

## President's Message



Romey Swanson TOS President.

Dear Friends, Birders, and TOS Members,

Summer brings opportunities for reflections, crazy-from-the-heat birding, and excitement around upcoming events. As your newly elected President, I am thrilled to share some updates and upcoming opportunities with you.

### Recent Achievements and Updates

I want to thank our outgoing board members, Susan Foster and Randy Pinkston, for their invaluable contributions. Their dedication has helped shape TOS into the thriving organization it is today. Additionally, I want to extend a special thanks to Byron Stone, our outgoing President. Byron's leadership, sacrifices, and unwavering commitment have set us up for continued success, and we are profoundly grateful for his contributions.

We are also delighted to welcome our new board members and officers: Samantha Wolfe (Region 7 Director - Brushlands), Ron Huebner (Region 2 Director - North Central), Crystal Ledezma (Region 6 Director - Central Prairie), and Kelly Smith (Region 1 Director - Panhandle). Additionally, we welcome Region 4 Director (Trans-Pecos) Pamela Pipes as Vice President, Lynn Thompson (At-Large Director) as Secretary, and Lorrie Mathers (At-Large Director) continuing as Treasurer. Your passion and commitment will undoubtedly enrich TOS.

Our Spring meeting in Weslaco was a tremendous success. Over 70 TOS members came together to enjoy the rich bird diversity of the Rio Grande Valley. Special sightings included Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, a variety of Rio Grande Valley specialties, and Texas vagrants like Mangrove Cuckoo. A personal highlight was seeing my lifer Muscovy Duck along the Rio Grande at Santa Margarita Ranch and observing a Mottled Owl during a private nighttime tour at Santa Margarita Ranch. The camaraderie and shared experiences were truly memorable, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to our hosts at the Valley Nature Center, volunteers, and trip leaders.

### Looking Ahead: Exciting Opportunities

I am excited to announce that we have reinvigorated our research and conservation grant fund. This initiative aims to support innovative research and conservation projects throughout Texas. Please encourage folks within your network to apply. The process is simple: a funding request outlining \$500 - \$2,000 to support a Texas bird conservation and/or research questions. Proposals can be sent to the TOS Executive Committee c/o Judy Kestner at [jkestner@stx.rr.com](mailto:jkestner@stx.rr.com).

Mark your calendars for our Winter meeting, which will take place in Port Arthur from January 16-19. This meeting will focus on birding in Southeast Texas, and the planning committee is working towards an exciting lineup of field trips and presentations. More details will be provided in the fall newsletter.

The Board of Directors is pleased to share that we will conduct a retreat in August to finalize and formally adopt a new TOS strategic plan. This plan will outline our priority goals and programming to ensure TOS remains a vibrant and impactful organization. We will also begin outlining business and operations initiatives to meet the objectives of our strategic plan.

### Call to Action: Get Involved

Our organization thrives on the enthusiasm and participation of our members. Here are a few ways you can get involved:

- **Recruit a Friend:** Encourage your friends and fellow birders to join TOS. Membership growth and retention is crucial for expanding our impact and visibility.
- **Share Your Ideas:** We want to hear your ideas on how TOS can further bird conservation efforts throughout Texas. Your input is invaluable as we strive to participate in all communities that care about birds and the habitats we all need to thrive. Please feel free to email me directly with your ideas ([romey.TOS@gmail.com](mailto:romey.TOS@gmail.com))
- **Stay Informed:** Check our website ([www.TexasBirds.org](http://www.TexasBirds.org)) for learning and service opportunities. It's a great resource for staying up-to-date on upcoming events and initiatives.

Thank you for your dedication and support. Together, we can significantly impact bird conservation in Texas. Let's make this a productive and enjoyable year for TOS.

Good birding to you all!

Sincerely,

—Romey Swanson

President, Texas Ornithological Society  
[romey.TOS@gmail.com](mailto:romey.TOS@gmail.com)

## TOSNEWS Staff

Jack Eitniear	Editor	Judy Kestner	Proofreader
		Susan Foster	Proofreader

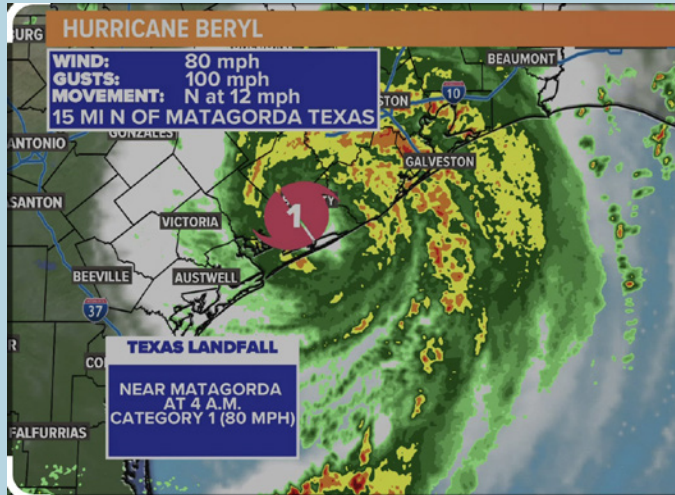
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## No significant damage at Sabine Woods in Tropical Storm Beryl



No significant damage at Sabine Woods in Tropical Storm Beryl. Storm surge apparently came up about half way to the shelter (i.e. 20-30 feet into the sanctuary, which slopes down to the highway relatively steeply). When that water reached Sabine Woods, it had passed over 1/2 mile of Texas Point NWR marsh with lots of water in it and that presumably diluted the salt water. Surge water apparently did not reach the ponds. There has been a lot of rain since then and more coming, so any salt should have been mostly washed back towards the Gulf by now. There are two or three relatively small trees (1 ft diameter or less) over trails, and, as usual in these events, many small branches that need to be thrown to the side. No large trees down, and relatively little damage to or limb loss from trees still standing. One Prickly Ash/Hercules Club/Toothache tree very near the gate has lost all its leaves and may not make it -- it was used extensively by migrants. Live oak trees are fairly tolerant of brief salt water events, but they are not very tolerant of drought, and three or four large trees seem to be dead (from

last summer's drought). One or two will have to be taken down within the next two or three years as they become potential fall hazards to visitors. One of the large live oak trees killed by Hurricane Ike (September 2008) that was well away from all trails was not blown down until earlier this year (pre Hurricane Beryl), so they remain standing for a long time. Because of the low elevation of Highway 87 between Port Arthur and Sabine Pass, Sabine Woods becomes inaccessible in storms but localized thunderstorms in late spring are a concern and visitors are warned to stay out of the Woods during thunderstorms.

