



President's Message



Byron Stone TOS President.

Change is in the Air, and it's Not Just the Birds

Change is in the air. Spring is springing. Redbuds have been in bloom here in northwest Austin for several weeks, and the White-winged Doves and Northern Cardinals are singing up a storm. Cavity nesters like Carolina Chickadees are exploring exploring cavities and even defending them already. We had very little in the way of winter chill this year, but it is getting even warmer and many

trees are well on their way to leafing out. And it is time to get ready for the TOS Spring Meeting in Rockport May 4–7. Make your hotel reservations as soon as possible because rooms will not be available after April 1.

The Spring Meeting, like the season, will bring changes. An election will be held, in which you hopefully will have voted, and the composition of the Board of Directors may change as a result. And then the board will elect officers, which could result in changes to the composition of the Executive Committee. These changes are organic, and will probably accrue to the benefit of the organization. Not all change, though, is welcome or beneficial. I especially am having trouble with Global Climate Change.

I realize that a few of you may still not believe that the climate is warming, but I have been following the science for over a decade and I not only believe it, but I feel it in my bones. Day after day of warmer than usual weather, year after year. Many more record daily high temperatures are set than daily lows. I realize that even some of you who don't discount climate warming still don't mind it too much. After all, isn't it nice to have shirtsleeve weather in Lubbock in early February? Well, perhaps, but I rather miss winter. I can't help but think of all the good things that winter's freezes do for us temperate-latitude dwellers, like keeping mosquitoes and other insect pests at bay, and locking up rainwater in ice at higher elevations and latitudes so that it stores longer for later use in liquid form. This winter warmth, like the tornadoes that just ripped through Minnesota in early March, just doesn't feel natural. It sometimes seems to me as though the world is melting, and in more ways than one.

But climate change is not even the current natural history event that worries me the most. It's that other, bigger story, the biggest story that many of your neighbors haven't even heard of yet – the alarming, escalating global loss of biodiversity often referred to now as Earth's sixth mass extinction event.

When you live in an era in which the veracity of news is publicly debated daily, you sometimes wonder what to believe. I

had such an experience a few months ago when I walked into the natural history section of a bookstore (looking for a book related to birds, of course) and noticed titles like, "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History," by Elizabeth Kolbert, published in 2014. I haven't read this book yet, but The Guardian voted it "No. 1 non-fiction book of all time," see e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/01/100-best-nonfiction-books-of-all-time-the-sixth-extinction-elizabeth-kolbert> from Feb 1, 2016. A quick survey of the bookstore shelf showed several similar titles. I picked up a couple of the books and leafed through them and experienced an epiphany – "it's not just the birds!" Even before the story "A Storm Gathers for North American Birds," in National Audubon Magazine in September - October 2014, I knew or suspected that a lot of North American birds were in trouble. I've noticed changes in abundance during my 4+ decades of birding that suggest that birds like Eastern Meadowlark and Northern Bobwhite are much less abundant and widespread than they were 30 years ago. And spectacular fallouts of spring migrants seem to occur far less frequently than they did 4 decades ago. And Breeding Bird Survey data indicate decades-long significant declines of many North American breeding birds across the continent. And I had read that amphibians were in trouble globally, and almost everyone has heard about problems with honeybees, but it didn't hit me until that moment in the bookstore that this might be a global phenomenon affecting all animals, and perhaps plants, too.

I didn't purchase any of those books that day, but the memory stayed with me and I began to investigate the topic further, beginning with the question, "is this for real?" Sure enough, population biologists have been writing about escalating extinction rates for several decades. Then, in the June 19, 2015 issue of Science Advances, population biologists Gerardo Ceballos and Paul Ehrlich and colleagues published a paper titled, "Accelerated Modern Human-Induced Species Losses—Entering the Sixth Mass Extinction." Using very conservative models which would "tend to minimize evidence of an incipient mass extinction," their study indicated that "the average rate of vertebrate loss over the last century is up to 100 times the background rate." You can read an abstract of the article here <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/5/e1400253> There is a link in the abstract to the full article, available online for free.

This is grim news, folks. In fact, Science Daily published an article on that same date (06/19/2015) titled "Sixth Mass Extinction is Here: Humanity's Existence Threatened." Wait, what?! It's not just birds and other animals, but mankind, too? This article, also available online, includes an overview of Paul Ehrlich's earlier work leading up to the new study with Ceballos, and reports that, "there is general agreement among scientists that extinction rates have reached levels unparalleled since the dinosaurs died out 66 million years ago," but that some scientists had challenged the notion of a global crisis, "believing earlier estimates may have rested on assumptions

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that overestimated the severity of the crisis.” So Ceballos, Ehrlich, et.al., emphasize that their deliberately conservative calculations “very likely underestimate the severity of the extinction crisis, because our aim was to place a realistic lower bound on humanity’s impact on biodiversity.” In an interview with Science Daily, Ceballos says that if this current extinction rate “is allowed to continue, life [on earth] would take many millions of years to recover, and our species itself would likely disappear early on.” Ehrlich summarizes it thusly, “we [humankind] are sawing off the limb on which we are sitting.”

Holy cow! They also report that “the specter of extinction hangs over 41 percent of all amphibian species and 26 percent of all mammals.” This is consistent with conclusions of the 2015 Audubon Report on Birds and Climate that indicates that almost half of bird species in North America could be threatened with extinction by the year 2080. Almost half?! This includes such relatively common and widespread species as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. But who knows for sure which half? And what if these estimates, like those of climate forecasters a decade ago, turn out to be too conservative? Which half of the bird species that you enjoy looking forward to seeing on your next field trip are you willing to give up?

Some will argue, “so what, other species will move in or evolve to take the place of species that disappear. Adapt or die. And besides, the species that counts most is *Homo sapiens*.” Michael Pollan, in his marvelous, multifaceted book “*The Omnivore’s Dilemma*,” points out that modern American food production and the modern American diet rely largely on a very few highly adapted and highly successful plant and animal species, especially corn, soy, cattle, pigs and chickens. And even the livestock are fed corn and soy, to such an extent that modern Americans consume more corn per capita than citizens of Mexico, the self-proclaimed “Corn People.” If you were to read Pollan’s book very selectively, you might be tempted to conclude that humans can survive with minimal biodiversity, just by continuing to cultivate plenty of corn and soy and raising their food animals on those crops, too. But if you read Pollan thoroughly (and I recommend you do), you are likely to conclude that this efficient, successful production of a wide variety of foods based primarily on corn and soy and a few livestock species is not really very good for our health or for the health of our planet. It is beyond the scope of my modest essay, but there is a growing research-based literature on the importance of biodiversity and sustainable consumption to the health of our planet and the health of our species. See, e.g. this page from *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* <<http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/en/events/2017/extinction.html>

And also this page from The Pontifical Academy of Sciences (yes, that means the Pope) :<http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/en/events/2017/extinction.html>

This page is titled “Biological Extinction” and was the mission statement for a conference at the Vatican in late February titled “How to Save the Natural World on Which We Depend.”

The problem with the argument that other species will assume niches vacated by species that disappear, is that it takes many hundreds or even thousands of generations before new species arise that can take the place of species that are extinct. This is especially true for large animals like the large

mammals that are threatened globally. We are, after all, a large mammal, too. And the problem with the argument that we can feed everyone as long as we can cultivate and harvest a few high-yield crops and livestock species is that it may not be environmentally sustainable in the long-term, and that it appears to not be very healthy for us. We humans are omnivores, after all, and our long-term survival is probably predicated on maintaining a healthy, diverse ecosystem on our home planet.

