

PROGRAM FOR OCTOBER:

Kenneth Seyffert will present the program for October. His topic will be "Aids to Hawk Identification". This will be a non-expert presentation aimed toward the beginning birder who is having trouble distinguishing a hawk from any other high flying bird. The experience and expertise of the audience will be called upon to enliven the event.

THE BALD EAGLE VS. THE GOLDEN EAGLE: AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION FOR BEGINNERS (AND OTHERS):

Most of us have no trouble in identifying an adult Bald Eagle, particularly when we are fairly close to one; its conspicuous snowy white head with very heavy, yellow beak attached, and equally noticeable white tail, are diagnostic features. If any doubt still exists, one should look also at its yellow tarsi and toes; the tarsi of the Bald Eagle are unfeathered and exposed, whereas they are feathered in the Golden Eagle. It must be kept in mind, however, that should you happen upon a perched Golden Eagle on a very windy day, its tarsi may be exposed by the force of the wind and you may conclude, insofar as the tarsi are concerned, that you are looking at a Bald Eagle. If this problem confronts you, keep your eyes on the head and tail.

If you are afield on a cold, clear winter day and spot an eagle-like bird soaring very high above you, and you notice, further, that it doesn't seem to have a head or tail, you may safely conclude it is an adult Bald Eagle. The white head and tail blend so well against the blue background of the deep sky that they almost literally disappear from the sight of the viewer below. After so long, the air forces of the world finally figured this out and started painting their combat planes white, thus making them harder to see while they were in the air. If they had done a little bird watching, particularly Bald Eagles flying high, they could have saved themselves alot of trouble.

Identifying an immature Bald Eagle is something else. The white head and tail are not acquired until its fourth or fifth year. Its beak is brownish, not yellow, and overall, it is a more brownish bird than the darker adult, with variable mottlings of buff and white, and some white in the wing linings. It can easily be distinguished from an immature Golden Eagle. On the latter the tail is basally white while the terminal third has a distinct black band. This combination will vary as the bird matures. Also, the immature Golden Eagle has white patches at the base of its primaries. When flying, these white wing patches flash upon the eyes of the viewer.

You will notice that flying eagles have flat profiles. This is particularly noticeable when the bird turns and comes toward you more or less headon. The line from wing tip to wing tip is almost straight, save for a bump in the middle where the head is. As it turns away from you, the massive size of the wings, in contrast to the size of the head, smacks you in the eye. The head of a flying Bald Eagle projects farther forward from its body than that of a Golden Eagle.

It appears bigger-headed. Unlike the white head of the mature Bald Eagle or dusky brown head of the immature Bald Eagle, the head of the mature Golden Eagle is discreetly golden or tawny on the crown and nape. This golden sheen on the head can be seen when the light is right as the bird banks and turns in the sky.

We are fortunate in the Panhandle in being able to view these magnificent birds with a fair amount of frequency. The Golden Eagle is with us the year around and nests in the canyon country, particularly the Palo Duro. The Bald Eagle winters with us. It is more likely to be encountered near bodies of water as it feeds frequently on fish, both live and carrion, and preys on the large numbers of waterfowl that winter here. Lakes Meredith and Tanglewood are good places in which to find them, the latter more so if you want to get a close look at one. It is a small impoundment and as many as a dozen eagles at a time have been observed as they perched in the dead trees scattered about in it.

At one time the Bald Eagle nested in the Texas Panhandle. In 1916 E. W. Gates collected eggs from a nest in Potter Co. In 1876 C. A. H. McCauley, Lieutenant in the Third U. S. Artillery, accompanied the Buffner expedition to explore the source of the Red River, and found the bird nesting there. His own account describes the discovery best: "Haliaeetus Leucocephalus - White-headed or Bald Eagle: met with several times in the canyon of the Red River. On Mulberry Creek, June 17, a nest of this species was found containing two young about a week old. They were taken to camp, added to the list of pets of the soldiers, and brought in on our return. It was over a month before they acquired the necessary strength or learned to use their legs. Of a generally uncouth appearance, their awkward look was heightened by squatting in the most ungraceful manner upon their 'elbows', as the soldiers remarked, the whole tarsus resting on the ground, and their toes and claws continually in their way, for they were evidently conscious of having no place to put them so as to be at ease. This is one of all the feathered tribes most valuable to the red man. The birds soon were consequently and naturally, to no small degree, mistrustful of our approach. Every chief and young buck of a tribe must needs have his war-bonnet; and as the quills of the Eagle alone will suffice for such purpose, they are always in demand and eagerly sought for. The purchaser of Indian trophies and things has consequently to pay well on his adding this curiosity to his collection".

The Bald Eagle didn't know how well off he was when he only had the redman to contend with. Shooting, trapping and poisoning of the species since then has almost eliminated it as a nesting species anywhere in Texas. As it has been aptly stated: "In 1971, six miracle occurred in Texas: Six young Bald Eagles flew from four nests. According to Dennis N. Russell, Texas Parks & Wildlife biologist assigned to study endangered species, these eagles and their parents were able to accomplish this feat because they avoided fish. Instead they ate rabbits, teal, and gallinules---all primarily herbiv-

orous creatures which ingest and store in their body fat less pesticides than do most fish. Interested Texans should not expect miracles to continue---even rabbit flesh will probably become highly polluted in a few years." (The Bird Life of Texas, Oberholser/Kincaid).

