

April, 1971

2709 S. Fairfield, Amarillo, Texas 79103

Vol. VIII, No. 4

## PROGRAM FOR APRIL:

Our program for April will be a color slide showing of wildflowers presented by Thelma Puntch. Over the past years a number of our members have given showings of their own work and these programs have always proven popular. Be sure to be at the meeting to view this new work.

## BIG DAY COUNT:

In the hopes of getting as many participants as possible, we have moved our annual Big Day Count up from May 9 to May 2. This is a dawn to dusk count in which we record all the birds seen in Potter and Randall Counties, both as to species and numbers. The most productive time of the day for counting is the morning. At that time we need parties in the Palo Duro Canyon, at Buffalo Lake, and in the parks and cemeteries within the city. The Elysian Fields can be visited later in the day without missing anything. If you can take part please notify Peggy Acord as we need to plan our count so that the most productive sites can be covered.

## REMINISCING:

An exciting bird adventure always seems to bring back other experiences with the same bird. As I was writing about the Golden Eagles at Lake Meredith pictures from the past crowded into my mental mirror.

In May of 1969 five of us took off on a long and eagerly awaited trip to the Big Bend. We, of course, made a few detours from a straight course (is there any other way to go?). One of our most fascinating side trips took us along the Pecos River. We missed the river road the first time but were very pleased with the detour even if we did refrain from telling that oilfield crew that we were faintly lost ladybirders.

The Big Bend was a colorful jumble of beloved sights and sounds. The second evening of our stay we were weary from our 8½ hours horseback ride. It was partly overcast and after a leisurely dinner we were driving back down through the gap towards the desert where we had a late date with an Elf Owl. As we came to the beginning of the Lost Mine Trail at Casa Grande Peak, we saw a pair of eagles hunting over the rugged area at the base of the peak. Some of us walked a way along the trail and watched the two birds hanging almost motionless just above our heads. They were undoubtedly the pair which annually nests on Casa Grande. In the rather dramatic half-light we could see the heads turn from side to side - alert to the movement of any rabbit, snake, gopher or anything else edible - a scene etched in all of our memories.

The Black Mesa of Cimarron County, Oklahoma is also a rugged, dramatic land - rich in gophers and jack rabbits. Many of us have seen Dr. Sutton's wonderful watercolor in Audubon Magazine. Just looking at it I can smell the fragrance of hot juniper, dust, sage. Memory at once projects in my mind the display of a pair of Golden Eagles maneuvering on a windy, bright October afternoon. The pair was riding the currents of air at the rim of the mesa. One would suddenly fold its wings and drop with breathtaking speed for a long way, then spread its wings and soar up once again. The other eagle would

perform the same actions, soar back, and so it went, an alternating soaring and plummeting for several repetitions - beautiful birds, masters of the air, displaying the gifts of the Maker to the eyes of a breathless beholder.

....Peggy Acord....

## FIELD TRIP:

Approximately 40 people turned out on April 4 for our field trip to the Alibates Nat'l. Monument. Not only was Amarillo represented but also Borger and Pampa, Plainview and Dalhart, and one gentleman and his two children from Grand Canyon, Arizona. It was a raw and windy day and few birds were seen but the canyon floors were carpeted with blooming bladder-pods and the brisk walk to the Alibates flint quarries gave everyone a warm feeling. To top it off, one of the Park Rangers gave a demonstration on how the Indians made arrowheads.

