

February, 1970

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

Vol. VII, No. 2

PROGRAM FOR FEBRUARY:

Our program for February promises to be one of the most unusual ones we have had. Stan Taft will tell us of his work for the Peace Corps in Peru setting up a Vicuna Refuge. Stan assures us this will be a straight forward program without political overtones.

ANNUAL DINNER:

The annual dinner of the TPAS was held on Monday night, Jan. 19, with some 50 members and guests attending. A delicious covered-dish meal was served by the ladies, the deliciousness attested to by the number of those who were observed going back for seconds.

The following officers were elected for the coming year:

President - Rev. Charles Pedersen
 Vice-President - Mr. Jim Jokerst
 Secretary - Mrs. Alvin Fiedler
 Treasurer - Mr. Armon Mays
 Recorder - Mrs. I. D. Acord
 Board Members - Mrs. George Ross
 Mr. Kenneth Seyffert

Since the Vice-President and Secretary are automatically member of the Board, Mrs. Grady Fox was elected to fill one of the positions and a quorum of the Board meeting on Jan. 29 appointed Mrs. Joe Deason to fill the other. At the same time, Mr. Bob Rinehart was appointed to fill the Board position vacated by Mr. Tolliver Settle who had offered his resignation. The officers and members extend to Toll their sincere thanks and appreciation for the years of service he has given our Society and hope he will continue with his active interest.

Peggy Acord presented the program for the evening and a dandy it was. Showing color slides of the flora and fauna of the Texas Panhandle, and narrated in her own words, Peggy demonstrated how effective such a slide program can be in getting across the conservation message to the smaller and more intimate gathering.

The retiring President wishes to extend to all the members his appreciation and gratitude for their wonderful cooperation and assistance in guiding the Society to a more active role in conservation. In the past two years we have doubled our membership, thus laying the basis for an ever more active and vital organization.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN:

The cause of preserving our earth as a habitable and beautiful environment is no longer the preoccupation of a peculiar few who belong to conservation societies. It has a national priority.

However, the living habits and value-preferences of people are not necessarily changed upon the enactment of laws. The responsibility for continuing education in awareness of nature's capacity to renew the human spirit, as well as the necessity to understand its role as our life-sustainer, is a local task.

We of the Texas Panhandle Chapter must take on a greater public commitment to enlist both young and old in the cause of preserving our earth. We are no longer "the peculiar people" and we need to cast off that self-consciousness which prevents

us from vigorously recruiting for the Audubon cause.

Why not bring another person with you to our February 16th meeting? We need their wisdom and they need the corporate wisdom of Audubon. Let's double our attendance next Monday evening!

....Charles Pedersen

NEW MEMBERS:

We welcome the following new members to the TPAS:

Mr. & Mrs. T. A. Hollar
 7513 Lamount - Amarillo

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Rinehart
 Route 2, Box 114 - Canyon

Mrs. Rita Kenney
 301 Rancho - Amarillo

Mrs. Louise Johnson Thomas
 2400 Polk - Amarillo

Mr. & Mrs. Norman D. Ecker
 1608 S. Fannin - Amarillo

A WINTER'S TALE:

One of the great attractions of birding is the element of surprise.

On Jan. 20 five of us went to the Palo Duro Canyon for the day. The sun was bright but the wind was quite cool and the warmth of the sun through the car windows was pleasant. Birding had been nice but not very exciting and we were starting home feeling content after our outing. As we came to the park road at the hill just above the first water crossing two birds twinkled across in front of us at treetop level (and with mesquite that's not very high). The birds were dark-colored, sabre-winged and sleek-bodied -- everyone yelled "Swifts!!!" and jumped out into the nearest bush - stickers and all. We all saw the two birds - Black Swifts - though we were almost unbelieving. We excitedly began to speculate as the birds twinkled on down the canyon, why two birds would be in the Texas Panhandle in January when they should be in the Peruvian Andes. And what such insect eaters could possibly find to sustain life. Somewhat breathlessly we got back in the car to discuss the surprising field observation all the way home. The "we" of this group were Vera Deason, Rena Ross, Esther Waddill, Thelma Fox and Peggy Acord.

