



San Antonio Audubon Society

AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

Volume 55 Number 3

March 2009

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HOUSE FINCHES

The solstice has long passed, and with every passing day the sun speeds faster towards our hemisphere, the intensity of the sunlight and the length of the day growing apace. These changes have not gone unnoticed by our birds, as they sing with a renewed intensity from gardens and vacant lots around town. Amid this familiar spring chorus can be heard the pretty, warbling song of the House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*).

The genus *Carpodacus* contains more than twenty species, and the songs of the closely related Cassin's (*C. cassinii*) and Purple Finches (*C. purpureus*) will soon be ringing forth across our western mountains and north woods respectively. Most species in the genus are native to the Old World. At this very season, just as the song of the House Finch echoes across our urban streets, so does the warbled song of the Sinai Rosefinch (*C. synoicus*) echo across the Holy Land.

Male House Finches may sing at any time of year but active courtship and pairing begins in the late winter flocks. In all populations there are nearly half again as many adult males as there are females. The exact cause of this skewed sex ratio is unknown; unmated males may sing persistently all summer long.

House Finches are almost exclusively vegetarian in habit. Carotenoid pigments obtained from the diet serve as a signal of biological fitness in males, the drab females preferring those males with the largest amount of red. Regional variations in male plumage do exist however, and yellow-colored males are also common in some populations.

Male House Finches guard their mate against the attentions of other males as well as defending the immediate vicinity of the nest. Females may lay as many as six clutches per season, although no wild pair has been observed successfully raising more than three broods in a year. The size of the clutch varies, from as many as six to just a single egg, probably in response to food supply. A nest may be re-used for subsequent broods; in other instances pairs may relocate more than half a mile between breeding attempts.

The nestlings are reared mainly upon seeds, a dietary habit which renders this species immune to successful cowbird parasitism. The male feeds the incubating female on the nest; both sexes tend the young, and the male often cares for the fledged brood while the female constructs another nest.

Their ability to raise their young upon birdseed, their relative lack of territoriality, and their high fecundity all serve to make the House Finch easy to keep in captivity. Escaped caged birds may account for the species' successful introduction into Hawaii in the 1870s.

Prior to World War II, House Finches were sometimes sold illegally in pet shops under the name "Hollywood Finches." In the 1940s, several of these illegal stocks of House Finches were released in New York City. These birds are thought to have been the founding stock for a still-expanding eastern population, which now occupies part



House Finch by Marcin Kojtka

(Continued on page 3)

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR

MONTHLY MEETING

March 5th, Thursday, 7:00 PM

Presenter: Karen Kilfeather

“Collective Personalities: Journey to Private Lands for Birding and Nature Photography”

Lion's Field, 2809 Broadway
(Mulberry at Broadway)

March 7, Saturday, 8:00 AM

SAAS Field Trip to Stone Oak Park

Meet leader Mariann Golden at Stone Oak Park located at 20395 Stone Oak Parkway. Take US-281 N and turn left at Stone Oak Parkway and go about 1.2 miles to the Park on the right. Bring water. Contact Mariann Golden at (210) 650-4312.

March 14, Saturday, 8:00 AM

SAAS Beginner's Bird Walk

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz at the Judson Nature Trail next to the Alamo Heights swimming pool. At the 5900 block of Broadway in Alamo Heights, turn west on Ogden to stop sign at Greeley Street. Turn left one block, then right on Viesca to small parking lot on the left before the swimming pool. All are welcome; binoculars available. Contact Georgina Schwartz at (210) 342-2073.

March 22, Sunday, 8:00 AM

SAAS Field to Trip Friedrich Wilderness Park

Meet leader Helen Rejzek at Friedrich Wilderness Park's parking lot. From Loop 1604 and IH-10 West, take IH-10 West and exit at Camp Bullis Road. Turn left under the freeway, then right on the access road and follow the signs to the Park. Target bird is the Golden-cheeked Warbler. Time permitting, we may take a side trip to Crownridge Canyon Natural Area. Bring water. Contact Helen Rejzek at (210) 679-7437.

March 25, Wednesday, 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM

SAAS Field Trip to San Marcos

Meet leader Sandi Wheeler at the San Marcos Tourist Information Center. Take I-35 north to exit 205; take turn around and go under I-35 and then go south on access road to the Center, approximately .5 miles on the left. Field trip includes the Rio Vista Park along the

San Marcos River and Aquarena Springs. Bring water and bug spray. Free. Contact Sandi Wheeler at (210) 659-8168.

