

San Antonio Audubon Society

AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

Volume 55 Number 12

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GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS

by Mike Scully

A late October front had swept through the city during the night, bringing with it cooler weather and clear, sunny skies the next day.

Much less noticeable to most people that morning were the little songbirds that had arrived with the front and landed wherever the winds and fortune had taken them.

A glimpse of movement in a small vacant lot next to a McDonald's caught my eye. A little bird had landed in a large patch of bur clover, and even in that short cover it moved rapidly along the ground unseen, with only the movements of leaves marking its furtive progress.

Binoculars in hand, I followed the motion, actually hoping for a rail. At the very edge of cover, the fugitive paused for a moment before flying off. It was small, large-headed and short-tailed; a Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*), clearly out of place in that urban landscape.



Grasshopper Sparrow by Keith Bartels

Grasshopper Sparrows are among the most elusive of our sparrows, often running rodent-like from intruders, typically taking flight only when pressed and then only briefly before dropping back into cover again.

Neither are they commonly noisy like the wrens, the call note in any case being a short, high-pitched "seep".

Grasshopper Sparrows are most easily located in the breeding season. At that time the males sing their buzzy, insect-like songs (from whence the common name derives) from a low perch and engage in fluttering flight displays.

Although they have become scarce and local in many areas, Grasshopper Sparrows still breed across a surprisingly expansive range, including most of the United States east of the Rockies, parts of the Great Basin and Northwestern U.S., and the Coastal and Central Valley regions of California. Isolated breeding populations also occur in the Caribbean, Mexico, and in Central and South America as far south as Ecuador.

Across this wide sweep of latitudes, Grasshopper Sparrows breed in a number of grassland types. The exact habitat preference varies by region, two commonalities throughout being a need for enough grasses and low cover to offer concealment and a preference for habitat areas on the order of hundreds of acres in size. Within these broad open areas, individual males defend small territories typically two to four acres in size.

Most North American populations of the Grasshopper Sparrow are migratory. In the breeding season insects comprise the major portion of the diet for both adults and young, which may be why the species is a relatively late spring migrant, arriving on the breeding grounds in April and May. Monogamous pairs are the norm; the female alone constructs the well-hidden domed nest of grasses and incubates the three to six eggs. Both sexes tend the young.

Development of the nestlings is rapid; the young depart the nest on foot at around nine days of age. As is common among ground-nesting grassland birds, predators exact a heavy toll of both eggs and nestlings.

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SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR

Please call the trip leaders for more information concerning any of the following field trips. Last-minute changes to field trips will be posted at saaudubon.org or on the recorded message at 308-6788.

Tuesday, December 1, 8:00 AM

O. P. Schnabel Park

Meet Helen Rejzek (679-7437) at the parking lot by the soccer fields just inside the entrance to the park at 10000 Bandera Road. The entrance is on the east side of Bandera Road opposite Braun Road. The park is north of Huebner Road and south of Loop 1604.

Saturday, December 5, 8:00 AM

Pullin Ranch, Whitsett, Texas

Meet leader Jean Bensmiller at the Pullin Ranch in Whitsett at 8 AM. We'll be doing a lot of walking, so bring lunch and water and wear long pants. Whitsett is south of Pleasanton in northwest Live Oak County, about 1.5 hrs south of San Antonio. Directions: take I-37 south to FM 99 and go west (right) through Whitsett, past the railroad track to the ranch road. Pullin is on the left. Georgina Schwartz is the back-up leader. For information, call Georgina at 342-2073.



Sunday, December 6, 8:00 AM

Southwest High School

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (342-2073) in the parking lot of the Tink-a-Taco restaurant at the corner of Loop 1604 and Old Pearsall Road in SW Bexar County. Please be on time as the gate to the high school will be closed after we enter.

Saturday, December 12, 8:00 AM

SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

Join leader Georgina Schwartz (342-2073) 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. Everyone is welcome. Binoculars are available.

Sunday, December 13, 8:00 AM

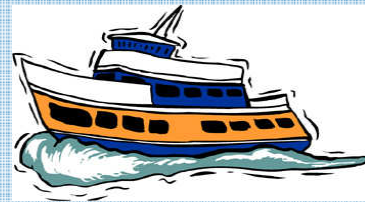
Goliad State Park

Meet leader Derek Muschalek at the Whataburger at the intersection of US 59 and US 183 in Goliad (don't be late). We will follow Derek to a parking area where the trip will begin. There is a \$3 park entrance fee. Be prepared for a 2-mile hike. We will eat lunch at a local restaurant. Driving time is about 2 hours from San Antonio (about 100 miles).



