



# T.O.S. News

Texas Ornithological Society

[www.texasbirds.org](http://www.texasbirds.org)

Winter 2015

## President's Message



Jim Hailey, TOS President.

This will be the last President's message which I shall write for the Texas Ornithological Society. I will be succeeded by Byron Stone after the Spring Meeting in Winnie. Having known Byron for several years now, I know that TOS will be in able hands. It has been my honor to serve TOS as an officer for these

past six years. I hope I have done an acceptable job and have moved this organization forward. I have been pleasantly surprised by the membership acceptance of the Weekender Program which I started two years ago. Each of these events has quickly filled and I have heard nothing but positive feedback from those who attended them. I am sure these events will continue.

I chose to hold the upcoming Spring Meeting in Winnie because it will give the membership an opportunity to visit all of the TOS upper Texas coast sanctuaries. Hook's Woods, Crawford Woods and Sabine Woods are the work of past presidents and boards and they have provided sanctuary for passerines and for birders to enjoy our hobby. Field trips will also include other venues such as Anahuac and even some Century Club trips for those pursuing this important program. Byron Stone stepped up to put the field trips together and would greatly appreciate any local birders who will be willing to assist in the field trips. You can contact him at [drbirdie@aol.com](mailto:drbirdie@aol.com) if you are willing to provide local knowledge of how to get to various sites.

I am proud of TOS as a leader in the nation for these types of organizations. In addition to the many field trips which we offer, the work that, Jack Eitniece (our publications editor) has done for our publications stand out. The *Texas Birds Annual, Bulletins* and our *newsletters*, which are now delivered electronically and in color, are the envy of many other state ornithological organizations. Each and every TOS member can be proud of the work of this organization.

I hope you all plan to attend the Winnie meeting. Timing of the event was chosen to be at the peak of spring migration on the Texas coast. And I have lined up an impressive list of speakers who are very familiar with this region. We will welcome Richard Gibbons, Conservation Director for Houston Audubon, Glenn Olsen, tour leader, and Winnie Burkett who needs no introduction to Texas birders. There will be great field

trips to choose from, knowledgeable trip leaders and I assure you that you will have a great birding experience.

Again, thanks for the opportunity to lead TOS these past two years

—Jim Hailey, President TOS

## EL PASO MEETING A SUCCESS!!!!!!

On January 16, 2015 85 registrants attended the first TOS meeting in the El Paso area in over 20 years. The El Paso Trans-Pecos Audubon chapter organized 19 local birders to lead a variety of field trips to locations reaching from Elephant Butte SP, NM to Culberson County, TX.

The weather was more than cooperative with daytime temperatures reaching into the 60's and reserving a rare snow storm and freezing temperatures for two days after the gathering.

West Texas specialties were delivered to birders eager to add life birds to their lists including; Crissal Thrashers, Phainopepla, Gambel's Quail, Black-tailed Gnatcatchers, Sagebrush Sparrows, Black-chinned Sparrows, Brewer's Sparrow, Western Bluebirds, Prairie Falcons, Ross's Goose and both Clark's and Western Grebes. Notable rarities included a Long-tailed Duck, Band-tailed Pigeons, Lewis's Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Varied Thrush, Palm Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper and Red Crossbill. A total species count was never calculated due to a mishap with the master checklist, but numbers were estimated to be between 175 and 180 species.

After several hours of birding each day, attendees were treated to nightly presentations delivered by experts including a fascinating presentation on the high number of species and variety of rarities which can be observed in the El Paso area by Jim Paton and discoveries in the Davis Mountains by hummingbird bander Kelly Bryan. Additionally, a Saturday night banquet of local fare was enjoyed by 65 participants and followed by keynote speaker Michael Hilchey who spoke about his findings during his time with the Sandia Rosy-Finch Banding Project.

Raising in excess of \$2,500 for both TOS and the local Audubon chapter, both organizations benefitted greatly from the turnout.

*By all accounts, everyone had a great time, saw lots of birds, saw areas of the Southwest they hadn't seen before and enjoyed some good Mexican Food!*

—Janet Perkins

*The turnout was great as well as the field trips. I likewise heard nothing but compliments on the organization of the meeting.*

—Jim Hailey

*I had a great time, and enjoyed the birds, the scenery and the hospitality.*

—Byron Stone

## Photo collage from El Paso Meeting

Photos compliments of Sandi Wheeler



## The New T.O.S. T-shirt

We received 15 wonderful bird art entries for our TOS Texas Bird Art contest. They represented original art works of six artists located in various locations about the state. The purpose of the contest was to solicit art work for our next T.O.S. tee shirt as we are almost out of our Scissor-tailed Flycatcher inventory, and are definitely out of many sizes. The winning art work will be featured on the cover of our 2015 Texas Birds Annual, our full-color magazine, this year.

