

THE PRAIRIE HORNED LARK  
Newsletter of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society

September, 1986

2206 S. Lipscomb, Amarillo, TX 79109

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PROGRAM FOR SEPTEMBER:

The monthly meetings of the Texas Panhandle Society recommence on Monday night, September 15, at 7:30 in the Garden Center. The program will consist of a tape recording on "Sparrow Identification" made from a work-shop on that topic at the recent American Birding meeting at Tucson that was conducted by that noted authority, Kenn Kaufman. To be able to follow the lecturer on the finer details of his steps in sparrow identifications, bring along one of your field guides, preferably (1) Peterson's, (2) the National Geographic's. Here is your chance to become an expert on sparrows!

FIELD TRIPS:

- Sept. 20 (Saturday) - Ceta Glen (Christian Church Camp): meet at the entrance at 8:00 a.m. Leisurely birding in a very lovely setting.
- Sept. 27 (Saturday) - Buffalo Lake NWR: meet at the entrance at 8:00 a.m. We can bird the area near the dam and then drive down and see what is on the water behind Stewart Dike.
- Oct. 12 (Sunday) - Amarillo's cemeteries: meet at the entrance to Memorial Park Cemetery at 8:00 a.m.
- Oct. 25 (Saturday) - Dog Canyon in the Guadalupe Mountains: meet at White's City (9:00 a.m. Texas time, 8:00 a.m. New Mexico time) at the junction of US 62-180 and New Mexico 7 which leads to Carlsbad Caverns. From this point we will drive two hours over the Guadalupe Mountains (all but four miles paved) to Dog Canyon in Guadalupe Mt. National Park to see the fall foliage and do a little birding. Those who wish to stay in White's City Friday or Saturday night, or both, please make your reservations at Cavern Inn, phone 505-755-2291. Those who stay Saturday night will make a Sunday morning trip to Rattlesnake Springs (just 5 miles south of Whites's City) where we might see more birds in two hours than we will see all day Saturday! This is one of New Mexico's birding "hot spots". Be sure to bring lunch Saturday. For details call Peggy Acord at 352-6372.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM:

As a service to Amarillo College and to our community as a whole, the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society provides a volunteer staff for AC's Natural History Museum. A one-room collection of an awesome display of specimens of all classes of wildlife, its emphasis is on High Plains fauna, but it is also highlighted by many spectacular butterflies and other insects from around the world.

AC's Fall Semester began September 2, and we need all the volunteers who can find time to help, so please thoughtfully consider becoming a part of this effort. The time required is only 3½ hours on a Tuesday or Thursday afternoon from 1:00 to 4:30, generally once per month, but owing to the vagaries of the Gregorian calendar, "odd days" also occur. Duties are simply to sit at the reception desk, to welcome each visitor, ask him or her to sign the guest book, and briefly indicate the major "points of interest". Richard Howard, curator of the collection and also AC's Biology professor, will eagerly familiarize you with the collection to whatever extent you desire to become an expert, or he also has recorded a 15-minute cassette tape which you can offer for visitors' use. On some days the museum is very busy, while on others it can be a blissfully quiet solitude where, totally removed from doorbells, telephones, spouses, children and pets, you can make a serious dent in your reading or other desk work.

Please do consider this opportunity to serve, and if you're interested, contact Mr. Page Smith at 355-0073, or at the next Audubon meeting. Thank you.

SUMMER BIRD NOTES:

As in all summers where birding is concerned, this past one has been exciting with the unusual and unexpected invariably occurring. The following is a chronology of the highlights of the season:

June 1: White-breasted Nuthatch - One in Redpoll Cove at the Buffalo Lake NWR. This is a species rarely reported past the first week in May and is the first summer sighting on record (KS).

June 8: White-faced Ibis - One in a cattail-covered playa in Hansford County, a species rarely reported here in summer (KS). The nearest nesting records are from Tucumcari Lake in New Mexico; however, there is a report of recent nesting somewhere in the High Plains but the location is not now known by your reporter. On 6 July migrants began showing up and the species subsequently became unusually common with flocks of 80+ being reported fairly regularly (DM, et al.).

June 12: Mountain Plover - Four approximately two miles north of Channing, Hartley County, a location where they have been seen before in summer and one that bears watching for possible nesting (KS).

June 14: Bush Tit - One on the treeless Rita Blanca National Grasslands east of Texline, Dallam County, where one would never expect to see this species (KS). It was perched on a fence line!

June 21: Brown Pelican - One on the sewage ponds (The Elysian Fields) south of town, the first sighting of this species since 1956 (RR,KS). Hooded Merganser - A female on the sewage ponds this same date and again on the 28th, only the second summer sighting on record (KS).

June 22: Scarlet Tanager - A singing male along the Canadian River near Mullanox, Potter County, the first summer sighting on record (KS).

June 22 & 29: Field Sparrow - A singing bird along the Canadian River near Mullanox, Potter County, far west of its usual summer haunts (PA,KS).

June 28: Upland Sandpiper - Ten in Armstrong County (PA). Possibly nesting but probably early migrants. Most observers consider this species unusually common this season.

July 4: Yellow-breasted Chat - One at the Buffalo Lake NWR, the first summer sighting at this location since 1956 (KS).

