

THE PRAIRIE HORNED LARK
Newsletter of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society

February, 1982

2206 Lipscomb, Amarillo, TX 79109

Vol. IX, No. 2

The monthly meeting of the Texas Panhandle Society will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, February 15 at the Garden Center. The program will be presented by Frank and Estelle Duncan and will be on "The Environmental Effort and Organization". This is a topic of greater importance now than ever with an Administration in power which has mistakenly interpreted its election mandate to include the dismantling of the environmental gains made over the last twenty years of bi-partisan effort.

NEW OFFICERS:

The following officers for 1982 were elected at our January meeting:

President.....Rena Ross
Vice-President.....Harold Read
Secretary.....Madeline Read
Treasurer.....Armon Mays
Recorder.....Peggy Acord
Garden Club Repr.....Mary Glenn

Committee Chairmen:

Program.....Harold Read
Conservation.....Helen Coleman Madsen
Membership.....Rosemary Scott
Education.....Esther Waddill
Field Trips.....Ken Seyffert
Public Relations.....Robert Conner
Social.....Virginia Gill
Auditor.....Waymon Gill
Nominating.....Martha Meadors
Member-at-Large.....Fern Cain
Birdathon.....Mary Moyer
Newsletter Editor.....Ken Seyffert
Scholarship.....Vera Deason

THANKS FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT:

I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to all the members of the TPAS who have offered me their confidence and support in guiding the Chapter in the coming year. At our last Board meeting, each of the Committee Chairmen outlined the plans of its group and I am very pleased with their presentations. To be an effective organization, we need the input and services of as many of the members as possible. The President can offer direction and support but let us be the type of organization wherein each member does his or her part in carrying out the necessary work.

....Rena Ross....

AUDUBON ARK:

We are happy to report that the traveling Audubon Ark was a smashing success while in Amarillo. It was a delight to have two such enthusiastic pilots of the Ark as Tom Troy and Gloria Hanly guiding the Ark through our city. Over 2000 people were tallied as having shown significant attention to the exhibits, a greater participation than has been shown by far larger cities, such as Dallas. In fact, we were told that the Ark was having better success in cities of our size than it was in the larger metropolises. All the members who helped in manning the booth, who provided lodging and hospitality to Tom and Gloria, and who secured

publicity for the event are to be congratulated.

BIRD NOTES:

When two such highly skilled and crackerjack birders as the brothers Keven and Barry Zimmer are in town things are bound to happen, as they did on Dec. 20 when an Arctic Loon (second record for the Panhandle), Virginia Rail, White Pelican, and Rusty Blackbirds were found at Greenbelt Lake, Donley Co. Too bad the brothers were not here for our Christmas Bird Counts!

COMMON MERGANSER - approximately 400 on Lake Meredith 1/9 (PA,FC,WG,VG,KS).

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK:- a regular visitor to the Ross' backyard on S. Travis (RR) - hopefully feeding on House Sparrows only.

ROUGH-LEGGED and FERRUGINOUS HAWK - a trip to Dimmitt in Castro Co. on 1/31 turned up 17 Rough-legs and 14 Ferruginous hawks (KS). Other birds of prey were 12 Marsh Hawks, 4 Red-tailed Hawks, 2 Golden Eagles, and 3 kestrels.

BALD EAGLE - the annual Bald Eagle count at Lake Meredith turned up 25 this year, plus one Golden Eagle. This is down considerably from past years.(PA,FC,WG, VG,KS,FS).

SANDHILL CRANE - continue to be found north of their usual wintering grounds in the Panhandle. Several hundred were seen on the Currie Ranch in Randall Co. on 1/10 (RC), and they have been seen regularly in the Vega, Oldham Co. area (RS).

SCREECH OWL - one in the Palo Duro Canyon. SP 1/17 (WG,VG,GH,TT,KS). The group was watching a Hermit Thrush and was completely unaware of the owl perched a few yards from them until the moment it flushed. It didn't fly far and everyone got a good look at the gray-phase bird.

LONG-EARED OWL - three at Buffalo Lake NWR 1/24 (PA,KS). A little "squeaking" enabled them to get a good look at one of the owls. The owls were in one group.

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER - one reported in the Grady Fox neighborhood (2800 block of S. Hayden) 1/8 (TF).

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE - one next door to

the Ross's 1/20 (RR).

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET - eight in Palo Duro Canyon SP 1/17 (VG, WG, GH, TT, KS). Seldom are more than two or three seen in one group in our area; these eight were all in one tree!

