

TOS Winter Meeting in Abilene: Take Two!

TOS is excited to announce our Winter Meeting, taking place Thursday January 12 through Sunday January 15, 2023. This is one of our main fundraisers of the year.

We are thrilled to offer a spectacular array of field trips in the Abilene area. Birds we will search for include winter sparrows and waterfowl, and there is an irruption of finches this year. There is also a possibility of a special trip to look for Short-eared Owls. Field trips will offer excellent birding on private ranches and state parks, with the opportunity to jump-start your Century Club lists in the eleven counties surrounding Abilene.

Our meeting speakers will offer their presentations in-person (no Zoom links this time), and they will present a variety of exciting and interesting topics so please make an effort to attend. Prior to each evening's speaker, we will share stories and interesting sightings from that day's birding efforts.

We will have in-person check-in, plus a wrap-up banquet at our host hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, and registration information appears below. **DEADLINE TO REGISTER AT THE HILTON IS DEC. 28, 2022.**

The Abilene area offers interesting birding opportunities. We eagerly look forward to seeing you during the meeting to pad your Big Country lists.

- Christine Turnbull, TOS Past-President

Online registration is required so that we can share instructions, resources, and details with you. **Online registration will open on our website on December 4 at 6:00 a.m. and close on January 7, 2023 at 11:55 p.m.** You will receive a confirmation email once your registration is complete.

Banquet selections (see Meals below) appear on the registration form and must be submitted by Dec. 27, 2022

The fee for the event will be \$100 per TOS member, and \$135 for non-members, which covers their annual membership dues. Students may attend for free. **No cancellations can be made after Jan. 7, 2023.**

Please note: The Abilene area has been in a severe drought which may affect the expected distribution of birds. There could, however, be some nice surprises too!

COVID Safety During the 2023 Winter Meeting

For the health and safety of everyone, TOS asks that participants comply with guidelines set by private businesses and municipal entities.

Hotel and Breakfast

Our host hotel is the Hilton Garden Inn at 4449 Ridgemont Dr., Abilene, TX 79606. Their phone number is 325-690-6432. (Caravans to field trips will leave from the parking lot of the nearby Abilene Mall.)

You must make hotel reservations **BY DEC. 28, 2022**. Click [HERE](#) to reserve a room at the special group rate of \$124 per night. Breakfast is included in that price and will be available at 5:00 a.m. daily.

Lunch and Banquet

No box lunches will be available at this event, but we will provide a list of nearby restaurants and shops where food can be purchased, and there is a 24-hour grocery store/deli next door to the hotel. Dinner is on your own on Thursday and Friday.

On the meeting registration form, you will see two Saturday banquet selections: 1.) herb roasted chicken breast with garden salad, roasted red-skin potatoes, seasonal vegetables, dessert and tea, coffee or water 2.) gluten-free pasta with marinara sauce, garden salad, mixed vegetables, dessert and tea, coffee or water. **THESE MUST BE SUBMITTED BY DEC. 27, 2022.**

Meeting Agenda

Thursday, January 12, 2023

4:00-6:00 PM Event check-in at the Hilton Garden Inn

6:30-7:00 PM Welcome/Introductions/Announcements (Lots of useful information is given during this time, so please attend.)

7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Jay Packer - *Welcome to the Big Country*

Friday, January 13

All Day Birding

4:00-5:00 PM Event check-in at the Hilton Garden Inn

5:00-6:30 PM Tentative Short-eared Owl trip

6:30-7:00 PM Announcements/Birding Reports

7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Professor Joel Brant - *Abilene Area Flora and Fauna*

Saturday, January 14

All Day Birding

5:00-6:00 PM Informal social hour in the hotel bar

6:00-7:00 PM Banquet/Announcements/Birding Reports

7:00-8:00 PM Speaker: Amy Packer - *Why Everyone Should Join the Texas Century Club*

Sunday, January 15

All Day Birding and depart for home

Registration Information

The link to register for the meeting is on our website, www.texasbirds.org, under Events and will open on Dec. 4, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. Please select a first and second choice of field trips, as some trips fill fast. If you would like to be on a waitlist for a trip, contact Judy Kestner at 361-701-1962. Be sure to mention the trip number, and how many spaces you'll need.

Please also be sure your email address and membership dues payments are up-to-date. (To confirm, just visit www.texasbirds.org and click Member Information to log in to your account.) Once you make your event fee payment, you will receive a confirmation email showing the trips and banquet meal, if any, that you have selected.