Mission Espíritu Santo, Goliad
Photo courtesy of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department © 2006.

LOOKING AHEAD Whooping Crane Tour



Aboard the Skimmer
Aransas National Wildlife Refuge
Sunday, Jan. 31, 1:00 PM
Contact Helen Rejzek, 679-7437
Space is limited!

SAAS Annual Holiday Celebration and Potluck Supper

Thursday, Dec. 3, 6:30 PM
Lion's Field, 2809 Broadway

Bring a covered dish to share and your favorite bird photos (limited to 15) on a CD or flash drive. Photographs will be shown after dinner. SAAS will provide coffee, water, and punch. Don't forget to sign up for our Sunday, December 20th Christmas Bird Count.

Grasshopper Sparrows *(Continued from page 1)*

The laying of a replacement clutch may commence as soon as three days after such a loss and two broods are commonly raised throughout, with as many as four broods possible in the warmer parts of the breeding range. Given the generally mouse-like demeanor of the species, it is not surprising that common predators of both adults and young include the Northern Harrier and, in our area, the Loggerhead Shrike.

North American populations of the Grasshopper Sparrow winter primarily in the Southern States, the Caribbean and Mexico. They are most common in our area on migration and in winter. Prior to the widespread destruction of the prairies, Grasshopper Sparrows were far more abundant than they are today. Widespread population declines of this species caused by the continuing losses of native grasslands to human activity and invasive species are still ongoing.

Although the Grasshopper Sparrow is listed on our local checklist as an uncommon summer resident and known breeder, I myself have but rarely encountered singing males here. Imported fire ants negatively affect breeding success, and the species cannot use the invasive Bermuda grass monocultures common to our area. It seems sadly typical, too, that the one place I found singing Grasshopper Sparrows most often in previous years has since gone under to development.

OTHER BIRDING EVENTS

Winter Sparrows & Wrens Workshop Saturday • 12/5 • 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM Cibolo Nature Center

Workshop led by Byron Stone of Austin for intermediate birders who want to become proficient at field identification of winter sparrows and wrens. Extensive fieldwork will follow a short presentation. Members \$25/person and non-members \$35/person. Plus \$10 box lunch. Workshop limited to 16. Pre-registration required. Call 830-249-4616.

Beginning Bird Walk • Saturday • 12/19 9:00 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. 210-207-3250.

FEDERAL DUCK STAMPS BENEFIT MIGRATORY BIRDS

Although originally created as the federal licenses for hunting migratory waterfowl, the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps known as "duck stamps" are today a vital component in the effort to save wetland habitat. In the 75 years that the program has existed, more than \$700 million has been used to acquire more than 5.2 million acres of habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System.



Buy Duck Stamps!
www.fws.gov/duckstamps

You don't have to be a hunter to purchase the stamp, which is not valid for postage. Of every dollar paid for the stamps, 98 percent goes toward the purchase or lease of wetland habitat. The art used on the stamp is chosen through an annual stamp design contest. Stamps cost \$15 each and may be purchased at many local post offices or <https://shop.usps.com>.

Mitchell Lake Birding Trips

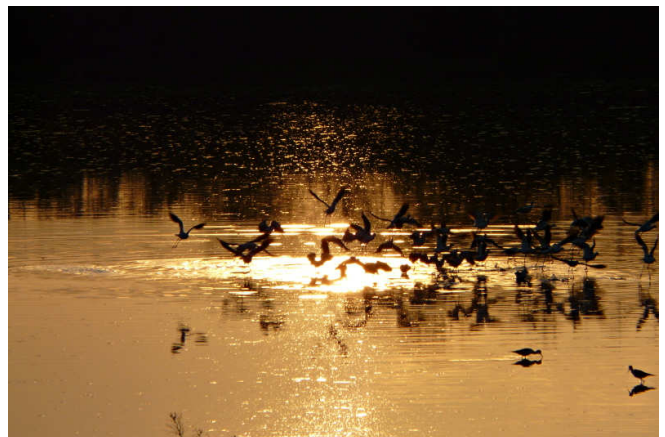
Regular hours are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Saturdays and Sundays; call Center at 210/628-1639 for other times. Directions: Exit South Loop 410 at Moursund Blvd (Exit 46); go south 0.7 mile to gate on left and ring buzzer for entry. Docent-led birding trips, \$3.00 for MLAC members, \$5.00 for non-members,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

