



San Antonio Audubon Society

AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

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GREEN KINGFISHERS

by Mike Scully

In late January, a visiting birder from Canada made the unprecedented discovery of an Amazon Kingfisher (*Chloroceryle amazona*) in the city of Laredo, the first time this tropical species had been recorded in the United States. Those who have not yet seen this spectacular green-and-white species may take some solace in finding its smaller and perhaps even prettier close relative; the Green Kingfisher (*C. americana*), an uncommon but regular bird in our area. A broad area of range overlap in the Tropics between these two species exists, but the range of the Green Kingfisher also extends as far north as the Texas Hill Country, and across the Mexican border into Southern Arizona.

Many kingfishers (Family Alcedinidae) in the Old World Tropics and in Australia occupy terrestrial niches, dropping from a perch to capture small prey items on land rather than in water. Of the 95 species in this Family, just six are native to the Americas. These New World species, in common with the archetypical Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) of Europe and Asia, forage almost entirely by diving into water after fish and other prey.



Green Kingfisher by Lee Pasquali

Only one kingfisher, the relatively large Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*), occurs over most of North America. In the Old World, the similarly sized congeners of the Belted Kingfisher are all primarily tropical in distribution. The most widespread Temperate Zone kingfisher in the Old World is the aforementioned Common Kingfisher, a small species quite similar in size to our own Green Kingfisher. Why the Green Kingfisher or a similar small kingfisher species does not occupy a large range across North America, too, seems a mystery. Like the Common Kingfisher of Europe, the species is frequently found along streams that would be too small to interest a larger

kingfisher species. Kingfishers are territorial at all seasons, and on occasion Belted Kingfishers will aggressively exclude the much smaller Green Kingfisher. Across much of South and Central America, however, the Green Kingfisher coexists with three or four other kingfisher species; three larger species and one species that is even smaller.

When hunting, Green Kingfishers generally occupy an inconspicuous perch above the water; they are often detected by a rattling call given upon the approach of an observer. Like other kingfisher species, Green Kingfishers hunt by sight and so require bodies of relatively clear water. Small fish and aquatic arthropods are captured by a brief plunge into the water; the birds themselves are susceptible to predation by larger fish. Perhaps to lessen the chances of such attacks, kingfishers commonly relocate to a new hunting perch after each sally. On rare occasions, Green Kingfishers have been observed hunting away from water, preying upon small reptiles and grasshoppers captured on the ground.

The nesting burrow of the Green Kingfisher can be up to a yard long, dug into the side of an earthen stream-side bank, the entrance preferably concealed by hanging vegetation. Both sexes excavate, using their beaks to break the earth and the fused two outer toes on their small feet to kick away the dirt. The usual five-egg clutch of Green Kingfishers in Texas is apparently larger than the usual two- to four-egg clutch of the same species in the Tropics. Both sexes help incubate the eggs and both feed the young. Kingfisher nests are famously messy; the eggs are laid on the bare dirt floor and the young squirt their feces onto the walls of the nest chamber. By the time of fledging at about four weeks of age, the floor of the nest will be covered with feces mixed with the regurgitated remains of prey. The young are driven from their parents' territory about a month after they fledge.

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SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR

Please call the trip leaders to RSVP so they know how many participants to expect, or if you'd like more information about the trip. Last-minute changes to field trips will be posted at saaudubon.org, sent by email through SATX Birds, and announced on the recorded message at 308-6788.

Saturday, March 6, 8:00 AM

Stone Oak Park

Meet leader Gail Nickel at Stone Oak Park, 20395 Stone Oak Parkway. Take US 281 N and turn left on Stone Oak Parkway. Go about 1.2 miles to the park on the right. Bring water. Call Gail (497-7626) to RSVP.

Saturday, March 13, 8:00 AM

SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

Join leader Georgina Schwartz at the Judson Nature Trails next to Alamo Heights swimming pool. At the 5900 block of Broadway in Alamo Heights, turn west on Ogden and go to the first stop sign at Greeley Street. Turn left on Greeley and then after one block, turn right on Viesca to the small parking lot on the left before the swimming pool. Binoculars are available; everyone is welcome. Call Georgina (342-2073) to RSVP.