July 6: Audubon's Warbler - an immature in her yard in west Amarillo, the first summer sighting since 1945, truly inexplicable (PA).

July 12: Marbled Godwit - One this date on a playa near Amarillo and numerous sightings thereafter of a species normally rare.

July 22: Common Merganser - A female on the sewage ponds south of town, remaining through the season (KS, et al.), the second summer in a row one has showed up there in summer.

July 31: Herring Gull - A young bird at the Buffalo Lake NWR, a rare summer occurrence (KS).

Aug. 2: Cattle Egret - One flying over southwest Amarillo, a rare summer sighting (RS).

Aug. 3 - 17: Bank Swallow - Unusually large numbers passed through during this period, some flocks of 200+.

Aug. 8: Broad-tailed Hummingbird - one at 2805 S. Travis (RR).

Aug. 15: MacGillivray's Warbler - One at 2805 S. Travis, the earliest fall date on record (RR).

Aug. 17: Short-billed Dowitcher - Three on a playa southeast of Amarillo (RR), a rare sighting in which the identification was based on the birds' calls as they lit, calls that are distinctively different from that of the plentiful Long-billed Dowitcher's. Osprey - two downstream from Lake Tanglewood, the earliest date on record for returning birds (RCS).

Aug. 18: Great Egret - one downstream from Lake Tanglewood (PA, RCS).

Aug. 26: Phainopepla - A male in Vega, Oldham County, seen closely and at length as it bathed (RS). This is only the fifth Panhandle sighting on record.

Aug. 27: Tennessee Warbler - A male in fall plumage at the Buffalo Lake NWR, the only August sighting on record (KS).

Aug. 31: Mississippi Kite - Unusually plentiful in late August and early September. A "kettle" of 79 observed over southwest Amarillo on this date, going west! (DM).

Sept. 1: Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, Hooded Warbler - all at the Buffalo Lake NWR upstream from Stewart Dike - the first fall report for the Hooded Warbler (KS).

PA - Peggy Acord  
DM - Don Myers

RR - Rena Ross  
RS - Rosemary Scott

RCS - Roberta Currie Seastrand  
KS - Ken Seyffort

#### FALL MEETING OF T.O.S.:

The Texas Ornithological Society will hold its fall meeting in Galveston November 6 through 9.

This meeting will feature identification workshops on shorebirds and sparrows and offer field trips to the Brazoria and Anahuac Wildlife Refuges, Boliver Peninsula, Galveston Island, and the Texas City Dike. Banquet speaker will be Bob Odear, founder and operator of the North American Rare Bird Alert.

Meeting concurrently with the TOS will be the Texas Colonial Waterbird Society and the Texas Bird Banders Association. In connection with the latter there will be a presentation on "New methods of Empidonax identification in the hand."

For more information about the meeting and registration, contact Mrs. John Hamilton, 4620 Avenue B $\frac{1}{2}$ , Galveston, TX 77550 (409) 762-7569. For TOS membership, the contact is: TOS, Miss Jolene Boyd, Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

#### BREEDING BIRD SURVEYS:

For the last twenty years breeding bird surveys have been conducted across the United States, primarily during the first two weeks in June, censusing the numbers of individuals and species to be found in the land. This program is sponsored by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service but is conducted largely by amateur volunteers. Designated routes are laid out in latilongs in which the observer begins the count exactly thirty minutes before sunrise over a route that is twenty-five miles long and in which a stop is made at each  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile interval to record, over a 3-minute time span, every bird seen and heard within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of the observer. The same routes are run each year with stops made at the exact spots each time. Much information is thus being gathered concerning population shifts, increases and decreases in numbers, the effects of changes in land use, etc. Seven routes are run in the Texas Panhandle - Booker, Channing, Childress, Miami, Pantex, Texline and Waka. What species are the most plentiful? Nationwide, in 1985, the following were:

Red-winged Blackbird	-	109,482
House Sparrow	-	80,739
European Starling	-	77,674
Common Grackle	-	69,843
American Robin	-	56,454
Mourning Dove	-	44,400
American Crow	-	42,382
Western Meadowlark	-	33,429
Barn Swallow	-	31,772
Cliff Swallow	-	28,933

In the Texas Panhandle, for all the years in which the counts have been made, the following were the most common:

Western Meadowlark	-	14,244
Horned Lark	-	10,991
Cliff Swallow	-	10,045
Red-winged Blackbird	-	7,174
Mourning Dove	-	7,017
House Sparrow	-	5,041
Cassin's Sparrow	-	4,178
Northern Mockingbird	-	3,383
Lark Sparrow	-	2,667
Western Kingbird	-	2,079

The next ten in order of abundance are: Northern Bobwhite, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Killdeer, Scaled Quail, Common Nighthawk, Barn Swallow, Northern Oriole, Grasshopper Sparrow, Mallard, and Ring-necked Pheasant.

#### LIVING LEGACY OF RARE PLANTS:

Collecting seeds and living specimens of nearly all the 3,000 endangered plants in the United States within the next decade is the ambitious goal of the new national Center for Plant Conservation. Living plants will be housed at 18 participating botanical gardens around the country, while seeds, for safety's sake, will be stored at a separate location.

Part of the center's job will be "trying to get people excited about plants they - and most botanists - have never seen".