There was some trash (mostly empty plastic bottles that were capped) along the northern edge where the surge reached and that has been mostly removed already. There is significant trash in the ditch along our Highway 87 fence (or what is left of it from years of minimal maintenance). Trash from the Gulf is always washed up along the shore on high tide and wind events -- most of it being trash thrown into the Gulf from vessels. Based on the labels on the trash, the offenders are most likely the crews of commercial vessels entering or leaving the Port of Houston, and most likely non-US flagged vessels. The ditch is holding water still, but that fence was scheduled to be replaced as soon as conditions make it practical anyway. Necessary funds (grant money) have been identified.

As our volunteer corps has aged quite significantly in recent years, I am not going to try to hold an organized work day until it gets cooler -- mid to late September -- out of concern for the well being of the volunteers. Some of the larger and more unsightly pieces of trash will likely be thrown into our pick-up trucks before then, a few pieces on each visit.

*—John A. Whittle, Manager  
Sabine Woods*

## TEXAS PELAGICS UPDATE:

Hi Seabirders and Texas Pelagic Fans,

The only Texas Pelagic trip this year now has just about enough birders to sail so the trip will be going, weather permitting of course. But there still some openings so don't wait too long to sign up or you may miss out on this exciting adventure.

Schedule for 2024 Texas Pelagics:

1. Sat. Sept 14th, 2024: 14-hour; 5 am - 7pm; aboard the Kingfisher from Port Aransas; \$200. (Cash price)

Click the link below to learn more details about Texas Pelagic trips, i.e. past trip reports, seabirds, marine mammals, preparations, and etc.

Register Now at [www.texaspelagics.com](http://www.texaspelagics.com)

Good seabirding,

Garett 'Gary' Hodne

## TOS Summer 2024 Director's Report

After the thrills and chills of the TOS June Alaska trip, summer birding has been slow in Central Texas. (See my article with photos provided by trip members in the upcoming TOS Annual.)

Since May, eBird reports noted 17 species of warblers passing through Comal County. Shorebird numbers and species from Canyon Lake are low compared to last summer. A Brown Booby has had good luck fishing from a buoy since June 29. It can be seen from the Canyon Lake dam, and Rock Wren is fairly consistent when you look for the Brown Booby.

In Bexar County, Bridled, Sooty, and Common Tern were hanging around Calaveras Lake. A California Gull,

listed as early as June 17, continued at Calaveras for a few weeks. The polders at Mitchell Lake continue to dry up and shorebird numbers and species are also exceptionally low. Recent rains have helped raise the Edwards Aquifer level and improved conditions in drought stricken counties in Central Texas.

Summer is a wonderful time to update eBird lists. Database management! Some hotspots have been added or renamed so I merged lists, added photos, and prepared for fall migration!

—Lynn Thompson,  
Director

### Regional Reports

#### Region 1—Panhandle

Hello!!

As the newly appointed Director for Region 1, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Kelly Smith and many of you have probably seen me at one of the bird festivals in Texas, either representing a local bird organization or the American Birding Association. I currently work for the ABA and also serve on the board of the Friends of the Wildlife Corridor. Between the two board positions in the Panhandle and the Rio Grande Valley, I have a pretty good excuse to go birding anywhere in the state!

I look forward to having more news about the region to share in the next report. If you have an interesting sighting, information about a new birding location or a question about an old one, or maybe a cool photo you want to share, please feel free to send it to me!

australe88@gmail.com

—Kelly Smith

#### Region 2—North Central Texas

I would like to take a moment to say how honored I am to be the new Director for Region 2. We have a great region with some awesome habitat to bird. Since I am new to the post, I had a lot of questions about who we are in Region 2, ie. The North Central region of TOS. So this report will be a bit of an anomaly, in that it will examine Region 2 birders instead of Region 2 birds. Well, there is some bird content but it's in the form of statistical records.

It IS a bit of a statistical mess, but one that I think is rather revealing. So here goes:

Our region consists of 35 counties and 100 TOS members. So where do we all live?

Dallas County - 35 members  
Tarrant County - 20 members  
Collin County - 16 members  
Denton County - 8 members  
Grayson County - 5 members  
Ellis County - 4 members

Johnson County - 4 members  
Wichita County - 3 members  
Hunt County - 2 members  
Cooke County - 1 member  
Erath County - 1 member  
Kaufman County - 1 member  
Knox County - 1 member  
Palo Pinto County - 1 member  
Parker County - 1 member  
Rockwall County - 1 member  
Young County - 1 member

That leaves 18 counties in our region with NO members...BUT....

Does that mean there are no birders in those counties? Au contraire mon ami...according to E-Bird.

For the current year of 2024, here is E-bird's count of individual lists submitted and individual birders who submitted those lists in the counties in our beloved region.

Tarrant County, 8344 lists by 1403 individual birders  
Dallas County, 5919 lists by 1249 individual birders  
Collin County, 4677 lists by 675 individual birders  
Denton County, 4151 lists by 685 individual birders  
Grayson County, 2075 lists by 372 individual birders  
Ellis County, 1151 lists by 199 individual birders  
Johnson County, 1151 lists by 197 individual birders  
Kaufman County, 853 lists by 157 individual birders  
Somervell County, 847 lists by 109 individual birders  
Wichita County, 724 lists by 119 individual birders  
Wise County, 629 lists by 98 individual birders  
Parker County, 440 lists by 170 individual birders  
Clay County, 438 lists by 79 individual birders  
Hood County, 415 lists by 99 individual birders  
Archer County, 366 lists by 32 individual birders  
Palo Pinto County, 342 lists by 102 individual birders  
Rockwall County, 301 lists by 87 individual birders  
Hunt County, 228 lists by 141 individual birders  
Young County, 234 lists by 28 individual birders  
Erath County, 224 lists by 107 individual birders

## Regional Reports (continued)

Cooke County, 188 lists by 111 individual birders  
Eastland County, 162 lists by 89 individual birders  
Haskell County, 125 lists by 20 individual birders  
Hardeman County, 110 lists by 84 individual birders  
Knox County, 107 lists by 28 individual birders  
Fannin County, 104 lists by 76 individual birders  
Throckmorton County, 95 lists by 21 individual birders  
Montague County, 76 lists by 61 individual birders  
Foard County, 75 lists by 21 individual birders  
Shackelford County, 75 lists by 30 individual birders  
Jack County, 68 lists by 39 individual birders  
Wilbarger County, 69 lists by 49 individual birders  
Stephens County, 65 lists by 28 individual birders  
Callahan County, 61 lists by 60 individual birders  
Baylor County, 55 lists by 36 individual birders

So, as you can see...ALL of our counties are being birded. Even those WITHOUT TOS members.

