

## San Antonio Audubon Society

# AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

Volume 56 Number 8

August 2010

## GRAY CATBIRDS

by Mike Scully

It is interesting how different cultures can evolve quite different perceptions of the same bird. The Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), for example, is seemingly one of our more descriptively named species. Their common call does indeed bring to mind the mewing of a domestic cat....but only to those familiar with cats.

Arthur C. Bent, in his epochal work, "*Life Histories of North American Birds*," states that the Chippewa people of the American Midwest called this species "the bird that cries with grief." Bent puzzled in print how the Chippewa could find the pleasant song of the catbird mournful. I believe they were referring not to the song, but to the distinctive call. It can come as a minor paradigm shift when one realizes that the plaintive call of this species does indeed possess a dirge-like quality.



Gray Catbird by Peter Massas

Certainly the catbird was familiar to many of the original inhabitants of North America, much as it remains today; an attractive gray bird, slipping low between brush tangles, the frequency of its songs and calls belying any impression of secrecy. The Gray Catbird possesses two attributes that doubtless help it succeed in human-altered landscapes; it prefers dense edge and early successional habitats, and it possesses a faculty for recognizing and rejecting the eggs of the Brown-headed Cowbird. The present breeding range includes the majority of North America, but they are absent from the Far North, the Florida Peninsula, much of the Southwest, the Great Basin and our Pacific Coast.

Gray Catbirds are perhaps best regarded as a type of thrasher; their distinctive chestnut undertail coverts recalling those of a number of Western species. Like most members of the Family Mimidae, catbirds possess a complex song repertoire and a talent for mimicry. In Northern Mockingbirds, the complexity of the songs of singing males is known to function in sexual selection. Presumably this is true of catbirds also, although to human ears the song of this species has a halting and creaky quality.

Male catbirds commence singing soon after their arrival on the breeding grounds, defending small territories containing suitable areas of brushy habitat. Much singing is done from exposed perches set low over dense tangles of vegetation, a habit that apparently gave rise to the old metaphor "sitting in the catbird seat."

Most often the cup-shaped nest is placed a few feet above the ground amid dense supporting vegetation. Male catbirds lack a brood patch; females perform most of the nest-construction duties and all of the incubation. Males do feed their mates on the nest and guard the nest when she is absent. This protective instinct is well-founded: Over much of their breeding range catbirds have probably long been sympatric with the Brown-headed Cowbird, also an edge species. When attempting brood parasitism, female cowbirds will remove a host egg before depositing one of their own.

The Gray Catbird's aforementioned ability to recognize and reject the brown-spotted eggs of the cowbird from among their own turquoise-colored clutch is apparently learned and not innate. Experiments have shown that if a cowbird egg is placed in a catbird nest before any catbird eggs are present, the catbirds may accept the cowbird egg and subsequently reject their own eggs.

### Inside this issue:

Calendar	2
Other Birding	3
On the Wing	4
Other Events	5
Field Trip Recaps	6
SAAS-Y Notes	7

(Continued on p. 3)

# 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](http://saaudubon.org), sent by email through SATX Birds, and announced on the recorded message at 308-6788.

Saturday, August 7, 8:00 AM

## San Antonio Zoo

Meet leaders Patsy and Tom Inglet 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](mailto:tpinglet@satx.rr.com)

Saturday, August 14, 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.

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](mailto:sngcanary@yahoo.com) or phone 561-2454.

Sunday, August 29, 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.

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

## SAAS AUGUST MEETING: GREAT BLUE HERONS AND MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

THURSDAY • AUGUST 5 • 7:00 PM

Lion's Field • 2809 Broadway

Join us in welcoming two presenters who are involved in conservation projects in conjunction with the Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne.



J.W. Pieper will speak about the Great Blue Heron rookery project.



Mary Kennedy will discuss Monarch

butterfly migration trends, Texas data and worldwide use of the data.