March 29, Sunday, 8:00 AM

SAAS Field Trip to Cibolo Nature Center

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz in the parking lot of Cibolo Nature Center. From San Antonio, take IH-10 West to the first Boerne Exit, US-87. Take this route north until TX-46 turns right at the Cibolo Creek Bridge. Turn right on TX-46 and follow it to the edge of town where there is a sign on the right to Boerne City Park and the Cibolo Nature Center. Go to the end of the road and turn right into Center. Bring water. Free. Donations appreciated. Contact Georgina Schwartz at (210) 342-2073.

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Regular hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Saturdays and Sundays; call Center at (210) 628-1639 for other times. Directions: Exit South Loop 410 at Moursund Blvd (Exit-46); go south 0.7 mile to gate on left and ring buzzer for entry. Docent-led birding trips, \$3.00 for MLAC members, \$5.00 for non-members, are scheduled at 8:00 AM on:

March 8, 2nd Sunday
March 10, 2nd Tuesday
March 15, 3rd Sunday
March 28, 4th Saturday

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Red-shouldered Hawk by Larry Van Buren



Please send your favorite birding photos to:
editor@saaudubon.org

(Continued from page 1)

or all of every State east of or adjoining the Mississippi.

The original range of the House Finch encompassed only the western states and parts of Mexico. Originally native to edge habitats, this species has benefited enormously from alterations to the landscape. The spread of the House Finch into areas outside of its historical range has also given us the interesting spectacle of a native species in an invasive role. Early reports that the House Finch was able to out-compete and displace the House Sparrow may have been in error. House Sparrow populations did decline in many areas, but in some places such declines preceded the arrival of the House Finch. It is believed however that the spread of the House Finch has resulted in population declines of the Purple Finch, apparently in response to competition over winter resources.

It was among this eastern population of the House Finch that mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, a highly contagious disease of poultry, was first observed in a wild songbird. The disease initially caused high mortality, but a feared catastrophic epidemic affecting this and other songbird species has not occurred. It is unknown to what extent, if any, the captive origin of the eastern population may have had in this disease outbreak.

~Mike Scully



Help the Birds!

We are in the midst of a major drought; it is extremely dry all around the area. Birds are not only hunting for water to drink, there is also a short supply of food (whether seed, fruit or insects). Please consider providing the birds with water and seed this year. Both area Wild Birds Unlimited stores offer SAAS members a 10% discount on regularly price bird seed or suet.

~Barbara Kyse

Volunteers Needed!

Several SAAS committee chair positions will be open in the near future. Help SAAS by sharing your time, talents and abilities. Contact Barbara Kyse for more information.

SAAS NEEDS YOU!



OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST

March 7, Saturday, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Crownridge Canyon Interpretive Walk

7222 Luskey Blvd. Reservations: (210) 564-6400. Hike is limited to 15 participants and may be canceled if there are no reservations. Meet near rest-rooms, \$2 donation. See: www.naturalareas.org.

March 7, Saturday, 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM

Kids Birding 101

Children will learn how to use binoculars and how to identify birds. Mitchell Lake Audubon Center (see directions on page 2). Free, but RSVP by e-mail at mlac@audubon.org.

March 14, Saturday, 8:00 PM—10:00 PM

Eisenhower Park Program

Spring Skies: What's available in the early spring skies. 19399 NW Military Hwy. Reservations recommended. \$3.00/individual; \$5/family. Call: (210) 564-6400 or see: www.naturalareas.org.

March 21, Saturday, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

S.A. Botanical Garden Beginner's Bird Walk

San Antonio Botanical Garden, 555 Funston Place. Meet at Carriage House. Fees: adults - \$7.00; seniors - \$5.00; children (under 12) \$4.00. Free for SABG members. See: www.sabot.org.

March 21, Saturday, 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Wildflowers & Butterflies - Calaveras Lake Park

San Antonio River Authority guided hike. Advanced registration required. Free. (210) 302-4280. See: www.sara-tx.org

March 21, Saturday, 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Boerne Birders—Boerne Lake

Birding census of Boerne Lake. Meet in the parking area near the dam. Free. For more information, call 830-230-5551 or 210-710-3981.

March 28, Saturday, 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM

Beginning Birding: Birds and Habitat

Class by Dr. Andrew Kasner, Audubon Texas Director of Conservation. Mitchell Lake Audubon Center (see directions on page 2). Free, but RSVP by e-mail: mlac@audubon.org.

The Birding Scene January 2009

Bird sightings in January were a bit slim, perhaps because of the serious continuing drought situation. One exception seems to be Green Jays. Helen Rejzek found them on January 1 in both Bexar and Medina Counties. The Bexar birds were at the Medina River crossing on Gross Lane near Mechler Road. Her other sighting was at Castroville Regional Park in Medina County. There was another report of Green Jays from Tim Stone in South Bexar County. He reports having seen up to eight Green Jays since mid-November. A rare vagrant in the past, Green Jays seem to be making inroads in the San Antonio area.



