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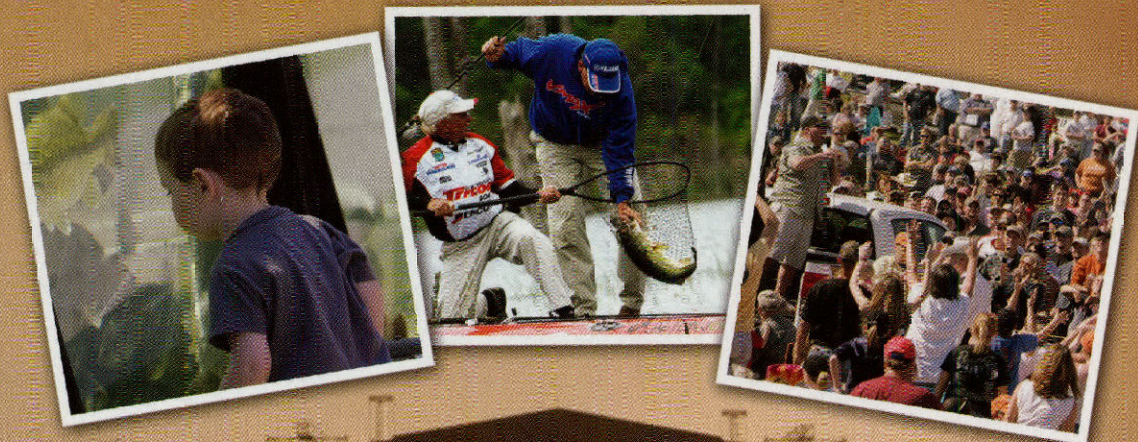
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M A Y 2 0 0 8



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THIS PAGE: American goldfinches. Photo © John R. Ford.





# TEXAS

THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

MAY 2008, VOL. 66, NO. 5

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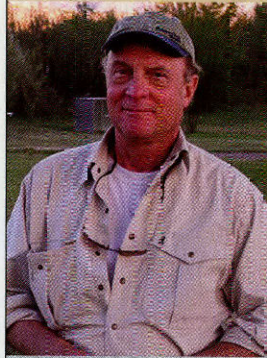
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# In the Field

## RUSTY MIDDLETON

specializes in writing about natural resources and environmental issues. "In the past, like many people, I was sometimes not quite sure what was hype and what was reality in this long-running debate about climate change," Rusty says. "Researching and writing this article gave me



the welcome opportunity to go in-depth into a difficult subject that most of us, other than scientists, simply don't have time to study. The implications of climate change are disturbing, to say the least, but the optimism in me wants to see this as an opportunity for us all to learn to think and work together to solve our increasingly serious and increasingly global environmental problems."

## BONNIE MCKINNEY

a former TPWD biologist, worked for more than 22 years in the lower Big Bend Region of the Trans-Pecos, conducting various wildlife research projects. Much of her fieldwork was conducted in the lower desert country on the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, which had a large population of elf owls. Bonnie says what really drew her attention to the elf owl was their dependency on other cavity nesting birds for their nest structures and their tiny size, long migration and joyful songs. Bonnie now lives in the Carrizal Mountains of northern Mexico and works as wildlife coordinator on the El Carmen Project, where she is involved in a host of wildlife projects, from bats and birds to black bears and bighorn sheep.



## SUZANNE WINCKLER

never paid much attention to the natural world until former TP&W artist Nancy McGowan introduced her in 1969 to Edgar B. Kincaid, featured in this issue on page 60. She worked with Kincaid editing Harry Church Oberholser's *The Bird Life of Texas*, which was published by the University of Texas Press in 1974. Besides editing and writing, Suzanne has also

worked in conservation, most recently on the Sierra de Alamos project in Sonora, Mexico. "Edgar was a huge force in my life," Suzanne says. "With the many lifelong friends I met through him, I continued to travel and bird with Edgar in Texas and Mexico until his untimely death in 1985, and now he continues to travel with us in spirit."





# AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF CARTER P. SMITH

**I am the son of a birder. Actually, make that two birders,** although one is arguably more serious than the other.

My father, a rather cerebral type, has an insatiable curiosity about the whys, whats and hows of the natural world. Among other things, he keeps meticulous records of his bird observations at the ranch and expects the same of others. Heaven help any of our lease hunters or other guests who inadvertently neglect to mention to him an encounter with a Montezuma quail, a zone-tailed hawk or even a common shoveler down by the river. Suffice to say, his data sets are impressive even by the most rigorous of scientific standards.

My sweet mother, on the other hand, seems to appreciate more of the social and aesthetic attributes of birding. She derives enormous pleasure at the first sighting of a male vermilion flycatcher and the return of the black-chinned hummingbirds that dart from feeder to feeder under the live oaks in front of the porch. Ensuring that the scores of naturalists and scientists who visit the ranch in the spring to study the birds are well-fed and well-stimulated with ample evening conversation is her hallmark. Together, my parents make a great pair, and their mutual enjoyment of birding only reaffirms that.

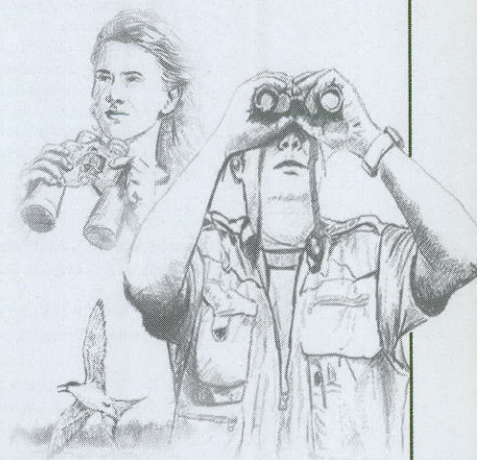
Well, it's springtime in Texas, and our state's estimated 3.8 million wildlife watchers, including my parents, are out and about, scouring the countryside for resident and migratory birds alike. It's no wonder why. Texas leads the nation, with more than 600 species of birds. The choice of birding spots is nearly unparalleled in all of North America. Who wouldn't want to catch a glimpse of a green jay or kiskadee in the deep South Texas brush country, a soaring black hawk along Limpia Creek in the Davis Mountains, a reddish egret foraging in the Laguna Madre, or a summer tanager flitting through the brush of a Hill Country pasture?

The economic impacts of wildlife watchers are felt throughout the state, particularly in rural areas. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, wildlife watchers contribute more than \$5 billion to the Texas economy. That comes from expenditures related to travel, lodging, sporting goods and even recreational land to support their nature-based pursuits. It is no wonder that communities from Weslaco to Canadian have embraced these nature tourists, particularly birders, as part of their long-term economic development plans.

What makes all of this possible, of course, is the uniqueness and diversity of habitats found in Texas. With 11 different ecoregions ranging from the grasslands of the high plains to the barrier islands of the coast, Texas is very biologically diverse. Our charge at the department is to ensure that it stays that way for future Texans, both the avian and people kind.

So, whether you are a birder or not, I hope you'll get outside this month and enjoy the best that Texas has to offer in the outdoors. I hope in doing so that you'll consider visiting one of the 90 state parks or 51 wildlife management areas across Texas.

As we like to say, Life's Better Outside. Don't forget to bring your binoculars!



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carter P. Smith".

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mission statement:*

**To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.**



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# MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

## FOREWORD

**At the TPWD communications division retreat in March** at Parrie Haynes Ranch, we discussed weighty issues relating to the future of the agency and our outreach efforts. To be honest, though, the main thing I'm still going to be talking about six months from now is the owl.

Before setting out on our adventure, Gerald Stewart of Johnny Stewart Wildlife Calls gave us a brief presentation on game calling in general and owl calling specifically. I'd seen a similar presentation at the retreat two years ago, but this time he also talked about calling owls in the daytime. Apparently, other birds will "mob" an eastern-screech owl when they hear it calling in the middle of the day. So you might be able to attract any number of other species that way.

After the presentation, we assembled outside the cabin, where Stewart had set up a decoy owl and his specialized calling equipment (consisting of tapes and a tape player with a large directional speaker). He had no luck after several minutes, possibly due to the fact that there was a crowd of people socializing (loudly) not far away.

As temperatures dropped into the mid-30s, we had to go to Plan B, which involved hopping in the back of pickup trucks and heading to a more remote area. We reassembled around a picnic table and resumed quiet time.

Spring had only partially sprung at this point, and the trees over the picnic table were largely leafless. An owl started to answer from about a hundred yards away, in an area of denser brush. Then another one started to call from the opposite direction. One landed in the top of a nearby tree and then abruptly flew away. We waited. And waited. And shivered.

After what seemed like an hour (but was probably more like 20 minutes), Stewart decided that it just wasn't going to happen this time around. We headed back to the trucks, disappointed, but looking forward to warming ourselves by the fire.

Then, just as we were all getting situated in the trucks, someone said that Stewart had found one. I remember thinking, "What are the odds that the owl will still be there by the time we walk back?" Nevertheless, we trudged back to the picnic table and saw that Stewart had his spotlight trained on something in the distance. As we approached him, the ground underfoot turned crunchy with dead leaves. But the owl didn't move.

We got within 10 feet, and still the owl didn't move. He told us to move even closer and that it was okay to take pictures. All of a sudden, it was like the owl had been discovered by the paparazzi. Despite all the flashes, the owl still didn't move. Some of us got within three feet of the owl. It still didn't budge.

After it seemed like nothing would rattle this owl, TPWD video producer Bruce Biermann decided to try and get even closer. He slowly moved closer and closer and got within a few inches before the curious little owl finally took flight.

*Robert Macias*

ROBERT MACIAS  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## LETTERS

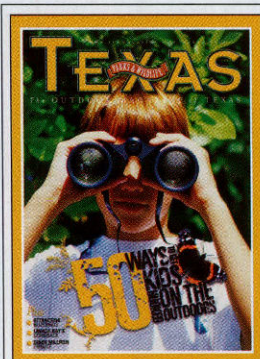
### CITY KIDS NEED MOTHER NATURE

**T**hank you for the "50 Ways To Get Kids Hooked on the Outdoors" article in the March issue. It is thrilling to watch city family/friends when they arrive here at the ranch. When they finally leave the traffic noise and bombarding of the

other senses — oh, the things they can hear, see, smell and even taste in the country. Time is suspended and spirits calm. City kids need to be introduced to Mother Nature. She is, after all, who feeds them, body and soul. Thanks again for the great magazine.

JOYCE BATTARBEE

*Jewett*



*It is thrilling to watch city family/friends when they arrive here at the ranch. City kids need to be introduced to Mother Nature. She is, after all, who feeds them, body and soul.*

*Joyce Battarbee  
Jewett*

### NATURE-INSPIRED POETRY

**I** received my first issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine this week. Reading "50 Ways to Get Kids Hooked on the Outdoors" brought back some wonderful memories.

I came to live on a farm/ranch when I married, and we raised two sons. A great-granddaughter, Lauren, came

to live with us at 13 months and stayed until she was 5 years old.

We were blessed to have a cabin on a lake and spent lots of time there. We always carried Lauren with us. She enjoyed the outdoors so very much. We would feed birds and other animals that came to the cabin at the lake. My husband taught her to hoot like an owl and they would answer her. One night she made the remark that she talked to the owls but did not know what she was saying.

The first year she went to school, the teacher tested the children by asking questions like: What floats? What flies? Most



children answered "boats, tubes, airplanes and kites." Lauren answered "little green frogs on lily pads" and "birds, bees and butterflies." The teacher called her mother and thought Lauren was gifted. She was informed that Lauren spent lots of time outdoors.

This year Lauren presented me with a poem. Here is an excerpt:

*On the porch I remember  
Watching the red birds as they flew.  
No one has learned more than I  
As we sat, just me and you.  
I don't remember each bird call  
But I remember how I learned to listen,  
To sit in simple silence  
And hear with intention.*

Thank you for such a wonderful magazine.

VIRGINIA W. RIVERS  
*Mount Calm*

#### NEW PERSPECTIVE ON GRASS

I found the story by Larry Hodge, "When the Rain Ends," in your February issue very interesting because I was in farm custom work for about 20 years. I never had thought about it in exactly that way, but it seems logical. In my years of planting coastal Bermuda grass, I could see that there should be more and better management of the land. I planted grass all over the southern part of Texas, approximately 18,000 acres. At the time, I thought it was the best thing that had happened to our part of the country for land managing, conservation and feed.

WOODIE POWELL  
*DeLeon*

#### Sound off for "Mail Call!"

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# SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

## JELLYFISH IN A LAKE

*Quarter-sized freshwater jellies show up sporadically all over the state.*

**John Newman was consulting on an East Texas ranch** when he saw something he never expected: a flock of round, whitish blobs bobbing in the clear water of a spring-fed lake.

Newman, who owns Newman Wildlife Management near Frankston, had a hunch what the blobs were. "I was in the Navy for four years, and I know what jellyfish look like," he says. The things in the lake were "just like a miniature saltwater jellyfish, but about the size of a quarter." Short tentacles rimmed the near-transparent bell. Internal organs formed a cross at the center.

That was August 1997. Newman called the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Jim Matthews, exhibits curator at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, came out with fisheries biologist Rick Ott to collect specimens. Newman found out about the existence of a freshwater jellyfish — not a true jellyfish, but a member of a related family. Biologists call it *Craspedacusta sowerbii* and it's found in lakes and ponds all over the world.

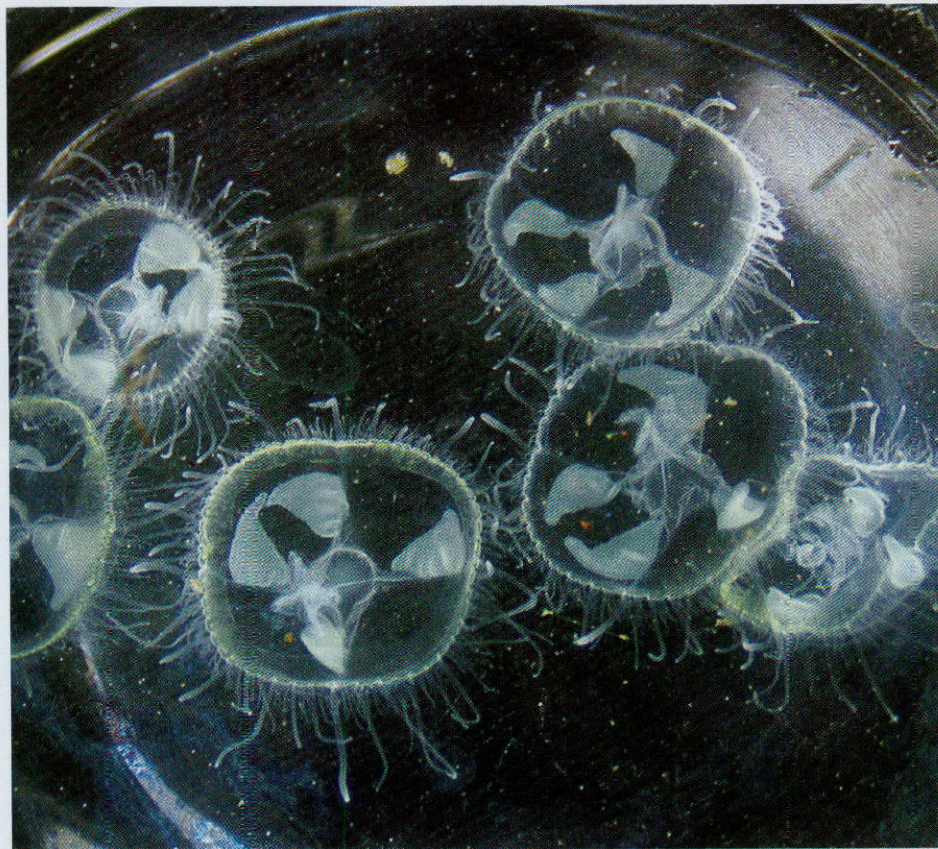
Terry Peard, who studies *C. sowerbii* at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, lists some 50 Texas sightings on his Web site.

Freshwater jellies have appeared in Lakes Amistad, Cisco, Grapevine, Joe Pool, Limestone, Nacogdoches, Medina and Travis, as well as several private lakes and ponds.

The free-floating medusa is the most visible stage of the jellyfish's complex life cycle. In most seasons, *C. sowerbii* lives in colonies of tiny, stalked polyps attached to underwater surfaces. A polyp reproduces by budding. It may produce a branch that remains connected or a frustule larva that breaks off and crawls away. Every so often, the polyps will bud off a crop of medusae, which develop sex organs and go looking for mates.

Both the medusa and polyp forms of *C. sowerbii* feed on zooplankton. Like its saltwater relatives, the freshwater jellyfish uses stinging cells to capture its food. The stingers aren't tough enough to have much effect on a human, although some people have reported a tingle when one touches a sensitive spot.

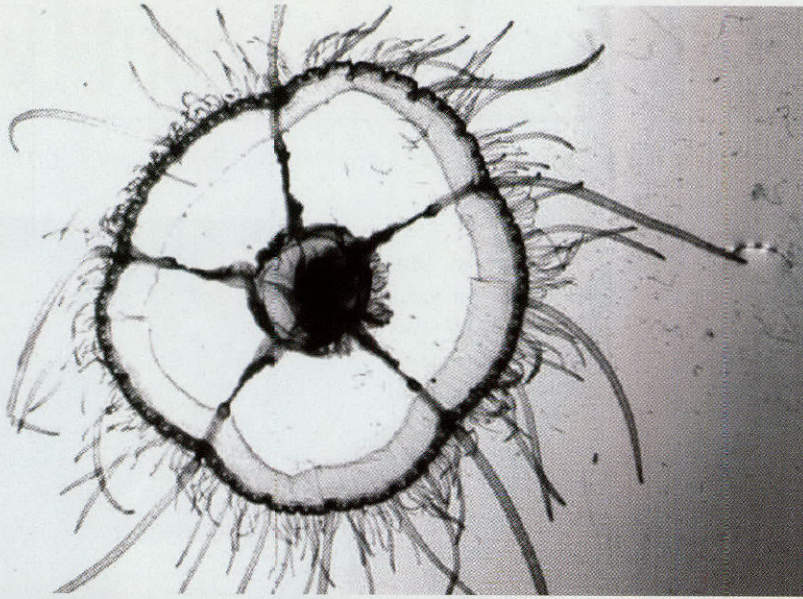
Newman observed medusa



The freshwater jellyfish has a whorl of string-like tentacles around its edge. From this ventral view, you can see four gonads and the manubrium (mouth) in the center.

PHOTO © SHARON MILSTEAD; OPPOSITE © LEWIS POPE; OTHERS COURTESY WWW.JELLYFISH.IUP.EDU





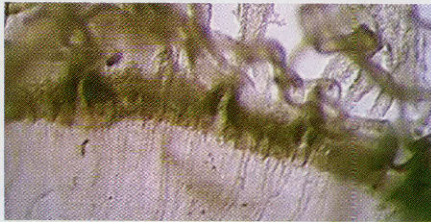
“blooms” at his client’s ranch each summer from 1997 through 2005. The sight reminds him of bubbles in a boiling pot. “They just appear from the depths and come up toward the surface,” he says. “Sometimes you don’t see more than 10. Sometimes, there are hundreds.”

This dance may not accomplish much, in biological terms. Peard’s research suggests that most United States populations are all male or all female. All the jellies in a given water body may be descended from a few dormant polyps (podocysts) that arrived on a bird’s foot or in a hatchery tank with stocked fish.

Blooms last only a few weeks, and they don’t happen on a predictable schedule. If you want to get lucky, Newman suggests gazing into water on a still day in late summer when the sun is high in the sky. “The hottest dog days of summer are when we see them,” he says. “The hotter the water, the more active they are.”

For more information on freshwater jellyfish, visit <[www.jellyfish.iup.edu](http://www.jellyfish.iup.edu)>. ☆

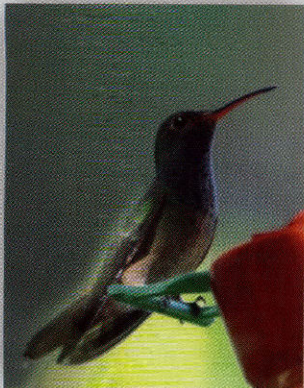
—Dyanne Fry Cortez



Adult medusae are quarter-sized (top); immature medusae (left) are much smaller. They are distinguishable from their marine counterparts by the presence of the velum (right), a thin, shelf-like structure on the ventral surface.

