

PROGRAM FOR FEBRUARY:

The monthly meeting of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Garden Center, Feb. 17. The program will be "Learning Panhandle Birds", produced by the TPAS, pictures by Ed Donelson, script by Mary Donelson, narration by Peggy Acord. The slide show will be 25 minutes in length and is a fine local production based on pictures of local birds.

OFFICERS ELECTED FOR 1986:

President	Bob Kerr	Board Members -	
Vice-President.....	Don Myers	Three year terms.....	Joe Cepeda
Secretary.....	Lea Reynolds		Tommy Rosson
Treasurer.....	Mary Moyer	Two year terms.....	Marvin Hilton
Recorder.....	Kenneth Seyffert		John King (returning)
Garden Club Rep.....	Rosemary Scott & Peggy Acord	One year term	Mary Donelson Rosemary Scott (returning)

A BACKWARD LOOK:

If your curiosity and imagination work like mine you probably wonder at times, while tramping about afield, just what the High Plains were ornithologically like a hundred or so years ago. About the only window into the past we have, and the only one that depicts the scene in any depth, is that of C. A. H. McCauley, Lieutenant Third United States Artillery, who explored the area in 1876 and submitted his findings in his paper "Notes on the ornithology of the region about the source of the Red River of Texas, from observations made during the exploration conducted by Lieut. E. H. Ruffner, Corps of Engineers, U.S.A." Lieut. McCauley was on sick-leave in southern New Mexico in March, 1876, when he made application to join the expedition to find the true sources of the Red River. In fact, he had already joined it when informed his application had been disapproved, but he continued on as a volunteer for one of his primary hopes was to improve his health. "Though my duties mainly related to the survey proper, an effort was made, after each day's work and march had ended, to obtain and prepare as many specimens as possible, in order to gain some idea of the avi-fauna of the country. With very limited time, subsequently restricted by recurrence of sickness, my collection was necessarily meagre. This is the more to be regretted, since, as far as recollection serves me, a portion of the region surveyed had never before been visited in the interests of ornithology."

The expedition itself began at the railhead at Dodge City, Kansas, proceeded south by way of Camp Supply, Indian Territory, and thence to Fort Elliott, Texas (near present-day Mobeetie, Wheeler County), where the survey began. From this station the expedition travelled some 600 miles and was gone six weeks, returning on June 22. Its general direction from Fort Elliott was southwest, "...striking Red River about 100 miles distant, the main intermediate waters touched being north fork of Red River and its main tributary, McClellan Creek, the Salt Fork, a branch called White Fish Creek, and Mulberry Creek..." Onto the Staked Plain (Llano Estacado), embraced between longitude 100°30' to 102° and latitude 34° to 35°30', he found the surface "flat beyond comparison, without an object on which to rest the eye of the traveler. The vegetation consists of short gramma grass, here lower than usual....whilst at long intervals appears a small 'soap-weed' (yucca)...or a prickly-pear cactus, both existing here in a dwarfed or depauperate condition compared with their size in more favored situations..." The expedition explored the canyons of the Palo Duro and journeyed to the sources of the Red River - Tierra Blanca and Palo Duro Creeks. He found these upper streams had "...fertile banks, with gently rolling land....covered with succulent grasses....timber-fringed everywhere....Birds are more frequently seen along these streams than elsewhere, the avi-faunas here finding its best expression."

The following are a few of the species he found and some of the comments he had to say about them:

Robin - "none were observed at headwaters in the Stake Plains"....but were "common along the wooded lower parts of streams....At ranches along the route....they are upon the same terms of sociability as elsewhere in settled country."

Mockingbird - "all the timber-fringed streams....particularly Wolf Creek and the 'Dry Washita', were melodius with the notes of this magnificent songster."

Golden-crested Kinglet (our Golden-crowned Kinglet) - "the only one....noted was at Canoncito Blanco, June 4." - Our latest date for this species is April 25!

White-throated Wren (our Canyon Wren) - "no water ever tasted as delicious as those fresh brooks that gush at intervals from the steep walls of the plain, to sink in the sand before reaching the river; and no singer's notes seemed brighter or more cheering than the warbling of this bird, which frequented these precipitous canyons, whose sides are thickly covered with cedars and under growth."

Southwestern Lark (our Horned Lark) - "this bright little songster was almost a constant companion in the daily surveys on the Staked Plains proper, being there especially noticeable and extremely abundant." One day a nest was found with a mother bird incubating her

eggs: "The escort was directed to change its course to prevent riding over her, she meanwhile remaining as quiet as if she knew we were friends."

Prothonotary Warbler - "frequenting Wolf Creek and the Canadian." Imagine that! Only four have been reported since mid-century.

Golden or Summer Warbler (our Yellow Warbler)- "this bright, active songster was very common among the groves occurring near the upper part of Red River and heads of its tributaries.... The birds were nesting, and exhibited little or no shyness." It is now absent as a breeding species with the possible exception in Hemphill and Lipscomb counties.

Long-tailed Chat (our Yellow-breasted Chat) - "of all the streams that add to the volume of the Red River near its source, none are more pleasing than the Palo Duro at its head.... For a short distance, no place was found offering greater variety...than this stream, which miles below its head passes through a beautiful canyon...this species inhabited the woodlands skirting the streams throughout nearly all the route." Go look at the stream now - the species is absent.

Lark Finch (our Lark Sparrow) - "not uncommon" and found nesting. "One was in an open prairie situation, but to conceal it the birds had placed it beneath a huge buffalo hipbone, entering by a small opening."

Painted Finch or Nonpareil (our Painted Bunting) - "contrary to my expectations, I found this species during the course of the survey....The colors of their plumage were as bright and exquisite as in Georgia and the Gulf States."

