

**TEXAS** *Birds*  
ANNUAL



A Publication of the  
TEXAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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

Delvin





# TEXAS *Birds* ANNUAL

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Texas added several new species to the list including Tufted Duck, Yellow-footed Gull and Gray-collared Becard. For details visit page 53.

Front Cover: Red-billed Pigeon. Artist Lynn Delvin



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Dear Friends, Birders, and TOS Members,



As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the dedication and passion of our TOS community. Being elected to serve as your President has been an incredible honor, and I am excited to share our achievements, challenges, and future aspirations with you.

## OUTGOING AND INCOMING BOARD MEMBERS

First and foremost, 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 and leadership over the previous years.

We are also delighted to welcome our new board members: 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 our new slate of TOS Officers with 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. While we have experienced significant losses with our outgoing board members, we resolved to add needed skills, particularly in the conservation sector. The enthusiasm and professionalism of our new board members will undoubtedly enrich and refresh TOS.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES

This year, we celebrated the success of our Winter and Spring meetings, both hosted by the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco. We focused on the rich birding opportunities in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. These gatherings brought us together to enjoy the diverse birdlife of the region but also strengthened our community and shared mission. Participants enjoyed various birdwatching trips and workshops, with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Between the meetings, well over 100 members were able to observe specialties like Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, Rose-throated Becard, and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet in addition to wayward vagrants like Mangrove Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Warbler, and Cattle Tyrant. Feedback from members in attendance was positive, with mixed feedback on hosting winter and spring meetings in the same location (a model we adopted 2 years ago). Our partnership with The Valley Nature Center has been instrumental, and their professionalism and support have been invaluable to the success of our events. Thank you to our volunteer field trip leaders for helping put on a great birding and birdwatching program.

One of our significant milestones last year was drafting the TOS Strategic Plan. This comprehensive document outlines our organizational and programmatic priorities, setting a clear path for our future. It provides a structured framework that ensures all initiatives align with our mission and goals. The Strategic Plan focuses on key areas such as membership growth, governance improvements, conservation efforts, and stewardship of our sanctuaries. During the August retreat, TOS leadership will begin developing business plans to implement these strategic goals successfully. Our goals include growing our membership by 10% by the end of 2025, enhancing our governance practices, developing management plans for our sanctuaries, increasing our vis-



ibility as a premier resource for bird conservation, and ensuring our programs are impactful and relevant. This proactive approach enhances our current operations and establishes a strong foundation for sustainable growth and long-term impact in bird conservation across Texas. To achieve these aspirations, we must focus on building our financial, human resource, and infrastructure capacities. Doing so will position us well to support and expand our conservation efforts, educational initiatives, and member services.

## FUNDING FOR RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION PROJECTS

TOS has provided funding for several significant research and conservation projects this year. PhD candidate Ari Rice was awarded a grant to support his research on Colima X Virginia Warbler hybridization in the West Texas sky islands. Alex Hoxie, a Master's student at Tarleton State University, was awarded a grant to support his research on the impacts of microplastics on birds. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory received funding to help replace research equipment for ongoing shorebird and grassland bird research. Additionally, the Tyler Audubon Society was awarded funding to assist in building a bird blind at the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge in Jacksonville, Texas. Over the past 12 months, TOS has provided over \$6,000 in grant funds supporting research, conservation, and birding access.

## CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

As we continue to grow, we face the ongoing challenge of understanding our role and influence within the greater Texas bird conservation landscape. We must maintain relevance with our existing members while expanding our reach to a broader community of Texas bird lovers. To address this, we focus on enhancing our communication and engagement strategies, ensuring that TOS remains a vibrant and welcoming organization.

I am deeply grateful for your dedication and support. Together, we have achieved remarkable things, and I am confident that our best days are ahead. Let's continue to work together to make a significant impact on bird conservation in Texas.

Good birding to you all!

Sincerely,

Romey Swanson

President, Texas Ornithological Society

romey.TOS@gmail.com

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Jack Clinton Eitniear ..... Editor

Judy Kestner, Bron Rorex, Susan Foster ..... Proof Readers

A special thank you to the Writers and photographers who contributed to this publication!

Printed by Sheridan PA

Typesetting by Phil Wolfe Graphic Design

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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

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ublishing *Texas Birds Annual* and three issues of the *TOS NEWS* newsletter requires a lot of material. Being uncertain as to the readership of the newsletter (viewable only on the TOS webpage) I decided to include a few of the articles from the past year's newsletters in this issue of *Texas Birds Annual*.

The vast majority of the publication will continue to be original material.

This year we can read about Sheridan Coffey's recent trip to Mongolia (*see A Texas Birder in Mongolia*) which is not a place we often think of as a birding hotspot but adding the cultural aspects it appeared to be a fantastic trip!

This past year was no exception when it comes to unusual sightings. With no observations for some time Brown Jays started making an appearance at the Santa Margarita Ranch. But don't wait long to add it to your life list as they frequently disappear for periods of up to a decade!

In June 2023 Becky Dehmer Marsalia photographed what turned out to be a Blue-gray Tanager in a backyard crepe myrtle near Eagle Lake (se. Colorado County). Eagle Lake is 66 miles (106 km) east of Houston. Whether it is a cagebird "that flew the coop" or a vagrant from Mexico is yet to be determined but it was an exciting observation with some outstanding photos!

We round out the issue with our usual coverage of the *Great Texas Birding Classic* of which TOS is a major sponsor and the *Birds of the Brush* art contest part of the Laredo Birding Festival. Both events seem to get bigger and better every year.

As a final note please keep the birdbaths full of fresh water. As the Texas heat evaporates all the natural sources our feathered friends have few options for staying hydrated. Scientific studies have shown that many resident species move to riparian areas during the summer months. If you want them in your yard, consider installing and maintaining a birdbath.

Now grab an ice cold beverage and enjoy this issue of *Texas Birds Annual*.



**Crimson-collared Grosbeak. Artist Lynn Delvin**

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# OFF THE BEATEN PATH – LAND BIRDS OF LAKE MEREDITH NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

**By Michael Patrikeev**

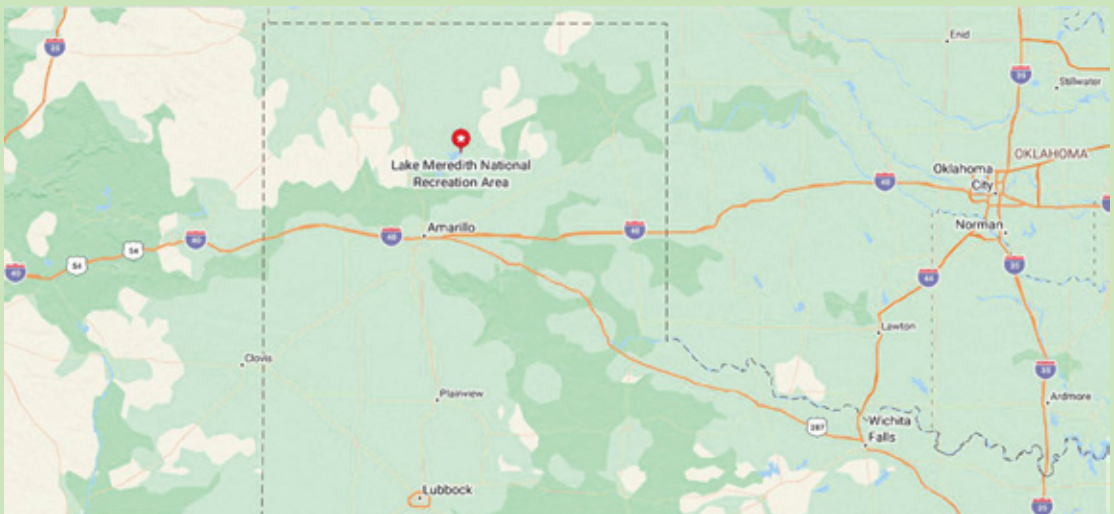
Lake Meredith National Recreation Area is located in the Texas Panhandle, 40 miles north of Amarillo. It consists of a reservoir (Lake Meredith), created by damming the Canadian River, and ca. 14,000 ha of adjacent canyons, tablelands, plains, and wetlands. Away from the reservoir, common vegetation communities are mesquite and cottonwood savannas, and grasslands with sagebrush and yucca. Lying at altitude 900 meters (3,000 feet), the area may see frost and snow in winter, but summers are hot and dry with nearly incessant winds.

Breeding avifauna of the recreation area is not as poor as could be expected from the geography and climate, and almost 100 species nested or suspected to nest in the area in recent decades. In addition to birds typically associated with arid planes, rocky slopes and prairies, the Canadian River Valley woodlands and savannas attracts species associated with riparian vegetation and forest edge. Up to 30

species colonized marshland, shorelines, and islands which appeared following the completion of Sanford Dam in the 1960s.

This photo essay focuses on birds inhabiting savannas, riparian woodlands, shrub thickets and rocky slopes of Lake Meredith National Recreation Area. These are species and habitats I studied and photographed during a survey in the beginning of the 2000s: raptors, turkey, quails, doves, cuckoos, woodpeckers, flycatchers, cardinals, sparrows and blackbirds.

The Texas Panhandle has experienced many droughts in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but the ongoing mega-drought that began in 2000, and is affecting much of the southwest, is unprecedented. It may be expected that the drought and associated fires will take a toll on much of arboreal vegetation in the river valley, affecting nesting species associated with savannas and riparian woodlands in the recreation area.



Lake Meredith National Recreation Area.

Graphics courtesy of Bing Images



**Devil's Canyon** (above) and **Canadian River Valley** (below). The Canadian River had carved a narrow, steep-walled canyon through Lake Meredith National Recreation area, and its tributary streams had created a rough and broken topography, known as the Canadian River Breaks. The valley bottoms are dominated by sagebrush, grasses, buckwheat, honey mesquite and small soapweed yucca, with scattered stands of plains cottonwood, netleaf hackberry, western soapberry, and common hoptree, and thickets of Chickasaw plum and fragrant sumac. **Photos by Michael Patrikeev**





Diurnal raptors in Lake Meredith NRA are not very diverse. **Red-tailed Hawks**—*Buteo jamaicensis* (above) hunt small mammals and reptiles and nest in dead or living trees, usually selecting standalone trunks. More common **Mississippi Kites**—*Ictinia mississippiensis* (below) prefer nesting in living cottonwoods in riverside woodlands by the Canadian River. Primarily insectivorous, they catch dragonflies, large grasshoppers, beetles, and cicadas, although occasionally take small rodents, lizards, and toads. Young leave nests after 25 days; the young kites in the photo are about to fledge.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.





**Wild Turkeys**—*Meleagris gallopavo* (above) inhabit woodlands, tamarisk and soapberry thickets in the river valley; broods stay together into late fall-early winter. **Northern Bobwhite**—*Colinus virginianus* (below) frequent mesquite savanna and mixed grasslands. Calling males are heard from late April to early August.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.





**Mourning Dove** (*Zenaida macroura*) and its nest, is common in savannas and grasslands of Lake Meredith NRA. Although it usually nests in shrubs or trees, 30% of nests in the recreation area were on the ground, hidden in tall grasses, or under tree cholla or yucca. Most of the ground nests were lost to predators. **Photos by Michael Patrikeev.**





**Greater Roadrunner**—*Geococcyx californianus* and its young, is uncommon, but widespread in the recreation area. This species may be seen in any habitats, but its nests are well-hidden in thorny shrubs and trees. Newly-hatched chicks have dark-grey skin with white down feathers.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.





**Red-headed Woodpecker**—*Melanerpes erythrocephalus* is most common, or at least most conspicuous, of the four woodpeckers found in Lake Meredith NRA. It nests in snags in the cottonwood savanna; neighboring nests were as close as 100–300 m. This colorful woodpecker is a skillful insect hunter and catches dragonflies, wasps, grasshoppers, and cicadas, often in mid-air. The smaller and drab-colored **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**—*Dryobates scalaris* is a less conspicuous resident of mesquite woodlands. This species often excavates nesting hole in leaning trunks, perhaps to avoid detection by the aggressive Red-headed Woodpecker, which is also a known nest predator.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.



**Western Kingbird**—*Tyrannus verticalis* (above) and **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**—*Tyrannus forficatus* (below) are locally common in cottonwood savanna, and in grasslands with few standing trees. Nests of the former species were invariably in dead or declining cottonwoods, whereas the latter also nested in mesquite. Photos by Michael Patrikeev.





**Ash-throated Flycatcher** (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) nests in natural cavities or those excavated by woodpeckers. Grasshoppers, katydids, beetles, moths, dragonflies, and cicadas are common food items of this species.

Photo by Michael Patrikeev.



**Lark Sparrow** (*Chondestes grammacus*) is common in grasslands and mesquite savanna in Lake Meredith NRA. It is a ground-nesting species, but one nest was in mesquite 2 m above the ground.

Photo by Michael Patrikeev.





**Rock Wren** (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) is common inhabitant of rocky canyons throughout the year. Nests are built in a crevices or cavities among rocks; nest entrances are decorated with small stones.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.





**Northern Mockingbird** (*Mimus polyglottos*) is common in savannas and shrub thickets in the area. Nests are in shrubs and trees, but are often robbed by snakes, including Western Coachwhip.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.

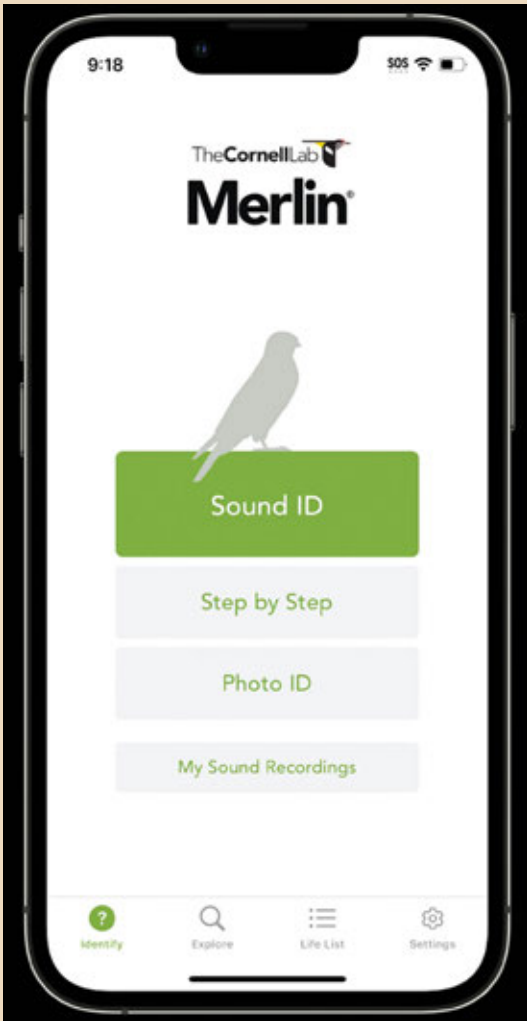


**Painted Bunting**—*Passerina ciris* (above) is uncommon (or under-recorded) nesting species in Lake Meredith NRA. Nests of this and the closely related Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*) are often parasitized by **Brown-headed Cowbird**—*Molothrus ater* (below). The female Painted Bunting in the photo is brooding two cowbird hatchlings.

Photos by Michael Patrikeev.



# BIRDERS COMMENT ON MERLIN CORNELL'S BIRD IDENTIFICATION APP



Cornells Bird Identification

From the Merlin webpage (<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/the-story/>)

“Part of the mission of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is to help people find the answer to “what’s that bird?” We know sorting through a massive field guide, using search engines, and other resources can make it really challenging to figure out what you just saw—our goal is to make that challenge easier.

Merlin is designed to be a birding coach for bird watchers at every level. Merlin asks you the same questions that an expert birder would ask to help solve a mystery bird sighting. Notice that date and location are Merlin’s

first and most important questions. It takes years of experience in the field to know what species are expected at a given location and date. Merlin shares this knowledge with you based on more than 800 million sightings submitted to eBird from birders around the world.

Merlin also asks you to describe the color, size, and behavior of the bird you saw. Because no two people describe birds exactly the same way, Merlin presents a shortlist of possible species based on descriptions from Cornell Lab experts as well as thousands of bird enthusiasts who helped “teach” Merlin by participating in online activities. They’ve contributed more than 3 million descriptors to help Merlin match your input with the most likely birds. When you identify a species and click “This is My Bird,” Merlin also saves your record to help improve its future performance.

Some people experience birds through the viewfinder of their camera, and putting a name to the bird they just photographed can be both rewarding and educational. The Photo ID feature in Merlin allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and get a list of suggestions. Photo ID is yet another method to help you identify the birds you encounter.”

Birders comments on Merlin from Facebook.....

## Bob White

I use Merlin the same way I use mocking-birds. It alerts me to birds that I should look (or listen) for in the area. It’s affirmative to hear a bird that I know well and look down to see Merlin identify it also.

## Garett ‘Gary’ Hodne

Given all the caveats others have expressed that I agree with, I still find it an incredibly useful tool. As someone who has hearing loss and I use advanced hearing aids that work

very well it's still a challenge to hear the complete song of high pitched bird songs. Merlin helps me sort them out and cues me for what songs to listen carefully for.

I never add a "heard by Merlin only" bird to my list. But when Merlin picks up some bird I can't hear well then I work on trying to hear and confirm the ID for myself and in that way I find it very satisfying.

### **Mel Cooksey**

It seems that many of Merlin's mis-IDs are high-frequency chip notes. I review the audio tracks with headphones at the point(s) in which Merlin made the ID. In many of these, I usually cannot detect the vocalization, nor can I see any characteristic sonogram signature for the species. Were these birds really there, and what were they? Are some mikes too weak to produce a proper readout on the sonogram? In some cases these phantom notes seem to be during or overlapping with another species song or call, which Merlin ID's correctly. Is Merlin hearing and mis-IDing a portion of that bird's vocalization that we cannot hear?

### **Daniel Lane**

I occasionally run the sound ID app to compare with my own detections here in Louisiana, and inevitably, it misses about 20% of the sounds I hear (no doubt, in part due to the mic in my phone), and adds 2-5 spp that simply were not there during the period of recording. Scarily, in most cases, the "phantom species" added are expected at the site, so if they were added to an eBird list, they wouldn't trip any filter... so it's adding erroneous information to the database that we'll never know about.