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# Birding Paradise!



Bob Martin



Beverly Doyle



Carolyn Whiteside

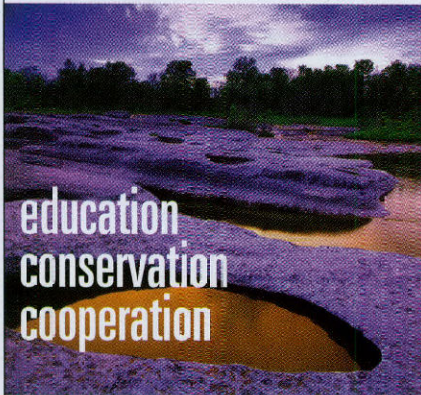
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# The Truth About Lye

*At Sauer-Beckmann Farm, making soap requires working up a sweat.*

### Ah, the choices of modern life.

Go to any store, and a staggering variety of scented bath soaps, heavy-duty cleansers and concentrated detergents stock the shelves. Which ones should you buy?

A century ago, people had only one option: lye soap. What's more, they typically made their own supply, a grueling chore that took most of a day.

This month, interpreters at the Sauer-Beckmann Farm — part of the Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site, near Stonewall — will make lye soap the old-fashioned way during a special event that's part of a yearlong celebration honoring the centennial of President Johnson's birth.

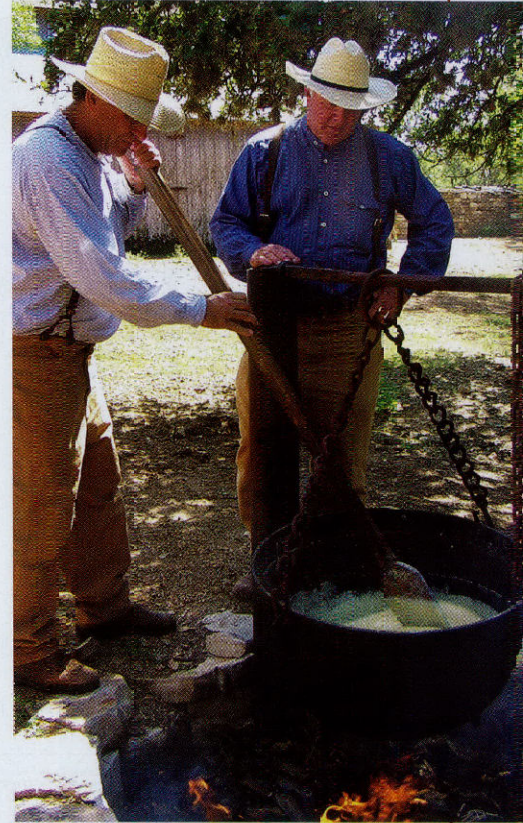
Visit Sauer-Beckmann any day and you'll find park staff dressed in period attire, portraying life on a Hill Country farm in the early 1900s. You can watch as women in long skirts cook lunch on a wood-burning stove, churn butter by hand or can fresh vegetables. Outside, men wearing leather suspenders tend to chores in the garden and barn, which houses the farm's resident cows, chickens, pigs and sheep.

During this month's soap-making event at the farm, Virginia Grona and other interpreters will cook up two batches of lye soap in a big cast-iron kettle. Their vintage recipe calls for 24 pounds of lard, 4 gallons of water and four 12-ounce cans of lye.

"We butcher our own pigs, then use the lard to store our cured ham, bacon and sausage for a year," Grona explains. "That lard is then used in our soap. It's how people recycled back then."

Over an open fire in a nearby pasture, interpreters, using a large wooden paddle, will stir the lard and water until the lard dissolves. "Then we'll carefully add the lye," Grona says. "You never add water to lye because it can explode."

When done, the soap will cool for several days before it's cut into small bars. Visitors that day will receive com-



Reenactors make soap by cooking lard, water and lye in a cast-iron kettle.

plementary samples. Handmade soap from the farm is also sold at the park's visitor center.

"People in the early 1900s used that soap for everything," Grona says. "They washed dishes and scrubbed floors with it. They washed their hands and face with lye soap. And on Saturday night, they bathed with lye soap. Back then, you took a bath once a week, whether you needed it or not."

The soap-making event runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 24. Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site is located two miles east of Stonewall on U.S. 290. Admission is free. For more information, call (830) 644-2252 or visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lyndonbjohnson](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lyndonbjohnson). For more information on the Centennial Celebration, visit [www.lbj100.org](http://www.lbj100.org). ★

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers



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# Black-Eyed Susan

*A lovely, prolific bloomer that's also low-maintenance.*

## Behold the noble, tall black-eyed susan

(*Rudbeckia hirta*). Resilient and sun-loving, this bright yellow, daisy-like species often gets overlooked during wildflower season in Texas. Its roots, though, reach far beyond the state's boundaries and into the past.

The flower's name likely comes from a popular ballad penned by English poet John Gay (1685-1732). *Black-Eyed Susan* told the sad story of a crying, lovelorn woman who boards a ship to bid her sailor farewell. Another historical tie: Caroleus Linnaeus, the "father of modern botany," named the flower's genus for his esteemed professor, Swedish botanist Olaf Rudbeck.

Actually, the flower's characteristic domed center looks more chocolate brown than black; hence, the species' other common name of "brown-eyed susan."

Endemic throughout North America, *Rudbeckia hirta* — a member of the sunflower family, Asteraceae — blooms from May well into fall along roadsides, across prairies and pastures, and in open woodlands. They thrive in home gardens with little attention. As a cut flower, black-eyed susans last up to 10 days in a vase.



Long ago, Native Americans valued the species as a medicinal plant. Forest Potawatomis treated colds with a tea made from its roots. Cherokees used juice from the roots to cure earaches. A tea made from the dried leaves produces a "stimulating diuretic," according to *Medicinal Plants of the Mountain West*. ★

—Seryl Smith-Rodgers

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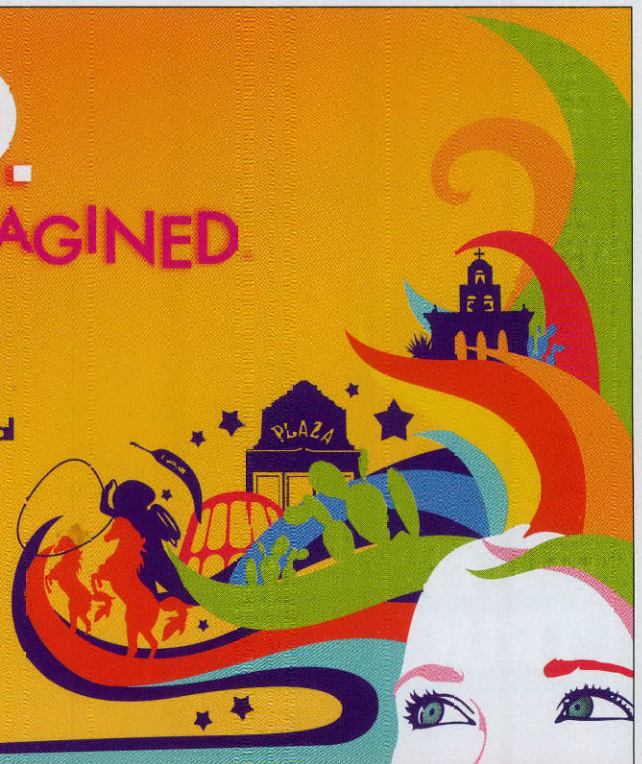
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# Sand Dollar

Scour the beach for these intricate skeletal remains.



White sand dollars seen on the beach are merely the dead shell, or "test."

scavenge for food by night. They breed in late spring and summer by external fertilization. This occurs when females and males respectively release their eggs and sperm into the water. The young, easily swept away by tides, swallow sand to help anchor them in place. Generally, sand dollars live approximately four years before they die and end up in some beachcomber's bucket. ★

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

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Often mistaken simply for a shell, the sand dollars you find washed ashore are actually skeletal remains of sea animals that burrow into the sandy ocean floor. Related to sea urchins, heart urchins and sea biscuits, sand dollars — also called keyhole urchins — lack arms and use spines to move around.

Those fuzzy, gray spines cover both sides of a live sand dollar's endoskeleton (called a test). Topside, five symmetrical petalloids resemble their namesake — flower petals — and serve as gills. As for the five oval holes, called lunules, researchers believe they're used to pass algae, bacteria and other planktonic food to an urchin's mouth, located on the bottom side.

If you break open a brittle sand dollar, five tiny "doves" will fall out. These pieces, arranged in a circle that's called "Aristotle's lantern," work as jaws to crush and chew food.

Sand dollars live in dense colonies and



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# Is that Baby Bird Really an Orphan?

*Usually, the mother is not far away, and it's best to leave it alone.*

**What should be done** if you happen across a baby bird that appears to be orphaned? The first thing to consider is that the baby may not actually need your help.

Often, out-of-nest babies are mistaken for orphans or injured when the truth is they are simply doing what maturing birds do — preparing themselves to fly the coop. Coming to the rescue of baby birds who don't really need rescuing is one of the most common mistakes made by well-intentioned bird buffs. Cliff Shackelford, a non-game ornithologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, reminds us that “not everything that appears helpless is truly helpless.”

Many people still believe that once humans touch a baby bird, its parents will reject it. While that is incorrect, the truth is that by “helping” the baby bird, there is a good chance you have interrupted the parent's educational efforts or rescue attempts or even the baby's first attempts at spreading its own wings.

Shackelford cites baby blue jay behavior as a perfect example. “They look like a nestling but they're really a (flightless) fledgling,” he says. “Young blue jays often leave the nest before they can truly fly. Instead, they wander around on foot quite vocally so their parents can keep them fed and protected. Many folks pick up young blue jays not knowing that its parent is likely watching from the trees nearby.”

According to Roslyn Even, director of the Houston-based Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition, a bird that is already feathering will usually require only a short period of time before it becomes independent.

She explains that even with threats such as cats in the neighborhood, babies are most often better off left with the mother or father. “The parent will teach the fledgling necessary survival skills that we can't, so it is important that the fledgling be left with the parent,” she explains.

However, there are obvious instances when baby birds (especially nestlings) should be relocated, such as removing them from the path of approaching ants or traffic. Lynn Cuny, founder and executive director of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation in Kendalia, says you should first see if you can locate the nest the baby fell from. “If you can't,” she says, “create a makeshift nest in a shoebox and line it with an old T-shirt. Never line it with a towel, because babies often get their claws caught up in the frayed strings.” Then, secure the nest in dense shrubbery or a tree close to where you found the bird on the ground.

As tempted as you may be, it's best not to feed the baby. Quite often, birds are killed by their well-meaning caretakers either because they are given the wrong type of food (such as giving a

seed-eater an insect or vice versa) or are given liquids improperly (leading to fluid in the lungs).

If hours have gone by and the parent has not yet come to claim the offspring, it may be time to contact a rehabilitator who specializes in birds. Before doing so, warns Shackelford, make sure you're willing to make the commitment to deliver the baby a long distance away. “Remember, [rehabbers are] busy feeding and tending to injured animals around the clock and often can't afford to break away,” he says. It's also important to remember that most rehabbers are working as volunteers “on their own penny” and that a financial donation would be appreciated.

If you need the services of a Texas wildlife rehabilitator, you can find a listing at [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hunt/wild/wild/rehab/list/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hunt/wild/wild/rehab/list/). ★



↑ **Fragile as this young mockingbird seems, it probably doesn't need your “help.”**



# Bird Basics

*A no-nonsense guide for novice birders.*

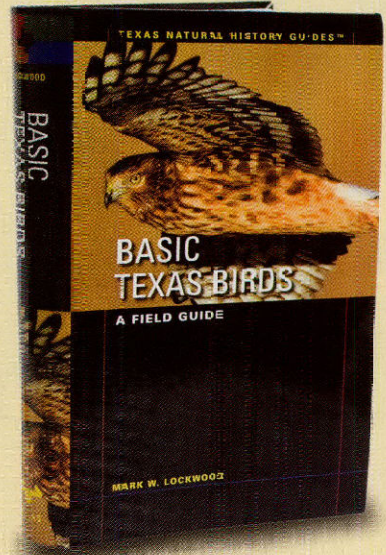
"The diversity of Texas can accommodate the full range of birding experience, from casual neighborhood observations to remote expeditions," explains author Mark W. Lockwood in his introduction to *Basic Texas Birds - A Field Guide* (University of Texas Press, 2007). "Many people first become interested in birds simply by looking at the species that are attracted to their backyard. This often leads to exploring the parks or natural areas close to where they live. For some, their interest develops into a lifelong obsession."

Lockwood should know. A longtime conservation biologist for TPWD, he happens to be one of the obsessed. And now, through his latest book, he can share this enthusiasm for birding with the rest of us. Lockwood, one of Texas' most hardworking and devoted ornithologists, has created a field guide

that offers a leg up for both the novice and the experienced birder. The palm-sized volume provides quick and easy access to descriptions for identifying over 180 species of common and specialty birds that can be found across the state. Included are 200 full-color photographs of the birds in their natural habitat, range maps and a glossary. Best of all, Lockwood provides an up-to-date account of habitat, status and distribution for each species.

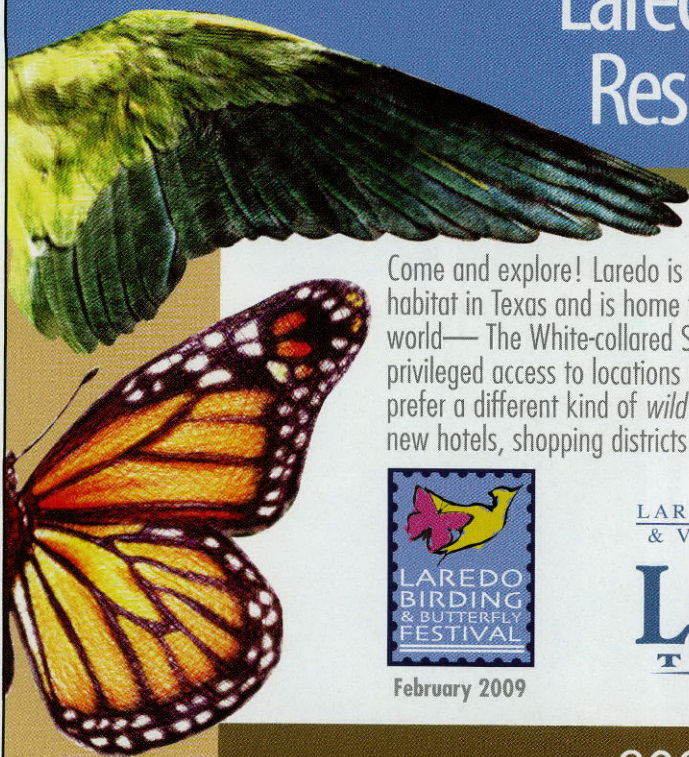
The field guide relies on Lockwood's no-nonsense, just-the-facts writing style to relay key information about background and identifying characteristics of each species. But his personal appreciation for the state's astonishing birdlife always manages to shine through.

"One of the most striking ducks found in Texas," he writes of the black-bellied whistling duck. "Very gregarious, they



can sometimes be found in flocks of more than 2,000 birds." It is indeed an astounding event to witness, made possible in part by habitat protection and restoration by advocates like Lockwood who have devoted their lives to maintaining the richness of the state's natural environments. Perhaps by drawing more Texans into the birder's world through his new field guide, Lockwood may also help to preserve that event for future generations to see. ★

## Laredo's Winged Resplendence



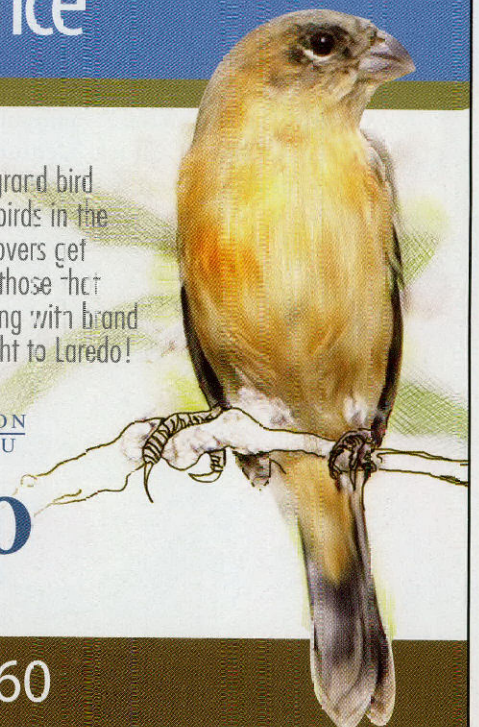
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# 3 Days in the Field / By Teresa S. Newton

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## My Funny Abilene

*Cotton and oil may no longer be king, but there's still plenty of wind — and good humor.*

**My trip to Abilene has been a long time coming.** I've known Pennie Boyett for 18 years, and she's told me so much about her old hometown. She talked about the people and places, the myths and legends, and how beautiful West Texas can be.

I wanted to see Abilene with her as my tour guide. So after years of talking about it, we're finally heading out.

We roll in on I-20 Business, past Frontier Texas!, a history-amusement venue, and a big pink flamingo, one of numerous outdoor sculptures downtown. We pull into the parking lot of the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau, located in the old Texas and Pacific Depot. Across the street, a friendly-looking dinosaur peers at a Volkswagen Beetle atop a two-story building.

Obviously, Abilene has a sense of humor.

After gathering up the usual tourist brochures, we stretch our legs downtown. Pennie points out the Paramount Theatre, the Grace Cultural Center and other buildings, noting their his-

torical or sentimental importance.

We step inside Texas Star Trading Company, billed as the "National Store of Texas." Pennie is drawn to a heavenly coffee aroma. "That's 'Abilene Delight,'" says the gal at the counter, pouring Pennie a cup.

I cruise through displays of touristy Texas goodies, laughing at the T-shirts that declare "West Texas girls don't wear lip gloss in a wind storm." Good advice.



A few blocks over, we stop outside Monks Coffee Shop with a "Keep Abilene Boring" T-shirt in the window. "I've gotta have one of those," Pennie says. She picks out a green one from the shelves, passing up the "What Happens In Abilene, Leaves Abilene" apparel.

Back on North First Street, we find even more funny stuff at the small park by the visitors' center. The city displays various outdoor sculptures each year, with some becoming permanent exhibits, Pennie says. A concrete sculpture looks like a man praying on one side, and on the other, it's a face with mouth wide open and little pigs hopping out. Nearby is a tall rusty metal pig with long legs and wheels. Further west, we find giant antlers.

Clockwise from left: *The Pig* resides at Minter Memorial Park in downtown Abilene; a bison relaxes at Abilene State Park; Texas Star Trading Co.

"This is jackalope country, isn't it?" I ask. "Definitely," Pennie confirms.

She notes that downtown's east-west streets are numbers





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and the north-south streets are trees, many for trees that don't grow here.

"If they named them after the trees here, it would be Mesquite 1, Mesquite 2, Mesquite 3 ..." Pennie laughs.

A sense of humor is an important quality out on the plains. Between the heat, wind, drought, oil industry crashes and military cutbacks, it might be all you have.

For centuries, these plains were empty except for some deer, prairie dogs and the visiting bison and Native Americans. Spanish explorers rode through in the 1540s. U.S. troops arrived at Fort Phantom Hill, northeast of town, in 1851. Buffalo Gap served as the first county seat. The railroad town of Abilene took the moniker of the Kansas town, destination of cattle drives that passed by.

Over the years, cotton and oil helped the economy. Nowadays, the major employers include Dyess Air Force Base and three universities: Abilene Christian University, Hardin-Simmons University and McMurry University. Hunting and fishing here remain popular with sportsmen. Wind is the newest commodity, with giant windmills popping up throughout the region.

Our walk has left us hungry, so we head to Harold's Pit Bar-B-Q. Pennie expounds on the hot water cornbread, so I order that with a brisket sandwich. The sandwich is wonderful, and the two corn ponies with butter are a true dessert. As we start to leave, Harold walks to the front, thanks everyone for coming and sings a beautiful version of *How Great Thou Art*. Dinner and a show!

