



San Antonio Audubon Society

AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

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SWALLOW-TAILED KITES

by Mike Scully

Often in bird watching, though a given species may have eluded you for years, it seems that once you have seen your first example, others subsequently turn up. So it was for me with the Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). Decades passed without my ever seeing one, although in fairness I never went specifically looking for it, not really wanting to use up all my North American life birds.

It was in Costa Rica last year that I finally saw this species, a spectacular raptor gliding languidly over the green and lush forest canopy.

Certainly this kite presents a unique flight profile. The formula of low wing loading, long pointed wings, and deeply forked tail also being characteristic of those other supreme aerialists, the frigatebirds of tropical seas. Among land birds, the distinctive attributes of the Swallow-tailed Kite suggest an equally distinctive mode of foraging.



Swallow-tailed Kite

Swallow-tailed Kites commonly spend all day on the wing, skillfully riding the breeze with scarcely a wing beat, sometimes high in the air, at other times skimming the forest canopy or gliding low over marshes and grasslands.

Nest sites and roosting perches are often selected such that the kites can become airborne by simply diving from a perch, directly resuming their gliding mode of flight (a mode of takeoff that theory has it was also practiced by pterodactyls in their day). When they do

employ powered flight, their wing beats are slow and deep.

The present range of the Swallow-tailed Kite encompasses much of the South and Central American humid tropics. Most of the surviving North American population breeds across Florida with small and local populations occurring in South Carolina, and along the Gulf Coast to East Texas. The North American population is migratory, returning to South America in late summer and early fall.

Adult kites in North America feed almost entirely upon insects, either captured on the wing, or plucked in flight from the tops of vegetation. Wasp nests are also taken. In common with other kite species around the world that utilize this resource, Swallow-tailed Kites have an especially dense plumage on their cheeks and throats, an adaptation thought to protect them from stings.

Captured prey is consumed on the wing. Populations in the tropics also take some fruit, a behavior possibly shared by our North American population while on their winter range.

The foraging mode of this species allows it to occupy a variety of tropical and temperate zone habitats, the requirements being areas of tall forest in proximity to open marsh or prairie, with rainfall sufficient to support a high density of insect and small invertebrate prey.

In historic times, Swallow-tailed Kites bred along the Mississippi and Ohio watersheds as far north as Minnesota and Ohio. In the upper midwest this species was regarded by at least some native peoples as the "Thunderbird" due to its tame and confiding nature, effortless flight, and practice of riding swiftly high in the air on the winds of approaching storms.

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SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR

Please call the trip leaders if you have questions. 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.

Tuesday, July 6, 7:30 AM

Crescent Bend Nature Park

Meet leader Sandi Wheeler (659-8168) in the parking lot of the park. From IH-10 East, take the FM 1518 exit and go north toward Schertz. Look for the brown park sign at Schaefer Road. Turn right and go about 3 miles. Bring water and insect repellent.

Saturday, July 10, 7:30 AM

SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

Everyone is welcome, especially beginners and newcomers. Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (342-2073) at the Judson Nature Trails for this walk around the Olmos Park area. From Broadway at the 5900 block, turn west on Ogden Street to the stop sign and the sign to the Natural Trails. Turn left after one block and then right to the parking lot before the swimming pool. Binoculars are available to borrow.

Saturday, July 17, 8:00 AM

Choke Canyon State Park

Meet leader Mike Creese (479-5552) inside the entrance to the Calliham Unit. The park is about 75 miles south of San Antonio. Take IH-37 South and exit at Three Rivers (Exit 72). Continue on US 281 to Three Rivers. Take Highway 72 west. The Calliham Unit is about 12 miles west of town. Bring plenty of water, insect repellent and lunch. Park fee is \$4 or use pass.

