

November, 1969

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

Vol. VI, No. 9

## PROGRAM FOR NOVEMBER:

Mr. Paul Ferguson, refuge manager of the Buffalo Lake Wildlife Refuge, will be our speaker at the November meeting. We look forward to hearing Mr. Ferguson speak about one of our favorite birding areas: if it weren't for the refuge he and his fellow workers manage, these pages would not be so replete with reports of a rich and varied bird life.

## AUDUBON FILMS:

The second in the series of Audubon Wildlife Films will be shown on Nov. 30 when Robert W. Davison brings us his film on "The Vanishing Sea". Our first program as a resounding success with a standing room only crowd that gave us the outlook for a successful season. It was a touch-and-go situation for awhile, however, as we wondered it we would have a film to show and a commentator to present it. Our lecturer, Mr. Fran William Hall, was due in Amarillo Sunday morning at 10:15 on a flite from Dallas. Sunday morning was abominable, with a heavy ground fog that prevented all incoming flites from landing. Mr. Hall called from Lubbock saying he was grounded and where, it turned out, he rented a car, arriving at the Garden Center 45 minutes before show time, a hamburger in one hand and a carton of milk in the other. By this time it was raining and a strong wind was blowing from the east. As he had to be in Little Rock, Ark. the following evening, Mr. Hall left immediately after the program and the last we saw of him was as he vanished into the fog, following the Pedersens to the airport.

## THREE WISE MEN:

THREE WISE MEN are nearing completion by TWO NICE LADIES. Although our society did not elect to participate in the annual Festival of Trees sponsored by the Amarillo Council of Garden Clubs, Thelma Fox and Peggy Acord volunteered to make three life-size Wise Men as our contribution to the effort, for which we owe them thanks. These objects will be bid on along with the Christmas trees and will ultimately grace the homes of three Amarillo families.

## A JOURNEY NORTH:

On a long trip to unfamiliar areas, Pettinelli's "Guide to Bird Finding", "Bird Watcher's America", park naturalists and wildlife refuge managers are all helpful, but if you can find a local birder your trip is much more successful and rewarding. Mary Griffith and I were fortunate on our trip to Canada in June to find people in two cities who could take time to show us the surrounding countryside.

Miss Esther Serr, Rapid City, S. D. invited us to stop to see her. She arranged a morning trip for us with Mr. J. B. Rose, Mrs. Bonnie Green and her daughter Kelley. We found many birds that we could not have found alone. The Black Hills are beautiful and the area around Rapid City very productive. It is a nice place to visit any time.

In Calgary Mary's son, Laurence Griffith, Mr. Gary McKay, recorder for the Calgary Bird Club, and Cleve Wershler, ornithology

student, took us to wonderful birding areas. We enjoyed the prairies with grass much greener and taller than our grass and filled with pot holes of all sizes. An island in the Bon River that is a bird sanctuary was very interesting. We visited a national forest and a biological station where some of the men are studying the habits of the Spruce and Blue Grouse.

We will be very interested in seeing the official reports of this year's waterfowl nesting season. To a first-time visitor to Saskatchewan and Alberta Provinces, the nesting places seemed to be abundant. There were ponds and lakes everywhere and ducks, grebes and phalaropes on all of them. Red-winged, Yellow-headed and Brewers Blackbirds were nesting in the reeds. Ruddy Ducks were displaying. The air was filled with gulls and swallows. Our survey of one pot hole of approximately three acres showed: 4 Mallard hens with 41 young ranging in size from downy young to half grown; 6 pair of Blue-winged Teals on the banks; on the water, 4 pairs of Canvasbacks, 2 male Shovelers and 2 pairs of Lesser Scaup. Mary and I stopped at so many ponds and lakes that it is surprising that we ever reached Calgary.

The Richardson's Ground Squirrel was one of my greatest surprises. They are almost as abundant in some areas of Alberta as English Sparrows are here. They sit erect in the fields and along the highway right-of-ways and dart across the roads so unexpectedly that hundreds are killed by cars. There is no lack of food for hawks and owls during the summer months in this area.

One beautiful immature Snowy Owl stayed south last summer and on June 13th he was hunting on the Blood Indian Reservation south of Calgary. We were able to watch him as long as we wished and very happy to add him to our life lists.

...Thelma Fox

## NESTING CARDS:

Those of you who have kept nesting records please turn in your card as soon as possible so that they can be mailed to Cornell Univ.

## "TOMORROW'S ENVIRONMENT---UGH!":

This is the title of a program to be presented on Wednesday, Nov. 19 at 8:00 p.m. in the Student Union Building Ballroom at WTSU, Canyon, Texas, by Dr. Dan E. Willard of the Dept. of Biology at the Univ. of Texas. The public is invited without charge and the program is sponsored by the Campus Christian Community. Dr. Willard is an outspoken and effective leader in the cause of conservation in Texas and was one of the prime movers in the defeat of the Texas Water Plan. He represents the new breed of scientists who believe they must play a vital role in preserving and repairing our environment. Dr. Willard brings with his beliefs a sound background in teaching and field research.

## CHRISTMAS COUNT:

The date of our annual Christmas Bird Count will be set at our Nov. meeting, so please be there to help us decide when it will be.