For any questions, or if you do not have access to the internet, you may call Judy Kestner at 361-701-1962 or Frances Cerbins at 512-372-9039 for assistance with registration. If you don't get an answer, leave a message and Judy or Frances will call you back when they are available.

Event Prices

Winter Meeting Package

\$100 for TOS members

\$135 for Non-TOS members (includes a one-year membership)

FREE for all students

Registration cost will increase by \$10 on Dec. 31, 2022.

Meeting Presentations

Thursday Evening

7:00 PM

Title: *Welcome to the Big Country*

Presenter: Jay Packer

Description: In this introductory presentation, long-time Texas birder and Abilene native Jay Packer explains why the Big Country is a great place to go birding. You'll learn about the region's habitats, both in Taylor County where Abilene is located, and the surrounding counties. Jay will explain what makes the region special from a birding perspective, as well as cover some of the region's avian highlights over the years. Join us for Jay's talk and get excited about the birding at our winter meeting!



Bio: Born and raised in Abilene, TX, Jay Packer started birding at the age of 12 after an extended family road trip to the great national parks of the Western U.S. He quickly began traveling across Texas, then the U.S. and, at 20 years old, took his first trip to the tropics in Costa Rica. Epic road trips to Mexico ensued, where he and friends subsisted on peanut butter and tortillas for days as they looked for Mexico's rarest birds, pulling the car into the woods to camp and getting a hotel once a week for the shower. More recently, Jay and his wife Amy have traveled for birds to

Europe, then Ecuador, Australia, Brazil, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. Closer to home, Jay is passionate about the Texas Century Club (seeing over 100 species in each county of Texas) and finding new county records. Jay loves sharing and talking about his passion for birding and photography.

Friday Evening

7:00 PM

Title: *Local Flora and Fauna*

Presenter: Joel Brant, Professor of Biology, McMurry University

Description: Lace Hedgehog Cactus, Hispid Cotton Rat, Blanchard's Cricket Frog - are they mammal, amphibian, vegetation, insect? Professor Brant will sort it all out for us so we can understand how each helps to sustain the other.



Bio: Joel Brant began his professional journey as a naturalist while studying at Abilene Christian University. After graduating in 1998, Joel pursued a Masters' degree at Angelo State University followed by a PhD from Texas Tech University. While interested in all aspects of the natural world, Dr. Brant specializes in small mammal ecology. He has published 15 journal articles and directed several undergraduate research projects. His research interests are primarily concerned with the natural history of mammals, particularly in the Southern Rolling Plains and Chihuahuan Desert of Texas.

Working with his undergraduate students, Dr. Brant is currently conducting an inventory of the vertebrates of Firebase Libby, a 160-acre research property owned by McMurry University in central Callahan County, Texas. Most weekends you can find him and his students on the property catching mice, chasing lizards, attempting to catch frogs, or photographing birds. Joel is a member of the Big Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists and an officer for the Texas Society of Mammalogists. While not a very good birder, Joel is learning and getting better. You can follow him on iNaturalist (joelbrant).

Saturday Evening

7:00 PM

Title: *Why Everyone Should Join the Texas Century Club*

Presenter: Amy Packer

Description: The Texas Century Club is an attempt to find 100 species in 100 or more counties in Texas. What started as a game to increase the regional coverage of birding in Texas has blossomed over the last decade into a way of birding and a community of friends that share a special bond.

In her presentation, Amy will share why you should pursue the Texas Century Club, how it will impact your birding for the better, and the unexpected ways in which it will enrich your life. She'll also share a few stories along the way that range from the sublime to the absurd.

Whether you're a current CC'er looking for tips or a skeptical holdout wondering what all the fuss is about, be sure to join Amy's talk to learn why county birding is all the rage in Texas.



Bio: Amy Packer has been birding for 17 years and has been fortunate to travel the world (and some of the U.S.) in search of all things feathered and beautiful. Closer to home, Amy is passionate about the Texas Century Club – finding 100 species in every county of Texas, which she and her husband have greatly enjoyed over the last 10 years.

In the summer of 2020, during the pandemic doldrums, she logged her 100th county with more than 100 birds. This fall, she visited Dimmit County, the last of the 254 counties in Texas to visit. Amy has been an elementary educator for 16 years, both as a classroom teacher and an administrator. She holds a Bachelor's of Science in Education from Abilene Christian University and a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction from Angelo State University.