

BIRD NOTES:

We devoted the greater part of our May issue of this newsletter to a listing of the various species of birds for which additional information was needed in order to better establish their nesting status in the Texas Panhandle. From this summer's reports, the following observations are of interest:

Green Heron - no nests found but 2 adults were observed at Greenbelt Lake near Clarendon, Donley Co., on June 24, and 1 at Lake Marvin, Hemphill Co., on July 22 (Ken Seyffert).

Black-crowned Night Heron - a rookery was found near Sunray, Moore Co., and reported to Carolyn Stallwitz in late June. After checking it out, she invited the members of the TPAS to join her on a field trip to the rookery on July 8. Approximately 100 nests were counted at that time. Including adult birds and unfledged young observable from the ground, 150+ herons were observed.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron - no nests were found but 2 adults were observed at Greenbelt Lake, Donley Co., on June 24 (Ken Seyffert); 1 adult on a playa near Lake Tanglewood, Randall Co., June 24 (Peggy Acord and Mrs. Roy Deupree); 1 fledged immature at the Black-crowned Night Heron rookery in Moore Co., July 8 (T.P.A.S.); 3 adults at Lake Marvin, Hemphill Co., July 22 (Ken Seyffert).

Ducks - the Mallard, Pintail, and Blue-winged Teal nested at Buffalo Lake NWR, Randall Co., 48 young of the three species appearing on one day's count as reported by refuge manager, Paul Ferguson. Redheads were seen in Randall and Potter Counties through June (100+ at Buffalo Lake on June 17); 70+ Green-winged Teal (almost all males) at Buffalo Lake through June 17; up to 7+ Cinnamon Teal at Buffalo Lake through June 30; 24+ Shovelers at Buffalo Lake all summer; a half dozen or more Ruddy Ducks at Buffalo Lake and the Hollywood Road waster disposal station playa (Randall Co.) through mid-June, and 1 in Moore Co. on July 8; 3 Wigeon and 1 Gadwall at Buffalo Lake through mid-June. 1 female Wood Duck was seen at Greenbelt Lake, Donley Co., on June 24 (Ken Seyffert).

Ferruginous Hawk - no nests reported but 1 bird was seen between Amarillo and Fritch, Potter Co., on June 16 (Ken Seyffert).

Golden Eagle - 2 nests were reported from the upper Palo Duro Canyon, Randall Co., by Roberta Currie. Both nests fledged young.

Prairie Falcon - 1 was observed in the upper Palo Duro Canyon, Randall Co., in late July or early August, by the Wedels, leaders of a Smithsonian team conducting an archeological dig on the Currie Ranch in that area, and both competent birders. The large falcon was being attacked by a pair of American Kestrels (report by Peggy Acord); 1 was seen at Buffalo Lake on Aug. 12 & 19 by Ken Seyffert. No evidence of nesting was reported.

Virginia Rail - several were heard in the cattail marsh near the heron rookery in Moore Co., July 8 (T.P.A.S.) Attempts were made to flush the birds and a search for possible nests was made but both efforts failed. Fern Cain reported the species summered in the marshes below the dam at Lake Meredith, Hutchinson Co.

Sora - 1 was heard calling in the same marsh containing the Virginia Rails, Moore Co., July 8 (T.P.A.S.).

Mountain Plover - a search for nests was made in Dallam Co. in early June, without success. However, a nest with 3 eggs was found in adjoining Union Co., New Mexico, June 10 (Ken Seyffert).

Black-necked Stilt - 2 spent the summer at Buffalo Lake, Randall Co., but no evidence of nesting was discovered.

Black-chinned Hummingbird - at least 1 male present all summer around her home, as reported by Rena Ross. A hummingbird nest with young was found and photographed in the Avondale addition of the city, Potter Co. Although observation of a male was not reported, the nest is presumed to be that of a Black-chinned.

Eastern Phoebe - a pair with nest containing 4 young not over a day or two old was found in South Cota Canyon, Randall Co., July (Ken Seyffert - first observation of a nest from the central Panhandle. 1 observed at the head of South Brush Draw, Palo Duro Canyon, Randall Co., July 4 (Ken Seyffert) - nest not found.