Large photos of each entry were posted for viewing by those in attendance at the mid-January El Paso TOS meeting with a ballot box nearby. Ballots had been enclosed in each attendee's registration packet. Each member voted for their first, second and third place selections. The votes were tallied and results were announced at the Saturday Banquet.

The results:

First Place: Yellow-throated Warbler by Dennis Shepler (who happened to be in attendance at the Banquet)

Second Place: Cactus Wren by John Cappadonna

Third Place: Elf Owl by Lynn Delvin

Our new T-shirts with Dennis' Yellow-throated Warbler on the front have been printed and will be available for purchase at our Winnie meeting (April 30-May 3). Cost is only \$15 each. Stop by the TOS sales booth and pick yours up.

A photo of the first shirt as it came off the press is included in this article.

—Bron Rorex

### Collage of art contest winners



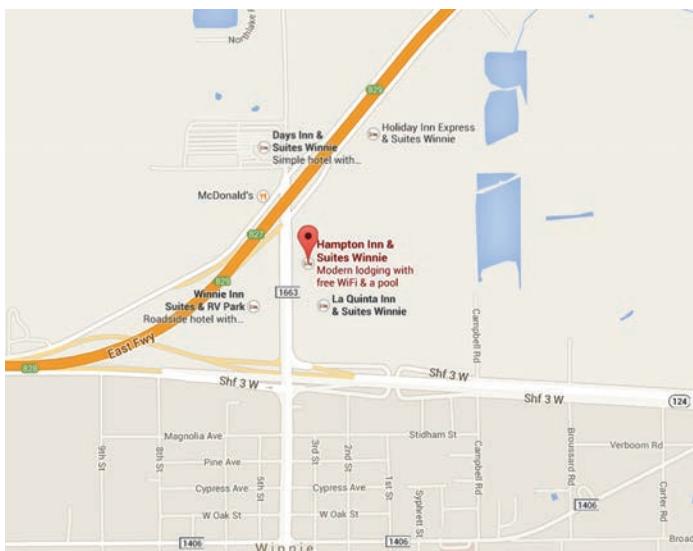
1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winners.



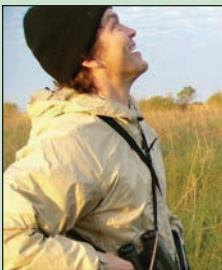
# Spring TOS Meeting in Winnie

## April 30—May 3

This will be my final meeting as President of TOS. I made the choice of Winnie for two reasons—one, the upper Texas coast in spring migration is a fantastic place. It will allow our members to visit three of our sanctuaries—Hook's, Crawford and Sabine Woods. There is no place in the ABA area that offers more exciting birding opportunities than this region of our state. We will have the opportunity to observe many warbler species in their breeding plumage, experience the difficulty of identifying migrating flycatchers, check out the shorebird population on Bolivar Flats, and the breeding birds of Anahuac NWR. In addition, there will be opportunities to explore some of the surrounding counties of East Texas and their specialties such as Swallow-tailed Kite. And we will have the opportunity to learn from the experience of featured speakers—Richard Gibbons, Glenn Olsen and Winnie Burkett. So grab your binoculars and cameras and join the fun this spring with TOS.



## Speakers *(continued)*



**Richard Gibbons** is the Conservation Director for Houston Audubon where he is responsible for their 17 sanctuaries, develops and manages monitoring programs, and advocates for birds and conservation in the region. He has worked as an ornithologist throughout the Americas for nearly two decades. Most recently he worked at Louisiana State University's Museum of Natural Science for five years coordinating citizen science projects in Louisiana and earned his PhD studying birds, wetlands, and climate change in Peru's high Andes. Now he is focused on habitat restoration, building partnerships, and helping citizen scientists maximize their efforts for bird conservation.