## "Ghost Bird" Film Tickets On Sale Now!

Our Thursday, September 2 meeting will feature the full-length documentary, "Ghost Bird," about the search for the elusive Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Showtime is 7 PM at the Lion's Field Community Center, 2809 Broadway. Tickets are \$5.00 per person. Tickets are being pre-sold and will be available at the door as space is available. To purchase in advance, email Patsy Inglet at [tpinglet@satx.rr.com](mailto:tpinglet@satx.rr.com) with Ghost Bird in the subject line. Tickets will also be available at our Aug. 5 SAAS meeting.

## Gray Catbirds *(Continued from p. 1)*

Two broods each year are the norm, with three possible in the South. A new nest is constructed for each brood. Four eggs are usual in a first clutch, but subsequent clutches average somewhat smaller. Both sexes help feed the young. Insects and other arthropods constitute the bulk of the summer diet, although the species may also raid the nests of small songbirds. Outside of the breeding season, catbirds become largely frugivorous (fruit-eating). Among bird-watching circles the species is termed "half-hardy," meaning that stray individuals sometimes survive late into the winter far north of their normal winter range.



Gray Catbird  
*by Alan Vernon*

The usual winter range of this species extends south along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to the Gulf Coast and to Central America, including the Florida Peninsula and the Caribbean. An isolated resident population exists on the island of Bermuda. Catbirds pass through our area on migration, and a few individuals may over-winter. It is our misfortune, however, that this tame and confiding species does not breed here.

To contact Mike, email: [Mike.Scully@nisd.net](mailto:Mike.Scully@nisd.net)

## OTHER BIRDING EVENTS

### Beginning Bird Walk • Saturday • 8/21 9:00 - 10:30 AM • SA Botanical Garden

Enjoy birds in native habitats at the Garden and check out our new Bird Watch in the South Texas area. Our bird checklist is at [www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org). Meet at the Carriage House for this monthly walk. Free for SA Botanical Garden members; non-members \$7/adult. 555 Funston. 207-3250.

## Mitchell Lake Monthly Birding Tours

No reservation necessary

Every 2nd Sunday: 7:30 AM (Aug. 8)  
Every 2nd Tuesday: 7:30 AM (Aug. 10)  
Every 3rd Sunday: 7:30 AM (Aug. 15)  
Bird count/survey: Every 4th Saturday: 8:00 AM  
(Aug. 28)

*Birding tour fee: \$5 for non-members;  
\$3 for members*

For more information: [mlac@audubon.org](mailto:mlac@audubon.org)  
or (210) 628-1639

The Mitchell Lake Audubon Center is open 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM each Saturday and Sunday.  
Directions: From South Loop 410, take Exit 46 (Moursund Blvd.) and go south 0.7 mile.

## SAAS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteers are the backbone of our organization. Each one helps make our mission of promoting the enjoyment, understanding and conservation of native birds and their habitats possible. Some ways you can help:

Education/Outreach: Assist in planning education programs, staff an information table at events, make a presentation, and more. Upcoming events in October include a nature event at the Land Heritage Institute, the Mitchell Lake fall festival, and the San Antonio Botanical Garden's Botanica event.

Meeting Reception: Coordinate the Lion's Field meeting requirements.

Bird Records: Assist with input of historical Bexar County bird records to the eBird database.

Cats Indoors!: Assist in distributing the American Bird Conservancy information around the community.

Whether you have a lot of time or a little, we welcome your participation. Please contact us for more information ([info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org) or Barbara Kyse at 824-8884).

# ON THE WING IN AUGUST

by Sheridan Coffey

If you think it's too hot to bird in August, you risk missing some of the best surprises of the year. Birds are on the move and you may find a real rarity.

Shorebird migration is at full tilt. Juveniles begin to pass through and occasionally one of the Old World species will get mixed in with a flock of our regulars. There is a good chance of picking up one of the uncommon shorebirds, like Red-necked Phalarope.



Jabiru  
*Wikimedia Commons*

Even if nothing rare is found, it's a great opportunity to practice separating not only species of shorebirds, but ages.

Birds tend to wander after their breeding season is over. Be on the lookout for Wood Storks, Roseate Spoonbills and Reddish Egrets. August is the prime time to

find a Jabiru or a Masked Duck, particularly in wet years like this.