Cardinal Redbird or Virginia Nightingale (our Northern Cardinal - the matter-of-fact scientists have taken over in naming our birds) - "occasionally observed on the Canadian and the McClellan and Wolf Creeks; very shy. The birds were always in pairs, and could not be approached."

Western Field Lark (our Western Meadowlark) - "very abundant, except upon the sterile plain itself."

Raven (our Common Raven) - "frequently seen. No place could be found that would better suit its preferences for a habitat than the great Llano Estacado. Fearfully monotonous, and with solitude as its main characteristic, rarely crossed by man...it is perfectly congenial to the Raven, offering adequate sustenance in the carcasses of animals that are often too numerous to be pleasant to the traveler." This was during the days of the great buffalo slaughter. He found our present-day Chihuahuan Raven the most common, with our Common Raven second and only a few American Crows observed. The Common Raven is now almost entirely absent except in the northwestern corner of the Panhandle.

Swallow-tailed Flycatcher (our Scissor-tailed Flycatcher) - "this peculiarly beautiful and graceful bird was one of the species most frequently seen....These birds were grace itself when on wing....The delicate crimson below their wings as they go glancing by, glows in contrast with the beautiful hoary ash of their general plumage; and as the little heart ceases to palpitate, you pick up your specimen with a pang of remorse, and for once mentally agree with the friend beside you....that, as he avers, 'a bird skinner is as bad as a butcher. Even the teamsters call them 'mighty pretty', and no one wonders that the 'Texicans' (as our scouts, old buffalo hunters, title the natives) brag on their beauty, and call them 'Birds of Paradise'."

White-headed or Bald Eagle - found nesting on Mulberry Creek, June 17. The two young were secured and taken along in captivity.

Black Vulture or Carrion Crow - found to be more common than the Turkey Vulture! We have only one record of it since mid-century.

Carolina or Common Dove (our Mourning Dove) - "the number seemed to be limitless."

Audubon's Caracara (our Crested Caracara) - he observed one near Lower Mulberry Creek and considered that the northern limit of its range. Now absent from the plains.

Common Wild Turkey- "It may be said to be common throughout the whole section visited save in the alkali region of Red River proper. The decrease or disappearance of this game bird from this section, particularly the Palo Duro and the Washita regions, has been very marked during the last few years."

Southern Pinnated Grouse or Prairie Hen (our Lesser Prairie Chicken) - "Beyond the Sweetwater they were not found, nor were they seen in any part of the lower sections visited, until on our return, we reached the rolling land north of McClellan Creek."

Golden Plover - "On our return, in the latter part of June, this fine game bird, like the buffalo, come north with the increasing heat, and were abundant on the route....As we drove by them, if near the road, they would show no shyness whatever." It is now noteworthy when one is observed.

Long-billed Curlew - "Frequent, and perhaps of as general distribution as any other species throughout the section traversed."

Wood Ibis (our Wood Stork) - "This large and notable bird has ventured to take up his dwelling in the Staked Plain, one having been observed on the Palo Duro, a few miles below its head; some days later, two others were met with near the upper part of the Tierra Blanca. As he has informed me, this species was previously observed by my friend, Dr. H. S. Turrill, assistant surgeon United States Army, when crossing the Staked Plain with a column of the Eighth Cavalry, under General Gregg, United States Army, in 1872." Now found no nearer than the San Angelo area.

BIRD NOTES:

The pace of birding has been quite slow so far this year. Only one unusual sighting has been reported, that of a lone Western Sandpiper at Elysian Fields on 2/1 by Ken Seyffert. This is extremely early as the previous early date was 3/29/81. The bird must have been enticed north by our spring, almost summer-like, weather of late January. A Curve-billed Thrasher has taken up winter residence at Rosemary Scott's and a Brown Thrasher at Rena Ross'. On the day of the Big Snow (2/7), Rena reports she was talking on the telephone and looking out the window into her back yard when a Sharp-shinned Hawk zipped in and swiftly grabbed a bird at a feeder (hopefully a House Sparrow) and hauled it off to a neighbor's yard for dinner. While Ken Seyffert was out shovelling snow that day he saw or heard the following species: Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco, McCown's Longspur, Red-winged Blackbird, House Finch, and House Sparrow. He is thinking of starting a "birds-I-have-seen-while-shovelling-snow" list.

JUDGE HANDS POACHER 15 YEARS IN PRISON:

A Montana man who for years killed and sold such protected species as eagles, elk, grizzlies and bighorn sheep has received the stiffest penalty ever for poaching in the United States - 15 years in prison.

"Until now, five years would have been considered a very stiff penalty," says John Gavitt, the agent in charge of special operations for the Fish & Wildlife Service's Law Enforcement Division. But even in the laissez-faire West, Gavitt says, "people are no longer willing to tolerate someone who exploits a resource to the detriment of everyone else."

Gavitt personally nabbed the poacher, Loren Ellison, after posing for three years as the business manager for a Montana taxidermist. He had managed to gain Ellison's trust to the point where the poacher was selling protected animals directly to him.

NOTICE:

Should any of the past officers of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society have in his or her possession records pertaining to the business activities of the Society, please return them to the Garden Center where such files can be centralized. Thank you.

SECOND NONGAME PRINT, STAMP AVAILABLE:

The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Nongame Stamp and Print program will feature its second edition with artwork by noted wildlife artist John P. (Jack) Cowan. The artwork depicts a pair of endangered Attwater's Prairie Chickens. The inaugural edition of the Nongame Stamp and Print featured a pair of Whooping Cranes. Revenue from the stamps and prints will be dedicated to the department's nongame and endangered species program.

Locally, the \$5 stamps are now available from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department office at 2736 S. Georgia, Amarillo.