### Winnie TOS Field Trip Descriptions—May 1–3, 2015

#### General Considerations:

- Be prepared for mosquitoes—bring insect repellent.
- The sun will be intense, so wear a hat and bring sunscreen and water.
- Many locations will have wet ground even if it hasn't rained, so consider wellies or sturdy leather boots that will protect your feet when walking through wet spots. Most people on these trips want to see a lot of birds, so stops for gas, food or restrooms will be kept short in order to maximize time spent birding.
- Bring walkie-talkies if you have them, preferably set to channel 11–22. They are indispensable for communicating between vehicles in a car caravan.
- Several of the Sunday trips have been designed with "leaving town" in mind.
- Keep in mind that trip leaders are volunteering their time and talents to help you see birds – *please treat them cordially.*

#### FRIDAY

**4. Jefferson County Century Club**—It would be hard to bird a full day at multiple locations in Jefferson County in late spring and not see 100 or more bird species. Habitats covered on this trip are likely to include freshwater and saltwater marshes, urban parks, Gulf beach and the famous coastal migrant trap of the TOS Sabine Woods Sanctuary. This trip will be a full-bore, pedal-to-the-metal county big day, returning to the motel as late as 6 p.m. State park entrance fee (or annual pass holder in each vehicle). Moderate walking on level ground in one or two locations. Some opportunity for fast food/ convenience stores. *Departs 0615.*

#### FRIDAY AND SATURDAY

**3. Anahuac NWR**—Anahuac NWR has a lot to offer visiting birders in the spring – lingering and breeding waterfowl and other waterbirds, rails, shorebirds, raptors, grassland birds, and it can be surprisingly good for passerine migrants, too. This trip will visit both main units of the refuge, with good access to restrooms. Minimal amounts of walking on this trip, as most of the birding will be at multiple stops along refuge roads. Bring water and a sack lunch. Since the refuge is not too far from Winnie, *trip can depart at 0645. Return to motel by 4:00 p.m.*

**7. Chambers County Century Club**— If conditions are good, this trip could find 100 species of birds in Chambers County by lunchtime. In addition to Smith Point and Anahuac NWR, this trip may include stops at White Memorial Park, the town of Anahuac and the rice fields around Winnie. Some walking on level ground in one or two locations. Minimal opportunity for fast food/ convenience stores. *Departs 0600. Returns to Winnie by 5 p.m.*

#### FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

**5. Migrant Hotspots**—This trip will hopefully focus on observing migrant landbirds. If the coastal migrant traps are hopping, then destinations will include the famous TOS and Houston Audubon Sanctuaries of High Island and/or the TOS Sabine Woods Sanctuary. If weather conditions are not favorable for migrant landbirds, then this trip may stop only briefly at coastal migrant traps, and then focus on birds like shorebirds, whose coastal stopovers are not so weather-dependent. TOS members have free admission to TOS Sanctuaries, but a daily fee or season pass ("patch") is required for admission to Smith Oaks and Boy Scout Woods. Participants will need to be flexible with expectations on this trip. If the wind is steady from the southeast and there has been no recent rain, the coastal woodlots can be almost birdless and the trip leader(s) will move the trip elsewhere to try to find birds in other habitats. Bring water and a sack lunch. Blissfully late *departure time of 0700, back to Winnie by 4:30 or 5 (earlier on Sunday).*

**16. Sabine Woods & Sea Rim State Park**—Sabine Woods is a TOS Sanctuary and is famous nationwide as a spring migration hotspot. This trip will head straight from Winnie to Sabine Woods (a little over an hour away) in order to give participants maximum opportunity to explore the sanctuary. Since Sea Rim State Park and "The Willows" are just a few miles down the road, the trip will also include stops at those locations, where one can sometimes view additional passerine migrants in addition to birds of the gulf beach (visible from the State Park and from the beach at the end of the paved road). Bring water and a sack lunch, as there is no fast food between Sabine Pass and the end of the road. *Trip departs 0700, will start back for Winnie between 2 and 3 p.m.*

**17. Leader's Choice**—This trip will go wherever the leader believes conditions are optimal to view rarities, specialties or good numbers of birds. During spring migration, conditions can change daily, and can vary widely from one location to another. This trip could travel to one or more coastal migrant traps, or might head to the beach for gulls and shorebirds, or could go to a location for specialty breeding birds or a recently-discovered rarity. Flexibility of expectations and itinerary will be key. *Depart 0630, return between 4 & 5 p.m. (earlier on Sunday).*

**18. Young Birders' Trips**—Birders must be between 10 and 29 years old to participate in these trips. Birders younger than 15 years old should be accompanied by a parent. The groups will confer with their appointed TOS leader each day to decide where to go and what birds the group is most interested in finding. *Depart 0630. Sack lunch or fast food.*

**1. Rice Fields / High Island**—Bird the rice fields near Winnie and Anahuac in the morning, then head over to the famed woodlots of High Island late in the morning. Participants will get to "sleep in" with a blissfully late *departure time of 0700, return to Winnie by 5 p.m.*