## NEW MEMBERS:

Mr. & Mrs. C. P. Elliott  
1201 Kokomo  
Plainview, Texas

Mr. P. D. Wheeler  
2028 S. Milam  
Amarillo, Texas

## BIRD NOTES:

The tempo in birding has picked up with the advent of spring. The 4 Oldsquaws on Lake Meredith, first sighted by Barbara Lund, were very noteworthy, and Peggy Acord's excited call on 3/12 reporting a Red-necked Grebe on Durnivon Lake brought about an abrupt halt to an otherwise leisurely supper for your Editor. This bird was carefully observed through scopes. The next day an Horned Grebe was seen on the same lake by Peggy Acord and Rena Ross. There seems to have been an invasion of Long-eared Owls at Buffalo Lake for KS reported 3 there on 3/7, 7 on 3/14, and 1 on 3/28. Maurine Fortus had a noteworthy bird in her yard in Borger on 3/27 - nothing less than a Vermilion Flycatcher! On 3/21 KS and Barbara Lund went rail hunting in the cattail marshes below the dam at Lake Meredith (Hutchinson Cy.), but not with guns but a recorder of taped rail calls. Though never seen, the Virginia Rails responded vocally to a playing of their taped calls and there were an estimated 10+ in the rather restricted area of the marsh that was covered. The truth of the matter is, they responded more readily to the playing of the Sora's call than to their own. A lone Sora also responded and an American Bittern "pumped". One Bonaparte's Gull was seen of the several that were observed intermittently during the winter by Barbara Lund. A Swamp Sparrow was seen in the same locality prior to and subsequent to this date by several of our ladybirders. A singing Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was observed at Buffalo Lake on 3/28 by KS as well as 7 Sage Thrashers in one flock. On 4/7 Peggy Acord reported 60+ Turkey Vultures passing over Lake Tanglewood with 29 in one flock.

On the week-end of 4/3-4 several of our members birded at George and Rena Ross's in Roger Mills County, Okla. Grady and Thelma

George and Esther Waddill, Don and Peggy Acord, and Barbara Lund joined them in the woe hours of the morning to watch 7 cock Lesser Prairie Chickens perform on their dancing grounds near there. In past years 18 to 25 birds would be seen on the grounds but extreme drouth conditions prevail now which no doubt has had an effect on their population. Taped recordings of their calls were made from the car. Sitting on the Ross's porch and peering through scopes, the birders were pleased to see a dozen or so Lared Grebes, both in winter and breeding plumages, an Horned Grebe in breeding plumage, many Buffloheads, all 3 of the teals, plus several of the other more common waterfowl. Many singing Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were in the neighborhood and 18 Long-billed Curlew were seen in a field. Altogether, Barbara reported 73 species for the trip.

#### BIRD NAMES:

In thinking on the names given to birds and discovering from what sources they were derived, it is not surprising to find that a fair number of them are based on the calls or songs of the birds themselves, for often the sounds a bird makes are its most outstanding characteristic. One need only think of the Bobwhite quail and consider what one would name it if it had some other call than its own distinctive and compelling "bobwhite". T. Gilbert Pearson states that at the turn of the century "Northorners call him Quail; Southerners, Partridge; but he has named himself and ornithologists have decided that he is the prior authority. His cry is interrogatory. It is pleasing, heartening, delightful. Farmers translate it as "more wet", saying it foretells rain. And this prophecy is always welcome in the drouth of summer". This prophecy is also welcome in the drouth of summer, fall, winter and spring, such as we in this area are experiencing, and should I hear a Bobwhite calling in the near future I will be tempted to join the ranks of the farmers and translate his call into a prophecy of "more wet".

To digress a moment from my intended subject, reading about birds as written by the older ornithologists is a never-ending source of delight as well as of information. I'm quite sure that such a statement will raise the hackles of most modern-day ornithologists worth their salt and that they will turn away from me in pure disgust. It seems to me, nonetheless, that the older ornithologists were men who possessed a gift that too few today have, and that is an unabashed love for their subject. And birds as birds, not birds as objects to be manipulated or as tools for the furtherance of careers. You can get an idea of what I'm talking about by reading some of the passages in the earlier Bent "Life Histories" series and comparing them with the writing in many of the accounts published in the last three volumes, issued recently. The earlier writers had no fear of letting their joy and love for birds to shine through and insisted upon writing about birds in terms that brought to life their incomparable vitality. It strikes me that a bird to them was a vibrant, living thing that was played upon by the same forces that play upon you and me, and that this constituted as legitimate an avenue toward a deeper knowledge of birds as does the omnipresent and never-ending graph and statistic. A

Sutton, for instance, is not satisfied with giving you a mere fact about a bird but will furnish you with anaesthetic of the bird also. The word "curlew", derived from the Old French corlicu, is another that fits more or less exactly the call of the bird uttering it. Our own Long-billed Curlew gives a rising inflection to the last syllable, turning it into "curlee", and at the same time turning it into one of the wildest calls in nature. To hear the curlew call on the prairie in the spring is to be transported to a time before man.