Sunday, March 14, 8:00 AM

Crescent Bend Nature Park, Schertz

Meet Sandi Wheeler at the park, 12805 W. Schaefer Road. From IH-10 East, take the 1518 exit and go toward Schertz. Look for the brown Crescent Bend sign at Schaefer Road, turn right and go about 3 miles to Cibolo Creek. Bring water and insect repellent. Call Sandi (659-8168) to RSVP.

Tuesday, March 23, 8:00 AM

Max Starke Park, Guadalupe County

Meet Sandi Wheeler in the large parking lot in front of the water treatment plant at Max Starke Park in Guadalupe County. Take IH-10 to Exit 603 to merge onto W. Kingsbury St/W US 90. Slight right at W. Court St./US 90. Turn right at S. Austin/State Loop 513/TX-123 Business. Turn right at Wave Pool Drive, then turn left at S. Guadalupe St., turn right at River Drive. Call Sandi (659-8168) to RSVP.

Saturday, March 27, 8:00 AM

Southside Lions Park

Brad Wier will meet participants at the parking lot inside the park. From IH-37 southbound, exit Pecan Valley Drive. Turn left and go northeast on Pecan Valley Drive

one-half mile past Southcross Blvd. and the golf course. The park entrance is on the right. Enter, stay to your left, follow road to main parking lot. Call Brad (544-8173) to RSVP.

Sunday, March 28, 8:00 AM

Choke Canyon State Park

Meet leader Mike Creese at the entrance to the Calliham Unit Of Choke Canyon State Park. The park is located about 75 miles south of San Antonio. From San Antonio, take IH-37 south, exit at Three Rivers. Continue on US 281 into Three Rivers. The Calliham Unit is about 12 miles west of town, past the South Shore Unit. Bring water, insect repellent, and lunch. Park fee is \$4 or use Texas State Parks Pass. Call Mike (479-5552) to RSVP.

Tuesday, March 30, 8:00 AM

Friedrich Park/Crownridge Canyon

Meet leader Helen Rejzek at the parking lot of Friedrich Wilderness Park. Take IH-10 West to the Dominion Drive exit. Continue on access road until turnaround, do a U-turn, and stay on access road to Milsa. Turn right to go into the park. Expect the trails to be steep and rocky, bring water. If time permits, we will go to Crownridge Canyon Natural Area after birding at Friedrich Park. Call Helen (679-7437) to RSVP.

If members have ideas or suggestions for future field trip destinations, please send the information to Helen Rejzek at fieldtrips@saaudubon.org.

MARCH 4 SAAS MEETING

Birding in New Guinea

Join us at 7:00 PM, Thursday, March 4 at Lions Field, 2809 Broadway, to hear SAAS member Ron Huffman's presentation on Papua New Guinea: Birds of Paradise and More. Ron led a trip to New Guinea and was accompanied by six SAAS members.

Ron is a Ph.D. Neuroscientist and was one of the founding faculty members of the University of Texas Medical School in San Antonio in 1968, where he worked for 31 years. Now retired, he has spent the past 10 years traveling around the world as an avid birdwatcher. He has two major life lists that he pursues, a World Life List and a Mexico Life List. He has seen more than 926 species in Mexico.

Green Kingfishers (Continued from p. 1)

Among kingfishers in general, studies have shown that mortality rates of recently independent young kingfishers are usually high, and that even adult kingfishers may suffer close to 50% mortality each year. Green Kingfishers were reportedly once quite common in the San Antonio area before the widespread loss of habitat occasioned by the growth of our city. Within the city limits they may still be found along our local lakes, ponds and waterways. The species is uncommon enough here, however, that finding one always comes as a pleasant surprise.

OTHER BIRDING EVENTS

Young Birders Club • Saturday • 2/27 • 8:00 - 10:00 AM • Friedrich Park



SAAS members Tom and Patsy Inglet will lead this monthly class for children ages 9 yrs to 14 yrs who are interested in birds and birdwatching.

