

## PROGRAM FOR OCTOBER:

Alice Allen, interpretive specialist and park naturalist at the Sanford Recreation Area, Lake Meredith, will present our program for October. She will give a demonstration of the art of wool spinning. This should be of great interest to all who have wondered how the task of spinning was carried out in the old days.

## VIEWS FROM THE OTHER SIDE:

The following essays come from two of the nation's leading or, at least, most articulate EWS's (Bird Watchers' Spouses). It is thought that the member of the gentler sex of the two was the founder of that rising group, the EWSA (Bird Watchers Spouses' Association), having been, possibly, the more provoked. The organization has certainly taken wing during the last few years, no doubt taking heart from other like-depressed groups that have succeeded in becoming liberated. This Editor, by your leave, has no prejudice one way or the other concerning the matter, and wishes to prove it by helping both articles be broadcast across the land. To further prove to what lengths he is prepared to go, he never goes afield any more with merely Petersen's field guides tucked under his belt, but he has also found a prominent spot to carry Strunk & White's "Elements of Style". You can hardly ask for more than that!

## THE EDITOR AND THE GRAMMARIANS

When the Prairie Horned Lark editor received the invitation to spend a spring weekend with former TPAS'ers, he accepted advisedly; for while he knew his host to be a birder through and through, he feared that his hostess, though nominally a birdwatcher's spouse, was, at heart, an English teacher. Nevertheless, he reasoned, school does not keep on Saturday and Sunday, and perhaps there would not be much talk of participles and sentence fragments.

On the appointed date, therefore, the editor duly arrived in St. Joseph, Missouri, and spent a pleasant enough Friday evening discussing the obvious topic: birds. But the next day Fate, in the form of a young English professor out for his morning walk, intervened. The professor, creator of the fictitious Gladys Biscuit, stereotype bird-watcher who excitedly reports an Ivory-billed Woodpecker to the Audubon Society, possessed a clinical interest in the ways of real-life birders and, borrowed binoculars in hand, he accompanied the editor and his friends to the field. By late afternoon, the professor, a trifle dazed, had concluded that ornithological truth is stranger than his own variety of fiction. The editor, somewhat bemused himself, was sure that the ways of an English teacher--any English teacher--are past finding out.

Still, he remained stoical when his hostess announced that her department chairman had agreed to come for dinner. The editor was surprised that the head grammarian was a pretty lady. The lady was equally astounded when the table talk devoted itself solely to famous birding episodes starring, for the most part, the editor and their host. In parting, the grammarian hoped that the editor might some day return for another visit.

Having already determined to come back for study of winter bird populations, the editor replied, gallantly, if ambiguously, that nothing could keep him away.

It might seem that survival of one day among the English teachers had earned the editor a reprieve. But even nature conspired against him, raining out the next afternoon's birding. The alternate activity--touring the local museum--resulted, predictably, in a meeting with still another grammarian engrossed in the display of mounted avian species. The editor's long-cherished conviction that birds and verbs do not mix began to crumble, and he thought favorably of a speedy return to the Texas panhandle, where the open spaces would at least minimize his chances of entanglement with an entire English department.

...RG (St. Joseph, Missouri)...

## THE EVOLUTION OF A EWS

The EWS (bird watcher's spouse) is not a BW (bird watcher) because birds never seem to look like their pictures in the field guides. In fact, the EWS found that it is almost an accident when live birds look like those drawn by artists.

At one time the EWS thought about becoming a BW. Enthusiasm started dwindling in direct ratio to time spent on the first birding trip. With binoculars focused on a bird and a matching picture in the Bird Book he thought a satisfying identification had been made EXCEPT the BW pointed out the bird was not a "pink-rumped whatabird" but a "black-speckled cowlet" that was too young to have black spots and not old enough to have lost its pink rump. This was his first encounter with changing plumages.

Time passed and frustration increased as it was learned that nearly all land birds change color to some degree with Age and Season. It began to be evident that Bird Guide captions should include the date of birth of the bird illustrated. It was also obvious that bird artists only saw and painted birds in their most colorful phase regardless of the fact this phase only lasts a short time during the year. For a short period the budding BW thought it would be all right to be a BW during the short time birds matched the Field Guide pictures. But his BW instructor pointed out that the many birds that migrate through this part of the country rarely look like the book pictures and hence the neophyte would never be able to become a true BW by following this matching theory.

To complicate matters, the embryo BW, now fast changing into a full-fledged EWS, was informed that a very few birds, exemplified by ravens and jays, never change color and that the sex of these birds could not be determined by sight. Up to this time the budding EWS had not considered the sex of birds to be important -- he figured the birds had already resolved that problem to their satisfaction and he would not have to bother with it. Now he was informed that the sex of birds is important because normally the female is differently colored and seldom resembles the male who is almost always, but not invariably, the more highly colored sex. This sex thing reached the breaking point when the rapidly

developing BWS identified a female "rose-beaked flat tail" and was informed it was not a female but a young male and that most young males normally look like adult females (shades of Women's Lib). Then he was told that other young birds, as some egrets, are completely different from the adults--so much so that they are often mistaken for entirely different species.