#### FRIDAY AND SUNDAY

**2. Searching for Shorebirds (Bolivar to Anahuac)**—The upper coast of Texas is considered by most to be one of the best Shorebirding areas in North America! Early May is prime time to observe migrant and breeding shorebirds on the upper coast. In addition to 35 species of shorebirds, we will also be searching for many other bird species that occur in the same habitat namely, terns, gulls rails, egrets, herons, raptors, and even sparrows! We will begin near the Ferry Landing and work our way back to Winnie, with potential stops to include Fort Travis, Bolivar Flats, the North Jetty, Rollover Pass, and Anahuac NWR. There will be lots of birds to see! *Departs 0615.*

**10. Baytown Nature Center**—Baytown Nature Center is a public park in eastern Harris County, located across the Houston Ship Channel from the San Jacinto Monument about 45 minutes west of Winnie. It can be good for waterfowl, waders, gulls, terns, shorebirds and flycatchers. Three Brown Boobies spent late summer and fall here in 2014. There is a \$3 entrance fee. This trip may include San Jacinto Monument, which is about 25 minutes away and offers additional birding possibilities. Good chances for convenience stores and fast food. *Departs 0615, done by 2 p.m.*

## SATURDAY

**6. Hardin County Century Club**—This trip will visit multiple locations in Hardin County attempting to find as many bird species as possible. Starting either in Lumberton or at Gore Store Road near Silsbee, other likely stops include Village Creek State Park (entrance fee or annual permit), Old Kountze Road, and stops at small ponds along county roads or on private property. Since Hardin County is uniformly heavily wooded, this trip is not likely to encounter more than about 80 species for the day. Breeding woodpeckers, vireos and warblers are likely to be the stars. Do NOT expect Red-cockaded Woodpecker or Bachman's Sparrow on this trip. Bring water and a sack lunch. *Depart 0615. Return by 5 p.m.*

**8. East Harris County Hotspots**—Harris County is large and includes the city of Houston and a surprising variety of habitat for resident and migrant birds. This trip will leave early in order to reach Russ Pittman Park near downtown Houston during prime birding hours. From there, the trip will caravan back toward Winnie, stopping at 3 more locations, including the San Jacinto Battleground and Baytown Nature Center (\$3 admission). Participants should see a variety of warblers, vireos, flycatchers and lingering ducks but shorebirds will be limited. Quite a few local rarities have been seen over the years at these hotspots in early May and the trip leaders are very familiar with Harris County birding locations. Some walking on flat, possibly wet ground. Participants will be encouraged to share if they have any particular species they would like to see during the day. Convenience stores and fast food are possible. *Departs 0600, return to Winnie between 4 and 5 p.m.*

**9. Birding the Pineywoods**—The East Texas ecosystem is often referred to as the Pineywoods because of the abundant pine trees that are the dominant tree species for the region. To stand beneath these majestic trees and soak in their quiet beauty is a glorious experience. Toss in some neotropical migrants, a few rare birds, and few habitat restricted birds, and you have an exciting day to look forward to! This trip leaves early because of a long drive (almost 2 hours) to a location in Angelina National Forest to search for Bachman's Sparrow. We will search for this habitat restricted sparrow in the bluestem grass beneath the tall pines, or if lucky find one perched on a pine bough sending its melodious song into the morning stillness. We may also find Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches and Pine Warblers feeding and frolicking in the tall pines. We will then travel to different sites to bird a variety of types of habitat within the Pineywoods in search of Neotropical migrants and Pineywoods breeders like Yellow-throated Vireo, Painted Bunting, and Prothonotary Kentucky, Hooded and Worm-eating Warblers. Hairy Woodpecker is rare but possible. In the afternoon we will bird our way to Tyrrell Park and Cattail Marsh in Beaumont. The city of Beaumont originally constructed Cattail Marsh as the final stage of the city's wastewater treatment facility. Over the years this 900 acre wetland complex with levee roads has grown into a birding hotspot. The 350 species of birds recorded here is an amazing record and it is a birder's haven. We will sort out the American Crow from the Fish Crow; a great opportunity to see both species in the same day. We will look for beautiful but over dressed Wood Duck, Anhinga, the elusive King Rail, the largest woodpecker in North America—the Pileated Woodpecker, and hopefully, the swamp-loving Barred Owl. *Departs 0600, returns 5 p.m.*

**19. Orange County Century Club**—This trip will try to find 100 or more species for the day in Orange County, a small county with a remarkable variety of habitats nestled between Port Neches and the Sabine River. Some walking in parkland. Good chances for convenience stores and / or fast food. *Depart 0615, return by 5 p.m.*