I challenge you to engage with all of these birders and encourage them to join TOS. I would love to report next year that we have members in all the counties in our region. I don't think that is an unobtainable goal.

While we're at it...if you have anything you want taken up with TOS, let me know. Or maybe you have some ideas for us all to get together and socialize. My email is feralbirder@gmail.com. My job is to represent you to the organization and vice versa. But building community is also on the agenda, and I can't do that without input from you. Bird on, Garth!

—Ron Huebner

### Region 3—East Texas Timberlands (Pineywoods)

—Laura Wilson

### Region 4—Trans-Pecos

—Pamela Pipes

### Region 5—Edwards Plateau Report

Fort Clark Springs is situated on the south side of Brackettville, with a gated entrance off of US Hwy 90. The eBird hotspot is listed as "restricted access" but this simply means that visitors must sign in at the gate. Tell the gate attendant that you are going birding, and they will provide a map of the property and a bird list.

Fort Clark Springs contains the named spring along with approximately 7 miles of trails along Las Moras Creek. The creek is lined with dense riparian woodland of predominately Live Oak and Pecan, with scattered Mulberry trees, palms, and a dense understory of Texas Persimmon. Primary birding areas are trails along the creek accessed from McClelland or Scales Road in the northeastern quadrant of the property, and trails in Red Bridge Park accessed from near the Golf Clubhouse in the Southeastern portion of the property. These areas are historically very good for migrating songbirds, especially in the spring, with notable sightings over the years including Cape May, Blackburnian,

Bay-breasted, Prothonotary, Chestnut-sided, and Golden-winged Warblers; Scarlet and Western Tanagers; Baltimore, Bullock's, Hooded, Orchard, and Audubon's Orioles; as well as Black-headed and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. In the past few years, as many as 3 different individual Tropical Parulas have been recorded singing on territories along the creek beginning in April and persisting into July. Clay-colored Thrush has been documented here in the Spring as well. Most years, there is a nesting pair of Zone-tailed Hawks present on the property. Scrub habitats away from the creek is inhabited by typical dry-land species such as Pyrrhuloxia, Bell's Vireo, Curve-billed and Long-billed Thrashers, and Painted Buntings.

For waterfowl and shorebirds, the Fort Clark Springs WTP pond can be excellent. Access this area from Red Bridge Park, circle around the east side of the WTP to a bird blind situated on the south side of the ponds (note, do not enter the WTP ponds themselves – stay outside the fence. Some ponds may only be visible from the top of a vehicle). In winter, this is an excellent spot for ducks, including Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks, Northern Shoveler, Ruddy Ducks, Lesser Scaup, and others. All three species of Phalarope have been recorded here, and in some years (particularly dry ones) shorebirds can be plentiful and diverse – with 23 species of shorebirds recorded here, mostly during early fall migration, including Buff-breasted, Baird's, Pectoral, Least, Semipalmated, Upland, Western, Stilt, White-rumped, Spotted, and Solitary Sandpipers; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; Long-billed Curlews, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's, Red, and Red-necked Phalarope, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Killdeer and Semipalmated Plover.

—Christine Turnbull

### Region 6—Central Prairie

A warm welcome to all new members, and new Region 6 members Michelle Allen and Ali Herington and family. Wood Storks are on the move, be on the lookout for them and other early migrants!

—Crystal Ledezma

### Region 7—Rio Grande Brushlands

—Samantha Wolfe

### Region 8—Central Prairie

For those new to TOS, welcome to Region 8, where the birds put on quite a show! With too many notable species to list since March, we'll start with the celebrities. These are the birds that drew the masses. Texas' first record for **Yellow-headed Caracara** (Harris Co.) was seen on 2 separate days this June. Crowds of birders sat vigil at El Jardin Beach, hoping for a flyby, but most came up empty. Up to 4 **American Flamingos** (Galveston Co.) were seen for 2 weeks in June, providing ample opportunities for birders to marvel at their fluorescent plumage. A **Purple Sandpiper** (Galveston Co.)

## Regional Reports (continued)



*Yellow-headed Caracara. Photo by Andrew Hamlett*

was detected for nearly two months at Texas City Dike. Finally, a **Piratic Flycatcher** (Harris Co.) generated over 160 ebird reports in just two days!

With hurricane season in full swing, birders know the best thing to do once it is safe to leave the house! On the day Hurricane Beryl hit, birders reported **Parasitic Jaegers** at inland locations in Harris Co. and Fort Bend Co, a **Sabine's Gull** in south Houston (Harris Co.), **Sooty Tern** from the seawall in Galveston Co, and **Great Shearwater** near Bayview (Galveston Co.). Just north of us in Montgomery Co, **Cory's Shearwater** and **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** were found on Lake Conroe.

A variety of notable species were found during spring migration. In addition to the previously-mentioned Piratic Flycatcher, a **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher** (Chambers Co.) was seen on April 19, and **Gray Kingbird** was reported in Chambers Co. on April 29 and Brazoria Co. on May 18. (Incidentally, a Gray Kingbird was reported in Louisiana on



*Purple Sandpiper. Photo by Frank Farese*



*Masked Booby. Photo by Kyle O'Haver*

April 27 and 28, potentially indicating the same individual was moving down the coast). It was a good spring for **Yellow-green** and **Black-whiskered Vireos**, with multiple sightings throughout Galveston Co. At one point, both species could be seen on the same day at Crenshaw School of Environmental Studies. Also notable was a rare May sighting for Black-throated Gray Warbler. While they are occasionally found in the fall and winter, this bird represents only the third May record for the species in our region.

Special attention must be given to Galveston Co which had, by far, the most rare bird sightings of the season. **Long-tailed Duck** was reported at multiple locations throughout April. A **Masked Booby** was rescued from Galveston Island State Park on May 8. A **Red-naped Sapsucker** was found at Smith Oaks in late March. Lastly, the county had its first records for **Ringed Kingfisher** (April 15 and 18) and **Brewer's Sparrow** (March 29).

