

March, 1980

2206 S. Lipscomb, Amarillo, Tx. 79109

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PROGRAM FOR MARCH:

Our program for March will concern that most controversial of Panhandle spots, the Buffalo Lake NWR, and it will be presented by the refuge's Acting Manager, Larry Wynn.

Larry is a native of Estelline, growing up there and later attending South Plains Jr. College two years and West Texas State Univ. two years. He has worked for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for eleven years, the past three as Acting Manager. Larry and his wife, Rita, have been married eleven years and have two children, Christi(7) and Chad (4). His hobbies include raising and training horses, and hunting.

Larry has always been the friend of birders and particularly those of our Society, and has contributed many valuable observations on the birdlife of our area. Anyone who has ever visited the refuge has experienced his warm hospitality and graciousness and he has always gone that extra mile to share that prime birding spot with us.

The traditional 5 minute bird talk for the meeting will be given by Rena Ross who will recreate for us her adventures while birding in Mexico.

HERONS TO BERMUDA: AN AUDUBON STORY OF INTERNATIONAL AID:

Bermuda has a problem with burrowing land crabs; an over-abundance of these crustaceans has been causing erosion. Naturalists believe that in centuries past there were Yellow-crowned Night Herons on the island that kept the land crab population in check, and that something, probably human alteration of habitat, long ago drove out the herons. In 1976 the government of Bermuda decided to try to re-introduce Yellow-crowned, and came to the National Audubon Society for help. National Audubon turned to Frank Dunstan, then warden/biologist of the society's Tampa Bay Sanctuary in Florida, which has herons to spare. Since then, nestling herons from Florida have been transported to Bermuda, reared there and released. Not all have stayed, but in at least one section of Bermuda enough of them have settled in to gobble up enough land crabs to have significantly reduced the erosion problem.

Dunstan, who has since become the society's Mid-Atlantic regional representative, described the heron transplant this winter during his testimony in support of the nongame wildlife bill which he gave on behalf of the society before the Senate Sub-committee on Resource Protection. It was one of several examples he gave of ways in which nongame species can be valuable.

AN IMPORTANT BOOK ON TEXAS BIRDS:

The Fort Worth Audubon Society has joined with Warren Pulich in the re-writing and re-publishing of "The Birds of Tarrant County". This book, complete with a number of black and white illustrations done by Anne Marie Pulich, serves as an in-depth reference book for the birds found in Tarrant County. The book covers each species found in Tarrant County and details when it can be seen and in what particular habitat.

The book can be purchased by sending a check or money order made payable to the

Fort Worth Audubon Society (No cash please). The total cost is \$7.25 which includes tax, handling, and postage. Send the checks to Elizabeth and Virginia Stagg, Fort Worth Audubon Society, 2047 Glenco Terrace, Fort Worth, Texas 76110. Allow 2 to 3 weeks for delivery.

BIRD NOTES:

Sandhill Cranes - this has been a remarkable winter for this species in the Texas Panhandle. A record high of 7,000 were recorded on the CBC at Buffalo Lake NWR on 12/26/79. Numbers continued increasing after that and by early February there were 25,000 or more. The sight, sound and movement of these magnificent birds is an experience never to be forgotten. From Brisco Co. we received the following: "For the past two or three months thousands of the grey colored sandhill cranes have gathered around Silverton on the playa lakes and in adjoining fields. This is the first time the cranes have come here in such numbers and there is much speculation as to what is responsible for their migration here this year".

GLAUCOUS GULL:- this gull remained at Buffalo Lake NWR until around Feb. 1. The bird was first seen on the 12/26/79 CBC. This Arctic species that usually winters along the east coast as far south as New Jersey, and occasionally to the Great Lakes, and along the west coast south to lower British Columbia, afforded area birders a rare opportunity to view it.

BALD EAGLE - as in the winter of 1978/79, large numbers wintered in the Panhandle. Up to 40 were counted at one time at Buffalo Lake NWR, and 56 were recorded on the Lake Meredith Recreation Area during a survey made there on 1/12 by area birders (Fern Cain, Ken Seyffert, Frank Smith) under the sponsorship of the National Wildlife Federation. The first such survey was made at Lake Meredith on 1/20/79 when 54 were observed.

The 1979 census produced 9836 eagles in the "lower 48" states, nearly twice the number counted in any previous survey of the endangered bird. The Federation said the census was the first it had conducted and attributed the surprisingly high count to the "intensity" of the survey. The final results of the 1980 count are not known at this time.

SAY'S PHOEBE ONE AT Buffalo Lake NWR 1/6 by Ken Seyffert. An unusual number wintered in the Panhandle this year.

ROUGH-LEGGED & FERRUGINOUS HAWKS - go to Buffalo Lake NWR where both species can be easily found, and in good numbers.

LARK BUNTING - very large numbers wintered with us this year.

HERMIT THRUSH - seen at Buffalo Lake NWR on the 12/26 CBC and one was still there on 2/17 (Peggy Acord, Ken Seyffert).