So, in the face of all of these changes and challenges, what can we birders do? Ceballos and Ehrlich say that “avoiding a true sixth mass extinction event will require rapid, greatly intensified efforts to conserve already threatened species, and to alleviate pressures on their populations – notably habitat loss, over-exploitation for financial gain, and climate change.” If they are right, and we have not yet gone beyond a global tipping point, then we birders probably need to adhere to that decades-old environmental maxim to “think globally and act locally.” We need to work hard to preserve, protect and promote what we know and love best – birds. We need to work to educate our friends, neighbors and policy-makers about the importance of saving endangered birds like Golden-cheeked Warblers and Whooping Cranes, because those species are important to us, and they are tied to habitats that are important for maintaining biodiversity. We also need to provide as much sanctuary space as possible for birds and other animals that need appropriate habitat to survive and reproduce. And we need to work with other organizations to help promote values of sustainability and biodiversity maintenance, and to help minimize the adverse impact of human activities on the local and the global environment, while continuing to study and enjoy the birds that we love so much.

This is important work; our very future may depend on it.
Best wishes for a great spring migration season.

I hope to see many of you in Rockport in early May if not before.

Good birding ya’ll,

—Byron Stone, *President TOS*

Birding at Reservoirs in the Trans-Pecos.

“Birders throughout the state need to be aware that access to the three reservoirs southeast of El Paso (Tornillo Reservoir, Fort Hancock Reservoir, and McNary Reservoir) is restricted to a small number of local birders who have written permission from the irrigation district to be there. No other birding access is allowed. People in violation of this are subject to be ticketed for trespassing. Out of area birders may get additional information on this matter by contacting a permit holder in El Paso Audubon (Jim Paton at 915-585-2628 or Barry Zimmer at 915-269-6855). It may be possible on occasion for someone to visit the reservoirs by accompanying one of the permit holders. Please do not attempt to contact the irrigation district for access and do not trespass by entering these sites without a written letter of permission to do so. Failure to cooperate will result in total access denial for everyone, not to mention giving birders in general a bad name. Please abide by these restrictions. Thank you for your cooperation.”

—Submitted by Barry Zimmer and Jim Paton

T.O.S. NEWS—Winter 2017

TOS Spring Meeting on the Central Texas Coast

The TOS Spring Meeting will be based in Rockport on May 4-7, 2017. We have field trips for you to enjoy on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We are hoping for a fabulous spring migration in the area!

In addition to spring migrants, Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, Sandwich and Sooty Terns and Tropical Kingbird may be found in the area at that time. Audubon's Oriole and Plain Chachalaca are also possible.

All TOS events will be held at the Saltwater Pavilion, which is the second pavilion as you drive into Rockport Beach Park. Beach Park admission fee will be waived for attendees during the weekend. Field trip departures will be from the Saltwater Pavilion each morning. Adequate parking is available. We will distribute box lunches there each morning.

We encourage you to bring your walkie-talkie to enhance communications as field trips will be via car caravans. Be prepared to team up with others on your trip in order to minimize the number of vehicles. This will maximize the likelihood of participants spotting birds sighted during the caravanning portion of birding trips.

Rockport will be hosting numerous other events simultaneously during this popular weekend. We were able to reserve blocks of rooms at two motels (see below). **These blocks will be held only until April 1st.** After they are either fully booked or released on April 1, it will be very difficult to book a room in the Rockport-Fulton area. This cannot be stressed enough! You are encouraged to reserve your room immediately, then relax and enjoy the anticipation of the TOS Rockport Spring Meeting at the Coastal Bend.

Fairfield Inn and Suites



2950 Business 35 North, Rockport, TX 78382
(361) 727-9007 (call local phone number to reserve at
"May 4th TOS rate")
\$159 plus tax, king or double queen room

Lighthouse Inn at Aransas Bay



200 South Fulton Beach Road, Rockport, TX 78382
(361) 790-8439 (call local phone number to reserve at
"May 4th TOS rate")
\$129 plus tax, king or double queen room

Meeting Agenda

All meeting events will be held at Rockport Beach Park's Saltwater Pavilion
(second pavilion inside Rockport Beach Park)

Thursday, May 4

- 3:30 pm Board Meeting
- 4:00-7:00 pm Registration at Saltwater Pavilion; social time
- 4:00 pm Silent Auction and Raffle opens
- 6:00 pm Announcements and Welcome (including election results)
- 6:30 pm Bird Pub Quiz
- 7:30 pm Speaker Brent Ortego, Ph.D
"Texas Avian Population Trends"

Friday, May 5—Cinco de Mayo

- 5:15 am Box Lunch pick up
- 5:30-6:45 am Field Trip departures
- 5:00-7:00 pm Registration and Silent Auction and Raffle; social time
- 7:00 pm Announcements and field trip reports
- 7:30 pm Speaker Owen Fitzsimmons, M.S.
"Texas Connection: Research and Conservation for Our Coastal Birds"

Saturday, May 6

- 5:15 am Box lunch pick up
- 5:30-6:45 am Field Trip departures
- 4:00-7:00 pm Registration and social time
- 5:30 pm Silent Auction and Raffle close
- 6:00-7:00 pm Dinner Banquet
- 7:00 pm Announcements, TOS business and field trip reports
- 7:30 pm Elizabeth Smith, Ph.D
"Whooping Crane Comeback: What Else Do They Need?"

Sunday, May 7

- 5:15am Box lunch pick up
- 5:30-6:45 am Field Trip departures

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

This meeting's registration is online only. For those with internet access, go to the meeting page on TOS website, <http://www.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 Judy Kestner (361) 387-7329, or Frances Cerbins (512) 372-9039 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.

- Registration Fee: \$50 TOS members
- \$75 TOS non-members (includes 1 year membership)
- \$10 Late fee after April 25, 2017
- Box Lunches \$12
- Saturday Banquet \$35

SPEAKERS

Thursday Night Speaker



Dr. Brent Ortego serves in two major positions in Texas birding: Editor of the Texas Christmas Bird Count and also Coordinator of the Texas Breeding Bird Survey. On Thursday evening he will discuss the 2016 winter CBC results and also the trends noted in the annual spring Texas Breeding Bird Survey.

Dr. Brent Ortego

He recently retired as a Biologist with 34 years of service with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department where he represented the state in developing conservation plans for many nongame and endangered species in South Texas. He is a graduate of Louisiana State University B.S. Forestry and M.S. Wildlife, and Auburn University Ph.D. Wildlife.

Friday Night Speaker



Owen Fitzsimmons is Senior Conservation Biologist, CBBEP's Coastal Bird Program, monitoring and managing bird populations through our 12-county region. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Texas A&M University-Kingsville where his primary focus was coastal wetlands and waterbirds.

Owen Fitzsimmons

He previously worked in habitat management for a private lease on the King Ranch with Ducks Unlimited and the Texas Forest Service. He currently serves as Coastal Bend Audubon Society President.

His talk "Texas Connection: Research and Conservation for Our Coastal Birds" will cover new information about shorebirds and colonial waterbirds with international partners to learn more about migratory connectivity, breeding and wintering habits as well as overall status and trends of the most imperiled coastal species in Texas. Through collaborative efforts they have gathered a great deal of new information in the past few years.



Dr. Elizabeth Smith

Saturday Night Speaker

Dr. Elizabeth Smith is a native Texan. During her formative years, she experienced the natural diversity and

abundance of the estuarine coastal habitat through outdoor activities, such as sailing, fishing, and surfing. She received formal academic training at Corpus Christi State University (B.S., M.S.) and Texas A&M University (Ph.D.) in biology and wildlife & fishery sciences. For 17 years, she was employed as a Research Scientist at the Center for Coastal Studies, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. She joined the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in 2011 as the Whooping Crane Conservation Biologist to increase our involvement in habitat conservation, coastal ecosystem health, and stakeholder leadership in Texas. Her current title is Senior Whooping Crane Scientist, Texas Program of International Crane Foundation.