LOOKING AHEAD

Saturday, August 7, 8:00 AM

San Antonio Zoo

Meet leaders Patsy and Tom Ingle at the Zoo's education center entrance for a tour of the many fascinating and interesting avian and other sights (some behind the scenes) to be found at our Zoo. The education center entrance is approximately a half block east (to the right) of the main entrance. While some passes will be available, bring your Zoo memberships. RSVP by July 31 to Patsy at 698-8445 or tpinglet@satx.rr.com

Thursday-Sunday, August 19-22

Davis Mountains

Martin Reid and Sheridan Coffey will lead a trip to the Davis Mountains August 19-22. The Davis Mountains

area is an excellent place in August for hummingbirds, resident western breeders and migrating warblers and flycatchers. The trip will begin on Thurs. Aug. 19, meeting at Lake Balmorhea at 1:00 PM (about a 6-hour drive from San Antonio).

We will bird Balmorhea State Park and then proceed to Fort Davis. There are a number of excellent birding spots, including the Davis Mountains State Park, Lawrence E. Woods Picnic Area, the Nature Conservancy property, and the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute. We will also visit the McDonald Observatory.

The recommended hotel is the Fort Davis Motor Inn, but there are numerous campgrounds and bed and breakfasts, along with the Indian Lodge at the state park. The trip will be limited to 12 people, including Sheridan and Martin. Contact Sheridan at her e-mail address: sngcanary@yahoo.com or phone 561-2454.

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

SAAS JULY MEETING: BIRDING IN COLOMBIA

THURSDAY • JULY 1 • 7:00 PM

Lion's Field • 2809 Broadway

SAAS member Sheridan Coffey will tell us about her trip to Colombia, South America, in December of 2009, and present a slideshow of the gorgeous birds encountered.



Among them was the bird pictured at right, a Blue-naped Chlorophonia, which Sheridan photographed at El Dorado Lodge in the Santa Marta Mountains of Colombia on Dec. 17, 2009.

Please join us for a very informative and interesting evening!

SWALLOW-TAILED KITES (Continued from p. 1)

Swallow-tailed Kites are gregarious by nature and a number of pairs may nest in close proximity. A flimsy nest consisting primarily of small twigs and epiphytes, all collected in flight, is usually placed near the top of a tall tree. Nest losses due to inclement weather are frequent.

Unlike most raptors, the sexes are similar in size and incubation duties are shared. Typical of raptors, however, the male supplies the majority of prey while the young are small and the female remains behind to guard the nest.

Two eggs are the norm, but hatching is asynchronous and smaller nestlings rarely survive. In contrast to the insectivorous leanings of the adults, young kites are fed a variety of small vertebrate prey, including amphibians, small reptiles and young songbirds plucked from their nests.

As a result of persecution and habitat destruction, by the 1940's North American Swallow-tailed Kite populations had suffered precipitous declines. At present it is estimated that fewer than 5,000 breeding pairs remain; fewer than ten nests have been confirmed in Texas. Much of this remaining population does appear to migrate around the Gulf, however. I saw my second Swallow-tailed Kite this past April--a lone individual soaring high over Rockport.

To contact Mike, email: Mike.Scully@nisd.net

OTHER BIRDING EVENTS

Flying WILD Teacher Training • Wed-Thurs • 7/7-7/8 • 9:00 AM - Noon • Cibolo Nature Center Pavilion • Boerne

Formal and non-formal educators will be trained in bird education with the Flying WILD program, which provides interdisciplinary activities and environmental education for educators to help middle school students excel academically with a program that engages students in real inquiry, and meets national science standards. To register, contact Mary Kennedy mbkenned@sbcglobal.net

Beginning Bird Walk • Saturday • 7/17 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.

SAAS SUPPORTS WARBLER WOODS PRAIRIE RESTORATION

For many years, SAAS members have been warmly welcomed to Warbler Woods by owners Don and Susan Schaezler for our field trips, on "open-gate" days, or when we call or email in advance. The 124-acre Warbler Woods Bird Sanctuary (WWBS), 19349 Old Wiederstein Rd., is now a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation that has been operating as a bird sanctuary and nature preserve for about 12 years. WWBS, a Gulf Coast Bird Observatory site partner, manages the sanctuary and operates entirely on the donations of money and services.