Although in mythology Phoebe was goddess of the moon, the bird name "phoebe" was taken from one of the bird's call notes, no doubt from that of the Eastern Phoebe who says just that ---"phoe-be". I say from that of the Eastern Phoebe for the Black Phoebe can only utter a thin "fi-bee" while the Say's Phoebe hardly qualifies to be in the phoebe class at all. I listened to a Say's calling the other day and a very melancholy sound it was, but then, the wind was raw and chill as it blew across the fields surrounding Buffalo Lake and it's a wonder the bird felt like singing at all. The scientific name of this species, Sayornis saya, is very unusual in that both terms bear the name of the person being honored, Thomas Say. This Thomas Say was rather unusual in his own right, acquiring the reputation of being the father of American entomology and naming quite a few of our insects, among others the Potato Beetle, the Hessian Fly, and the Chinch Bug. He was also a member of the New Harmony group in Indiana, an association of persons of communistic beliefs and practices. If that were known among certain circles today the A.O.U. would probably be petitioned to change Sayornis saya into something more decent.

That bird of summer, the Dickcissel, is another species that is fond of uttering its own name as perched on the top of a cottonwood tree it persistently and with endless repetition sings "dick'dick---cissel-cissel-cissel". By no means a common bird in our area, and then not seen every year, it can be found with fair regularity in the extreme southeastern part of Buffalo Lake. Go down there on some late June or early July day and if the somnolent mood of summer has not settled upon you by then, sit down and listen to the Dickcissel sing and he will instill the feeling in you before you leave. Its scientific name is Spiza americana, spiza in Greek meaning "a finch", derived from spizō, "to chirp", while americana needs no explaining, this bird embodying the very spirit of the summer, the Midwest, and America.

Who can wonder why the Chickadee is called such? Or the Willet? Not so obvious are other bird names derived from other or older languages than Modern English, languages used in naming hundreds of species with which we are not familiar. The Anglo Saxons, in imitation of the bird's strange cry, called the Owl, the ūle; in tackling a name for the Raven they came up with hraefn. Quail is from the Modern Latin quaquila derived in turn from the Modern Dutch quakola, in reference to the bird's note, and Rail is German ralle, a bird's note. Other bird names derived from their notes are the Pipit, the Towhee, the Veery, and the Bobolink. By the way, prior to being

alled the Bobolink it was known as the "boblinco ln".

In closing, it is interesting to consider the word "warbler". One often reads in the literature that our New World warblers are not true warblers and, furthermore, none of them can accomplish a warble. This is rather unfair for "warbler" is derived from the Middle High German word worbelen, meaning "to whirl, to be busy about". This fits our warblers to a nicety for I never saw a warbler yet that wasn't whirling about being busy about something.

....KDS....

#### DEFECTOR TO RUSSIA FELLIED BY GUNFIRE:

News of the death of a Texas defector to Russia has come from Moscow.

The victim was brought down by small arms fire and most likely became an ingredient in some Russian's borsch.

It was a female pintail duck.

The bird was banded by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on March 12, 1967, near Port Acres, and was shot near Ossora in Eastern Siberia on May 25, 1968, some 14 months and countless thousands of miles later.

It took almost three years for the band to return to Texas. It was returned by the USSR Academy of Sciences Zoological Institute, the Centre of Ringing and Marking of Birds and Terrestrial Mammals.

Biologists say pintails sometimes cross from Alaska to Siberia to nest, but they add that it is extremely rare for a bird to stray that far when tagged in the Central Flyway.

