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 210-308-6788

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 Bob Doe, Bird Records.....830-438-8399
 Shirley Bartels, Nature Trail.....828-2680
 Membership.....vacant
 Helen Rejzek, Field Trips.....679-7437
 Georgina Schwartz, Education...342-2073
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 Web Site.....vacant

Area code is 210 unless otherwise shown

Goldfinches

Ask most people when they take their summer vacation and they'll answer July or August. For bird watchers however, travel at that time can be far too late. During my youth in New York State, I observed that the dawn chorus fell off rapidly around the 4th of July, in a sense my "summer" was ending while that of most people was just beginning. When I first moved to Texas it was already late June, and I recall being disappointed at the silence of the woodlands here. Of course the local songbirds had been in full song in April, and by the time of my arrival many had finished breeding entirely.

It isn't totally silent in summer of course, songbirds that rear multiple broods continue to sing and many songbirds sing occasionally even after fledging their one brood, but taken as a whole the chorus isn't nearly the same.

Fortunately we have two species of songbirds for which their peak song period often coincides with our summer vacation season. Better yet, the



males of both species are brightly colored and have loud and cheerful songs combined with conspicuous flight displays so as to attract the attention of the most oblivious of tourists. I'm thinking of our Lesser Goldfinch (*Cardeulis psaltria*) and, to our north, the American Goldfinch (*C. tristis*). If I were in California, I might also include the Lawrence's Goldfinch (*C. lawrencei*).

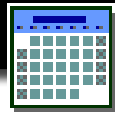


The genus *Cardeulis* contains thirty-three species. Within this diverse genus, eighteen of the twenty species that breed here in the New World, including our three goldfinches, are properly grouped with the

siskins. As a group, cardeuline finches feed primarily upon seeds. Where they differ from many other birds is that they also feed this diet to their young, a practice which renders them unsuitable as hosts for brood parasites like New World cowbirds and Old World cuckoos.

See "Goldfinches" on page 3

SAAS Calendar



September 6, Thursday, 7:00 PM

★ **SAAS Monthly Meeting**

at the Ruble Center, 419 E. Magnolia, Rm.500. SAAS Member **Ben Plummer** will speak on Christmas in Costa Rica.



September 2, Sunday, 8:00 AM

★ **O. P. Schnabel Field Trip**

Meet leader Helen Rejzek (679-7437) at O P Schnabel Park in the parking lot near the pavilion. The park is off Highway 16 (Bandera Rd) opposite Braun Rd outside the Loop 410. Mostly level walking.

September 8, Saturday, 8:00 AM

★ **SAAS Beginner's Bird Walk**

Meet Georgina Schwartz at Judson Nature Trails next to the Alamo Heights swimming pool. At 5900 block of Broadway in Alamo Heights, turn west on Ogden to stop sign at Greely Street. Turn left one block, then right on Viesca to small parking lot on left before the swimming pool. Binoculars available. 342-2073.

September 15, Saturday, 8:45 AM

★ **SAAS field trip Botanical Gardens**

Meet SAAS leader at the entrance of the Carriage House at 8:45 AM. Admission \$5 (or SABG membership). San Antonio Botanical Garden, 555 Funston Place (one block east of N. New Braunfels).

September 21, Friday, 8:00 AM

★ **Hazel Bazemore Hawkwatch**

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (342-2073) anytime after 8 AM for a day at the best hawk watch in south Texas. We may visit Tule Lake or other sites in the Corpus Christi area. This is a full day trip. Bring lunch, drinking water, sunscreen, sunglasses, and a chair. Driving time 2 1/2 hours. See page 5 for directions.

September 22, Saturday, 8:00 AM

★ **SAAS field trip to Mitchell Lake**

Meet leader Ernie Roney at the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center entrance on Moursund/Pleasanton Road, 0.7 mile south of Loop 410 (exit 46) in south San Antonio. A small entrance fee will be charged.