Green Jay by Marcin Kojtka

Helen also found several other good birds this month. Besides the Green Jays, on January 1 she found two Scissor-tailed Flycatchers off Loop 1604, south of Hwy 90. She saw two Harris's Hawks on Ingram Road near Highway 151 on January 2. Helen had a female Summer Tanager on Ave A, also on January 2. A Green Heron and White-faced Ibis were at Mitchell Lake on January 4.

Brad Weir reported a *Myiarchus* flycatcher from the Botanical Gardens. He also re-found a Great Kiskadee on January 24 at Nelson Road /Medina River. He had initially reported this bird for the CBC in mid-December. Brad and Marcin Kojtka found two hummingbirds on January 11. One has been identified as an Anna's. The other was a *Selasphorus* species, possibly an Allen's. Lora Render also had an Anna's Hummingbird in her yard on January 21.

San Antonio Audubon had a field trip to Mud Creek Park on January 21. Bird of the day was a Brown Creeper near the trailhead. They also had a Common Raven and numerous other regular resident birds. This under-birded park is located on Jones Maltsberger north of Redland Road on the north side of San Antonio.

The most intriguing report of month was at Cranes Mill Park on Canyon Lake. David Pueppke reported a flock of 12 Western Bluebirds. These birds continued through at least the end of the month, with the latest report being January 31. Cranes Mill Park is on the south side of Canyon Lake in Comal County.

According to The Handbook of Texas Birds by Mark Lockwood and Brush Freeman, Western Bluebirds are rare to very rare visitors to the western edge of the Edwards Plateau and casual further east. ❁

~Sheridan Coffey

For all window or road kills, please call Jack Eitnearer at (210) 643-2544 or Martin Reid at (210) 561-2454 to arrange a pickup. It is against the law to possess dead birds. Call right away.

Postage increase soon! Save SAAS money and see the newsletter in **living color!** Change your subscription to e-mail only. Contact: members@saudubon.org.



The Birds and the Bees

Mitch Heindel, from Utopia, posted this interesting birds and bees observation on Texbirds recently. Mitch has both Scott's and Audubon's Orioles at his hummingbird feeders in Utopia. Scott's Orioles are present March to October and Audubon's Orioles are the resident and default yellow and black oriole all winter.

The two species can be identified with 100% certainty there by whether or not there are X number of bees on the feeder and the bird still jumps on it.



Mitch reports that Scott's will almost never jump on a feeder with more than about 2 or 3 bees. While it may be possible, though very rare, to see a very hungry Scott's try a feeder with up to 5 bees (if it were truly in dire need), normally they move on if there are more than a couple of bees on the feeder.

Whereas 5, 10, 20, or 30 bees will not deter an Audubon's Oriole which deftly picks them off and drops them as needed, drinking at his leisure. Clearly they are on different wavelengths on this issue." ❁



~Mitch Heindel

Welcome New Members!

Moore, Myfe W. ----- (210) 695-3068
10518 Bar X Trail, Helotes, TX 78023-4041

Valcour, Francis & Maureen
250 Laurel Heights Place, San
Antonio, TX 78212-5218



Member Update

Weaver, Michael & Karen
12113 W. 141st Street, Overland Park,
KS 66221-2903

Two Bit, Four Bit Birding Challenge

Have you heard about the TOS birding challenge of finding 100 birds in 100 counties? While birding with Gail Nickel one day, we were talking about the 100-county challenge. We decided to make it a Two Bit, Four Bit Birding Challenge for SAAS. Your goal is to find 25 birds in 25 counties in Texas. You can find 50, 75 or 100 birds in as many counties, too.

If you want to join us, please do. Let us know how you are doing. You can list your birds in eBird by county and the website will keep track of them for you. You can learn the Texas counties while you are birding and have a new goal for your birding trips. Happy trails! ❁

~Mariann Golden

Judson Nature Trail Report

There will be a work day at the Judson Nature Trail on Monday, March 2, 2009. The committee and I would like to invite anyone interested in helping to come to the trail and see what you might be interested in doing. We really could use someone with a gas powered tree saw for cutting mostly Ligustrum bushes that have gotten very big. We usually start at 8:00 AM and end by noon, but any period of time you can give will be appreciated.

