

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

Monday, May 15: The last meeting of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society before the summer recess will be this next Monday night, May 15, at the Amarillo Garden Center.

The feature for the evening program will be Mr. Richard DeArment from Wheeler who will talk with the members about "Insecticides and Their Effect on Wildlife". Mr. DeArment is the Extension Biologist of Region I, which includes all of West Texas, with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. He has had extensive experience with wildlife, and the problem of insecticides has been one of his greatest concerns. He has been with the Department for 25 years, and is very familiar with the Panhandle area.

The current bird talk will be given by Mrs. Grady Fox, one of the most experienced members of the Audubon Society.

Mrs. Joe Deason will preside at the business meeting, and she urges anyone who is interested in the subject of the program to feel free to attend this meeting at 7:30 in the evening at the Garden Center.

Mr. & Mrs. George Ross will be hosts for the meeting.

Sunday, July 16: Wolf Creek Park, Ochiltree Park - meet at 8:00 a. m. This park is located southeast of Perryton off Highway 83. On the highway map, Wolf Creek is shown.

ONE OF THE SPECIAL PLACES:

Once in awhile, we stumble onto one of those very special places, often close to home. Always unexpected, they are therefore especially delightful.

Watching the Prairie Chickens dance is special in its own right. There is magic and exhilaration in sunrise across the sandhills with the soft colors of the morning, the scent of sage on the wind, and the awakening sounds of birds or the yip of a coyote - very heady stuff, this.

Dick DeArment told us the sandhills are special and we came to believe him. There are ponds in the sandhills, creeks and lakes, and bogs and a myriad of things interpreted by Dick's eye and knowledge of the area. He showed us plants of the area: which ones hold soil, which ones are best food; we saw beaver houses, ibis, herons, migrating swallows, and many nice things.

On one grassland we talked of controlled burning, sunflower plantings, the benefit of shelter belts, shin oak, sumac and Oh, so many things and phases of nature. Cows love our old gourd, birds love marijuana, deer browse certain shrubs as far as they can reach.

On one ranch we went to see a heronry. There is a line of huge old cottonwoods in a little valley along an underground stream. As we approached, the herons flew up and circled the grove. Way up on the highest branches of the biggest tree we could see a cluster of three nests. One old heron sat tight with the light sliding along her yellow bill. We thought her eggs were likely about to hatch as she sat so tight. Putting the scope on the nests, we were amazed to see that the outside nest were heron nest and the middle one contained two white, wooly young Red-tailed Hawks. Can't you imagine those three cold-eyed mothers glaring at each other just feet apart at the top of their world?

The Stein Ranch really intrigued us. This is a special place. The creek below the old house area is in a little valley in the sandhills. The ponds are covered with pink water-lilies, wild Turkeys scramble up the hillsides, cress covers the stream, and here is a bog. Bogs are not common in the Panhandle, but there are more than one would suspect, and the bogs at Stein's are very lovely. In the bright spring grass, violets are scattered, catkins are out on willows and oaks, and the wind sings through the cottonwoods. The bog is several feet above the stream, and the dunes are stabilized with grasses. Where wildfire cut up the valley, the new growth is lush and nutritious, while the unburned area is so covered with heavy dry grass that little growth can push up through it. Bog-hopping is a messy but delightful occupation.

We all thanked Dick for sharing his great knowledge and love of the sandhills with us, and for showing us a special place.

....Peggy Acord....

CONFRONTING THE EMPIDONAX:

Identification of Empidonax FLYCATCHERS represents one of the most complex problems of field ornithology. Apart from identification by song and habitat on the breeding grounds, field identification of the genus is an uncertain thing; verification by collecting is the only positive identification, one not available to us as field observers. Observations of Empidonaces on the breeding grounds by Carol Hack shows that the plumage of the Dusky varies even among a handful of pairs which nest in one aspen grove.