Next is a driving tour of town, past the colleges, landmarks, beautiful churches and houses. We cruise through her old neighborhood, past her former home and those of friends.

She takes me back to my truck, then it's south to Buffalo Gap. In the 1860s and 1870s, buffalo hunters camped at this break in the Callahan Divide, an east-west line of hills. It was a bustling town until Abilene took the county seat away in 1883. Today, about 460 folks live here.

We check in at a bed-and-breakfast near Buffalo Gap Historical Village. The b&b, a former parsonage brought in from nearby Clyde, is a simple white house, and we have it all to ourselves. We unload our things and head back to the assortment of small-town buildings, including the original Taylor County Courthouse. The



village hosts vintage baseball games, using 1883 rules, but there aren't any this weekend, unfortunately.

At closing time, Pennie suggests a quick drive in the country. South on FM 89 is Abilene State Park and Lake Abilene, where she pulls in. The lake is one of four nearby to satisfy anglers. Her family visited the lake often when her girls were little, she says.

We cruise down the road discussing the wind farms while we pass windmills on the horizon. Northeast of the road was Camp Berkeley, a World War II training facility and POW camp.

The road intersects with US 277 at Coronado's camp. The Spanish explorer parked here in the 1540s, and it is one of Pennie's favorite spots. She reminisces about the weekend outdoor concerts hosted by the barbecue place on the site.

Back at the b&b, I call for reservations at nearby Perini Ranch Steakhouse. There's a two-hour wait, and it's well worth it. I expect a lot from this legendary place, and they deliver. The steak, sides and bread pudding are pure heaven.

Next morning, I quiz some folks at Abilene State Park about the yurts (year-round recreational tents). The permanent tents are popular, and reservations are steady since the park added them a couple of years ago. Pennie and I peek into one. Looks pretty comfortable with a bunk bed, sofa, microwave and small table. There's even air conditioning.

The rest of the morning we walk around the stone structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the buffalo wallow where the buffalo ... well ... wallowed (it's a fishing pond today). A bird blind on one trail is maintained by the Big Country Audubon Society. We park on one of the two benches





**Clockwise from opposite top: the "Sweet Church" (1906) at Buffalo Gap Historic Village; ruins at Fort Phantom Hill historic site; Carter Ernst's *The Super Happy Fun Chicken* on North First Street is one of many sculptures on display throughout Abilene.**

Cornelia Clark Fort crashed here in 1943, the first American woman pilot to die on active military duty.

Back in town, I search for a "linear air park" shown on a local map. I end up at Dyess Air Force Base, and the guard rolls his eyes when he sees my tourist map. It's the base's huge aircraft collection, but tours are only for groups, he says. What is open is the Dyess Visitors Center and Memorial Park, just north of the base, so I go there. The center highlights the life of Lt. Col. William E. Dyess, while the outdoor park honors Dyess AFB men and women who died in service.

Later, I randomly pick Sharon's Barbecue from Pennie's list of local eateries. On the way, I drive through downtown to look at more architecture. On the side of an older brick building: Laughter Funeral Home.

Laughter. I should have expected that.

(Later, I found out this is pronounced *law-ter*, so the joke's on me.)

Now north to Fort Phantom Hill. Only the chimneys and a couple of buildings from this outpost remain today. "Imagine living here back then," a woman says before catching up with her sons. Back then, there were no noises from cars and jets, no monolithic windmills on the horizon, no lakes nearby. Not much but miles and miles of miles and miles. Rumor has it an officer's wife burned the place down.

Guess she didn't have a sense of humor. ★

## DETAILS

**Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau** (800-727-7704, [www.abilenevisitors.com](http://www.abilenevisitors.com))

**Abilene State Park** (325-572-3204, [www.tpwwd.state.tx.us/abilene](http://www.tpwwd.state.tx.us/abilene))

**Buffalo Gap Historic Village** (325-572-3365, [www.buffalogap.com](http://www.buffalogap.com))

**Cedar Gap Farm** (325-572-4738, [www.bigcountryaudubon.org/birding-locations/cedar-gap-farm/](http://www.bigcountryaudubon.org/birding-locations/cedar-gap-farm/))

**Dyess AFB Visitors Center and Memorial Park** (325-793-2199)

**Fort Phantom Hill** (325-677-1309, [www.fortphantom.org](http://www.fortphantom.org))

**Frontier Texas!** ([www.frontiertexas.com](http://www.frontiertexas.com))

**Harold's Bar-B-Q** (325-672-4451)

**Lola's Mexican Food Café** (325-572-3731)

**Perini Ranch Steakhouse** (325-572-3339, [www.periniranch.com](http://www.periniranch.com))

**Sharon's Barbecue** (325-672-3330, [www.sharonsbarbeque.com](http://www.sharonsbarbeque.com))

inside and look for birds on a list from the park office.

For lunch, we try Lola's in Buffalo Gap. Lola Molina dishes up some green enchiladas, beans, salad and tasty Indian fry bread. She and two gentlemen diners keep us entertained with amusing tales. Afterwards, Pennie heads back home, so I go it alone.

Earlene Hutto meets me at the bird-watching house at Cedar Gap Farm near Tuscola. She and her husband, Homer, built the 25-by-40-foot structure and a nature trail so others could enjoy watching songbirds. Their place is a regular stop for schoolchildren and Audubon Society members. Admission is free, but donations keep the feeders filled.

"Sharing it is so important to me," says Earlene, a semi-retired speech pathologist. She spends her days filling feeders, making sure and checking on houses for

bluebirds and black-capped vireos.

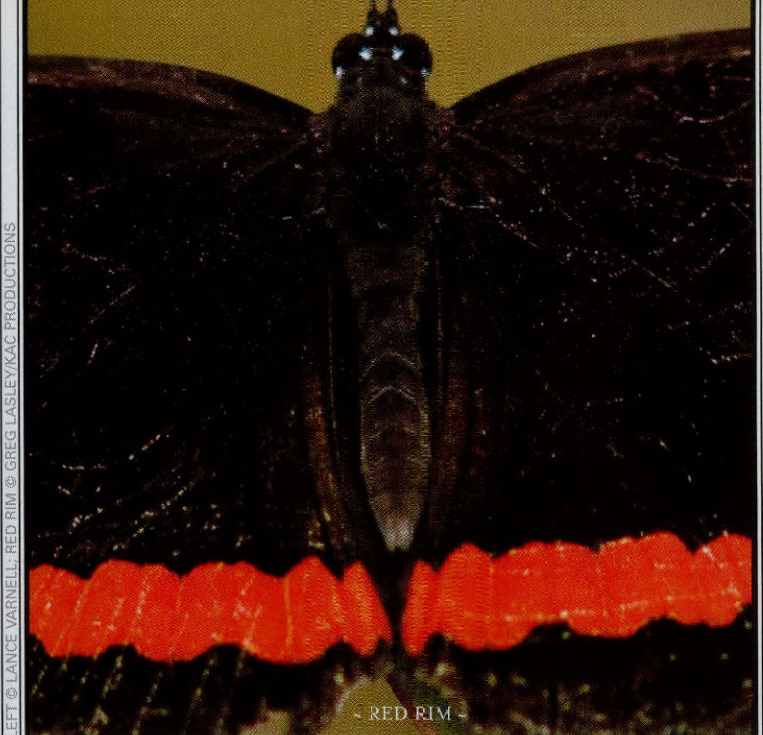
Large windows look out to a birder's delight. Feeders, both homemade and store-bought, dangle from trees and poles. Mesquite limbs fashioned into a few arbors are covered with chicken wire that lets songbirds in but keeps predators out. And there are birds, lots and lots of birds.

Earlene and I spend the afternoon watching songbirds and talking about their personalities and funny antics.

The wind is howling for my last day, and I don't want to be outside. A driving tour is in order. Down FM 89 again to Coronado's camp, then straight. My atlas shows a shortcut to FM 126, the road to Merkel, that takes me close to a few towering windmills.

Later, I stop for two historical markers at Mulberry Canyon. The canyon was part of the Military Road and Butterfield Stage-Overland Mail routes.





LEFT © LANCE VARNELL - RED RIM © GREG LASLEVY/KAC PRODUCTIONS

# The Big Shift



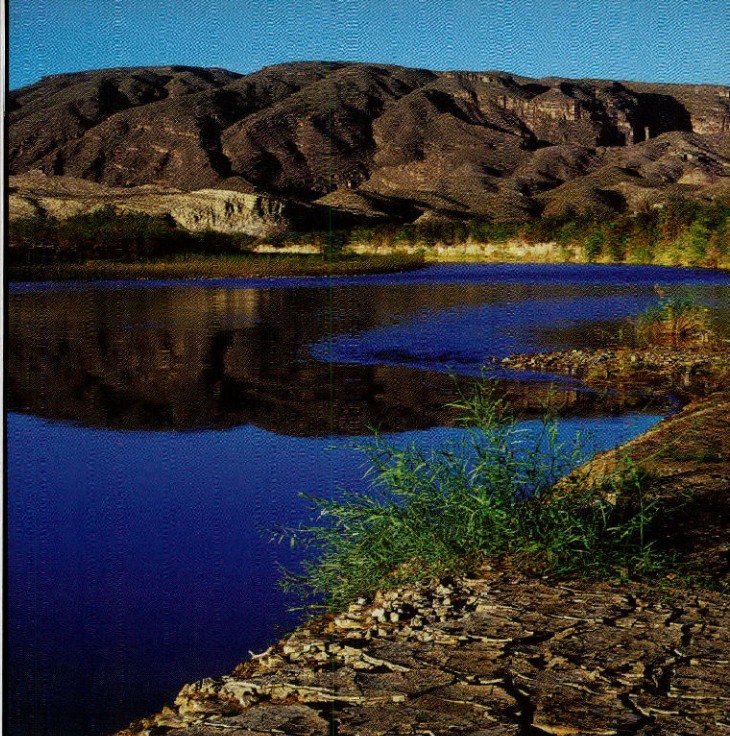
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- ROSEATE SPOONBILL

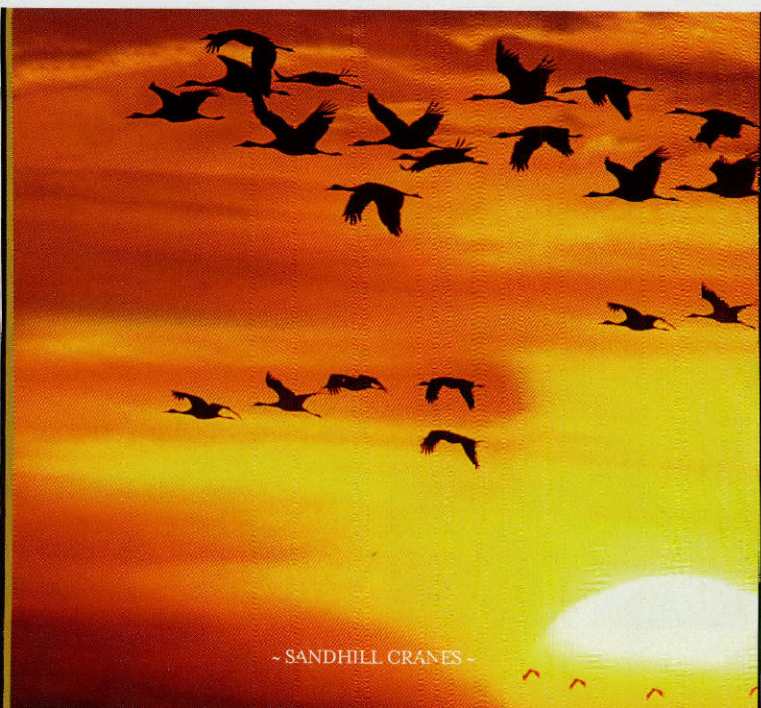
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*Why are birds, butterflies and other wildlife showing up where they've never been before?*

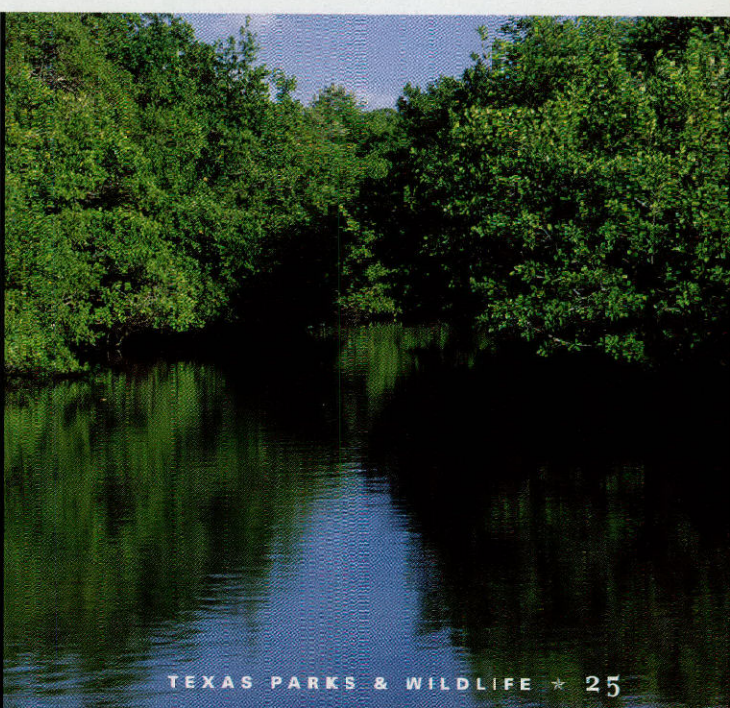


~BY RUSTY MIDDLETON~



- SANDHILL CRANES -

LEFT © JOHN E. FORD - RIGHT © ROJE NUSSBAUMER





“Oh, oh, I think I heard an Audubon’s oriole!”

said Selma Glasscock as she turned around excitedly and stared hard into the South Texas brush, her binoculars still dangling from her neck. Even in December the brush here is a thick, chaotic mass of mesquite, cedar elm, oaks, vines and elbow-bush. “In this country you ‘spot’ birds as much by sound as sight,” she said, giving up the search for the moment.

For many birders, the sight of an Audubon’s oriole would be a special thrill, because not so long ago you would have needed to go all the way to the Lower Rio Grande Valley to see one. Now there are reports of Audubon’s sightings near Beeville and here in the vicinity of Welder Wildlife Foundation, 150 miles north of the Valley. And the Audubon’s oriole has lots of company.

Around the Welder Wildlife Foundation’s 7,800-acre wildlife refuge near Sinton (just north of Corpus Christi), dozens of new species are showing up from the south. Striking, and very tropical looking, green jays flit around the refuge headquarters, calling raucously at each other. Once confined to the Valley, they now are seen near Pleasanton, Cuero and as far north and east as Lake Jackson. Great kiskadees once were seen only in the extreme southern tip of Texas. Now there are several pairs of them just west of Houston.

“When we saw the first kiskadee here at Welder we didn’t know what it was,” said Glasscock, assistant director of the refuge. “We were excited. It was jaw-dropping.”

More than 70 species of South Texas birds have moved north and east, according to John Rappole, formerly of Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M-Kingsville) and a senior research scientist with the Smithsonian National Zoological Park. In a recently released book, *The Changing Climate of South Texas 1900-2100*, Rappole just goes ahead and says it. The best explanation for birds moving north and east is climate change.

Other scientists aren’t quite there yet. It’s not

that they don’t believe that global warming is happening. It’s just that making assertions about climate change for specific species in Texas, where the effects of global warming are not as obvious, still makes them a little uncomfortable.

“Scientists are conservative,” says Glasscock, who holds a doctorate in systems ecology. She is friends with Rappole and helped him conduct his recent research on the changing ranges of Texas birds at Welder Wildlife Foundation. She’s a little wary of the “bandwagon effect” in ascribing range changes to global warming when there are so many factors possibly at work. “There are so many things that can affect bird behavior. There are grazing, fencing, fire suppression and invasive species. Agriculture is a big one, as well as human construction, among others. It’s a long list. Plus, as we all know, the weather oscillates. We may just be in a warm phase now.”

A recent analysis of weather patterns by scientists at Texas A&M-Kingsville reveals that the climate in South Texas has been warming steadily for about the last 30 years, just as it has elsewhere. In fact the ‘90s was the warmest decade on record, and 1998 was the warmest year on record. Before that, the South Texas climate had not shown much variation from its known historical patterns.

Tim Brush, an ornithologist with the University of Texas-Pan American in McAllen who has studied Valley birds since 1991, agrees that the climate change explanation for all the new birds he sees may be going a little too far out on a limb for him.

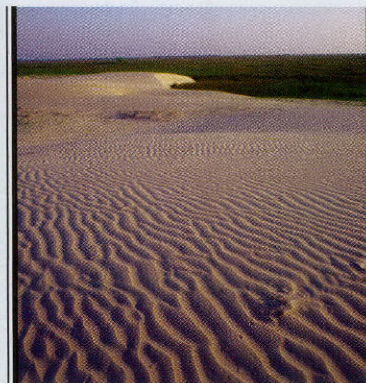
“I’d rather be closer to the tree,” he laughs.

Above: While once the sight of an Audubon’s oriole was rare, they can now be seen 150 miles further north. Opposite: The range of great kiskadees has extended from the extreme southern tip of Texas to near Houston.

BUTTERFLIES © GREG LASLEY/KAC PRODUCTIONS; LEFT © LANCE VARNELL; SAND © WYMAN MEINZER; OPPOSITE © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



~ COMMON MESTRA ~



~ VARIEGATED SKIPPER ~



*“When we saw the first kiskadee here at Welder we didn't know what it was. We were excited. It was jaw-dropping.” — Selma Glasscock, assistant director, Welder Wildlife Foundation*

~ GREAT KISKADEE ~



The appearance of new species is not just happening in the extreme south of the state. Butterflies once confined mostly to Mexico are showing up all over South and Central Texas.



- GREEN JAYS -



- RED RIM -



Top: Tropical-looking green jays, once confined to the Rio Grande Valley, are now seen as far north as Lake Jackson. Bottom left: Malachites were seen across much of the southern half of Texas last year, and red rims (below) have been seen around Austin. Bottom right: Snook have been appearing more frequently in Texas waters.

Brush cites the massive conversion of bird habitat in Mexico over to farmland as a possible reason why so many Mexican species are showing up in the Valley area in recent years. Brush is seeing short-tailed hawks, tropical kingbirds and clay-colored robins among many new southern species. (Altogether, a remarkable 513 species of birds have been sighted in the Rio Grande Valley.) Brush also thinks it is important to remember that one of the most fundamental behaviors of any species is to increase its population and expand its range. Fluctuations in population and range are a normal and constant part of evolution.

Rappole does not ignore the many possible causes. In fact, he has studied them extensively and found that for some species there are reasonable non-climate-related reasons for change. For example, the large influx of white-winged doves from the south, especially into urban areas, might be explained by the “heat island” effect of cities and the large number of people who are feeding birds in their backyards. And the appearance of cave swallows in Texas could credibly be attributed to the availability of many structures like highway bridges that provide new nesting opportunities. But for most birds, there was no particular explanation, Rappole found. Indeed habitat is declining for many species due to urbanization and expanding agriculture. Yet the birds are here and they keep coming.

Rappole’s conclusion: The only explanation that holds up, when you look at the total number of range expansions as a whole, is a changing climate. And Rappole is not alone. Other ornithologists, such as John Arvin at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson, agree that the best explanation has to be climate change.

And when you look at an even bigger picture, encompassing other plants and animals in Texas, that conclusion seems stronger still.

## MARINE LIFE

MARK FISHER, science director at the TPWD Marine Laboratory in Rockport, says new species of fish are showing up in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

“Gray snapper have definitely been moving north since the 1990s,” said Fisher. Once found only in the lower Laguna Madre and off the shore of the extreme

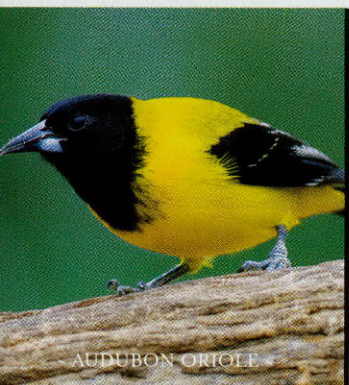
southern tip of Texas, they are now migrating all the way up to the Galveston area. Their growth has been “exponential,” said Fisher. Plus, snook have been appearing more frequently in Texas waters, although not in large numbers. Even the permit, a fish once known only in the tropics, is showing up in Texas when the water is warm enough.