For those braving the heat and summer storms to satisfy their unquenchable thirst for the greatest hobby in the world, good luck, stay safe, and happy birding!

– Kendra Kocab

# Texas Ornithological Society

## Board Meeting Minutes

May 2, 2024

Present at today's meeting were Ron Huebner, Christine Turnbull, Byron Stone, Susan Foster, Samantha Wolfe, Randy Pinkston, Romey Swanson, Crystal Ledezma, Lynn Thompson, Pamela Pipes, Lorrie Mathers, and Laura Wilson. Joining the meeting by Zoom were Kelly Smith and Kendra Kocab. Not in attendance was Clay Taylor.

President Byron Stone convened the meeting at 4:15 p.m. Byron Stone recognized and introduced new board members, Ron Huebner, Crystal Ledezma, Kelly Smith, and Samantha Wolfe. Byron then explained who on the board is rotating off and explained the procedure for the meeting.

1. Approval of January 2024 board of directors meeting minutes:

Laura Wilson moved to approve the minutes as corrected and noted. Seconded by Romey Swanson. All in favor. None opposed. Motion passed.

2. Nomination Committee and elections results:

Byron Stone explained the history of our bylaws changes and voting process and elections. Our consultant set it up that we have competitive elections. Board positions are elected for three year terms, and one-quarter of the board turns over each year. Byron Stone explained the nominating committee makeup and procedures. Byron Stone explained the voting process. Romey Swanson said that membership needs to vote and what is the best way to accomplish that. Laura Wilson suggested that we may be able to use Neon for voting elections. We discussed getting away from paper ballots. At least ten percent of our membership needs to vote according to bylaws. We will possibly have higher participation if we hold the election electronically.

3. Organizational Consultant:

Strategic planning for 2024-26. Met with consultant Steve McKee. Byron Stone explained our formation of a due diligence committee to decide if we should hire someone to help run the organization as we are all volunteers. Decided we needed to hire a consultant. Hired nonprofit consultant Steve McKee to help us with strategic planning. Went over vision and mission statements. Discussed our most important issues we came up with during this weekend: membership, governance, and conservation and stewardship of sanctuaries. These are the top three issues.

Byron Stone believes TOS would benefit from forming a search committee to find an executive director. Byron Stone's concern is that if we continue

as an all volunteer organization, TOS will not be able to grow.

4. Sanctuaries:

Sabine Woods - John Berner has been working with John Whittle of Golden Triangle. The fundraising committee had a very successful fundraising effort. Lorrie Mathers said GTAS received a \$5,000 SEMBRA grant to do the Sabine Woods fences and a new shelter roof plus another \$4,000 from the Hotel and Tourism board for Porta potties and other expenses. TOS had budgeted \$10,000 to pay for these expenses so we will have room to cover other expenses.>>

There have been some issues with the QR code due to cell service. Getting free gravel from one of the energy companies so parking expenses have not been handled yet. There is more work to do.

5. Discussed Membership Level

6. Discussed Future meetings

7. Grant requests:

Romey Swanson talked about grant student requests. The Executive committee is authorized by our bylaws to make decisions like this. Romey moved to approve a \$1,000 grant to the Tyler Audubon for a bird blind. Motion was seconded by Christine Turnbull. All in favor. None opposed. Motion passed. Laura Wilson abstained from voting.

8. Report on upcoming trips.

9. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory has requested \$1,824 to replace a camera for bird banding. It was decided we would counter with \$1,500. Romey Swanson moved to approve \$1,500 for the GCBO project. Seconded by Randy Pinkston. Motion carried.

10. Other business:

Kendra Kocab suggested we potentially install a bench in recognition of Maddie Averett. Byron Stone and Romey Swanson suggested we check with the donor to see if she would like that. Kendra Kocab will check with Maddie Averett.

Byron Stone: Municipal Utility District (MUD) property. The MUD board is considering putting in more soccer fields, etc. and this area is a migrant trap. Byron Stone suggested that maybe we can partner with Travis Audubon to address this issue.

With no further business to be addressed, Laura Wilson moved to adjourn. Seconded by Lynn Thompson. Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.

## A “renaissance” for House Wrens; species and genus splits for Barn Owls and Plovers; and lumping of Redpolls included in 2024 Check-list changes

65th Supplement to the Check-list of North American Birds publishes today in *Ornithology*  
18 July 2024  
AOS



House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), formerly considered one species, is now separated into seven species.

CHICAGO — July 18, 2024 — The **65th Supplement** to the American Ornithological Society’s (AOS’s) *Check-list of North American Birds*, published today in *Ornithology*, includes several updates to the classifications of bird species found in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean.

A few highlights from this year’s supplement, detailed below, include species splits for *Troglodytes aedon* (House Wren) and *Tyto alba* (Barn Owl); a lumping of *Acanthis flammea* (Common Redpoll), *Acanthis hornemanni* (Hoary Redpoll), and *Acanthis cabaret* (Lesser Redpoll); a genus merger for bitterns; and a genus split for plovers.

The *Check-list*, published since 1886, is updated in annual supplements from the AOS’s North American Classification Committee (NACC). The *Check-list* and its supplements provide the taxonomic and nomenclatural foundation for bird research, conservation, management, and education throughout the region, and are relied on as the authority on avian biodiversity by government agencies, NGOs, scientists, and birders, among others.

The taxonomic work of the NACC is distinct from the work of the **AOS English Common Names Pilot Project**, in

which new common names will be determined for an initial set of six species of North American birds, part of an effort to change English names under the AOS’s purview that are harmful or exclusionary. A new ad hoc committee is being assembled to oversee this pilot project and to develop and test new procedures for guiding future changes to English bird names. This effort will include developing partnerships with multiple entities involved in selecting common names of birds throughout their geographic ranges, and designing a new process that engages the public in soliciting suggestions for suitable replacement English names. The NACC will continue to review proposals annually for taxonomic and distributional updates to the *Check-list of North American Birds*, and will be one of several groups working closely with the ad hoc English Common Names Pilot Project Committee on that new committee’s efforts.

The full 2024 *Check-list* supplement is available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ornithology/ukae019>.

