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THE PRAIRIE HORNED LARK  
Newsletter of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society

March, 1986

2206 S. Lipscomb, Amarillo, TX 79109

Vol. XIII, No. 3

PROGRAM FOR MARCH:

The monthly meeting of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Garden Center, March 17. The program will consist of the National Audubon Society's video cassette production of the "Techniques of Birding" by Arnold Small, noted California birder. This should be a most interesting program, particularly for beginning birders, but will be of benefit to more experienced ones as well.

FIELD TRIP FOR MARCH:

The first field trip of the year will start with a bang on Sunday, March 23, in the Wheeler area. Birders will have the opportunity to see that most sought after species, the Lesser Prairie Chicken. It will require early rising as the group will meet its leader, Dick DeArment, at the courthouse square in Wheeler at 5:30 a.m. The chickens are active early and so must observers be to see them at their best. Wheeler is some 100 miles from Amarillo, so plan accordingly!

THE GREAT AMARILLO BIRD CHASE:

Objective: To see which team can identify the most bird species within a four hour period using the following rules:

Teams will consist of at least three persons, but not more than five.

The contest will begin at 8:00 a.m., April 19, at the McDonald's restaurant on Teckla (near 45th & Teckla) and will end at 12:00 noon at Grandy's restaurant at Ross & I-40.

The boundary of the contest will be as shown on the accompanying map (generally following the Amarillo city limits with some exceptions). Birds counted must be within the contest limits; however, the birders may be on the outside looking in.

The A.B.A. checklist will be used for determining wild bird species.

Birds must be seen and identified by at least two members of the team to count. A bird may be identified by sound, but it must also be seen at the same time (in other words, if the bird cannot be seen clearly enough by sight for identification, identification by its call is considered adequate identification).

No two team members may be more than 75 yards apart while searching.

A one bird penalty will be assessed a team that is not at the finish (Grandy's) at exactly 12:00 noon. 15 minutes late will result in disqualification.

If you wish to participate contact Don Myers. (355-1217).

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY SEMINAR:

Time: April 5, 1986 - Registration 8:00 a.m. Seminar 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Place: Quality Inn Central - 601 Amarillo Boulevard West.

Fees: Preregistration \$35 (\$20 students) - at-the-door \$45 (\$25 students).

SPONSOR: GOLDEN SPREAD SEMINARS, Box 774, Amarillo, TX 79105, 806/352-1008.

Leonard Lee Rue III is the most published wildlife photographer in North America and probably in the world. In 40 years he has sold to over 1200 different companies and publications in 42 countries, appearing in thousands of books, magazines, calendars, encyclopedias, brochures, catalogs, advertisements, cards, puzzles, games, and posters. His work has appeared in every major and most minor publications dealing with wildlife and natural history subject. He has to his credit over 1000 national covers and once had 5 in one day. His photographic success is derived in large part from the fact that he is one of America's top naturalists. He is the author of 19 books on wildlife, including his latest book titled "How I Photograph Wildlife and Nature". He has monthly columns in "American Hunter", "Deer and Deer Hunting Magazine", "Turkey Magazine", "Outdoor Photographer Magazine", and "Archery World".

Len Rue, Jr. holds a degree in Professional Photography from Rochester Institute of Technology. He now manages Leonard Rue Enterprises, bringing to it a broad business background as well as photographic skills. His work has been a major part of the photographic collection for many years and he continues to shoot for and expand the files. His work has been published in several hundred different publications world wide including "Field and Stream", "Sports Afield", "Outdoor Life", "Natural History", "National Wildlife", "Ranger Rick", "Geo", "Newsweek", "U.S. News and World Report", "N.Y. Times Magazine", and others.

Although the Rues average over 50 such seminars a year throughout the country, this is the first ever in the Southwest. If you have any interest in improving your photography, whether it is the birds in the back yard or shooting wildlife from a blind, this is for you. If you enjoy watching birds, believe in conservation, enjoy nature and the outdoors, or would like to see 700 outstanding slides, it is for you.

For further details contact Bob Kerr at the above addresses.

URGENT PLEA:

Would all former officers and Committee Chairmen look in closets, attics, odd drawers, and garages and turn in any committee folders and old minutes of meetings and any other papers or reports pertaining to the Society so that our business matters can be brought up to date. Thank you.

#### FIELD NOTES:

With the rapid melting of the Big Snow of February 7, intimations of spring began appearing with increasing frequency. During the bad weather itself, that notorious winter wanderer, the Pyrrhuloxia ( male in this case) showed up in DM's yard in southwest Amarillo and remained from 2/8 through 2/10. A trip to the Palo Duro Canyon SP 2/19 (KS) on a balmy, spring-like morning, found numerous species singing with vigor: Roadrunner, Mockingbird, Curve-billed Thrasher, Cardinal, Rufous-sided Towhee, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco. FC and FS observed the first Burrowing Owls of the year in Moore County on 2/23, along with many Snow and Canada Geese, one of the latter a small sub-species no larger than a Pintail. Snow Geese have been found in large numbers at several localities. Cinnamon Teal were seen for the first time 2/22 (KS) on the playa lake south of Tradewinds Airport. This playa has a wide variety of ducks on it: Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck. On 3/2 FC, DM, and RR examined the gulls at the Elysian Fields and found several Herrings among the many Ring-billeds, plus the year's first Lark Buntings. On the same date KS had a flock of seven Evening Grosbeaks and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in the Palo Duro Canyon SP. On 3/3 PA, FC, RD observed eight Hooded Mergansers on Thompson Park Lake in Amarillo (two males and six females) and were entranced as they watched the birds fight over a goldfish that appeared too large for them to handle. A tour of the surrounding Amarillo area also turned up three dark-phase Ferruginous Hawks. On 3/7 two more Hooded Mergansers were found on Martin Road Lake in Amarillo (DM), making this a very good year for the species, and on the same day he had a White-breasted Nuthatch in Llano Cemetery.