## BUTTERFLIES

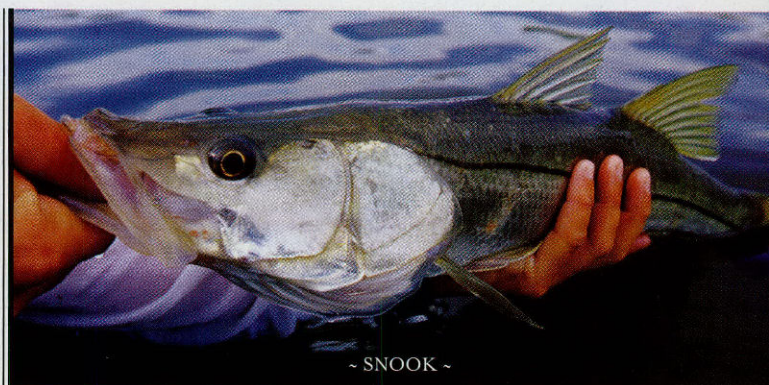
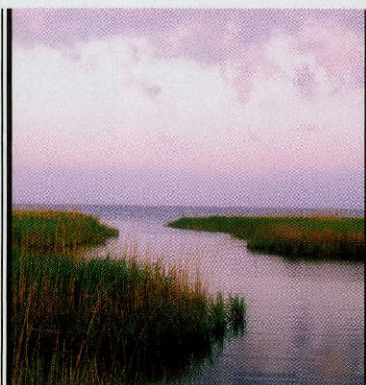
**THEN THERE ARE THE BUTTERFLIES.** Although butterfly specialists caution that some new records could be attributable to the fact that more people are interested in, and thus looking for, butterflies these days, there are an awful lot of new sightings of southern species. Josh Rose, a TPWD natural resource specialist at the World Birding Center in Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, was thrilled to see the one-spotted prepona on a baited post just outside the park’s visitor center in early December 2007. (His butterfly bait is an unpleasant looking but effective combination of mashed-up old bananas combined with some brown sugar and a few other ingredients.) This was only the second sighting in the U.S. of this species. The recent appearance of rare Mexican butterflies such as the Guatemalan leafwing and telea hairstreak in other areas of the Valley made news around the country.

But the appearance of new species is not just happening in the extreme south of the state. Butterflies once confined mostly to Mexico are showing up all over South and Central Texas. A variegated skipper appeared in Kerr County, and malachites have been seen across much of the southern half of Texas during 2007. Uncommon species such as blue-eyed sailor, red rim and common mestra have been seen around Austin.

More famously, Camille Parmesan, associate professor of biology at the University of Texas at Austin and member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, testified before Congress: “We’re seeing many tropical species moving into the Gulf Coast states — former migrants like the rufous hummingbird and the green jay have become year-round residents in Alabama and Texas, respectively. Florida has five



AUDUBON ORIOLE



~ SNOOK ~



new species of tropical dragonfly. Many tropical butterflies that are normally confined to Mexico are starting to breed as far north as Austin, Texas."

## PLANTS

THE UNITED STATES Department of Agriculture map of plant hardiness zones has shifted north for most areas of the country by one or two zones since 1990. Biologists agree that studies of changes in wildlife cannot be separated from changes in the plant communities they depend on, either directly or indirectly. There are signs of temperature-related changes in plant communities in Texas, also.

Early maps of the Texas coast showed only about 65 acres of black mangrove habitat in the Mission-Aransas Bay areas just north of Port Aransas. Nowadays, there are at least 15,000 acres of black mangrove in that area alone. This has happened mostly within the last 20 years, according to Paul A. Montagna, a marine science professor at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

All mangrove varieties are intolerant of freezing temperatures, and red mangrove is even more sensitive than the black variety. Coastal scientists say that it is red mangrove that may show the most dramatic response to rising temperatures in the future. In fact, it already has. Since 2005, red mangrove has become established in several areas along the Texas coastline, from South Padre Island to Matagorda Island along the central coast. This plant had been restricted to Mexico and the extreme southern tip of Florida in the

past. Scientists see red mangrove as very much an indicator species for climate change along the Texas coast.

There have been some changes observed inland as well. Lynn Drawe, executive director of the Welder Wildlife Foundation, has tracked habitat at his refuge for decades. Although he is not ready to attribute the changes to global warming (simply because he doesn't know the cause), he has seen exponential growth in elbow-bush and a near doubling of overall brush cover since the refuge was first surveyed in 1939. "It has just amazed me how elbow-bush has gone from just scattered small plants to huge and pervasive," he said. Other scientists in South Texas have also noted that brush is noticeably thicker than it used to be in past decades.

## PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

THE FIRST paragraph of the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report begins with the statement: "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is evident from observations of increases in global average air temperature and ocean temperature, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level."

Such a worldwide consensus of hundreds of scientists indicates that there is no longer any meaningful debate over the reality of global warming. It is already happening. Although the effects are manifesting more



PHOTOS © WYMAN MEINZER

Above: Some scientists predict the climate will become dryer due to increased temperatures, not decreased rainfall.



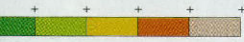
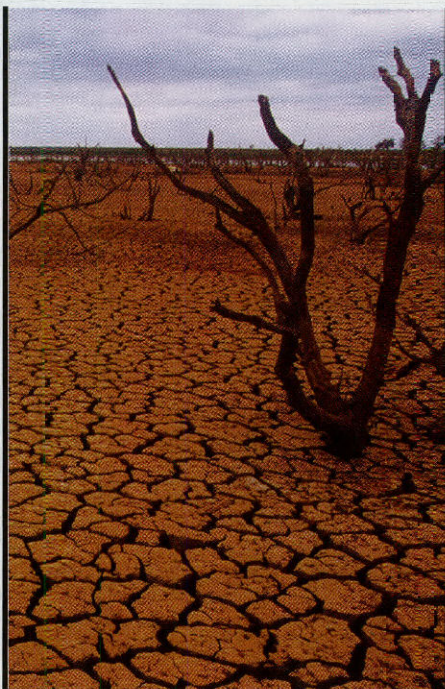
- GREAT EGRET -

*"... We've only had a 9-degree increase in the last 10,000 years. It kind of blows your mind."*

*—Jim Norwine, regents professor of geography at Texas A&M-Kingsville*



*"I still have a little trouble getting my mind around a 7-degree increase within about 100 years..."*



Below: Other effects of climate change are more intense rain events and the spread of plants like red mangrove.



LEFT © LANCE VANNELL, RIGHT © ROLF NIJSSBAUMER

dramatically at the poles, Texas is already being affected and will be even more in the future. The questions now are how much will we be affected and when.

Although no one really knows the exact answers, Texas scientists have been able to make fairly detailed predictions based on recent global and local climate studies. Jim Norwine, regents professor of geography at Texas A&M-Kingsville, has written extensively about climate in Texas. In talking about the future, he says, "Think about Corpus Christi moving, climatically, about 100 miles south and west." It will be dryer, not because the rainfall is expected to decrease, but because it will be hotter, by about 7 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100, based on current assumptions. Water will become increasingly scarce.

"Frankly I still have a little trouble getting my mind around a 7-degree increase within about 100 years," Norwine says. "I mean, we've only had a 9-degree increase in the last 10,000 years. It kind of blows your mind."

Dry spells will last longer, rain events will be more intense and the entire climate regime will likely shift east, with western South Texas becoming semi-desert and eastern South Texas becoming semi-arid, he says. Although Norwine's studies are specific to South Texas, he says they can be extrapolated to the rest of the state. Commensurate changes in wildlife can be expected.

Texas scientists have also made forecasts for the Texas coast. Paul A. Montagna and John W. Tunnell Jr., of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, and James G. Gibeaut of UT-Austin say a rising sea level will bring major changes to the coast. While they are less sure of the

magnitude of the changes due to uncertainty about how much humans will intervene in global warming, they are more confident about the trends.

Increasing sea level will result in more frequent and longer flooding of marshes that could eventually convert to open water. Seagrass beds will appear and disappear with changing water depths. Tidal flats will spread inland, and bays and estuaries will grow. Erosion could cause steeper shorelines that would change the habitat for mangrove, tidal flats and marshes. Ranges of marine species would certainly change.

Other scientists predict that if the sea level rises high enough, the barrier islands will disappear, eliminating the protection they provide from increasingly active storms.

Norwine cautions that most predictions about sea level rise are based on business-as-usual assumptions, meaning no reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. With no reductions, sea level is expected to rise by 7 to 10 feet by the end of the century.

James Hansen, the NASA scientist who first sounded the alarm about global warming, says that if there is a rapid disintegration of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, the rise could be as much as 20 feet by 2100.

Two things are certain about wildlife and plants in Texas. Changes have already happened, and more are on the way. ★

#### DETAILS

*The Changing Climate of South Texas 1900–2100* is available from the Texas A&M-Kingsville bookstore or by contacting Jim Norwine at [kfjrn00@tamu.edu](mailto:kfjrn00@tamu.edu).



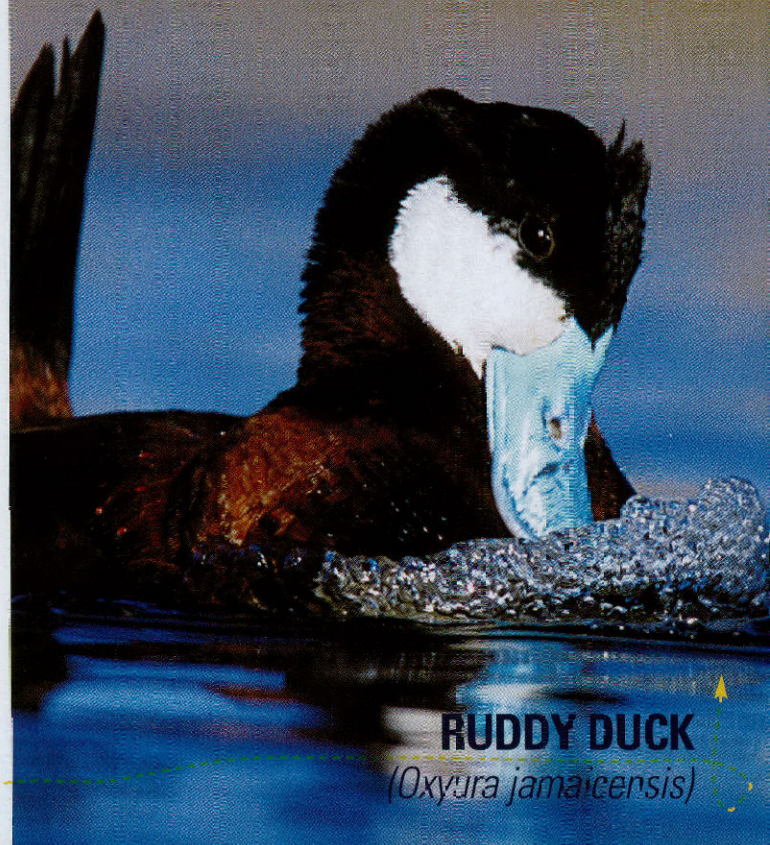
# Boogie Woogie Bugle Birds

By Noreen  
Damude

Avian courtship on parade.

RUDDY DUCKS LEAVE LATE for their northern prairie pothole breeding grounds, having spent much of the winter in Texas. It's late March and males have finally sloughed their winter drabs in preparation for departure. Suddenly, a resplendent mahogany-chestnut drake breaks away from the sleepy pack and skitters across the water. With his signature stiff tail pointing skyward, flashy electric-blue bill a-thumping and rakish feathered horns a-popping, he strikes a comical pose. A virtual shape-shifter, he puffs out his neck and inflates his breast feathers with air. Haloed in a froth of bubbles and circlets of foamy ripples, he breaks into dance. The flailing male combines quick dives, wing flutters and frenzied head-bobbing as he burlesques his way back across the pond to engage a hen's attention. Females seem to pay him no heed, having seen it all before. Not to be rebuffed, he tilts his body up and bears his wings violently against the water, cocking his tail repeatedly to expose his snowy white rump. If she continues to play coy, he lowers his head and slaps his bill against his inflated upper breast, making weird hollow thumping sounds. The entire frenzied dance ends with a husky croak. Impressed at last, she opens her bill and stretches her head out upon the surface of the water. Woe to any rival drake that tries to butt in. The intruder is summarily dunked and routed. While mostly monogamous, a dominant male may at times pair with two females simultaneously. Unusual in ducks, females rarely choose a mate before they reach the breeding grounds. Odd as well, hens occasionally dump a few surplus eggs into other females' nests.

*I'll buff and I'll fluff*



**RUDDY DUCK**  
(*Oxyura jamaicensis*)



AS FOR THE QUESTION, "WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?" of any one of the millions of birds that migrate through Texas each year, and the answer would be resoundingly simple: Survive the winter, reproduce in spring, repeat until no longer able. For male and female alike, reproductive fitness is clearly measured by the number of fruitful young each leaves to continue the family line. And no matter how subtle or bizarre, variations in a species' game plan for breeding successfully are firmly rooted in the age-old imperatives "chercher la femme" and "go forth and multiply."

From ducks to dickcissels, males typically don a stunning array of ceremonial attire with brightly colored accessories cued to wow and win a willing mate. Add heady courtship flights, heart-stopping aerobatics, winsome and percussive songs, lavish courtship feedings and improbable nuptial gifts — all are designed to overwhelm a female's coy resistance. Don't be fooled, those plainly garbed females are the valuable resource over which males compete so vigorously, bowing one and all to the stringent demands of female choice.

Display rituals play a crucial role in avian courtship. They take many forms, each with a special meaning — attraction, species identification, pair-bond formation and preparation for mating. Whether monogamous, polygamous, promiscuous or opportunistic — from the Song of Songs until today, the same sequence applies: "Look at me, I'm one of you, I sing an age-old song, I dance the dance better than the rest, I'm the one!"



**GREAT EGRET**  
*(Ardea alba)*

*With this leaf I thee wed*

AS A DAWN WIND STIRS OVER the awakening marsh, an ethereal white bird emerges from the dissolving mist. It's a great egret, Texas' largest white heron, in full nuptial dress. Beguiling in its elegance, the great egret has just grown 35 long white filigree feathers down its back and neck that it can erect in an intoxicating display. These tremulous, flowing "aigrettes," all a-shimmer, serve as a "bridal train." The golden bill and immaculate white plumage provide a perfect foil for the bright green lores that glow with emerald fire. Both beautiful plumage and color-infused lores and bill are ephemeral and soon fade to pale. To capture the moment, the male initiates his deep display of seduction. In a stately pavane, he walks circles around the female, tossing back his head and extending his frilly wings. He fluffs out his neck feathers, bobs his head and noisily claps his mandibles. He then takes flight and draws lazy, elegant circles in the airspace surrounding the female's favorite tree. Normally a bird of few "words," a raucous grunt seems to suffice to express a myriad of emotions. During tender moments, he whispers a few soft gurgling sounds. To "pop the question," a male simply flies up and drops a fresh-cut leafy branch in front of her as a nuptial gift. If she is favorably impressed, she grabs it and works it into her make-shift nest. Both work feverously to finish the twiggy nest in time for her to lay her eggs. A common resident of Texas coastal prairies, great egrets nest in colonies in the company of herons, ibises and spoonbills. Serially monogamous, the male is true to his mate for a single breeding season, then seeks another each year thereafter. Great egrets suffered dearly for their beauty in the early years of the previous century and were nearly driven to extinction. Rapacious plume hunters raided nesting colonies each spring in quest of those long frilly courtship feathers women craved for fancy hats and wreaps.





**PEREGRINE FALCON**  
(*Falco peregrinus*)

## Death-defying aerial love dance



FALCON © LARRY DITTO; FALCON INSET © JOHAN SCHUMACHER

## For whom the bell chimes

FEW ANIMALS USE THEIR VOICES as eloquently as do birds, and they are at their most spellbinding come spring — whether to entice a prospective mate, declare hegemony over a parcel of land or thwart the impudent intrusions of would-be philanderers. Like visual signals, songs proclaim both a male's species and his identity as an individual. The most gifted songsters are typically those with cryptic plumage where male and female dress alike. By taking shallow mini-breaths, this thrush trills, warbles and whistles: a soulful mix of glissandos, appoggiaturas, pizzicati and tremolos designed to please a potential mate. Definitely the maestro of the forest, the wood thrush has few equals as a singer. In early spring, East Texas woodlands sway to the sound of his evocative songs. Serene, suggestive of bells and flutes, it consists of a series of varied phrases broken by pauses, repeated, varied slightly and each time sung in a different key. Males arrive a week or two before females and quickly set up territory. Once the females arrive, they are treated at first like trespassers. Oddly, she neither resists nor flies away. The uniquely feminine response disarms him, and all will to fight suddenly drains away. From low in the understory, a sudden burst of notes leaps into the dawn's dim light, a flute-like *ee-o-lay* followed by a slower, bell-like trill. The rich haunting melody, down-slurred, ventriloquial, organ-like flourishes *Doooooah, holy holy, ah, purity purity, eh, sweetly sweetly* is a quintessential song of love. The courtship song of this "nightingale thrush" fills the spring woods with an ethereal music that, once heard, is never to be forgotten.

TRANSCENDING ITS TERRESTRIAL ENVIRONMENT, the peregrine falcon claims the open sky as its domain. Flashing quickly through a kettle of broad-winged hawks, this superb hunter works the Texas coastlines, especially during spring migration. Magnificent flying machines, peregrines are hard-muscled, hard-plumaged, virile and yet sensuous birds. They nest in small numbers in West Texas along steep cliff faces, in hollows of broken-off tree snags or in other remote locations. While the female weighs twice as much as the male, both are consummate hunters and fliers. When diving on prey, they may reach speeds of well over 100 mph. As the male (also known as a tiercel) provides virtually all the food to the nesting female and young, a female chooses her mate based on hunting and flying skills. Because small males tend to be more agile fliers, she may favor a smaller male over a large one. The tiercel demonstrates his prowess directly over the territory he has claimed by performing dazzling aerial displays for her, accompanied by excited chitterings. Spiraling ever upwards to a great height, the male plunges abruptly downward at dizzying speeds. At the bottom of his dive he swoops up again, sometimes circling rapidly from side to side, sometimes looping the loop with wings half-closed. The female may join him in this virtuosic fight. High in the air, the two swoop on one another, interlock talons and tumble downwards through space — so close at times, they touch their breasts or beaks in mic-flight. Graceful and breathtaking, they sail back and forth, moving with perfect synchrony in this death-defying aerial dance of love. Typically monogamous and solitary nesters, pairs mate for life until the death of one of them intervenes.



