

PROGRAM FOR NOVEMBER:

The regular monthly meeting of the Texas Panhandle Audubon Society will be on Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the Garden Center, Nov. 17. The program will be a slide presentation given by Don Myers on "Identification of Fresh-Water Fish in the Western United States". Are those really "pike" that are caught at Lake Meredith or are they "walleyes"?

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS:

The following tentative dates have been set for the Christmas Bird Counts:

Dec. 20 (Saturday) - Amarillo (Palo Duro Canyon): meet at the entrance to the State Park at 8:00 a.m. Compiler - Peggy Acord.

Dec. 24 (Wednesday) - Buffalo Lake NWR: meet at refuge entrance at 8:00 a.m. - Compiler Ken Seyffert.

Dec. 27 (Saturday) - Lake Meredith(west): meet at National Park headquarters in Fritch at 7:30 a.m. Compiler - Fern Cain.

Jan. 1 (Thursday) - Quitaque (Caprock Canyons SP): meet at entrance to State Park at 8:00 a.m. Compiler - Ken Seyffert.

Jan. 3 (Saturday) - Lake Meredith(east): meet at National Park headquarters in Fritch at 7:30 a.m. Compiler - Ken Seyffert.

BIRDOMANIA:

To illustrate how birding can take possession of one's life, I have reviewed my records to determine how many trips afield I have made since becoming serious about the matter and making that first memorable journey to the Buffalo Lake NWR on 27 October 1963, its sole purpose that of discovering what was going on in the world as far as birds were concerned. Through November 7, 1986, I find I have made the journey 1837 times. I can truthfully say that each journey has been memorable, that every one brought forth something new and unexpected, strange and exciting, and that not a day afield proved dull. This total figure includes 757 trips to the Buffalo Lake NWR, 440 to the Palo Duro Canyon SP, 84 to Lake Meredith, 58 to the Caprock Canyons SP, and 498 to some other location, 98% or more to a point in the Texas Panhandle. These figures do not include birding while driving to and from work, while eating, while reading, while listening to music, while mowing the lawn or shoveling snow, or upon awakening in the middle of warm summer nights. I find that I have seen (I started to say "found", but most experienced birders know that birds reveal themselves, you don't "find" them) 350 different species in the Panhandle, 341 in Potter/Randall Counties, 308 at the Buffalo Lake NWR, 192 in the Palo Duro Canyon SP..... And the pace quickens!.....(KS)....

NESTING RECORDS UPDATE:

In the October Newsletter we ran a list of the species of nesting birds found in Randall County. Among them were some, including the Roadrunner, for which we had no actual nest records but only inferences of nesting based on observations of newly fledged young or of adults still feeding young. In the case of the Roadrunner the deficiency has been filled by the Waddills who have supplied us with a detailed account of two nestings, both in the Palo Duro Club near Canyon:

June 1981 -

A pair of Roadrunners were discovered to have just started incubating an unknown number of eggs in a nest about 15 feet above the ground in the crotch of an elm branch. This nest was easily observed from our porch and the birds ignored us if we did not get too close to the tree. It was interesting to see how the birds took turns in duty on the nest, and careful they were to not allow the nest to go unattended. It was also amusing to watch the pattern of activity when it was time for a change. The bird that had been off duty would approach the tree in a stealthy manner, using whatever cover was available. Each time in its ascent from ground to nest there were certain limbs that were used as perches.

Incubation continued about two weeks. By then we were expecting a sign that the eggs were hatching. But one night there was a violent thunderstorm, with high winds and heavy rain. The next morning the nest was still there, but the parent Roadrunners were absent. We never saw them again. Of course, we searched the area under the tree but found no eggs and no baby birds.

June 1982 -

This time we watched a pair of Roadrunner finish building a nest in a juniper near our porch. This nest was ten or twelve feet above the ground on a limb near the trunk of the tree. We watched until we were convinced that eggs had been laid and incubation was under way. Activities were about as we had observed before. Regular exchange of duties, stealthy and systematic approaches to the nest, etc.

My records are not that accurate, but I am pretty sure that hatching was in a little over two weeks. We could soon count three chicks as they extended their heads above the crest of the nest when being fed.

Both parents took part in the feeding. We could watch as one of them would be hunting in the area or making the approach to the nest with whatever had been caught. It was astonishing how many small lizards, small snakes, etc. were brought to the nest. These things had evidently been beaten to death, or insensibility before brought to the nest. The manner of feeding consisted of the parent bird inserting the victim head down into the mouth and gullet of the baby bird, sometimes leaving the tail of the prey hanging out of the baby's mouth. This jamming of food into the baby was done with enough force that we jokingly anticipated the time when a skink's head might appear out the baby bird's back side.