Liz's Saturday talk will be "Whooping Crane Comeback: What Else Do They Need?"

Saturday Evening Banquet

The sit-down catered banquet entrée choices are:

Penne Marinara Primavera

Bowtie Alfredo with Chicken

Shrimp Ligure

Gluten free option: Gluten free Pasta with grilled shrimp
The meal will include freshly baked focaccia bread, house salad, iced tea or water and gourmet cookies.

The deadline for meal selections is Saturday, April 22.

Box Lunch Menu

Chips & fruit medley with honey sauce & bottled water included in box lunches.

Friday choices:

Thai Chicken Wrap—chicken & veggies with Thai peanut dressing in tortilla

Ham & Swiss Sandwich—ham, Swiss, tomatoes & romaine on ciabatta

Hummus Veggie Wrap—hummus, pepper jack, veggies & light southwest ranch dressing in tortilla

Saturday choices:

Buffalo Chicken Wrap—chicken, mozzarella, veggies & light ranch dressing in tortilla

Turkey Bacon Ranch Sandwich—turkey, bacon, Swiss & veggies on ciabatta

Hummus Veggie Wrap—pepper jack, veggies & light southwest ranch dressing in a tortilla

Sunday choices:

King Caesar Chicken Wrap—chicken, parmesan, veggies & Caesar dressing in a tortilla

Rustic Turkey & Apple Club Sandwich—turkey, cheddar, gorgonzola, bacon, kale & apple slaw on thin seedilicious bread

Hummus Veggie Wrap—pepper jack, veggies & light southwest ranch dressing on a tortilla

Rockport TOS Field Trips—May 5-7, 2017

Field trips depart from Rockport Beach Park's Saltwater Pavilion and should return around 3-4 pm. There is only one exception—the half-day rookery island boat trip on "The Skimmer" which departs from Fulton Harbor; the boat is located behind Charlotte Plummer Restaurant.

General Considerations:
<p>South Texas can be hot; shrubs and vines often have thorns. It is humid near the coast. Wear appropriate layers, closed toe shoes/boots, a hat and bring sunscreen. Bring mosquito repellent if there has been recent rainfall.</p> <p>If there has been recent rainfall, wet ground may be possible; should that be the case, consider wearing waterproof boots.</p> <p>Bring adequate water and snacks/lunch for the day.</p> <p>Please fill your gas tank the preceding evening so your car will be prepared at departure time. Stops for gas, food or restrooms will be kept short in order to maximize birding time.</p> <p>Bring walkie-talkies if you have them, preferably set to channel 11-22. They are indispensable for communication between vehicles in a car caravan in remote areas. Please exchange cell numbers with your leader prior to departure.</p> <p>Arrive at field trip departure site with adequate time to locate your birding leader/group, exchange phone numbers, car pool, and pick up your box lunch (if you ordered one).</p> <p>Most 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.</p>
Friday
<p>1. Victoria County Begin your trip listening for calling nightlife at a bridge along the San Antonio River. Continue birding at the San Antonio River Unit of Guadalupe Delta WMA. Travel Salem Road north of Victoria to survey rice fields for waterbirds, then visit a turf farm near Dacosta. End at the Invista plant educational wetlands. 5:30am Victoria County</p>
Friday & Saturday
<p>2. Hazel Bazemore County Park & Pollywog Ponds Bazemore Park offers much more to interest the birder than the famed spring and fall hawk watch platform. The Nueces River and small lakes and marshy areas attract birds to the surrounding trees and fields. Impoundment areas of Pollywog Ponds and its large trees attract spring migrants. Target birds include Green Kingfisher, Green Jay, Painted Bunting, Vermilion Flycatcher and Black Phoebe. 6:00am Nueces County</p>
<p>3. Fennessey Ranch & Bayside Marshes Bird hayride style on a coastal ranch with conservation easement which is bordered on three sides by nine miles of the Mission River. You will be guided by Fennessey Ranch scouts, including the Famous Shoes Sally Crofutt. Target birds: Green Kingfisher, White-tipped Dove, Bald Eagle, Painted Bunting. End your trip with a stop at Egery Flats. \$27 per person. 6:00am Refugio County, Aransas County</p>
<p>4. Goose Island State Park & Rockport Hot Spots Goose Island SP offers extensive woodlands, oak mottes, beaches and salt marshes. A feeding station with drippers and boardwalks enhance the birding experience. There will also be stops at Rockport sites frequented by local birders. Target birds: Tropical Kingbird, Sooty Tern, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, shorebirds, wading birds and spring migrants. State Park entry fee. 6:30am Aransas County</p>
<p>5. Indian Point and Live Oak County Park Indian Point Park features a boardwalk over salt marsh, oyster reefs and brackish ponds. Sunset Lake is a tidal lake beside Aransas Bay and Live Oak Park offers extensive oak mottes. Target birds: Clapper Rail, Reddish Egret, shorebirds, wading birds and spring migrants. 6:30am San Patricio County</p>
<p>6. Jim Wells County This trip covers the South Texas brush lands of western Jim Wells County. It is a combination of car birding and short walks over easy surfaces. Possible bird species: Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, Bullock's & Audubon's Orioles, Greater Roadrunner, Olive, Black-throated, Grasshopper and Lark Sparrows, Cactus Wren, Long-billed and Curve-billed Thrashers. 5:45am Jim Wells County</p>
<p>7. Magic Ridge and Whitmire Unit of Aransas NWR The TOS Sanctuary is a spring migrant trap with salt flats. The nearby Whitmire Unit of Aransas NWR is open by prior arrangement. The group will visit salt marsh, saltwater and brackish waters and inland rice fields. Target birds are Glossy Ibis, rails including possible Black Rail, Gull-billed Tern, Curve-billed Thrasher, Bewick's Wren, American Oystercatcher, spring migrants. 5:30am Calhoun County</p>