December 8, 2nd Tuesday with Helen Rejzek,
Georgina Schwartz

December 13, 2nd Sunday with Curt McCamy

December 20, 3rd Sunday--Tour guide not
available due to Christmas Bird Count

December 26, 4th Saturday with Ernie Roney



*Avocets by Bill Skinner
Photo taken at Mitchell Lake, Oct. 13, 2009*

THE BIRDING SCENE

October 2009

by Sheridan Coffey

October brings new winter arrivals and a push of fall migrants. There are a few lingering summer birds still around. Passing cold fronts can change things in a heartbeat. One of these fronts on October 3 brought a small crowd of moving warblers and other migrants to area birders. Brad Weir was working at a residence with a goldfish pond with running water and had Nashville, Black-and-white, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers, joined by a Common Yellowthroat and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Janice McClintock was equally lucky on the same day, with Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Nashville, and Black-and-white Warblers, Blue-headed and White-eyed Vireos and Indigo Buntings in her yard in Medina County. Tina Gilson had a Mourning Warbler in her yard and a Baltimore Oriole at El Dorado (Golden) Pond.

Marcin Kojtko visited a flooded Leon Creek Greenbelt on October 5 and despite the high water was able to find a stunning breeding plumaged Scarlet Tanager, a rare fall migrant. He also had some Yellow Warblers and a couple of Clay-colored Sparrows. The Schaezlers' Warbler Woods was busy on October 6, with most of the warblers mentioned above, along with Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, an Ovenbird and a House Wren.



Scarlet Tanager
By Marcin Kojtko

October 9 was a good day for yard birds. Lora Reynolds had a first for her yard, a meadowlark sp. Jerry Hernandez had both Lesser and American Goldfinches. Susan Schaezler reported Brown Thrasher, Broad-winged Hawk, American Redstart, and a Northern Harrier. Tina Gilson also passed on a report of a possible Calliope Hummingbird from a feeder in San Antonio.

Wintering duck numbers started to pick up. Andy Garcia led a trip to Mitchell Lake on October 11 and reported 150 Gadwall, 250 Blue-winged Teal, a number of Redheads, Green-winged Teal and Ruddy Ducks. Over 1000 Cave Swallows were flying over the various ponds and the lake. On October 18 Georgina Schwartz and her group added American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail to the mix. They also reported Yellow-rumped Warblers and Savannah and Lincoln's Sparrows.

Bob Doe in Spring Branch added a new yard bird this month at his place. On October 18 two House Sparrows graced his feeders. On a much brighter note, he had an early Winter Wren, a juvenile Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Blue-headed Vireo on October 22. Sheridan Coffey flushed a LeConte's Sparrow out of the shrubs in front of her apartment on October 23. The bird perched briefly on the patio fence, giving identifiable looks.

Sheridan also had a rather late Common Nighthawk flying over her apartment on October 28. Keith Bartels



Common Nighthawk

had an even later Lesser Nighthawk on October 29 at his house.

Helen Rejzek led a field trip to Medina River Park on October 27, where they found two Green Kingfishers. Brad Weir found a group of 20 Couch's Kingbirds at the Botanical Gardens on October 30.

San Antonio Audubon finished the month with a field trip at Warbler Woods on October 31. Sparrows dominated the day, with seven species being found: Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow.

CRESCENT BEND NATURE PARK

New Birding Venue

Those of you familiar with the 175-acre Crescent Bend Nature Park in Schertz know what a transformation has been made in developing a park out of a flood-ravaged residential community.

Located where Schaefer Rd. intersects Cibolo Creek (between FM 78 and FM 1518), the park opened to the public in September. Park amenities include a 1.5 miles walking trail, five picnic sites and restrooms with drinking fountains.

The SAAS group who had a pre-grand opening field trip to the park in July saw 37 species of birds.

Welcome New Members!