### **Jon Mann**

#### **Daniel Lane**

Or maybe it is detecting birds that you have tuned out

Many times when I've been running Merlin, I'll pick up birds. I had it detected usually because I was concentrating on something

else But then I stop and try to find or hear that bird and most of the time it will actually have been there

### **Daniel Lane**

**Jon Mann** in the circumstances I mention, I am actively conducting ear surveys, and I tend to be pretty good with my ears, so I'm quite convinced I'm not tuning those birds out. Furthermore, the phone is recording the session, so i can go back and listen, and it's clear that it's making a phantom identification when that sound isn't there.

### **Donna Dittmann**

**Daniel Lane** I agree with Dan. Misses some obvious species, which I don't think is always a phone mic issue because misses are not always subtle, distant, or unexpected. It has issues with IDs and especially Summer Tanager (wants to ID as American Robin) both in Louisiana and west Texas. It can't always figure out mimics like Lesser Goldfinch and would enhance my list with other species if that is how I used the app, which I do not. Most of the time I use to compare what it is hearing versus what I am hearing. I have never gotten crazy species (found on other continents) like some report on their eBird lists. Rarely does it hear something I don't but in those cases I may be filtering because I do later detect the obvious missed (e.g. crow) species. I have tried to ID species recorded in west Texas while I'm in Louisiana and it doesn't have any suggestions even though it should! I use it when I need help to figure out/confirm a song I'm uncertain about but I try to get a visual to confirm it's right and it typically is. Bottom line: It is a great and fun tool.

### **Linda Henry Houser**

**Bob White** ditto! Because I am still learning so many songs, this is how I use it. If I can not identify the bird myself then, either visually or hearing the song, I don't report it.



## **Daniel Lane**

**Bob White** Interesting anecdote: I was once birding on a river island on the Rio Grande upriver of Laredo, TX, and heard a Mockingbird that imitated Thick-billed Kingbird, Phainopepla, and Buff-collared Nightjar. Unfortunately, I didn't record this performance, but I did later use Howell and Webb to see where the nearest place (straight-line distance) that Mockingbird could have learned those sounds (assuming the mapping of distributions of Mexican birds was accurate at the time), and it was \*Sinaloa, Mexico!\* So, ever since, I have considered the sounds mimicked by Mockingbirds not to be representative of local avifauna, as I suspect Mockingbirds may have huge dispersal capabilities we haven't even scratched the surface of yet!

## **Jeanne DeFriese**

**Daniel Lane** for nearly three years, I had a mockingbird whose regular call mimicked the car alarms so common back then

## **Jon Mann**

### **Daniel Lane**

For the last several years, my local Mockingbird in suburban Scottsdale Arizona has done a perfect tea kettle of a Carolina Wren

I always wonder how he learned that song

There are a few records of Carolina Wren in Arizona so it is possible that there was one undetected in my neighborhood

## **Linda Hale**

I use it to try to improve my ear birding skills, but I don't rely on it. I'd never count a merlin only bird. A couple of weeks ago Merlin picked up about half a dozen birds that weren't right for my backyard (Belted Kingfisher in a backyard with no water...). I looked around to see a Mockingbird on my tv antenna making all those calls. It also doesn't pick up all the birds I hear while sometimes picking up birds that I'm not hearing.

## **Mike Twilly**

Useful as a very rough guide but in no way definitive

Sound more useful than photo id as a rough alert of what might be around but no more

Photo id is wrong as much as its right so tend not to use it

## **Susan Schaezler**

I Don't use it to ebird—it brings up lots of sounds of rare birds at times, but if I Don't see them, I Don't count them, unless I know their sound.

## **Brent Franklin**

Went in a bird walk once with a group of very inexperienced birders and they counted everything Merlin heard. After speaking up against something I highly doubted it nearly devolved into an argument. I kept my mouth shut rest of the time and never birded there again.

That said I occasionally use it to see what it hears that I should look for. I am deaf in high frequencies which makes birding pretty frustrating when alone.

## **Dennis Horton**

**Brent Franklin** I am also hearing impaired in high frequency, the birds I used to hear, I don't anymore. I run Merlin, see what it thinks, then look for or dispute what can be highly unlikely. And usually it never picks up what I am hearing to id an usually sounding bird.....

## **Selma Glasscock**

Sadly, I too have experienced high frequency hearing loss and also use it to alert me to bird songs/calls that I can only hear portions of or no longer hear at all. If in doubt, and I can't verify by sight, I don't report them. Hearing aids definitely help but can never completely replace my high frequency hearing loss. I've noticed lately that the app occasionally reports birds that are highly(!) unlikely in my area. I

recently upgraded my phone and the app, so I wonder if that is why this is happening.

### **Michael Smith**

I find it to be about 70% correct.

### **Troy Hibbitts**

Sound ID useful but it's important to know those species that sound similar. Last weekend up in the Guadalupe Mts, every time a Plumbeous Vireo would sing, it would return both Plumbeous/Cassin's at the same time ... and sometimes throw in Red-eyed and Yellow-throated, too. Similarly, I've had singing Black-headed Grosbeaks return as Rose-breasted, Hepatic Tanager, and American Robin all from the same singing bird. With those caveats and an understanding of its limitations, I find it very useful overall

### **Jon Paul Bergman**

I have had some fantastic luck tracking down birds I have been trying to see for years. White eyed vireo are the most intrigued when hearing themselves.

### **Trent Reed**

I want a better microphone for my phone. I've used Merlin to simply record audio. Mostly of birds but it does record everything.

### **Riner Bishop inda**

Using Merlin ID is a great way to get non-birders interested in what birds show up nearby. Kids like the challenge of finding the bird that Merlin has heard.

### **Beth Hawkins**

I use it in my Freshman Biology class to help my students learn birds and it is absolutely transformative! To see the look of awe and amazement on their faces when they first go outside and turn it on is pure joy!

### **Jeff Faircloth**

It seems that most only talk about the sound ID when Merlin is mentioned. There are other uses of Merlin. I use the photo ID all the time and it does a great job suggesting

what bird I photographed. Or the description ID works well also. Or I use the explore function to learn more about species I am interested in. The sound ID is pretty good also. I think many people expect too much from it or beginners place too much trust in it. Overall it is a great birding app and I use it regularly.

### **Justin Bower**

One of my finest achievements is convincing Merlin I was a Barred Owl.

### **Erik Wolf**

**Justin Bower** I've been working my screech owl call and Merlin will occasionally pick it up. You know you're getting better when that happens!

### **Dave Skinner**

This spring, May 15th, I was birding with a couple of friends at Rondeau Provincial Park in Ontario. Lots of birds and lots of bird song. I heard a bird song that I was not familiar with. Checked it with Merlin and it was identified as a Connecticut Warbler. It sang about 8 times. Very distinctive. My friends heard it, too. There was no mistaking it. A Lifer for me.

### **Erik Wolf**

It's a learning tool that makes suggestions of POSSIBLE birds in the area. You still have to do the work and verify the sighting.

If I see a bird and can't ID it and Merlin picks it up it may point me in the right direction. I can grab my field guide and verify that's the bird I'm seeing.

It also lets me know what birds are in the area that I may need to be looking for.

We were out of town once and Merlin picked up crossbill. We had no idea what that was so we looked it up in the guide. The guide mention they like the tops of trees. 15 minutes later we got some great views and decent photos of a Crossbill calling from the very top of a very tall tree. Had we not had Merlin on we would have missed it.



You should never add it to a list just because Merlin heard it.

### **Jason Leifester**

I use Merlin for two main reasons. (1) I use it to make recordings that I can later upload to my eBird checklists. (2) I use it to give me to the \*possible\* ID of an unknown bird I'm hearing and haven't seen yet, or of the \*possible\* presence of calling/singing birds I haven't keyed in on yet. In these cases, it's not trustworthy enough to consider listing something I haven't verified with my eyes, although it often turns out to be correct. Just a few days ago near Elgin it correctly picked up a singing Magnolia Warbler I wasn't sure about and managed to see a few minutes later, but it kept mistaking a singing Northern Cardinal for a Prothonotary Warbler. But, a few weeks ago in Big Bend it consistently identified the Colima Warblers I was watching/recording as Orange-crowned Warblers.

### **Susan Heath**

It is useful to support id when you are unfamiliar with a song but this requires knowledge of what species are likely to occur. I've never had it come up with something crazy like I see others reporting. It is also useful as a portable field guide when in a foreign country. I use it to look up what a bird looks like, its range, etc. When I'm in an area where I know most of the songs it's sometimes helpful to tease out individual songs when lots of birds are singing at once. I always make sure I can verify what it's telling me with my own ears though.

### **Nancy Clarkson Devlin**

I use Merlin to alert me what to look for. If I start getting weird birds from other continents, I delete some of the old recordings and then it works fine.

### **Jt Williamson**

Mostly a good app. I use it to confirm what I hear. But must warn you, It is not always right.

### **Margaret Farese**

Merlin is a quick and easy way to record bird sounds - when I hear something that sounds different from what I'd normally expect, I turn it on. It's sometimes impossible to visually find the target bird, but that gives me an idea of what to look for. Later in the car or at home I can listen carefully to the recordings to narrow down my intended target (and determine if I recognize the bird or can ID when compared to other sound recordings) - if it's worth saving, then export to Voice Record Pro for trimming and editing, next save to my files for upload to my eBird list. Sometimes I check with BirdNET too before adding to my list. If I have an interesting bird sound that I can't quite positively ID, I'll put the recording under something like "sparrow sp." in case I figure it out later. So... it's a useful tool but can't stand alone for ID. Good subject for an article.

### **Marianne Feeney**

I have used Merlin to help me learn bird calls but would never ID a bird just on it alone. I have had too many unusual birds come up when using it.

### **Brigid Berger**

Can come up with some inaccurate ids.

### **Jo Ann Stensaas Cobb**

was a great tool to use during my recent trip to England! After I downloaded the UK bird pack, I used it to figure out what I was hearing in the sometimes dense forest, so I had some idea of what to watch for. I then verified my sightings by looking at the Merlin photos or using my copy of the "Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Handbook of British Birds" that I bought in England. It was thrilling to recognize the White-Throated Dipper without any help because it was behaving like our American Dipper! Other favorites were Western Yellow Wagtail and Eurasian Curlew in the Yorkshire Dales. I use Merlin in the United States, too. In my eBird

list, I only record the birds that I eventually see.

### **Judy Kestner**

In many instances I hear a bird that Merlin does not. It's an interesting "toy" and helpful at times, though I've seen people relying on it rather than their own ears.

### **Karen Carbiener**

It has greatly improved over the past year or so and I use it, but don't completely trust it. I only make an eBird report if I agree with the call (heard only), or if I see the bird it has ID'ed. I think it will continue to improve over time.

### **Leslie Linehan**

It's a great tool but dangerous in the hands of inexperienced birders. It consistently IDs Summer Tanager as Am Robin. It tells me Black-chinned hummers are Ruby-throated even in early-mid summer when Ruby-throated aren't expected at my location. It sometimes identifies Red-breasted Nuthatch or other species with nothing but a chip note (or nothing audible to me at all and nothing showing on the spectrogram). Recently, it wouldn't identify Blackburnian Warbler, in spite of a strong spectrogram, until I changed my location to someplace where the warbler wasn't flagged Rare by eBird. So the location filters seem very odd to me. However, it's a great way to jog my memory on something I haven't heard in awhile. It would be great if the app would incorporate an editing tool that would make it simpler to upload sound files to eBird. You might want to join the Merlin Bird ID App Facebook group for additional input. I rarely use it for photo ID and find it so-so for this. And I forget that it has field guide functions. You can use it to listen to calls or view photos but I haven't explored these functions thoroughly.

### **Laura Gott**

I use it frequently and I've learned so much!

### **Brush Freeman**

There was a mockingbird that lived on the IBM in Austin for several years that did numerous out of region birds. Especially Black Rail, Willet, Kiskadees etc. I am very leary of Merlin especially after this spring which almost daily would turn a Bewick's Wren into a Song Sparrow, ..Also I picked up N. Shovelers, Hutton's Vireo, etc. that did not exist in our yard.

### **Deborah Lancaster**

I just birded in Colombia without a guide. I also don't count "heard only" Merlin was great in helping me identify birds I've never seen before. I like the explore feature when I have a general idea. I always back it up with a good old fashion bird book as well.

### **Carolyn Ohl**

When I talk to birders on the subject, their experiences are like mine. Some birds it's right on and others it misses. People should not report any bird based on Merlin. I'd say it's accurate for over 50% of the species I encounter. I find it helpful enough of the time that it pays to use it. Just don't rely on it. Here at Christmas Mountains Oasis it gets the Crissal Thrasher/ Curve-billed right. It invariably calls Pyrrhuloxias as Cardinals.

### **Valerie Rickert**

Fantastic Sound ID option!! I've learned a lot from this feature alone!

### **Claire Runnels Moore**

All three types of ID options are very useful! Great app!

### **Christina Mild**

I love this app. When I am in unfamiliar surroundings, I can easily find out which birds are calling around me.

### **Mark Klym**

I have very little use for it and resort to a hard copy field guide when I want to ID a



bird. Have been led on too many wild dragonfly chases by Merlin.

**Katherine Miller**

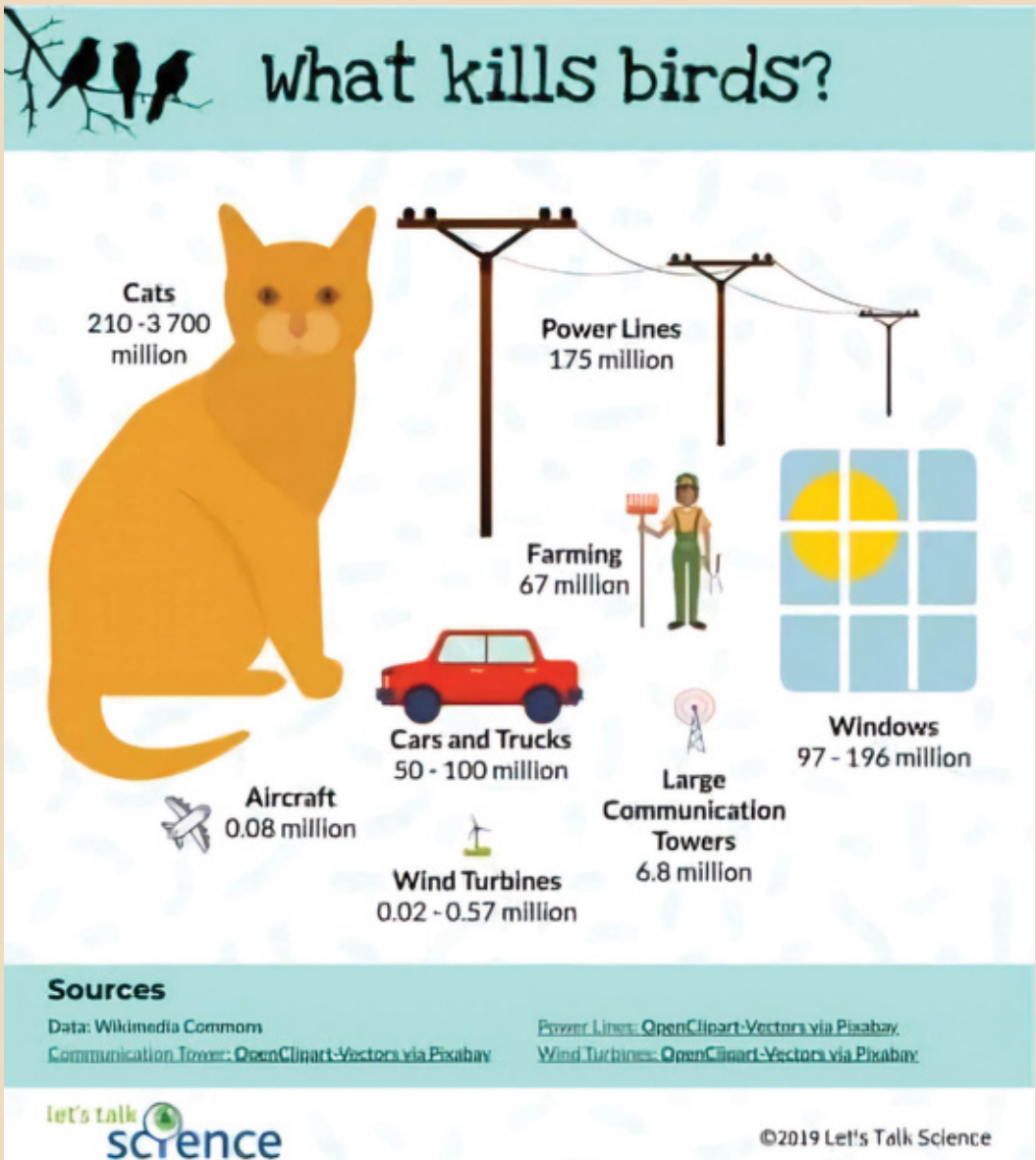
I had it give me sora and pheasant in a spot where only one was likely. I listened back to the recording several times and never heard the sora, didn't make the list for the day. Recently it IDd a song sparrow I never heard,

same deal. It can also be finicky about picking up quail that tend to have fairly robust calls. Sometimes it IDs them, sometimes not.

I went birding in an area I've not been in for ~10 years, turned out to be windy. App was useless in that situation.

**Katherine Miller**

It's better than my smart bird feeder ID.



# PANAMA WITH SUSAN FOSTER



**By Susan Foster**

## DAY 1: AUGUST 25, 2023

Kathie Holder and I arrived at the Canopy Tower around 4:00. We saw a family of TEN coatimundis on the drive into the compound.

After being greeted by our guide, Alex, we explored the roof views, then decided to sit outside at the hummingbird feeders. We had

seven lifer hummingbirds plus Gray-breasted Martins.

My first Panama bird was a Turkey Vulture, and Kathie's was a Great-tailed Grackle.

Picking up the rest of our crew tomorrow and heading to the Canopy Lodge for five days. Lovely weather and great food.







**DAY 2: AUGUST 26, 2023**

Day two of TOS Panama trip 2023. Started the day birding from the tower rooftop. Canopy guide, Alex, helped Kathie and me find 16 life birds before 8:00 am and a Three-toed Sloth.