The BWS was almost fully developed on a trip to the seashore. Gulls of several sizes and shades of color were constantly in sight. The BW explained that during the first three years of life gulls undergo many plumage changes, each different than the last. With this information the BWS threw his binoculars in the trunk of the car and spent the rest of the trip digging in the sand with the children.

The BWS reached his present state when the ducks returned. The previous spring he had learned to identify three or four ducks (males particularly) and was looking forward to their return. Fall brought the ducks but none were recognized. When the EW identified these three or four ducks in a small flock of completely non-descript brownish ducks, the BWS laid his binoculars aside, picked up a paper-backed western story and henceforth behaved as any good BWS should, i.e.; drive the car safely, keep his eye out for anything that flies so he can point it out to the BW, and keep a large supply of interesting books on hand to kill the hours he sits around dull places like mountain roads, sea-shores, city parks, lakes and sewer ponds, waiting for the BW.

...HLW (midland, Texas)...

#### BIFD NOTES:

Sunday, Sept. 23, turned out to be a day of the greatest excitement for TPAS members and guests on their first field trip of the fall to Buffalo Lake. Rena Ross and Peggy Acord drew the group's attention to a small gull that, as it flew, displayed a striking and bold wing pattern of white, black and brown triangles, and a forked tailed edged in black. The bird was observed carefully as it both flew and rested on the ground, at times within 50 yards of the observers, and it proved beyond a doubt to be an immature Sabine's Gull.

The Sabine's Gull "broods from the Arctic coast south to Bristol Bay, Alaska. It migrates mainly off the Pacific Coast, but a few (rare rather than casual) pass through the Great Plains, Great Basin, and lower Colorado River." It is mainly an oceanic gull, spending its summers on the tundra.

Records of this species in Texas are quite rare. Petersen lists it as accidental for the state, having been reported from Corpus Christi and Anahuac. Since publication of his book, there have probably been a half dozen or fewer sightings. We have just learned that on Sept. 22, the day preceding our own observation, an immature Sabines Gull was seen at Dallas. Three sightings have been turned in from Oklahoma (2 of them supported by collected specimens), and two from New Mexico. On Oct. 12, 1969, Ken Seyffert spent about an hour within 25 yards of one at Buffalo Lake. Such a sighting by a lone birder is not acceptable, however, as the rarity of the species warrants confirmation by two or more reputable birders. Besides Rena and Peggy, others in the fortunate group were Fern Cain, Rita Kenney, Charles Smith, Bill and Ginger Holliday, Ruby McDowell, and Ken Seyffert.

So far this fall, migration has been spotty. We have had some days of strong, northerly winds that, possibly, sailed the birds right on over us without their stopping. A few species have appeared in unusual numbers. Peggy Acord and Estelle Stevens observed 28 White-faced Ibis at Buffalo Lake on 9/13, and 15 Long-billed Curlew on a playa lake near there on the same date. Rena Ross reported a minimum of 14 Sharp-shinned Hawks at the Palo Duro Club during the last week of September plus (unusual at any time) 2 Goshawks and a Broad-winged Hawk. She also observed the latter species in her yard in town as well as several sightings of the Red-eyed Vireo and a Philadelphia Vireo. Our group has decided that it should start making field trips to Rena's back yard. Black-bellied Plover have been unusually common at Buffalo Lake. Ken Seyffert reported 14 there on 9/22 and 16 on 9/30. At the same locality he observed an immature Little Blue Heron on 9/22.

#### A BANDED BLUEBIRD RECOVERY;

James Dillard, wildlife biologist with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. in Dumas, writes of a recovery of a banded Mountain Bluebird during the fall of 1972. The bird had apparently been hit by an automobile near Stratford. Information received from the North American Bird Banding files in Laurel, Maryland, showed the bird had been banded near Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, on June 26, 1971. When banded, it was too young to fly.

"Those who favor better roads and various other enticements are no doubt honest in their professed desire to promote what they call 'fuller use' of the wilderness and the parks. But what they are encouraging is not a fuller but a different use--incompatible with the original one. It would hardly be practicable to examine every visitor to wilderness or reserve and to make him prove that he has come for a legitimate purpose. But it is perfectly possible to make the test automatically by having the road ask the question: 'Are you willing to take a little trouble to get there?' Thought the proposal to prepare deliberately for such automatic questioning will seem fantastic to many, that is only because ours is an age--the very first perhaps--which has come to assume that 'the most accessible' is always 'the best'--in education, art, and entertainment as well as in recreation."

...Joseph Wood Krutch...

#### CALENDAR:

- Oct. 15: Monthly society meeting at the Garden Center - 7:30 p.m.  
Topic - "Spinning"  
Speaker - Alice Allen
- Oct. 28: Audubon Wildlife Film at the Garden Center - 2:30 p.m.