September 23, Sunday, 8:00 AM

★ **Adopt-a-Highway**

Highway cleanup on S US 281, 4 miles south of 410. Meet at our sign. Contact Barbara Kyse at 824-8884. Bring gloves and water and bug spray. See page 5.

September 25, Tuesday, 6:30 PM

★ **SAAS Board Meeting**

at The Carlyle Condominium Meeting Room, 7887 Broadway. Info: Barbara Kyse, 824-8884, <bckyse@msn.com>.

September 29, Saturday, 8:00 AM

★ **Live Oak Park Field Trip**

Meet leader Mike Fatone at the park. From I-35 N, take the Judson Rd exit and continue when Judson Rd becomes Toepperwein. Turn left at the Leafy Hollow traffic light. Go to the end of the road. Turn right on Park Road. Go to the end of this road to the parking lot. Bring bug spray, sunscreen, and drinking water. Moderate walking.

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Regular hours are Saturdays and Sunday from 8 AM to 4 PM, with other times by appointment. Call the Center at 628-1639 for information. Directions: From the Loop 410 take exit 46 to Moursund Blvd south 0.7 mile to gate on the left. Ring the buzzer for entry. MLAC scheduled birding trips in September (fee):
2nd Tuesday, September 11 at 8:00 AM
3rd Sunday, September 16 at 8:00 AM
4th Saturday, September 22 at 8:00 AM

Other Events

September 8, Saturday, 10- 11:30 AM

Eisenhower Park. STx Herp Soc. "Snakes" 564-6400 resv.

September 13, Thursday, 6:45 PM

Bexar Audubon Society meeting. Trinity Cowles Life Sci Bld. Denise Pope "Natural History & Behavior of Fiddler Crabs"

September 18, Tuesday, 6:45 PM

Sierra Club meeting Witte Museum. Film "Who killed the Electric Car?"

September 14- 16

Fall Nature Quest 800-210-0380 <www.thcrr.com>

September 27- 29

TOS fall meeting at Winnie TX. <www.texasbirds.org>

Looking Ahead

October 4, Thursday, 6:30 PM

SAAS Annual Banquet. Speaker Dr. Keith Arnold, TAMU Ruble Center. Catered by Grady's Bar-B-Q. See SAASy Notes.

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.



“Goldfinches” from page 1

Goldfinches depend largely upon the seeds of herbaceous plants, including those of wildflowers. Indeed, anyone who has put out thistle seeds at their feeders can testify how fond both siskins and goldfinches are of these. Goldfinches do not time their breeding to coincide with the emergence of insects in the spring-time; rather they commence breeding later in the season, when their food plants are setting seed, in some localities initiating breeding as late as August.



The occurrence of bright yellow male American Goldfinches in summer, circling over open areas with an exaggerated undulating flight, calling a cheerful “pechirokee!” with every bounce, is a familiar sight over much of North America. Similarly, across much of the Southwest from our Hill Country and parts of South Texas west to California, brightly colored black and yellow male Lesser Goldfinches may be seen in circling song flights, white wing patches flashing prominently.

Both species sing their pretty, canary-like songs in flight and from a perch

Male goldfinches do not defend a feeding territory, but rather defend their mate from the attentions of other males, and later defend a small territory in the vicinity of the nest. Several pairs commonly nest in close proximity. The woven cup-shaped nest of plant fibers is placed in a tree or bush, nest construction and incubation of the 3 to 6 eggs both being performed by the female. Males depart the nesting territory to forage, often in small groups, and return to feed the incubating females regurgitated seeds. The male will continue to feed the female for the first few days after the eggs hatch, the female in turn regurgitating these seeds again to feed the tiny young. Older young are fed by both parents, and after the young leave the nest family groups may move together to feeding areas, the young being fed by one or both parents for perhaps three weeks after fledging. One brood appears to be the norm; but, when conditions permit, some female American Goldfinches will leave their first brood in the care of the male and nest again with a second mate, the same is presumed to be true of the Lesser Goldfinch.