Sandy Ferguson-----210-494-5972

110 Encino Blanco St.

San Antonio, TX 78232-3813

Bron Rorex-----361-790-9353

112 Cedar Ridge

Rockport, TX 78382-6825

Samuel and Allison Taylor--210-296-6504

11819 Burning Bend St.

San Antonio, TX 78249-3022

OTHER EVENTS

FRIENDS OF MEDINA RIVER NATURAL AREA • Wednesday • 12/2 • 6:00-7:00 PM

Be one of the first to join the Friends of Medina River Natural Area! We're meeting the first Wednesday of every month at Palo Alto College, Library-Ozuna Building, Room 206. For more information, contact Gail Dugelby, Nature Preserve Officer, 624-2575, email gail.dugelby@sanantonio.gov, or visit the website www.sanaturalareas.org

NATURE WALK • Saturday • 12/5 9:00-11:00 AM • FRIEDRICH PARK

Take a nature walk with us before you start your holiday shopping.

The park is located at 21395 Milsa, near IH-10 West and the Dominion Dr. exit. Donation: \$2 per person. Reservations recommended.

564-6400 or www.sanaturalareas.org



STAR PARTY • Saturday 12/12 • 6:00-8:00 PM EISENHOWER PARK

The Natural Areas and Bexar Audubon Society invite you to a Star Party with the San Antonio

Astronomical Society. Find out what there is to see in the crisp, clear winter skies. This program will give you an opportunity to use several elaborate telescopes. Call 210-564-6400 for reservations and information. Suggested donation: \$3.00 per individual/\$5.00 per family. Eisenhower Park, Harris Pavilion, 19399 NW Military Hwy. www.sanaturalareas.org

SAAS EDUCATION/OUTREACH

October 2009

The Mitchell Lake Fall Festival on October 24th welcomed 2,000+ attendees. The SAAS Education/Outreach Committee participated by "bird" banding 67 children among the 350-400 children and adults who stopped by our booth.



SAAS President Barbara Kyse promotes SAAS at Mitchell Lake.

The next day at the San Antonio Botanical Garden's Botanica event with over 2,500 attendees, we banded 167 children and contacted about 250-300 creatively costumed children along with

350-400 adults. In addition to "bird" banding, the children created owl faces with cardboard cutouts and CDs, and visited with the SAAS Whooping Crane (Jodell Miller). We were fortunate to borrow the zoo's Whooping Crane education kit to show children how the cranes raised in captivity are fed.



Patsy Inglet (left) and Jodell "Whooper" Miller (right) greet an "astronaut" at Botanica.

Thank you to all who volunteered during this busy, rewarding weekend: Patsy and Tom Inglet, Stephanie Sparkman, Patricia Zimbicki, Metha Haggard, Mariann Golden, Georgina Schwartz and Jodell Miller. While we cannot promise the same glorious weather next spring, please consider volunteering for the four events scheduled next year. We are developing new programs and ideas,

so please contact us at info@saudubon.org.

Thanks to Tom and Patsy Inglet for the event photos and Barbara Kyse for the event reports.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS



Magic Ridge, 10/17

Eleven members of the San Antonio Audubon Society, including Karen and Jerry Moulder, Georgina Schwartz, Bron Rorex (Rockport), Jerry Coleman, Dana Green, Tim Katafias, Jodell Miller, Anne Robinson (VA), Martha Taylor (VA) and Sandi Wheeler joined Dr. Brent Ortego and Diane Nunley for a field trip to the TOS sanctuary, Magic Ridge.



SAAS at Magic Ridge, by Sandi Wheeler

The group also had the opportunity to go to the Wet-mire Unit of Aransas NWR, which is not normally open to the public. Sandi reports that they had a great day and saw a total of 101 species. Just a few warblers and sparrows were seen, but lots of herons, egrets, shorebirds and ducks. At one point, a Merlin came in to investigate all the shorebird activity. Special thanks to Dr. Brent Ortego and Diane Nunley for leading such a great trip.

Choke Canyon, 10/25

Martin Reid and Sheridan Coffey were very pleased to be joined by 20 people at the Calliham Unit at Choke Canyon State Park for the butterfly walk. In spite of the clouds, they observed 35 species of butterflies. American Snouts were plentiful, as were Red-bordered Metalmarks, and the group saw a Black Witch moth. Sheridan reports they managed to sneak a little birding in, too, with 46 species, including an Audubon's Oriole, Harris's Hawk, several Couch's Kingbirds and Green Jays, Laughing Gull, Long-billed Thrasher and Orange-crowned Warblers. They also saw a young male Common Yellowthroat and a young male Vermilion Flycatcher.