Bring binoculars if you have them. For directions to park: www.sanaturalareas.org. Suggested donation: \$2/meeting. Next class: **March 13, 12:00-2:00 PM.**

Basic Birding Workshop • Saturdays • 3/6, 3/13, 3/20 • 8:00 - 11:00 AM • Cibolo Nature Center

Tom and Patsy Inglet are the leaders of this three-part workshop taking place over three Saturdays. Each session consists of 1.5-2 hours of classroom instruction and 1-1.5 hours of guided field practice. Part 1: Optics, Size & Silhouette (March 6, 8-11 AM) Part 2: Bird Anatomy, Color Patterns, Field Marks, Field Guides (March 13, 8-11 AM) Part 3: Behavior and Habitat (March 20, 8-11 AM) Per session cost: CNC Members \$20/person; non-members \$25/person. Pre-registration required. Call 830-249-4616. More info at www.cibolo.org

Bird Walk Guide "Refresher Training" • Saturday • 3/13 • 9:00 AM - 12:00 Noon • SA Botanical Garden Auld House

This session is for all currently trained SA Botanical Garden bird walk guides and for others who know birds fairly well but may not know the Garden and the best places to find birds here. We will give you updates on the Garden and do a little on-the-job-training and birding, plus preview the new Bird Watch in the South Texas area.

Beginning Bird Walk • Saturday • 3/20 • 9:00 - 10:30 AM • SA Botanical Garden

Enjoy birds in native habitats at the Garden. Visit our "[birding list](#)" at www.sabot.org. Meet at the Carriage House. Free for SA Botanical Garden members; non-members \$7/adult. 555 Funston. 207-3250.

Boerne Birders • Saturday • 3/27 • 8:00 - 10:00 AM • Cibolo Nature Center

Meet at the CNC pavilion and join us for our Spring bird census. This group of friendly birders and a local checklist will make it easy and fun. For more information, call Jerry at 210-710-3981 or Delmar at 830-230-5551.

Mitchell Lake Wetland Society News

Mitchell Lake Wetland Society's annual membership meeting will be held at 7 PM on Monday, March 8, preceded by open birding beginning at 4:30 PM. All are welcome. Mitchell Lake refuge is reached off of South Loop 410 at exit 46, Moursund Blvd. Go south 0.7 mile to gate on left. Bring your own sack supper.

SAAS to Assist KLRN March 5

SAAS members will volunteer at KLRN-TV from 7 to 11 PM on Friday, March 5, to answer phones during their on-air membership drive.



Call Georgina at 342-2073 to get in on the fun at the station or call us during the program to pledge your support of nature programming.

Mitchell Lake Birding Trips

Regular hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Saturdays and Sundays; call Center at 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 9, 2nd Tuesday with Helen Rejzek, Georgina Schwartz

March 14, 2nd Sunday with Curt McCamy

March 21, 3rd Sunday with Helen Rejzek, Georgina Schwartz, Mariann Golden

March 27, 4th Saturday with Ernie Roney

THE BIRDING SCENE January 2010 by Sheridan Coffey

Depending on your point of view, January 1st brought a new decade, or at least a new year, and it looks like it's going to be a good one! Though a little outside of the regular reporting area, the biggest sensation was a Northern Wheatear, the second record for the state, found on a farm near Beeville, south of San Antonio. Amish farmer John Borntreger initially found the bird a few days before January 1. Using a broken pair of binoculars and a field guide, John was able to identify the wheatear, despite never having birded outside of the area of his farm. He contacted Jimmy Jackson, a well-known Beeville birder. Jimmy got out the word and birders were able to begin seeing the bird on January 1. The bird was still present as of February 10.



Northern Wheatear
By Lora Render

Closer to home, Curt Harwerth began the year with eight species of sparrows at Stone Oak Park, including a Grasshopper Sparrow. He also observed Monk Parakeets working on a nest in the Wal-Mart sign at Loop 1604 and Highway 281. Brad Wier found two Least Grebes at Braunig Lake, also on January 1. Tina Gilson spotted eight dark ibises, almost certainly White-faced, at Mitchell Lake on January 2. Helen Rejzek re-found the Surf Scoter at Mitchell Lake on January 2, which had been seen off and on for several weeks prior.