The mostly sedentary Lesser Goldfinch occurs in Bexar County all year round, chiefly in the northwestern Hill Country areas, but may be outnumbered everywhere in winter by the more migratory American Goldfinch.



~Mike Scully <JJHSScully@aol.com>

Sources and links to more information can be found on our web site:

<www.saaudubon.org/articles/articles.html>

SAAS-Y Notes

Bexar County Birding Challenge

SAAS member Mike Fatone has volunteered to coordinate the BCBC this year. Please send Mike your sightings at : <bcbc@saaudubon.org> .

In Memorium

Marvin Hershey was laid to rest at Ft Sam Houston National Cemetery on August 13. Marvin and Edith joined SAAS in 1978.

Also, **June Osborne** of Waco, author of **Birding Concan** and long-time proponent of birding in Texas passed away in August.

Our sympathies to their families.

SAAS Banquet

The annual banquet will be held in the large room at the Ruble Center starting at 6:30 on Thursday, Oct. 4. **Dr. Keith Arnold**, TAMU, will speak on Forty Years of Ornithology. He will also have a book signing for his new book **Birds of Texas**. The banquet will be catered by Grady’s Bar-B-Q and cost \$12.50. Reservations must be paid by September 27. Send payment to:

San Antonio Audubon Society
5150 Broadway #257
San Antonio, TX 78209-5710

SAAS needs Webmaster

The San Antonio Audubon Society is looking for a new volunteer webmaster. If you are interested, please contact Eric Brierley at 590-4063. You must have a working knowledge of web site management and design, of course, and the ability to receive and filter multiple email addresses. You will be working closely with other members of the society, and as a representative of SAAS, you must be responsive to questions and comments from site visitors, as well. You should be able to devote at least several hours a month to updates and maintenance. There ARE helpers to back you up, too! This is a fun and rewarding way to volunteer for the society

Membership

New Members

Hester, Donnell & Lorraine..... 497-0241
703 Pepper Oak San Antonio TX 78258-3129

No Updates this month.

~Charlotte Wenger, Membership Committee <membership@saaudubon.org>



Field Trip & Event Reports

Carter Ranch

On Sunday, July 22, thirteen people joined Sue Carter at her ranch in Karnes County for a great morning of birding. Participants included, Georgina, Willie Sekula, Derek Muschalek, Joe Orr, Colin and Lynn Bludau, Ron and Teresa Hillstrom, Janie Holcombe, Eva Fromme, Gary and Lynda Echard from Colorado, and myself. Everyone had a good time, a big thank you to Sue for her wonderful hospitality! She even had breakfast waiting for us when we arrived. Having Derek and Willie along to ID butterflies and plants was a real plus, and thanks to Ron for his help with the dragonflies. Our visitors from Colorado were able to pick up a few lifers! A very nice day! Highlights: 52 species, Green Jays, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Couch's Kingbird, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Grasshopper and Cassin's Sparrows, 25 Dickcissels. ❖

~ Helen Rejzek

KLRN

Thanks to all the SAAS team that showed up for our KLRN night on August 9. There wasn't much activity, but we did look pretty good. And everyone showed up and smiled for the camera. Jerry Coleman, Debbie Engler, Lorna Engelman, Andy Garcia, Mariann Golden, Barbara Kyse, Metha Leslie, Marge Lumpe, Marjorie McFarland, Jerry and Karen Moulder, Maren Phillips, Margaret Rote, Nelson Seffel, Betty Walters. ❖

~ Georgina Schwartz

Beginner's Bird Walk

On August 11, I was joined by a Scout troop of 5 boys, 2 leaders, 2 more ladies and a gentleman on this hot day. We found 22 species with the bird of the day being the Red-shouldered Hawk that flew around calling as we were getting back. Carolina Wrens were calling all over the place. We will be back at 8 AM in September. Come join us. ❖