<p>8. Nueces Delta Preserve The preserve is owned by Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries and is being managed for wildlife. It is located at the mouth of the Nueces River and includes the newly acquired Wyatt Ranch. It is open by prior arrangement. It combines large areas of brackish and fresh water wetlands with brush and chaparral. Target birds: Groove-billed Ani, wading birds, shorebirds and spring migrants. 6:00am San Patricio County</p>
<p>9. Port Aransas Hot Spots Cover the Port Aransas spring migrant sites—a freshwater lake, salt marsh, and Gulf of Mexico beaches. The trip will include Leonabell Turnbull Birding Center, the jetties, Charlie's Pasture and Paradise Pond. Target birds: spring migrants, shorebirds and wading birds, gulls and terns. 6:00am Nueces County</p>
Friday & Sunday
<p>10. Welder Wildlife Refuge This 7,800-acre refuge is comprised of riparian woodland, prairie, freshwater marsh and open water habitats along the south bank of the Aransas River. It is open to the public by prior arrangement. Target species include Audubon's Oriole, Bald Eagle, Barred Owl, Plain Chachalaca, Green Kingfisher, Great Kiskadee and Green Jay. 6:15am San Patricio County</p>
Friday, Saturday & Sunday
<p>11. Choke Canyon State Park There are two State Park Units to visit at Choke Canyon Reservoir. Surrounding birding sites provide the drier brush lands birds. Target birds are Black-throated, Cassin's and Olive Sparrows, Pyrrhuloxia, Greater Roadrunner, Groove-billed Ani, White-tipped Dove, Audubon's Oriole, Bell's Vireo and possible Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. State Park entry fee. 5:30am Live Oak County, McMullen County</p>
<p>12. Refugio Lion's Park and Goliad State Park These two parks offer excellent birding opportunities year around. The riparian woodland trails of Lion's Shelly Park follow the Mission River. Goliad State Park trails are beside the San Antonio River. Target birds are Green Kingfisher, nesting Northern Parula, Bell's Vireo and spring migrants. State Park entry fee. 6:15am Refugio County, Goliad County</p>
<p>13. Rookery Islands Boat Visit rookery islands in shallow bay waters aboard "The Skimmer" which offers the choice of an enclosed lower deck or open upper deck and bathrooms on board. This trip should be the delight of birders and photographers wishing to view nesting birds in breeding plumage, many with babies. You will likely spot bottlenose dolphins following the boat. \$65 per person; Capt. Tommy Moore is donating \$20 to the TOS Sanctuary Fund for each person on this boat trip. 6:45am Aransas County</p>
Saturday
<p>14. Guadalupe Delta Wildlife Management Area Search for birds in a rich riparian corridor lying along Hog Bayou Road and explore adjoining impoundment areas. Then visit wetlands and freshwater marshes by vehicle. End in upland scrub habitat. Target birds: Anhinga, both Golden-fronted and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Vermilion Flycatcher, spring migrants. 5:30am Calhoun County</p>
Saturday and Sunday
<p>15. Corpus Christi Hot Spots This trip will visit Corpus Christi spring migration hot spots. Stops will include a variety of well-known spring migrant sites, saltwater channels and flats. Target birds include Chuck-will's-widow, Reddish Egret, Bronzed Cowbird, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, shorebirds, wading birds and spring migrants. 6:00am Nueces County</p>
<p>16. Powderhorn Ranch This 17,000-acre ranch with 11 miles of shoreline along Matagorda Bay contains brackish and freshwater marshes, salt flats, grasslands and mature woodlands to provide diverse birding. An old ranch house will provide bathrooms during your lunch break. A large portion of the ranch will become a TPWD Wildlife Management Area shortly. 5:30am Calhoun County</p>
Sunday
<p>17. Aransas County Shorebirds Explore the large variety of shorebirds, wading birds, terns and gulls of Aransas County. 6:30am Aransas County</p>
<p>18. Leader's Choice #1 These trips are scheduled to search for interesting birds spotted during the preceding days' birding. 6:30am</p>
<p>19. Leader's Choice #2 These trips are scheduled to search for interesting birds spotted during the preceding days' birding. 6:30am</p>
<p>20. Leader's Choice #3 These trips are scheduled to search for interesting birds spotted during the preceding days' birding. 6:30am</p>
All trips are encouraged to return to Rockport by 3-4pm

Regional Reports

Region 3—Piney Woods

For a great birding experience take a trip to Mineola Nature Preserve. The Preserve has 2,911 acres and is located in Wood County. It is home to more than 195 species of birds. The park boasts many types of trails such as birding, biking, walking and equestrian. Ever thought about birding from horse back?

There is an abandoned rail bed that lends itself to a great birding trail. Get out and enjoy Texas's many great parks.

It was great to see so many TOS members from Region 3 at the TOS meeting in McAllen. I think we had one of the bigger groups there. Hope to see you in Rockport for the May meeting. May 4 to the 7th.

—Linda Belssner Director

Region 5—Edwards Plateau

Birding helps us mark the change of seasons. People sometimes ask what is the most unusual bird I've ever seen. Sometimes the ordinary is just as special as the extraordinary. The winter birds giving way to spring migrants and summer breeders then fall migrants and the winter residents as the cycle continues. Enjoyment of the seasons and the avifauna of each is part of what I love about birding.

The most wonderful time of the year for many of us is spring migration! That means it's time to get ready for the Great Texas Birding Classic (GTBC) running April 15-May 15. The GTBC website says: "There's a tournament category for everyone from the beginning backyard birder to the competitive lister.... Registration fees raise money for Texas bird and birding conservation grants." Check the GTBC website as well as Travis Audubon, San Antonio Audubon, Bexar Audubon and Mitchell Lake Audubon Center to see how you can get involved with this conservation fundraiser. Colorado Bend State Park and San Saba Bird and Nature Club will host a State Park Tournament Team.

Dorian Anderson, the bicyclist birder, will be the featured guest for Wings over the Hills Nature Festival in Fredericksburg, April 28-30. During 2014, Anderson cycled over 17,800 miles through 28 states while observing 617 species. He peddled, hiked, and kayaked the entire distance and raised more than \$50,000 for bird conservation. There are lots of great field trips and speakers during the Wings festival.

There are classes, field trips, and programs happening this spring at your local birding club. Check out the above-mentioned group's websites to find out more. If you know of other Edwards Plateau birding clubs, please let me know and I'll include them in the next newsletter.

—Jimma Byrd, Regional Director

Region 7—Brushlands

Winter is usually a time for rare birds in the southern part of Texas, but it has been fairly quiet recently. However, those rarities that have shown up have graciously stayed around for a while giving anyone interested in seeing them a

chance to do so. Rose-throated Becard, Amazon Kingfisher, and Golden-crowned Warbler were the biggest highlights of last season. As we move into spring, weather has dominated the news and birding circles. Severe storms and heat waves (triple digits in mid-February!) are common topics among nature lovers while birds are going about the business of nest building and egg-laying.

This spring is shaping up to be a good one for migration with reports of unusual shorebirds, warblers, and raptors beginning to move through the southern part of the state. Be sure to mark your calendar and plan a trip south or to the coast for the Spring TOS meeting in Rockport (May 4-7), the Spring Chirp in Weslaco (March 29-April 1), and the Birdiest Festival in America (Corpus Christi, April 20-23). Registration details can be found on the festival websites.

—Kelly Smith, Region 7

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Texas Ornithological Society 2017 Winter Meeting

Romey Swanson¹

Day 1

Erin (my wife and adventure partner) and I attended the Texas Ornithological Society's (TOS) 2017 Winter Meeting (January 22, 2017) located in the Rio Grande Valley of far South Texas. This trip was filled with birding, catching up with birder and naturalist friends, presentations, and traveling along and among the tropical frontier of Texas. And, of course, having Erin with me made it even more fun than a usual exploration.

Our weekend itinerary included field trips called How Low Can You Go, Winged Wonders of Weslaco, and Zapata County Century Club. I'll visit more about these trips during the respective blogs (3 total, all will be linked to one another when completed). We ended the weekend trip on a very high note, which I'll keep as a surprise for now.

Before I review the first day of the trip, I want to thank our gracious AirBNB host, Rose, who provided us a wonderful room at a very reasonable rate. If you want a nice, central place to stay while in South Texas, I recommend you check out A Warm Home in the Heart of the Valley.

Our first field trip, How Low Can You Go, took us to The Lennox Foundation's Southmost_Preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy. Byron Stone and Justin LeClaire provided guide service for the field trip. Preserve Manager, Max Pons, got us signed in and joined us for a morning of birding. We spent nearly three and half hours hiking through the preserve. I was able to observe a total of 42 species while an additional four species were seen by other group members. Highlights of the morning included Altamira Oriole, "Western-type" Flycatcher (a complex ID challenge composed of Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers), Ash-throated Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Nashville Warbler, White-tailed Hawk, and Horned Lark. In addition to the great birds, we spent some time with a Gulf Coast Ribbon Snake and a beautiful Texas Indigo Snake.

I took a couple of interesting notes from the morning of birding at Southmost Preserve.