## SUNDAY

**11. Trinity River Waterbirds and Woodlands**—This trip will visit three locations with riparian, woodland and park land habitats - Trinity River Waterbird Rookery, Trinity River Island Recreation Area, and White Memorial Park. The focus will be on the breeding birds of the area but hopefully we will encounter some migrants too. In addition to identifying the birds, we will be watching for and discussing interesting bird behavior. Most of the day will entail s low walking on level ground. The trip will end mid-afternoon. *Departs 0645.*

**12. Angelina National Forest Field**—This trip targets breeding sites for Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Prairie Warbler. We will visit the Boykin Springs area of the Angelina National Forest and adjacent sites. Travel time to this site is 2 hours and the field trip will conclude at approximately 1:00 pm with participants departing for home after that. *Departs Winnie 6:00 am.*

**13. Jones State Forest**—If you like woodpeckers then WG Jones Forest in Montgomery County north of Houston is a fun place to bird. Jones State Forest is known for its small breeding population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, but it may host a greater variety of woodpeckers than any similar sized property in the state. This trip will focus on finding and observing Red-cockaded Woodpecker. There are several possible nesting trees in three different areas of the forest. Sometimes we find them right off and other times we have to search and sometimes we do not find them. But the breeding season is the best time to find this species as they will be actively feeding their young. We will also be on the lookout for other desirable birds namely, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Brown Thrasher, and a variety of neotropical migrants that may be stopping over in this open pine habitat. This place can be a surprising migrant trap considering its inland location. *Depart Winnie: 6:00 am. Done by noon, then head home.*

**14. Montgomery County Hotspots**—This trip will drive about an hour and 45 minutes west of Winnie to Lakeside Park in the Woodlands where a couple of hours will be spent looking for waterbirds, lingering ducks, and nesting and migrant warblers, vireos and flycatchers. The group will then head over to Jones State Forest to try for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Brown-headed Nuthatches. Bring sack lunch and water. *Depart Winnie 0630. Done by 1:30, after which participants will head home.*

**15. Polk County Century Club**—This trip will try to find as many bird species as possible in Polk County. Livingston, the county seat, is an hour and 20 minutes northwest of Winnie. Trip will conclude at 2 p.m. and participants will depart for home after that. *Departs Winnie at 0600.*

## REGISTRATION INFORMATION

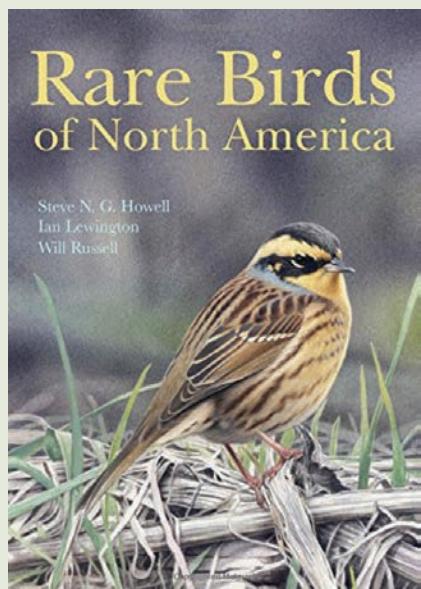
This meeting's registration is online only. For those with internet access, go to the meeting page on TOS website, <http://texasbirds.org> and follow the directions there. If you receive registration materials only via hard copy and DO NOT have access to the internet, you may call Sandi Wheeler, 210-632-2812, Frances Cerbins, 512-372-9039, or Judith Bailey, 512-480-9386 for assistance with registration. "If you don't get an answer leave a message with your name and phone number and you will get a call back when someone is available".



Brown-headed Nuthatch

Red-cockaded Woodpecker

## Rare Birds of North America



by Steve N. G. Howell, Ian Lewington, and Will Russell.  
2014. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.  
ISBN-13: 978-0691117966

We are fascinated by things that are rare—few in number, out-of-the-ordinary—and therefore, treasured. This is true whether we’re talking about antiques, vintage automobiles, or “limited editions” of . . . anything. When it comes to birds, we’ve all experienced that thrill of spotting the bird we’ve never seen before – for us, a rare bird. If this happens when we’ve travelled to a new place, our initial excitement may be diminished when we find out that in this place in this time, it’s not so rare after all – maybe even common. This is a salient point about rare birds: every bird is rare somewhere, sometime.

The authors acknowledge the difficulty of defining what is meant by “rare”, and establish their criteria for inclusion of species in this account as those for which “on average, only 5 or fewer individuals have been found annually in North America since around 1950”. They have chosen to draw the geographic lines of “North America” to include “the United States and Canada, including St. Pierre et Miquelon and excluding Hawaii”.