Bob Doe had a productive January in New Braunfels, beginning on January 3. He reported a flock of about 300 longspurs in the fields off of Barbarosa. All of the birds he could identify were McCown's. He also reported two Peregrine Falcons and one Prairie Falcon. Martin Reid found a Brown Pelican at Braunig Lake, also on January 3. The Schaezlers reported 11 species of sparrows at Warbler Woods on January 4, including Eastern Towhee, Clay-colored and Harris's Sparrows.



Peregrine Falcon

Bob Doe saw a Horned Grebe at Boerne City Lake on January 5. Marcin Kojtko found a Fox Sparrow, two

Harris's Sparrows and a Winter Wren at Leon Creek Greenbelt the same day. Participants of the SAAS field trip, led by Bill and Marian Collins at McAllister Park, saw a Fox Sparrow and two Harris's Sparrows, along with a Black-and-white Warbler and a Barred Owl. On January 10 Chet Burrier spotted a Zone-tailed Hawk in Guadalupe County at Hwy 46 where it crosses the river, just south of Seguin. Georgina Schwartz led a group at Mitchell Lake on January 12. They saw White-faced Ibis, Least Grebes, Cinnamon Teal and good numbers of regularly occurring winter residents. Mike Creese saw a female Summer Tanager and a Couch's Kingbird on Ave A on January 16. Also on January 16, Brad Wier birded Southside Lions Parks and found a Golden-crowned Kinglet, a Red-shafted Northern Flicker and a Pine Warbler.

Marcin Kojtko, his wife Daria and Jon McIntyre from the Corpus Christi area birded Jungman Road on January 17 and had a flock of 50 McCown's Longspurs, as well as Horned Larks and Sprague's Pipits. Helen Rejzek had another pair of Harris's Sparrows at O.P. Schnabel Park on January 18, as well as a Black-and-white Warbler. Don Schaezler found a LeConte's Sparrow at Warbler Woods the same day.

Bob Doe made an interesting discovery at Canyon Lake on January 19: two Common Loons, a Pacific Loon and a possible Yellow-billed Loon. Bob took a distant photo of the bird and it showed a number of features of Yellow-billed. Unfortunately, no further photos were obtained. Alan Wormington of Ontario, Canada checked unsuccessfully for the Yellow-billed Loon on January 26, but did find a Red-throated Loon.

Finishing the month was a sign of spring, the first Purple Martins at the Botanical Gardens, found by Brad Wier. Chet Burrier saw a Green-tailed Towhee at Mitchell Lake off of the gravel trail between the house and Bird Pond. He also saw two Common Pauragues about 30 yards past the bridge where the Native Plant Trail starts.

SAAS ED/OUTREACH ACTIVITIES by Barbara Kyse

The SAAS Education/Outreach committee met February 1st to plan SAAS activities for three community nature events this spring. The first will be the Get Outdoors! event at Mission San Jose on March 6 from 10 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Last year, more than 5,000 people attended the event, which is co-sponsored by San Antonio River Authority, the National Parks Service and the City of San Antonio.

(Continued on p. 5)

Welcome New Members!

Steve Rusher-----830-981-5455
29246 Seabiscuit Drive
Fair Oaks, TX 78015-4460

Leigh Starlin
19931 Park Hollow
San Antonio, TX 78259-1925

OTHER EVENTS

Compost • Saturday • 3/6 • 9:00 AM - Noon • Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Members of the Bexar County Master Gardeners, educational outreach for Texas AgriLIFE Extension, will be at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center on March 6 to answer your questions about gardening with compost, or "Black Gold." Program fee: \$5 for non-members; free for members. Space is limited and an RSVP is required. For more information or to RSVP, email mlac@audubon.org