WATER PIPIT - five near Hart, Castro Co. 1/31 (KS).

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER - one wintering at 2206 S. Lipscomb (KS).

PURPLE FINCH - one wintering at 2222 S. Harrison, our only Purple Finch report for this winter (EW).

PA - Peggy Acord	RR - Rena Ross
FC - Fern Cain	TT - Tom Troy
RC - Roberta Currie	KS - Ken Seyffert
TF - Thelma Fox	RS - Rosemary Scott
VG - Virginia Gill	FS - Frank Smith
WG - Waymon Gill	EW - Esther Waddill
GH - Gloria Hanly	

LONG-EARED OWL:

The Long-eared Owl is a species on the "most wanted" list of many local birders, and for that matter, one on a similar list of down state birders who have never seen one in Texas. Like many of the owl species, it rarely advertises itself but it can be seen here if one knows where to look and has the patience to pursue it.

The most likely place to find the Long-eared Owl is on the Buffalo Lake NWR. It has been found with consistency at two locations on the refuge. One location is the extensive and dense stand of salt cedars at the southeastern end just west of the large grove of cottonwood trees. These stands of salt cedar appear, and often are, impenetrable but you can often find narrow avenues of relatively open ground leading into them. If you move slowly and cautiously you can get quite near an owl before it flushes. Too often the very act of flushing is your first indication that an owl is even around, but if you observe its flight carefully you will find that it will not fly far before alighting. If you have pretty well pinpointed where it lit, again proceed cautiously and see if you can locate it before it flushed again. You may go through this owl and mouse game several times before you are successful and can view the owl long enough to actually identify it. It has also been my experience that if you stop dead in your tracks upon an owl's first flushing and look around closely you may find one or more other owls still perched nearby. I once found eight of these owls roosting together, and seven at another time, both times in these salt cedars.

Another likely location is a side canyon on the north side of the lake near the dam. There is a very large cottonwood tree at the entrance to this small canyon. Enter the canyon and just beyond its first bend you will come upon an area heavily overgrown with grape vines. If you proceed quietly and slowly you may

very well find one or more owls perched in these vines. It will help in seeing one if you first divest yourself of all preconceived notions of what a Long-eared Owl is supposed to look like, as it is portrayed, that is, in the bird books. Owls are lazy birds and would much rather sit tight and let you pass them by than they would fly. The Long-eared is particularly good at this for it will compress its contour feathers close to its body; close its eyes until they are mere slits, and erect its long and narrow "ears" that are placed rather close together on top of its head. When it does this it gives every appearance of being a dead limb projecting upward from another limb. If you can detect one in this posture and do not disturb it, you can usually watch it to your heart's content. It will not fly for it very well knows it has you fooled completely! I once detected one in this condition (it was in Redpoll Cove) as I was walking toward it. I continued on my course at a steady pace and walked by it at a few yards distance and it never flushed. We miss a lot of owls this way.

The Long-eared Owl can be looked for from late September to mid-May. I have found it most often in mid to late March. There are some old records of it nesting in the Texas Panhandle. Oberholser (The Bird Life of Texas) cites eggs collected near Glenrio in Deaf Smith Co. 9 April 1920. Johnsgard (Birds of the Great Plains) shows its breeding range as extending across the northern two thirds of the region and gives 9 March to 9 April as the range of egg dates. The basis of these records is not given. Sutton (Oklahoma Birds) cites nesting records from nearby Cimarron, Beaver, and Harmon counties. In nearby Union Co. in New Mexico, I found a pair of adults with a fledged juvenal a few miles northeast of Grenville on 12 June 1976. We should all be on the alert for it nesting in the Panhandle.

....KS....

EDITOR' APPEAL:

To make this a more interesting newsletter and to keep our members better informed of what our organization is doing, it is vitally necessary that we receive more input from the membership, particularly our Committee Chairmen. The Editor needs a monthly report (brief, to the point, and in writing) from most of the Chairmen. This is the common practice in other Audubon chapters. In them the Editor does not write the newsletter; he edits, assimilates, and publishes it. Please help with your contributions. We go to press on: March 6, April 10, May 8, Sept. 11, Oct. 9, Nov. 6, Dec. 11, Jan. 8, and Feb. 12. Please have your material in no later than these dates. Thank you!

ANNUAL DINNER:

Make plans now to attend our annual Conservation dinner on March 15. This is our big event of the year and we want a good attendance.