### Species Splits and Lumps

#### A “renaissance” in this year’s Check-list supplement

A successful proposal to “recognize multiple species within the House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* complex” (**Proposal 2024-C-3a-1**), submitted by Pamela C. Rasmussen, R. Terry Chesser, J. Van Remsen, Jr., and Brian Sullivan, is a boon for birders in the Caribbean. In a major shakeup of *Troglodytes aedon* (House Wren), what was formerly considered one species is now separated into seven species. A similar proposal considered in 2022 (**Proposal 2022-B-10**) failed to pass, but new data, including a near-comprehensive phylogeny based on mitochondrial DNA and genomic data, provided an opportunity to reevaluate the complex.

This new proposal’s authors again considered the status of the Caribbean forms *beani*, *guadeloupensis*, *rufescens*, *martinicensis*, *mesoleucus*, *musicus*, *grenadensis*, and *albicans*, but expanded their analysis to the continental forms *parkmanii* of western North America, *brunneicollis* of the Mexican highlands and southeastern Arizona, and the *musculus* group of eastern Mexico through South America, suggesting that “a broader geographic perspective is required, given the new data on phylogenetic relationships among continental forms.”

For this proposal, the NACC considered a variety of data, including genetics, song, morphology (plumage and measurements), ecology, behavior, and habitat. “The habitat, to me, was particularly persuasive for splitting island from mainland birds,” says R. Terry Chesser, of the U.S. Geological Survey and chair of the NACC. He explains, “Tropical mainland populations of House Wrens typically occur in villages and towns and thrive there, whereas the island populations, for the most part, occur in forests or other natural habitats. Chesser continues, “Many of the island

birds are not doing well, because those habitats have been destroyed or disturbed extensively. If they *were* the same species, they would be thriving in the towns, urban areas, and villages like their mainland counterparts, but they're not." In addition, songs differ among the island populations, most remarkably so for *T. musicus*, the St. Vincent Wren, and played an important role in the decision to recognize additional species.

Why not treat all the island populations as a single species rather than splitting so many? "As it turns out, most island populations are not each other's closest relatives, so they should not be considered the same species," Chesser notes, adding, "There were clearly several independent colonizations of these islands."

### ***Elevation of Tyto furcata (American Barn Owl) to species status separate from Tyto alba***

A proposal to break up the cosmopolitan *Tyto alba* (Barn Owl) complex (**Proposal 2024-C-1**), co-authored by Louis Bevier, Carla Cicero, Jon L. Dunn, Rosa Alicia Jiménez, and Oscar Johnson, used a combination of vocal and genetic data to propose separating the Barn Owl of the Americas, *T. furcata* (American Barn Owl), from those of the Old World. They specifically highlight "a distinctive and prominent flight call associated with mate attraction that is uttered by New World Barn Owls [*furcata*]." Significantly, this call, the "kleak-kleak" display call, does not occur in the Old World groups of Barn Owl (*T. alba*, Western Barn Owl; *T. javanica*, Eastern Barn Owl) and thus represents a diagnostic difference associated with breeding. The recognition of three species of barn owl is also concordant with the genetic data included in a 2018 proposal (that did not pass) on the same topic (**Proposal 2018-C-13**), which showed that these owls consist of three genetically separate lineages. "The acceptance of the new proposal," Chesser says, "was due to its emphasis on vocalizations. The vocal differences, in combination with the genetics, indicate that the American Barn Owl is truly reproductively isolated from the other barn owls, and not just geographically isolated from them."

### ***Lumping of Acanthis hornemanni (Hoary Redpoll) and A. cabaret (Lesser Redpoll) with A. flammea (Common Redpoll)***

These Holarctic passerines, named for their distinctive red forehead patch, were previously considered for lumping in a 2017 proposal (**Proposal 2017-B-7**). That proposal did not pass, due in part to a lack of genetic sampling from populations in Greenland and Iceland, as well as reports of assortative mating among the species. Now, Nicholas A. Mason, Erik Funk, and Scott A. Taylor have authored a new proposal (**Proposal 2024-B-3**) based on a study with whole-genome sequencing of *A. cabaret*, *A. flammea*, and *A. hornemanni* from across their ranges, including Greenland and Iceland. The sequencing shows that they are nearly identical genetically, except for an inversion in one of the chromosomes, despite variation in morphology, including bill size and shape, and plumage coloration. The authors write that "Funk et al. (2021) provide strong support that

a chromosomal inversion—also known as a 'supergene'—maintains phenotypic variation despite widespread gene flow between all currently named species." Chesser explains, "A chromosomal inversion occurs when a part of the chromosome is detached and turned around, and then reinserted. This section of the chromosome is now backwards from what it used to be, and in these birds that inversion is responsible for the phenotypic differences we see in plumage and bill size and shape." Significantly, presence or absence of the inversion does not affect interbreeding of the birds, and there is no evidence for long-term reproductive isolation. Moreover, an addendum to the proposal, authored by Chesser and Mason, summarized numerous studies purported to support assortative mating among redpolls, but which as a group provided rather weak evidence, especially when considered in light of the genomic data.

## **Genus Splits and Reallocations**

### ***A genus merger for the bitterns***

Bitterns have been placed traditionally into two genera, *Ixobrychus* for the smaller bitterns and *Botaurus* for the larger species. However, new phylogenetic data reveal that some *Ixobrychus* species are more closely related to species of *Botaurus* than they are to other species of *Ixobrychus*. One of these species is North America's *Ixobrychus exilis* (Least Bittern), which looks very similar to two other species that are vagrants to North America—*Ixobrychus minutus* (Little Bittern) and *Ixobrychus sinensis* (Yellow Bittern)—but is more closely related to the quite different *Botaurus lentiginosus* (American Bittern). **Proposal 2024-A-2a-d**, submitted to the committee by Chesser, proposed changes to the *Checklist* to better reflect evolutionary relationships among the bitterns. The NACC, taking note of the variation within *Ixobrychus*, decided to merge the two genera rather than transferring some but not all species of *Ixobrychus* to *Botaurus*. "In the end, we found it difficult to justify placing birds that were almost identical into two separate genera," Chesser says, referring to *I. exilis*, *I. sinensis*, and *I. minutus*. "The two species of bittern in the U.S. differ dramatically, but if you take a global view, you find there's quite a bit of variation in *Ixobrychus*," Chesser explains. "The largest species of *Ixobrychus* approaches *Botaurus* in size, and some other species either have plumage that is intermediate between typical *Ixobrychus* and *Botaurus* or have female plumage very similar to that of *Botaurus*." Therefore, all bitterns are now placed in the genus *Botaurus*.