Nevertheless, Jon Dunn has reported a breakthrough in an article in "The Western Tanager," published by the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Trapping empidonaces, keying them out in the hand, and then releasing them and observing their field characteristics has developed some field marks usable for separating the species. Guy McCaskie, Pierre Devillers, and Dave DeSante have contributed the following data about identifying members of this difficult genus. This information still does not permit identification of every Empidonax; however, it im

proves immeasurably out ability to identify some of them. It is essential that every observer exercise extreme caution before making any Empid identification. Dunn describes the following information as "not so much to supply a definitive solution to the dilemma as to serve as an exploration of the problems to be encountered in confronting this frustrating and challenging genus."

Phillips, in *Birds of Arizona*, says, regarding this perplexing genus, that all look very much alike. Most migrate south before the pre-basic molt, which means that they look even more alike in the fall, due to wear and fading, than in the spring.

The information we present here makes identification both harder and easier; for instance, a yellow Empid is not automatically a Western, particularly in the fall.

Many of the differentiating marks are of a subtle nature--and since these marks are often variable, it is generally imperative to take into account a combination of characters before arriving at a conclusion as to species.

WESTERN FLYCATCHER - Empidonax difficillis

Behavior - Quite distinctive. Actively flicks its wings while flicking its tail upward. Only Western and Hammond's flick both wings and tail at once.

Call Notes - Diagnostic, once learned;

A whistled, up-slurred "su-whoop", commonly given on the breeding grounds and routinely in migration (unlike other Empids).

A soft, White-crowned Sparrow-like "peep", very unlike the "wit" notes given by any other Empids.

Plumage - Overall shape: large-headed and short-tailed.

Largely yellow underparts (shading to olive on the sides).

Fairly greenish back color.

Yellow throat.

Some fall birds are very drab, lacking almost all traces of yellow on the underparts. In dealing with these birds, the most useful character is the bill, which is proportionately much longer and wider than that of other similarly-sized Empids. Also, when viewed from underneath (the usual position), the bright orange mandible should serve to identify it.

HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER - Empidonax hammondi

Behavior - Like the Western, Hammond's flicks its wings while flicking its tail upward, with some frequency.

Call Notes-The characteristic soft "wit" note of most Empids.

A piercing "peep" note, described as resembling the call of the Pygmy Nuthatch.

Plumage - Overall shape: large-headed and short-tailed (like Western).

Underparts present a "vested" appearance, a result of contrast with darker sides and flanks with paler belly. (This pattern is reminiscent of that of the Olive-sided Flycatcher or Western Wood Pewee, although here it is less distinct.)

Only slight olive tinge on back.

Head always appears very gray, with a contrasting, white eye ring. (Disregard illustration in Robbin's *Birds of North America*, which shows a distinct rusty tinge to cap and back.)

Very thin and short bill, when compared with Western. When viewed from the side, the lower mandible appears primarily dark, rather than bright orange like the Western.

Little contrast between outer tail rectrices and rest of tail.

Some fall immatures can be quite yellowish below; in fact, they can often be considerably brighter than some drab Western individuals. Despite their brightness, however, these immature Hammond's display their "vested" appearance--though now the contrast is one of dark olive with yellow. In addition, these birds invariably display a grayish throat.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER - Empidonax oberholseri

Behavior- Flicks only its tail upwards, and then only occasionally.

Call Notes-The characteristic soft "wit" note.

Plumage - Tail longer than Hammond's, lending it a longer appearance overall.

Underparts uniformly pale, largely lacking the vested appearance of Hammond's. Sometimes (like Hammond's) it shows very pale yellow on belly and under tail coverts.

Paler-headed than Hammond's, particularly in the cheek area.

Bill larger than Hammond's, approaching length of the bill of the Western.

Outer webs of rectrices distinctly edged with grayish-white. (In Hammond's, a less contrasty, drabber, gray shade.)

Immatures are slightly brighter than adults, but none (of Dunn's observations) even nearly approach the brightness of an immature Hammond's. You can assume that a very bright bird encountered in the fall is not a Dusky.

LEAST FLYCATCHER - Empidonax minimus

Behavior - Vigorously flips its tail upward, but seldom flicks its wings.

