so, while breeding records of the Hairy Woodpecker are scarce. For the White-breasted Nuthatch records are extremely rare for the entire state. As a reason, it is suggested that "since the height of the Wisconsin glaciation the climate of peninsular Florida has become progressively more unfavorable for northern species and that they represent a receding element in the avifauna."

Florida is seemingly open to the normal north-south movements of birds but what kept the Starling out so long? Released in NYC in the early 1890s they did not nest on the peninsula until the late 1930s, at which time they were breeding as far west as Kansas. By the mid-1950s Starlings had bred in Arizona, New Mexico and Washington while in peninsular Florida they first bred in Tampa in 1942, at Kissimmee in 1946, at Miami in 1956, and at Cocoa in 1961. The density of pairs in residential St. Petersburg is 2 to 6 per 100 acres while in urban Illinois it is 60 to 90 pairs. Thus the Starlings made it across the continental mountain and plains barriers earlier and more successfully than they did southward into Florida.

Only seven natural colonizers from the West Indies now breed in Florida, and the invasions of two of these, the Cuban Nighthawk and the West Indian race of the Yellow Warbler, have occurred recently. Along with these two, the Florida ranges of the other 3 colonizers, the Smooth-billed Ani, Gray Kingbird, and Black-whiskered Vireo, are expanding. The only north-eastern land bird that seems to be adapting to the hot Florida

summers is the Red-eyed Vireo. In 1919 to 1942 it was found to be "a regular summer visitor", but only "an occasional nester", while in 1967 it was a "common breeder".

A TRIP TO NORTHERN NEW MEXICO:

During the first week of April, Thelma Fox and Mary Griffith spent two days in the Santa Fe/Los Alamos area birding in the company of Patricia Snyder (Mrs. Carl E.). Those of you who subscribe to the Audubon Field Notes know Mrs. Snyder as the knowledgeable author-ess of the Southwest Region reports. The ladies reported seeing the Gray, Pinyon, Scrub and Steller's Jays, all in one day, along with the Clark's Nutcracker. Although they could not find a live Flammulated Owl, they were able to observe a frozen specimen Mrs. Snyder had preserved in her deep freeze. On their way back they discovered a pair of Vermilion Flycatchers at Conchas Dam.

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM TOURS:

Mark your calendar now for these dates: Oct. 26, Nov. 30, 1969, and Jan. 4, Feb. 8, and April 5, 1970. All are on Sunday afternoons in the Garden Center Auditorium. We have a big promotional job facing us and we all need to be thinking of ways we can aid the Garden Center in making a success of this undertaking. We will discuss this at our next meeting. In the meantime, begin talking about the films to all your acquaintances. Spread the word!

CALENDAR:

April 21: Monthly society meeting at the Garden Center - 7:30 p.m.
Topic: "Birds and their Parasites".
Speaker: Dr. Derl Brooks, Associate Professor, Biology Dept., WTSU.

April 26: Field trip to Buffalo Lake. Meet at the bait shop at Umbarger at 8:30 a.m.

May 10: Big Day count.

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