WWBS is planning a Prairie Restoration Project to restore native prairie grasses to about 33 acres of fields or other open land on the property. Phase I will begin this summer on a 5.1 acre test plot. In recognition of the value of this wonderful local sanctuary for birding and the natural environment, SAAS has donated \$1,000 to spearhead Phase I. The SAAS Board encourages members to consider either donating money or time to support WWBS. Learn more at www.warblerwoods.com.

TOWHEES WIN GREAT TEXAS BIRDING CLASSIC

SAAS partially funded a group of teen birders, the Travis Audubon Towhees, through a donation to the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. The Towhees placed first again this year in the 14th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic, with 213 species.

Congratulations to Christian Walker, Austin Walker, Irene Smith and Caleb Dye. Caleb is one of our SAAS members.

Mitchell Lake Birding Trips

The Mitchell Lake Audubon Center is open 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM each Saturday and Sunday and there is a small fee to enter. Call 628-1639 for other times. Directions: From South Loop 410, take Exit 46 (Moursund Blvd.) and go south 0.7 mile. MLAC is on the left side of the road. Docent-led trips are offered at the times and dates listed below. (Please note the earlier start time for Tuesday and Sunday walks during the summer.)

- July 11, 2nd Sunday, 7:30 AM
- July 13, 2nd Tuesday, 7:30 AM
- July 18, 3rd Sunday, 7:30 AM
- July 24, 4th Saturday, 8:00 AM

ON THE WING IN JULY by Sheridan Coffey

Do you know what July 4 is? I bet my answer is different from yours! July 4 is the first day of fall migration in Texas, at least according to the old timers who mentored me. If you go out on July 4 to the proper habitat you will probably see a few shorebirds. These birds have already left their breeding grounds in the north and are heading south. They will always be adults, as the new young are not old enough to migrate. As July progresses so does the number of shorebirds passing through. Toward the end of the month, the flood gates open.

Proper habitat is the key. If there are mud flats at Mitchell Lake you are guaranteed shorebirds; if the water levels are high, there will be very few. If there has been rain and fields are flooded, good numbers of birds can be seen. Lakes or ponds that are at a low level are also a good bet. Remember that not all shorebirds are tied to water. So-called "grasspipers," such



Upland Sandpiper

as Upland Sandpipers and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, can be seen at local sod farms. American Golden-Plovers are rare in fall, but that is where they will be found as well. If there is irrigation going on, wading shorebirds will take advantage of large puddles.

Another opportunity that July presents is seeing newly fledged young birds. Friedrich Wilderness Park is one of the sites to find the first Golden-cheeked Warblers of the year in March. In July the results of their arrival and nesting can be seen.

Other juvenile birds at Friedrich include Blue-gray Gnat-catchers, Black-and-white Warblers, Painted Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks and Rufous-crowned Sparrows.



Painted Bunting
By Lora Render

A cool early morning walk here can be very productive!

HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH GULF COAST OIL SPILL RECOVERY by Barbara Kyse

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Round Robin blog site states that "the worst aspect of the oil spill for many of us is the sense of powerlessness it leaves. Donating is one way to help, at least a little" Please consider making a donation to support both the short-term and long-term efforts to save the Gulf Coast birds and the natural habitat in the path of this spreading oil spill.

The [American Birding Association](http://www.aba.org) has established the ABA Gulf Coast Fund (www.aba.org/donate/gulf). According to the ABA, 95 cents of every dollar donated to the ABA's Gulf Coast fund will go directly to organizations carrying out grassroots bird monitoring projects, research projects, and clean-up efforts. Additionally, the ABA's Gulf Coast Conservation Coordinator is on-site reporting on the oil spill, affected bird populations, and the efforts to save them (<http://www.aba.org/gulf/>).

The National Audubon Society states that "the Gulf oil spill is an unprecedented catastrophe for people and nature of the region. Audubon mobilized quickly to help birds as soon as the toxic slick began spreading toward vulnerable wildlife and habitats. Now, as the crisis continues to deepen, we need your help. Our Volunteer Response Center is already in touch with more than 20,000 people eager to help with efforts from Florida to Texas. Your support will help fund Audubon's work to aid birds already suffering the oil's deadly effects, to protect now-unharmed wildlife in the path of the spill, and to meet the long-term challenge of restoring a devastated Gulf of Mexico ecosystem." (<http://www.audubon.org/>)

Other organizations involved with the rescue, rehabilitation and release of oiled birds include: International Bird Rescue Research Center (www.IBRRC.org), Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research (www.tristatebird.org) and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (www.crcl.org).