While Esther Waddill and Rena Ross make plans to meet in Houston to bird, Thelma Fox and Mary Griffith and Thelma's mother, Mrs. Braswell, went to Muleshoe. Muleshoe has lots of water and lots of ducks. Cinnamon Teal are always a joy to see. Mary was thrilled with her first Sandhill Cranes and Thelma particularly enjoyed some Chestnut-collared Longspurs in bright spring plumage. If you haven't been down to Muleshoe you should make a fall or winter trip down there to see the cranes. Special bird of the month ---a Crissal's Thrasher.

....Peggy Acord

SEEN ANY BLACKBIRDS LATELY?

The blackbirds of the country have now been taken notice of officially. The Bureau of

Sport Fisheries & Wildlife of the Department of the Interior sent census forms to various individuals around the country and requested they count blackbirds for them any time between Dec. 20 and Jan. 31. These counts were to be taken of the birds coming in to their roosts for the purpose of obtaining as complete a survey as possible. Ken Seyffert made a count of a roost at Buffalo Lake and found a total of 4,300 birds. This roost consisted of 71% Red-wings, 19% Starlings, 5% Brewers, and 5% Brown-headed Cowbirds. Leo Galloway made a survey of a roost at Lake Vincent in Ellis County, Oklahoma (near Arnett), and counted 50,000 birds, viz.; 84% Red-wings, 8% Starlings, 4% Brewers, and 4% cowbirds. We have a report of one other count made in this area. At the Gene Howe Wildlife Management Area near Canadian, Vernon Morse found 3,000,000 birds, all black, consisting of 90% Starlings and 10% Red-wings. The only comfort I have been able to draw from all this is that I only had to count 4300 birds and not 3 million!

THE SIERRA CLUB COMES TO THE PANHANDLE:

An informational and organizational meeting was held in Canyon on the night of Feb. 3 for the purpose of explaining what the Sierra Club is and to form a local chapter. Approximately 70 people attended. This is heartening and is testimony to the latent interest in conservation that exists in this area that only needs an awakening. A Family Outing is planned for Saturday, Feb. 14, in which the group will hike from the loop at the end of the road in Palo Duro Canyon to Tubb Springs, and return. Meet at the loop at 10 and plan on returning at 3. Bring your lunch, your family, your binoculars, but leave your pets at home, and enjoy an outing in the beautiful Palo Duro.

The next scheduled meeting of the Sierra Club will be on March 5 when Dick Gritman, Ass't. Manager of the Buffalo Lake Wildlife Refuge will present a program on "The Existing and Proposed Wilderness Areas in the Southwest".

YOU AND THE NEWSLETTER:

This message is addressed to those of you who are not members of the Audubon Society but who receive a copy of The Prairie Horned Lark on a complimentary basis. For one reason or another word has reached us that you are interested in the aims and purposes of the Society and for this reason we are happy to send you a copy in the hope that you will join us. Maybe we are wrong and, if so, would you please let us know? We are a small group operating on a tight budget, as who isn't these days; we need to make our pennies count. So, if you would, drop the Editor a line or let one of our members know if you want us to continue carrying your name on our mailing list. Thank you.

BIRD NOTES:

The one female Pine Grosbeak reported in the last newsletter by Thelma Fox as frequenting her bird feeder has now been increased to four having been joined by another female and two males, one adult and the other immature. Still another was sighted by KS in the Palo Duro Canyon on 1/25, and this one was vigorously singing! The most incredible sighting of this or any other year was that of the two Black Swifts seen in the Palo Duro on 1/20 and as recounted by Peggy Acord