1. The Valley supports low density wintering populations of several bird species I usually only expect in the Hill Country during migration and the breeding season (i.e. Nashville Warbler, Ash-throated Flycatcher, etc.)
2. The Western Flycatcher is an extremely difficult identity challenge, basically impossible without hearing it vocalize. Unfortunately, our bird never made a sound. The choices for the "Western-type Flycatcher" are Cordilleran and Pacific-slope Flycatchers. Cordilleran Flycatchers are migratory and occur as local breeders in the high elevations of West Texas mountains; far away from the Rio Grande Valley. Pacific-slope Flycatcher

has not yet been confirmed by the Texas Bird Records Committee in Texas. The Pacific-slope Flycatcher could very well might be found in the state as a vagrant or overwintering species but, because they aren't usually vocal outside of breeding season (Texas is a good way from their breeding range), it is a very difficult thing to conclusively prove.

Old Port Isabel Road.

After Southmost, we drove out along Boca Chica Boulevard onto the beach and south to the mouth of the Rio Grande. During this portion of the field trip we noted many wading birds and shore birds. We saw two Reddish Egrets, a state threatened species, in the shallow wetlands leading towards the beach. Reddish Egrets come in two color phases, white and reddish. Most of the birds of the lower Texas coast are the white phase. Additionally, these egrets have a characteristic hunting behavior where they are observed erratically chasing, dancing, and flapping while in pursuit of prey.

Along the surf we were able to study small plovers and gulls. Here is a complete list of species observed at Boca Chica. On the way out of Boca Chica, Erin and I kept our eyes open for falcons (hoping for Aplomado) and were caught behind the group while studying a nearby Merlin (North America's second smallest falcon only slightly bigger than American Kestrel). We eventually caught back up with the birding group and headed out to Old Port Isabel Road in search of Aplomado Falcons. After nearly an hour of searching, we were running out time and were preparing to head back to McAllen. After a brief powwow, the group agreed that we could afford 30 more minutes of birding. It was a wise decision, shortly afterwards Justin LeClaire spotted a pair falcons on an artificial nesting platform several hundred yards from the roadside. Good but distant looks were had by all.

Day 2

Day 1 ended up being an excellent adventure covering a variety of habitats and the birds that they support. Truly a great beginning to what was angling to be a wonderful weekend. How would day 2 end up?

Winged Wonders of Welaco

Saturday's field trip was called Winged Wonders of Weslaco. As the name implies, we never left the Weslaco area but that didn't mean we would be limited in highlights or numbers of birds seen. After a quick powwow with our trip leader, Mary Gustafson, this group was off to Estero Llano Grande State Park.

A quick side note about this park. Last year during the Great Texas Birding Classic, my team took 1st place in the

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State Park Category by tallying 123 species in 24 hours, all within the park boundaries.

Rose-throated Becard

At Estero, we immediately directed ourselves to the Tropical Zone to look for a Rose-throated Becard that had been recently discovered. The Becard had been fairly elusive in recent days and, when found, only provided short opportunities to view it before disappearing again. However, and for whatever reason, its mood changed this day and it made sure that just about every person that visited the park was allowed fantastic views.



Rose-throated Becard

Rose-throated Becards have an interesting history in the Rio Grande Valley. This is where they reach their northernmost limit in distribution. They are associated with open woodlands adjacent to rivers and creeks. Because much of the lower Rio Grande Valley have been usurped by agriculture and only a very few mature woodlands remain (almost exclusively on the US side of the river), this bird which may have been more common and regular in deep South Texas in the distant past, is now so rare and infrequent that sighting one is extremely noteworthy and worth study. The Texas Bird Records Committee considers this a “review species” requiring documentation to be a substantiated record. Rose-throated Becard has been somewhat regular in the Valley in the recent past with 1-2 individuals found per year.

After everyone got their fill from the Becard, we began to explore the park and varying habitats included. We spent time on the observation deck at headquarters taking in ducks, grebes, herons, and hummingbirds. Everywhere you turned, great views of colorful wildlife prevailed. After restroom breaks and reviewing notes, we hit the trails again to take a look at the wetlands and ponds on the eastern side of the park. Along the way, we studied American Avocet, Long-billed Dowitchers, and Stilt Sandpipers.



Least Grebe

Mary Gustafson, a really great birding guide!



Much of the group studies Long-billed Dowitchers while Mary searches for Stilt Sandpipers.

It was about this time that I realized that Mary was such an incredible resource as a guide. She had a genuine and contagious excitement for birds and birders. Beyond that, she was a productive well of knowledge on the topics of natural history and the ecology of birds of this tropical frontier.

So, now that I have declared myself a Mary Gustafson fanboy, we’ll go ahead and move the plot along.

Continuing along the trails, we picked more wetland type birds including both Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night-Herons, Anhinga, and more ducks. It was on the uplands, though, that we got great looks at a common but extremely cryptic Valley specialty, the Common Pauraque!



Common Pauraque

Obligatory mention of herps

I'll go ahead and share here that Erin and I were keeping our eyes out for herps (reptiles and amphibians) but hadn't had much success with any regional specialties besides Red-eared Sliders and a large American Alligator (which is pretty dang cool to see wherever you are).

Erin and I briefly split off from the group to spend a little time in the Desert Zone of the park. We hoped to find some more reptiles, especially Texas Tortoise and Rose-bellied Lizards. We whiffed on those but did find a Southern Plains Woodrat tucked in a pricklypear midden chowing down on a cactus pad (a favorite food). It seemed a little uneasy eating while being watched.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird

It wasn't long after this that unexpected rain showers hit. The group took lunch under the covered observation deck and wondered around in leisure until it was time for the next stop. While enjoying the canopy shelter of a kind park volunteer's RV, Erin and I enjoyed watching a Buff-bellied Hummingbird bathe in the beads of rain stuck to the leaves and stems of a neighboring shrub. At Estero, we ended up seeing 69 species through the morning.



Buff-bellied Hummingbird
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdZXx3x34iA>

Frontera Audubon Nature Preserve

The trip's next stop was at the grounds of the 15 acre Frontera Audubon Nature Preserve. This tract supports a combination of open and dense woodlands with wetlands and a restored native Sabal Palm forest.

Hiking the grounds we discovered a mixed species feeding flock that included a Black-and-white Warbler. A Green Kingfisher patiently perched on a branch of a Montezuma Cypress for all to enjoy.



Green Kingfisher on Montezuma Cypress.

Further down the trail, we enjoyed feeder birds and a feeder mammal (Fox Squirrel) taking advantage of the easy meal. While relaxing at the feeder site, we spotted another nice overwintering warbler, a Black-throated Green Warbler. With much of the day behind us and the threat of more showers looming, we ventured on to our final stop of the field trip.

The Valley Nature Center

The Valley Nature Center provides fantastic hands-on outdoor education opportunities to the community and public at large. We were there to walk the trails of the 6 acre park but another heavy rain shower kept us indoors for over 30 minutes. One of the more unique attractions of the Valley Nature Center is the resident population of piebald Plain Chachalacas. These normally dull brown birds were instead speckled and spotted with patches of bleach white feathers. I wasn't able to get a photo of this cool anomaly (photo of normal plumaged bird below) but I'll be looking out for it next time I'm down.



Plain Chachalaca

Texas Tortoise

Finally! We stumbled upon a little juvenile Texas Tortoise on the trails at the Nature Center. Texas Tortoises are listed as threatened in Texas. It was very nice to see this young critter all shiny and active after the rains.