Call Note -A loud "whit", resembling the call of the Audubon's Warbler.

Song: a shortly snapped cry, "Che-bek" (accent on last syllable), very emphatic. Frequently given during migration.

Plumage - Overall shape: big-headed and short-tailed, like Hammond's.

Underparts have a whiter appearance than Hammond's.
 Breast: sides have only a slight grayish cast, giving it only a faint horizontal band, in contrast to the "vested" appearance of Hammond's.
 Lower belly and undertail coverts a very pale yellow (often appearing white on some birds.)
 Head slightly paler gray than Hammond's.
 Bold eye ring and slight greenish cast to back, like Hammond's.
 Bill, although short like Hammond's, reveals a wider base when viewed from underneath--giving it almost a triangular shape.
 Bolder white wing bars, terciales, and edgings to the wings. Back ground color of wing is of a darker shade than Hammond's, which further emphasizes the contrast.
 Tail, a uniform shade, lacking pale grayish edge of Hammond's.

WILLOW FLYCATCHER - Empidonax traillii

Behavior - Consistently flicks its tail upward.

Call Notes-Call, "whit", like other Empids, possibly a bit louder.

Song, an emphatic "fitz-bow", often heard during spring migration.

Plumage - Lacks a distinctive eye ring (although it may have a very faint one).

Head and face a fairly uniform brownish-olive, which further accentuates the lack of an eye ring.

Shape: head proportionate smaller and rounder than all other Empids, except Gray.

Throat whiter than other Empids, except Least.

Bill longer and wider than Hammond's and Dusky and Least.

GRAY FLYCATCHER Empidonax wrightii

Behavior - Drops tail downward (without a wing flick). Although it will occasionally begin to raise its tail upward, no other U. S. Empid flicks its tail down.

Call Notes-Typical soft "wit", like other Empids.

Plumage - Largest Empid. Smaller-headed and rounder-headed than Dusky or Hammond's.

Back grayish, lacking olive or greenish tones of Dusky or Hammond's.

Face much paler than Dusky, with whitish eye ring contrasting less distinctly with the rest of the head.

Bill slightly longer than Dusky (and much longer than Hammond's). Base of lower mandible is a distinct pinkish.

Tail: slightly longer than Dusky. Outer webs of outer rectrices conspicuously edged with white, contrasting even more sharply with the rest of the tail than on Dusky.

Most immatures have a pale suffusion of yellow on the belly.

....from the Colorado Field Ornithologists....

BIRD NOTES:

April 15 - In McBride Canyon, Barry Zimmer observed a Black & White Warbler. Off Alibates he had 100 White-faced Ibis, Franklin's Gulls and the Water Pipit. In her yard in town, Rena Ross reported a Black-chinned Hummingbird.

April 16 - At Caprocks Canyon SP, Ken Seyffert had an Osprey. The most memorable animal of the day was seen when he arose from a mid-afternoon nap in a shaded grove and found a 2½' rattlesnake coiled a few inches from his head. No more naps!

April 19 - Barry Zimmer flushed a Poor-will in Memorial Park Cemetery.

April 20 - While driving between Panhandle and White Deer, Rena Ross observed 30 Swainson's Hawks.

April 23 - Peggy Acord and Rena Ross observed a Horned Grebe at Lake Tanglewood. On this same date, Ken Seyffert recorded 65 species of birds on the Hugh Currie Ranch, including a Worm-eating Warbler, Black & White Warbler, and 2 Swamp Sparrows (one of them singing).

April 24 - While driving in the Lakeside Road area, Rena Ross observed 24 Swainson's Hawks and 9 Long-billed Curlew. In her backyard, she listened to a singing White-throated Sparrow.

April 29 - At the Palo Duro Club, Esther Waddill reported a Tennessee Warbler and Carolina Chickadee. In Memorial Park Cemetery, she observed a Black & White Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler. Another Black & White Warbler was seen at their home near Canyon by Nancy and Ed Elliott. In McBride Canyon, Barry Zimmer saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

April 30 - In the Christian Church Camp in S. Ceta Canyon, the field trip observers (Peggy Acord, Fern Cain, Nancy and Ed Elliott, Rosomary Scott, Ken Seyffert, and Barry Zimmer) observed such good birds as a very unexpected Great Egrot, a Black & White Warbler, and two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. 54 species were seen.