# Rapping for romance

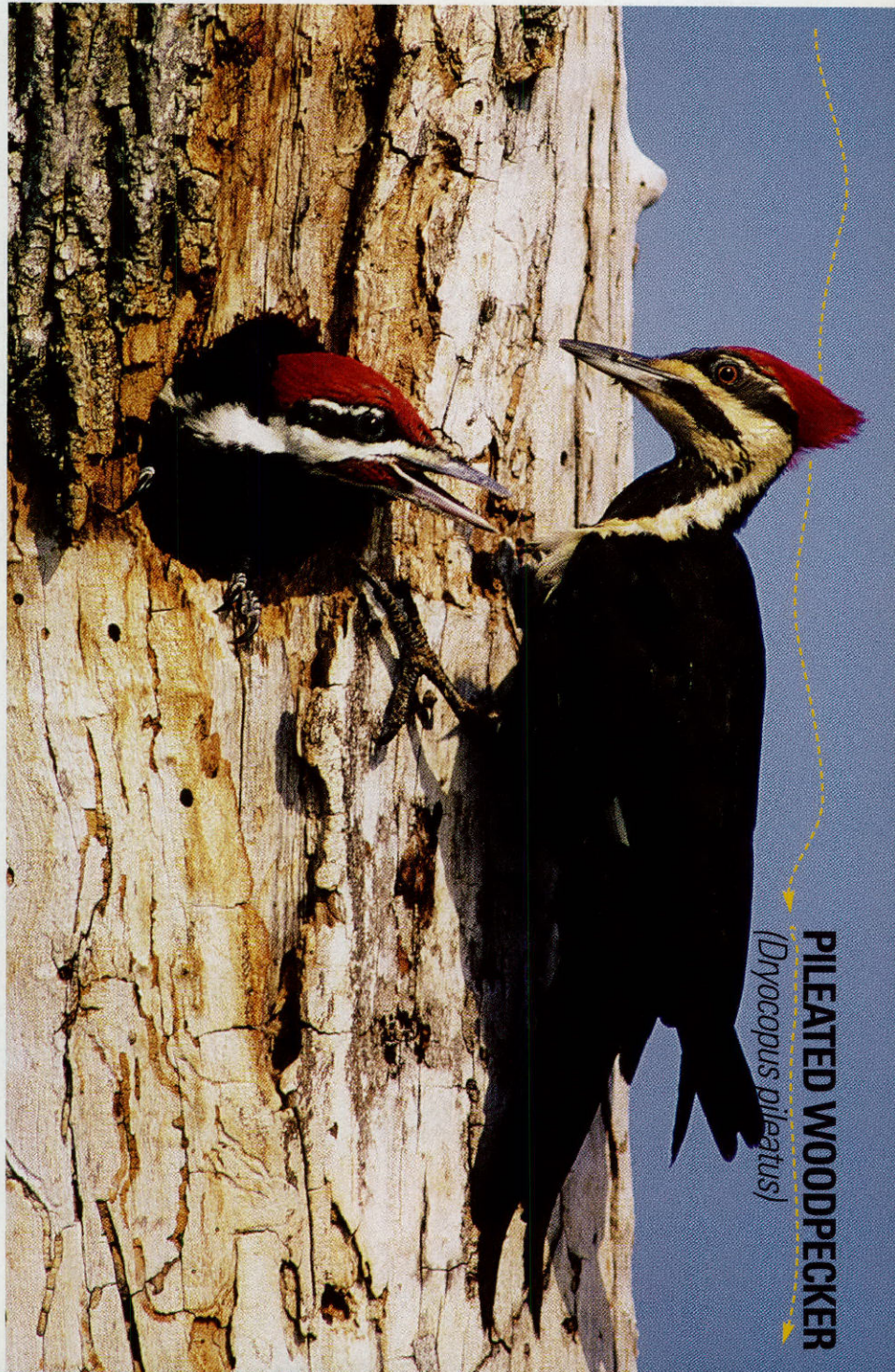
A VISION OF TWO LATTER-DAY PTERODACTYLS FLYING ACROSS A MEADOW and up into the trees — stiff black wings flashing white, red crests backlit and flaming in the late afternoon sun — must surely be a pair of pileated woodpeckers. The spring woods resound with their flicker-like *whucker, whucker, whucker* calls. A master woodchopper, this dashing bird favors mature mixed deciduous-coniferous forests and leaves his inimitable sign on well-worked trees, sometimes honeycombing them with distinctive rectangular holes in search of coveted carpenter ants. As the male greets the dawn with a strident “bugle call,” the courtship season is about to begin. For woodpeckers, though, drumming is a far more powerful call to love than a song. Males select trees or branches that are particularly resonant for the purpose — a hollow trunk or a dead snag. A few enterprising Casanovas go “high-tech” and drum on metal roofs or electrical transmission towers, especially prized for their enhanced acoustics. Forceful and resonant, the deep reverberations ring out through the forest, fully audible up to a mile away. Pileateds keep in constant communication. With loud rapping and high-pitched calls, they send messages back and forth to one another winter and summer alike. Visual displays are not ignored, especially near the nest cavity. Both male and female spread their wings to show off white wing patches or make short gliding flights above the cavity tree. A male may erect his flaming crest and swing his head back and forth in a blur of scarlet to further cement the pair bond. Pileateds mate for life and pairs jointly defend their territory year-round by drumming, calling and chasing away intruders.



**WOOD THRUSH**  
(*Hylotrichla mustelina*)



WOOD THRUSH © CLIFF BETTEL; WOOD THRUSH INSET © BILL BEATTY; WOODPECKERS © GRADY ALLEN



**PILEATED WOODPECKER**  
(*Dryocopus pileatus*)



FEW BIRDS FLAUNT their evolutionary adornments so flamboyantly as do the grouse, and the lesser prairie-chicken is no slouch. Males are polygynous and mate with several females, investing no energy in parental care. Lesser prairie-chicken cocks begin to gather in the predawn at the lek — a traditional booming ground reserved for group courtship displays. The scene itself is captivating. Males mingle, primp and preen in predawn hours before the show begins. As dawn gives way to a morning shrouded in mist, one or two birds pop up and down like popcorn on the near horizon, fighting for position. These ancient gallinaceous birds flaunt elaborate crests, eye combs, neck sacs and a booming song. Cocks begin to dance, stomp their feet, erect their ear plumes, engorge eye combs and inflate their flashy neck sacs. Like breathless zany puppets, males compete for center stage, the focus of choice of the most discerning females. A female saunters nonchalantly across the lek once or twice, pausing to weigh the merits of the males' ritual dance. The dance becomes ever more frenetic, as basic steps are punctuated with heady aerial leaps and agonistic lunges at neighbors in the chorus line. Hypnotic strains of booming calls drone on in accompaniment, evoking times long past when this species once numbered in the millions. Drab, well-camouflaged females observe inconspicuously from the sidelines, all seemingly of one mind. Only one or two master cocks holding center stage on the lek get most of the matings. Females all seem to agree on just who's king of the runway. Sadly, these performances play at fewer venues each year. Native Americans of the Central Plains have patterned their traditional dances after steps perfected by the lesser prairie-chicken. The birds' elaborate foot-stomping, leaping, tail-splaying courtship dances may yet persist through preservation of a native people's cultural heritage.

An unexpected chorus line:  
dancing in the dawn

**LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN**  
(*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*)



PRAIRIE-CHICKENS © ROLF NUSSBAUMER; FLYCATCHER © CLIFF BETTEL

A LITTLE EMBER OF FLAME, the male vermilion flycatcher lights up the azure sky like a firecracker. Cressed year-round in fire-engine red, he shows all the hallmarks of a virtuoso songster and dancer in the sky. His nuptial flight begins as he lifts off his territorial perch and soars high into the air in sweeping circles, singing a soft, tinkling song. At the top of his towering rise, he hangs on fluttering wings like a giant diurnal moth, his crown feathers erect and glowing, tail cocked upward and splayed asunder, as he tips it repeatedly downward. Three sharp notes followed by a longer, louder *zee* accompany his slow descent. Rivaling the brightest of tropical flowers, the male juts out all the stops to win a potential mate, a shy demurely dressed damsel in pale mottled browns with a soft salmon underwash. Again and again he dances to his own accompaniment, until she yields to his charms. Puffing out his vermilion chest he sings again, then flutters down once more to land on a branch where the female awaits him. Mostly monogamous, males do little to help the female build the nest or incubate the eggs, though he will occasionally feed her as she sits on eggs. He has been known to dally on occasion with other females if opportunity knocks. He can't tarry too long at this as he's bound to defend his territory from interlopers that he dilly chases away.

Flashdancer dressed in red

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER**  
(*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)





## LEAST TERN (*Sterna antillarum*)



Bring me sushi

CATCHING DINNER AS THE PATHWAY TO LOVE is a time-honored courtship ploy. Commonly observed in gulls and terns, ritual courtship proceedings allow a female to assess a male's ability to provide for her and her young. An added bonus is the rich nutritional boost she gets for egg production. Least terns are fish eaters and are supremely adapted to life on beach and water. Highly acrobatic in flight, they dive repeatedly in search of their favorite prey — fresh fish and fingerlings. As noisy as they are social, colonies of leasts are well-known for their active and vocal courtship displays. The diminutive, silver gray male with narrow wings and short forked-tail entices his mate-to-be by catching a shiny, wriggling fish and flourishing it for all to see. He circles the small colony triumphantly and noisily with fish held crosswise in his beak as waiting females look on. Abruptly he lands at her feet, fish flashing in the sun. Bowing low, the female lifts and wags her tail, while fluttering her outstretched wings. The male circles her with neck extended, wagging his head back and forth as he goes. Now face to face, she eyes his tantalizing gift in consideration of his troth. If she takes the offering, she accepts him as her mate. Gifts of food don't end with the betrothal. Fish flight displays help reinforce the pair bond. During incubation, the male arrives several times a day with a fresh-caught fish. The pair pass it back and forth a few times before she gobbles it down. Least terns are monogamous and remain with their mates for a single breeding season. A high-strung pixie of a bird, the least tern is highly intolerant of intruders — human, canine or vehicular. Disturbance of the breeding colony can be devastating to a colonies' reproductive output.



## NORTHERN JACANA (*Jacana spinosa*)



Divas of the swamp

MOST AVIAN POLYGAMISTS ARE MALE, but in a few cases it is the female who entertains multiple mates. In a polyandrous system, the female mates with various males and leaves them to look after the eggs and chicks. And jacanas, a subset of the shorebird tribe, boast some highly macho females. The northern jacana, a fairly rare visitor to the southern portion of the state, is a long-legged, long-toed bird that walks on vegetation floating along resacas and sloughs. Why jacanas have adopted this sexual role reversal remains a mystery. Jacanas nest under dangerous circumstances. Threats from alligators, snakes and other large marsh birds, like purple gallinules, abound in sluggish waters, any one of which will readily eat eggs or chicks. A female jacana claims a large tract of this high-risk habitat and seduces up to four males to build a nest within her domain. After a few days of courtship with each of them, she lays a clutch of eggs in each male's nest and leaves them to incubate and tend the young alone. She will fiercely guard her territory, though, and zealously drives off any female intruders. The female northern jacana has raised cuckoo cry to an art form. While homobody males tend the young, she tiptoes out across the lily pads in search of additional reproductive liaisons with extra-rare males. Apparently, more than 40 percent of a male jacana's brood contains chicks sired by others, so questions of paternity naturally arise. Rates may be higher where females mate promiscuously with several extra males. If no extras are on tap, females will occasionally assist the males in shading young from the scorching afternoon sun, a crucial task. Two days after hatching, the fluffy youngsters leave the nest ready to forage — the dutiful fathers lead them to proper feeding sites. ✪

LEAST TERNS © JOHANN SCHUMACHER; JACANA © TIM FITZARRIS



# BLACK GAP ELVES

My three-year adventure with the  
smallest owl in North America.

By Bonnie Reynolds McKinney

The  
elves were  
due back this  
week.

I had been patiently waiting for days. Each evening, as dusk approached and the sun's last rays slanted across the desert flats, I walked the area around the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area headquarters checking for the elves. They usually arrived from March 15–17 each year, and for years they had been on time. The elves had a long journey with many hazards along the way before reaching the Black Gap, in West Texas.







PHOTO © BONNIE MCKINNEY



# Perhaps they were already here, hiding

in the vegetation, but I had not heard a single peep from them. I continued my walk around headquarters, stopping and listening in the early evening darkness. A common poorwill called and another answered, then all was quiet. Resigned to the fact that this was March 17 and they were not back, I headed to the house. Suddenly, a sharp, puppy-like yip erupted, shattering the desert stillness, then another, and yet another — yes, they were back and on time.

Elf owls are the smallest owls in North America, and one of the smallest in the

world. They are migrants, spending the winter in the Mexican states of Michoacan, Morelos, Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca and part of Sinaloa. Early spring finds the elf owl migrating back to their breeding grounds in west and south Texas, parts of California, New Mexico and Arizona. In Mexico, they breed in the states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Baja Sur, Sonora, Puebla and Guanajuato.

In Texas, elf owls are unevenly distributed from the south Texas brush country to the Rio Grande Valley. In West Texas, they are found in the Trans-Pecos region in the scattered mountains in pine-oak woodland habitat, the lower desert elevations and along the Rio Grande riparian corridor, eastward to Val Verde County.

I had observed elf owls at Black Gap for many years and in 1994 began a three-year study on this tiny owl. Their arrival in March 1994 was eagerly anticipated because I wanted to determine if elf owls would use nest boxes. Why? The elf owl is a cavity-nesting species, and in the lower desert elevations of West Texas, trees are scarce. Elf owls use old abandoned cavities of ladder-backed woodpeckers in the lower desert habitat. The woodpeckers excavate cavities in the trunks of yucca, stalks of maguey plants, fence posts, dead tree limbs and electric poles. I had noticed that a number of power poles were being downed and the lines were being placed underground. If significant num-



*Black Gap Wildlife Management Area*







OPPOSITE TOP AND BOTTOM BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/FPW; CENTER © BONNIE MCKINNEY; THIS PAGE © GREG LASLE/KAOPRODUCTIONS



bers of these poles were removed, both the ladder-backed woodpecker and the elf owl populations could be impacted by the absence of cavity-nest sites. The Black Gap had a very healthy population of elf owls and was the perfect location to test the nest boxes, since my husband, Billy Pat, and I had lived at Black Gap since 1981 and were both employed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. My proposed study was approved; I had a small budget and a lot of enthusiasm. I designed a nest box, purchased the lumber and hardware needed for construction, and cajoled our son, Matt, into volunteering his time to help me build 80 nest boxes. The boxes were up, placed in different habitats from the low desert to the higher arid canyons, and along the Rio Grande corridor. I was anticipating the elf owls finding their new deluxe accommodations and providing me detailed insight into the natural history of a little-known species in West Texas. If the elf owls used the nest boxes, the information could be shared with area landowners wishing to provide habitat enhancement for elf owls, especially if power poles were being removed from their lands.

The male elf owls were back, evidenced by the three calling at the Black Gap headquarters. Males always arrive first and begin calling at dusk, advertising their presence to other males and establishing their small territories and checking available nest sites. The females arrive seven to 10 days later than the males.

In the ensuing days, I checked the three males around the headquarters every night; watched them hunt for moths, and, yes, the male with the territory in our yard went in and out of the nest box several times. However, he also visited the old ladder-backed woodpecker nest site higher up on the same power pole. Would he pick the woodpecker nest site or the new deluxe accommodations in the nest box? Time would tell, and the final choice would be up to the female.

The females arrived during the night of March 26, eight days after the males. The next evening at dusk, the desert was alive with the puppy-like continuous yips of the males calling to the females. All I needed was a flashlight, a comfortable seat in the yard and my notebook. Amid much fanfare of flying back and forth, entering the nest box and then leaving, the male was trying his best to entice the female to his choice of a nest site. This continued for



several nights, and finally the female flew close to the box. The male's excited yips increased in volume to a frantic pitch, and his tiny round face with white eyebrows was framed in the entrance hole to the nest box. The female perched at the entrance hole, the male slowly descended into the bottom of the nest box, his yips changing to softer *churr* sounds; the female answered with a high-pitched *phew* vocalization. This courtship behavior continued for hours, slowing around 2 a.m., then resuming from 5 a.m. to daylight. Both then flew into an ash tree and were immediately concealed in the leafy vegetation. Once the pair bond between the male and female is established, the female begins day roosting in the nest site, and the male starts bringing her food. As egg laying and incubation nears, she spends more time in the nest cavity, flying at dusk and dawn to stretch her wings.

While making the rounds, I noticed that if female elf owls were roosting inside when I approached the boxes, they would fly from the box, then re-enter as soon as I left the immediate area. A total of 19 boxes had female elf owls day roosting. That was great news, but I purposely stayed away from the boxes for several days in order to decrease any disturbance I might be creating. I didn't want the females to abandon

TOP RIGHT © ROLF NUSBAUMLI; OPTICITE TOP BY TPWD; OTHERS © BONNIE MCKINNEY







*Elf owls use the old abandoned cavity nests of ladder-backed woodpeckers. The nests are located in the trunks of yucca (above left), dead tree limbs, fence posts and electric poles. The author constructed nests from lumber: the elf owl added a cottontail (far left). McKinney gently banded the tiny owls (below) to be able to identify them later without recapture.*



the nest boxes. After waiting almost a week I decided that egg laying was well underway. Early the next morning, I quietly placed a ladder against the power pole in our yard and climbed up to the nest box. Slowly, I opened the hinged top, and to my surprise and delight, I was face-to-face with a tiny elf owl female that was stretched as high as her five-inch height would allow. Her gray-brown feathers were puffed up, beak snapping — 48 grams of mad momma elf owl. I gently moved her to the side of the box and saw that she was incubating three white eggs.

I needed to take a series of measurements, weigh and photograph her, as well as band her with a United States Fish and Wildlife aluminum band and a tiny color band to make her identification easy without having to recapture her. I gently picked her up, only to have her lie flat on her back in the palm of my hand. Amazingly, she offered no resistance and did not try to escape, but remained perfectly still, glaring at me with those fierce yellow eyes. I quickly recorded the necessary data and replaced her in the nest box.

I headed for the field to check the rest of the nest boxes. No females were leaving the boxes, which meant they were sitting tight on eggs. I began a long day of banding, measuring, weighing, counting eggs and marveling at the gentle nature of these tiny owls. Elf owls lay from one to five white eggs; the normal clutch is two to three eggs. The eggs are not laid all at once, but at intervals over a several-day period, thus when the eggs hatch, the tiny owls are different sizes. The female performs all the incubation duties, with the male making many nightly trips to and from the nest site with food for the female.

Now that egg laying was over, and incuba-

tion well underway, I needed information on their diet; what prey did they find in their small territories? In the low desert country, elf owl prey consisted of moths, occasionally a small black-headed snake, crickets, centipedes, beetles and scorpions.

Incubation lasts around 24 days. Once the eggs hatch, the young fledged from 28 to 32 days later, looking much like carbon copies of the adults.

Before the young fledged, I documented nesting success and banded, weighed and measured the young owlets. The first year of the study, the occupancy rate was very good, and the rate continued to increase year after year. Many of the banded females returned to the same nest boxes, or to nearby boxes. During the second and third year of the study, many of the nestlings I banded returned to their natal areas as adults to raise their young.

Elf owls have adapted to habitats from pine-oak woodlands to the low desert. They require cover, cavity nest sites and an abundant insect supply. In the lower desert elevations, nest boxes can enhance habitat for elf owls, particularly if power poles have been removed or if natural nest sites are not abundant.

Threats to elf owls are loss of habitat along riparian corridors, development of desert country for urban and agricultural purposes, and loss of structures for cavity nests. In the low desert, the natural predator of the elf owl is the great horned owl, which preys on adults and fledglings. Ringtails are suspected of breaking and eating eggs.

If you live in West Texas, particularly in the low desert country, take time to listen for the desert elves. They are easy to identify — their tiny size, round head, white eyebrows, grayish-brown feathers and yellow eyes are distinct field marks. Their calls are diagnostic — a loud, puppy-like “yipping.” If you decide to install nest boxes to enhance their habitat, please don’t disturb the nesting owls. They will tolerate your presence from a distance and provide many hours of enjoyment.

During my three-year study of the Black Gap elf owls, I developed a deeper understanding of their natural history, the dangers they face, their ability to adapt to various habitats, and their incredible homing instinct to return yearly to the same area to nest and raise their young. ★









# The Art of Birds

By E. Dan Klepper

TEXAS BIRD ARTISTS CARRY ON A TIMELESS TRADITION.

## Birds of Bastrop

Fort Worth artist Billy Hassell painted this array of birds found near Bastrop in oil, 48" by 48"

### Thoughtout history the dreams

and aspirations of humankind have been symbolically depicted by one creature above all others — the bird. In fact, artifacts from our ancient past indicate that nature governed all the creative arts, and birds, in particular, played a primary role.

A stylized bird, called a pictogram, can be seen in cuneiform, the earliest known form of writing devised by the Sumerians over 5,000 years ago. Egypt and its cult of the afterlife created the most recognized bird in art — Horus, alternately sky god and sun god, represented by the body of a man with the head of a great falcon. Horus, a name that translates literally from the hieroglyph as “falcon,” held the sun in one eye and the moon in the other.

Ancient Egypt, perhaps more than any other known culture, was responsible for securing the bird's power in art and language. Symbols of birds blanket much of the surviving Egyptian hieroglyphic texts. But most remarkable of all is the way the elevation of the bird in art occurred in tandem across the globe, spanning seas and deserts as people all over the planet imbued birds with meaning. As cultures sought ways to transcend the primitive in a world full of birds, the avian creature became their avatar of spiritual growth.