Rounded Metalmark
by Sheridan Coffey

Medina River Natural Area, 10/27

Leader Helen Rejzek was joined for this field trip by Georgina Schwartz, Mike Creese, Tina Gilson, C.W. Edens, Dona Lehr and Jean Anaya. The group was unable to bird some of the trails due to the muddy conditions, but they saw 34 species, including both a male and female Green Kingfisher.

Warbler Woods, 10/31

Forty-one birders found a total of 42 bird species and 25 butterfly species. The group formed three teams lead by Don Schaezler, Dana Green and Sandi Wheeler. Highlights included Wood Duck, Double-crested Cormorant, Bell's Vireo, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, three warbler species, and seven sparrow species. As always we thank our wonderful hosts Don and Susan Schaezler.

Castroville Regional Park, 11/1

Georgina Schwartz led 15 birders on a trip around the park, including the Medina Riverside. Highlights were a first-ever pair of Black-and-white Warblers, two Vermilion Flycatchers, a Wilson's Snipe, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, a Common Yellowthroat, a first-of-season Myrtle Warbler, a Green Kingfisher at the Medina River, some Sandhill Cranes, three Lincoln's Sparrows, a Kestrel and two Crows.



Beeville, Bee County, 11/7

The San Antonio Audubon Society was graciously hosted for this trip by Jimmy Jackson at his ranch just outside of Beeville. Sandi Wheeler reports that highlights were a Common Pauraque, Wild Turkeys and a Great Horned Owl. Eastern Phoebes were abundant. They ended the morning with 51 species.

In the afternoon several of the group went to the 75-acre lake at Choke Canyon State Park to see the Northern Jacana. It was in the company of many American Coots and White-faced Ibis. There were also two huge alligators sunning themselves nearby. The Jacana was across the lake but they got good looks with scopes.

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.

SAAS-Y NOTES

Dates for Area Christmas Bird Counts

Uvalde, Monday, Dec. 14

Coordinator: Susan M. Cooper, 830-278-9151
s-cooper@tamu.edu

San Antonio, Sunday, Dec. 20

Coordinator: Sheridan Coffey, 210-561-2454
snrcanary@yahoo.com

Boerne, Saturday, Jan. 2

Coordinator: Sue Wiedenfeld, 830-995-2300
suewie@hctc.net

New Braunfels, Sunday, Jan. 3

Coordinator: Lynn Thompson, 830-629-1215
lthompson54@satx.rr.com

SAAS BOOK SALE A SUCCESS

The book sale at our
November 5 SAAS meeting
brought in \$185.

Thank you to Georgina Schwartz, Tim Katafias,
Jerry Coleman and Debbie Engler for their help and
to all of the donors and buyers for their support of
this project.



Buy SAAS Items Online



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



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Mariann Golden
Sheridan Coffey
Jerry Coleman
Tim Katafias
Mike Sims

**SAAS NEEDS YOU
TO VOLUNTEER!**
info@saaudubon.org

Committee Chairs

Bird Records
Sheridan Coffey ----- birdreports@saaudubon.org
Conservation Chair, Vacancy---- info@saaudubon.org
Education ----- info@saaudubon.org
Field Trips
Helen Rejzek----- fieldtrips@saaudubon.org
Historian, Betty Walters
Membership----- members@saaudubon.org
Database, Tom Inglet
Hospitality, Metha Haggard
Nature Trails & Publicity, Shirley Bartels
Newsletter, Lora Reynolds----- editor@saaudubon.org
Website, Bill Collins----- web@saaudubon.org

SAAS Board of Directors Meeting Tuesday, December 29, 6:30 PM

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

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC
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 Life: Individual (\$200) Life: Couple (\$300)
 Contributing (minimum of \$30 per year)

Would you like to save money for the club and receive your newsletter via e-mail each month (faster and in color)?

Yes No

Donations: Sanctuary Fund _____

Judson Nature Trail _____

How did you find out about us? _____

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 **join online** using a credit card or PayPal by going to: www.saaudubon.org/membership.html. Email contact: <members@saaudubon.org>

MONTHLY MEETING Holiday Celebration and Potluck

DEC. 3, 6:30 PM

Bring a covered dish to share, along with up to 15 favorite bird photos on CD or flash drive to view after dinner. SAAS will provide coffee, water and punch.

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

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. Please send submissions via email to editor@saaudubon.org.

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