After breakfast we drove to Panama City to pick up four of our birders and then contin-

ued on to Canopy Lodge with our awesome guide, Carlos. We birded the Lodge grounds and ended up with 37 life birds.

The rest of our birders showed up this evening. Carlos and I welcomed the group then had a delicious filet mignon dinner.

We start birding in earnest tomorrow morning. Glad everyone could make it.









**DAY 3: AUGUST 27, 2023**

This morning we birded the lodge grounds and then Las Minas Road. We birded Las Mosas Road in the afternoon.

The most fun for me is seeing species I've had to chase in the United States. No, wait, the most fun for me are all the mind blowing brilliantly colored endemics. No, the food...

or the camaraderie. At approximately 80 life birds so far, and today was our first official outings. It's all been amazing and magical, and we are going to do it again next year.

Mark your calendars for August 26-September 4, 2024. Best bird so far was Spectacled Owl. I tried not to cry.



Anteater in a tree: <https://www.Vimeo.com/manage/videos/860691571/general>



**DAY 4: AUGUST 28, CANOPY LODGE**

Several stars of the show today, including this Three-toed Sloth.

We birded a finca (farm) this morning with a private road, and enjoyed feeders at a private residence this afternoon. More amazing meals and fun with friends. Glad to be sharing it with them.

Tomorrow we head to the Pacific Ocean. Saw Ruddy Ground Doves copulating! Also

had eight Smooth-billed Anis, two White-necked Jacobins, Southern Lapwings, Tropical Screech-Owls along the roadside, Tody and Broad-billed Motmots, excellent looks at two Northern Emerald-Toucanets, White-winged Becards, antshrike, antvireos, antwrens, and antbirds as well as antpitta and antthrush, and so much more.

Photos below were digiscoped by our guide Carlos Bethancourt.









**DAY 5: AUGUST 29**

Apparently there was a 5.4 magnitude earthquake while I slept last night. I was awakened by it, but I didn't realize it was an earthquake. It was not close to where we are located though.

We went west today, birding our way to the Pacific. Most of us donned our bathing

suits and bobbed in the water. It was very refreshing. We enjoyed arroz con pollo and a lovely shaded yard.

We spent a little more time in the water watching many Frigatebirds plus Whimbrels, and some shorebirds plus some huge lizards in the yard. This is a private residence owned by the Canopy Family.





**DAY 6: AUGUST 30**

Today was a traveling day. We revisited a few places around Canopy Lodge in the morning where we had great looks at a hopping Black-crowned Antpitta as well as trogons. It certainly was a day for ants: antpittas, antwrens, antbirds, antthrushes, and literally ants in my pants. They find me wherever I go.

We also visited Canopy Adventure where we hiked up to a waterfall and a scoped Mottled Owl. After lunch we drove across the Panamerican Highway to Canopy Tower,

crossing the Panama Canal along the way.

On Semaphore Road heading into the Tower, we had a very cooperative anteater and an amazing Black and White Owl which had been spotted earlier in the day by one of the Canopy Family guides.

After settling into our rooms, we ascended to the roof observation deck and had swifts, martins, and hummingbirds. We are currently at FIVE owl species.

What a fun and productive trip, and we are only halfway through!









DAY 7: AUGUST 31

Yesterday morning we birded the Canopy Tower rooftop observation deck and had Blue Cotinga and Green Shrike-Vireo. Then we moved on to Semaphore Road which is right outside of the Tower.

An awwww moment was seeing mother and baby Howler Monkeys. We also had several Tamarin Monkeys. White-whiskered Puffbird and Broad-billed Motmot were just a couple more of the amazing birds we saw and heard.

Another special moment was seeing a Dot-winged Antwren on a nest just on the side of the road. A Squirrel Cuckoo and Cinnamon Woodpecker were also breathtaking.

After lunch we went to the Ammo Dump Ponds in Gamboa near the Panama Canal. Birds we found there included two Rufescent Tiger-Herons, a Gray-lined Hawk, a Ruddy-breasted Seedeater, and Streaked and Piratic Flycatcher.

The food, staff, and guides are all amazing.





DAY 8: SEPT. 1

The day started at the Panama Discovery Center where we climbed the 175-step observation tower, which has 360-degree views above the canopy. We then relaxed at the hummingbird feeders where a Long-billed Hermit flew along my arm!

A family of Red-throated Ant Tanagers entertained us, and we had excellent looks at

a Purple-crowned Fairy. A Broad-billed Motmot posed for us near the restrooms.

Back at the Canopy Tower for lunch, we had a close King Vulture soaring overhead. In the afternoon we went to the Summit Municipal Park where we enjoyed the beautiful grounds and added Collared Aracari, Lineated Woodpecker, and oohed and ahhed over their captive Harpy Eagle, a very majestic bird.











## DAY 9: SEPT. 2

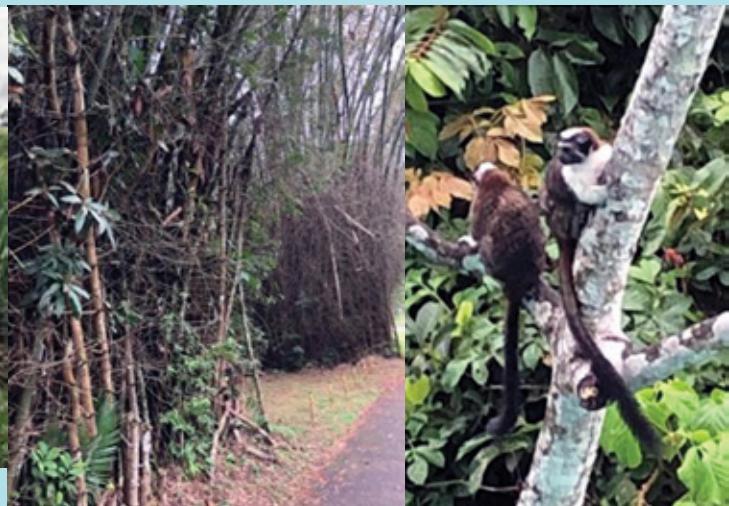
Our day began on the famous Pipeline Road where we momentarily had an opportunity to don our rain gear. We were all able to get on a beautiful Semiplumbeous Hawk perched in a tree. Carlos, our guide, makes sure that all members of the group are able to get on the bird we are looking at. Capuchin monkeys frolicked in the trees around us. After getting several more target birds, the lightning storm forced us to go to plan B, which turned out to be fabulous.

We drove to Canopy Family's B&B which is in a beautiful residential area of Gamboa. The yard has lush vegetation and feeders for the birds. We had excellent looks at Gartered

and Whooping Motmots as well as various tanagers and hummers.

Next stop was a nearby marina which was teeming with birds including nesting Snail Kites, Greater Anis, a Crane Hawk, and a Striated Heron.

After lunch and a siesta at the Canopy Tower, we spent the afternoon at Summit Ponds where we had many, many amazing birds including seven Boat-billed Herons, Amazon Kingfisher, a White-necked Puffbird posing in a tree, a Gray Cowled Wood-Rail mother and babies crossing the road, a Slaty-tailed Trogon, and a Jet Antbird. A Common Black Hawk sat sentry at the end of the road both on our way in and out. Another truly satisfying day.









DAY 10: SEPT. 2

Today was our last full day of birding. Back to Pipeline Road again. Had a Bat Falcon perched on our way in. Carlos heard a Gray-headed Tanager so we stopped to look for it. You know you've got a good bird by the number of "oh my Gods" Carlos says.

Army ants had attracted a bunch of birds, and we were standing slightly above them watching all the action. We had been hearing Greater Tinamou for the past two weeks, but now two were out in the open, chasing each other around, sitting and posing for us. At one point I saw a Tinamou grab a grasshopper from a Bicolored Antbird. Continuing on down Pipeline Road, we heard a Collared Forest-Falcon. While trying to find that, one of our group members, Carter Crouch, located a perched Tiny Hawk (more "oh my Gods" from Carlos).

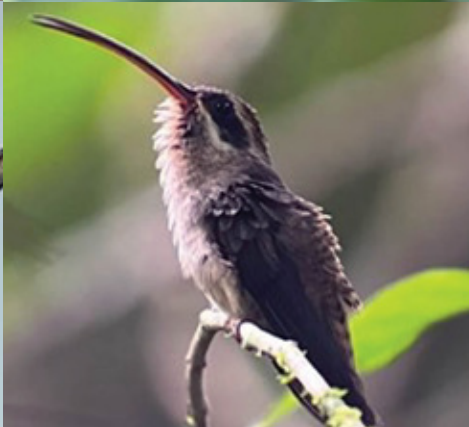
In the afternoon we headed to the Miraflores Locks at the Panama Canal where we watched an Imax documentary about the history of the canal, then we watched a ship pass through one of the locks and scanned the area for birds.

Last night at dinner I told Carlos how great the food was and how I'd like to take some of the sausage and have it for breakfast. Lo and behold, a special sausage plate magically appeared for me for breakfast.

Everyone associated with the Canopy Family pays attention to the finest detail to make sure all guests are happy.

I highly recommend everyone sign up for next year's trip. Same itinerary. August 26-September 4, 2024. PM me if you're interested.

Thanks for reading,  
Panama Sue







## ETHEL MARIE KUTAC, 1926-2021

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*By Jane Tillman*

Ethel Kutac was a long-time member of the Texas Ornithological Society and a regular fixture at TOS meetings, often hitching a ride with another long-time TOS member Georgina Schwartz. She loved her annual visits with friends to the High Island sanctuaries, enjoying the hotspots from Sabine Woods to Galveston.

Ethel was a native Texan, born and raised in Yoakum, along with her three siblings. When she graduated from high school and the Baldwin Business College she moved to Corpus Christi where she worked as a secretary for the Robert Driscoll Hotel. At age 18 Ethel received some money after her father's death, which allowed her to further her education. She attended A&I in Kingsville and then the University of Texas at Austin, where she received a B.S. in Home Economics. With her baccalaureate degree in hand she became an elementary school teacher in Schulenburg for a couple of years. Then Ethel got the travel bug and worked for the Department of Defense for five years, in Okinawa, England, Germany, Spain and France. Upon returning to the United States, she received a Master's Degree in Counseling and Guidance from the then Southwest Texas State University. She became an Early Childhood Training Specialist for UT Austin, and after that spent the rest of her working life in various counseling positions at the Austin Independent School District.

After retirement in 1989, Ethel reinvented herself. She became an enthusiastic bird watcher with mentoring provided by her beloved brother, Ed Kutac, who was a well-known Austin birder. Her birding passion took her to Russia, China, the Czech Repub-

lic, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Costa Rica, Ireland, South America and India. She birded regularly with her Wednesday group of friends. Whenever her birding interfered with Sunday Mass, Ethel said she attended the lovely "cathedral of nature" instead.

Ethel balanced out her birding with other interests including volunteering at many cultural venues in Austin as an usher, as well as for Westcave Preserve and the Democratic Party. (She was a self-described Yellow Dog Democrat, pacifist, and fiscal moderate who believed in Civil Rights and the importance of education.) Ethel served on the Bird Records Committee for Travis Audubon in the years before eBird became the database for sightings.

Ethel was a great role model for aging independently and living with zest. She stayed engaged and interested in her extended family, her friends, her church, travel, the Lady Longhorns, politics, world events and birds. She was fun and a great conversationalist—sharp as a tack until the end. Ethel rarely talked about her aches and pains, even as she became frail. She did complain that doctors' appointments were getting in the way of her birding though.

Ethel slowed down a bit with age, and loved to sit and rest a while. When TOS member Frances Cerbins took Ethel to see the first phase of the accessible trail at Travis Audubon's Blair Woods Preserve, she remembers Ethel saying "You better put benches along the way, especially for the uphill parts." Perhaps a tiny part of her generous bequest to the Texas Ornithological Society could be a well-placed memorial bench, at Hooks or Sabine Woods to allow birders to enjoy the cathedral of nature and celebrate Ethel's generosity.





Ethel with two of the Wednesday group birding friends, Terry Banks (L) and Ingrid Huskey (R).



Ethel close up showing her joie de vivre!

Photo by Terry Banks



Ethel participated in many Christmas Bird Counts through the years. Here she is in the red hat with Dan Callaway's birding team in 2013.



Ethel with her two sisters Jo (left) and Evelyn (right) (I was unable to get a date for this but they all look so young!)



# MEMORIES OF ETHEL FROM TRAVIS AUDUBON MEMBERS

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## **Dan Callaway**

I met Ethel in the early 90's. I had joined Travis Audubon with my son, Scott, who was working on his Bird Study merit badge on his way to attain the rank of Eagle Scout. I became a member of the bird records committee assisting Ed Kutac, his sister Ethel, and other early birder participants. When Ed left Austin, Ethel hosted those monthly events. I'll always remember her special baked cookies she served.

During the 90's I took a day off from work on occasion to join the weekly bird group. In 1994, Lawrence Buford took over from Ed and changed from Thursday to Wednesday. Ethel was a major part of the group, always needing a breakfast taco to begin the day. Her final outing was Friday, July 2nd, 2021, to Taylor which included BBQ for lunch.

Ethel volunteered at Westcave Preserve. She helped organize the Christmas Bird Count and served with me as a coordinator for ten years beginning January 3rd, 2004. She helped arrange for participants to lead the many areas of the count circle. And she always managed to find the perfect restaurant for the countdown.

For several years she hosted a group of birders at a family home in Galveston the last week of April which coincided with bird migrants in the area. She always knew the best restaurants for seafood.

Ethel was a world traveling birder. She enlightened us all upon her return. She had a strong will and character and didn't mind speaking her opinion on various matters. She never let her failing health deter her from one of her favorite passions. Ethel was one birder we'll never forget.

## **Anne Donovan**

My favorite memories of Ethel are from the Wednesday morning birding outings. There was never a dull moment when Ethel was there.

When the Wednesday group came to our ranch, the walking was a little rugged for Ethel. She eagerly talked John into taking her around in the Ranger. They usually returned for lunch with tales of birds that the rest of us never saw.

Ethel was never shy about asking the men in the group to help her into whatever vehicle was going where she needed to go. She enjoyed knowing that they all loved to come to the aid of a damsel in distress.

Ethel added good ideas and fun to any group she joined. We will miss her but enjoy remembering the fun she brought to us.

## **From Deb Wallace, San Antonio Formerly a very active Travis Audubon field trip leader.**

Wednesday birding on a slow day:

We all meet and set out.

We pile out of the cars at the first sound.

We find a few birds and keep looking, hoping for the best.

Folks start chatting. A few of us start giving "maybe we should move on" eyebrow raises to each other.

Ethel: Aren't we done here yet? We're burning daylight! Let's go!

Always count on Ethel to keep the group moving!

Ethel loved to eat at Donn's BBQ on FM 969 before birding.

She also loved Lee (Wallace). He was her favorite personal stability device and if she really wanted to see a bird, she called him to find it for her.

We will miss her.

## **From Lee Wallace – formerly of Austin, now San Antonio. Formerly a very active Travis Audubon field trip leader.**

We met Ethel about five years ago when we started going birding with the Wednesday group. She was a lot of fun! She was always so interested in what we had been doing, even

though it was only a week since we had seen her last. The thing I will always remember was how we worked to get her on the birds. Deb would set up her scope low for Ethel and we would start to work. Sometimes she would take pity on us and say “ Oh yes, I see it”, but you knew she did not. You could always tell when she did. The excitement in her voice and the way she would linger at the scope appreciating the bird. The group would all

cheer. I also remember the TOS meeting in Alpine where she came up and told me about the Western Screech Owl that she had seen and how some in the group had not.

I believe this picture was taken at Reimer’s Ranch. We had walked about as far as Ethel was willing and she flagged down this young man to give her a ride back. She really enjoyed the ride.



**Ethel hitching a ride at Reimers Ranch in Austin, at the end of a birding trip. Photo by Lee Wallace**

### **Frances Cerbins, Travis Audubon and TOS member**

Ethel was a force in nature. She was a world traveler, a teacher, a devout Catholic, a yellow dog Democrat, an avid reader, a volunteer, a Kutac legend, and a BIRDER! I first met Ethel in 2006. I lived close to her so had the honor to give her rides to TAS events and some of her Wednesday Birding group trips. Every trip was an education and adventure! I miss her every time I pass her street; I miss her wonderful laugh and strong opinions!

### **Terri Siegenthaler**

My offering:

I was a fan of Ethel Kutac’s and though I didn’t have a lot of contact with Ethel, I cher-

ished the times I got to be with her. She was an exceptionally caring person, an avid birder, a passionate educator, an adventurous woman and refreshingly outspoken. I knew her to be a quick study of people with a gift to easily connect across many spectrums. She was so curious and loved hearing others’ stories. Her voice was strong, her interaction direct, her sense of humor fantastic, and her laugh contagious. I felt drawn to her right away, 20+ years ago.

I’ll share 2 moments that stick out among my Ethel memories that aren’t about birding:

1. On a cold evening in December with a chance of precipitation, I showed up for the Travis Audubon holiday party and



silent auction on 45th Street (can't remember the church name) to help with set-up for the event. Ethel was already there setting out the auction items. We chatted and caught up with each other while working, and I mentioned that I had made a very expensive mistake at a well-known social service organization's silent auction once. Ethel turned to face me and said "Oh tell me!" I shared that I thought I had read the large gala crowd well and sensed a lot of money in the room. Many people kept filing past the bid sheets and bids were quickly increasing on many high-value items. I wanted to participate and not just walk through the line so I added my bid to a 6-night hotel stay for two in Hawaii, assuming I'd be out bid. Well I wasn't! And I ended up giving that organization a huge donation that night for the Hawaii item I couldn't afford to use at the time because it didn't include airfare. I told Ethel I learned my lesson. She laughed and laughed. And then she said "Let me tell you, I learned my lesson too!" and she told me that she made an even bigger mistake. At a previous TAS silent auction when she was setting out the items with bid sheets, she went through and put her name on EVERY bid sheet to get the bidding started, and not just at the recommended starting bid. On that night, it was cold and icy, and hardly anyone came to the event because of how treacherous the roads were. Much to her embarrassment, she had to shell out a lot of money for nearly all the items! She said, "I love Travis Audubon and in the end I didn't mind giving them all that money, but I'll NEVER do that again!" We both had fun laughing about those silent auction experiences.

