

THE PRAIRIE HORNED LARK

Newsletter of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society

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PROGRAM FOR SEPTEMBER:

The Texas Panhandle Audubon Society will begin its fall meetings at the Amarillo Garden Center, 1400 Streit Ave. on Monday evening, September 15 at 7:30, as announced by the President, Mrs. E. L. Donelson.

In line with the environmental emphasis the Society is regularly encouraging, the program will be presented by a team from the Southwestern Public Service Company, bringing their new plans and a film on "Southwestern Solar". This has been developed by the Director of Communications, Valerie Sanders, in response to a meeting of representative people last summer to help provide solutions to the energy crisis. In the trade area of Southwestern Public Service, Solar is an extremely viable energy source, and this presentation will bring their plans to the public. Kenneth Ladd, the Senior Engineer for Environmental Services, and the Project Manager for Alternate Energy Resource Studies will present the program and he will be introduced by Melvin Kunkel, the local District Manager for Southwestern.

The members are urged to attend this meeting in order to become more informed on this most timely and important subject.

BIRD NOTES FROM A SUMMER JOURNAL:

- May 26: A Chuck-wills-widow at Buffalo Lake NWR (PA,RR,RS,KS,MT,EW). The bird was flushed several times in Redpoll Cove.
- May 26: Two adults with two young Scrub Jays in the Palo Duro Canyon SP (KS).
- June 1: Two Ferruginous Hawks and a Mountain Plover on the Channing Breeding Bird Survey, Hartloy Co.(KS).
- June 3: 32 Grasshopper Sparrows on the Miami Breeding Bird Survey, Roberts Co.(KS).
- June 5: 12 White-faced Ibis and a Spotted Sandpiper on a playa lake east of Pantex, Carson Co., and two Snowy Egrets on another playa to the north of it.(KS).
- June 7: Two adult Ferruginous Hawks with two young still in nest, two Mountain Plovers, and 39 Long-billed Curlews on the Texline Brooding Bird Survey, Dallam Co.(KB). In the Thompson Grove Picnic Area northeast of Texline there was an empidonax flycatcher, a W. Wood Pewee, a singing male Black-headed Grosbeak, and a Pine Siskin.(KS).
- June 15: A Snowy Egret and an adult male Wilson's Phalarope with a downy chick on a playa lake east of Pantex. (KS). This is the first reported nesting of the species in Texas - see following for story.
- June 22: A Green Heron, two Black-necked Stilts, a singing male Yellowthroat, and a singing male Indigo Bunting at the Buffalo Lake NWR, Randall Co.(KS).
- July 6: A Green Heron, a calling Virginia Rail, three Common Gallinules, a singing Yellowthroat, and a male Yellow-headed Blackbird in the cat-tail marsh below the dam at Lake Meredith, Hutchinson Co.(KS). Near the mouth of Mullinaw Canyon, Potter Co. was a singing male Yellow-breasted Chat and two singing male Indigo Buntings.(KS).

- July 13: A Hairy Woodpecker in Mullinaw (KS).
- July 20: A female Indigo Bunting at Buffalo Lake NWR (KS).
- July 27: A Green Heron and two Eastern Phoeboes in Caprock Canyons SP, Briscoe Co. (KDS). The first reported Chipping Sparrow of the season, in Amarillo (PA).
- Aug. 3: A singing Brown Towhee in the Palo Duro Canyon SP, Randall Co. (KS).
- Aug. 10: An adult and two young Brown Towhees in the Palo Duro Canyon SP (KS).
- Aug. 12: The first reported Yellow Warbler of the season - in Amarillo (PA).
- Aug. 17: 34 Mississippi Kites, an immature Cooper's Hawk, a spot-breasted Eastern Bluebird in Chicken Creek, Potter Co. (PA,FC,KS).
- Aug. 23: The first Black-headed Grosbeak of the season - in Miami, Roberts Co. (OB,RB).
- Aug. 24: Family groups of three of both the Brown and Curve-billed Thrasher at the Buffalo Lake NWR (KS) - plus two Brewer's Sparrows for the earliest on record for the season (KS).
- Sept. 1: 85 Western Kingbirds that moved past the observer in less than ten minutes time, 15 empidonax flycatchers, 17 W. Wood Pewees, a Red-eyed Vireo and Solitary Vireo, at Buffalo Lake NWR (KS). Three Snowy Egrets on a playa lake south of Umbarger (KS).
- Sept. 2: The earliest fall Ovenbird on record - in Amarillo, Potter Co. (RR).
- Sept. 6: The first reported Hermit Thrush of the season - in Amarillo (KS).
- Sept. 7: A scolding Cactus Wren, a Black and White Warbler, an American Redstart, the first reported Sharp-shinned Hawk of the season, a female Summer Tanager - all at the Buffalo Lake NWR (KS).

- PA - Peggy Acord
- OB - Orilla Bryant
- RB - Raymond Bryant
- FC - Fern Cain
- RR - Rena Ross
- RS - Rosemary Scott
- KB - Kenneth Seyffert
- MT - Max Traweck
- EW - Esther Waddill

FIRST NESTING RECORD OF THE WILSON'S PHALAROPE IN TEXAS:

On June 15 on a playa lake east of the Pantex Ordnance Plant in Carson Co., Ken Seyffert found an adult male Wilson's Phalarope with its downy chick. This is the first reported nesting of the species in Texas. The nearest point to the Texas Panhandle at which it is known to nest is on the Cheyenne Bottoms NWR in western Kansas.