One Last Stop

After a long day of birding, the group disassembled. Erin and I decided that we should rest and make plans for dinner and visiting with friends before taking off to Falcon Lake

State Park (almost 2 hours drive) where we had reservations for camping and would begin the next day's field trip.

But, there was still one thing to do after a long day of birding. Look for more birds! Erin was very keen to look for the roosting sites of the exotic but naturalized Green Parakeets found in the Valley. So, off to the HEB parking lot we went. Looking for a loud and raucous mixed group of Parakeets and Great-tailed Grackles. At the end of the day, we had found 76 species of bird and several other wonderful wildlife.

Birding Results from the Winter 2017 TOS Meeting, McAllen, Texas.

This is, as promised, the checkerboard report from our winter meeting in McAllen. The field trip organizers went to town; coming up with forty field trips spread across three days and, thanks to the preparation of our trip leaders and the skills of our participants, we did a great job of birding an already well-birded region—I suspect the eBird reviewer(s) for the counties involved have had their hands full☺

Before I get into our results I want to explain how the checkerboard was built this time around. I used eBird to generate a list of every species that had been seen during the last ten Januaries in every county we were to explore (Brooks, Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, Willacy, and Zapata). This yielded a list of 352 species. From this list I removed species that the ABA does not consider countable (such as Lilac-crowned Parrot). I then removed those that had been reported to eBird four times or less from the period surveyed. This left me with a list of 278 species and field trip participants with the task of competing with every eBirder who had spent time in those counties from 2007 through 2016.

How did we do?

We saw, as a group, 223 species of the 278 that seemed reasonable. That works out to about 80% and given that we were, in effect, competing against every hard-core county birder and rarity chaser that had worked this well-birded region during the last ten years of Januaries, I think that is pretty respectable. We also had five write-ins—all species that had not been reported to eBird, from the counties surveyed, more than four times during the last ten Januaries: Surf Scoter, 'Western' Flycatcher, Mountain Bluebird, Canyon Towhee, and Painted Bunting. If you add those in, we could call it 82%!

Birders are a competitive bunch so a few highlights are in order. By the numbers, the Water, Water Everywhere group prevailed on Friday with 103 species, the Willacy County TCC group prevailed on Saturday with 100 species, and the Winged Wonders of Weslaco group prevailed on Sunday with 76 species.

Numerous teams contributed species uniquely to the list: the Water, Water Everywhere group found the only Fulvous Whistling Duck on Friday; the Brooks County TCC group found the only Ross's Goose on Saturday; the Willacy County TCC group found the only Surf Scoter on Saturday; the Count Your Lucky Starrs group found the only Scaled Quail on

Sunday; the How Low Can You Go group found the only Eared Grebe on Friday; the Count Your Lucky Starrs group found the only Groove-billed Ani on Friday; the Have a Ball at Bentsen group found the only Rufous Hummingbird on Saturday; the Island Fun group found the only Marbled Godwit on Friday; the Island Fun group found the only Dunlin on Friday; the Linger at Laguna group found the only Wilson's Phalarope on Saturday; the Water, Water Everywhere group found the only Franklin's Gull on Saturday; the Island Fun group found the only Least Bittern on Friday; the Jim Hogg County TCC group found the only Barn Owl on Friday; the On the South Side group found the only Red-naped Sapsucker on Friday; the On the South Side group found the only 'Western' Flycatcher on Friday; the How Low Can You Go group found the only Ash-throated Flycatcher on Friday; the How Low Can You Go group found the only Chihuahuan Raven on Saturday; the On the South Side group found the only Rock Wren on Friday; the Winged Wonders of Weslaco group found the only Winter Wren on Saturday; the Count Your Lucky Starrs group found the only Black-tailed Gnatcatcher on Sunday; the Birds and Butterflies group found the only American Robin on Saturday; the Water, Water Everywhere group found the only Cedar Waxwing on Friday; the Water, Water Everywhere group found the only Northern Parula on Friday, the Water, Water Everywhere group found the only Yellow-breasted Chat on Friday; the Brooks County TCC group found the only Green-tailed Towhee on Friday; the Zapata County TCC group found the only Canyon Towhee on Sunday; the Bahia Grande Bash group found the only Cassin's Sparrow on Friday; the Brooks County TCC group found the only Grasshopper Sparrow on Saturday; the Zapata County TCC group found the only Swamp Sparrow on Sunday; the Brooks County TCC group found the only Summer Tanager on Friday; the Water, Water Everywhere group found the only Rose-breasted Grosbeak on Saturday; the On the South Side group found the only Painted Bunting on Friday.

For what it's worth we, as a birding horde, racked up 203 species on Friday, 196 species on Saturday, and 158 species on Sunday.

Also for what it's worth, surprising misses included some of the region's most sought-out specialties. Not a single group reported countable Muscovy Duck, Red-billed Pigeon, or Hook-billed Kite!

Most of you have seen more than a few lists from me over the years ... so here comes another one. Without further ado, the list from the Winter TOS meeting in McAllen, Texas: Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Mottled Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Surf Scoter, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Plain Chachalaca, Northern Bobwhite, Scaled Quail, Wild Turkey, Least Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Eared Grebe, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared Dove, Inca Dove, Common Ground Dove, White-tipped Dove, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Groove-billed Ani, Common Pauraque, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Clapper Rail, Sora, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, American Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Snowy Plover, Killdeer, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Stilt Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Snipe, Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Phalarope, Bonaparte's Gull, Laughing Gull, Franklin's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Forster's Tern, Royal Tern, Black Skimmer, Common Loon, Neotropic Cormorant, Double-crested Cormorant, Anhinga, American White Pelican, Brown Pelican, Least Bittern, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Reddish Egret, Cattle Egret, Green Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, White Ibis, White-faced Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Harris's Hawk, White-tailed Hawk, Gray Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Barn Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl,

Burrowing Owl, Ringed Kingfisher, Belted Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Crested Caracara, American Kestrel, Merlin, Aplomado Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Monk Parakeet, Red-crowned Parrot, Green Parakeet, 'Western' Flycatcher, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Black Phoebe, Eastern Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Vermilion Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Couch's Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Rose-throated Becard, Loggerhead Shrike, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Green Jay, Chihuahuan Raven, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Cave Swallow, Black-crested Titmouse, Verdin, Rock Wren, House Wren, Winter Wren, Marsh Wren, Carolina Wren, Bewick's Wren, Cactus Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Clay-colored Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Curve-billed Thrasher, Long-billed Thrasher, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, House Sparrow, American Pipit, Sprague's Pipit, House Finch, Lesser Goldfinch, Ovenbird, Black-and-white Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Tropical Parula, Yellow Warbler, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, White-collared Seedeater, Olive Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, Canyon Towhee, Cassin's Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Summer Tanager, Northern Cardinal, Pyrrhuloxia, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird, Great-tailed Grackle, Bronzed Cowbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Hooded Oriole, Altamira Oriole, and Audubon's Oriole.

—Anthony 'Fat Tony' Hewetson



Winter Meeting Pub Quiz Fun

Begun by Steve Gross in 2011 at the Junction meeting, the TOS Pub Quiz is a way for old and new members to connect by competing in a bird trivia contest. Members form teams whose first duty is to come up with a creative name for their team. At the McAllen meeting, we had four teams of ten. The team names were: Band of Birders, Great Kiskadee, Good Grebe, and Jaeger Bombs! Categories included: Name the nine locations of the World Birding Centers in the Rio Grande Valley, List movies with bird names in their titles, List companies with birds in their logos, and List birds with Least or Lesser in their name. Teams had three minutes to write down as many answers as possible and received one point for each correct answer. Whichever team earned the most points was the winner. The winning team was Good Grebe, and the ten members were able to each take home a bird feeder donated by HEB.