PYRRHULOXIA - a male and a female at the first water crossing in the Palo Duro Canyon SP on 2/24 by Ken Seyffert.

FIRST NESTINGS BY OUR RELEASED BALCONS:

This spring, for the first time in more than 20 years, peregrine falcons paired, mated and laid eggs at eyries in the eastern United States. Last year we wrote about the formation of a pair of released falcons at a site in the New Jersey wetlands in mid-summer, after the normal mating season; and we also told of Scarlett, the female that has taken up a permanent territory in downtown Baltimore, where she has established her eyrie on a ledge at the 33rd floor level of the USF&G home office building. All through the long winter we waited anxiously to see what these falcons would do in '79.

March, the normal time for pairing, passed; no falcons had taken up residence at the New Jersey towers, and no mate had appeared in Baltimore for Scarlett. We began to fear there would be no brooding by our released falcons again in 1979.

As a last resort we decided to try to provide a tiercel for Scarlett, for she indicated by her nest-scraping behaviour and other signs that she would soon come into breeding condition. Across the street from USF&G, a flat roof of the 10-story C & P Telephone Co. building offered a convenient location within Scarlett's daily view to set up a cage for housing a prospective mate. The C & P people proved to be just as cooperative as those at USF&G in their desire to help us establish a breeding pair of falcons in Baltimore. By the middle of March, Steve Sherrod had the cage constructed, and on the 19th, we placed an 11-year old, falconry trained tiercel named Blue Meanie inside. Tom Maachtlo, our attendant, began a daily vigil of care and observation that was to last well into June.

The idea was to see whether the two birds would establish a pair-bond while the Blue Meanie was confined, so that on release, he would be attracted to Scarlett and would remain in the city as her mate. Scarlett very quickly discovered the tiercel in his cage and made frequent visits to him to take the quail and pigeons that Tom left as an enticement on an outside shelf. Scarlett showed much interest in the Blue Meanie, calling and wailing to him. Once he offered her a quail through the bars, but otherwise he did not return her favors.

The, on 4 April Scarlett laid the first peregrine egg to be seen in the outdoors east of the Mississippi River in more than 20 years. On 7 April she laid a second egg, and we knew that if our plan was to have any chance for success, we would have to set the Blue Meanie free before Scarlett completed her clutch and began steady incubation. Released from the cage, he flew up and at once joined Scarlett in the air; soaring together wing tip to wing tip, they disappeared around the other side of the USF&G building. Our hopes began to rise with the, but in about 10 minutes Scarlett reappeared alone. The Blue Meanie was never seen again! A second, captive produce tiercel released later on in the season was just as unsuccessful. Meanwhile Scarlett laid her third and final egg and began incubation.

After allowing Scarlett to incubate full term, we substituted some downy young falcons from Cornell for her mother. She performed her parental duties with flying colors, catching much of the food for her nestlings

herself, and she successfully fledged two males and two females. Thanks to a sympathetic press, and to the informed and tolerant

citizens of Baltimore, Scarlett has already become one of the most famous peregrines in history, rivaling her Canadian counterpart, the Sun Life falcon of Montreal.

....from the Peregrine Fund NEWSLETTER of the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology....

P.S. - we will tell you of the exciting events taking place with the New Jersey falcons in the next issue of the Prairie Horned Lark.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN MARCH AND EARLY APRIL:

March 2 to 8: Tree Swallow; House Wren

March 9 to 15: Long-billed Dowitcher; Baird's Sandpiper; Semi-palmated Sandpiper; Say's Phoebe; Bullock's Oriole

March 16 to 22: Am. Avocet; Least Sandpiper; Western Kingbird; Eastern Phoebe; Rough-winged Swallow; Vesper Sparrow

March 23 to 29: Turkey Vulture; Swainson's Hawk; Wilson's Phalarope; Long-billed Curlew; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; Lark Sparrow; Cassin's Sparrow

March 30 to April 7: Snowy Plover; Franklin's Gull; Scissor-tailed Flycatcher; Ash-throated Flycatcher; Barn Swallow; Cliff Swallow; Black-necked Stilt

April 8 to 14: Spotted Sandpiper; Wilson's Warbler

LATE BIRD NOTES:

At Buffalo Lake NW 3/9/80 - as reported by Ken Seyffert:

Brewer's Sparrow(2); Long-eared Owl(2); Snow Geese(800); Bald Eagle(7); Greater Yellowlegs(8); Lincoln's Sparrow(1).

The following were singing their heads off:

Roadrunner; Rod-winged Blackbird; Mourning Dove; Western Meadowlark; Bewick's Wren; House Finch; Song Sparrow; White-crowned Sparrow; Rock Wren; Dark-eyed Junco.

9 Ferruginous Hawks were circling together over the prairie dog town; Chestnut-collared Longspurs were flying overhead; the Ruddy Ducks and Blue-winged Teal are back; there are still a bunch of Sandhill Cranes around.