The 2009 committee members are: Angela Bartels, Dick Bartels, Fran Campbell, Jerry Coleman, Bill and Marian Collins, Linda Koehler, Barbara Kyse, Jerry and Karen Moulder, Gail Plummer, Georgina Schwartz and Sandi Wheeler. ❁

~Shirley Bartels, *Chairman*

Education Report

In the past month, I took our Birds of Bexar County program to the Garden Club in Hollywood Park and to the Helotes Creek Nature Center in Helotes. ❁

~Georgina Schwartz

Bexar County Birding Challenge

Yes, birding has been relatively slow this year due to the drought. However, even lighter is the number of members who submitted reports to Bexar County Birding Challenge for January. Dodge and Lorna Engleman were out of town until the 27th, but in just four days they saw 81 and 79 species respectively in Bexar County. Helen Rejzek reported on SATXbirds that she saw 114 species on January 9th. If any other members have Big Days, please send your reports to bcbc@saaudubon.org.

The purpose of the Birding Challenge was to create interest in our local birds and their habitat. Traditionally the SAAS Birding Challenges comprised three separate challenges:

- **Big Day:** total of **100+** species within Bexar (or adjacent) County within 24 hours
- **Local Big Year:** total of **200+** species identified within Bexar (or adjacent) County
- **State Big Year:** total of **275+** species identified within Texas with at least 150 being within Bexar County.

If none of our traditional challenges appeals to you for 2009, create your own challenge and get out and bird. Several of our members have created a "two-bit" challenge for 2009, where their goal is to spot 25 species in 25 different counties. Growing up in the era of five and dime stores, my personal challenge for 2009 is to bird in at least five counties, other than Bexar, and spot at least 10+ species. Perhaps you have set a personal 2009 goal to see a minimum number of species in Texas within a classification (such as hawks), bird at a new destination within the state, or increase your Texas life list to over 400. If you are interested in sharing your personal birding challenges for 2009, send the information to:

BCBC@saaudubon.org. ❁

~Barbara Kyse

FIELD TRIP REPORTS



Field Trip to Mud Creek Park, Jan. 21

The day started out really cold, but warmed up right away. Those participating were Georgina Schwartz, John & Barbara Gore and Gail Nickel. We walked all around in this interesting park. The best bird was the Brown Creeper found near the trailhead in a thick grove of trees. There were 18 species. John Gore said there are normally more birds there, especially in the spring. This park deserves more attention than we have been giving it, so drop in.

~Georgina Schwartz

Field Trip to Cartwright Ranch, Feb. 7

Thanks to Jean Bensmiller, granddaughter Sarah, friend Ashton, and the resident photographer at the Cartwright Ranch for a great day of birding along the shores of Lake Corpus Christi. It was pretty windy and we ate lunch in the lee of our various vehicles. Seventeen of us found 75 species. Highlights included: Least Grebe at a pond that has its water supplied from a well or it would be dried up, too; a Black-bellied Plover spotted by Mike Sims, a large flock of Sandhill Cranes, a Greater Roadrunner seen only by the first car, a Great Horned Owl sitting on a stump (almost missed him), Great Kiskadee, Vermilion Flycatcher, Green Jays; and Olive, Field, Vesper, Lark, Savannah, Lincoln's, and White-crowned Sparrows. Numbers were quite low due to the drought. This is always a fun trip whether it is your first time or a repeat. Thanks to Lon Cartwright for allowing us access to his Twin Oaks Ranch.

~Georgina Schwartz

Field Trip to Jackson Nature Park, Feb. 8

Derek Muschalek lead a group of 17 people around the Stockdale sewage ponds and Jackson Nature Park. For most of the people, this was their first visit to the park, and all were pleased with what they saw. The San Antonio River Authority has done a great job of keeping it "wild." We started at the sewage ponds where we had 7 species of ducks including Hooded Mergansers. Other Highlights included White-tipped Dove, Brown Creeper, Harris's Sparrow (and 7 other sparrow species), and Northern Flicker. We birded the road and then drove to the park. In spite of the winds picking up later in the morning, we ended the day with 68 species.

~Helen Rezbek

Beginners' Bird Walk, Feb. 14

Another cold and windy day brought eight of us together to look for birds in the Olmos Basin Park. Highlights included a Great Egret in breeding plumage; a calling pair of Red-shouldered Hawks; a large group of American Goldfinches bathing in waves at the creek in the Park; a 3-woodpecker day: Downy, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed; and 2 Shrikes. The last bird of the day was the best--a Barred Owl swooped over us along the trail in back of the Trail house and sat for us to look at him. Thanks to our three new birders and to David Edwards, Joanne Hall, and Fran Campbell who showed up to help look. We had a total of 27 species.