Across the Mediterranean, the Aegeans created some of the greatest known works of early avian art. More than 35 species of birds have been identified in the Cycladic archaeological restorations at Thera alone. Meanwhile, the ancient Armenians placed bird images on their pottery, bronzes and mosaics, while archaic Americans painted a firmament of feathered bodies into their pictographic murals.





*Cardinal  
With Prickly  
Pear*

Fort Worth  
artist Billy  
Hassell painted  
this northern  
cardinal in oil,  
60" by 72"

The Asians forged exquisite sculptures of bronze, jade and ivory depicting the beautifully plumed birds of their primeval world. European tapestries of the Middle Ages portrayed entire aviaries in delicate silken threads, while Africa bewitched the modern world with ebony abstractions of hoopoes and ibis.

The history of birds in art is, moreover, a chronicle of spiritual evolution incarnate, embracing a spectrum of ideology that arcs across the entire human psyche from asceticism to theocracy. In fact, our world of birds has held such sway over the human spirit that the power of the bird and all it represents has yet to diminish, making birds in art a living history as rich in its past as in its promise of a future.

The bird in art has facilitated a practical analysis of the natural world as well. Its representation has informed us about the history of an environment, about changes in migratory flight patterns and the way avian ranges have changed over the centuries. Together with archaeological investigations and forensic ornithology, the

study of birds in art can help explain which bird species inhabited specific regions according to seasons and habitats, which were considered sources of food and which were granted special status. Sometimes it can also tell us about which bird species once thrived and when, regrettably, they became extinct.

Science, perhaps as much as art, has helped to elevate the presence of bird images in our lives as well as in our museums. While the bird as symbol continues to reign in the artist's pantheon, much as it has done for thousands of years, the rise of the scientific illustration of birds is a relatively recent event, beginning in earnest with the 13th century.

The works of British naturalists such as George Edwards, Thomas Pennant and Mark Catesby signaled the synthesis of art and science, sparking a movement that has yet to subside. Catesby, although born and trained in England, is considered the primary figure in American ornithology, and his talent, as well as the way he worked, foreshadowed the works of an artist who would ultimately

Science, perhaps as much as art, has helped to elevate the presence of bird images in our lives, as well as in our museums.

dominate the history of birds in art to date — than 500 species of birds in Texas brought many of them to the state. Ornithology and its attendant artists have since flourished here, blending astute observation with creative output. As a result, the state's avian enthusiasts enjoy an ongoing tradition of birds in art and one that many consider distinctly Texan.

John James Audubon. Catesby spent many years in America during the early- to mid-1700s, preferring to study and collect his avian subjects himself rather than working from specimens that had been sent back to Europe, as most of his contemporaries did.

Almost a century would pass before Audubon followed, dazzling the scientific and art communities with his stunning publication of 435 plates of bird illustrations, hand-colored and life-size, in a giant portfolio called *Birds of America*. Upon its release, the appreciation of birds as art would be permanently transformed. Today, over a century after his death, Audubon continues to be one of the most collected fine artists in the world.

As naturalists and ornithologists followed Audubon into the American frontier throughout the 1800s, the presence of more

contemporary Texas avian artists include an array of wildlife virtuosos who specialize in depicting the birds of Texas in both exacting and highly creative styles. Best known for their Audubon-inspired master works, twin brothers Scott and the late Stuart Gentling lead the state in producing the most ambitious artistic record yet of the birds of Texas. Their book, *Of Birds and Texas*, includes 40 beautifully detailed bird portraits along with 10 classic Texas landscapes. The work, published in 1986, was printed in limited edition and formatted in an appropriately named "elephant folio" at 23 by 29 1/2 inches. As proof of Audubon's far-reaching prodigy and enduring influence, the Gentling twins were inspired by Audubon's pursuit of art and wildlife and set out to follow in his footsteps, just as many other young artists did over the last century.





Above: Rockport artist Al Barnes painted these black skimmers in oil on canvas, 24" by 36"

*Harbor Skimmer*

*Ring-Necked Reflections*

Below: Kerrville artist Ken Carlson painted these ring-necked ducks in oil, 15.5" by 14"





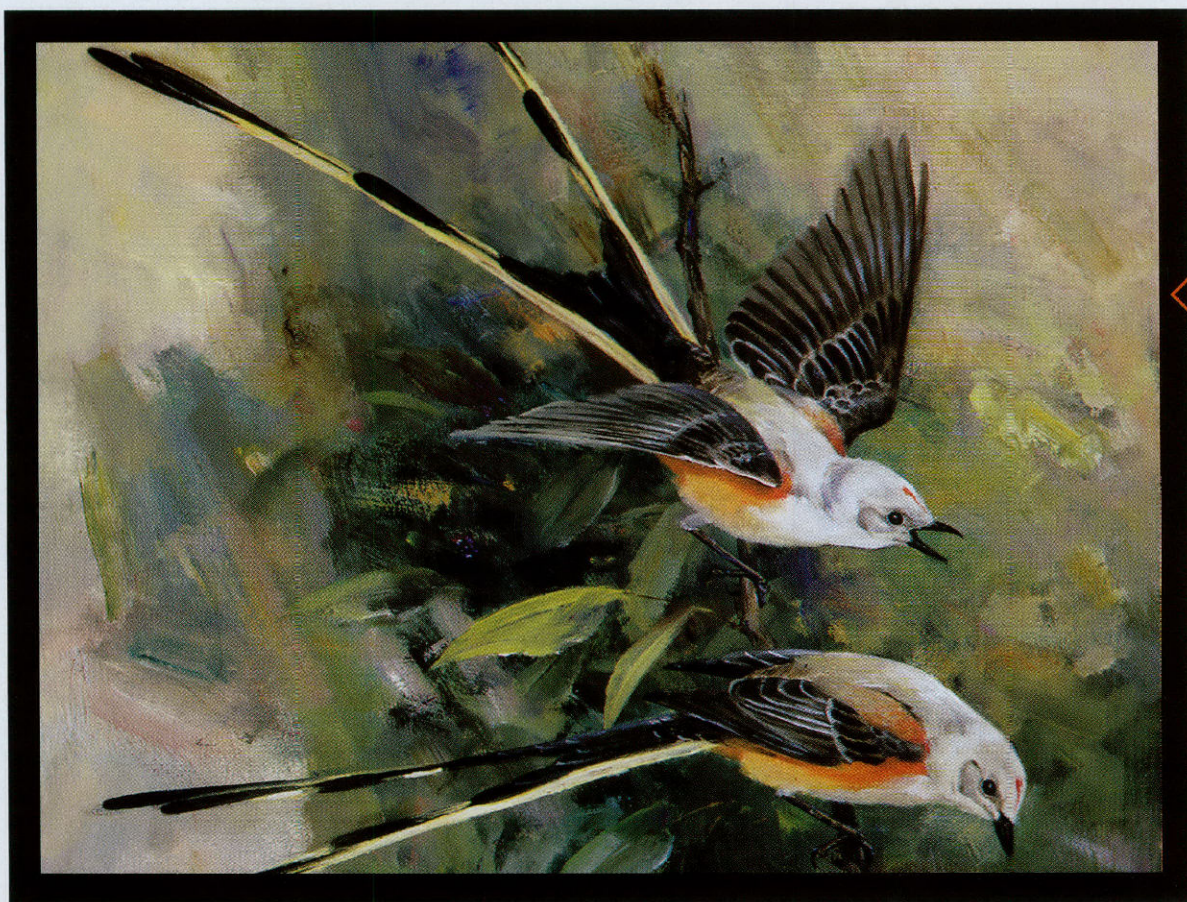
*Down Time*

Rockport artist Al Barnes painted with oil on canvas to capture these American white pelicans.



*Scissor-Tails*

Kerrville artist Ken Carlson painted these scissor-tailed flycatchers in oil, 18" by 15.5"





Texas bird artists are also often sportsmen as well as artisans, taking the opportunity to study their subjects in the field while filling the game bag. Bubba Wood, Collector's Covey Gallery owner and publisher of images from the Texas Conservation Stamp program, considers Texas artist John P. Cowan the father of the state's sporting arts. "The Texas sporting art market has been great," says Wood, "and that's really thanks to Cowan. He spent the last 50 years capturing the Texas wildlife and outdoor sporting scene. He built all the bridges, and everybody else got to walk across them."

Some contemporary bird artists find themselves picking up the binoculars and camera more often than the shotgun. Texas artist Al Barnes produces his stellar works of art from the heart of the state's birding mecca—the Texas Gulf Coast. "It had become obvious to me a number of years ago that there was more to birding than shooting them, once I realized I was living right in the middle of one of the hot birding areas in the world," recalls Barnes. "Coastal birds are different from inland birds in their shape, size, color and habits, which make them excellent subject matter. It's much more interesting to paint a pink bird with a four-foot wing span than a brown one with a four-inch wing span."

Hill Country artist Ken Carlson attributes the development of his own special style to his study of bird anatomy and feather detail. Once he succeeded in mastering the technicalities, Carlson recalls, he let go of the details in order to develop a more fluid style. "When I started painting birds," Carlson explains, "I did them very exact using gouache paint. Now I use oils with much less detail. I want them to be accurate but try more for the essence of the bird and its habitat."

Intriguingly, bird illustrations tell us as much about the artists who created them as about the birds themselves. "I paint whatever resonates with my heart and soul," reveals Texas painter and printmaker Melanie Fain. Fain, whose multiple-plate etchings are enhanced with pastels and watercolor, cites nature's cruel beauty as one of her muses.

"One afternoon I walked out of my studio and saw a hummingbird caught in an orb weaver's web," Fain says. "She was maybe about 8 to 10 feet off the ground. I photographed the bird and

**Texas bird artists are also often sportsmen as well as artisans, taking the opportunity to study their subjects in the field while filling the game bag.**

then climbed up and got her. Once I had the hummer down I used a pair of tweezers and a jeweler's loop to remove all the webbing. The bird was covered in spider's web, particularly the wings, and couldn't fly. After I was done, I took the hummer outside, released her, and she flew away. It gave me a great opportunity to study the bird up-close, in hand, and also inspired me to create an etching about the experience. Whatever the subject, it's got to speak to me on some level like that to make the art happen."

Texas' birds in art aren't limited to two-dimensional represen-



Corpus Christi sculptor Kent Ullberg cast this eagle in bronze, 25.75" by 28.5" by 11.75"

*Guardian*

tation. Sculptor Kent Ullberg creates compelling works of the state's avian class, as well as other wildlife, in bronze and stainless steel. Ullberg's style captures accuracy and authenticity as well as imbuing each bird sculpture with an aura of life that can only be achieved by a master's hand. Ullberg's work is classic in both its materials and subject—nature as art at its best.

But the modern world is not without its modern bird artist. The satiated paintings and mosaics of Billy Hassell may be familiar to Texans who have traveled out of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. The enormous and stunning medallion titled *Early Morning Flight*, a stylized mockingbird against green and violet-blue foliage and a star-studded dawn sky, decorates the floor of Terminal D. Assembled from glass mosaic tiles, the mockingbird is just one of many public works, and bird species, that comprise the Hassell oeuvre.

Hassell considers birds as signs, bridging the natural world with urban life. He believes that birds "share space" with humans differently than other wildlife. Unlike most animals, birds always seem to be present in our lives. "I think that's why people are drawn to birds," says Hassell. "They're wild and accessible all at once."

Birds populate our creative expression in a continuum, from winged shamans in early shelter paintings to flights of aviary fractals in digital imaging. They narrate the story of our magical selves, our enigmatic journeys made manifest in the depiction of the flesh and blood we share, but with an agility that the human intellect can only strive to achieve—the ability to soar. ✧



GREAT TEXAS BIRDING

# 2008

& NATURE CALENDAR

*A whole year's worth of birding events and other outdoor fun.*



— purple gallinule —

— least bittern —

— anhinga —

*By Shelly Scroggs Plante  
Illustrations by Clemente Guzman*





— scissor-tailed flycatcher —

**YEAR-ROUND EVENTS**

**AVAILABLE DAILY**

*Mangrove Warbler Boat Tours — Laguna Madre Bay, Port Isabel.* Bay tour to see mangrove warblers and do shorebird study. Six or fewer people make it a personal tour. \$45 per person. (956-739-2473, spinaturecenter.com)

**AVAILABLE DAILY**

*King Ranch Nature Tours — King Ranch, Kingsville.* Guided bird-watching and nature-related tours on the famous King Ranch. Focus of tours, length and cost will vary. (361-592-8055, www.king-ranch.com)

**EVERY WEDNESDAY**

*Birding on the Boardwalk — Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center, Port Aransas.* Guided birding tour for anyone novice to expert with local guide Ray Little. 9 a.m. Free. (361-749-4158, www.cityofportaransas.org)

**EVERY WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY**

*Nature Walk — Goose Island State Park, Rockport-Fulton.* Half- to one-mile nature walk featuring marsh, woods and flora. 2 p.m. Free with park entry. (361-729-2858, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gooseisland)

**EVERY WEEKEND**

*Interpretive Van Tours — Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, Austwell.* Two-hour tours to see alligators, javelinas, whooping cranes (mid-October to March), armadillos, white-

tailed deer, wild turkeys, roseate spoonbills and other wildlife. Reservations required. 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Park entry fee (\$5 per car or \$3 per person). (361-286-3559, www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/aransas)

**SECOND SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH**

*2008 BCP Hike and Lecture Series — Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, Travis County.* The BCP partners share opportunities for the public to learn about and experience one of the region's natural treasures. Monthly hikes throughout the preserve and a variety of lectures hosted by leaders in the fields of conservation and wildlife management provided. Free (pre-registration required). (512-263-6437, www.balcones-canyonlands.org)

**SECOND SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH**

*Beginner's Bird Walk — Judson Nature Trails, Alamo Heights.* Binoculars are provided. All are welcome. 8 a.m. each month except June, July and August, when groups meet at 7:30 a.m. Free. (210-342-2073, www.saaudubon.org)

**THIRD SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH**

*Breakfast with the Birds — Lake Houston Park, New Caney.* Fun and educational guided bird walks open to birding enthusiasts of all experience levels.



— green kingfisher —

8 a.m. Free with \$3 day-use fee (reservations required). (281-354-0173, www.houstonparks.org)

**THIRD SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH**

*Monthly Saturday Bird Banding — Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson.* Bird banding station open to the public for observation. 8 a.m. — noon. Free. (979-480-0999, www.gcbo.org)

**MONTHLY (see Web site or call for dates and times)**

*Breakfast with the Birds — Estero Llano Grande State*

*Park, Weslaco.* Enjoy a continental breakfast on the deck overlooking one of the park's lakes, after which an experienced bird guide will give a walking tour of the park. \$7 per person. (956-565-3919, www.worldbirdingcenter.org)

**BY RESERVATION IN ADVANCE**

*Pontoon Boat Birding/Nature Tours — Lake Conroe.* Personalized pontoon boat birding and nature tours on 22,000-acre Lake Conroe to see bald eagles, osprey, waterfowl and other wildlife. Costs vary (call for details, 936-577-4019)



— vermilion flycatcher —





— reddish egret —

**APRIL**

**EVERY WEDNESDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY THROUGH MAY 25**  
*Bird Walks—Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco.* 1 1/2- to 2-hour walking tours conducted by experienced bird guides over about 2 miles of mostly level terrain and boardwalks. 8:30 a.m. \$4 park admission. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

**EVERY WEEKEND IN APRIL**

*Bird Walks—Blucher Park, Corpus Christi.* Audubon Outdoor Club

**APRIL – MAY 4**

*High Island Open for Spring Migration—Houston Audubon Sanctuaries, High Island.* The four High Island sanctuaries, including Boy Scout Woods and the Smith Oaks Rookery, are open to the public, with volunteers manning the kiosks. Daily bird walks until May 5; times vary. \$5 daily entrance fee or \$25 patch. (713-932-1639, [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org))



— green jay —

**APRIL – MAY**

*A Natural Place to Be—Kickapoo Cavern State Park, Brackettville area.* Kickapoo Cavern State Park supports the largest breeding population of black-capped vireos on state lands as well as a large variety of migratory avian species. Come birding in the park on your own or call for tour dates (please call ahead for availability and updates). \$3 park entrance (more for tours). (830-563-2342, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/kickapocavern](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/kickapocavern))

migratory birds and their annual journey across the Americas. 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Free. (817-860-6752, [www.riverlegacy.org](http://www.riverlegacy.org))

**APRIL 20**

*Yellow Rail Walks—Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Anahuac.* Search for the elusive yellow rail on foot through salty prairie habitat. Interested participants should bring waterproof boots, binoculars, insect repellent

of Corpus Christi members lead walks through Blucher Park and the expansive lawns of the homes across the street. Blucher Park is the site of large spring migrant fallouts. Sat./Sun., 7:30 a.m. Free. (361-443-0744, [www.ccbirding.com](http://www.ccbirding.com))

**APRIL – MAY**

*Dragonfly Walks and Butterfly Walks—Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco.* 1 1/2-hour walks through park conducted by knowledgeable leaders. Fridays at 1:30 p.m. \$4 park admission. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

**APRIL – JUNE 30**

*Valley Land Fund 2008 Photo Contest—South Texas.* South Texas Shootout, small tract competition and youth contest open to landowners and photographers in eight Rio Grande Valley counties. (956-686-6429, [www.valleylandfund.com](http://www.valleylandfund.com))

and drinking water. All tours begin at the Visitor Information Station at the refuge. 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. Free. ([www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/anahuac](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/anahuac))

**APRIL 21 – 26**

*Earth Week 2008—Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Orange.* Enjoy visits to see the birds in the heronry, guided nature walks, boat trips on Adams Bayou and special speaker Jack Hanna. Call for cost. (409-670-9113, [www.shangrilagardens.org](http://www.shangrilagardens.org))

**APRIL 19**

*Walk Across Texas and Plant Sale—San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio.* An official Fiesta event with plant sales by various plant societies. 9 a.m. – noon. Free. [www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org)

**APRIL 19**

*Wonders on the Wing Migratory Bird Day—River Legacy Living Science Center, Arlington.* Includes hikes, birdwatching, educational programs and other events designed to increase awareness and understanding of

**APRIL 21 – 26**

*Birding for Conservation in Southeast Tamaulipas—Southeast Tamaulipas, Mexico.* This Texas Parks and Wildlife-Pronatura project offers access for private birding tours to private sites in southeastern Tamaulipas that have conservation agreements with Pronatura, a Mexican non-governmental organization that has



— altamira oriole —





— groove-billed ani —



— great kiskadee —

been a leader in habitat conservation and restoration in northeastern Mexico. \$800-\$880 per person. Also held May 12-17, September 15-20 and October 13-18. ([www.pronatoursbirding.com](http://www.pronatoursbirding.com))

**APRIL 22 – 27**

*Nature Quest – Texas Hill Country River Region, Uvalde County.* Learn from world-class experts about native plants, wildflowers, butterflies, insects, birds and

games and food, and educational booths set up throughout downtown area. (903-873-3111, [www.willspointbluebird.com](http://www.willspointbluebird.com))

**APRIL 26**

*Fennessey Spring Migration Tour – Fennessey Ranch, Bayside.* A full day in the field with experienced birding guides to explore marshes, woodlands and riparian corridors on a private coastal ranch. Lunch on the banks of the Mission River. \$58.50 per person. (361-529-6600, [www.fennesseyranch.com](http://www.fennesseyranch.com))

*Coalition's Baby Bird Program – TWRC Wildlife Shelter, Houston.* Train to feed and care for baby birds under the supervision of a permitted wildlife rehabilitator. Birds are fed 7 days a week – shifts suitable for all working schedules. Free. (713-468-8972, [www.twrc-houston.org](http://www.twrc-houston.org))

**MAY BEGINS IN MAY**

*Butterfly Exhibit – Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, McKinney.* A beautiful collection of live native Texas butterflies, including swallow-tails, monarchs, sulphurs and many more. Check Web site for specific dates. \$8 per adult, \$5 for kids 3-12 years of age and seniors. (972-562-5566, [www.heardmuseum.org](http://www.heardmuseum.org))

**MAY 1 – 3**

*TOS Spring Meeting – Alpine.* The Texas Ornithological Society's annual meeting with field

**MAY 1 – 4**

*WildFest San Antonio 2 – Various locations throughout Bexar County.* Fifty events, including birding trips to Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, Government Canyon State Natural Area and various other locations. Cost varies. (210-886-9991, [wildfestsanantonio.com](http://wildfestsanantonio.com))