Occasionally word goes around that the Bald Eagle has been seen in the Panhandle during the summer, and that nesting is suspected. If you hear of such a story and can pinpoint the location of the sighting and the person making the observation, our Society would very much like to know of it. It is a good practice to keep records of all observations of both species of eagles for the information is of value. A hundred years from now your observations of the eagles in the Panhandle may be of as great an interest as ours are of Lt. McCauley's made in 1876.

FALL MIGRATION:

Grobes - the sighting of a Pied-billed Grebe in our area is not unusual, but the behavior of one at Memorial Park Cemetery on 9/22 was. On the pond at the NE corner of the cemetery was an individual that refused to be frightened of the humans gathered there to observe it. Normally a Pied-billed will vanish the moment a two-legged creature approaches it: it didn't acquire the name of "hell diver" without reason! This bird, however, was full of curiosity and instead of fleeing, swam toward the observer for a better look. It appeared to be a young bird of the year going through a post-juvinal molt.

Raptors - by the third week in Sept. the Osprey had returned to the Panhandle. Both Roberta Currie and Peggy Acord reported two at Lake Tanglewood. On 9/26 Fern Cain observed one at the dam at Lake Meredith. Two Broad-winged Hawks were seen at Memorial Park Cemetery on 9/21 by Peggy Acord, Bill and Ginger Holliday, and Roberta Currie. Carolyn Stallwitz had an interesting experience with a dark-phase Swainson's Hawk near Dumas. While photographing it (and beautiful shots they turned out to be), she approached it so closely "I could have touched him before he flew, but he wasn't hurt; he just seemed curious about me". On 10/8 Rona Ross reported two very late Mississippi Kites over town.

Rails - we often hear the Virginia Rail calling from among the cattails, but we seldom see one. On 9/22 Bill & Ginger Holliday observed one as it fed in the open at Southeast Park near Amarillo. Rails were in the news at the Muleshoe NWR in late Sept., as reported by the Lubbock Audubon Society. An incredible 4 Black Rails were flushed by the group during a field trip to the refuge, followed by an even more incredible Yellow Rail. The latter species "wandered out---completely ignoring all the excitement of the birders, and those standing about four feet away from him."

Shorebirds - most reports of shorebird activity comes from Carolyn Stallwitz in Dumas. She not only saw them but took excellent photographs of them. Her pictures of the Common Snipe and Pectoral Sandpipers are as good as you will likely see, and she has excellent shots of the Wilson's and Northern Phalaropes in fall plumage. Those skeptics who are dubious of our past reports

of the Northern Phalarope in the Panhandle can now rest assured. A note of interest is her report of 3 Spotted Sandpipers that remained in the area all summer.

Cuckoos and Goatsuckers - On 9/21 the Empires and the Hollidays reported a Black-billed Cuckoo at Buffalo Lake. They reported the lack of any rufous in the bird's wings, and a black bill. It is interesting to note that an immature of this species was found dead at Lake Ransom near Lubbock on 9/18. The Amarillo bird was evidently an immature also as it was reported as having a white eye-ring. On 9/21 a Chuck-will's Widow was observed at Memorial Park Cemetery by Peggy Acord, the Hollidays, and Roberta Currie. The bird was watched as it both flew and perched.

Warblers - this has been an outstanding fall for warblers. There have been several sightings of the Townsend's Warbler. KS reported 3 at Buffalo Lake on 9/8, and 2 more on 9/28. One was seen at Memorial Park Cemetery on 9/21 by Peggy Acord, Roberta Currie, and the Hollidays. Peggy observed another at her home on 10/7. A Chestnut-sided Warbler was observed at the cemetery on 9/14 by KS and Peggy Acord. The next day KS observed one there, and at the opposite end of the cemetery Esthor Waddill saw another. On 9/23 KS watched one through his kitchen window as it hopped about in a snowball bush by the back door. The bird was in typical fall plumage except that the two wing-bars were bright yellow and it had retained the very bright yellow feathers on its crown. A Black-throated Blue Warbler was seen at Buffalo Lake on 9/21 by the Hollidays & the Empires. This species is rarely seen in our area and most records are fall ones. Sightings of the Black & White Warbler and American Redstart continue coming in. There have been an unusual number of both species around this fall. KS had a Magnolia Warbler at Buffalo Lake the afternoon of 9/22. The Hollidays & the Empires had a floating look at one that morning in town. KS reported another in Amarillo on 10/6. From his back door he watched the bird from no more than 3 feet away as it fed in a snowball bush in the rain. Peggy Acord observed another one at her home 10/7 that was equally close to her. KS reported 2 Black-throated Green Warblers on 9/15, one in town and the other at Buffalo Lake. A Yellow-breasted Chat at Memorial Park Cemetery hung around for a week or so: it was first seen by the Hollidays. Nashville Warblers have not been uncommon and the Yellow-rumps and Wilson's have been abundant. On 10/7 Rona Ross reported a Virginia's Warbler in town. This is the only reported sighting of this species this year.

Fringillids - Bill & Ginger Holliday saw a grosbeak in their yard in town on 9/22, that puzzled them. It appeared to be an immature Black-headed. A closer look disclosed a few specks of bright pink on its breast, leading them to think it might be a Rose-breasted. It is a fact that the two hybridize, and there is an interesting article on their hybridization in South Dakota in the March, 1974 issue of The Wilson Bulletin. We have had more than the usual number of reports on the Black-headed Grosbeak this fall.

one spotted rail