Verdin - nest with 3 eggs found in the Palo Duro Canyon, Randall Co., May 6 (Ken Seyffert).

Carolina Wren - a singing bird heard frequently at the Currie Ranch, Randall Co., through early summer. Nest not found (Roberta Currie and the T.P.A.S.).

Curve-billed Thrasher - a nest with 2 eggs found and photographed on the Currie Ranch, Randall Co., June 23 - first documented nesting of this species in the central Panhandle (Roberta Currie).

American Goldfinch - 1 male at Lake Marvin, Hemphill Co., July 22, and several heard as they flew overhead (Ken Seyffert).

Brown Towhee - 1 north of amphitheatre, Palo Duro Canyon, Randall Co., first week of June (Leo Galloway), and 1 singing near head of South Brush Draw, Palo Duro Canyon, July 4 (Ken Seyffert). Nest not found.

Lark Bunting - nest found and photographed in Moore Co., June 14 - first documentation for county (Carolyn Stallwitz). Pair spent the summer at Buffalo Lake NWR, Randall Co., but nest not found (Ken Seyffert).

Grasshopper Sparrow - nest found and photographed in Moore Co., first week in June - first documentation for county (Carolyn Stallwitz). Pair observed carrying food at Buffalo Lake NWR, Randall Co., June 16 & 17, but nest not found (Ken Seyffert).

Other interesting observations were turned in since publication of the May newsletter. These include not only summering birds but also late spring and early fall migrants:

White Pelican - 1 at Buffalo Lake NWR through June 30.

White-faced Ibis - 3 on playa near Lake Tanglewood, Randall Co., mid-June through June 24 (Peggy Acord, Mrs. Roy Deupree, Thelma Puntch).

Bufflehead - 1 female remained on creek below the dam at Buffalo Lake NWR as late as May 17.

Sparrow Hawk - adults observed feeding downy young at Girls' Scout Camp, Randall Co., June 29 (Peggy Acord).

Long-billed Curlew - 13 at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 20 (Peggy and Don Acord). About same number found killed on playa near Texaco refinery, Potter Co., around June 20.

Solitary Sandpiper - 3 on a playa near White Deer, Carson Co., July 21 (Ken Seyffert).
Willot - 1 at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 20 (Peggy & Don Acord).
Greater Yellowlegs - 1 at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 16 (Ken Seyffert).
Lesser Yellowlegs - 3 at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 20 (Peggy & Don Acord). This species was present there throughout summer and had increased to 150+ by Aug. 19 (Ken Seyffert).
Long-billed Dowitcher - 1 at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 16 (Ken Seyffert).
Stilt Sandpiper - 1 first seen on July 15 at Buffalo Lake NWR; their numbers had increased to 300+ by Aug. 5 (Ken Seyffert).
Marbled Godwit - 9 at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 16 (Ken Seyffert).
American Avocet - 800+ throughout most of summer at Buffalo Lake NWR. None observed nesting.

Northern Phalarope - beginning with 2 seen at Buffalo Lake NWR on July 29, up to 9 were observed off and on throughout August and into early September (Ken Seyffert).

Franklin's Gull - up to 8 at Buffalo Lake NWR throughout summer.

Forster's Tern - 1 at Buffalo Lake NWR, July 28 (Ken Seyffert).

Black Tern - up to a dozen at Buffalo Lake NWR throughout summer.

White-winged Dove - 1 at Buffalo Lake NWR, May 19 & 21, and photographed (Ken Seyffert - first documentation for area).

Broad-tailed Hummingbird - 1 at the George Ross' in Amarillo, Aug. 3 (Rena Ross).

Rufous Hummingbird - seen beginning in early August at the George Ross' in Amarillo (Rena Ross).

Says Phoebe - 1 pair raised 2 broods at the Roy Dupree's, Lake Tanglewood, Randall Co. Several other pairs were noted in the area (Peggy Acord).

Epidonax sp. - first fall observation at her home, Aug. 17, Potter Co. (Peggy Acord).