2. I attended an education committee meeting at Westcave Preserve in 2006. Ethel had been on the committee for

some time, and I was new to the committee and in the midst of planning to launch a residential nature-immersion camp for kids from low-income families. I had been working for the Shield Ranch for a few years and we were collaborating with Westcave Preserve to help us develop nature education programming, and with El Buen Samaritano Episcopal Mission to identify families to serve. Linda Wofford was the chair of the Westcave Education Committee at the time and had put our camp on the agenda to share about. She started her report and then looked at me and said "Terri, you should be talking about the camp". So I picked up where Linda left off and shared about various aspects of the planning process and what we were envisioning. When I got to the part about what the campers would sleep in, and that we had some debate on our planning team about whether the kids should be in screened cabins or tents, I heard Ethel mumbling about something. I paused and said "Ethel?" And she very pointedly said, in her strong and direct voice, "In tents of course! It's a nature-immersion camp. The kids need to be in tents!" I loved that she shared that with such force. That's what I thought too, and when I shared her comment with others on the planning committee, we all agreed that we needed to start out that way and see how it goes. Soon after that meeting the camp was named El Ranchito, and for 15 years the 4th through 12th grade campers have stayed in tents on the Shield Ranch. Ethel had such a depth of professional and personal experience with kids and adults of all ages, at nature camps and exploring the outdoors. She knew. And she inspired us over and over.

### **Georgina Schwartz, TOS member**

Ethel was my roommate for several Texas Ornithological society meetings. Mostly she rode with Jane Tillman and roomed with me.

However, the year that TOS went to Amarillo, she rode with me as well. I enjoyed the company of some of her family in Amarillo and I appreciated her low key style of traveling. I can hardly believe that she will not be calling me up on some Sunday afternoon any more. I was so glad to read her obituary. It was full of things I did not know about Ethel. It seems like the end of an era with Ethel gone.

### **Jane Tillman, TOS and Travis Audubon member**

I can't say when I first met Ethel, but thanks to eBird.org I know that she accompanied my husband, Mark, and me to the Davis Mountains back in August 2010 on a Texas Ornithological Society trip. Ethel shared several birding adventures and Christmas Bird Counts with us over the years. When you spend long days together and in the field you get to know someone. Ethel was always fun and easy company. (It never ceased to amaze me how compactly she traveled – just three tiny bags at most - not even a suitcase. I guess she learned that skill with all her overseas travels earlier in life.)

One of the more memorable trips that Ethel and I took was to chase a rare Collared Plover down near Raymondville, TX in August 2014. I picked up Ethel, we made the 4.5 hour drive (probably with a stop for coffee as Ethel was never far from a cup), and set up on a levee overlooking a dried playa in late afternoon. The temp was 103 degrees when we arrived, and it was windy – Ethel and her chair almost blew over. The plover was not easy to see, and I was not that talented in getting the scope focused on it at Ethel's seated level. Thankfully, up walked Eric Carpenter who took charge and got her on the bird. (Later she always called him, "such a nice young man.") The back story was that Ethel attended a Texas Ornithological Society meeting near Uvalde several years prior in May, 1992. Her field trip leader asked the group if they wanted to make a side trip to the Uvalde Fish Hatchery to see the first U.S. record of Collared Plover, and one woman said "I believe I'd like to get back

to the hotel." That did not sit well with Ethel, and I am glad she finally got to see one. Before we went to the hotel we had to go find a beer for her to celebrate. Ethel liked her beer.

During COVID I did weekly grocery shopping for Ethel at HEB and often visited afterwards. It was a pleasure to talk of mundane things like good recipes, good foods, happenings in our families, movies, and current events. Ethel had interests in so many things, and it never flagged. She could talk about the Lady Longhorns, UT football and baseball, recent books, what was right or wrong about politics and politicians, etc. I loved it when she'd lower her voice and say a little more slowly "in My Opinion."

Religion was very important to her, but whenever Ethel had to miss Sunday Mass, due to a birding weekend, she said she was thinking of the divine out in the Cathedral of Nature. I always liked that expression.

It tickled me that Ethel had such a network of friends, who each helped her in various ways – someone did her Randall's and Walgreen runs, others took her to various appointments, someone brought her newspaper up to her home, someone brought the trash cans up from the curb, and others helped with plant watering, changing filters, etc. She never overworked any one of us, whether by accident or design.

Those of us who knew Ethel know how she could squeeze a penny. Stretch leftovers from restaurants into 2 or 3 meals, always buy the least expensive brand of x, y or z unless you have a really good reason for the higher priced item, and don't take the toll road when regular roads just take a little bit longer. These economies were part of her game in life, and they allowed her to travel well in to her 80s and support charities she loved. What's not to like about that?

It was a privilege to know Ethel. She knew how to live life fully.



# RAYMON SAMUEL LITTLE, 1923-2024



Noted birder residing in Corpus Christi, Rockport, and Portland, Texas, Ray passed away on April 3, 2024. He was born in Wilmer, Texas, on September 24, 1923. He was 100 years old.

He graduated from Wilmer-Hutchins High School in 1940, and went on to Texas A&M, that was cut short by World War II. When the war started, Ray began working at his uncle's

shipyard in Savannah, Georgia. He chose to join the United States Navy in November 1943, and began active duty as a Corpsman in January of 1944. From there, he was shipped out to the Philippines, and was on Okinawa territory during the Easter Day invasion, where he and four others were captured for a day and later rescued by United States Marines. Ray was honorably discharged in May of 1946.

Ray married his beloved wife, Margie Cheek Little, on February 14, 1947. He worked several jobs including the beginning days of Owens Sausage. Ray made a career of sales to hospital laboratories for Scientific Products, which later became Baxter Healthcare. He finished his career with Curtis Mathes Scientific.

After retiring, Ray worked for many years as the bird guide on the Wharf Cat for their Whooping Crane trips in winters when it was harbored in Rockport, Texas. This fit along side his birding hobby, which he and his family were passionate. He also maintained nature preserves for Corpus Christi Audubon Outdoor Club and Aransas First. Ray was also a proud Mason out of Lancaster, Texas.

## SEARCHING FOR COLOR BANDED CLAY-COLORED THRUSHES!

This is a photo John Brush took last year of a Clay-colored Thrush at Quinta Mazatlan, nicely showing the color-bands we have been placing on the birds for a few years now. We would call this one Green/Red left and Green/Silver right ( a few birds have the silver numbered band on the left leg, but in the vast majority it is on the right leg). Our birds have mainly been seen near banding locations in Edinburg and McAllen (especially Quinta), but some thrushes have been resighted miles from where they were banded.

So far it looks like the thrushes are very mobile, while the Green Jays (which we are also color-banding) have more site fidelity. I know there are still quite a few birders in the Valley now, so



please let us know if you see one of our color-banded Clay-colored Thrushes or Green Jays. Photos are great, or you may get a good look through your binoculars. You can send sightings to [colorbandingrgv@gmail.com](mailto:colorbandingrgv@gmail.com). Thanks and your help will be greatly appreciated!

# LYNN ARTHUR DELVIN, 1952-2024

## ART CONTRIBUTOR GREATLY MISSED

Lynn Arthur Delvin (1952-2024) was a Michigan native (Grand Rapids area) and graduate of the BFA arts program at Western Michigan University. He developed an interest in birds and particularly owls at an early age. Books that include his work include the

*Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas* (edition 1), *Los Buhos Neotropicales/Neitropical Owls* as well as various magazines including *Texas Birds Annual* and the *Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society* (frontispieces). His art can often be viewed as art shows, including ARTPRIZE, in southern Michigan.



From *Los Buhos Neotropicales: Diversidad y Conservación*



2018 *Texas Birds Annual* Cover



Frontispiece BTOS 2015  
56



Frontispiece BTOS 2016  
TEXAS BIRDS ANNUAL 2018



# DON SCHAEZLER, 1944-2024

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Donald "Don" Joseph Schaezler, beloved husband, father, grandfather, uncle, and friend, passed away peacefully on March 16, 2024 at 80 years old, surrounded by loved ones. He brought warmth and brightness to the lives of those he touched, and his loss is deeply felt.

Born on February 11, 1944 in San Antonio, Texas to Harold and Marguerite Schaezler, Don led a life filled with love, kindness, and steadfast dedication to his family, friends, and community. Renowned for his kindness, generosity, knowledge, intelligence, integrity, and caring nature, he left an everlasting impression on the lives of many.

Don had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and pursued his education with passion, first graduating valedictorian from Alamo Heights High School in 1962, in a class that some claim as one of the smartest, then earning from Rice University a Bachelor of Arts Cum Laude in 1966, a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering in 1967, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Environmental Science and Engineering in 1971. He was a professional engineer in both Texas and New York, a certified industrial hygienist, and taught at Rice University, the University of Houston, and Texas A&M University. He utilized his skills and expertise to strive for excellence and share his wisdom, leaving an indelible mark on his industry and those with whom he worked.

Outside of his professional pursuits, Don cherished spending time with family and friends. He served many roles in people's lives, coach, teammate, professor, teacher, and mentor. In college he played varsity baseball and lightweight football and studied hard, often late into the night, taking breaks every hour to do chin-ups. He coached

baseball or soccer for each of his four sons. Favorite family events included camping throughout Texas with Big Bend being his favorite, hiking including on the old farm that eventually became Warbler Woods, canoeing Armand Bayou and elsewhere, and collecting fossils and Native American points. Often during camping trips or hikes, he would stop and share insight into the surroundings, whether it was a geological formation, unique plant species or history of the area. He enjoyed identifying and teaching others to identify plants, animals, rocks, and animal tracks. As an ordained minister, he presided over the marriage of his son Robert and his spouse Jennifer. As a grandfather, he taught kindness, shared his love of nature and the outdoors, inspired learning, read fun books, and played, including with the model train set from when he was a kid. He was a member of the Lion's Club and enjoyed playing bridge with friends. He started a men's Bible study, often held in his backyard, that was very important to him. He was a pillar of strength, offering guidance, support, spirituality, and love to all who sought it. His friendly presence brought joy and warmth to every gathering, and his laughter will echo in the hearts of those he leaves behind.

As an avid lover of nature with a passion for birding, Don co-founded, with Susan, Warbler Woods Bird Sanctuary in Cibolo, Texas where he shared his love of nature with many. Warbler Woods has grown to be a renowned birding location with close to 300 bird species sighted and over 13 thousand checklists. He and Susan were awarded the Texas Land Steward award in 2011 for their work at Warbler Woods. He worked hard creating what Warbler Woods is today, and overcame obstacles, including a wild boar attack at the age of 74. He approached each day with optimism and grace, inspiring others to do the same.

Don's legacy of love, compassion, and integrity will live on in the hearts of his family, friends, and colleagues. He leaves behind his loving spouse of 57 years, Susan Schaezler, four sons and their spouses, David and Esther Schaezler, Michael and Vivian Schaezler, Robert and Jennifer Schaezler, Ryan and Brittany Schaezler, seven grandchildren, Ethan Schaezler, Brendan Schaezler, Allan Schaezler, Austin Schaezler, Michaela Schaezler, Adam Cantrelle, Averi Quintanilla, his sister, Margie Bonnes, and his nephews, Scott Carlin, and Gary

Carlin, who will all continue to honor his memory through the values he instilled in them. His beloved dogs, Ninja and Kali, miss him greatly.

Though his physical presence may no longer grace this earth, Don's spirit will forever remain a guiding light, shining brightly in the memories of all who were blessed to know him.

Forever remembered, forever cherished, Don will live on in the hearts of all who were touched by his boundless love and kindness.

Rest in peace, dear Don. You are deeply missed. Your spirit will continue to inspire us all.

### *A brief remembrance for Don Schaezler....*

TOS lost a good friend recently. Don Schaezler passed away peacefully at the age of 80

in the presence of family on March 16, 2024. Don was devoted to his wife Susan's passion for Warbler Woods. I think Don designed and installed the water features at Warbler Woods - he was the brains and the brawn. And he was remarkably generous with his time and attention. I recall one of my first visits to Warbler Woods and Don offered to drive me all over the place in their golf cart. I found myself thinking "he hardly knows me!" But Don was like that. He was also keenly interested in nature, and he often identified plants that I was unfamiliar with. I know that Susan will carry on at Warbler Woods, but I know she will miss Don terribly. We all will. He was a great friend.

Sincerely,

Byron Stone, President TOS





# TEXAS BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE (TBRC)REPORT

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Below is a summary of the records that the Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) has reviewed and come to a decision on since December 31st, 2023.

The MAJOR highlight of this batch is the first state record of TUFTED DUCK, YELLOW-FOOTED GULL, and GRAY-COLLARED BECARD. The addition of these 3 brings the state list to 669.

The Tufted Duck acceptance was based on a hunter-shot bird where feathers were gathered and isotope analysis was done on them at Rice University by Cin-Ty Lee. Based on the analysis, the duck appeared to have grown its feathers (current molt) in northern latitudes consistent with its winter range. It also determined that the bird was eating a plant-based diet, not eating a corn-based diet as might be expected for a captive bird.

Perhaps of most interest to Texas and ABA birders, the CATTLE TYRANT was NOT ACCEPTED due to questions about its pro-

enance. None of the TBRC Members claim to know how the bird arrived in Corpus Christi, but there was enough concern about this that led to the record being not accepted by a majority of members. In addition, it was discovered that the Cattle Tyrant had been present since mid-September, almost 2 months earlier than originally known.

## ACCEPTED (90):

2023-157 - Brant (1) 5 Dec 2023, Lubbock, Lubbock County

2024-13 - Brant (2) 9 Feb 2024, Lorenzo, Crosby County

2023-98 - Eurasian Wigeon (1) 20 Oct - 4 Nov 2023, Anahuac NWR, Chambers County

2023-109 - Eurasian Wigeon (1) 16 Nov 2023 - 17 Feb 2024, Lewis Lake, Burnet County

**2023-172 - Tufted Duck (1) 23 Jan 2021, near Snook, Burleson County**



Tufted Duck

Photo by Cameron McCoy

2023-99 - American Flamingo (3) 21 Oct  
- 14 Dec 2023, Port Aransas, Nueces County

2023-127 - American Flamingo (2) 22  
Oct - 11 Nov 2023, Laguna Atascosa, Cam-  
eron County

2023-134 - Ruddy Ground Dove (1) 17  
Nov 2023, Buffalo Springs Lake, Lubbock,  
Lubbock County

2024-38 - Mexican Violetear (1) 7-15 Apr  
2024, South Padre Island, Cameron County

2023-142 - White-eared Hummingbird  
(1) 4-10 Jul 2023, west of Fort Davis, Jeff  
Davis County

2023-159 - Common Crane (1) 17-18  
Dec 2023, Dimmit, Castro County

2023-93 - Bar-tailed Godwit (1) 5 Oct  
2023 - 20 Feb 2024, Portland/Sunset Lake,  
Nueces/San Patricio County

2023-160 - Purple Sandpiper (1) 17-19  
Dec 2023, Sylvan Beach, La Porte, Harris/  
Chambers County

2023-130 - Red Phalarope (1) 13 Oct  
2023, west of Hereford, Deaf Smith County

2023-131 - Red Phalarope (1) 11 Nov  
2023, Lake Somerville, Washington County

**2023-124 - Yellow-footed Gull (1) 2  
Nov 2023 - 30 Jan 2024, Southeast Park,  
Amarillo, Randall County**

2024-15 - Great Black-backed Gull (1) 5  
Feb 2024, Ash Lake, Harris County



Yellow-footed Gull.

Photo by Janice Allen



2024-17 - Great Black-backed Gull (1) 24 Feb 2024, Old River/Channelview, Harris County

2023-88 - Brown Noddy (1) 1-25 Oct 2023, Port Aransas jetty, Nueces County

2023-137 - Red-billed Tropicbird (1) 27 Oct 2023, South Padre Island, Cameron County

2023-101 - Wedge-tailed Shearwater (1) 23 Oct 2023, ~34 miles southeast of Mustang Island, Nueces County

2023-138 - Great Shearwater (1) 25 Oct 2023, Mustang Island, Nueces County

2023-139 - Great Shearwater (1) 26 Oct 2023, Mustang Island, Nueces County

2023-103 - Great Shearwater (1) 27 Oct 2023, along beach, south of Port Aransas, Nueces County

2023-102 - Great Shearwater (1) 27 Oct 2023, along beach, south of Port Aransas, Nueces County

2023-136 - Manx Shearwater (1) 26 Oct 2023, Mustang Island, Nueces County

2024-11 - Red-footed Booby (1) 2 Feb 2024, ~198 nautical miles southeast of Brazos River mouth, Brazoria County

2023-123 - Bare-throated Tiger-Heron (1) 12 Nov 2023 - 18 Mar 2024, Santa Margarita Ranch & Salineno, Starr County

2024-10 - Crane Hawk (1) 29 Jan - 11 Mar 2024, Salineno, Starr County

2023-107 - Roadside Hawk (1) 7 Nov 2023 - 23 Mar 2024, Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County

2023-154 - Roadside Hawk (1) 9 Nov - 28 Dec 2023, Bentsen SP, Hidalgo County

2023-120 - Roadside Hawk (1) 7 Dec 2023, La Gloria tract of LRGV NWR, Cameron County

2024-04 - Roadside Hawk (1) 13 Jan - 15 Mar 2024, south of Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County

2024-18 - Roadside Hawk (1) 4 Mar 2024, south of Lasara, Willacy County

2022-67 - Short-tailed Hawk (1-2) 2 Sep - 19 Oct 2022, Bentsen-Rio Grande SP, Hidalgo County

2023-144 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 28 Jul 2023, Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis County

2024-34 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 23 Mar 2024, north of Leakey, Real County

2024-35 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 29 Mar 2024, Santa Margarita Ranch, Starr County

2024-36 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 3 Apr 2024, Santa Margarita Ranch, Starr County

2024-26 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 5 Apr 2024, west of Cedar Park, Travis County

2022-36 - Northern Saw-whet Owl (1) 13 May - 23 Oct 2022, west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis County

**2023-112 - Gray-collared Becard (1) 25 Nov 2023 - 23 Mar 2024, Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County**

2021-111 - Rose-throated Becard (1-2) 13 Nov 2021 - 16 Apr 2022, Bentsen-Rio Grande SP, Hidalgo County