Rare hummingbirds tend to show up in August, too. Keep an eye on your feeders for species such as Broad-tailed and Calliope. Rufous can appear at this time as well.



Calliope Hummingbirds  
*by Wolfgang Wander*

One of the biggest birding bonanzas can be when a tropical storm or hurricane makes landfall on the central Texas coast. Amazing sea birds have been found on our area lakes after storms, such as Sooty Terns, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Jaegers and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels. Even without a storm, Laughing Gulls and Caspian Terns can make an appearance. So, get a cold drink, put on sunscreen and a hat and brave the heat. The rewards can be great!



Magnificent Frigatebird--The male puffs out his throat pouch to attract a mate.

## WILDLIFE RESCUE OPENS ANIMAL DROP-OFF CLINIC IN SA

Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation (WRR), which operates a 187-acre sanctuary in Kendalia and a resale shop in Boerne, opened the Roger & Phyllis Sherman Animal Care Complex in San Antonio in January. According to the organization's website, the property, funded by the Sherman Foundation, is a "drop-off point for injured and orphaned wildlife, a temporary rehabilitation center for certain species of orphaned mammals and birds, a small rescue and adoption site for cats, and an education center."

Young animals of certain species (squirrels, rabbits, songbirds, and opossums) stay at the Sherman Animal Care Complex until they



are old enough to be transferred to the facilities at the Kendalia sanctuary for the next step on their way to release. Others will be evaluated, given care, and readied for immediate transfer to the sanctuary clinic, according to the website.

The San Antonio clinic is located at 137 Earl Street, San Antonio, TX 78212, between McCullough and N. Main Ave., in the Olmos Park area.

Hours are 9 AM to 6 PM daily. Call 257-8823 or visit <http://www.wildlife-rescue.org/> for more information.

## Welcome New SAAS Members!

Matt Golas  
4707 Broadway  
San Antonio, TX 78209

Brad Wier  
205 Zambrano Rd.  
San Antonio, TX 78209-5458

## OTHER EVENTS

### Family Nature Walk • Saturday • 8/7 • 10 AM - 11:30 AM • Eisenhower Park • 19399 NW Military Hwy

Bring the kids, especially young children, on a nature walk designed especially for families. The pace will accommodate the group and this will be shorter than our regular nature walks. At the end, look at the inside of trees and make a tree "cookie." Remember to bring water for the hike!! Program is conducted in the large gated pavilion compound. Call 372-9124 or email [peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov](mailto:peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov) for reservations. Suggested \$2 donation per person or \$6 per family.

### Roaches to Go • Saturday • 8/14 • 10 AM - Noon • Eisenhower Park • 19399 NW Military Hwy

We all love those creeping and crawling bugs. Master Naturalist Holly Camero leads our exploration into the world of the six-legged. Lots of live critters and specimens to observe and examine! Call 372-9124 or email [peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov](mailto:peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov) for reservations. Suggested \$3 donation per person or \$5 per family.

## NEW HOURS FOR FISH HATCHERY IN UVALDE

Birdwatchers heading to the Uvalde National Fish Hatchery, please take note of the new hours:

**Mon-Fri: 7 AM to 3:30 PM**  
**Sat: 9 AM to 3:30 PM**  
**Sun: CLOSED**

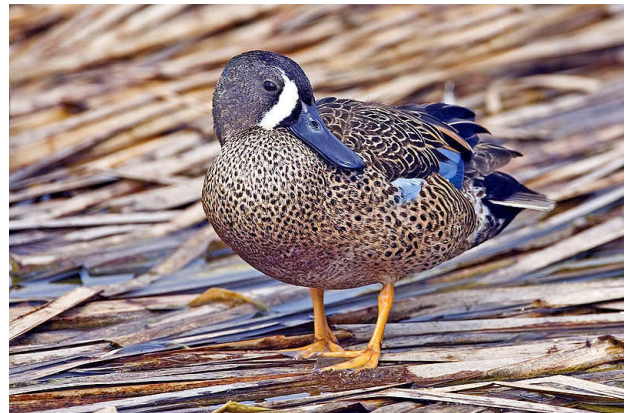


## WEBSITE PROVIDES ARTICLES ON HOW YOU CAN HELP PROTECT THE PLANET

The National Resources Defense Council, a non-profit environmental action group, offers online articles, videos, newsletters and blogs containing good information on steps all of us can take toward environmental protection. Visit [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).