SAAS MEMBER NEEDED FOR CATS INDOORS! PROGRAM

SAAS needs a member to spearhead a local effort for the American Bird Conservancy's (ABC) Cats Indoors! program to educate people about the benefits of keeping cats inside. Please contact Barbara Kyse (bckyse@msn.com) or any Board member if you are interested in heading this committee.

Welcome New SAAS Members!

Jill Oettinger -----210-254-0835
110 Saint Dennis Avenue
San Antonio, TX 78209-5255

Laurie Pomerantz & Family -----210-826-5343
418 Paseo Encinal St.
San Antonio, TX 78212-1773

OTHER EVENTS

Nature Walk • Saturday • 7/3 • 10 AM - Noon • Walker Ranch • 12603 West Ave.

This State Historic Park contains striking interpretive panels by artist Joy Fisher Hein and is home to many plant and animal species. Join us to explore this great little pocket of nature and history! Call SA Natural Areas, 564-6400, for reservations. \$2 donation.

Growing Up Wild • Saturday • 7/10 • 10 AM - Noon • Eisenhower Park • 19399 NW Military Hwy

This program targets ages 3-7 and their families with nature games, crafts, hands-on displays and other activities. Call SA Natural Areas, 564-6400, for reservations. \$3 donation per person or \$5 per family.

Rocks, Minerals and Stones • Saturday • 7/10 • 9 - 11 AM • Medina River Natural Area • 15890 Hwy 16 South

Emmett Jackson will discuss minerals and their formations. We'll have kid-friendly activities, including stone polishing. Call 624-2575 for reservations. \$3 per person or \$5 per family.

JUDSON NATURE TRAILS REPORT by Shirley Bartels

JNT Committee members, Alamo Heights Public Works crew and Jack Eitniewski's son and nephew helped with work on the trail and trail house so that we were ready for the annual SAAS picnic June 5.

The crew from Alamo Heights cut low branches in the yard, cleared ligustrum and cut fallen trees, distributed road base onto trails, and replaced and painted rotted wood in front of the trail house. Georgina Schwartz cleaned mud from the stairs at the Hondondo Creek (west) crossing and sanded and

stained some of the benches. Bill Collins helped fix a large hole on the Hondondo Creek (east) crossing and Gail Plummer raked the Hondondo Creek Trail. Jack spread mulch next to the front walkway and began painting the underside of the aluminum roof. Dick Bartels power washed the roof, front beams, posts and the back bench. I helped by power washing the back, sides and the concrete slabs of the house and cleaned inside. Dick painted the back table. Jack's son and nephew spread the road base via wheelbarrow and Jack put more plants in the hummingbird and palm gardens and replaced those that had been stolen. This month our hose and the large trash can on the back porch were stolen. The can had been a flood debris gift.



SAAS Picnic June 5 (L to R): Georgina Schwartz, Carolyn Cuthbertson, Bill Collins, Marjorie McFarland

The picnic began at 6:00 PM and everyone enjoyed a generous potluck buffet on a hot, humid evening. Present were 16 members and eight guests, including two children. Alamo Heights City Manager Ann McGlone and her husband Mike, and Community Development Director Brian Chandler attended. Brian gave a short overview on the trail plans.



SAAS Picnic June 5 (L to R): Terry and Gail Nickel, Barbara Kyse, Mariann Golden, Richard Fortenberry

Thank you, everyone. All help on the trails is greatly appreciated, even for an hour or two. I could use more help, especially some muscle.

To join the JNT committee, please contact me at 828-2680 or sbartels@grandecom.net.

FIELD TRIP RECAPS



Thank you to all who led SAAS field trips during the past month and to all who participated. In-depth field trip reports can be seen on the website <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SATXbirds/> and you can search for them using the message numbers.