I think it was about two weeks after hatching that we were seeing signs that the little ones were soon going to venture from the nest. Then one morning the nest was empty. The parents were still around and gave us the impression that they were looking for their babies. We joined in the search, but found nothing. We were forced to assume that a predator must have found the little ones.

In December 1982 there was a long, severe winter spell with ice and snow and near-zero temperatures. From that time until August 20th we did not see a Roadrunner in the Palo Duro Club property. I sighted one on August 20th and another on September 14th. From that date Roadrunners were infrequently seen in that area until midsummer 1985. Since then we have seen them quite often again.

.....George Waddill.....

BIRD NOTES:

- Oct. 6: Double-crested Cormorant - an immature at the Palo Duro Club (EW,GW) - a species scarce this fall in comparison to the last few years.
- Oct. 12: Common Moorhen - several at Lelia Lake in Donley Co. (FE,JE). We learn this species was also seen there this past summer (FS) - further evidence of its spread into the Panhandle.
- Oct. 14: Mountain Bluebird - flocks in McBride Canyon at Lake Meredith (FC) - early arrivals in what looks like is going to be a good bluebird winter. Also a Townsend's Warbler, the only one reported this fall.
- Oct. 15: Williamson's Sapsucker - a female at Buffalo Lake NWR (KS).
- Oct. 16: Ped-naped Sapsucker - since its elevation to species status in 1985, this represents its first reported appearance in the Panhandle - one at the Buffalo Lake NWR (DM). Black-throated Green Warbler - a female in the Palo Duro Canyon SP (KS).
- Oct. 18: Wood Duck - two males on the Whittaker Road playa southeast of Amarillo (KS).
- Oct. 19: Little Blue Heron - one at the Elysian Fields and at the Palo Duro Club (EW,GW), the first reported here in a long time; Western Bluebird - several at the old Bivin's Lake in Randall County (TW); Solitary Vireo - one in southwest Amarillo, Potter Co., a very late date (RS); Black-throated Blue Warbler - a male at the Buffalo Lake NWR (KS); Canvasback - an estimated 130 at the Buffalo Lake NWR, the largest single group reported here in some time (JR,KS); American Redstart - a female at the Buffalo Lake NWR (KS).
- Oct. 20: MacGillivray's Warbler - one in southwest Amarillo, the latest date on record (RS), along with a Wilson's Warbler, also late.
- Oct. 23: Common Poorwill - one at the Buffalo Lake NWR - a very late sighting (KS).
- Oct. 26: Winter Wren - one at the Buffalo Lake NWR (PA,KS).
- Oct. 28: Inca Dove - one in the Palo Duro Canyon SP (KS); Merlin - one harassing shorebirds on a flooded field in Randall Co. (KS); Wilson's Phalarope - a single bird on a playa lake in Randall Co., the latest date on record (KS).
- Oct. 31: Barn Swallow - 4+ at the Buffalo Lake NWR (KS) - the latest date on record by eight days.
- Nov. 7: Western Bluebird - three in the Palo Duro Canyon SP (KS).

PA - Peggy Acord
FC - Fern Cain
FE - Fred Elston
JE - Jan Elston

DM - Don Myers
JR - Joel Reese
RS - Rosemary Scott
KS - Ken Seyffert

FS - Frank Smith
EW - Esther Waddill
GW - George Waddill
TW - Tom Wood

THE WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER IN THE TEXAS PANHANDLE:

Not many Williamson's Sapsuckers have been reported in the Texas Panhandle. Seeing a female at the Buffalo Lake NWR this past 15 October prompted me to trace the history of it in the area.

First one ever was a female observed in the Palo Duro Canyon SP 12 February 1966 by Peggy Acord, Walter J. Breckenridge, and Maxine Foreman. Peggy you all know, Maxine was a TPAS member who has since moved away, and Walter a well-known ornithologist who was in Amarillo in connection with an Audubon Film Tour. Following closely on this sighting was a male bird found dead in Canyon by Peggy on 8 March. 1955 proved a banner year as another female was seen in the Palo Duro Canyon SP on 6 November by Peggy.