PEAK Program • Saturday • 3/13 • 9:00 AM - Noon • Eisenhower Park

Children ages 8-12 years old are welcome to join the PEAK (Promoting Environmental Awareness in Kids) Program, a partnership between the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and REI (Recreation Equipment Incorporated). It is designed to educate children about the outdoors and responsible enjoyment of our shared public lands (www.lnt.org). With the guidance of Leave No Trace Master Educators, children will learn proper hiking skills, how to pack for a day hike, and the importance of respecting wildlife and fellow visitors. Suggested donation of \$3/person, \$5/family. Eisenhower Park, 19399 NW Military Hwy. More info at www.sanaturalareas.org

Brackenridge Park Clean-up • Monday • 4/5 • 7:30 AM



Save the date for the day after Easter to help the Brackenridge Park Conservancy pick up litter at Brackenridge Park. Meet at the Joske Pavilion on Brackenridge Drive between the Witte Museum and the Zoo. Trash bags and gloves will be furnished. SAAS members will start along Avenue A.

Operation Migration Update

The 20 Whooping Cranes in the Operation Migration class of 2009 reached their final Florida destination on January 20th, 2010, 89 days after launching from the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin.

For those following their daily reports, the migration seemed endless due to weather conditions. Around Christmas it seemed as if the flock was destined to spend the winter somewhere in rural Illinois.

In the project's nine-year history, this 89-day journey was the second longest.

The Operation Migration Team delivered 10 juvenile Whooping cranes to the St. Marks NWR in Wakulla County, Fla. on January 13 and the remaining 10 chicks to the Chassahowitzka NWR in Citrus County, Fla. on January 20.



For the last two years, the San Antonio Audubon Society has sponsored one mile of the trip, which covers seven states and 1,285 miles.

Read more about this annual ultralight-led Whooping Crane journey at www.operationmigration.org.

SAAS Ed/Outreach Activities *(Continued from p. 4)*

On April 17, from 8:00 a.m. - noon, we will be at the Botanical Garden's Fiesta event, Walk Across Texas, which will coincide with the opening of their new Bird Watch area.

We will return to the S.A. Zoo again this year for International Migratory Day on May 8 from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Activities at the three events will vary depending on the venue, but all are geared to be informative, educational and entertaining for all ages. To assist with any event, please contact Barbara Kyse at 824-8884 or Patsy Inglet at 698-8445.

While SAAS is now participating in more community-wide, nature-oriented events, Georgina Schwartz continues to present the Birds of Bexar County and other programs at schools and libraries and to Scouts and other groups throughout the community. Our goal is to interest children and adults in birds and birding.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS



Southside Lions Park, 1/19

Brad Wier was pleased to be joined by nine birders for a muddy hike through Southside Lions Park and its newly completed Salado Greenway segment. Despite seeing nearly every bird in foggy silhouette, they tallied 57 species, encountering many resident birds and passerine flocks in a variety of habitats. The group's last finds while packing up were a Couch's Kingbird, Pine Warbler, and finally the long-sought-after Eastern Bluebirds. Other highlights included a handsome Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a talkative Summer Tanager and a Red-shafted Flicker, which responded to a recording by coming in for closer inspection.

Haggard Ranch, 1/23

Bill and Marian Collins led a group of 15 people (one all the way from Canada!) on a walk at the Haggard Ranch in SW Bexar County to spot 53 species of birds. The highlights were a Northern Flicker, Couch's Kingbird and Pine Warbler, wonderful aerial aerobatics by three Red-shouldered Hawks, two Crested Caracara, and one Osprey. A Fox Sparrow may have been seen, and turkeys were heard. To bird at the Haggard Ranch, call Metha Haggard at 622-3886.

Rockport Whooping Crane Trip, 1/31

Helen Rejzek was joined by 27 people, who in spite of the cold, had a great trip aboard the Skimmer with Capt. Tommy Moore. They ended the day with over 50 species, with the highlights being a close-up look at the "elder" Whooping Crane chowing down on crabs and a gorgeous Peregrine Falcon that was a delight to every-

one. They saw at least 13 Whoopers, one being a youngster. Some of the other highlights included thousands of Lesser Scaup, hundreds of Northern Pintails, Reddish Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Roseate Spoonbills, a very cooperative White-tailed Hawk, Northern Harriers, Black-bellied Plovers, 11 American Oystercatchers, Dunlins, Willets, Long-billed Curlews, and Forster's and Royal Terns.