## Port O'Connor Area Farmer Joins Federal Program to Aid Migratory Birds

Calhoun County rice farmer Clay Wiatrek, whose 250-acre property is near the Texas Ornithological Association's Magic Ridge Sanctuary on Matagorda Bay, is the first landowner in the state to sign a contract with the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative, a program of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The program has been allocated up to \$20 million to use for 150,000 acres.



Blue-winged Teal is one of the migratory species to be helped by the new federal initiative.

*Photo by Alan D. Wilson*

The goal of the initiative is to provide farmers with technical and financial assistance to create resting, nesting and feeding grounds for migratory birds as an alternative to oil-contaminated areas along the Gulf Coast, according to the NRCS website.

Wiatrek will work with the NRCS in developing habitat management plans for his farm, such as levee maintenance, shallow disking and field flooding. Shallow disking (similar to roto-tilling) will help promote an increase in food quality and availability. Shallow water management will involve flooding and maintaining water levels on 227 acres of his property. Read more at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

## 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.

### Medina River Natural Area, June 19

Led by Helen Rejzek. Message #16546. Species observed: 31. Species of note: Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, and Summer Tanager at pond; Painted Buntings.

### Aquarena Springs, San Marcos River Walk, June 22

Led by Sandi Wheeler. Message #16551. Species observed: 32. Species of note: Ladder-backed, Downy, Red-bellied and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers; many Green Herons.



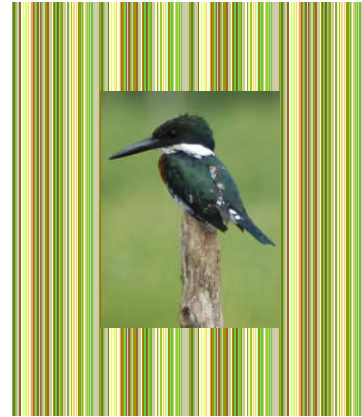
Downy Woodpecker, Crescent Bend Nature Park, 3/18/10  
*by Lora Render*

### Castroville Regional Park, June 27

Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #16560. Species observed: 41. Species of note: 98 young Purple Martins on the wires at the sewer ponds, 33 Northern Rough-winged Swallows at the soccer fields, several Bullock's Orioles and a Green Kingfisher.

### Crescent Bend Nature Park, July 6

Led by Sandi Wheeler. Message #16576. Species observed: 28. Species of note: Many young birds, including Dickcissel, Northern Cardinal, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and White-eyed Vireo. Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers and Yellow-billed Cuckoos were prevalent.



Green Kingfisher  
*by Stevenj*

### Judson Nature Trails/Olmos Park, July 10

Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #16589. Species observed: 19. Species of note: Western Kingbird, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Phoebe and Mourning Dove. (Mourning Doves are unusual for this location.)

## JOIN SATXbirds FOR AREA BIRD INFO



SATXbirds is a Yahoo! Groups site for the local birding community to discuss and share information on wild birds, sightings, and birding events in our area. SAAS <http://www.saaudubon.org/> has a direct link to the Yahoo! Group:

(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SATXbirds/>).

You will have options for receiving messages: individual emails, daily digests or web only. SATXbirds members can search the message board for past sightings by species or by site.