Western Wood Pewee - first fall observation on Aug. 5 at Buffalo Lake NWR (Ken Seyffert).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - 1 observed in Amarillo, July 24 (Estelle Stevens).

Loggerhead Shrike - 3 grown young at Buffalo Lake NWR, June 16 (Ken Seyffert).

Yellow-headed Blackbird - common in Randall and Moore counties throughout summer (T.P.A.S.) no evidence of nesting.

Western Tanager - 1 female at the George Ross' in Amarillo on the early date of Aug. 30 (Rena Ross).

Summer Tanager - 1 male at Lake Marvin, Hemphill Co., July 22 (Ken Seyffert).

Black-headed Grosbeak - 1 at the George Ross' in Amarillo, Aug. 30 (Rena Ross).

Red Crossbill - 1 female at Buffalo Lake NWR on the early date of Sept. 8 (Ken Seyffert).

White-crowned Sparrow - 1 singing in Dallam Co. on the late date of May 23 (Ken Seyffert).

A COURSE IN BIRD STUDY:

Amarillo College will offer a night course in bird study for beginners this winter. The course will be taught by Peggy Acord and will be held on Tuesday nights from 7:30 to 9:30. It is a 10-weeks course and will include field trips from time to time. It is scheduled to begin around Oct. 1, but the Sunday newspaper should be consulted for a specific date.

BUFFALO LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE:

Public concern has been aroused recently

over the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service's announced policy change in the management of its wildlife refuges. In our area this change has been headlined in the news media as a possible cancellation of public access to Buffalo Lake. This is an exaggerated and erroneous presentation of the policy changes and it needs to be corrected and clarified.

Lack of funds has forced the Fish & Wildlife Service to take another look at its management policies. At many refuges, and this is particularly true of Buffalo Lake, much of its budget is directed toward the support and maintenance of people-oriented recreational activities. The Service has decided that, under the circumstances, it is necessary that it go back to its original purpose of maintaining refuges for wildlife and to support public activities on its refuges that are oriented toward wildlife. Activities it will eliminate are boating, water skiing, camping and off-road vehicles. Activities permitted will be scientific study, environmental education, birdwatching, and fishing.

Certainly in the case of Buffalo Lake, this is a realistic management policy. As everyone knows, the lake no longer has an assured supply of water, except for what falls upon it direct from a sometimes beneficent sky. Water impoundments and other uses upstream have cut off, by and large, the flow of water into the lake. As a result, the water level remains low. This shallowness forcibly rules out boating and water skiing and, as has happened this summer, high temperatures deplete the oxygen supply in the water and there is a great fish die-off, forcibly eliminating fishing. This fish die-off has laid down a blanket of odor that has pretty well eliminated all picnickers from the area. You can go to the lake now and you will be hard put to find human companionship, should that be your intent. However, these same conditions are ideal for much of the wildlife there. The ducks and geese prefer the shallow water and the extensive flats upon which to rest, and each winter sees a large population of them making use of their refuge. Reduced people activity has resulted in better grass-land habitat which has had a direct effect on increasing the quail population. Deer have come to the refuge in recent years and they are prospering. The mudflats that are so extensive are the shorebirds' paradise.

A town meeting was held in Canyon on Sept. 6 to discuss what could be done to preserve Buffalo Lake as a "People" refuge. This is a wholly commendable objective as there are not enough such refuges in the country and they are extremely scarce in our section of it. "Wildlife" refuges, however, are far scarcer and we need to hold on for dear life to the one we have. We need to keep this refuge in operation even if it means eliminating birdwatchers from having access to it.

This is not the reality of the matter, however. For the Fish & Wildlife Service to pull out and turn the refuge over to the city, county, region or state will not automatically convert it into a "peoples" refuge. Unless there is an assured flow of water into the lake there won't be anything there most years to attract people. A visit to the lake right now will prove that to you. If there is a full lake another problem must be met and solved, a problem that the refuge

was contending with before the recent drop in water level. That problem was pollution caused by upstream feedlots and produce houses. At that time, even with akfull lake, boating, fishing, water skiing, and swimming had all been banned because the waters of Buffalo Lake were foul, foul, foul !