2023-169 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 13 May 2022, National Butterfly Center, Mission, Hidalgo County

2023-152 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 8 Nov 2022 - 9 Mar 2023, Bentsen-Rio Grande SP, Hidalgo County

2023-125 - Rose-throated Becard (2) 12 Nov 2022, Salineno, Starr County

2023-146 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 27 Dec 2022, Santa Ana NWR, Hidalgo County

2023-147 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 7 Apr 2023, Santa Ana NWR, Hidalgo County

2023-150 - Rose-throated Becard (1) 3 Sep 2023, National Butterfly Center, Mission, Hidalgo County

2024-21 - Rose-throated Becard (2) 22 Mar 2024, Lincoln Park, Brownsville, Cameron County

2023-163 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1-4) 9 Nov 2023 - 16 Mar 2024, Santa Margarita Ranch, Starr County



**Gray-collared Becard.**

Photo by Jeff Sexton

2023-158 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 22 Nov - 9 Dec 2023, Lake Alice, Jim Wells County

2023-129 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1-2) 23 Nov 2023 - 9 Feb 2024, Santa Ana NWR, Hidalgo County

2023-156 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 24-25 Nov 2023, National Butterfly Center, Mission, Hidalgo County

2023-149 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 25 Nov 2023 - 24 Mar 2024, Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County

2023-170 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 15 Dec 2023 - 16 Mar 2024, Salineno, Starr County

2023-171 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 17 Dec 2023 - 18 Feb 2024, Arroyo Colorado Unit, Las Palomas WMA, Cameron County

2024-05 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 13-14 Jan 2024, La Sal Veija, Willacy County

2024-25 - Dusky-capped Flycatcher (lawrence's) (1) 5 Feb 2024, west of Santa Maria, Hidalgo County

2023-106 - Nutting's Flycatcher (1-2) 22 Oct - 28 Dec 2023, Santa Elena Canyon, Brewster County

2022-90 - Fork-tailed Flycatcher (1) 15 Oct - 13 Nov 2022, San Benito Wetlands, Cameron County

2023-167 - Fork-tailed Flycatcher (1) 21-22 Dec 2022, north of Bayview, Cameron County

2023-100 - Greater Pewee (1) 19 Oct 2023 - 27 Mar 2024, Bear Creek Park, Houston, Harris County

2023-110 - Greater Pewee (1) 18 Nov 2023, El Paso, El Paso County

2023-161 - Greater Pewee (1) 14-26 Dec 2023, Canyon Lake, Comal County

2024-01 - Greater Pewee (1) 3 Jan 2024, Jeronimo Banco tract of LRGV NWR, Cameron County



2023-143 - Black-whiskered Vireo (1) 26 Jun 2023, High Island, Galveston County  
 2023-132 - Varied Thrush (1) 18 Nov 2023, Tobe Canyon, Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis County  
 2023-133 - Varied Thrush (1) 24 Nov 2023, Dell City, Hudspeth County  
 2024-12 - Varied Thrush (1) 6 Feb - 24 Mar 2024, Amarillo, Randall County  
 2023-135 - Evening Grosbeak (1) 20-21 Nov 2023, Duncanville, Dallas County  
 2023-111 - Pine Grosbeak (1) 25 Nov 2023 - 8 Jan 2024, Lake Palo Duro, Hansford County  
 2023-126 - Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 11 Dec 2023 - 13 Jan 2024, Palo Duro Canyon, Randall County  
 2024-07 - Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 14 Jan - 28 Feb 2024, McKinney, Collin County  
 2024-27 - Golden-crowned Sparrow (1) 7 Apr 2024, South Llano River SP, Kimble County  
 2023-104 - Golden-crowned Warbler (1) 13 Sep 2023 - 23 Mar 2024, Hugh Ramsey Park, Harlingen, Cameron County  
 2023-165 - Golden-crowned Warbler (1) 16 Sep 2023 - 1 Mar 2024, Frontera, Hidalgo County  
 2023-168 - Golden-crowned Warbler (1) 26 Nov 2023, Santa Margarita Ranch, Starr County  
 2023-155 - Golden-crowned Warbler (1) 26 Nov 2023, Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County  
 2023-151 - Golden-crowned Warbler (1) 24 Dec 2023 - 14 Jan 2024, Slaughter Park, Laredo, Webb County  
 2024-37 - Flame-colored Tanager (1) 12 Apr 2024, Quinta Mazatlan, Hidalgo County  
 2023-67 - Crimson-collared Grosbeak (1) 14 May 2023, Sabal Palm, Cameron County  
 2023-166 - Crimson-collared Grosbeak (1) 30 Dec 2023 - 17 Apr 2024, Estero Llano Grande SP, Hidalgo County

2020-122 - Blue Bunting (1-2) 3 Dec 2020 - 8 Feb 2021, Bentsen-Rio Grande SP, Hidalgo County  
 2021-44 - Blue Bunting (1) 27 Feb - 4 Apr 2021, Frontera, Hidalgo County  
 2023-148 - Blue Bunting (1) 1-3 Mar 2023, Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County  
 2023-153 - Blue Bunting (1) 27 Oct - 6 Nov 2023, Estero Llano Grande SP, Hidalgo County  
 2023-108 - Blue Bunting (1) 7-9 Nov 2023, Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron County  
 2024-06 - Blue Bunting (1) 14 Jan - 12 Mar 2024, San Antonio, Bexar County  
 2024-16 - Blue Bunting (1) 19-25 Feb 2024, Laguna Atascosa NWR, Cameron County

**NOT ACCEPTED (9):**

2024-14 - Brant (1) 22 Jan 2024, Lubbock, Lubbock County  
 2024-24 - Garganey (1) 10 Feb 2024, Falcon State Park, Starr County  
 2024-23 - Slaty-backed Gull (1) 12 Feb 2024, Ash Lake, Harris/Chambers County  
 2023-77 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 6 Apr 2023, Del Rio, Val Verde County  
 2024-30 - Short-tailed Hawk (1) 25 Apr 2024, west of Liberty Hill, Williamson County  
 2023-105 - Cattle Tyrant (1) 18 Sep - 4 May 2024, Corpus Christi, Nueces County  
 2023-97 - White-rumped Swallow (1) 3 Apr 2022, South Padre Island, Cameron County  
 2023-113 - Rufous-capped Warbler (1) 16 Aug 2023, Salineno, Starr County  
 2023-145 - Blue Bunting (1) 13 Apr 2023, Estero Llano Grande SP, Hidalgo County

*[[Note: The number in parenthesis following the species name is the number of individuals of that species involved in the record.]]*

A number of factors may contribute to a record being denied acceptance. It is quite un-

common for a record to not be accepted due to a bird being obviously misidentified. More commonly, a record is not accepted because the material submitted was incomplete, insufficient, superficial, or just too vague to properly document the reported occurrence while eliminating all other similar species. Also, written documentation or descriptions prepared entirely from memory weeks, months, or years after a sighting are seldom voted on favorably. It is important that the simple act of not accepting a particular record should by no means indicate that the TBRC or any of its members feel the record did not occur as reported. The non-acceptance of any record simply reflects the opinion of the TBRC that the documentation, as submitted, did not

meet the rigorous standards appropriate for adding data to the formal historical record.

The TBRC makes every effort to be as fair and objective as possible regarding each record. If the committee is unsure about any particular record, it prefers to err on the conservative side and not accept a good record rather than validate a bad one. All records, whether accepted or not, remain on file and can be re-submitted to the committee if additional substantive material is presented.

If you have any questions on any of these results, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to submit documentation to the TBRC - it is very much appreciated.



The Cattle Tyrant was NOT ACCEPTED due to questions about its provenance. None of the TBRC Members claim to know how the bird arrived in Corpus Christi, but there was enough concern about this that led to the record being not accepted by a majority of members. In addition, it was discovered that the Cattle Tyrant had been present since mid-September, almost 2 months earlier than originally.

Photo by Dan Jones.



# AN AMERICAN FLAMINGO (*PHOENICOPTERUS RUBER*)

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**By Joseph M. Hood**

A very uncommon bird in Texas (16 accepted Texas records by the Texas Bird Record Committee), continued at the wetlands at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center in Port Aransas, Texas on 5-23-2024.

There are six flamingo species in the world:

1. Greater flamingo, whose range includes parts of Africa, southern Europe and parts of south and southwest Asia.
2. Lesser Flamingo, whose range includes the Great Rift Valley of Africa to northwest India. This is the most numerous species of flamingo.
3. Chilean Flamingo, whose range includes temperate South America.
4. James's or Puna Flamingo, whose range includes the High Andes in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.
5. Andean Flamingo, whose range includes the High Andes in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.

6. American Flamingo, whose usual range includes the Caribbean islands, Caribbean Mexico, southern Florida, Belize, coastal Columbia, northern Brazil, Venezuela and the Galapagos Islands.

The name flamingo comes from Portuguese or Spanish “flamengo” (“flame-colored”), which in turn comes from Provençal “flamenc”—a combination of “flama” (“flame”) and a Germanic-like suffix “-ing”. The word may also have been influenced by the Spanish ethnonym “flamenco” (“Fleming” or “Flemish”). The name of the genus, *Phoenicopterus*, is from the Greek φοινικόπτερος *phoinikopteros*, lit. ‘crimson/red-feathered’. Other genera names include “*Phoeniconaias*”, which means “crimson/red water nymph (or naiad)”, and “*Phoenicoparrus*”, which means “crimson/red bird”.

Young flamingos hatch with grayish-red plumage, but adults range from light pink to bright red due to aqueous bacteria and beta-





carotene obtained from their food supply. A well-fed, healthy flamingo is more vibrantly colored and may be perceived as a more desirable mate; a white or pale flamingo, however, is usually unhealthy or malnourished. Captive flamingos are a notable exception; even if adequately nourished, they may turn a pale pink if they are not fed carotene at levels comparable to the wild.

When walking, a flamingo's legs may appear to bend backwards. This is due to the middle joint on their legs being the joint corresponding to the ankle instead of the joint corresponding to the knee. Flamingos have webbed feet that aid with swimming. They may stamp their feet in the mud to stir up food from the bottom.

Flamingos have fascinated humans for centuries. Human perceptions of and beliefs about flamingos have played interesting roles in cultures around the world.

- The Moche people of ancient Peru revered nature. They placed emphasis on animals, and often depicted flamingos in their art.
- The Ancient Egyptian god Set is depicted with a flamingo head in the Book of the Faiyum.
- Flamingos are the national bird of the Bahamas.
- Andean miners have killed flamingos for their fat, believing that it would cure tuberculosis.



# BIRD WATCHING THROUGH A RESEARCHER'S LENS

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**By Rebecca Bracken**  
**Conservation Research Director at the  
Gulf Coast Bird Observatory**

Many photographers are determined to capture the best possible photo, one in which a bird is perfectly placed to highlight its individual features against a background that doesn't distract from the bird's natural beauty. But researchers instead focus on the bird's legs, wings, neck, and/or head. This may seem like an odd practice, but there's a very particular reason we do so.

Much of the work ornithologists do through standardized research programs involves catching and banding the individuals of interest. We band birds for many reasons, but the primary reason is to know which bird we are watching at that exact moment. Being able to tell one bird from another allows us to evaluate many aspects of a bird's life, including: annual productivity (i.e., how many eggs a specific bird lays, if those eggs hatch, how many chicks fledged from that specific brood, etc.), movement patterns (i.e., how far the bird travels during the breeding and non-breeding season, how far that specific bird needs to travel to find food for itself and its chicks, is the bird faithful to the same breeding and wintering site each year, etc.), and longevity. By banding a bird in a unique way that allows us to know exactly who that bird is, we can determine who its mate is, evaluate its behaviors, and monitor its ability to breed successfully.

But it isn't as easy as just banding a bird. To be able to identify the bird in the field with either binoculars or a spotting scope, we must mark the bird in a specific way. We often place color bands in a set pattern that are unique to that bird, or we use a single color band with a unique alphanumeric code on it. However, there are times when identifying the bird in question remains difficult. Herein lies an example of the value of photography in research.

When Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's research team is out in the field, whether it be on a UTV on Sargent or Matagorda Beach, or on the boat near an island in West Galveston Bay, there are many times when we cannot see the alphanumeric code on a banded bird well enough with our binoculars alone. But having a tool such as a digital camera with a lens that zooms to 500mm or more allows us to really focus on the bird's legs and get the information that we need. This becomes even more important when we're staring at a colony of Black Skimmers. These birds nest in colonies of hundreds or even thousands at the sites we monitor, making it extremely difficult to scan through all the birds to look for banded individuals. By taking multiple pictures of the colony, specifically the legs of the colony, we can easily start to pick out banded individuals.

Photography has already played an important role this year during our Black Skimmer monitoring. Sadly, we had a colony of Black Skimmers abandon their normal nesting site in West Galveston Bay, and we were unsure where they went. By looking at the photographs taken at one of our other sites, we were able to determine that at least some of the West Galveston Black Skimmers moved to our other site. This information is crucial as we work to protect nesting waterbirds across the upper Texas coast. If we didn't have information recovered through banding and photographs, we wouldn't have any idea if the birds from that abandoned colony were able to find another site to nest this year. The loss of even one colony for this species, which is one of concern in the state of Texas, could have catastrophic consequences. The images of the banded birds gave us hope.

We would like to thank the Texas Ornithological Society for providing us with a grant to purchase a new camera, and for supporting Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's research



**Banded Snowy Plover**

programs. Our mission is to protect birds and their habitats around the Gulf of Mexico and beyond, a goal that is unachievable without the support of many other partners

and organizations. We are looking forward to collecting data with the new camera for many years to come.



TOS awards research grants each year to researchers and graduate students studying the birds of Texas. Previous grants have helped fund avian malaria research, Purple Martin research, Baird's and Grasshopper Sparrow's research, Black-crested Titmouse research, and Loggerhead Shrike research. To apply for a grant, contact [info@texasbirds.org](mailto:info@texasbirds.org) for more details.



# 2024 TOS BIRDING CLASSIC

CENTRAL TEXAS COAST ROUGHWINGS TEAMS:

1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE: TOS KRAZY KESTRELS

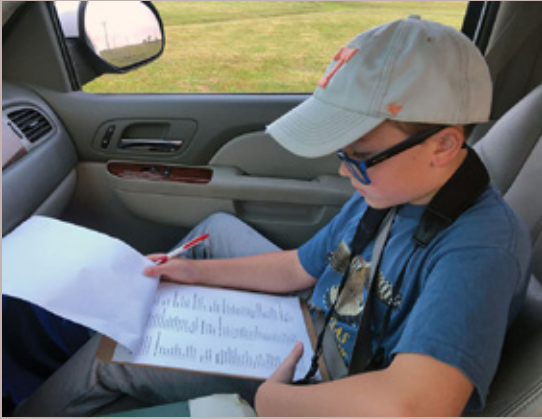


We had another fabulous day of migration and counting bird species! So many beautiful birds were seen again today. Highlights of our day: the Painted Bunting singing in a tree, baby ducks swimming with their mother, Fulvous Whistling Ducks, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, several Magnificent Frigatebirds soaring about the ferry boats, Cape May Warbler, a White-tailed Hawk and a Red-tailed hawk, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, the humongous alligator, a Coral Snake slithering away... just an incredible day to celebrate finding and identifying 108 species of birds + the Aplomado Falcons on their nesting platform.

—Martha McLeod

2<sup>ND</sup> PLACE (TIE): TOS CRAZY CUCKOOS





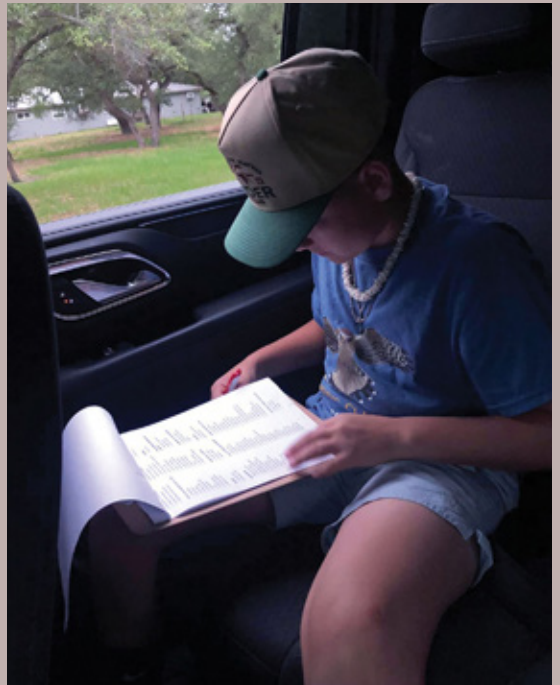
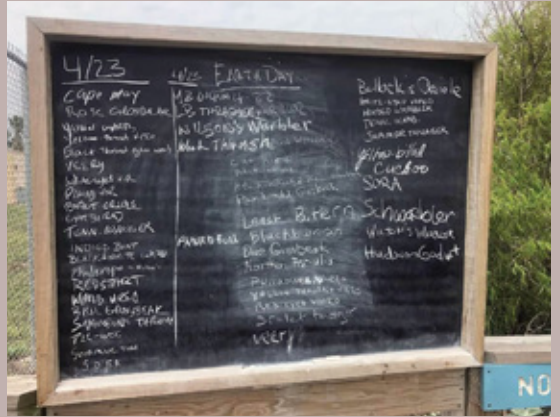
My 3rd/4th grade team of all boys who are all 1st year birders competed on a team named the TOS Crazy Cuckoos. We had another fabulous day of migration and counting bird species! So many beautiful birds were seen today.

Great birds seen today included Summer Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Baltimore Orioles, Magnificent Frigatebird, Gray Catbirds, American Oystercatcher, Chimney Swifts, Fulvous Whistling Ducks, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and an Eastern Bluebird.

—Martha McLeod.



2ND PLACE (TIE): TOS WHOOPIEST WHOOPING CRANES









WOW!! What a FANTASTIC day of birding we had. So many migrant species! The boys took some outstanding bird pictures today too. We ended with 92 different species of birds. So amazing!

Great birds seen included Summer Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Painted Buntings, Baltimore Orioles, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Gray Catbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Blue Grosbeaks, OH MY! –Martha McLeod.