Here in Texas, we are fortunate to lie in the path of migratory flyways and to straddle or edge several different ecoregions, including the tropical to the south, which puts us in a great position to encounter diversity and rarity. When we do encounter a rare bird, all sorts of questions come up. How is it rare? Why is it rare? Is it rare here, but common elsewhere? Is it rare now, but common previously?

Is it a member of a healthy population of an abundant species, but out of its range? So, perhaps rare in this place at this time, but not elsewhere or at another time. If so, what caused it to stray? Is it lost . . . or just wandering?

Is it a member of a healthy population of an abundant species, but characterized by habits of shyness or secretive behavior or superb camouflage, so that even when it’s around, it’s seldom seen? Why is it so secretive?

Is it a member of a diminishing population that was once healthy? Is it even a member of an endangered species? If so, what changed—why is it scarce?

Is it here “naturally”, arriving under its own power, or has it escaped confinement after having been captured and transported by humans?

While many of these questions are addressed by the authors, their emphasis is on vagrants – birds that show up in places where they are not normally found. Here, a rare bird is not necessarily a bird seldom seen at all, but a bird that is lost. Because vagrancy is often associated with shifts in migration, many of these rare birds can be thought of as being lost in migration. The authors include an excellent and extensive (28 pages) discussion of the nature of migration and vagrancy, addressing the factors that might affect these species’ movements and displacements. They also summarize patterns of migration and typical points of origin for North American vagrants.

After this exploration of how birds might show up where they don’t normally occur, the authors then proceed to the individual species accounts, which form the bulk of the book. The species accounts are quite thorough, addressing issues of taxonomy, distribution and status, as well as field identification. The field identification sections helpfully discuss age/sex/molt differences, as well as habitat and behavior, to a much greater extent than do most field guides. The illustrations are nicely-done with multiple views.

Even as experienced birders, our neurophysiology predisposes us to see what we expect to see. Thus the rare bird sighting often starts out as “oh look, it’s a . . .” and then as we experience a slight dissonance between our inner picture and our outer viewing, we say to ourselves, “wait, that’s not quite right – that bill is too large and the belly’s streaked , etc.; then “oh my! it’s not a \_\_\_; is it a \_\_\_?” So here is where one wants to seek clarification through the details; it would have been nice to have a little “similar species” box for each species account, to help the viewer key in on what distinctions to look for in the few seconds they might have. Although each species account includes a helpful “similar species” comment, the actual distinguishing features are not always emphasized. The plates often include several nice illustrations, and sometimes illustrate the similar species for comparison, but the labelling and placement of these drawings next to one another aren’t always as clear as they could be. So the initial uncertainty can turn into confusion instead of clarity. Separating out the similar species drawings in a box next to the species of interest might have been more helpful.

This volume will make an excellent addition to your library. It’s not so much a book for the casual or beginning birder; rather, it is a guide for serious, experienced birders. This book will help you figure out if that bird you’re seeing that doesn’t quite fit your expectations is indeed a bird that’s “not supposed to be here”—and then learn a little about who it is and where it came from and where else it might show up. Enjoy!

—Nita Hazle  
Email: nitahaz@earthlink.net

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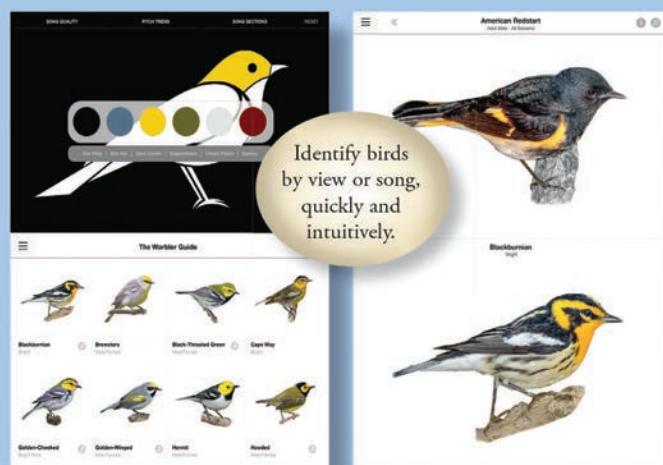
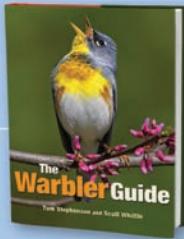