The observer first noticed a bird he could not identify as it circled and hovered above a certain spot at the northeastern part of the playa. He was looking toward the rising sun and could see a meadowlark-size bird that continued hovering a few feet above the ground for what seemed like several minutes before it finally lit. Noting the spot where it had landed, he circled the playa and upon nearing it, the bird rose and flew toward him calling strongly and steadily but not stridently. It took the observer awhile to realize that the agitated bird was, in fact, an adult male Wilson's Phalarope, and from its behavior it seemed obvious that it either had young or a nest in the area. As is well known, the sex:

roles in the phalaropes are largely reversed with the male being the drab colored sex and the one that incubates, broods, and raises the young.

Continuing toward the spot from where the bird had flown, the observer began searching diligently in the tall grass and sedges for a nest or young bird. All the while, the adult bird continued flying closely around the searchers head, calling constantly and seemingly trying to divert his attention away from the area for it would periodically move off a short distance and begin hovering once again over a different spot. As the search proved fruitless, the observer moved away and sat down to watch further. The adult bird eventually flew back to its starting point and lit on the ground. This interaction between the bird and the observer continued several times until finally the adult bird did not fly up until the searcher had gotten quite close to it. A quick dash to the spot from where it had flown, a rapid parting of the high grass, and there on the ground was a downy chick crouched motionless.

The observer picked it up and the chick did not struggle but remained still in the palm of his hand. The chick was orange-buff in color with two black stripes running from a lateral stripe at the base of the head up to almost the base of the bill. The body likewise had a quite similar pattern of stripes that ran from the rump to the bend of each wing. The bill was dark colored and rather long and pointed and the legs and feet seemed enormous in relation to the body size. Its undersides were light buff and the chin whitish. After awhile, the chick perked up and looked around and tried to squirm out of its captor's hand. When it was released, it ran off through the tall grass quite rapidly.

It is not uncommon to see small groups of Wilson's Phalaropes on playa lakes in the Texas Panhandle during the summer. These have always been considered to be late spring or early fall migrants and little attention has been paid them. Sometimes lone phalaropes are seen, which is untypical of the species in our area as we usually see them in flocks. The finding of this male with his chick should alert all birders to pay particular attention to the species and to report all such June and July sightings.

THE BLACK RAIL IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE:

Oberholser, in his monumental The Bird Life of Texas, gives one sight record of the Black Rail in the Texas Panhandle, a bird in Roberts Co. in June, 1935 as reported by H. F. Saunders. On September 16, 1974, members of the Llano Estacado Audubon Society (Lubbock) observed four Black Rails on the Muleshoe NWR in Bailey Co., presumably migrants.

On the night of July 1, 1979, an exciting event took place on Jim's Lake northeast of Borger, Hutchinson Co. It was here, while recording night sounds on his tape recorder, in between bouts of fishing, that Richard Bryant picked up the call of a marsh bird that he could not identify. A patient listening to the bird songs recorded on the Peterson record led him to make a tentative identification of the call as that of a Black Rail.

The matter was not pursued further until May 18 of this year. On that day, Ken Seyffert was a visitor at the home of Mrs.

Orilla Bryant in Miami, and Richard was also

there. During the course of conversation, Richard mentioned the recording and that he thought the strange bird call was that of a Black Rail. The visitor voiced his skepticism and the matter was seemingly dropped. NOT SO! When Ken dropped by again on June 12, Mrs. Bryant had the recording with her and promptly played it. On the tape was also Peterson's recording which Richard had included in order to demonstrate the similarity of calls. The Jim's Lake recording seemed without a doubt to be that of a Black Rail! The tape was borrowed, shipped off to Keith Arnold at Texas A&M University, and verified by himself and Tony Gallucci as being an authentic call of a male Black Rail on territory. The recording was retaped and deposited in the state sound collection.

The Black Rail is one of the most elusive of birds to find in North America and the one most sought after by avid birders. All students of birds in Texas (and particularly those of the Panhandle), are most grateful to Richard Bryant for his alertness, Orilla Bryant for her persistence, and both for sharing their discovery with the rest of us.

ALUMINUM = ALUMINUM = ALUMINUM = ALUMINUM

Bring it to the meeting. It is really bringing money now!

FALCONS HATCH ON EAST COAST:

Captive-bred Peregrine Falcons, released to the wild in southern New Jersey, have mated and fledged chicks of their own. It was an historic first that brought encouragement to the effort to restore this endangered species to the Eastern states, where it had not been known to breed for at least 15 years.

Four adult falcons were involved, all hatched from artificially inseminated eggs in the breeding lofts of the Cornell University Peregrine Fund project. They were among a number of captive-bred falcons that have been "hacked out" to the wild as young birds at two wildlife refuges on the New Jersey Coast during the past two to five years. This spring, at the Barnegat National Wildlife Refuge, two of them mated and produced a single chick, a female. The other two, at the Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, fledged two males and a female. In both cases the birds nested in the man-made hack boxes used for the bird releases.

CONDOR CHICK DIES AFTER HANDLING:

In a heartsickening stroke of bad luck, which came just as the program to save the endangered California Condor was moving into high gear, one of the two chicks hatched this spring died last month after being handled in the nest by biologists of the study team. An autopsy has failed to fully explain the death, but experienced field ornithologists suspect it was simply the stress of being weighed, studied, and measured. Such deaths are rare but not unknown, they say. In studies over the years, in which thousands of nestlings of various species have been handled, a few such deaths have occurred. This time it happened to the second condor chick examined.