May 1 - Ken Seyffert reported the following interesting species from Buffalo Lake: Long-eared Owl, Townsend's Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Green-tailed Towhee.

- May 3 - After chasing the bird up and down the creek in Palo Duro Canyon SP for a long time, Ken Seyffert finally concluded he was seeing a melanistic Broad-winged Hawk. This was following the morning snow storm! Also seen was a Warbling Vireo and Black-headed Grosbeak.
- May 4 - In McBride Canyon, Ken Seyffert observed a Black-throated Green Warbler and a male Baltimore Oriole. Off Alibates, he reported 2 Black-bellied Plover, 6 Willetts, 2 Marbled Godwits, and a Black-necked Stilt.
- May 5 - At Lake Theo in Caprocks Canyon SP, Ken Seyffert found an American Bittern, 11 White-faced Ibis, and 2 Pectoral Sandpipers.

BIRDING ON ONE'S OWN IN BRAZIL:

The following excerpt from a letter of Lucile Fiedler's, one of our members now living in Brazil, is illustrative of the adventures awaiting a birder in a strange land:

"When I arrived here, folks told me I wouldn't see many birds, and hardly anyone knew the names of the flora or fauna around here. On my own, I have taken notes on over 50 species of birds now, and have pressed many flowers as well as collected a few colorful moths, and quartz crystals are to be found everywhere, it seems. Finally, I found someone who had a couple of fascinating records of Brazilian birds; one with their songs "accompanying" orchestration, by Johan Dalgas Frisch; one with their songs with part commentary....Then another "break-through" came yesterday.

"I was taking a little walk not far from the compound and found a place where some flowering shrubs were in bloom and found myself in a hummingbird paradise! Beautiful! Farther along the way I spotted some flycatchers and some gray-headed, red-brown doves, etc. I was scanning the area for other birds with my binix when this lady drove up. (I was just outside the wall of her place). We talked (good way to learn Portuguese in a hurry! K've had 5 formal lessons, so far!) She invited me in and we talked about the compound and she knew some folks there and we got around to birds again. She had a book! It started to rain "cats and dogs", so we went through the whole book. I learned a lot of Portuguese, alot about birds, and got acquainted with a lovely lady; She lent me the book and wants me to visit her often. How delighted I am with this!

"I have seen a mockingbird-type bird here; a small glossy black bird that flies up into the air, sings its song and lights again and then repeats the "act"; a pair of green parrots with long tails; a large black and white crow-like bird; cute little wren with a brilliant song; woodpeckers; an ostruck-like bird, but small; beautiful rich blue one with a black throat; sparrow hawks and owls; small, finch-like bird with bright red bill and eye stroak and reddish breast (the "bico-de-lacre"); swallows; whipperwill-type; swift-type; to name a few---and they are in this book! Very interesting with write-up for each bird. It's called "Aves" and doesn't have a title page or an author - only "M E C" which maybe means its a compilation by several individuals.

"If you are acquainted with any publication on plants and/or birds, I'd be happy to have the information."

BIG DAY COUNT:

Sunday, May 14: Dawn to dark count in which we identify as many species of birds in Potter and Randall Counties as we possibly can. The 3 group leaders will be Fern Cain, Peggy Acord and Ken Seyffert. Fern Cain will be in charge of the northern Potter Co. area, taking in all the good birding spots in the western Lake Meredith sections. Peggy Acord will be covering the parks and cemeteries in town and the Elysian Fields and nearby areas in the morning and will join Ken Seyffert in the afternoon to cover the Lake Tanglwood area. Ken will cover Buffalo Lake NWR in the morning. We need a party to cover the Palo Duro Canyon and/or Ce... Glen. Any volunteers? Bring the results of your counts to the meeting on Monday night and we will compile the total list.