It was almost a decade later before another one was sighted. On 12 April 1964 Jim Jokerst had a female sapsucker on the ranch along Palo Duro Creek south of Amarillo. Jim also has moved away and now lives in Montana where he probably sees Williamson's Sapsuckers much more often. The following 27 March 1965 was the first time I ever laid eyes on one, a male on the Buffalo Lake NWR. I saw it in company with Leo Galloway and can show you to this day the exact juniper tree in which it was seen. The male bird is a startlingly handsome creature and once seen will not be forgotten. Leo, too, has since moved on, to Missouri, where I doubt he has ever seen a Williamson's Sapsucker, one of the hardships of living in Missouri.

1967 was another vintage year for this sapsucker. A male bird took up residence at the Galloway's at 2213 S. Bonham in Amarillo, sleeping there every night beginning 9 February. Everybody who was anybody in the TPAS got to see this fellow. The bird was observed "going to roost flattened just below crotch 40 ft. or so in elm - on east side - at Leo's" (Peggy Acord). Another male bird was seen later in the year on 30 December in the Palo Duro Canyon during the annual Christmas Bird Count (Ken Seyffert). This was not in the State Park but farther up-canyon beyond where the "No Trespassing" signs are (they were not there then, I swear). It, too, was in a juniper.

The 1970's brought a number of sightings, including the first one outside of Randall County. On 14-16 October 1971 Barbara Lund and Peggy Acord ran onto a female in Plum Creek, Lake Meredith, Potter County. Barbara was a sharp and knowledgeable Park Naturalist who has since moved on to other climes, where I am sure she must yet be sharp and knowledgeable as ever. On the following 19 December Peggy and Rita Kinney had a Williamson's Sapsucker (sex?) in the Lake Tanglewood area. Rita now lives in Turpin, Oklahoma. Old hands remember her as the lady who could spot screech owls perched in trees while she was driving down the highway at 60 m.p.h., snow or no snow. On 24 December 1972 (some Christmas present!) Rena Ross saw a female in the 2800 block of Ong in Amarillo. This is the area in which some of the most famous birds in the Panhandle have been seen. On 9 October 1975 we had our second unsexed Williamson's Sapsucker, a city of Amarillo sighting (Peggy Acord).

So far in the 1980's we have had only two sightings, the one that prompted this article and a male seen in Amarillo, Potter County, 20 December 1982 by Estelle Stevens, a TPASer. This makes thirteen sightings in 32 years. Why don't we see more? Well, we are a little too far east for this species that breeds in the montane forests of the western U. S. It winters "generally from the breeding range (extending to lower elevations) south to northern Baja California, Jalisco and Michoacan, and east to western Texas, Chihuahua, Durango and Zacatecas." Elsewhere, it is casual or accidental.

How it got its common name of Williamson's Sapsucker is interesting. The type specimen, a female, was collected by John G. Bell in 1852 at Georgetown in Eldorado County, California, about twelve miles from Sutter's Mill, and described in the literature by John Cassin. He called it the "Black-breasted Woodpecker" (Melanerpes thyroideus) but the bird he described and figured in his publication as a male was actually very much like what we presently know as the immature female; however, he thought the female looked much like the male but with the colors more obscure. In the meantime, on the shores of Klamath Lake, Oregon, a Dr. Newberry, surgeon to the Pacific Railroad Survey, shot a male woodpecker on 23 August 1855 which he thought new to science and named it Picus williamsonii, in honor of Lt. R. S. Williamson, his commanding officer, not knowing his male bird and Cassin's female were of the same species. Nor did any of the other ornithologists of the time suspect the two were connected, all because of careless, or improper, sexing of specimens. Thus it wound up with the adult of each sex regarded as the male of a species, and the young bird of each sex regarded as the female of a species. This error was perpetuated in subsequent learned publications by Baird, Cassin, Lawrence, who described the male as Sphyrapicus williamsonii ("Williamson's woodpecker"), and the female as Sphyrapicus thyroideus ("brown-headed woodpecker"), Cooper, who called the female the "round-headed woodpecker", and by even Brewer and Ridgeway. It wasn't until 1875 that Henry W. Henshaw discovered the two supposedly separate species cohabiting near Fort Gardand, and the cat was out of the bag.

How was this mess resolved in finally attaching a name to the bird? "Because of the law of priority in dates of publication of scientific names of birds and other animals in zoology, Cassin's name thyroideus stands; however, the bird is still known by the common name of Williamson's Sapsucker." It could have been worse; it could have been called the "Sutter's Mill Sapsucker".

.....KS.....