### ***A genus split for the plovers***

Until now, plovers (Family Charadriidae) in the Americas had been placed into three genera: *Vanellus* for the lapwings, *Pluvialis* for the golden-plovers, and *Charadrius* for all other plovers. "Because the lapwings are so distinctive phenotypically, they had traditionally been treated as the separate subfamily Vanellinae," Chesser explains. As it turns out, new genetic data highlighted in **Proposal 2024-A-3a-h**, submitted by Oscar Johnson, indicates that *Pluvialis* plovers are actually the most distinctive evolutionarily, having split off first from the others. Furthermore, the "species that



we've traditionally placed in *Charadrius* don't form a single evolutionary group by themselves," says Chesser, "because the lapwings are part of that group and arose from within it." As a result, the committee split *Charadrius* into two genera—*Charadrius* and *Anarhynchus*—to reflect their evolutionary relationships. *Charadrius* still includes such species as *C. vociferus* (Killdeer), *C. semipalmatus* (Semipalmated Plover), and *C. melodus* (Piping Plover). However, *A. wilsonia* (Wilson's Plover), *A. collaris* (Collared Plover), and *A. nivosus* (Snowy Plover), among other species, are now placed in *Anarhynchus* and are actually more

closely related to the lapwings than to species that look superficially similar but are retained in *Charadrius*. This new evolutionary information is also reflected in a revised linear sequence, in which *Vanellus* is now placed between *Charadrius* and *Anarhynchus*, and in the subfamily classification, which has eliminated subfamily Vanellinae but recognized the new subfamily Pluvialinae for golden-plovers.

Article at <https://americanornithology.org/65th-supplement-to-check-list-of-north-american-birds-publishes-in-ornithology/>

## William R. "Bill" McDaniel's Obituary



Per Susan Kosoris, "Bill was superintendent of Pedernales Falls State Park for 24 years. During his tenure, he was instrumental in the design and implementation of the wonderful bird blinds and butterfly garden filled with native plants, as well as the Star Theater located in the park. He was a lifelong birder,

he especially loved watching shorebirds, and had traveled to many countries with his son on birding trips."

Here is the obit: <https://www.crofts-crowfuneralhome.com/obituary/william-bill-mcdaniel>

**William R. "Bill" McDaniel**, of Johnson City and longtime superintendent of Pedernales Falls State Park, died June 2, 2024 in an auto accident near Johnson City. He was 69.

Bill was born March 11, 1955 in Corvallis, Oregon to Bruce and Margery McDaniel, who later settled in Houston.

He was a graduate of Spring Branch High School, Stephen F. Austin State University and the Central Texas Police Academy.

After assignments with Texas Parks & Wildlife at Galveston, Lake Somerville and Sea Rim State Parks, he was appointed superintendent of Pedernales Falls State Park, where he served from 1990 until his retirement in 2014.

Survivors include Kathryn Phillips of Spokane, WA; his former spouse Gayle Shackelford of Austin; brother Dudley McDaniel of Boerne; daughter Anne Shackelford of Austin; son David Shackelford (Mallory) of Dripping Springs; grandchildren Ava and Sid; and Marvin, his closest companion and best friend.

A public memorial service in Johnson City is planned for the fall. In lieu of flowers, donations are invited to the Friends of the Pedernales Falls State Park, 2585-B Park Road 6026, Johnson City, TX 78636

## Previous TOS President Passes



Dr. John Schwetman, a former TOS president, passed away peacefully on January 12, 2023.

A note received from his wife, Jenny, reads:

"Hi! I just want to announce that my husband, John Schwetman, past TOS officer, has passed away.

He treasured his time with TOS as I did too – always going with John to meetings, and birding from far north of the Arctic Circle to Antarctica, to many points on the African continent and most of Europe and Asia.

TOS was special in our lives. I want to be sure that friends who remain know of John's passing.

Best wishes,  
Jenny Schwetman

P.S. I will scatter some of his ashes in his beloved Brazos River. John and two friends put in canoes in the Brazos River at Waco and traveled 400+ miles to the mouth of the river in the Gulf of Mexico – thus my plan to donate some of his ashes to his much loved river!

J.S.

# William J. Graber III

January 15, 1933 - July 26, 2024



William J. Graber III passed away on July 26 at the age of 91. Born January 15, 1933 in Temple, Texas, he was the only child of Lillie Vaughn and William J. Graber, Jr. The family moved to Beaumont when Bill was a small boy, and he remained a proud Beaumont resident for the rest of his life. He was a graduate of Beaumont High School, The University of Texas at Austin, where he was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon and the Silver Spurs, and Tulane Medical School. He trained at New Orleans Charity Hospital for his residency in Urology and considered it a privilege to have provided medical care to the citizens of southeast Texas for the next 30 years.

Bill loved Beaumont, its people, its climate, and its proximity to the Texas coast. "Paradise," as he would say, "sure it's hot, but at least it's humid!" After completing his medical training, he happily returned to Beaumont with his wife Laura Lee Planche, who sadly predeceased him in 2017. There they raised their three children Vallette, Will, and Travis.

Bill was a man of many interests and hobbies. He ran track at Beaumont High and UT and later became an accomplished tennis player. Always an avid hunter, he was as eager to make a pre-dawn trek to the duck blind as he was to track leopard in Kenya. He earned his pilot's license and flew himself to Rosebud, Texas, to perform surgeries once a month. He planned and led family camping trips to Village Creek, Big Bend, Colorado, Utah, the Yukon, New Guinea, and the headwaters of the Amazon in Peru. He collected Navajo wearing blankets, pottery, and other Native American artifacts. He studied classical guitar and played in a physicians' band. He had a great affinity for Hispanic culture and studied Spanish for many years with his teacher Marilynne Wall. He proudly practiced his Spanish on his many trips to San Miguel de Allende. After retiring from medicine, he single-handedly built a boat in his garage which launched a decade of cruising the Caribbean and Florida coast. He tended a number of beehives and was happy to share their bounty with friends and family at Christmas. Each of these pursuits was executed with an intense level of passion, dedication, and expertise.

Of all his interests, none was as important and integral to Bill's life as birdwatching. Beginning with his days as a Boy Scout, Bill was a lifelong birder. He kept annual checklists of the birds he had seen and was a regular follower of the rare bird hotline. A particularly satisfying achievement was when he reached 600 on his North American Life List. He spent countless days birding in southeast Texas, High Island and Smith Woods being particular favorite spots. Many of his travels revolved around the quest to see new birds for his Life List. Bill loved to share his enthusiasm for birding with friends, and was always an eager guide for new birders.