**CENTRAL TEXAS COAST SUNRISE TO NOON TEAM:  
7<sup>TH</sup> PLACE: TOS WOBBLY WARBLERS**







Migration was WONDERFUL on our birding day and we ended with 85 species. We got 50 species in the Rockport area before heading over to Port Aransas. Great species seen included Baltimore Orioles, Orchard Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, Painted Buntings, and several species of warblers. A huge thank you to Texas Ornithological Society for sponsoring our team!

-Martha McLeod



**HUMAN-POWERED TEAM:  
3RD PLACE: TOS BIKING BUNTINGS**



Another mentor and I joined two Rockport-Fulton middle school students for a Human-Powered team this year. We biked and hiked for approximately 10 miles around Port Aransas. We began at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center where we found a beautiful Magnolia Warbler, Roseate Spoonbills, Wilson's Phalaropes, and a Magnificent Frigatebird flying over. Then we biked over to the wetlands area across from the post office where we found a Black-bellied Plover. Next, we biked to the jetties and beach front where we found Black Terns, Sandwich Terns, Royal Terns, and Least Terns. The tide was high and the waves were crashing higher on the beach.

It was fun watching the Sanderlings and Willets competing to eat the little bait fish trapped in the pools of water. Next, we headed to Paradise Pond where we found a Virginia Rail, a Sora, a Baltimore Oriole, a Green Heron, a Black-and-white Warbler, and a pair of Solitary Sandpipers. After a tasty lunch at San Juan, we rode our bikes through Charlie's Pasture and were excited to find a Painted Bunting singing, a Loggerhead Shrike, and a White-tailed Hawk. After logging down 73 species we called it a day. Thank you, TOS, for sponsoring another team of mine for the Classic!

—Martha McLeod

**UPPER TEXAS COAST GLIDERS TEAM:**

**1ST PLACE: TOS HAWKWARDS**



The TOS Hawkwards was a Glider, one a complete beginner, one intermediate, and one somewhat experienced, had a slow mosquito-plagued morning, but a lot more fun when we went to the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge after lunch, then Bolivar Peninsula, then the ferry to Galveston and added a quick stop at East Beach before it got dark. I challenged them to find and ID 50 species, they ended up with 66! Many thanks to TOS for sponsoring this team.

**UPPER TEXAS COAST ROUGHWINGS TEAMS:**

**1ST PLACE: TOS HAPPY HAWKS**





The TOS Happy Hawks had their competition day on Saturday April 20, 2024. They enjoyed a big day of birding that started at the University of Houston Clear Lake. They then visited Exploration Green Phase 1 (highlights were the Osprey and the Limpkin and her chick), EG Phase 4 (highlight was the Scissor-Tailed Kite), and Bay Area Park (Pileated Woodpecker) before driving down to Galveston Island for the afternoon. It was an exciting afternoon of birding with several “lifers” for everyone. Fulvous Whistling Duck, Summer Tanager, Scarlet Tanager, Western

Tanager, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Blue Grosbeak were all spotted at Lafitte’s Cove. Our birding guides were well used! When the eight hours of birding time were up, the children had 79 species on their list. The discussion in the car on the return trip was that American Crows and American Robins were missing from the list. It so easily could have been 80 species or more! Thank you to the Texas Ornithological Society for sponsoring this team.

–Rowena McDermid

## 2ND PLACE: TOS JUNIOR HAWKS



The TOS Junior Hawks had their birding day on Saturday, April 20, 2024. Parents and birding leaders Wendy Reistle and Andy Sipocz accompanied them around Phase 1

of Exploration Green, which is in the Clear Lake neighborhood of Houston. They saw (and heard!) plenty of Red-Winged Black-birds, as well as Cormorant sp., and Black Bellied Whistling Ducks. They were able to identify many species of Egret, Heron, and other shorebirds because they had seen them on previous visits to the park, but the Osprey was a special treat just for competition day. Total time birding = 2 hours, Total species = 25. Next year they want to join the “Big Kids” for a full day of birding! Many thanks to The Texas Ornithological Society for sponsoring this team.

–Rowena McDermid

**CENTRAL TEXAS COAST ROUGHWINGS:  
5TH PLACE: TOS EXPERT BIRDING CHIRPERS  
6TH PLACE: TOS OWLS  
8TH PLACE: TOS RAVENS**







On April 29th our Flour Bluff Elementary Bird Club was so lucky and grateful to be sponsored by TOS to compete in the Texas Birding Classic. The students were amazed at the giant cameras with telescopic lenses and passion people had for birding! After an exciting day of seeing tons of shore birds, rare warblers and even a flamingo the fire for nature and birding was lit! I can't thank our Master Naturalist volunteers (Chad Huckabee, Cindy Frank, Bill and Denise Beaman) as well as TOS and Shelly Plante for this wonderful opportunity!

–Nicole Biggerstaff

**CENTRAL TEXAS COAST SUNRISE TO NOON TEAM:  
8TH PLACE: OLSEN TOSPREYS**



CENTRAL TEXAS COAST BIG SIT! TEAM:  
4TH PLACE: TOS BLUE MERLINS



To members of TOS:

We are so grateful for your sponsorship of two youth birding teams here in Port Aransas. The TOSpreys were a Sunrise to noon team,

made up of three elementary students, one parent of birder, and myself. Justin Quintanilla, the Naturalist for the Port Aransas Preserve, was our driver. We were also spon-



sored for our Big Sit youth and adult team, the TOS Blue Merlins. This team was made up of our youth Birding class plus volunteer adult mentors.

Both teams had a great time. The TO-Spreys were especially excited by a mother Mottled duck and her six ducklings. In addition, we were gifted with close-up looks at a Least bittern, hanging on to a cattail stem right by the boardwalk at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center, and a Wilson's Phalarope, right below us at the boardwalk. We finished the morning with 83 species.

The TOS Blue Merlins (the Blue Marlin is our school mascot) had an enjoyable time,

also seeing mother duck with babies. We saw several raptors, including the White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, and Turkey Vulture. We also had a number of Roseate Spoonbills in their beautiful breeding plumage. A Magnificent Frigatebird flew over at the end of the day, bringing our count to 54 species.

Thank you for your commitment to youth birding. We couldn't have done it without you!

Sincerely,  
Julie Findley, youth birding volunteer  
Rae Mooney, Director of the Port Aransas Nature Preserve

### **PRAIRIES AND PINEYWOODS WEST SUNRISE TO NOON TEAMS:**

**7TH PLACE: TOS LINCOLN CENTER SPARROWS - LH**

**8TH PLACE: TOS LINCOLN CENTER SPARROWS - PS**





The TOS Lincoln Center Sparrows, teams LH and PS met at the Lincoln Recreation Center early on Saturday, April 20. Priscilla Solis led team PS, and I led team LH. We traveled together, ate together and went through the BioBlitz together, but kept our distance while actually birding. After loading

our lunches and drinks in the Lincoln Center van, we commenced our tournament day at 7:28 on the LRC outdoor basketball courts.

Team LH was treated to very cooperative Northern Mockingbirds and a Barn Swallow who made multiple passes, giving my kids time to see distinguishing features. We



added a few more species before making the call to load up and head to our first stop. The highlight of Lincoln Center birding for team PS was having both Common Grackle and Great-tailed Grackle in view and being able to work through the ID as a team

Our first stop was Gabbard Park for the nesting Green Herons and Yellow-crowned Night Herons. The kids on both teams loved seeing those birds! Team LH kids were particularly intrigued by the vocalizations of the green herons. Separately, we each picked up a few more species before boarding the bus to head to Lick Creek Park where we would finish our Prairies and Piney Woods West Sunrise to Noon tournament.

At Lick Creek Park team LH started off with good looks at a male Brown-headed Cowbird and a Tufted Titmouse that cooperatively spent some time out in the open. We also had both Black and Turkey Vultures, both species the kids had seen at the Lincoln Center, so they were pretty quick on the identification. A cooperative male Summer Tanager singing from a dead tree top and an Inca Dove at the Nature Center were highlights. The kids were able to use our field guide to figure out those species. Team PS also practiced using the field guide on Brown-headed cowbird, Tufted Titmouse and Inca Dove and were able to come together as a team and identify the birds.

We took a break in the middle of our Lick

Creek Park birding to visit the BioBlitz event that was happening at the park. The kids had a lot of fun at the interactive exhibit designed to teach about different shapes of bird bills. The local wildlife rehabilitator had brought in many baby birds of various species, and the kids were able to observe her assistant feeding them. She also had baby foxes, raccoons and a baby armadillo. Admittedly, it was a little hard pulling them away from the exhibits to get back to birding, but we did! We birded until about 11:30 when they started getting tired, hungry, and thirsty, so we made the call to head back to the van and pick up our sack lunches. After lunch, we went back to the BioBlitz and checked out the bird and herp tables. A highlight of the herp table was that one child, who had been very afraid of snakes when we arrived earned by observing the folks at the table handle a garter snake that snakes are not all bad. She actually gently touched the snake!

My personal highlight of the trip was at the very end when one of the girls on Team PS came up to me and said that if we did this again, would we please invite her? That made it all worth it! We may not have tallied great totals, but both teams won that Saturday. The children had a wonderful time, learned about our local wildlife, and in particular the local birds. Thank you very much for your sponsorship so the kids could have this experience!

– Linda Hale

**CENTRAL TEXAS COAST ROUGHWINGS TEAM:  
4TH PLACE: TOS PADRE ISLAND PENGUINS**





On May 11th, which was the Global Big [birding] Day, the Seashore Middle Academy 5th grade Junior Master Naturalist's Birding Team, the TOS-Padre Island Penguins, took

part in the 2024 Great Texas Birding Classic competition. Students competed in the Roughwings (13 and under) category. Led by Ms. Emma Mathis the six-member team visited three birding hot spots in Port Aransas and identified 54 species of birds! A few highlights were; Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and a very rare sighting of the Flame-Colored Tanager from Central America! The team's impressive birding etiquette and knowledge were praised by many experienced birders throughout the day.

The JMN Birding Team would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our chaperones David Jackson, Stephanie Nolte and Cindy Frank, our team sponsor Texas Ornithological Society, and the Audubon Outdoor Club of Corpus Christi for equipping the team with great Vortex binoculars! —Emma Mathis

*This was the ONLY team from the 2024 Birding Classic to spot the Flame-colored Tanager! Very impressive for it to have come from a first-timer youth team!! - Shelly>*

### HEART OF TEXAS WEST GLIDERS TEAM:

#### 1ST PLACE: TOS BIG SPRINGS 4H FLEDGELINGS





**HEART OF TEXAS EAST GLIDERS TEAM:  
1ST PLACE: SHRIKE 3! YOU'RE OUT! TOS**



LOWER TEXAS COAST ROUGHWINGS TEAM:  
1ST PLACE: TOS PADRE'S PURPLE GALLINULES







They had a great time! I was happily impressed with their improved birding skills!  
-Javi Gonzalez

## BOOK REVIEWS



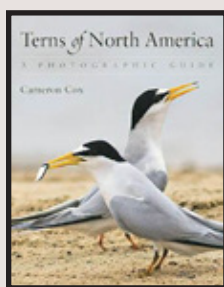
### **In a Class of Their Own: A Detailed Examination of Avian Forms and Functions.**

2023. Springer. Hardbound: 2506 pages in 3 volumes. Price: \$159.99 U.S.

**PUBLISHER'S SUMMARY:** With more than 10,000 species that vary in size, use diverse habitats that extend across latitudes and altitudes, consume a wide variety of

food items, differ in how they fly (or not), communicate, and reproduce, and have different life histories, birds exhibit remarkable variation in form (anatomy) and function (physiology). Our understanding of how natural selection has generated this variation as birds evolved and as different species adapted to their unique circumstances has grown considerably in recent years. In *In a Class of Their Own: A Detailed Examination of Avian Forms and Functions*, this variation is explained in great detail, beginning with an overview of avian evolution and continuing with information about the structure and function of the avian skeleton, muscles, and the various body systems. Other chapters focus on avian locomotion (including flight), migration, navigation, communication, energy balance and thermoregulation, and various aspects of avian reproduction, such as nests and nest building, clutch sizes, and parental care. *In a Class of Their Own: A Detailed Examination of Avian Forms and Functions* will be must reading for anyone, professional or non-professional, who needs or wants to learn more about birds.

**RECOMMENDATION:** This set of books is a MUST-HAVE for anyone with a serious interest in bird biology!



### **Terns of North America: A Photographic Guide.** **Cox, Cameron.**

2023. Princeton University Press. Paperback: 202 pages. Price: \$27.95 U.S.

**PUBLISHER'S SUMMARY:** This is the essential identification guide to the terns, noddies, and skimmers of North America. Covering every species and featuring hundreds of high-quality color images, this book is the ideal companion for anyone interested in this charismatic but sometimes challenging group of seabirds. Detailed species accounts describe the size of each bird as it appears in the field along with structure, behavior, flight style, vocalizations, subspecies, and North

American and worldwide ranges. An incisive introduction lays out a remarkably simple approach to identification that focuses on key elements and addresses how to avoid getting bogged down in the variability of appearance. This state-of-the-art guide also provides additional in-depth coverage of the two most challenging groups of terns, Sterna terns and crested terns, aiding field identification while also highlighting the beauty and elegance of these marvelous seabirds.

- Features more than 325 stunning color photos, with side-by-side comparisons of similar species throughout
- Includes detailed captions for each image that describe age and key identification traits
- Covers 19 species found in North America, including the most frequent vagrants
- Presents a unique, simplified approach to field identification
- Explains the fundamentals of molts, plumages, and hybridization
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**RECOMMENDATION:** A MUST-have for anyone with an interest in the terns of North America!



## BOOK REVIEWS



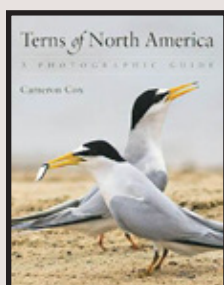
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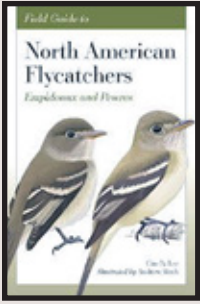
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Reviews by Ian Paulsen.



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

Lee, Cin-Ty and Andrew Birch

2023. Princeton University Press. Flexibound: 157 pages. Price: \$19.95 U.S.

PUBLISHER'S SUMMARY: The identification of *Empidonax* flycatchers and pewees can be a daunting challenge for even the most seasoned birder. *Field Guide to North American Flycatchers* takes bird identification to an entirely new level by training readers to observe subtle differences in structure, color patterns, and vocalizations before delving into the finer details of a particular species. Because the plumages of flycatchers are so similar, this one-of-a-kind guide uses illustrations

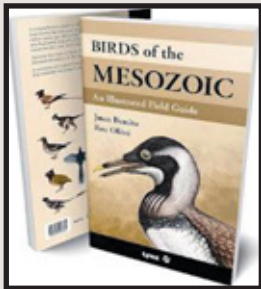
that highlight slight variances among species that photos often miss. One of the last frontiers of bird identification is now accessible to everyone—once one knows what to look for:

- Uses a holistic approach that makes flycatcher identification possible even for beginners
- Features a wealth of beautiful illustrations that depict every species in North America
- Shows how to observe subtle differences in structure, plumage contrasts, and vocalizations, which together create a distinctive overall impression of the bird
- Includes detailed audio spectrograms and seasonal distribution maps for each species
- Shares invaluable tips for successful identification in all kinds of field settings
- Its compact size and field-friendly layout make it the ideal travel companion for any birder.

**RECOMMENDATION:** This book is a MUST have for anyone birding North America!

## **Birds of the Mesozoic: An Illustrated Field Guide.**

Benito, Juan and Roc Olivé Pous



2022. Lynx Edicions. Paperback: 272 pages. Price: 29.00 Euros (about \$32.00 U.S.).

PUBLISHER'S SUMMARY: Birds are the most diverse tetrapod group today, but they have a rich and complex evolutionary history beyond that of their modern radiation. Appearing during the Jurassic, more than 160 million years ago, birds took to the skies and evolved into a plethora of forms during the Age of the Dinosaurs.

This comprehensive and up to date illustrated field guide, by palaeontologist Juan Benito and palaeoartist Roc Olivé, aims to illustrate in unprecedented detail the staggering diversity of avialans (modern birds and

their closest fossil relatives) that lived from the origin of the group until the Mass Extinction that ended the reign of the non-avian dinosaurs 66 million years ago: the birds of the Mesozoic.

This beautifully illustrated field guide includes over 250 full-colour illustrations covering more than 200 types of bird that populated the world during the Mesozoic Era. In addition to detailed fact files on the diverse avifauna of the Mesozoic, including a description of each species, with information on its name, location, size, period, habitat, and general characteristics, *Birds of the Mesozoic* also seeks to explain the origins of the group and their evolution from other feathered dinosaurs up to the origins of modern birds in the Late Cretaceous. It also covers in detail multiple facets of their phylogenetic, morphological, and ecological diversity, and provides an introduction to bird skeletal anatomy and several of the most recent and cutting-edge methods palaeontologists use to reconstruct fossil bird colour, diet, and biology.

Easy-to-use and pleasant to contemplate, this book is a must for both bird and palaeontology enthusiasts!

**RECOMMENDATION:** This book is a must have for anyone with an interest in prehistoric birds!





## **Identification Guide to North American Birds (Part I, Second Edition).**

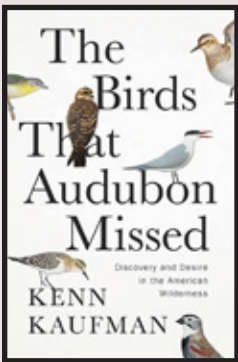
*Pyle, Peter*

2022. Slate Creek Press. Paperback: 698 pages. Price: \$80.00 U.S.

**SUMMARY:** This second edition of the *Identification Guide to North American Birds (Part I)* is the definitive guide for identifying and ageing the North American (north of Mexico) passerines and near passerines (Pigeons to Tropical Tanagers) in the hand, and although aimed primarily at banders, it is a useful reference for any serious birder. It now treats 421 species in all. There are descriptors for 1736 subspecies, expanded and detailed sections on molt for all species, and all known hybrids are listed. Most of the literature cited is

now available on-line, so the book is a little smaller than the first (732 pages for the first vs 698 pages in the 2nd).