**MAY 3**

*Birdathon 2008 – Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio.* Annual fundraising event where birders raise pledges based on species seen. All levels of birders are welcome to participate. This is a pledge drive, call for details. 7 a.m. (210-628-1639, [www.mitchelllakeaudubon.org](http://www.mitchelllakeaudubon.org))

**MAY 3**

*Galveston County Spring Bird Count – Galveston County.* Sponsored by the Galveston Group of the Houston Audubon Society, this count differs from the Christmas Bird Count in that the weather is

mammals through field trips, workshops, seminars and evening programs. Cost varies. (800-210-0380, [www.thcrr.com](http://www.thcrr.com))

**APRIL 25 – 28**

*Balcones Songbird Festival – Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, Lago Vista.* A celebration of nature to experience birds, butterflies and wildflowers. Join birding nature walks and enjoy family events, including searches for the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. Nature tours are \$23 per person. (512-965-2473, [www.balconesongbirdfestival.org](http://www.balconesongbirdfestival.org))

**APRIL 26**

*15th Annual Bluebird Festival – Wills Point.* Includes educational and entertaining programs, driving tours to see hundreds of bluebirds and nesting boxes throughout town as well as arts and crafts,

**APRIL 26**

*Festival on the Bayou – Sims Bayou Urban Nature Center, Houston.* Come celebrate International Migratory Bird Day with the Houston Audubon Society. Live birds, snakes, games, crafts, raffles, food and lots of fun on the bayou. 1 – 5 p.m. Ticket prices vary. (713-640-2407, [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org))

**APRIL 27 – MAY 4**

*12th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic – Texas Coast.* This friendly birding-for-conservation tournament is held each year to coincide with the spectacular spring migration. To date, \$578,000 has been donated directly to habitat conservation projects through this event. Entry fees vary. (979-480-0999, [www.birdingclassic.org](http://www.birdingclassic.org))

**APRIL 28 – AUGUST 8**

*Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation*

trips to Big Bend, Davis Mountains and several private ranches. Keynote speakers: John O'Neill and Dan Lane. Call for costs. (979-299-0066, [texasbirds.org](http://texasbirds.org))

warmer, you'll have a chance to see neotropical migrants, and the count area includes all of Galveston County. Species total for 2007 was 199. Free. (409-772-3126, [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org))



— painted bunting —





— couch's kingbird —

**MAY 3**

*International Migratory Birds Day* — *Guadalupe River State Park, Spring Branch*. Celebrate the wonders of our feathered friends through bird hikes, bird banding demonstrations, naturoscaping for birds, children's games and crafts and more. A fun family event sponsored by the Friends of Guadalupe River and Honey Creek. 7 a.m. – 3 p.m. \$6 park entry fee for adults. (830-438-2656, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/guadalupe/river](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/guadalupe/river))

**MAY 3**

*Master Gardener Hidden Gardens Tour* — *Green Acres, Rockport*. Arrive at Green Acres to purchase your tickets and maps for this one-day event. You will find maps to wonderful hidden gardens in both Aransas County and San Patricio County. 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. \$10 per person. (361-79C-0103, [www.aransas-tx.tamu.edu](http://www.aransas-tx.tamu.edu))

**MAY 3**

*National Frog Monitoring Day* — *statewide*. Families and communities across the state are encouraged to spend this night outdoors listening for the songs of frogs as part of the 2008 Leap Year "Year of the Frog" activities. Monitoring materials and a \$5 CD of frog calls are available from Texas Parks and Wildlife. Free. (800-792-1112,

ext. 7011, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/amphibians](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/amphibians))

**MAY 3**

*Night Hike* — *Armand Bayou Nature Center, Pasadena*. Take a beautiful walk through the woods and listen to the fascinating sounds of the night. Children over 6 years of age are welcome; parents, remember your flashlight. 8 – 9:30 p.m. Costs vary from \$3 to \$8 per person. (281-474-2551, [www.abnc.org](http://www.abnc.org))

**MAY 4**

*San Antonio Water System Garden Jazz Party* — *San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio*. Live jazz music fills the garden while visitors learn water saving tips presented by SAWS. Water-saving plants and colorful blooming flowers on sale. Free from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

**MAY 10**

*Birdathon* — *Central Texas*. Count birds and collect pledges from sponsors based upon the number of species you see in a given time frame. Have fun and raise vital funds to promote the enjoyment, understanding and preservation of birds, other wildlife and their habitats in Central Texas. Free. Dawn

to dusk. (512-300-BIRD, [www.travisaudubon.org](http://www.travisaudubon.org))

**MAY 10**

*Dragonfly Family Nature Day* — *Valley Nature Center, Weslaco*. Children will make dragonfly nature crafts, take nature walks and listen to dragonfly presentations. 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. \$3 per child, adults are free. (956-969-2475, [www.valleynaturecenter.org](http://www.valleynaturecenter.org))

**MAY 10**

*Kids Birding 101* — *Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio*. Kids learn the basics of bird identification and binoculars, and go out in the field with trained docents. 9 – 11 a.m. Free, reservations required. (210-628-1639, [www.mitchelllakeaudubon.org](http://www.mitchelllakeaudubon.org))

**MAY 12 – 17**

*Birding for Conservation in Southeast Tamaulipas* — *Southeast Tamaulipas, Mexico*. This Texas Parks and Wildlife-Pronatura project offers access for private birding tours to private sites in southeastern Tamaulipas that have

conservation agreements with Pronatura, a Mexican non-governmental organization that has been a leader in habitat conservation and restoration in northeastern Mexico. \$800-\$880 per person. [www.pronatoursbirding.com](http://www.pronatoursbirding.com))

**MAY 15 – 18**

*Dragonfly Days* — *Valley Nature Center, Weslaco*. This festival includes speakers on dragonflies, field trips to different nature destinations, seminars and a banquet. Cost varies depending on activity. (956-969-2475, [www.valleynaturecenter.org](http://www.valleynaturecenter.org))

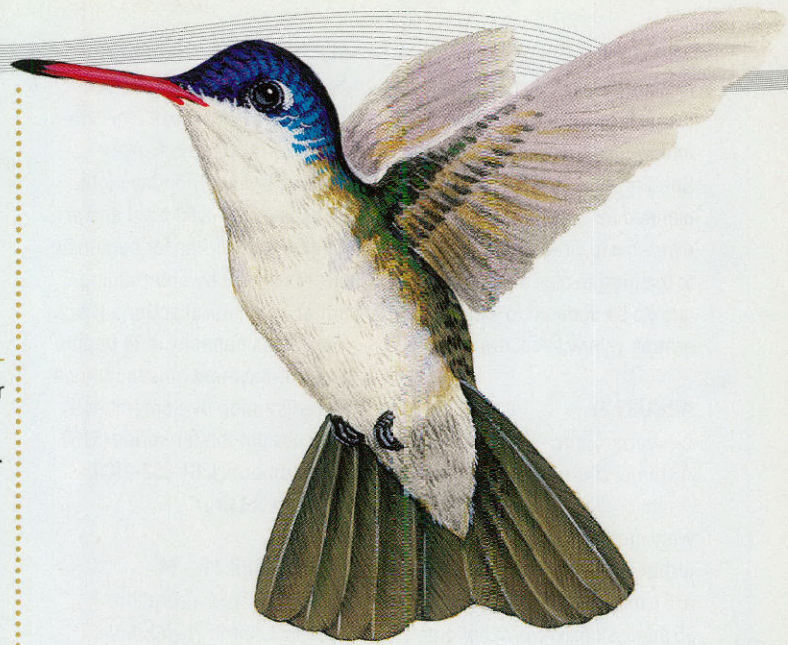
**MAY 24**

*Warbler Woods Bird Sanctuary Open Gate* — *Warbler Woods, Cibolo*. Warbler Woods is a premier inland migratory stop that is a major nesting site for painted buntings and other songbirds. During migration, visitors can see up to 32 species of warblers! 8 a.m. – sundown. Free (donations accepted). ([warblerwoods@gmail.com](mailto:warblerwoods@gmail.com), [www.warblerwoods.com](http://www.warblerwoods.com))



— ruby-throated hummingbird —





—violet-crowned hummingbird—

**MAY 24 – 25**

*Texas Hill Country Nature Photography Alliance Bird and Nature Photography Ranch Previews* — various Hill Country ranches. Explore bird and nature photography opportunities on premier private ranches in the Texas Hill Country. Attendance is limited and advance registration is required. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Free. (830-833-0958, [www.hillcountryphoto.org](http://www.hillcountryphoto.org))

**MAY 31**

*Hill Country Alliance Photo Contest*. Capture the essence of the Hill Country with your photography. Deadline to receive photo entries is May 31. Winners from the HCA Photo Contest will be recognized in the 2009 Hill Country Alliance Calendar. Free. (512-560-3135, [www.hillcountryalliance.org](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org))

**JUNE**

**JUNE – AUGUST**

*Alligator Walks* — Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco. One-hour walks to observe and

learn about the park's resident alligators. Daily. Call or check Web site for dates and time. \$4 park admission. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

**JUNE – AUGUST**

*Family Campout* — Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco. An overnight adventure for all ages. Tents supplied – bring your own bedroll/sleeping bags. Evening dinner and breakfast cooked outdoors included. Call or check Web site for dates, times and cost. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

**JUNE 2 – 6 OR JUNE 9 – 13**

*Kids' Nature Camp* — Valley Nature Center, Weslaco. Children will experience nature up-close, listen to nature speakers, make nature crafts and go to Estero Llano Grande State Park. 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. each day. \$85 for one week (ages 6-8, first session; ages 9-12, second session). (956-969-2475, [www.valleynaturecenter.org](http://www.valleynaturecenter.org))

**JUNE 6 – AUGUST 21**

*Revealing Character*—Robb Kendrick's Tintypes — Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi. Exhibition features 66 tintypes of cowboys and cowgirls taken all over the Lone Star State, plus 12 enlarged prints of tintype images. \$6 per adult, children 12 and under free. (361-825-3500, [www.artmuseumofsouthtexas.org](http://www.artmuseumofsouthtexas.org))

• kids 3-12 years of age and seniors. (972-562-5566, [www.heardmuseum.org](http://www.heardmuseum.org))

**JUNE 19**

*Concerts Under the Stars* — San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio. Live bands fill the garden with music. Box dinners can be ordered ahead of time. Gates open at 6 p.m. and concert starts at 7 p.m. \$5 admission. ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

**JUNE 7**

*Night Hike* — Armand Bayou Nature Center, Pasadena. Take a walk through the woods and listen to the fascinating sounds of the night. Children over 6 years of age are welcome; parents, remember your flashlight. 8:30 – 9:30 p.m. Costs vary from \$3 to \$8 per person. (281-474-2551, [www.abnc.org](http://www.abnc.org))

**JULY**

**JULY 15 – 18**

*Kid's Photo Camp* — Valley Nature Center, Weslaco. Ruth Hoyt, a well-known nature photographer, will teach techniques on how to photograph the beauty of nature. 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. each day. \$120 per child. (956-969-2475, [www.valleynaturecenter.org](http://www.valleynaturecenter.org))

**JULY 17**

*Concerts Under the Stars* — San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio. Live bands fill the garden with music. Box dinners can be ordered ahead of time. Gates open at 6 p.m. and concert starts at 7 p.m. \$5 admission. ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

**AUGUST**

**AUGUST 2 – 3**

*Dog Days of Summer* — San Anto-

**JUNE 16 – AUGUST 31**

*Rat Snakes to Rattlers: Live Texas Snakes* — Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, McKinney. Check out a collection of dozens of live native Texas snakes and learn about the venomous snakes of Texas and how to distinguish them from non-venomous snakes. Kids can also enjoy snake education games and activities. \$8 per adult, \$5 for



—reddish egrets—

—whooping crane—

—green jay—



*Botanical Garden, San Antonio.* This is the only time during the year guests can bring their four-legged friends to the garden. Special pet-related activities are planned for Saturday, August 2. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Free with admission to the garden plus a donation per dog (to be donated to local animal groups). ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

#### AUGUST 21

*Concerts Under the Stars — San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio.* Live bands fill the garden with music. Box dinners can be ordered ahead of time. Gates open at 6 p.m. and concert starts at 7 p.m. \$5 admission. ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

#### AUGUST 30 – SEPTEMBER 1

*Terrific Tree houses — San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio.* Through a judged competition, local design teams will create and build tree houses at the garden. The exhibit opens Saturday with a three-day extravaganza packed with family activities (exhibit on display through November 30). Free with admission to the garden. ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

#### SEPTEMBER

EVERY WED., SAT. & SUN.,

SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER

*Bird Walks — Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco.* 1 1/2- to 2-hour walking tours conducted by experienced bird guides over about 2 miles of mostly level terrain and boardwalks. 8:30 a.m. \$4 per person park admission. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

#### EVERY SATURDAY

*Hummingbird Banding Bonanza — Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson.* Watch experts demonstrate the delicate art of hummingbird banding. Adopt a hummer and shop in the nature store. 8 a.m. – noon. Free for members, \$5 for non-members. (979-480-0999, [www.gcbo.org](http://www.gcbo.org))

#### SEPTEMBER 8 – DECEMBER 6

*Beginning Birding ID Series — South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Corpus Christi.* Twelve Monday night classes (6:30 – 8:30 p.m.) and six weekend field trips for beginning birders taught by entertaining birder and naturalist Gene Blacklock. Class capacity is 16 people and pre-payment must accompany registration by September 4. \$175 per person for series (\$150 for members). (361-852-2100, [www.stxbot.org](http://www.stxbot.org))

#### SEPTEMBER 11 – 14

*Hummer/Bird Celebration — Rockport Fulton High School, Rockport.* Listen to birding experts, visit hummer homes, see banding and enjoy over 80 nature themed vendors. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. \$40 for all-program pass. (361-729-6445, [www.rockporthummingbird.com](http://www.rockporthummingbird.com))

#### SEPTEMBER 13

*Hummingbird Migration Tours — Fennessey Ranch, Bayside.* See hundreds of hummingbirds in the wild. These tiny birds feed and roost by the Mission River on this private ranch. (Call 361-729-6443 for times, costs and reservations. [www.rockport-fulton.org](http://www.rockport-fulton.org))

#### SEPTEMBER 17 – NOVEMBER 15

*Ansel Adams—The Man Who Captured the Earth's Beauty — Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi.* Exhibit features 25 black-and-white photographs printed from vintage negatives taken by renowned photographer Ansel Adams. \$6 per adult, children 12 and under free. (361-825-3500, [www.artmuseumofsouthtexas.org](http://www.artmuseumofsouthtexas.org))

#### SEPTEMBER 20

*Kleb Woods Hummingbird Festival — Kleb Woods Nature Center, Tomball.* Hummingbird banding, lectures and children's activities. Free. (281-357-5324, [www.pct3.hctx.net/PKleb](http://www.pct3.hctx.net/PKleb))

#### SEPTEMBER 27

*Fall Plant Sale — Green Acres, Rockport.* Purchase those native plants that you can't find anywhere. 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Free. (361-790-0103, [aransas-tx.tamu.edu](http://aransas-tx.tamu.edu))

#### SEPTEMBER 27

*Gardens by Moonlight — San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio.* The garden is filled with live music performers, plus culinary treats all under the light of the fall moon. 7 – 11 p.m. Advance tickets (\$20 per person) will be available online or visitors may purchase tickets at the gate. ([www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org))

#### SEPTEMBER 27

*Hawk Watch — Fennessey Ranch, Bayside.* Kettle after kettle of hawks



— white-tailed hawk —



— ferruginous hawk —





— gray hawk —

— hook-billed kite —

by the thousands take off from the tall pecan trees on the Mission River. Full day in the field with guides and lunch. \$59.50 per person. (361-529-6600, www.fennesseyranch.com)

**OCTOBER**  
**OCTOBER 1 – 13**

*McAllen International Birding Festival — El Cielo, Mexico; Rio Grande Valley; Veracruz, Mexico.* Visit El Cielo, the Rio Grande Valley and Veracruz. Cost varies. (1-800-MCALLEN, www.mcallencvb.com)

**OCTOBER 4 – 5**

*Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo — Austin.* Expo gives visitors an opportunity to learn about and experience a wide variety of outdoor sports and pastimes, including wildlife viewing, native gardening, angling, rock climbing, mountain biking, paddling, camping, shooting and much more. (800-792-1112, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/expo)

**OCTOBER 11**

*2008 Fall Wildlife Festival and Plant Sale — Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio.* Annual festival features native plants, lectures, nature activities, demonstrations, exhibits and children's activities. Event will have hayrides and a raptor show. 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Free. (210-328-1639, www.mitchelllakeaudubon.org)

**OCTOBER 16 – 19**

*13th Annual Texas Butterfly Festival — Mission.* Celebrate the Valley's 280-plus species of butterflies. Learn from internationally renowned speakers, explore the area's natural habitats with expert guides and enjoy other activities at the festival. (800-580-2700, www.texasbutterfly.com)

**OCTOBER 18**

*Nurture Nature Festival — Baytown Nature Center, Baytown.* Festival to highlight natural resources found in the Baytown area including children's activities, birding tours, educational exhibits, live animals, games and food. Free. (281-420-5360, www.baytown.org)

**OCTOBER 19**

*BOOtanica! and Fall Garden Fair — San Antonio Botanical Garden, San Antonio.* The entire family can celebrate autumn at the garden. Plant sales, nature walks and various demonstrations on wildlife rescue and fall gardening will be offered. Free with admission to the garden. (www.sabot.org)

**OCTOBER 30 – NOVEMBER 1**

*Wild in Willacy Boofest — Raymondville and Port Mansfield.* Celebrate the natural biodiversity of Willacy County with birding field trips, airboat rides into Laguna

Madre Bay, children's programs from nature organizations and other special events. (888-603-6994, www.wildinwillacy.com)

**NOVEMBER**

**NOVEMBER 5 – 9**

*15th Annual Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival — Harlingen.* This festival focuses on field trips, a trade show and special presentations by internationally renowned birders and authors. Field trips offer glimpses of parrots, plain chachalacas, great kiskadees and green jays. (800-531-7346, www.rgvbirdfest.com)

**NOVEMBER 15**

*En-Raptor-Ed! — Kinkaid School, Houston.* Third annual fundraiser for the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's conservation operations. Amazing live raptor show with free flight over the audience. Lunch included. 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. \$100 per person. (979-480-0999, www.gcbo.org)

**NOVEMBER 20 – 23**

*Ninth South Texas Birding and Wildlife Festival — Community Center, Kingsville.* Specialist birding and nature tours day and night led by renowned guides and a variety of seminars hosted by academics, naturalists and guides. Educational activities from the Valley Nature Center, Last Chance Forever Bird of Prey Conservancy, Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Texas Zoo. Free admission, tours \$25-\$60 per person. (800-333-5032, www.kingsvilletexas.com)

**DECEMBER**

**DECEMBER 5**

*Holiday Open House and Sale — Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson.* Tax-free shopping day in natural history bookstore on the Upper Texas Coast. Find the perfect gift for the nature lover in your life. Refreshments served. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Free. (979-480-0999, www.gcbo.org)



— elf owl —







— belted kingfishers —

— green kingfisher —



— least grebe —

**EVERY SATURDAY,  
JANUARY – MARCH**

*Natural History Series – Valley Nature Center, Weslaco.* Every week there will be a different speaker on a nature-related topic. 10 a.m. \$3 per adult, \$2.50 per senior, \$1 per child. (956-969-2475, [www.valleynaturecenter.org](http://www.valleynaturecenter.org))

**JANUARY 12 – MAY 2**

*Advanced Bird ID Series – South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Corpus Christi.* Twelve Monday night classes (6:30 – 8:30 p.m.) and six weekend field trips for birders with previous beginning training. Classes taught by entertaining birder and naturalist Gene Blacklock. Class

capacity is 16 people and prepayment must accompany registration by January 6, 2009. \$175 per person for series (\$150 for members). (361-852-2100, [www.stxbot.org](http://www.stxbot.org))

**FEBRUARY  
FEBRUARY 5 – 8**

*Laredo Birding and Butterfly Festival – Laredo.* The Laredo-Webb County area is caretaker to more than 150 species of birds, including three very rare species for the United States (the white-collared seed-eater, clay-colored robin and red-billed pigeon). Enjoy this unique birding environment by attending the City of Laredo's second annual nature festival. Call for costs. (800-361-3360, [www.visitlaredo.com](http://www.visitlaredo.com))