Some 100 people attended the meeting in Canyon, mostly fisherman who expressed sincere concern for Buffalo Lake's future. These were people who unabashedly love the place, just as birdwatchers do. The upshot of the meeting was the appointment of a steering committee to look into the possibilities of forcing upstream users to guarantee a flow of water into the lake, and to look into the possibilities of getting ownership of the refuge transferred to a city, county, regional, or state authority. After this preliminary work is done, another town meeting will be held. At this meeting the Fish & Wildlife Service will have some of their people present to give the public the true facts of the situation and to clarify what their intentions are. This is a meeting all of us must attend and in which we must support the Service in its efforts to keep Buffalo Lake a "wildlife" refuge.

The crux of the whole matter is the lack of funds. A wildlife refuge cannot be all things to all people unless the people are willing to pay for it. If the people in our area want Buffalo Lake to continue operating as it has in the past then they must direct their Congressional representatives to give the Fish & Wildlife Service the funds with which to do the job. After funding, Congress must see to it that the people's will is not overruled by the Budget Bureau and the President. Failing in this, we need to explore the possibilities of the city, county, region or state negotiating an agreement with the Fish & Wildlife Service for the taking over of the responsibilities of supporting the people oriented activities. In any case, we must see to it that Buffalo Lake remains a "wildlife" refuge and under the direction and control of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Not for our sakes, or the Services' sake, but for the sake of ducks and geese and shorebirds and cages and deer and jack rabbits and prairie dogs and quail and coyotes and, yes, rattlesnakes.

FOURTH GRADERS' VIEWS:

This Spring, Fourth Grade students at Forster Elementary School in Houston wrote to Senator Lloyd Bonssen giving their view on some of the issues of the day. Listed here are a couple of solutions to the problems facing our nation, as a fourth grader sees them "(who says they aren't perceptive):"

"I citizen of Houston Texas suggest you should capture some wolves and give some coyotes to other states who don't have some coyotes." - Richard

"Our wildlife is in danger. Too many animals are getting extinct and also very rare. I would like you to support a law that says 'No one should kill animals that are in extinction.' Please consider this problem under your hands." - Randy

PROGRAM FOR SEPTEMBER:

Dr. Ron McKown of West Texas State Univ. will present our program in September. The

topic will be "Turtles of the Panhandle and Speciation in Turtles". It will be a slide and lecture type presentation and we urge members and guests to attend to launch our new season with a large attendance.

THE COMMON CROW:

Is it still legal to shoot crows in Texas? Yes, according to Parks and Wildlife Department officials, the crow may be shot if it is committing depredation or about to commit depredation on ornamental or shade trees, agricultural crops, livestock or wildlife. The use of crow calls or recordings is still legal in the state.

All the controversy on crow shooting started about a year ago when the U. S. signed a treaty with the Republic of Mexico placing the family corvidae, which includes crows, under federal protection. Actually, the intent of the agreement was to protect other members of the family which are found in Mexico, but the raucous, common American crow found himself enjoying the unusual leisure of federal protection.

Recent federal guidelines received by the Parks and Wildlife Department give Texas two options on crow hunting. One provides for a season which treats the crow as a game bird. Such a season would be for a maximum of 120 days and prohibits the hunting of crows during the peak nesting season. The second option permits the hunting of depredating crows the year round.

Texas is bound to the second option. To set a season on crows as outlined in option one would call for legislative action making the crow a game bird.

....Texas Parks & Wildlife Department..

LATE BULLETIN:

Several noteworthy sightings of birds were reported while going to press. Rena Ross reports a Blackburnian Warbler, Red-eyed and Solitary Vireos, and several Cedar Waxwings at her home on Sept. 8. The following day Esther Waddill and Peggy Acord found Cedar Waxwings at Lake Tanglewood.

CALENDAR:

- Sept. 17: Monthly meeting at the Garden Center, 7:30 p.m.
Topic - "Turtles of the Panhandle & Speciation in Turtles".
Speaker - Dr. Ron McKown
- Oct. 15 - Monthly society meeting.
- Oct. 28 - Field trip to Buffalo Lake NWR.