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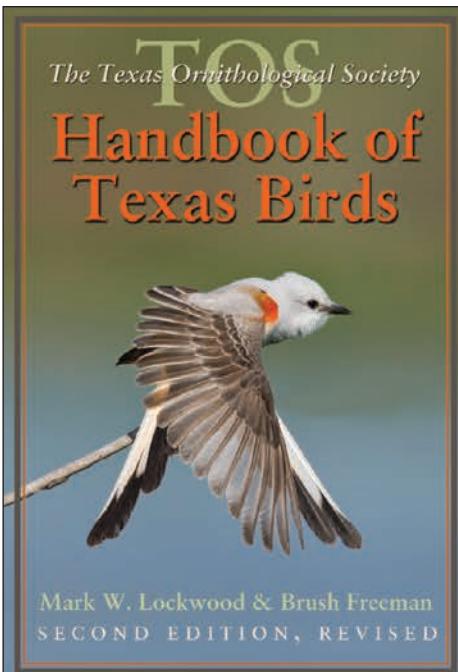
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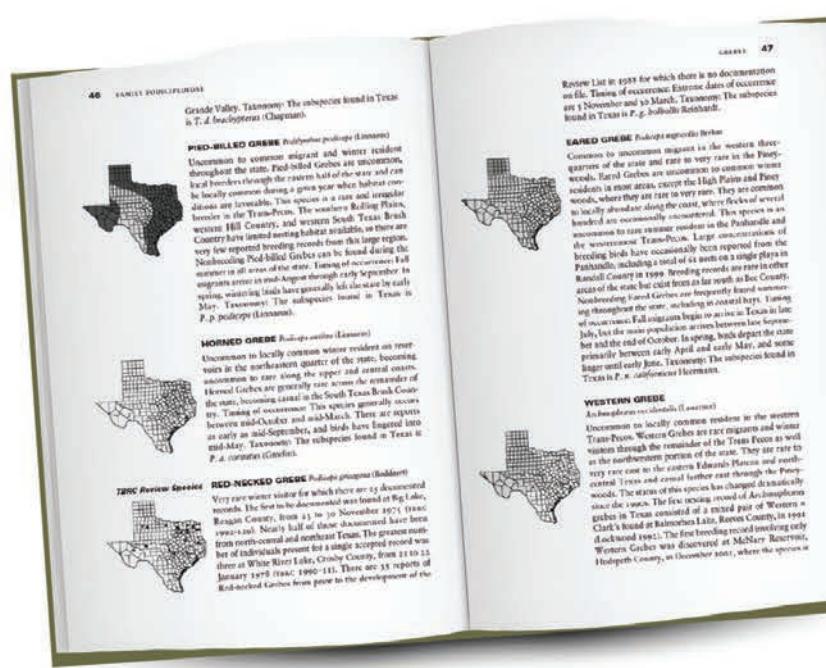
## The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds, Second Edition

Mark W. Lockwood and Brush Freeman

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Range maps with each species; helpful appendixes documenting presumptive, non-accepted, exotic, and review species; and a comprehensive reference section round out the offerings in this invaluable guide.

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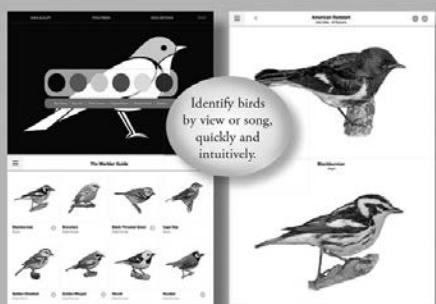