....Texas Parks & Wildlife News....

#### CONSIDER THE SHAG ON THE ROCKS:

For forty-nine million years there were shags in the world, but no men. Then one of the primates began to distinguish himself from others (while the old shags continued to catch fish and stand spread-eagled on the rocks). After some nine hundred and ninety-five thousand more years the new primate, conscious of his distinction as man, began to make his works conspicuous on the face of the earth. (The shags continued to fish and stand spread-eagled on the rocks.) Something a bit less than five thousand years later, he began to fill all the land surfaces of the earth, to establish his dominion, to transform the planet into a human world. He was not concerned with the future of being as such, or with the future of life as such, but with the future of himself. He invented forms of philosophy that took account of himself alone, leaving out the Shag, the Storm Petrel, the Fulmar, the skua, the auk, the phalarope, the gull, and the Gannet. They had no credentials that man need honor in what he had now established as his own world.

Among the foreseeable possibilities for the future, one is that man, having arrived only a million years ago, will go on for another forty-nine million, in the course of which he will begin to learn at first hand how big the universe is. He will go fishing in the Milky Way--thinking, perhaps, that it belongs to him. But at the end of those forty-nine million years another creature may arise, and it may refashion the Milky Way to suit itself. Then man, lacking credentials, may come to seem no more important than a Shag.

....Louis J. Halle....

Since a Shag stands "spread-eagled" on the rocks would an eagle stand "shag-spread?"

#### YOUR HELP IS NEEDED:

An important piece of legislation comes up for hearing on April 28 in the Lt. Governor's committee room. This is the Environmental Protection Act of 1971, similar to legislation recently enacted by the state of Michigan.

The Michigan act adopted the "public trust" doctrine. No longer is the state the only controller of pollution. Every citizen of Michigan has an equal right with the state to bring court action against polluters.

The two major aspects of the bill are:

First, the bill declares the air, water and other natural resources to be held in public trust by the State for all of our citizens.

Secondly, the bill gives legal standing to the individual citizen, as well as to state and local governments and organizations, to seek court orders and injunctions challenging any activity which threatens the interest of that public trust in our environment.

Opponents of the measure fear it will bring a deluge of suits which will further clog our courts. Its backers believe there are built-in safeguards to prevent this. The individual bringing suit would not be entitled to damages. Get-rich quick schemes would be out. Also, Texas district judges have the power to summarily dismiss suits which have no merit.

Our Sen. Max Sherman is a member of this committee that will review the bill. He is reported to be cool toward it, which isn't so surprising since pollution in our area is a dirty word in more ways than one. Living in such relative purity, it is difficult to convince our leaders that now is the time to build safeguards against the encroachment of any impurities. It is difficult but we should try. We won't always live on the caprock by ourselves!

#### CALENDAR:

- April 17: Bird walk - Memorial Park Comotory - 8:30 a.m.
- April 19: Monthly society meeting at the Garden Center - 7:30 p.m.  
Speaker - Thelma Puntch  
Topic - "Wildflowers"
- April 25: Bird walk - Llano Comotory - 8:30 a.m.
- May 2 : Big Day Count
- May 16: Wildflower Field Trip - Sanford Recreation Area.
- May 17 : Monthly society meeting.

It is an irony of history that the great powers should have discovered the unity of nations at Cairo in 1943. The geese of the world have had that notion for a longer time, and each March they stake their lives on its essential truth.

In the beginning there was only the unity of the Ice Sheet. Then followed the unity of the March thaw, and the northward hogira of the international geese. Every March since the Pleistocene, the geese have honked unity from China Sea to Siberian Stoppe, from Euphrates to Volga, from Nile to Murmansk, from Lincolnshire to Spitsbergen. Every March since the Pleistocene, the geese have honked unity from Currituck to Labrador, Katamuskoot to Ungava, Horseshoe Lake to Hudson's Bay, Avery Island to Baffin Land, Panhandle to Mackenzie, Sacramento to Yukon.

....Aldo Leopold....