In 1962, when Bill first moved back to Beaumont after medical school, he gathered a handful of fellow birders to conduct the first Bolivar Peninsula Christmas Bird Count. He chose the 15-mile diameter of the count area, recruited and deployed the birders, and tallied the results for the National Audubon Society. The first count was a success with 97 species counted. Bill continued as the count's organizer and compiler for the next 50 years, finally handing over the reins to a younger, tech savvy team in 2012. By that time, the species count would typically exceed 170, thanks to the robust cohort of experienced birders Bill recruited.

As he goes to his reward, Bill can look forward to reuniting with Laura Lee to continue their partnership forever and to watch their children and grandchildren lead their lives. Bill will be happy to see some birds as well – new and old – including the Dodo, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and Bachman's Warbler (Bachman's will be a repeat, as Bill had one of the last sightings of this now-extinct bird). He will also be happy to see his beloved and devoted fox terrier Trixie, whom he considered the second-smartest member of the family.

Survivors include his three children and seven grandchildren: Vallette and Russell Windham of Houston and their children, August and Isabel; Will and Shannon Graber of The Woodlands and their children, Madelaine and husband David Altman, William V, Abigail, and Andrew; and Travis Graber and Iris Steinebrunner of Dresden, Germany and their daughter, Alena. He is also survived by his only cousin, Emily Fuchs of Hunt, Texas.

Bill is preceded in death by his parents and his wife, Laura Lee.

## David Sarkozi

I learned yesterday that one of the real giants of birding in Texas passed away on July 26, 2024, Bill Graber.

Bill was I believe a past president of the Texas Ornithological Society and the founder of the Bolivar Peninsula CBC which he compiled for 50 years until turning it over to myself and Steve Mayes.

Bill was as he described to me a one-man nominating committee for TOS and it was him who recruited me as TOS vice-president. While I knew I would be in the chute to

become president-elect and president of TOS, I had no idea that would lead to me being on the board for 16 years!

It turns out Bill may have been one of the last people to a Bachman's Warbler and I don't know for sure, but suspect he also would have seen Eskimo Curlew because of his place in birding on the Upper Texas Coast in the last days of Eskimo Curlew.

While better known in the Golden Triangle area in the last 20 years if you look at old birding records in Texas, Bill was everywhere for many years in Texas.

<https://broussards1889.com/obituary/william-j-graber-iii/>

### Brush Freeman

He did indeed wear big birding shoes. Sad to hear this. He also nominated me to the TOS board back in the day and we had some good conversations over the years before I lost touch with him. He was a fine man to know

### David Sarkozi

Bill never did get an e-mail account nor never did get on social media, one of the reason he finally gave up the Bolivar CBC is because you had to have a computer turn in the results and the neighbor that was helping him turn in the CBC results moved away!

### Brush Freeman

I knew he had no e-mail 30-odd years ago but was not aware he never had it. He would write a few letters and call on occasion. More than likely he was better off without that tech.

### Jim Peterson

One-of-kind great guy. Supported every thing and every body at TOS. He had all best southern gentleman qualities with a big smile and just the right touch of sarcasm.

### Tom Taroni

Did the Freeport Christmas Bird Count for many years with Bill. Great guy.

### Debby Barnes McWhorter

Dr Graber was a great mentor to many of us newcomers!! His legacy is outstanding

### Sandy Dillard

He was everywhere and I birded with him often. I also have fond memories of him birding with my parents and they birding each other's CBC. Bill was the one that asked me for years to do the coast watch on the Bolivar CBC..... his manner made it impossible to say no. Great birder great person he will be missed.

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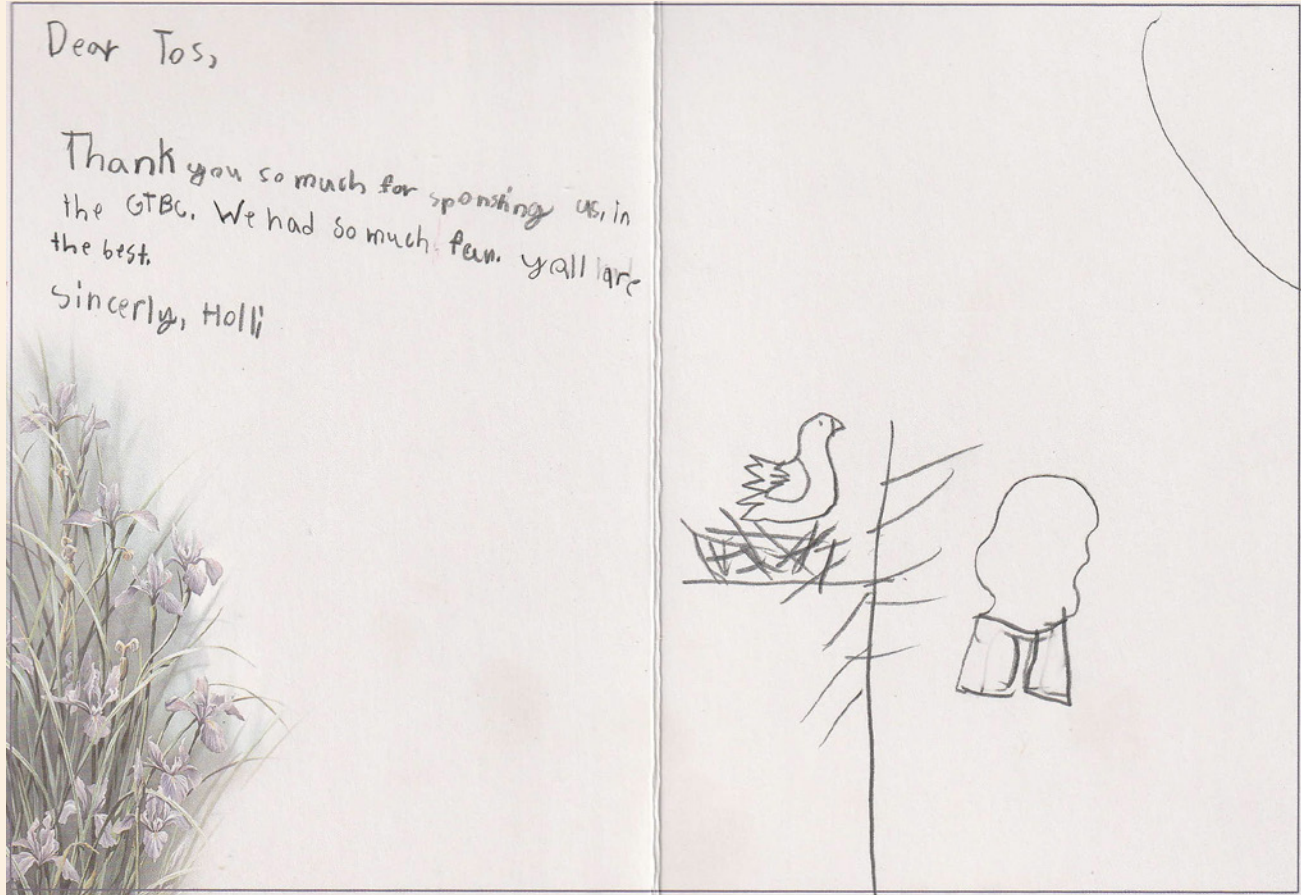
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If you need a little help with raptor identification, you can take advantage of two exciting opportunities to polish up your skills.