~ Georgina Schwartz

Judson Nature Trail Report

After being away for five weeks and missing all the rain, I returned to quite a bit of maintenance needing to be done at the JNT as well as at home. As a nice surprise however, a boy scout was waiting for me to approve a project. His name is Jason Ball. He is fourteen and attends Alamo Hts. High School. He wanted to put up Blue Bird houses, but since the area is not a prime place for them I had him contact Georgina Schwartz. She was able to get him to think about Woodpecker houses and so that is what he will be doing. He will work with his troop Saturday, August 25, and the following Saturday. They will also be washing the trail benches and the numbered posts and picking up as much trash as they can without getting too muddy. ❖

~ Shirley Bartels, JNT committee chairman

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Many of you know that MLAC is planning to build a covered pavilion to help us serve the increasing numbers of visitors.

To achieve this goal our project was part of the recent City of San Antonio bond issue and will receive \$125,000 through the bond process.

We were notified recently that our project, budgeted at \$250,000, will receive \$100,000 from The Kronkosky Foundation. This wonderful accomplishment means that we are well on our way to fully funding this much needed improvement.

Our current visitor center has only two bathrooms and limited seating capacity. Our new pavilion will sit at our trailhead (trail improvements are already underway) and allow us to provide seating for larger groups. I can already see groups of students leaning over microscopes, writing in their field journals or enjoying lunch! Our family and community programs will also have the opportunity to serve more attendees and recreational visitors; and birders will have a wonderful place to sit, picnic and relax. The additional restrooms will insure that visitors do not wait on long lines and can spend more time enjoying the many wonders of MLAC's unique site.

Thank you all for your support and appreciation for the mission of MLAC and the work we are doing in our community. We are so excited to partner with you all and look forward to going forward together!

Please look for more information and updates as we go forward.

~ Susan Albert, MLAC ❖



~ photo by Willie Sekula

At our August meeting SAAS Member Willie Sekula gave a program on Birds and Butterflies of Ecuador such as this Velvet Purple Coronet.



Hazel Bazemore Hawkwatch

An estimated 95% of the North American population of broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platyterus*) fly over the Corpus Christi Hawk Watch site at Hazel Bazemore Park every fall in huge flights called kettles. Single kettles of 10,000 hawks are routine, and single flights of 100,000 hawks or more have been recorded. During the peak of the broadwinged hawk migration flight (generally around the last weekend in September), single day totals of 100,000 to 400,000 hawks have been recorded. The largest area flight recorded was October 4-5, 1977 when a monster cold front brought in 750,000 Broad-winged Hawks for an overnight roost. The peak of migration occurs between September 24 and October 1 and there are usually two to three days of counts exceeding 100,000! That's a lot of hawks...but...it is impossible to pin it down any closer. The park is located in the northwest corner of Corpus Christi in the community of Calallen. Highways 37 and 77 intersect and run together for a short distance, the first exit south on Hwy 77, less than one half mile south of this intersection, is FM 624 (Upriver Road). Go west on 624 for .7 mile to the second traffic light. The entrance to the park is on the right. For more information on the park, or the Hawk Festival September 27-30 please see the Hazel Bazemore information page at <ccbirding.org>. Below is a list of raptor species and the best times to see them.

Swallow-tailed Kite	August 15 to September 15
Mississippi Kite	August 15 to September 15
Broad-winged Hawk	September 15 to October 15
Osprey	September 15 to October 15
Peregrine Falcon	September 20 to October 20
American Kestrel	September 10 to October 15
Cooper's Hawk	September 20 to October 20
Sharp-shinned Hawk	September 25 to October 25
Red-tailed Hawk	October 5 to November 5
Swainson's Hawk	October 5 to October 20

~ CCHW



Bird Photo of the Month



~ frame from video

This juvenal Couch's Kingbird by **Malcolm Mark Swan** is this month's Bird Photo of the Month. BPM highlights the work of SAAS members. Send us your favorite shot!