**JANUARY 2009  
ALL MONTH**

*Art-in-Nature Workshops – Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco.* Four- to five-week programs on a variety of topics (nature writing, bird wood carving, nature drawing, nature photography and close-up photography) offered at different times. Call or visit Web site for more information. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

**JANUARY – APRIL**

*Birding Hot Spots – Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco.* A classroom setting where the latest rare and unusual bird sightings will be outlined. \$4 park entry. Call or check Web site for dates and times. (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

**EVERY THURSDAY  
JANUARY – FEBRUARY**

*Recipe for the Birds – Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco.* Learn about different types of bird feeders and how to make your own mixes. 10 a.m. \$6 per person (includes bird food you can take home). (956-565-3919, [www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org))

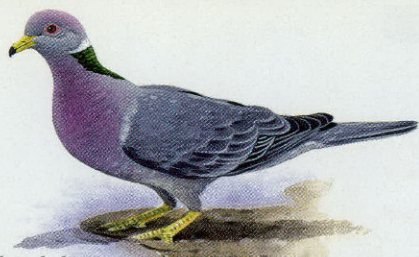
**EVERY WED. AND SAT.,  
JANUARY – APRIL**

*Guided Bird Walks – Goose Island State Park, Rockport-Fulton.* Spend the morning with birding guides and walk through the park identifying birds of the Gulf Coastal Bend. Bring binoculars and comfortable shoes. 8 a.m. Free with park entry. (361-729-2858, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gooseisland](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gooseisland))



— carolina chickadee —





—band-tailed pigeon—

**FEBRUARY 28**

*Nature Day—Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson.* Fishing, birding and habitat gardening are just a few of the activities that will be highlighted at this event. Fishing is available for youth from 1–3 p.m. only. Bring your own rod, reel, tackle and bait. 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Free. (979-292-0100, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/seacenter)

**MARCH**

**MARCH 7**

*Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend (101)—South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Corpus Christi.* Study some of the more than 450 known bird species in South Texas with acclaimed birder Gene Black-

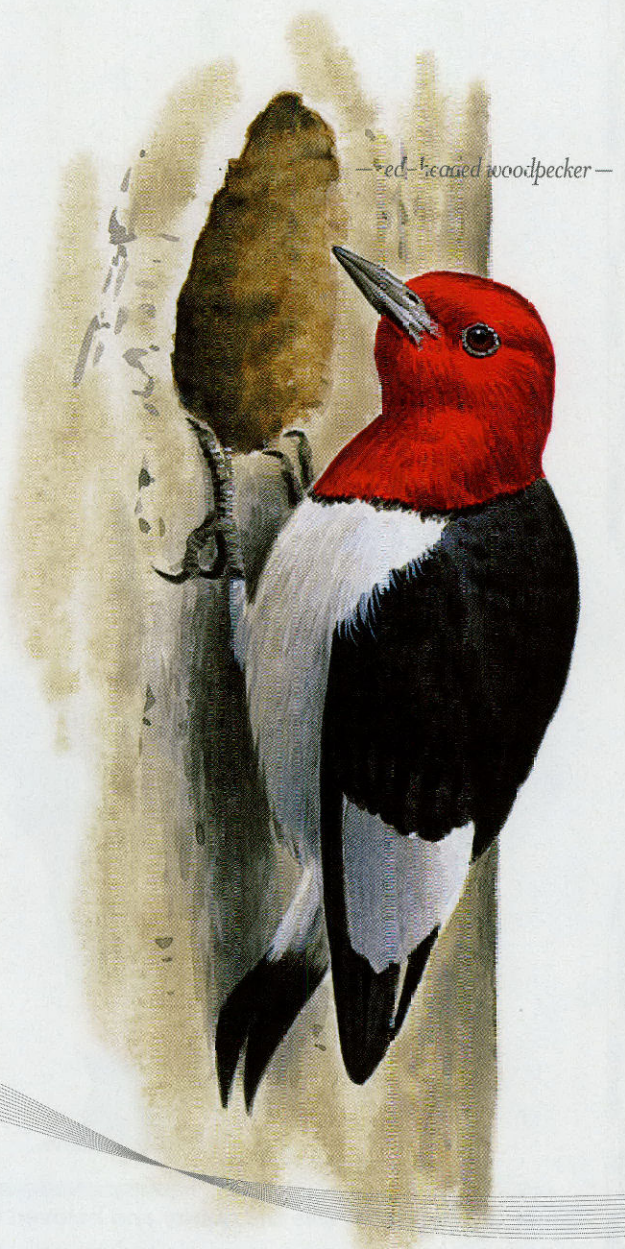
lock. Class capacity is 30 people and pre-payment must accompany registration by March 3. 8:45–11:30 a.m. class, 1:30–4:30 p.m. field trip. \$25 per person (\$22 for members). (361-852-2100, www.stxbot.org)

**MARCH 7**

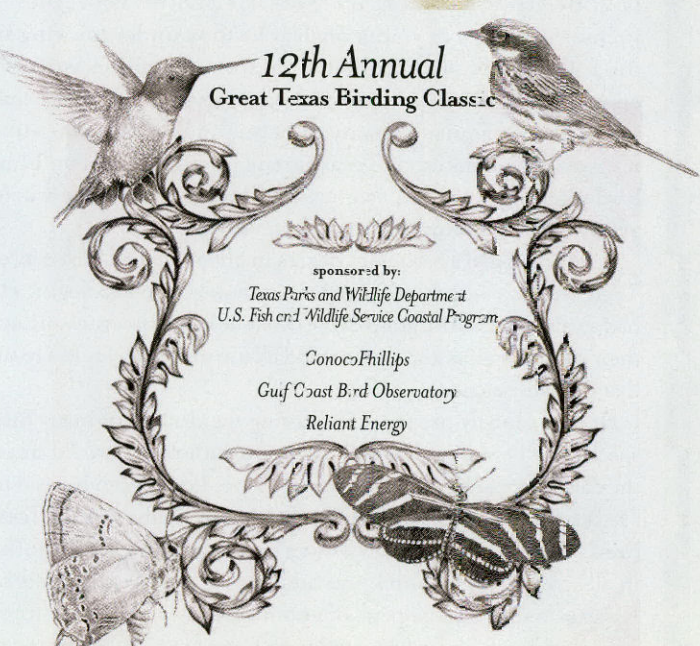
*NatureFest—Jesse H. Jones Park and Nature Center, Humble.*

Join this fun and educational event, which includes noted speakers on nature topics as well as guided nature walks, bird walks, pontoon boat tours, educational booths and live animals. 9:30 a.m.–4 p.m. Free. (281-446-8588, www.hcp4.net/jones) ★

—red-headed woodpecker—



**12th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic**



sponsored by:  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program

ConocoPhillips  
Gulf Coast Bird Observatory  
Reliant Energy



# The Father of Texas Birding

Edgar Kincaid, the quirky editor of *The Bird Life of Texas*, mentored a new generation as he birded along the roads less traveled.

By Suzanne Winckler



**Edgar B. Kincaid Jr. was the quirky and beloved father** of 20th-century birding in Texas. He and his colleagues — including a covey of young birders he took under his wing in the 1960s — elevated birdwatching from a pastime associated with pith-helmeted spinsters to an exacting exercise that revealed the exquisite beauty of nature and at the same time measured the status of Texas' avian populations. For him, birdwatching was both science and high art, and the world around him a laboratory and museum.

Kincaid earned a bachelor's degree in botany at the University of Texas but was a largely self-taught ornithologist and ecologist. He had an almost intuitive grasp of the dynamic between organisms and their environments and understood all too well how easy it is to tip that delicate balance.

He was a lonely prophet, forecasting the decline of many bird species well before academically trained ornithologists would amass the data to prove his point. Many of his predictions can be read in *The Bird Life of Texas*, published in 1974 by the University of Texas Press. The treatise, originally written by Henry Church Oberholser in the early 20th century, was edited over a 14-year period by Kincaid and various helpers, of whom I was one. Because he foresaw a world with ever more people and fewer birds, he was not what

you would call a happy person. A tall, stooped man whose —craggy features made him appear much older than his years, Kincaid seemed to bear the burden of the biologically compromised planet on his shoulders.

Gloom notwithstanding, Kincaid possessed a zany wit and a madcap sense of adventure, which explains why so many young disciple-birders swarmed to him. He was the antithesis of normal. While he became increasingly reluctant to travel in later years, in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, he roamed the byways of Texas and Mexico, chronicling birds in their habitats, and to be in his entourage on these outings was a gift beyond measure. It is no exaggeration to divulge that two trips I made with Edgar and associates — one to the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona in July 1969; the other to Rancho del Cielo in Tamaulipas, Mexico, in July 1970 — put my callow and rather humdrum life on a different and far richer course.

Kincaid was born on December 30, 1921, in Physicians and Surgeons Hospital in San Antonio, his mother and father, Lucile and Edgar Sr., having come in from the ranch near Sabinal in anticipation of his birth. He grew up on the ranch, but spent many weekends in San Antonio with his paternal grandparents, James Madison and Ethel Fenley Kincaid. He also regularly visited his



maternal grandparents, Richard Alexander and Ray Park McKee, in Velasco on the Texas Gulf Coast. Edgar was an only child, and perhaps because he spent so much of his youth in the company of adults, many of whom were advanced in age, he always displayed a wonderful kindness and respect for elders.

It was a fertile environment for a bright, curious boy. Edgar had literally thousands of acres to roam on what was essentially his own private preserve, and he was surrounded by loving parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Besides love there was culture. The Kincaids and McKees put a high premium on the life of the mind — on education, discourse, literature, music and travel.

As a young woman fresh out of Southwestern University in Georgetown, Edgar's mother-to-be, Lucile, came to teach school in Sabinal, where she would meet and marry Edgar Sr. All three McKee sisters graduated from Southwestern at a time (the early 1900s) when few people, especially women, contemplated a college degree. Lucile's older sister, Bertha, in describing college many years later captured the family's matter-of-fact attitude toward education: "[My parents] decided that I would graduate from Southwestern — I was the oldest, I would be the first in line to go. I would graduate with honors, and I grew up knowing I would."

Not surprisingly, there was among Edgar's extended family a great reverence for books. Bertha attributed a lack of feminine social skills as a freshman in college to her passion for reading. "I cared for nothing but books all my life," she said. "I couldn't talk anything but books and I learned that wasn't what you did."

Edgar, too, grew up with book lust. The next best thing to a bird was a bird book. He once wrote: "How does one distinguish a truly civilized nation from an aggregation of barbarians? That is easy. A civilized country produces much good bird literature."

According to a story he told often, a book would seal Edgar's bird-besotted fate. On one of those weekend visits to San Antonio, when he was about six years old, he was with his mother, shopping in Joske's. On a display table in the book department, Edgar spied a book with a singing eastern meadowlark on the cover. Meadowlarks were al-ready one of his favorite ranch birds, and the vivid yellow of its breast was and would remain his favorite color. "I threw such a tantrum there in Joske's," he was fond of recounting, "that in order to calm me down, Lucile bought me the book." It was the *Burgess Bird Book for Children*, the first in a collection that grew to more than 1,000 volumes, now housed at Texas A&M University.

As idyllic as his life seems from afar, it was punctuated with tragedy. Young Edgar and his parents were in a harrowing accident in which their car was struck by a truck hauling pipe. He almost died. (In ghoul-ish moments, he would pull back his snow-white

hair to show friends the tidy scar ringing his scalp where the top of his head had been opened like the lid of a tin can). A liability lawsuit ensued, during which Edgar had to take the stand and at which point he developed a lifelong antipathy toward lawyers. Then, when he was 14, out of the blue, his beloved mother died unexpectedly of heart failure at age 42.

It is possible that her loss explains two unwavering attributes of Edgar's. He was a confirmed bachelor — no woman could ever live up to his mother — yet he adored women and held them in far higher esteem than men. He was a feminist long before the term came into parlance. He surrounded himself, albeit at a bachelor's arm's length, with women of all ages. He was kind, courteous (what genteel manners he had!), generous and supportive of countless women, and, in turn, they nurtured him as best they could, given his reclusive bachelor habits. Through his respect and friendship, he empowered a number of young women, including me, to make our ways in what was, even in the 1960s and '70s, a man's world.

Case in point: Kathleen Collins, now a teacher in Austin, was hanging wallpaper in the 1970s. In a card dated May 18, 1979, she wrote: "Casso [a name for Edgar that will be explained momentarily], I worked for a new builder this week, who, unlike yourself, was very skeptical of the capability of females. He was nervous as a cat, and hesitant about my doing the job. But I finished Friday and he told me I did a fine job and would I work for him next time!

Yea for me and females everywhere!"

After Lucile's death, the closest and dearest woman to Edgar was Aunt Bertha, his mother's elder sister and the wife and amanuensis of the scholar, folklorist and raconteur J. Frank Dobie. Since they had no children of their own, Edgar became their de facto son. He lived with them in their comfortable, two-story, white-frame, book-stuffed bungalow at 702 East 26th Street on the edge of the University of Texas campus. J. Frank and Bertha would both die at home — he on September 9, 1964, at age 75; she on December 18, 1974, at age 84. Edgar lived barely another 10 years, dying at the untimely age of 63 on August 9, 1985.

Kincaid's most tangible ornithological legacy lies in the two volumes of *The Bird Life of Texas*. Each range map for the book's 545 species represents a massive behind-the-scenes effort on the part of Edgar and his birding minions who fanned across the state to, in his words, "bird the underbirded counties." Since birdwatchers have always tended to concentrate their efforts looking for specialties and rarities (like the golden-cheeked warbler in the Hill Country or the whooping crane near

Aransas) or for conspicuous beauties (like the majestic coastal wading birds), most of Texas' 254 counties were underbirded, until Edgar et al. came along.

(continued on page 63)

This whimsical illustration of Kincaid's head imposed on the body of a cassowary was printed as a special tip-in sheet and bound into only a dozen copies of *The Bird Life of Texas*.



**KINCAID SEEMED TO BEAR THE BURDEN OF THE BIOLOGICALLY COMPROMISED PLANET ON HIS SHOULDERS. GLOOM NOTWITHSTANDING, HE POSSESSED A ZANY WIT AND A MADCAP SENSE OF ADVENTURE, WHICH EXPLAINS WHY SO MANY YOUNG DISCIPLE-BIRDERS SWARMED TO HIM. HE WAS THE ANTITHESIS OF NORMAL.**



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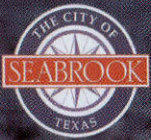


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(continued from page 61)

Always careful to give credit where credit was due, Kincaid explained the fact-finding mission in the introduction: "The senior editor [Kincaid] and his associates — chiefly Ruth Black, Bertha McKee Dobie, Carolyn Sue Coker, V. L. Emanuel, Frances Gillotti, Anne LeSassier, G.F. Oatman Jr., J.L. Rowlett, Rose Ann Rowlett and Dan Scurlock — drove, alone or in parties, some 200,000 miles in the 243 underbirded counties, gathering records to fill in the blank spaces on the maps." Even today, these range maps are the best "snapshots" of the breeding, wintering and migratory patterns of Texas birds.

The other stroke of Kincaidian brilliance in the *BLOT* (as those of us who worked on the book so lovingly called it) was the inclusion of a "Changes" section for those species that, as he wrote, "have historically or recently undergone major changes in status or distribution — usually this means a decline." The "Changes" sections display Kincaid's flare for writing, the sum of his years of observation, and his passion for his subject, and taken together they represent a clarion call to conserve habitat in order to conserve birds.

Edgar's other gifts are less tangible. His pebble in the pond continues to ripple outward. Those who were most touched by him have scattered across the country, variously involved in ecotourism, conservation, teaching, resource management, environmental policy and politics, landscape and bird photography, bird art, environmental writing and publishing, and (perhaps most importantly) relishing the pleasure birds bring to daily life. They, in turn, are touching others.

For many of us, his crowning gift was the bestowing of a bird

name. It all began in December 1960 on a rollicking trip to Mexico — the party included the young Frank Oatman, John Rowlett and sister Rose Ann Rowlett, on their first trip to Mexico, with Edgar and two lovely, avid birding adult women, Elizabeth Henze and Maggie Schwartz, in the role of chaperones. On the trip, a rambling conversation ensued with regard to the particular "bird" traits that various friends and associates manifested — some, I am told, not always positive, since *Homo sapiens* can be a cruel species. By the trip's end, bird names had been assigned to each member of the group and a tradition was born.

Edgar was self-christened the Cassowary, a large, flightless bird of Australia and New Guinea known for its bellicose behavior (yet another example of Edgar's perpetual efforts to conceal his very gentle nature). His name later evolved to either the World's Oldest Cassowary or simply Casso.

The tradition was well-established when I arrived on the scene in the early 1970s, so I cannot begin to plumb the nuances of its evolution. I am just glad to be part of it. There are no hard and fast rules to the process, although until his death, we always petitioned for Edgar's approval of a bird assignment. I suspect there are a few hundred people with bird names still living across the planet. I know the tradition spread to California birders. I do not know if it remains a habit among birders in Texas. As for me, I am a greedy person with multiple personalities. For the historical record, I am the Brown Pelican, the Dipper and the Yellow-eyed Junco, and to prove I'm never satisfied, I always wanted to be the Yellow-breasted Chat. ★



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LOOK FOR THESE STORIES  
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Vanishing hardwoods of East Texas; training hunting dogs; family land management traditions; Comal Springs; Village Creek State Park.

### May 4–11:

Life of the American Alligator; rocks and rolling at Davis Mountains State Park; tent maintenance; Palo Duro Canyon; honoring Doc Shelton.

### May 11–18:

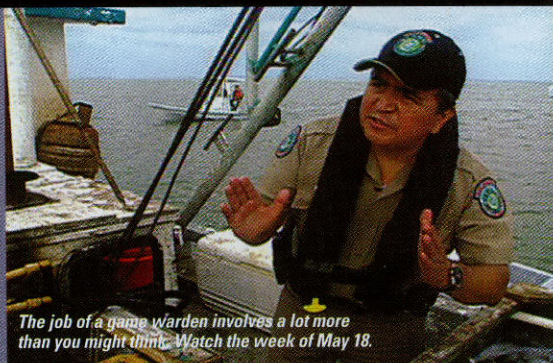
Comeback of the tenacious tarpon; Panhandle wildfire recovery; Litteken Ranch outdoor outreach; Big Bend's blooms; Lake Whitney State Park.

### May 18–25:

The job of a Texas Game Warden; birding for beginners; Martin Dies Jr. State Park; spring restoration on a Llano River ranch; radical rocks at Copper Break State Park.

### May 25–June 1:

Hill Country State Natural Area; watching out for frogs and toads; morning mist on the Leon River; animal coloration; overcoming obstacles and pedaling the country.



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**ODESSA-MIDLAND:** KPBT-TV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 4:30 p.m.

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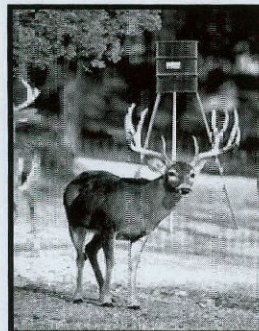
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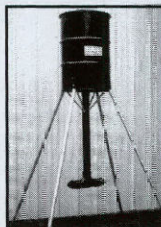
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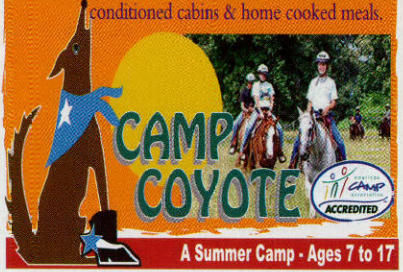
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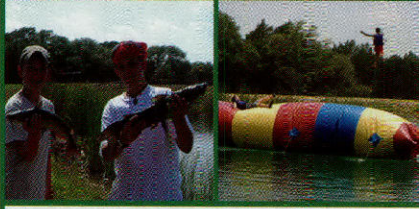
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**IMAGE SPECS:**

Nikon D2X with 200-400mm zoom lens and F4 aperture, digital 200 ISO, 1/125 second shutter speed, f/stop of 5.6.



photo by Sean Fitzgerald, Hennessey Ranch

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