in another column. Peggy, Rena Ross, Thelma Fox, Esther Waddill, and Vera Deason are responsible for this observation as well as that of a Baird's Sparrow seen on the same day. Why the two swifts were not in Peru where they were supposed to be is beyond my powers of explanation, unless it was because of a late start in leaving their summering grounds. Any bird reports after that one are anti-climactic, but still, some interesting ones were made. Lucile Fiedler reported a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in her yard on New Year's Day. Peggy Acord and Esther Waddill saw a Blue Goose and a Whistling Swan at Buffalo Lake on 1/11 and Burrowing Owls just a few miles south of there. Refuge personnel say there are five known Whistling Swans in our area. Charles and Sharon Pedersen reported 13 eagles at Buffalo Lake on 1/24: 7 Balds, 5 Goldens, and 1 "Big Bird". For the last two week-ends KS reports seeing 6 Western Bluebirds hanging out around the first water crossing in the Palo Duro. He also reported seeing that rare bird of this winter, the Townsend's Solitaire. All observers agree there are an unusual number of Golden-crowned Kinglets this winter as well as high numbers of Cedar Waxwings - there are undoubtedly several thousand of the latter around town. KS counted approximately 550 Ring-billed Gulls at Buffalo Lake on 1/25. For the record it should be noted that 3 Fulvous Tree Ducks were seen at Buffalo Lake last July by refuge personnel. Dick Gritman was able to get a picture of them which was good enough to identify them as tree ducks.

Heretofore we have only reported the extraordinary sightings of rare birds in our own area. In doing so one is left with the impression that only we are gifted with sharp eyesight, that it is only in the Texas Panhandle that the unusual species can be seen, that it is only ourselves that need to go back to our bird guides and begin over again. Believe-you-me, the rest of the State is mixed up, too, as witness the following:

- 1 Little Gull in Southern Travis Count 1/20.
- 1 Hooded Merganser, 3 Mountain Bluebirds, 1 Brown Towhee in Western Travis County 1/28.
- 1 Am. Woodcock in Austin in early January.
- 1 Oldsquaw in Dallas County 11/25.
- 1 Common Gallinule at Midland 1/20.
- 30 Red Crossbills (1/15) and 1 Phainopepla (1/25) in Big Spring.
- 1 Groove-billed Ani in Lubbock 10/17-18-19. Also seen at Midland.
- 2 Male Yellowthroats at Midland 1/17.

"GOOD" AND "BAD" ANIMALS:

(Ed. note: There has been a tongue-in-cheek feud between two members of the Midland Naturalists over the merits or demerits of the Loggerhead Shrike. This discussion elicited a response by one of the readers of that group's excellent newsletter, The Phalarope. Mr. Kenneth I. Lange, Naturalist, Devil's Lake State Park, Baraboo, Wisc. sent in the following which I thought should be shared by all our members:

"In regard to the shrike being a "murderer" and having the "lust to kill", I think the readers of The Phalarope would be interested in the following, which is taken from an article on otters by Joseph A. Davis, Jr., in ANIMAL KINGDOM, December, 1968: "The predatory act is not a single one, but at least four separate, sequential activities; searching, seizing, killing, and eating. Recent studies of cats by the German ethologist

Paul Leyhausen indicate quantitatively that a cat becomes satiated with these acts in reverse order. Given an unlimited supply of live mice, a cat performs all four acts as it would in the wild. Eventually its hunger is satisfied, and it ceases to eat the mice it has killed. After a while the killing urge seems to be extinguished, and the cat merely stalks and captures its mice (the seemingly cruel act of toying with its prey, not cruelty at all, but obedience to an inborn command). Later the cat only stalks the mice, and still later ignores them completely. Rarely does a cat at large find so many mice that it would follow this pattern of stop-by-step satiation, but the relative durability of the early stages of predatory activity appear to be a mechanism to keep a cat hunting even when it has missed the first few mice it tried to catch.

The same pattern can be found in otters. It explains the occasional "wanton" and wholesale killing an otter may perform in a fish hatchery, where prey is so numerous that hunger is quickly satisfied. It also explains why raccoons and claw-less otters "wash" food and toys. Their first predatory act of searching takes place in shallow water. Fed consistently on land, as they are in captivity, the animals' searching and seizing drives are frustrated, but persist as part of the behavioral repertoire that must somehow be performed. Accordingly the animals take their "prey" (food or toy) to water, "lose" it by letting go of it, and then search for it again, and they do this even after their actual hunger has been satisfied. If the "prey" is ground meat, as it often is in captivity, the otter or raccoon may lose it permanently, as it disintegrates in the water, but he keeps searching until the urge is satisfied.