Adopt-a-Highway

The Adopt-a-Highway program began in 1984 when a Texas Department of Transportation engineer observed debris blowing out of a pickup truck bed while driving through Tyler. With the increasing annual cost of picking up litter, the engineer began an unsuccessful appeal to local groups to "adopt" a section of highway. The TxDOT's Tyler District's Public Information Officer became involved in developing and implementing the Adopt-a-Highway program and created the quarterly cleanup cycle for adopting organizations. The Tyler Civitan Club became the first group to volunteer by adopting a two-mile stretch of Highway 69. Within months more than 50 groups in that region joined the program, which eventually spread nationwide. The grassroots movement demonstrates the value of a successful public-private partnership as it involves nearly 90,000 groups in 49 states, Puerto Rico, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Japan.

TxDOT estimates that 827 million pieces of litter will collect on our highways this year, so they need our help more than ever. Over the years volunteers have picked up millions of tons of trash yearly. Research has shown that people are less likely to litter when the roadside is clean.

In 2005, the San Antonio Audubon Society adopted a two mile section of U.S. Highway 281 approximately 4 miles south of Loop 410 and less than half a mile east of Mitchell Lake. The sign designating the San Antonio Audubon's highway section is located just south of the point where Mitchell Lake is first visible to the west. Our two-mile section ends approximately a quarter mile south of the Medina River. In the past, local residents have stopped and thanked the SAAS volunteers and frequently we get a honk and a friendly wave of appreciation. We are fortunate that our section tends not to be extremely trashy, which might be partially due to our past efforts.

The next quarterly pick up is scheduled for Sunday, September 23rd starting at 8:00 am. Our goal is to always finish in less than two hours. The more volunteers who participate, then the earlier we can go home or go birding. As a note, we do not pick up trash in rain storms, but to date we haven't encountered rain on our scheduled dates. Hope to see you on the 23rd. Family members and other volunteers are more than welcome to help. ❖

~ Barbara Kyse, chairman SAAS Board of Directors

San Antonio Audubon News

Editor: Mike Sims
 Contributing Editor and Mailing: Georgina Schwartz
 Mailing Labels and PDF e-mailing: Charlotte Wenger

Please submit items by postal mail, e-mail, or phone to the editor. The deadline is the **15th** of each month for the following month's issue. Send to: ATTN: Editor, San Antonio Audubon Society, 5150 Broadway #257, San Antonio, TX 78209-5710; call 655-8995; e-mail <editor@saaudubon.org>.