## BIRO NOTES:

October weather was turbulent with an early freeze occurring on the night of the 11th-12th and with an unusual number of rainy days in which the prevailing winds were from the east. This is uncharacteristic of October days in the Panhandle which are usually calm, mild, and wonderful to be active in. This weather difference accounts, perhaps, for some of the unusual sightings of eastern bird species. One should be cautious, however, in attributing unusual bird movements to unusual local weather conditions: a wider picture of weather patterns is needed before advancing such speculations. Ken Seyffert is of the opinion, notwithstanding, that the violent weather prevailing on Oct. 11 & 12 had a direct bearing on the presence of a Sabine's Gull at Buffalo Lake on the 12th. The Sabine's is an Arctic species, circumpolar in distribution. It breeds from the Arctic coast south to Bristol Bay, Alaska, and migrates mainly off the Pacific Coast, with a few occurring in the Atlantic. To advance such a sighting on top of the previously reported one of a Parasitic Jaeger at the same locality is about as much as a person can bear. One's veracity is now teetering on a razor's edge and a life's reputation is on the verge of shambles; nevertheless, here's my reasons for thinking it was a Sabine's Gull.

To begin with, I sat down beside it and examined it closely and leisurely. I had already tagged it as an immature Sabine's and this close look confirmed it. I first spotted the bird from a distance of a hundred yards or more as I approached the far end on the lake where the mud flats are. It was on the ground and facing into the wind. This wind was something else again, blowing directly over the lake at 30+ m.p.h. The temperature when I had left the house about an hour earlier was 32 degrees F, necessitating wearing a heavy coat with hood up, insulated underwear, warm boots, and gloves. Without gloves the fingers got numb quickly. I set up my zoom scope and zeroed in at 30x and quickly decided I did not know what kind of gull it was. There was a large mixed flock of Ring-bills and Franklin's on the other side of the lake but there were no gulls near this bird. Suddenly, it arose in a short, hovering flight and as suddenly resettled to earth. My heart skipped a beat as the vivid black and white wing pattern was displayed. It was outstanding, like a Willet's wing pattern is outstanding. This occasional short hovering flight continued for some time with the bird always returning to the point from whence it had started. Dissatisfied with the looks I had gotten of its tail, I decided to walk toward the bird slowly in the hopes I could get near enough so that when it flew again I could get a clear look. I could have saved myself the trouble, however, as the bird displayed no fear of me and remained standing in the shallow water 10 feet away. As cold as it was I would have been much more comfortable moving about vigorously but it isn't every day one gets to make the acquaintance of a Sabine's Gull, so I didn't complain. Still, I wanted a close-up look of it flying! I clapped my hands -- nothing doing. I gave up and squatted down at the water's edge and examined it, reading Peterson as I did so. I soon began to worry as this bird neither had a black bill with a yellow tip nor black legs and feet as Peterson said it should. It wasn't until I go home later and did some reading that I discovered

the immature bird has a uniformly black bill with pink legs and feet, as this bird indubitably did. My patience was finally rewarded as the bird rose and hovered over the water's edge making feeding motions into the vegetation, displaying to my eyes its forked tail edged in black. This was all I needed for my own satisfaction. Later, as I walked away, the bird tucked its head under its wings and went to sleep.

Oct. 12 - Snowy Egret near Canyon by Charles and Sharon Pedersen.

Oct. 19 - Double-crested Cormorant (11) at Buffalo Lake by KS.

Oct. 20 - Black-throated Green Warbler (1) and Carolina Wren (1) in the Palo Duro Canyon by KS.

Oct. 24 - Common Grackles (50+) in back yard KS. Red-bellied Woodpecker (1), Bonapartes Gull (1), Long-eared Owl (1), and White-fronted Goose (1) at Buffalo Lake by KS. There is one previous record of the Red-bellied Woodpecker in this area reported from the Canyon City Club area 15 years or so ago.

Oct. 25 - Winter Wren (1), Grey-headed Junco (3), Western Bluebird (3), Double-crested Cormorant (7) at Buffalo Lake by KS.

Nov. 2 - Common Crow (1) and Eastern Bluebird (2) at Buffalo Lake by KS. Neither of these species are unusual for this area but they are seldom if ever seen at Buffalo.

Nov. 5 - Long-eared Owl (1) at Buffalo Lake by Peggy Acord and Mary Griffith.

Nov. 8 - Rose-breasted Grosbeak (1) and White-winged Junco (1) in the Palo Duro Canyon by KS.

The White-winged Junco is a first for this area. It was seen a mile or so upstream from the horse stables in the Park. It was a light grey bird that would be taken for a Slate-colored Junco except for the double row of white wing bars and the wide area of white on the tail.

In addition to the above sightings, other reports have come in but the exact dates and localities of these sightings are not known. In mid or late October Esther Waddill reported Red Crossbills in her yard while Thelma Fox has had Red-breasted Nuthatches coming in to her feeders. The Pedersens reported 2 White Pelicans in the Canyon area and during the first week of Nov. Sharon reported a flock of Snow Geese, which is early.

"Environmental ugliness and the rape of nature can be forgiven when they result from poverty, but not when they occur in the midst of plenty and indeed are produced by wealth. The neglect of human problems by the scientific establishment might be justified if it were due to lack of resources or of methods of approach, but cannot be forgiven in a society which can always find enough money to deal with the issues that concern selfish interests."...Rene Dubos

## CALENDAR:

Nov. 17: Monthly society meeting at the Garden Center - 7:30 p.m.

Topic - Buffalo Lake Wildlife Refuge  
Speaker - Paul Ferguson.

Nov. 19: Lecture at the Student Union Bldg. at WTSU - 8:00 p.m.

Topic "Tomorrow's Environment--Ugh!"  
Speaker - Dr. Dan Willard

Nov. 30: Audubon Wildlife Film at the Garden Center - 2:30 pm.

Topic - "The Vanishing Sea"  
Speaker - Robert W. Davison.

Dec.: Annual Christmas Bird Count.