**RECOMMENDATION:** This book is a must have for all banders of the region! Hard core birders will find the detailed identification information very useful! The book can be ordered from Buteo Books here: [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com).



## **The Birds That Audubon Missed: Discovery and Desire in the American Wilderness**

*Kaufman, Kenn*

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; 2024; Illustrated By: Audubon, John James; Binding: Hardcover; Condition: New; Pages: 400; NYP: 0. Item #15371; ISBN: 9781668007594; Price: \$32.50.

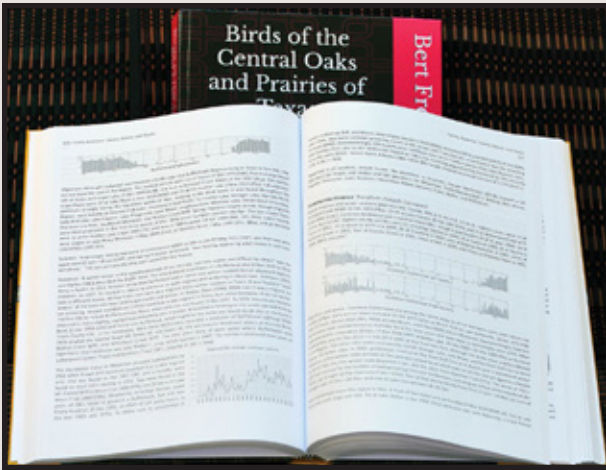
Renowned naturalist Kenn Kaufman examines the scientific discoveries of John James Audubon and his artistic and ornithologist peers to show how what they saw (and what they missed) reflects how we perceive and understand the natural world.

Raging ambition. Towering egos. Competition under a veneer of courtesy. Heroic effort combined with plagiarism, theft, exaggeration, and fraud. This was the state of bird study in eastern North America during the early 1800s, as a handful of intrepid men raced to find the last few birds that were still unknown to science.

The most famous name in the bird world was John James Audubon, who painted spectacular portraits of birds. But although his images were beautiful, creating great art was not his main goal. Instead, he aimed to illustrate (and write about) as many different species as possible, obsessed with trying to outdo his rival, Alexander Wilson. George Ord, a fan and protégé of Wilson, held a bitter grudge against Audubon for years, claiming he had faked much of his information and his scientific claims. A few of Audubon's birds were pure fiction, and some of his writing was invented or plagiarized. Other naturalists of the era, including Charles Bonaparte (nephew of Napoleon), John Townsend, and Thomas Nuttall, also became entangled in the scientific derby, as they stumbled toward an understanding of the natural world—an endeavor that continues to this day.

Despite this intense competition, a few species—including some surprisingly common songbirds, hawks, sandpipers, and more—managed to evade discovery for years. Here, renowned bird expert and artist Kenn Kaufman explores this period in history from a new angle, by considering the birds these people discovered and, especially, the ones they missed. Kaufman has created portraits of the birds that Audubon never saw, attempting to paint them in that artist's own stunning style, as a way of examining the history of natural sciences and nature art. He shows how our understanding of birds continues to gain clarity, even as some mysteries persist from Audubon's time until ours.

Order the audiobook version from [libro.fm](http://libro.fm) and support Buteo Books at the same time!



## **BIRDS OF THE CENTRAL OAKS AND PRAIRIES OF TEXAS, WITH EMPHASIS ON HISTORICAL CHANGES**

by Bert Frenz

A monumental and revolutionary ornithological work for Texas. Its title and thousand pages might cause many an eye to glaze over. They might suggest that this is a technical work of little interest to birdwatchers except in some remote, poorly understood area of Texas. Think again! The area covered by this book runs from the NW Houston area up through the Bryan/College Station area up to Waco-Temple and down toward east Austin

and hence back to Houston. Many millions of people live, work, and study or enjoy birds in this "cerebral triangle." The area has a rich ornithological history beginning with Gideon Lincecum in the 1830s, so the book considers almost 200 years of observations. Dr. Frenz has collected over **five million** individual sighting records of birds in this area. Using various forms of mathematical analysis, he has generated graphs for abundance and migration timing for most species. He has included regular species, rare and accidental ones, as well as many random escapees from captivity. The book covers 546 species of which 489 are regularly occurring. These totals are well beyond most birders' experience. The book examines historical records for each species, and although these make up less than 5% of the records, they often come with interesting behavior and habitat information that allows the reader to appreciate the environment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The book begins with a review of the historical changes including a general timeline, earliest peoples, and the influence of conversion to agriculture, stock tanks, oologists and specimen collectors, wanton killing, plume hunting, cowbird parasitism, wastewater and sewage treatment plants, lakes, landfills, interstate and state highways, suburbanization, DDT and other pesticides, red imported fire ants, bird houses and feeders, parks, preserves, refuges and greenbelts, West Nile virus and other diseases, turf farms, and climate change on the avifauna. This section concludes by considering how various species' abundance has changed over time. The balance of the text is devoted to individual species accounts. The species accounts do not include descriptions or illustrations of the birds, readily available in field guides. They do present a status overview of the species in the area, sections on breeding and migration, a historical section, a population trend section, and a documentation section. Most species also have graphs depicting occurrence based on all records and graphs indicating high counts, which allow readers to see when a species occurs and how abundant it might be at any given time. These features are revolutionary in bird publications and are based on millions of data points. The book is a phenomenal resource for any bird enthusiast that wants to know more about a bird beyond its identification and name. The historical sections on each species are filled with gems ranging from folklore, tales of collectors and birders along with some more poetic lines like these written: "on the UT Austin campus 1 Apr 1916, Florence Merriam Bailey wrote, ... 'a herd of Jerseys grazed under the trees with pleasantly jangling bells whose leisurely tinkling harmonized with the familiar *Pe-ter, Pe-ter, Pe-ter*, of the Tufted Titmouse which hunted among the branches, and the soft cooing of Mourning Doves which flew around through the trees with musically whistling wings.'" I find each species account, whether a common bird or a rare one, enlightening and often a most enjoyable read. Aside from belonging in every serious ornithology library, this book should be at the side of every birder's recliner for days too rainy, too hot, or too cold to be out watching birds. This book is the next best thing.

Review by Fred Collins.



# APRIL SURPRISES

## By Sheridan Coffey

April is my favorite month for birding in Texas. Spring migration kicks in, wildflowers are spectacular, and the weather is either beautiful or dramatic. My spouse, Martin Reid, and I squeeze in as much birding as we can. We have both been at this long enough that there isn't much to see that is new, but this past April held a couple of surprises for us.

We headed to the central coast on April 7 to look for shorebirds, early warblers, and other migrants. We normally would go to Mustang Island first to hit Port Aransas, but instead we made a stop at a park that sometimes has good shorebirds and some other migrants. I am not naming the park to protect a sensitive species.

In the park there was a flooded field with shorebirds. We could see Sedge Wrens sitting up and singing, if you can call it that. We passed a couple of small ponds with tall grasses around them. A bird called "KICK-A-DOO!" I excitedly said, "STOP! I hear a Black Rail!" Both of us have heard Black Rails a number of times, but neither of us have ever laid eyes on one, despite being maybe a foot away from them a couple of times. They are tiny, about the size of a Song Sparrow, and very secretive. Martin pulled over and parked.

To our shock there was not just one calling, but three! I knew they had been reported there in the past, but at dawn or dusk. It was about 830AM, so not the time I would expect to hear them.

We were standing on the road and could hear one of the rails coming closer. There was a little cut through in the grass by one of the ponds. The rail walked right across it, giving us our first ever look at one. We both gasped and then high-fived each other. I count heard only birds, but Martin does not. It had been a long time since he got a life bird in Texas. Then it got even better. The rail approached again. It was coming back to the cut. We aimed our cameras, and I started videoing. The bird scooted quickly across the cut and we both caught it! At that point I was shaking. I thought I had used up all my bird karma for the year.

The following day, April 8, was a big day for a lot of Texans, the total eclipse of the sun was passing through the central part of the state, and our apartment complex was just inside the line of totality. Ever since I was a kid, I had ached to see a total eclipse. I had seen several partials, but that was akin to only hearing a Black Rail. We had heard traffic was going to be insane, so we were very grateful that we would be able to see it from home.





Unfortunately, the weather forecast was very bad that morning, with heavy clouds all day. Martin could see I was crushed, so he suggested we drive northwest to see if we could find a spot with a clearer sky. We jumped in the car with me watching both Waze and the weather channel, avoiding traffic and looking for the best possibility of seeing it.

We ended up in Llano. There were a few clouds, but it looked great. There was a park with a crowd building. We parked and walked around looking for birds and butterflies. Then the clouds started to roll in. My natural pessimism kicked in. We were blocked in and couldn't leave to go find another spot so I resigned myself to seeing whatever we could. The eclipse started. There were breaks off and on with the clouds. Martin set up our spot-

ting scope to project the image onto a poster board. We could see the crescent sun shrinking when the clouds broke. We were about ten minutes from totality when the clouds broke completely. The sky darkened, we saw the diamond ring, and then got fabulous looks at totality. I had no idea how deeply it would impact me. I took a couple of poor photos, and then had the sense to just drink it in. I kept saying "I can't believe this!" When the sun finally came back out the crowd cheered and clapped for several minutes. We were able to leave quicker than we expected. Within a few minutes the sky was totally cloudy again. I could see how chasing eclipses would be as good as chasing birds!

I thought that the rest of my month would be spent enjoying the regular migrants. We



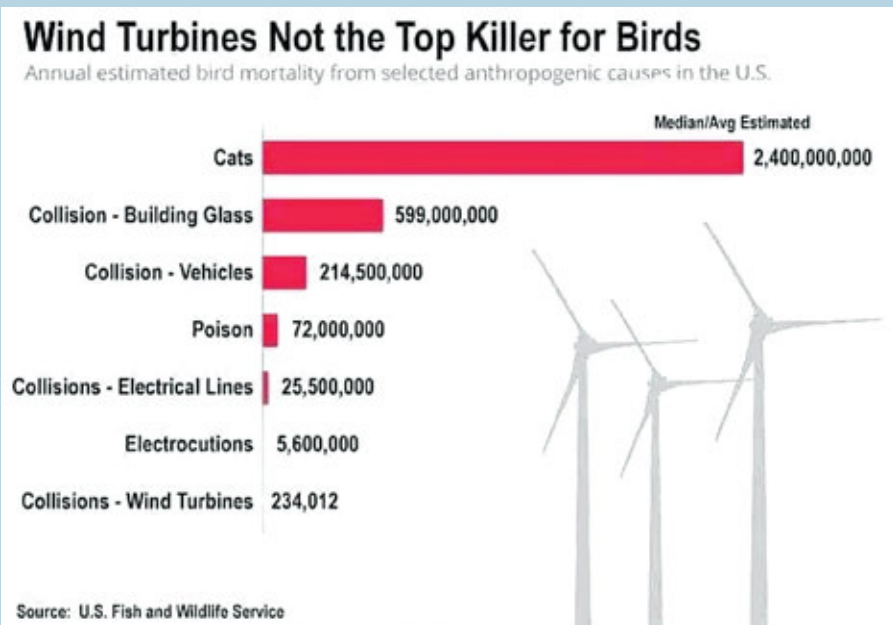
had a few birds off of our apartment balcony and talked about doing a long weekend in early May on the coast. Then a shock wave ran through the birding community. On April 13 a Southern Lapwing was found on a golf-course in Mercedes by Gary Jensen, a golfer and a birder. This is a Central and South American species, a striking large plover, black, gray and white, with a crest. Its range has expanded significantly in the last ten years, moving further north, into Mexico. There was one found in Michigan in 2022, which caused a lot of speculation. That bird was found on an airfield, which is great habitat for one, but also raised the question if it had hitched a ride on a cargo plane.

We debated going down. The consensus among birders was that it was good bird. Both of us had seen them in South America, so it wasn't a life bird for either of us, but it would be a heck of a Texas bird! We decided to wait and see if the bird stuck around, and it did. I had to work through the week and couldn't take a day off. I checked reports over and over, expecting it to go. It was still there on Friday, April 19, so we cut out as soon as I got off and drove down, arriving quite late. We got a room at a motel nearby and slept a few hours. At dawn we left to go to the golf

course. Google maps took us through a neighborhood to a dead-end road. We could see the golf course but couldn't get there. We back tracked and finally found where we needed to be. Even though it was still before sunrise the clubhouse was open. We went in to ask if we could look for the bird. They were very nice and said yes and told us there was a golf tournament that morning.

Sometimes when we go to look for rarities it is a challenge to find the bird. This was not one of those times. The bird was being seen not far from the clubhouse and luckily, we found it quickly. We kept back a way to keep from disturbing it. A few other birders arrived, and we watched it stroll around the fairway near a pond. Golfers were showing up for the tournament, so we left after getting some photos.

That was the last day the bird was seen. We were really concerned that the bird would be pushed off the course by the golf tournament, or even worse, get hit by a golf ball. That didn't happen. It stayed all day and many birders saw it. The last eBird report was at 745PM that evening. A strong cold front moved through during the night. I suspect that was what caused it to move. We were incredibly lucky that it stayed until we saw it.



# BIRDS OF THE BRUSH— LAREDO BIRDING FESTIVAL



View of Display.



As part of the Laredo Birding Festival, an image of a Painted Bunting I took here at the ranch was awarded 1st place in the Birds of the Brush art/photography contest, pro division. It was purchased almost immediately, which is really appreciated. We had photographers here today, and again tomorrow as part of the festival. Always fun to meet new people and watch them enjoy taking photos of a great variety of birds we have here.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR  
**2023 WINNERS!**

**BEST OF SHOW**  
**Anastasia Galvan**

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

- 1st - Alejandro Salazar
- 2nd - Luis A. Gutierrez
- 3rd - Cesar Gabriel Gomez
- HM - Olmeda Soledad
- HM - Debanlie Bisuet

**HIGH SCHOOL**

- 1st - Yahir Pena
- 2nd - Christian Castro
- 3rd - Anthony Aguirre
- HM - Andrea Santiago
- HM - Sara Santos

**PROFESSIONAL**

- 1st - Sandra Silva
- 2nd - Clarissa Vicama
- 3rd - Gerardo Martinez
- HM - Katherine Jaimez
- HM - Andrea Montalvo

**MIDDLE SCHOOL**

- 1st - Sophia Medina
- 2nd - Vivian Pedraza
- 3rd - Rene Reyes
- HM - Angie Garza
- HM - Mitchell Morgan

**AMATEUR**

- 1st - Sylvia A. Rodriguez
- 2nd - Vanessa Castillo
- 3rd - Patricia Najera
- HM - Beache Palazuelos
- HM - Edna Romo

**ELEMENTARY**

- 1st - Matthew Ramos
- 2nd - Margarito Flores
- 3rd - Madeleine Boswell
- HM - Mariano Gutierrez
- HM - Sabrina Perez

\*HM = Honorable Mention



Birding over the Rio Grande.



Eating lunch at La Perla.  
We provide breakfast and lunch in our festival.



Great weather for birding in Laredo.



Birding La Palmas and Zacate Creek with field guide, Jancie Travis



Having lunch at the Vargach ranch.



What bird would you like to come see?



Trip 1 at 'Oasis in the Desert' trip with field guide, Susan Foster



Trip 11 with 16 year old field guide, Ryan Rodriguez.



Birding to the Max at Max A Mandel Municipal Golf Course





Ranchers birding with Trip 3

Ranchers birding with Trip 3



Great looks at ringed kingfisher. He was going back and forth and calling super loud.  
Field Guide, Holly Platz



Trip 5 at San Ygnacio



This year's field guide, Susan Foster, won the "Jim Hailey & John Kelley" MVP award for BIRDER MOST LIKELY TO HIT The 300 Webb County Species (with sighting of the Painted Redstart).



Trip 13 having lunch at Lake Casa Blanca International State Park–Texas Parks and Wildlife with field guide, Holly Platz



Best of Show.



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**TOPIC:**  
**LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES - A CELEBRATION OF BIRDS**



**GUEST SPEAKER**  
**Christina BAAL**  
 ARTIST OF "DRAWING WILSON BIRDS"



**GUEST SPEAKER**  
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 HARRY CARPENTER, RIESS PROFESSOR OF GEOLOGY, RICE UNIVERSITY



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# 2024 SPRING MEETING IN WESLACO FROM A FIRST TIME ATTENDEE

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*By Karen Carpenter, Dallas  
Sunday, May 5*

I write this as I'm frantically researching new county target lists on eBird, counting all the new birds I saw for my Texas list as I reach for 500, and plotting which counties I can get over 100 on our way home. Today is the last day of my first TOS meeting in Weslaco, an experience I won't soon forget. One of my birding friends, **Kelley Miller**, told me about the Texas Century Club and introduced me to these gatherings last year. I can't decide if I'm mad at her for this yet! When I learned that my local Dallas birding hero, **Christian Walker**, would be there, the decision was made and off we went, birding our way down to the Rio Grande Valley.

I started birding several years ago, just enjoying the birds that I could identify, and wondering what all the others were. A volunteer at High Island once told me, after I asked him how do you remember all these different warblers, you just learn them one by one. And so I began my birding quest, one bird at a time. As I checked off new species that I had seen, puzzled over juvenile raptors passing through, and started recognizing the intricate field marks that differentiate the sparrow species in winter, this new challenge of county listing triggered my collector gene and I was hooked.

The TOS meeting in Weslaco offered all the obsessive birding a newbie like me could ask for. County listing success, check (Willacy county from 0 to over 100 in a single day, thanks **Lisa Edwards** and **Laura Wilson**). Meeting other people who don't glaze over as I recount the tales of the birds I had seen that day, check (Thanks **Christine Turnbull** for

the great new attendee orientation where I met more of "my people", fellow newbie **Lisa Madry** and her mom, **Karen**). Keeping my husband interested in birding alongside me, check (Thanks **Bill Clark** for the raptor search field trip where my husband could chase his favorite birds all day). Meeting ornithologists who readily shared their knowledge on hybridization and species concepts, check (Thanks **Chris Butler**, who was trapped riding with me in the backseat to Willacy County). Great birds in sketchy new locations I hadn't visited, check (Watching for drug dealers at the gravel pits in Brooks County, thanks **Lynn Thompson** and **Cystal Ledezma**). Learning at a great keynote address why the two cemeteries we visited this week contained so many birds, check (Thanks **Jennifer Bristol**, for a presentation filled with beautiful bird photos). Advice on which birds to prioritize of the many species I could chase the last day, check (Go for the Yellow-green Vireo, you can always find a Black-billed Cuckoo in Spring, thanks **Byron Stone** and **Randy Pinkton**!). A chance to support birding conservation and protection of habitat, check (Thanks TOS for sites like **Paradise Pond** and **Magic Ridge**, which I visited on the way home). And the obligatory Nana's feast when in the RGV, check (Thanks, **Nana**!).