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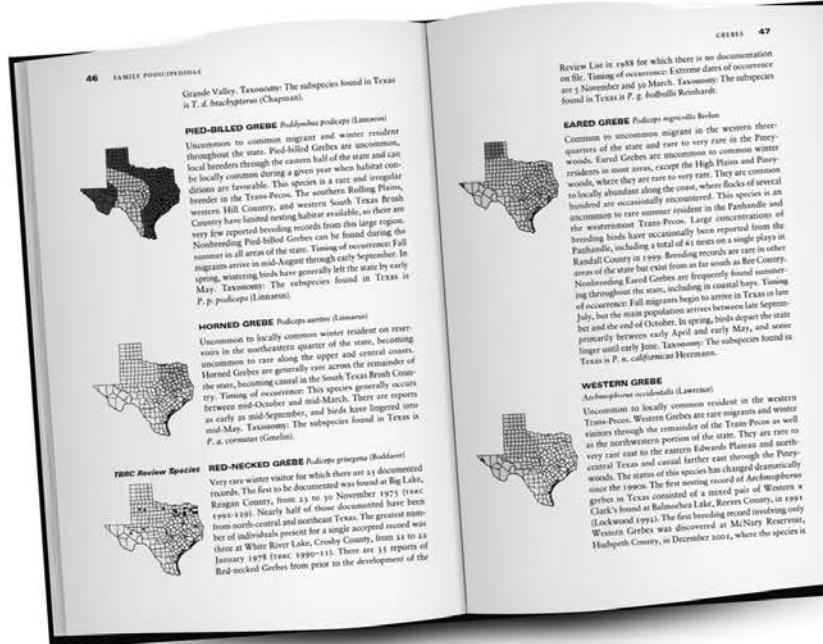
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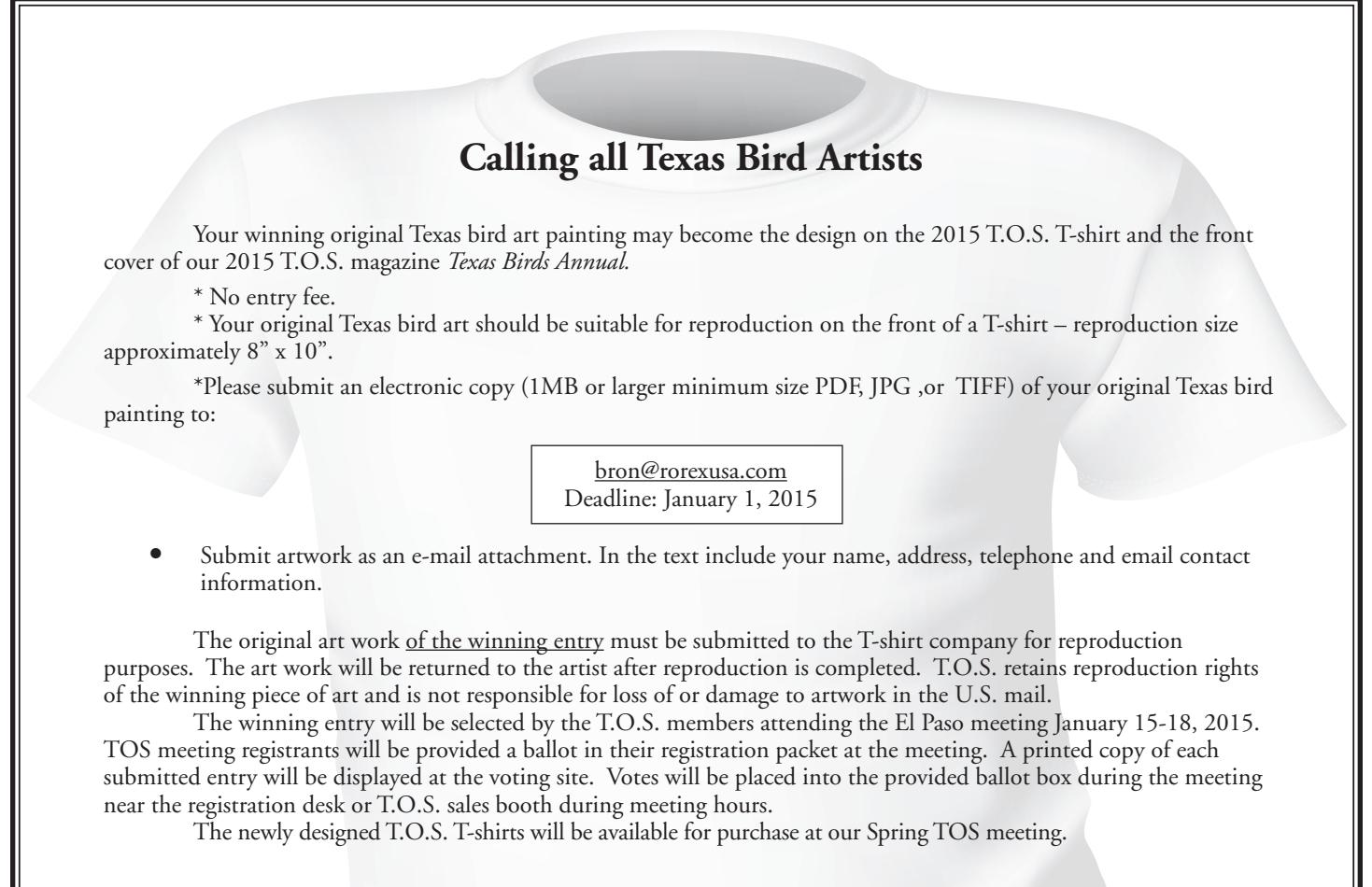
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