## VOTE NOW for Audubon at the American Express Members Project

Audubon can receive a \$200,000 donation for their Gulf of Mexico response by getting the most votes in the Environment/Wildlife category of the American Express Members project. Go to:

<http://www.takepart.com/membersproject/vote>

*You can vote ONCE A WEEK through August 22nd*

## SAAS-Y NOTES

### San Antonio and Bexar County Win America's Birdiest City/County Contest

From April 30-May 2, SAAS participated in America's Birdiest City/County competition. We counted 181 species in the county and 165 birds in the city. We won first place in the Large Inland City and County categories. Corpus Christi won the overall total for a city and Los Angeles won for the county total. Thanks to all who participated and let's count on winning again in 2011.--Mike Creese

### Donate for KLRN August Pledge Drive

KLRN will not need us to volunteer during their August on-air pledge drive, but please call in and make a donation during one of your favorite programs to provide support to our public television station.--Georgina Schwartz

### Jodell Miller Receives Volunteer of the Year Award from Floresville ISD

Jodell Miller, SAAS member, was named the Floresville Early Childhood Center's Volunteer of the Year and received recognition from the Floresville Independent School District during a luncheon. She gave 1,000 hours as a volunteer in the past five years. She does all of this and makes time to be a very good birder—not to mention how well she portrays a Whooping Crane for SAAS outreach!--Shirley Bartels

### SAAS Board of Directors Meeting Tuesday • August 31 • 6:30 PM

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

Copyright © 2010 by the San Antonio Audubon Society.



### 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](mailto:editor@saaudubon.org)

### San Antonio Audubon Society

5150 Broadway #257  
San Antonio TX 78209-5710  
210/308-6788  
[info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org)  
[www.saaudubon.org](http://www.saaudubon.org)

### Officers

Barbara Kyse, President  
Dahn Windhorn, Vice President  
Deneise Conrad, Secretary  
Patsy Inglet, Treasurer

### Directors-at-Large

Mariann Golden  
Dick Fortenberry  
Jerry Coleman  
Tim Katafias  
Gail Nickel

### Committee Chairs

Bird Records  
Sheridan Coffey-----[birdreports@saaudubon.org](mailto:birdreports@saaudubon.org)  
Education/Outreach -----[info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org)  
Field Trips  
Helen Rejzek -----[fieldtrips@saaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrips@saaudubon.org)  
Historian, Betty Walters  
Membership-----[members@saaudubon.org](mailto:members@saaudubon.org)  
Database, Tom Inglet  
Hospitality, Metha Haggard  
Nature Trails & Publicity, Shirley Bartels  
Newsletter, Lora Reynolds-----[editor@saaudubon.org](mailto:editor@saaudubon.org)  
Website, Bill Collins-----[web@saaudubon.org](mailto:web@saaudubon.org)

SAAS NEEDS YOU  
TO VOLUNTEER!  
[info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org)



### 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](http://www.saaudubon.org/membership.html). Those who receive the newsletter electronically will receive a renewal reminder via email.

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC  
5150 BROADWAY #257  
SAN ANTONIO, TX 78209-5710

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
SAN ANTONIO, TX  
PERMIT 1821

## San Antonio Audubon Society Membership/Renewal Form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

New

Renewal

Gift

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Please be sure your e-mail address is correct.

Your newsletters will be sent via e-mail unless other special arrangements have been made.

Please check box(es):  Individual (\$15 per year)  Junior, under 18 (\$7 per year)

Couple (\$20 per year)  Family (\$25 per year)

Life: Individual (\$200)  Life: Couple (\$300)

Contributing (minimum of \$30 per year)

Donation to Sanctuary Fund \_\_\_\_\_ or Judson Trails Fund \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: **San Antonio Audubon Society**. Send dues and address changes to:

ATTN: MEMBERSHIP  
SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON SOCIETY  
5150 BROADWAY #257  
SAN ANTONIO TX 78209-5710

or Online at: <[www.saaudubon.org/membership.html](http://www.saaudubon.org/membership.html)>

or E-mail <[members@saaudubon.org](mailto:members@saaudubon.org)>

Please report bird sightings either online utilizing  
the Bird Reporting form at [saaudubon.org](http://saaudubon.org) or by calling 210-308-6788.

**GREAT BLUE HERONS AND MONARCH BUTTERFLIES**  
• THURSDAY, AUGUST 5, 7:00 PM •  
LION'S FIELD • 2809 BROADWAY