Now, I just need to get that first Quarter Century listing pin. You can bet I'll be working on it over the next year, hoping to be ready for January 2025 in Beaumont! I'll see you there.

And yes, I did finally get a Black-billed Cuckoo on the way home.





*Fashionista, Randy Pinkston, dressed in theme as a Yellow-green Vireo to help find one on the last day Rarity Round-up, with Kelley Miller, who couldn't resist a lifer even though she had a long drive home that day..*



**Author Jennifer Bristol with Lynn Thompson**



**Bill Wright and Ron Conkey at happy half-hour**





Bob White, Annika Lindqvist and John Berner



Byron Stone at book signing



Captain Henry



Pam Pipes and Susan Foster



Romey Swanson gets breakfast



Siew Bee Hartman at happy half-hour



TCC recipients from left: Chris Walker, Fred & Kay Zagst, Bob White, Bonnie McKenzie, Laura Wilson, Pat & Ellen Oneal.



The incomparable David Ramos





Tillman Burnett meeting the author



Trip leader Christian Walker meeting his group

## TOS MEMBERSHIP HIGHEST IN EIGHT YEARS



Individual memberships in TOS broke through the 1,000 mark in June, the highest number since November of 2016. While the number fluctuates from month to month, we have made wonderful progress since the end of the pandemic.

During a March planning session with Stephen McKee of Social Impact Consulting LLC, your directors determined that membership in our organization was the top priority currently as we aspire to have “a growing, diverse, and engaged statewide membership that will support and increase TOS’s visibility and impact.” Focusing on membership, among the other topics outlined in the message from President Romey Swanson in this publication, will take us into the future and allow us to become “the premier resource for birding and bird conservation in Texas.”

One initiative we took was to launch a membership drive in February with the goal of positively impacting retention rates. We challenged TOS members to renew their memberships, whether they were due or not, to be entered into a drawing for \$100 off an

upcoming Weekender, or \$125 off a TOS travel opportunity. Congratulations to these four lucky TOSsers who won!

- Karen Hayward
- Mike DeHart
- Robert Esau
- Lynn & Kristopher Castle

We were shooting for a 10% increase in membership from the drive, and our membership numbers did increase by 7%. Though somewhat short of our goal, during that period new memberships outpaced lapses by 3.8%. The trend continues with over 100 new memberships so far this year.

If you attended the winter meeting in Weslaco, you received a recruiting flyer when you checked in. Please remember to pass that on to a non-TOS member so we can continue growing our numbers.

As our organization enters its 75th year, we look forward to growing and sharing our resources with the birding community of Texas.

—Judy Kestner  
TOS Membership Administrator

# AN ALASKAN ADVENTURE

**By Lynn Thompson**

Twelve TOS members escaped the heat of the lower 48 states for two weeks of chilly weather on the 2024 Alaska extravaganza. We birded in six boroughs/census areas and found 172 species, many of which were lifers for the participants. Life bird numbers ranged from 1 (Great Knot) for three participants, to 97 species for a newer birder! Add twenty-one mammal species!

After birding at Anchorage hotspots the first day, the ambitious agenda planned by Byron Stone and Randy Pinkston began in earnest with a five day visit to Nome. Flying in on Sunday morning, we stopped by the Victorian-era decorated Dredge No. 7 Inn to drop our suitcases. Then it was off to Council Road, a thirty-mile long drive along the shore of the Bering Sea.

Nome birding consisted of driving one of three gravel, pothole filled roads, 30 to 85 miles in length: Council, Teller, and Kougarok. Jaegers, loons, gulls, and ducks, as well as

breeding plumaged shorebirds, were abundant along Council Rd. The first of the Tundra Swan appeared; in total we saw around 170 in two days on this road. The pure blue sky and dark water, combined with red willows, made a stunning background for swan photos.

On our third day in Nome, June 4, Teller Highway produced Alaskan specialties such as Willow and Rock Ptarmigan and Eastern Yellow Wagtail. Our ratio was fifty Willow Ptarmigan to four Rock Ptarmigan. Closeup views of Northern Wheatear and all three jaeger species were a treat. Four Harlequin Ducks flew in *Top Gun*-like formation up the Sinuk River and under the bridge. The group enjoyed photographing a foraging American Dipper right below us as we leaned over the bridge.

The vans headed out at 5:00 a.m. Wednesday for Kougarok Road, the longest of our drives at 85 miles. The breeding spot for our target bird, Bristle-thighed Curlew, was at mile marker 72. Tussocks, willow shrubs, and



**Nome night birding, mouth of Nome River. Looking for Common Ringed Plover, 10:00 pm. L-R: Cindy Millford, Randy Pinkston, Bob Foehring, Gavin Awerbach, Byron Stone.**

Photo by Lynn Thompson.





Grizzly bear eating dandelions, near Eagle River Nature Center, north of Anchorage.

Photo by Lynn Thompson.

moss comprised the squishy tundra-covered hill we climbed to look for the bird. Several of us stopped about two-thirds of the way to the top due to the difficult terrain, where

we waited patiently as the rest of the group reached the summit. They flushed a curlew which flew down the hill, and all were able to see it.



Group picture on Eagle River Nature Center boardwalk. L-R: Byron Stone, Bob Foehring, Chris Booher, Paul Booher, Cindy Millford, Jimma Byrd, Leslie Morris, Orville Wiens, Theresa Wiens, Randy Pinkston, Lynn Thompson.

Photo from Cindy Millford's phone.



**Bristle-thighed Curlew, Kougarok Rd, Coffee Dome, Nome.**



**Photo by Bob Foehring.**

Returning to Nome around 6:30 p.m., we ate dinner for the fourth night in a row at Milano's Pizzeria. As Byron said, not too many places to eat in Nome. This versatile restaurant served good hamburgers, pizza, seafood, Italian, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese food. Stefan Lorenz with a High Lonesome bird tour gave us intel on two rarities seen at the Nome River mouth, Red-necked Stint and Common Ringed Plover. As it was still daylight, we birded until 10:30 p.m., getting good looks at both species. Before we left Nome the next day, we returned to Council Road to see a Great Knot, an ABA code 4

bird normally seen in the Pribilofs. Thanks, Stefan!

After two days in Anchorage, we flew to Utqiagvik, formerly known as Barrow, for a whirlwind 24 hours of daylight birding 350 miles above the Arctic Circle. Our hotel was aptly named The Top of the World; we checked in and headed out Cakeeater Rd. to Footprint Lake. Imaginative place names at the top of the world! We located King, Steller, and Spectacled Eider all within two hours. The ice pack had not broken up on the shores of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas and it was 30 degrees with 30 MPH wind gusts – such



**Bluethroat, Kougarok Rd., Salmon Lake Campground, Nome.**

**Photo by Bob Foehring.**



**Spruce Grouse, Mountain Vista Trail, Denali National Park & Preserve.**

**Photo by Randy Pinkston.**





**Aleutian Tern, Nome River Mouth.**

Photo by Lynn Thompson.

a treat! Around 11:00 p.m., we stopped for Chinese food at Sam & Lee's, surprised at how hungry we could be at that hour.

Before leaving Utqiagvik, we added the only Snowy Owl of the trip and stopped by a house with bird feeders and "palm trees" made of out of baleen "fronds." A mixed flock of Common and Hoary Redpoll, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspur were gobbling up seed and suet supplied by the homeowner.

Monday, June 9, we hiked the Eagle River Nature Trail, near Anchorage. Alder Flycatcher and Varied Thrush could be heard calling all over the trail. The boardwalk over a marshy pond with snow-covered mountains behind us served as group photo background.

As we left Eagle River, a local birder we met on the trail waved us over to the side of the road. He had spotted a large grizzly bear rolling around on the side of a hill, grazing on dandelions. From the safety of the van, we



**Horned Puffin, Resurrection Bay, Seward.**

Photo by Randy Pinkston.

all got fantastic photos. We encountered both grizzlies and black bears. Orv Wiens took a picture of a black bear from the parking lot and folks in the van watched a black bear run through a neighborhood.

Two days later, the group drove to Seward and boarded the M/V Outright for an all day trip from Resurrection Bay to the Chiswell Islands and Aialik Glacier. Wearing all the layers of the clothing we brought, we strove to stay warm while staying on deck to scout for birds. Memorable sightings were Parakeet and Rhinoceros Auklet; Kittlitz's, Ancient, and Marbled Murrelet; Horned and Tufted Puffin; Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorant. Not difficult to take pictures of seabirds when they land on the water. Humpback whales, Orcas, and Steller's Sea Lions entertained us throughout the day.

Thursday, June 13, we were off to Denali National Park & Preserve for our final few days. A moose and her calf were drinking water from puddles in the parking lot of our lodge and the mama even licked a windshield clean of raindrops. After a sound night's sleep with windows wide open and more rain falling outside, we were on the green tour bus

in Denali at 6:00 a.m. Our bus driver was very talkative. He kept repeating we were not guaranteed to see wildlife. But fortune favored us - we saw eight caribou and a flock of Dall sheep.

Leaving the bus at the turnaround at mile 43, we walked over three miles, looking for Arctic Warbler. This bird had eluded us so far, so when Cindy Millford called out that she had found one, we were thrilled to see it. At least two warblers sang from the treetops and the song echoed down the valley. Some of us even got semi-diagnostic pictures!

The hills were starting to green up, small Arctic flowers were blooming, snow covered mountains were thawing. A pair of Willow Ptarmigan chased four fluffy chicks away from the road. We were treated to a Spruce Grouse walking down the road at the Savage River campground. As we left the following day, the sky was clear enough that we were able to take pictures of the top of Denali. Thanks to Byron and Randy for a terrific tour through Alaska. Our congenial tour members shared truly memorable experiences, vowing to return someday.



**Red-necked Stint.**

Photo by Byron Stone.



# A COWBIRD STORY

**By Ted Lee Eubanks**

Eric Stager requested a brown-headed cowbird story. I will get to the brown-headed later; I want to stay with the South Texas birds moving north theme.

I grew up knowing the red-eyed cowbird (as we called the bronzed) from the Valley. My father took me white-wing hunting in South Texas in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and I only knew this bird from those adventures. The bronzed cowbird, like so many of the birds I have written about, has crept north in recent years. I see them in Austin fairly regularly, even at the feeders in my yard. Although the bird ranges north to Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, this bird remains, for the most part, a bird of the southern third of the state.

This cowbird, like the brown-headed, is a brood parasite. The female lays her eggs in the nest of a host, and the host bird raises both her young as well as the cowbird's (often at the expense of her own young). Cowbirds do impact the populations of native birds. Only with the physical removal of brown-headed cowbirds have the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo populations on Fort Hood begun to recover, for example.

We (i.e., man) changed the landscape to favor cowbirds with the introduction of ranching and agriculture. Bronzed cowbirds feed on the ground, and they benefited when weed

seeds they fed on were augmented by crops such as milo. Oberholser mentions that the bronzed cowbirds spread northward in Texas after the 1951 "Great Freeze;" facilitated by expansion of agricultural lands due to clearing of original vegetation and/or irrigation. I have seen enormous flocks of these birds around grain elevators in the Valley. They also feed on insects stirred up by feeding herds of cattle.

The bronzed cowbird is larger than the brown-headed, and it parasitizes larger birds than the brown-headed, as well. Altamira oriole is one of the species often mentioned as being commonly parasitized by this cowbird.

One reference states that "northern mockingbirds eject the immaculate eggs of bronzed cowbirds sooner than the spotted eggs of brown-headed cowbirds in at least one population in Texas. In contrast, mockingbirds in southeast Texas, where Brown-headed Cowbirds are uncommon, frequently raise bronzed cowbirds."

In addition to the bright red eyes, males erect their neck feathers into a ruff during breeding displays. Bronzed cowbirds have received surprisingly little study, and basic information about their life history is still unknown. For example, even though we see this species in Austin, I have no idea which birds they are parasitizing.



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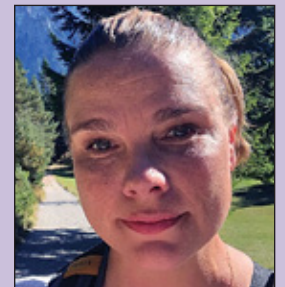
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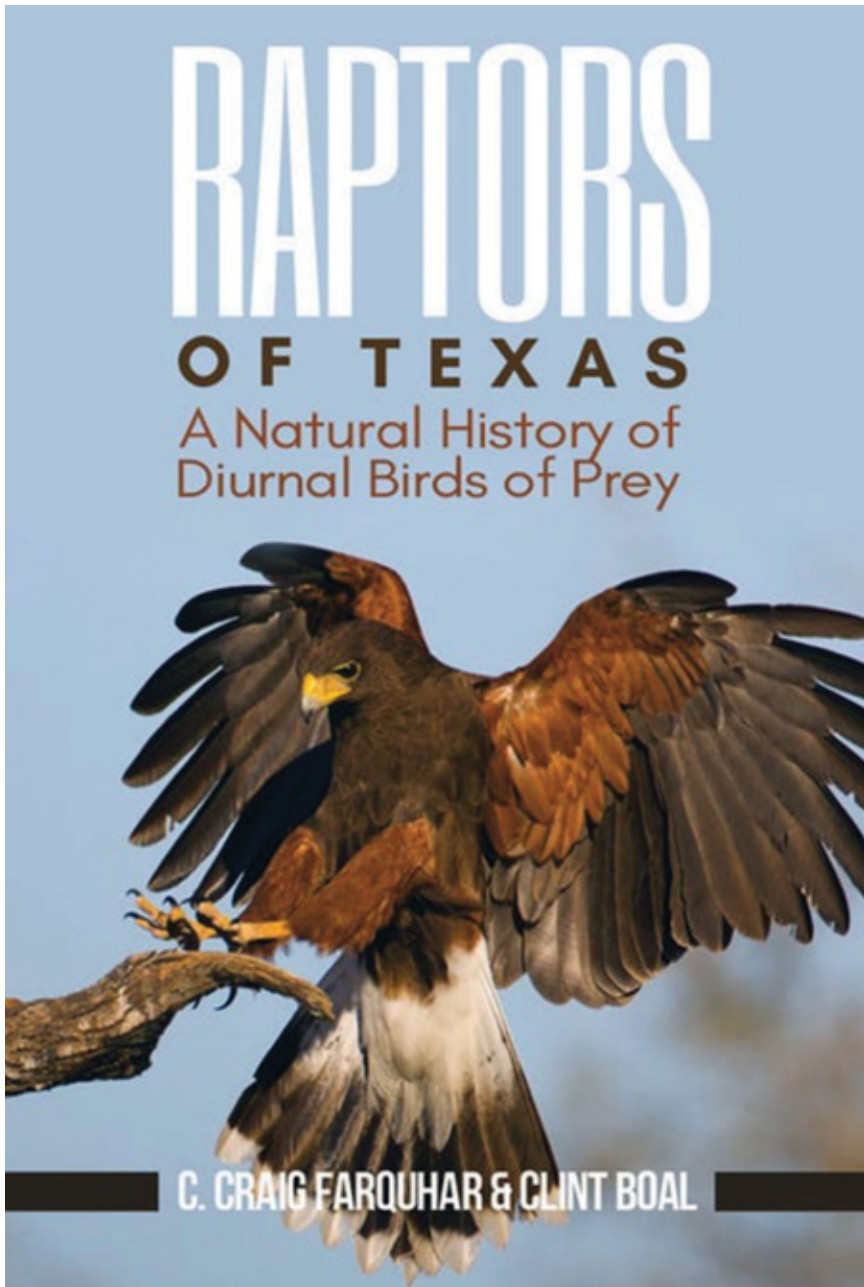
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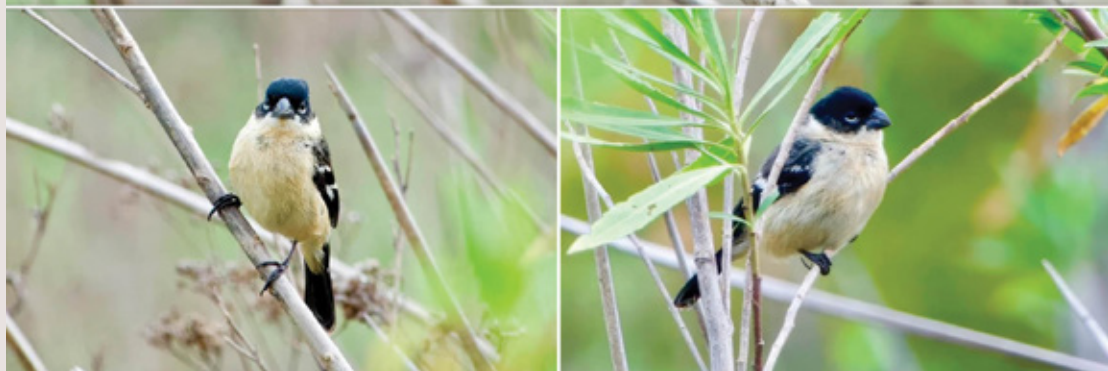
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- **UNDERSTANDING** - Throughout the year and during seasonal meetings, TOS is proud to offer in-person and online seminars led by professionals and specialists on a variety of nature related subjects. These seminars cover a range of topics and are designed to help you learn more about the importance of birds in our ecosystem. TOS also offers classes for birders at all levels.
- **CONSERVATION** - Combining habitat restoration at several TOS sanctuaries with educational opportunities for birders of all ages, TOS is committed to raising people's awareness of the needs of our feathered friends.
- **GRANTS** - TOS is proud to support research on Texas birds through annual research grants.



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Morelet's Seed eater *Sporophila moreletii*.

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TEXAS BIRDS ANNUAL

VOLUME 20 (2024)