"Might not the same mechanism apply to the shrike, in fact, to all predatory animals?"

"As a naturalist, I am often asked that egocentric and hence annoying question: 'What good is it?' (I'm always tempted to ask in turn: 'What good are you?') I suspect that the person making such a query assumes that the world is centered around man and that all living things are measurable by the 'naked ape' as 'good', 'bad', or 'neutral'. Let us always remember: an animal is 'good' or it is 'bad' only insofar as we have judged it. Many years ago, we were advised to judge not or we would be judged; can we extend this to animals? I believe we should.

"A given animal is neither a friend or a fiend, but a fascinating and distinctive part of our natural heritage. No animal gives allegiance to man nor does it owe him any. I am constantly humbled by what I see in the outdoors. One rarely, and only rarely, has a brief glimpse through the 'window'. We would do well to think often of Robert Frost's poem: 'We dance round in a ring and suppose, but the Secret sits in the middle - and knows!'"

"Judge not!"

LATEST ON MERIDIAN:

The town of Meridian, whose Senator and Chamber of Commerce feel it lacks only a golf course to burst forward from its traditional 890 people into a modern Zenith City, still has no golf course, because a misguided cliquidity of "bird-lovers" keeps interfering.

The latest gambits were (1) to appeal to

the U. S. Court of Appeals in New Orleans the dismissal of our case by Judge Jack Roberts of Austin, and (2) to file a new suit in the state court of Judge Herman Jones, in Austin. The Federal Court of Appeals granted and then dissolved a temporary injunction preventing the Farmers Home Administration from paying the \$100,000 loan check to Senator J. P. Word's golf course group. Our brief is due by mid-February. The state court granted and then dissolved a temporary restraining order preventing J. R. Singleton, Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, from acting on construction plans for the golf course in the virgin cedar brakes of Meridian State Park where the Golden-cheeked Warbler has its last breeding ground in that area. The trial is set for February 4.

Our main problem is to establish that conservationists who do not own any surrounding land, and therefore do not suffer any traditional monetary damage, can nevertheless sue as "private attorneys general," as Chief Justice Burger, of the U. S. Supreme Court, put it while he was on the Court of Appeals. Setting a Texas precedent in favor of our standing to sue would be of great value to conservation.

On Jan. 19, E. W. Hudgo, Jr., of Dallas, a substantial contributor to President Nixon's campaign, wire the President to block the FHA loan and thereby to save a rare ecosystem while saving the budget \$100,000, both in one stroke.

...Edward C. Fritz, Chairman, TEXAS COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES.

Your support is needed to continue the court fight to preserve Meridian State Park in its present state. Contributions in any amount should be forwarded to: Charles A. Haberman, Treasurer, Audubon Society, 5001-B Blue Spruce Circle, Austin, Texas 78723. Checks should be made payable to the Travis Audubon Society and marked "For Meridian Park Lawsuit."

Monies to support the Meridian Park lawsuit are being channeled through the Travis Audubon Society bank account for purposes of control and convenience. All such donations for support of this lawsuit are tax deductible by the donor.

FIELD TRIP:

Our first field trip of the year will be to Buffalo Lake on March 15. Meet at the entrance to the refuge at 8:30 a.m.

CALENDAR:

- Feb. 16: Monthly society meeting at the Garden Center - 7:30 p. m.
Topic - "Vicuna Refuge"
Speaker - Stan Taft
- March 15: Field trip to Buffalo Lake -
meeting time - 8:30 a. m.
- March 16: Monthly society meeting.
- April 5: Audubon Wildlife Film at the Garden Center - 2:30 pm
Topic - "Wild Rivers of N. A."
Speaker - John D. Bulger

"MAN: an animal so lost in rapturous contemplation of what he thinks he is as to overlook what he indubitable ought to be... his chief occupation is extermination of other animals and his own species, which, however, multiplies with such insistent rapidity as to infest the whole habitable earth.."

...Ambrose Bierce