#### A THANKS:

Our heartfelt thanks go to Dr. George Waddill for organizing so very nicely the bird slide collection belonging to the Society. His kind act is greatly appreciated.

#### NOMINATIONS IN ORDER:

April is the month for our annual Conservation meeting and dinner. Anyone having suggestions for a recipient for our Conservation Award please contact Tommy Rosson or Mary Moyer.

#### NEW REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE:

I am pleased to announce the selection of Murray Walton as the new Regional Representative for Audubon's Southwest Region. Also, I am pleased to note that Murray was recognized as Professional Conservationist of the Year by the Texas Outdoor Writers Association at their meeting in January 1986.

Murray comes to Audubon from the Wildlife Management Institute where he served as the Institute's Southcentral Field Representative for the past eight years. He worked on environmental issues primarily in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas. Prior to his private conservation work, Murray was employed by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department in the Resources Protection section (1½ years) and by Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, first in game biology, and then as a crawfish extension biologist (1 year) and later in the Commission's Environmental Section where he evaluated effects of water development projects and helped administer Louisiana's Scenic River System (3½ years).

Prior to his Louisiana employment, he worked one summer for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in South Dakota classifying wetlands and mapping waterfowl production areas.

Murray's formal education includes a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University and a M.S. in Game Management from Louisiana State University.

Murray's special expertise in a wide array of resources issues will be a great addition to our office. Murray is married and has a ten year old daughter. The Waltons live in the hill country west of Austin where they raise Arabian horses, garden, and watch wildlife as hobbies.

.....Dede Armentrout.....Vice President.....National Audubon Society

#### BRIEF INTERLUDE:

Hooded Mergansers are particularly attractive smaller ducks which captivate viewers. Never abundant anywhere, they are always a welcome sight. On March 1 a male was seen at the Thompson Park Lake in Amarillo. On March 3 there were two drakes and six hens in with the other ducks. As we watched, one drake dove and came up with a fair-sized goldfish, an act which produced instant warfare. Immediately the second drake charged and the possessor of the fish raced across the water twisting and turning and finally diving. The Hens were drawn into the foray, surrounding the male and diving. At one time a hen had the fish, then the drake got it back. Suddenly the fish disappeared. We couldn't tell if the drake had time to swallow the fish or if the fish simply got away. Quiet once more descended on the lake and the birds spread out and resumed fishing.

.....Fern Cain and Peggy Acord.....

#### BUFFALO LAKE NWR SUFFERS SETBACK:

Overruling its own staff and in spite of pleas by the National Audubon Society and other conservation organizations, the three member Texas Water Commission has voted against granting a water rights permit amendment sought by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for Stewart Dike. This action taken on January 7, 1986, is but one in a long series of troubles befalling Buffalo Lake and the National Wildlife Refuge. In 1941, soon after completion of Umbarger Dam which

impounds Buffalo Lake, the spillway was discovered to be inadequate( in later years, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service kept the lake drained for this reason). Shortly afterward followed lawsuits by downstream water rights holders wanting releases of water. Next came fish kills and a ban on water contact sports due to water pollution from feedlots and packing plants upstream. Currently, upstream diversions and groundwater pumping are reducing average annual inflow to only 1000 acre-feet. This amount of inflow is not nearly enough to keep the 18,000+ acre-feet conservation pool filled were the dam even safe.

To provide water for wintering waterfowl and other wildlife, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service built Stewart Dike in 1974 at the upper end of Buffalo Lake. Construction of the dike and repairs in 1983 were undertaken only after assurances that no water rights permit amendment was required. Stewart Dike has provided for maximum beneficial use of the little water available and has attracted large numbers of ducks, geese, Bald Eagles and other birds associated with water.

Problems for the lake began anew in 1985 when the Buffalo Lake Water District, formed by the Texas Legislature to assist in rehabilitating Buffalo Lake, forced a series of hearings by filing a complaint with the Texas Water Commission concerning Stewart Dike. At one of those hearings in Canyon, Texas on July 2, 1985, members of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society spoke out in favor of granting the amendment for Stewart Dike.

Conservations groups were expecting a no vote from Commissioner Ralph Roming, who is from the Texas Panhandle area near Buffalo Lake; however, they were surprised when Commissioner John Houchins joined in the assault on the National Wildlife Refuge. Commissioner Houchins was Texas Governor Mark White's "environmental" appointment to the Commission promised in 1985. The decision appeared to be based on an argument over federal versus state authority rather than any aspects of Stewart Dike itself. Wildlife resources are the real loser; therefore, an appeal of the Commission ruling has been filed.

....Southwst Leader....

#### SCHEDULE OF FIELD TRIPS:

- March 23 - Sunday: Lesser Prairie Chicken trip to Wheeler, TX. Meet at the courthouse at 5:30 a.m.
- April 12 - Saturday: Ceta Glen. Meet at the entrance to the Christian Church Camp at 8:30 a.m.
- April 19 - Saturday: "The Great Amarillo Bird Chase". See above for details.
- April 27 - Sunday: Buffalo Lake NWR. Meet at entrance at 8:00 a.m.
- May 10 - Saturday: Annual "Big Day" count, Details later.
- May 18 - Sunday: Amarillo - Memorial Park Cemetery at 8:00 a.m.
- May 31 - Saturday: Palo Duro Canyon SP. Meet at entrance to Park at 8:00 a.m.