First is Raptor Week with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

We hope you will support our partner by registering for their exciting virtual birding seminar. Speakers include Dr. Ben Skipper, Bill Clark, Mike Stewart, and TOS President Romey Swanson, among others.

Registration fees support their youth birding camp scholarships, and you can't beat the cost of \$35 for the full week of instruction and demonstrations! Individual days are \$15 each. Register [HERE](#) today!

For more information about Raptor week, please visit their webpage—<https://wildlife.tamu.edu/birding/virtual/>

Second, HawkWatch International's annual count at Hazel Bazemore Park in Corpus Christi is in full swing, with Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites streaming through already.

You can visit the park any time through November 15 and enjoy the spectacle, and your experience can be enhanced by attending this year's diurnal raptor identification workshop led by internationally renowned expert on birds of prey Bill Clark.

Bill's annual event, which is a fundraiser for TOS, includes three in-person classroom instruction sessions with visits to nearby Hazel Bazemore Park to put your new knowledge to work.

More information will be shared about Bill's workshop soon—watch your email inbox!



# SAVE THE DATE FOR A TOS TEXAS CENTURY CLUB WEEKENDER

**NOV. 22-24, 2024 WITH JANEY WOODLEY**

Thinking about joining the craziness that is the Texas Century Club? Already obsessed and need to start or finish Marion or Harrison County? Please join us as we see just how high we can get our species count!

TOS member Janey Woodley will be your leader for this Weekender. She has been pursuing the Texas Century Club dream since she did her first Century Club Field Trip with TOS in January of 2019.

The trip will be based in Marshall, and it begins on November 22 with a quick afternoon visit to the Port Jefferson History and Nature Center, followed by dinner and an evening presentation by Janey about how to get started on your Texas Century Club journey and strategies for making the most out of each county birding trip. What species to expect over the weekend will also be discussed. Then on November 23 you'll carpool to several parks on Lake O' The Pines with dinner at a local restaurant that evening to share sightings and relax.

Since no visit to this part of the state is complete without a visit to Caddo Lake, the next day you'll leave the hotel for a visit to Caddo Lake State Park and Caddo NWR. finishing the day between 12:00 and 1:00 pm.

An email with the registration link will be sent on September 8<sup>th</sup> and registration will open for THREE days on September 20<sup>th</sup>. A random drawing on September 23<sup>rd</sup> will determine the lucky 14 attendees, with a wait list created at that time in case of cancellations. Payment is due upon registration and will be immediately refunded to those not selected. A maximum of two people can register together. The registration fee is \$110 per person\*.

Don't miss this opportunity to pump up your year list, your county lists, and maybe your life list!

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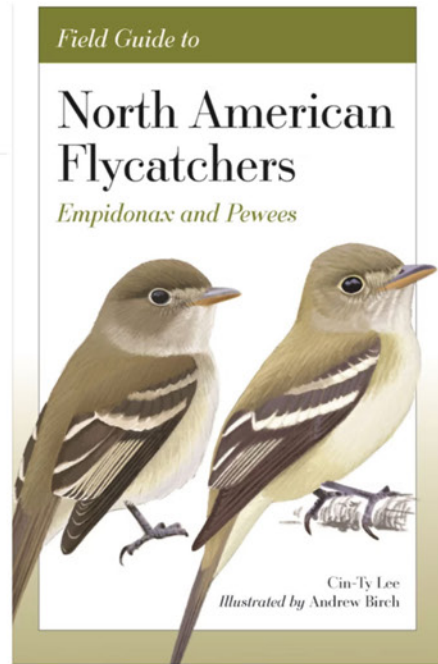
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# Field Guide to North American Flycatchers: *Empidonax and Pewees*

Cin-Ty Lee and Andrew Birch

A richly illustrated, portable field guide to flycatcher  
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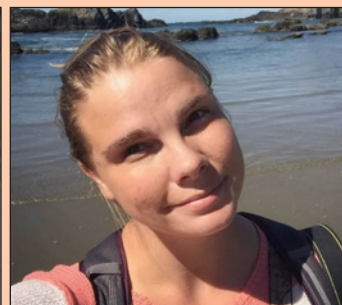
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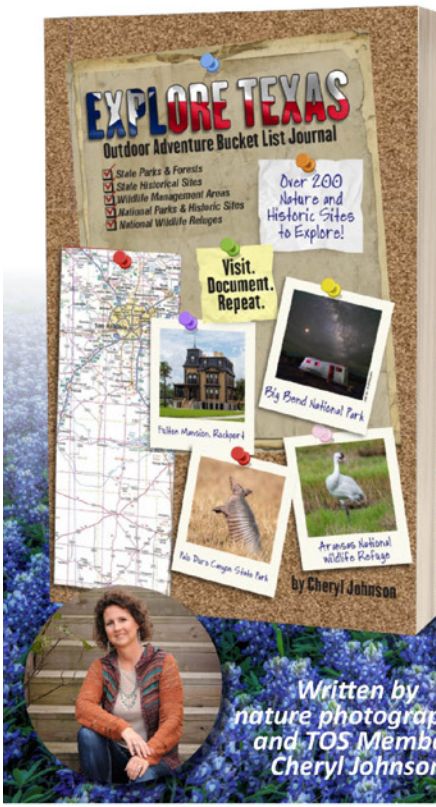
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