---Susan Foster



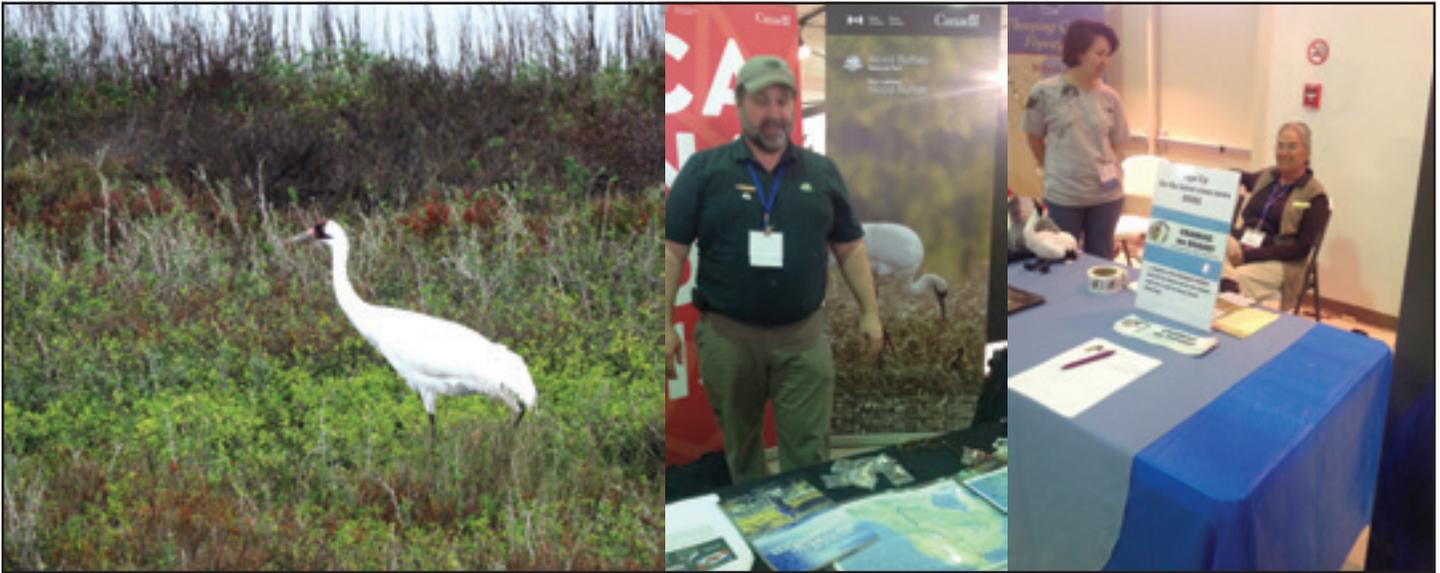
TOS at the 2017 Whooping Crane Festival

Members of TOS participated in the 21st annual Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas. The festival was held February 23rd through 26th. Participants enjoyed unseasonably warm weather at the Coastal Bend.

TOS members Susan Foster, Bron Rorex, and Catherine Winans were present at the TOS booth to tell visitors about birding opportunities in Texas and the role TOS plays in education, conservation, and other aspects of Texas birding. TOS members Mikael Behrens, Mel Cooksey, Scott Holt, Larry Jordan, Judy Kestner, and Tom Langshied assisted in leading field trips for the Festival.

Visitors to the TOS booth were excited to share stories of their sightings of Whooping Cranes and other Texas winter birds. They admired and sometimes purchased caps with the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher TOS logo and TOS T Shirts bearing Dennis Shepler's vivid Yellow-throated Warbler artwork.





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Photography by Juan Beharman

Local birders (and the birds) mourn the loss of a friend Steve (Stevan) Hawkins



Photo Patty Leslie Pasztor

“I thought I would write to inform you about the death of Steve Hawkins as well as say a few words about Steve. I found out on Wednesday that Steve had passed away after I spoke to his neighbor. He died on Oct. 29th.

Those of you that knew Steve would probably agree that he was an interesting character to say the least. I first met Steve in 1989 when I worked the SA CBC for the first time. I did quite a bit of birding with Steve in the 90s and he lead me to more than a few lifers back in those days. He also banded hundreds of Purple martins with me back in the days when I worked at the zoo. That was important to him. The San Antonio Audubon society was important to him as well. I’m pretty sure he was a member going back to the 70s. I don’t think that anyone would dispute that in his own way he helped to shape the organization into what it is today. Volunteering was important to Steve and whether it was with the SA Audubon, docent at Mitchell lake, or more recently out at Government Canyon he dedicated a great deal of his time to those things he thought were important.

Steve was proud of being an A&M graduate and he spoke fondly of those times when he was in school. He was extremely knowledgeable about birds and other aspects of the natural world. But he knew a lot about a lot of things. He was the type of person that would be reading 4 or 5 books at once. He liked novels, biographies, books about natural history and even technical manuals. He loved his camera and tried to document just about everything with pictures. He took thousands of pictures (both film and digital) over the last 30 or 40 years.

I’ll remember Steve as someone who loved birds, loved nature, and was always interested in learning new things. I’ll

miss his stories about his travels and the places he picked up his life birds. I’ll miss my time with him on counts and in the field in general. I feel I’m a better person for knowing him.”

Curt Harwerth

“I also really enjoyed my time with Steve when we first moved to San Antonio in 1997 and the first few years we crossed paths when birding (until 4 kids took up too much time).... and was saddened by the news.

Here’s to you, Steve...and Onward!”

Greg Lisciandro, Spicewood, Texas

I was saddened to read this news yesterday while traveling. Christine, it was Steve and you that were featured in that Express News article about Mitchell Lake, right? That was a great piece. He was always a wonderful volunteer there - I was disappointed when his regular bird surveys ended and I was never sure what prompted that. I loved the way he signed his messages, “Onward!,” forever positive, always looking up and forward. I hope he is still looking up at birds and beyond wherever he is.

I just looked up the news article. He had been collecting data there for 30 years!

http://www.mysanantonio.com/sports/recreational_sports/article/Mitchell-Lake-devotees-mark-30th-year-of-5748300.php

Alex Antram

“Thanks for sharing, Christine (and thank you, Curt for your sweet tribute below). I am so sad to hear about Steve. He regularly set up mist nets and banded birds at the SA Botanical Gardens in the early 1980’s when I was working there. I actually met him at El Salto Falls in Mexico a couple of years prior. I had ridden a bus down with my college roommate to check out the birds, and he had driven there with Steve Fischer. We found out we were both Aggies and from San Antonio! We remained friends ever since. He was an amazing guy and always curious and learning, and willing to share knowledge. I know he was devoted to SA Audubon Society at an earlier time, and in recent years, helping out at Government Canyon. He will be missed by many. I know San Antonio folks and many on Texbirds will be sad and will have some stories. I hope you’ll share.

Here’s to you, Steve... and Onward!”

Patty Leslie Pasztor

Thank you for such kind thoughts about Steve. I only knew him for a short time, but we connected immediately about birds and all things Texas. We had frequent emails about all things birds and beyond. We met in person at Mitchell Lake and kept up our communications afterwards. Deeply saddened .

Christine Turnbull

“Steve was a classmate friend from TAMU. I wrote this and posted it to Texbirds:

Arnold Palmer, Mohamad Ali, Princess Leia and now Steve Hawkins! Tell me it ain't so Joe.