Whooping Crane
by Chris Bailey

Comal County Sparrow Workshop, 2/7

Thirteen birders joined Bob Doe for a trip to Canyon Lake and the fields east of New Braunfels. They saw 13 sparrow species, including nice looks at LeConte's, Grasshopper, Harris's and Swamp Sparrows, plus

McCown's Longspurs. Other birds of note were Osprey, Common Loon, Horned Lark, Burrowing Owl, and about 1000 Sandhill Cranes.

Beginners' Bird Walk, Judson Nature Trails, 2/13

Karen Moulder was joined by four birdwatchers for a sunny, but chilly, morning stroll through the Alamo Heights game fields and Olmos Park. The group saw 17 species, including three different woodpeckers and two hawk species.

eBIRD and SAAS by Barbara Kyse

Recently eBird launched two new projects within the scope of the eBird program: The eBird Site Survey and eBird County Birding. The eBird Site Survey allows birders to identify a site, register the site as part of the Site Survey, and then begin collecting repeated observations on a daily or weekly basis. The location could be as simple as your backyard or one of your favorite birding places. The idea is simple: same observer, same location, same effort, repeat. Read more about the eBird Site Survey at ebird.org.

The second addresses the need for more observations from areas where little data is currently available. Most records in the eBird database are for locations with numerous birders. But the vast majority of birds most likely live outside urban/suburban areas, and it is important to begin to collect data from "off the beaten path" locations and even from places that might not be considered to be "birdy."

When exploring a new county or area, birders are apt to stop and count and report sightings at known wildlife refuges, wetlands or other natural areas which might get some coverage. But at the same time, consider a short birding stop when driving across miles of endless fields or down Texas highways with little obvious bird activity. These short 5-minute stationary counts in the middle of "nowhere" might not seem like a typical place to count birds, but they can give scientists critical information about a habitat that might represent the majority of land-cover in a given area. Read more about the eBird County Birding at eBird.org.

What to Do with a Deceased Wild Bird

Jack Eitniar is approved to receive dead birds for specimens in the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection at Texas A&M. Contact him at 828-5306.

SAAS-Y NOTES

SAAS Directory No Longer Published

Beginning this year, SAAS will not publish and distribute a printed roster of membership.

If you need current contact information for a member, you are welcome to contact us at members@saaudubon.org, or a request can be made to any member of the SAAS Board of Directors. If you do NOT want your contact information or email addresses provided to other SAAS members, please let us know so that we can make a note of your preference in our records.

Save Cardboard Tubes for SAAS Education/Outreach

The SAAS Education/Outreach committee needs your cardboard tubes to make "binoculars and scopes" for our spring events.

Please save your cardboard tubes from rolls of toilet paper, paper towels, aluminum foil, wrapping paper, etc. Bring the rolls to the SAAS monthly meetings and give to either Patsy Inglet or Barbara Kyse.



SAAS Board of Directors Meeting Tuesday, March 30, 6:30 PM

Meet at the Carlyle Condominium, 7887 Broadway.
Info: Barbara Kyse, 824-8884, bckyse@msn.com

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON NEWS

Editor: Lora Reynolds
Contributing Editor and Mailing: Georgina Schwartz
Mailing Labels: Tom Inglet

The newsletter deadline is the 10th for the following month's issue. Send submissions to editor@saaudubon.org.

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USE OF PHOTOS

The individuals who provide photographs of birds for SAAS newsletter articles may or may not have taken these photos on the specific field trips or at the events described in the articles. Thank you to the SAAS members and others who allow use of your photos to illustrate this publication. To submit photos for possible use, please email: editor@saaudubon.org

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TO VOLUNTEER!**
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