South Llano State Park (Junction), May 15. Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #16437. Species observed: 67. Species of note: Adult Black-throated Sparrow feeding a young; Olive-sided Flycatcher;



Black-throated Sparrows at South Llano SP
by Chris Bailey

Lark Bunting; Black-capped Vireo; Bell's Vireo; Eastern, Western and Couch's Kingbirds; Vermilion Flycatchers; Pine Siskin and Chuck-will's-widow.

Honey Creek State Natural Area, May 22. Led by Bill Zwartjes. Message #16463 posted by G. Schwartz. Special thanks to State Park Resource Specialist Chris Dooley for access to Honey Creek. Species observed: 22. Species of note: Nesting Cooper's Hawk.



Honey Creek State Natural Area
by William Skinner

Avenue A and SA Botanical Garden, May 23. Led by Tim Katafias. Message #16461. Species observed at Avenue A: 31. Species of note: Eastern Bluebird, Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Species observed at SABG: 21. Species of note: Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Crescent Bend Nature Park, May 25. Led by Sandi Wheeler. Message #16474. Species observed: 38. Species of note: Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Judson Nature Trails/Olmos Park, June 12. Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #16523. Species observed: 25. Species of note: Crested Caracara, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Western Kingbird and Purple Martin.



Black-capped Vireo with a bug at South Llano State Park on 6/3/10 by Lora Render

JOIN SATXbirds FOR AREA BIRD INFO

In April 2000, SAAS member Keith Bartels established the SATXbirds Yahoo Group for the local birding community to discuss and share information on wild birds, bird sightings, and birding events in and around Bexar County. While SATXbirds is not directly affiliated with SAAS, all SAAS field trip leaders are encouraged to post field trip reports on SATXbirds, along with an eBird listing of bird species.

At the May meeting, the SAAS Board decided to drop in-depth reports of past field trips from this newsletter, as many members read the full reports on SATXbirds within days of the actual event and/or sightings. Field trip reports in a current newsletter would cover events and sightings that occurred weeks earlier.

If you are not yet a SATXbirds member, the SAAS website <http://www.saaudubon.org/> has a direct link to the Yahoo group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SATXbirds/>). If you are already a Yahoo member, you do not need to set up a new user name or password. You will have options for receiving messages: individual emails, daily digests, or web only. Also, SATXbirds members can search the entire message board for past sightings by either species or site.

SAAS-Y NOTES

Remembering Betty Jean Evans

Former SAAS President Betty Jean Evans passed away in Blanco, Texas, on June 9. She was born in Blanco on February 7, 1928, to Alex Baxter Evans and Pearl Elizabeth Massey Evans, who predeceased her. A memorial service was held for her at Crofts Funeral Home in Blanco on June 11.



Jean graduated from Blanco High School and received her BA and MA Degrees from St. Mary's University. She had a long and illustrious career in Civil Service, retiring in 1978, at Brooks Air Force Base. She was a strong advocate for equal opportunities for women and mentored a number of young ladies in their professional careers.

She served for several years as president of SAAS and made birdwatching trips all over the state, country and world. Her pamphlet, "Birds of Blanco State Park, A Field Checklist," written for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, is still available in the park office. On May 24, 2010, a newly constructed bird watching station at Blanco State Park was dedicated in her honor and named for her.

SAAS Board of Directors Meeting Tuesday • July 27 • 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.

Permission is granted to other nonprofit groups to reprint articles, unless otherwise noted. Reprints must refer to the originating issue and give credit to San Antonio Audubon News and the specific author.

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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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SAAS Membership Renewal

If you still receive our newsletter via the U.S. Postal Service, your membership renewal due date is on your mailing label. Renew using the form on the back page or visit www.saaudubon.org/membership.html. Those who receive the newsletter electronically will receive a renewal reminder via email.

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Please report bird sightings either online utilizing
the Bird Reporting form at saaudubon.org or by calling 210-308-6788.

BIRDING IN COLOMBIA • THURSDAY, JULY 1, 7:00 PM •
LION'S FIELD • 2809 BROADWAY
PRESENTATION BY SAAS MEMBER SHERIDAN COFFEY