Steve was one of my closer Aggie classmates in the late 60 and early 70s. We spent many a dawn and dusk together lugging mist net poles across marshes in the dark while we caught snipe for Doctor Arnold. Steve was always game for any pursuit of birds. He was mister enthusiasm the night (the whole night) at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge that the snipe crew using a drag rope with milk bottles chased down, caught, and banded 24 yellow rails. He even demanded and arranged the photo to prove it. His listing hobby became something of an obsession as he aged and he chased birds all across the country. I think his US list was well above 700. His favorite place became North Dakota. He tried to figure out how he could move there for at least 10 years. I'm sure his heaven looks a lot like North Dakota.

As mentioned by others, he was an avid reader and we shared a fascination with Teddy Roosevelt. He recommended many books to me which I have still not found time to read. His knowledge of Teddy was unsurpassed. He made an interesting ornithological discovery reading a book about Maximillian's time in Mexico. The book written by Maximillian's wife (if I remember correctly) describes the trip from Veracruz to Mexico City during which she saw large white birds standing amongst and on the backs of cattle in 1864! Cattle Egret in the New World almost a century before they would be documented by ornithologists. That was Steve, finding hidden gems and sharing them with those who chose to listen and learn.

All of us who knew Steve well will miss his out of the blue phone calls and his energetic emails. Heaven is a richer place.

And yes Texbirds and the San Antonio birding community are poorer”.

Fred Collins



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PRESS RELEASE

TPPF Serves Notice of Intent to File Lawsuit to Delist Golden-Cheeked Warbler as an Endangered Species

Scientific Evidence Indicates Ample Populations of Golden-Cheeked Warbler

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 09, 2017

Contact: Brittany Eck
(512) 463-5708
brittany.eck@glo.texas.gov

AUSTIN, TX - Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) General Counsel and Director of the Center for the American Future Robert Henneke sent a letter to the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service serving the 60-day notice of intent to file a lawsuit to delist the golden-cheeked warbler from the Endangered Species List. The notice was served on behalf of the General Land Office of the State of Texas (GLO), which is represented by TPPF's Center for the American Future in this effort to delist the Warbler because of its documented recovery.

"The effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act should be measured in the successful delisting of species, not by the number of species on it," said Land Commissioner George P. Bush. "When a new species is listed, there should be a realistic and holistic plan for achieving the goal of increasing the population so that it can be safely delisted. The Golden Cheeked Warbler is a success story and now that its population is up, we can remove it from the list and focus on the species needing our protection and attention. Working together we are returning common sense to federal government."

"The golden-cheeked warbler is a recovered species and should no longer be regulated by the federal government under the Endangered Species Act," said Henneke. "The Warbler population is 19 times greater than when the species was listed. As the purpose for listing the species - recovery - has been accomplished, respect for private property rights and limited government demand that the language of the ESA be followed in delisting the Warbler from further regulation."

To view the notice of intent, please visit: <http://txpo.lj2IEITaP>

The Honorable Rob Henneke is the General Counsel and Director of the Center for the American Future at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a non-profit free-market research institute based in Austin.

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TPWD Supports USFWS Proposal to Remove Black-capped Vireo from Endangered Species List



AUSTIN, Texas—Citing a decline in threats, increased bird populations and improved habitat, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking public comment on its proposal (https://www.fws.gov/news/ShowNews.cfm?ref=three-decades-of-conservation-effortslead-to-recovery-proposed%20%E2%80%94%20&_ID=35911) to remove the black-capped vireo from the federal endangered species list. Much of the songbird’s U.S. range is in Texas, so the Lone Star State is where much of the work to aid it has occurred.

“The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department applauds this proposal from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the black-capped vireo from the endangered species list,” said Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department executive director. “When a species recovers after serious decline, it’s a conservation success story, and this news is a testament to the exemplary stewardship of Texas’ private landowners, research and work of the department, our non-profit partners and universities to responsibly manage and protect vireo habitat across the state.”

When the black-capped vireo was listed in 1987 there were only 350 birds reported. Primary causes for the species’ decline have included habitat loss and nest parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds who dupe the vireos into raising cowbird chicks at the cost of their own young.

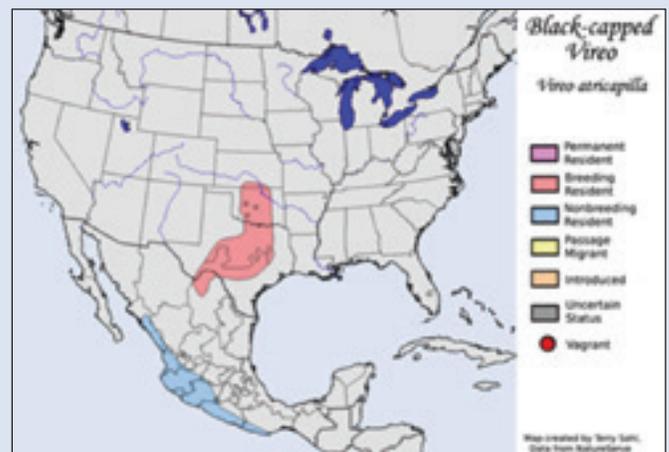
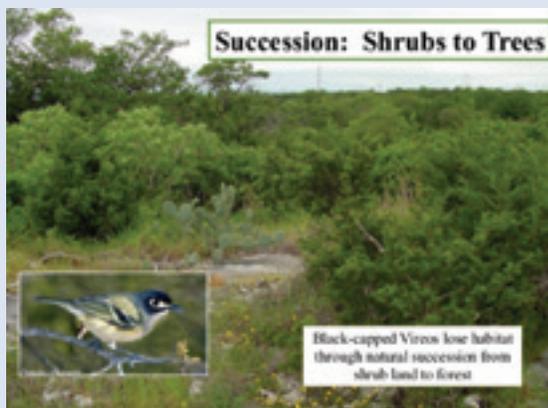
After multi-year scientific reviews that began in 2007, the USFWS now reports there are more than 5,200 known birds and more than 14,000 estimated across their breeding

range. Between 1987 and 2012, the bird’s U.S. breeding range increased by 17 percent. Goats which browse on shrub foliage necessary for vireo nesting have posed a significant habitat threat, yet goat density in the U.S. breeding range of the vireo has declined by 47 percent. Also, the breeding range in Mexico was previously only known from the state of Coahuila, and in 2003 vireos were documented in two additional Mexican states. USFWS says these and other factors contributed to the proposal.

“According to the best available science and 20 years of repeated monitoring, the Service and our partners have reduced or adequately managed the primary threats to the black-capped vireo, populations are healthy and stable, and the vireo has greatly expanded its range and population numbers since the 1980s,” states a USFWS frequently asked questions file.

Partnerships involving the U.S. Army, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, The Nature Conservancy of Texas, Texas A&M, and Environmental Defense Fund, among others, have been key to black-capped vireo recovery. Conservation efforts have included active management such as prescribed fire, grazing management, cowbird control, a 37-county Safe Harbor Agreement in Texas, state and non-governmental organization cowbird control programs, private lands incentives (e.g., USDA Environmental Quality Incentive Program), eight Habitat Conservation Plans, two permanently protected mitigation lands, several conservation easements, and public outreach.

At TPWD’s Kerr Wildlife Management Area, prescribed fire, grazing management, and population control of wild and exotic ungulates have helped create and maintain habitat the vireo requires to nest, including clumps or mottes of mixed brush with limbs and leaves that go all the way to the ground. Here, agency wildlife biologists pioneered a holistic approach that focuses on healthy habitat that sustains all wildlife, including wild turkeys, quality whitetail deer populations, and black-capped vireos. The TPWD Wildlife Division adapted research and demonstration work from Kerr WMA and shared it across the region via TPWD’s technical guidance program for private landowners and ranch managers.



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