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July Sightings

1—Friedrich Park (Helen Rejzek): 1 Golden-cheeked Warbler, 1 Roadrunner, 5 Barn Swallow, 1 Bronzed Cowbird, 1 Lesser Goldfinch.
 4—Blanco at 1604 (Nancy Norman): 1 Black-and-white Warbler.
 4—Narrow Pass at Toepperwein (Danny Large): 1 Swainson's Hawk.
 7—Warbler Woods, Guadalupe Co. (Susan Schaezler): 2 Chuck-will's-widow.
 8—Walmart at 1604 and 281 (John Bianchi) 5 Monk Parakeets.
 10—Mitchell Lake (H Rejzek and Georgina Schwartz): 1 Eastern Bluebird, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, 12 Dickcissel, 4 Bullock's Oriole.
 10—410 at Perrin Beitel (April Grunspan): Swainson's Hawk.
 10—Rio Medina, Medina Co. (Janice McClintock): 1 Golden-cheeked Warbler, Painted Buntings, White-winged doves.
 11—Spring Branch, Blanco county (Leslie Linehan): Scott's Oriole
 11—Eisenhower Park (H Rejzek): Golden-cheeked Warbler, Western Kingbird, 6 Western Scrub Jay, 8 Rufous-crowned Sparrow.
 12—Warbler Woods (S Schaezler); Bell's Vireo, Yellow-billed cuckoo, 2 Brown-crested Flycatcher, 1 Great Horned Owl.
 13—Cibolo Nature Center, Boerne, Kendall Co. (Tom Collins): 1 Cedar Waxwing.
 14—Warbler woods, (S Schaezler): 1 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.
 14—Live Oak City Park (D Large): 2 Little Blue Heron, Green Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Great Egret, 45 Purple Martins, Carolina Chickadee.
 15—Wimberley, Hays Co. (Cindy Rodriguez): Rufous Hummingbird.
 16—Warbler woods (S Schaezler): Indigo bunting, Black-and-white Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.
 17—Braunig Lake (G Schwartz and H Rejzek): 3 Least Bitterns, 5 Green Heron.
 20—Monte Vista (Brad Wier): Lesser Nighthawks.
 21—Warbler Woods (S Schaezler): Indigo Buntings with 3 Fledglings.
 21—410 at San Pedro (Sheridan Coffey); Common Nighthawks, 1 Barn Owl.
 23—Rosewood at Shook (Jerry Hernandez): 1 American Robin
 23—Smithson Valley, Comal Co. (Linda Martin): Rufous Hummingbird.
 24—Somerset at 1604 (H Rejzek): 3 Wood Storks
 26—Converse North Park (D Large): Spotted Sandpiper, 81 White winged Doves, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 1 Empidonax sp., 1 Loggerhead Shrike, 2 Purple Martin, 6 Barn Swallow,
 26—Crownridge Canyon NA (G Schwartz and H Rejzek) 2 Eastern Phoebe, 6 White-eyed Vireo, 1 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, 2 Summer Tanager, 1 Blue Grosbeak, 3 Painted Bunting.
 27—Guaranty Bank Bldg at 410 (Bill Holliday): Swainson's Hawk .
 28—Avenue A (S Coffey): 2 Least Flycatchers.
 29—Botanical Gardens (Malcolm Mark Swan): 3 pairs of

Couch's Kingbirds with one fledgling, 1 Brown-crested Flycatcher.
 29—Crownridge Canyon NA (Andy Garcia): Hutton's Vireo, 2 American Goldfinch, 1 Summer Tanager.

Bexar County Birding Challenge

The BCBC welcomes Elton Stillwell this month. He's definitely in the lead in Kendall County! That's an even half-dozen of us now!

	BY	BC	CC	MC	KC	GC	TX
Dodge Engleman		223					271
Lorna Engleman		182					253
Mike Fatone	14	92	22			23	148
Curt McCamy	51	184					283
Cathy Pedraza	37	116			58		218
Elton Stillwell	96				151		176

BY=Backyard, BC=Bexar County, CC=Comal County, MC=Medina County, KC=Kendall County, GC=Guadalupe County; TX=Texas list ❖

~ Mike Fatone, BCBC 2007 Coordinator

Email reports to Mike at <bcbc@saudubon.org> and for more information check out the web site at <www.saudubon.org/bcbc.html>

Fall Migration

Unlike spring, the best time to look for fall migrants is mid-morning. The cooler weather is nice, but birds have a morning-flight until around 9am or so, and that time may be very productive for songbirds, especially. This contrasts to spring, when incoming songbirds usually begin arriving late morning, and may well leave that evening – often making early mornings rather depauperate for birds. At a hawkwatch, accipiters fly all morning, but the soaring buteos like Broad-winged Hawks don't become active until mid to late morning. Some frontal systems, or sudden clear days, may produce hundreds of thousands (!) of broad-wings, floating in kettles like huge, avian tornados. It is well known that cold fronts often produce fallouts in spring, and though this “depends,” they also can be real bird producers in fall. First, though, if a front blows its winds out of the west for many hours preceding the front's arrival, it may blow the migrants back east – like toward Louisiana. Spring fronts are effective if they avoid this, and rain really downs far more birds than unfavorable winds. Western fronts in fall may deliver a few neat western species, but not big numbers of songbirds. However, the occasional front comes (north to south) down the Mississippi Valley, and these may be tremendous days for birds – delivering hundreds to coastal migrant traps much like spring fallouts. These days are not only as good as spring fallouts; they also don't come with the baggage of drowning thousands of weak individuals over the Gulf! So don't ignore the fall migration! Birding can be terrific, and some species such as *Empidonax* flycatchers are more common then than in spring.