~Georgina Schwartz



Jackson Nature Park field trip's enthusiastic birders. Leader Derek Muschalek is in the white hat (good guy) and white shirt.

SAAS Members: Please check your mailing label for the membership **renewal date!** Use the form on the back page or the online form at: www.saaudubon.org/membership.html to renew or change your info. Members who get the pdf newsletter will receive a renewal reminder via email.

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON NEWS

Editor: Marilyn Williams
Contributing Editor and Mailing: Georgina Schwartz
Mailing Labels: Charlotte Wenger

The newsletter deadline is the 15th for the following month's issue. Please send submissions via email to editor@saaudubon.org.

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SAAS-Y NOTES

Member News: Our deepest condolences go to Marie Caffall Banta, wife, and other family members on the recent death of member Tom Banta.

March 7, Saturday, 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Voelcker Park Open House

“Native Blooming Plants,” by Paul Cox, San Antonio Botanical Garden botanist and co-author of Texas Trees. 12000 NW Military Hwy. Free. See:

www.voelckerparksa.com

March 12, Thursday

Bexar Audubon Society's March Meeting

CANCELED. See: www.bexaraudubon.org

March 21, Saturday, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Natural Landscape Design Workshop

Speaker Judit Green, TPWD urban biologist, on using native and adapted plants in landscape design. Cibolo Nature Center auditorium. Cost: members \$15; non-members \$20. Limited to 30; pre-registration required. Call 830-249-4616.

March 28, Saturday, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Habitat for Birds

Program on Managing for Game Birds & Song Birds, by Rufus Stephens, Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist, speaking on how different habitat types provide food, cover and space for specific birds. Program includes outdoor examination of native plants important to wildlife. Cibolo Nature Center auditorium and park. Cost: Members \$15; non-members \$20. Limited to 30. Pre-registration required. Call (830) 249-4616.

Volunteer Opportunities

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Needs volunteers to be involved as education docents to assist with science programs for grades 3-8, on weekdays. Contact: Alicia Christian at (210) 628-1639 or achristian@audubon.org.

The Friends of Government Canyon (FOGC)

FOGC is seeking another birder to join its Education Committee. The Committee reviews past and upcoming events, contacts presenters and sometimes leads

events. For more information about the Committee, contact Steve Hawkins at (210) 474-0308 or shawkins4@satx.rr.com. To learn about FOGC, see www.friendsofsgc.org.

LOOKING AHEAD

Texas Ornithological Society Spring Meeting

To be held in Austin, TX on April 23-25, 2009. See www.texasbirds.org

San Antonio Audubon Society

5150 Broadway #257

San Antonio TX 78209-5710

info@saaudubon.org

www.saaudubon.org

Officers

- Barbara Kyse, President
- Sandi Wheeler, Vice President
- Gail Nickel, Secretary
- Patsy Ingle, Treasurer

Directors-at-Large

- Mariann Golden
- Sheridan Coffey
- Jerry Coleman
- Tim Katafias
- Mike Sims

Committee Chairmen

- Bexar Co. Bird Challenge ----- bcbc@saaudubon.org
- Bird Records,
 - Sheridan Coffey ----- birdreports@saaudubon.org
- Conservation, Harry Noyes
- Education, Georgina Schwarz
- Field Trips,
 - Helen Rejzek ----- fieldtrips@saaudubon.org
- Historian, Betty Walters
- Member Database,
 - Charlotte Wenger ----- members@saaudubon.org
- Nature Trail, Shirley Bartels
- Newsletter,
 - Marilyn Williams ----- editor@saaudubon.org
- Publicity, Shirley Bartels
- Website, Bill Collins ----- web@saaudubon.org

SAAS Board of Directors Meeting

March 24, Tuesday, 6:30 PM

Meet at the Carlyle Condominium, 7887 Broadway.

Info: Barbara Kyse, 824-8884, bckyse@msn.com

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC
5150 BROADWAY #257
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Donations: Sanctuary Fund _____

Judson Nature Trail _____

How did you find out about us? _____

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MONTHLY MEETING

March 5th, Thursday, 7:00 PM

Presenter: Karen Kilfeather

On Thursday, March 5, 2009, Nature Photographer Karen Kilfeather speaks on “Collective Personalities: Journey to Private Lands for Birding and Nature Photography”

Karen Kilfeather’s photos have been published in such books and magazines as Smithsonian Orchids, Texas Monthly, The Texas Hill Country, The Washingtonian, Executive Golfer and many U.S. State Department publications. Karen also leads tours to select locations and ranches in the Texas Hill Country or The Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. For a preview of her work see:

www.kilfeatherphotos.com.

Lion's Field, 2809 Broadway
(Mulberry at Broadway)