~ Jim Peterson, GOS ❖



Jay's Calls Might Mislead

Blue jays have a reputation for being loud and aggressive.

If you've paid attention to this sort of news event, you're probably aware that claims have been made of the rediscovery of ivory-billed woodpeckers. This woodpecker, the size of a crow, had been suspected to be extinct in its U.S. Deep South home for at least half a century. Attempts to confirm the recently claimed find include installation of microphones and recorders in the swamps and bottomland forests where the giant woodpeckers are suggested to persist.

Ivory bills have some near-unique vocalizations that should help to confirm their presence. I say "near-unique" because there is a tiny little nagging complication: Sharing those forests is a bird with a huge repertoire of vocal sounds, a few of which are for all practical purposes indistinguishable from sounds of the rare woodpeckers. That complicating bird — but not the great woodpecker — can also be found in the Concho Valley, including around my San Angelo home. It's called a blue jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*).

The blue jay is both admired and despised. The despised aspects of the bird come from its characters inherited as a corvid. The family Corvidae includes jays, crows and ravens. They're all intelligent but belligerent and aggressive birds. When present, they dominate the backyard. I accept that, but you might not all agree.

This bird occurred to me just now because I remembered hearing the raucous yelling of a flock of blue jays as I set out this morning for my walk to work. I don't even remember which call dominated the jay chatter at sunrise. Was it a "jeer" or a "pump-handle" call? I don't remember. What I do remember is that, as always, the jay calls blasted the neighborhood.

The loud calls of blue jays are associated with their complicated social structure. As it turns out, the subject remains a bit mysterious. If you would care to begin a 30-year investigation of blue jay social organization, the younger among us, who will be around then to admire your work, will appreciate it.

Here is what I see and hear in my neighborhood. In August, as in November and February, blue jays occur in loose flocks. Almost certainly in each flock is a monogamously mated pair of adult jays. There are other jays as well, including their young of the year. We do not know how the other adults that come to join the flock relate to the mated pair. This flock flies around the large

neighborhood. As it does so, it encounters other jays that join the flock, at least momentarily.

Why these encountered jays join the flock is unknown. Probably, it is an urge they cannot resist. But as the flock moves about, its composition changes. Membership in the flock is fluid.

So here's the scene as it unfolds. In the pecan tree in my front yard, a blue jay lets loose with a loud jeer call. Another jay in the walnut next to my backyard follows suit with its own jeer call. Then, one by one, the jays fly to the south. Two blocks away, they are joined by a new male and female pair that remains with the flock for a block-long row of pecans.



By the time the flock returns to my yard later that day, the social group has changed in content many times. In the middle of the day, several jays that otherwise might have had little to do with each other took a siesta together in a shrub.

One very interesting point is that available data confirms a high fidelity of mate loyalty. In one study, only 7 percent of mated jay pairs ended in divorce. So whatever else made up that flock of blue jays moving through my yard this morning, the chances were good that a mated male and female were among its members.

We understand so little about the complicated lives of these animals.

But I do feel safe concluding that on this day, an ivory-billed woodpecker was not among those jays. There's no question that's a safe bet, whatever sounds I heard. ❖

~ Dr. Terry Maxwell, Angelo State University

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 Life: Individual (\$200) Life: Couple (\$300)
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dues and address changes to: ATTN MEMBERSHIP, SAN ANTONIO
AUDUBON SOCIETY, 5150 BROADWAY #257, SAN ANTONIO TX
78209-5710. Email contact: <membership@saaudubon.org>.

Meetings

September 6, Thursday, 7 PM

SAAS Member **Ben Plummer**
will speak on Christmas in
Costa Rica.

San Antonio Audubon Society

For more information on our club
and to hear about or report bird sightings:

210-308-6788

SAAS Web site:

<http://www.saaudubon.org>