

San Antonio Audubon Society

AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

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LAPLAND LONGSPURS

by Mike Scully

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After 40 years of watching birds, it came as a surprise to me to realize that somehow I remain generally unacquainted with what the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology calls “one of the most abundant terrestrial birds wintering in northern North America.” I am referring to the Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*), a species that can apparently occur in prodigious numbers. A single winter flock of this species in Kansas was estimated to contain as many as 4 million birds. Though not found around here in such massive aggregations, the species is listed as a “Fairly Common” winter resident on our local bird checklist.

The name “longspur” refers to the long, straight hind toenail, an adaptation common among ground-dwelling songbirds. Four longspur species occur in North America; all nest and feed upon the ground in open areas and all form large flocks in winter. Two species, the Chestnut-collared and McCown’s Longspur, nest in shortgrass prairie on the Northern Plains, while the Lapland and Smith’s Longspurs breed in the open tundra of the Far North.



Male Lapland Longspur

Cornell also reports that the Lapland Longspur is the “the most visible and abundant bird and sometimes the only nesting songbird” across a breeding range stretching north of the tree line across North America, Greenland and Eurasia. The species returns to the breeding grounds in May, whereupon the males engage in frequent bouts of singing and flight displays as they defend territories against rival males. Their song is loud and melodious, a fast warble with a rich tonal quality reminiscent of a Western Meadowlark.

Unlike the case of the partially sympatric Smith’s Longspur, where both sexes pair simultaneously with as many as three different mates, the mating system of the Lapland Longspur is more conventionally monogamous. The female excavates a hollow in dense vegetation on the side of a tussock and constructs a snug, feather-lined cup nest set upon a mat of moss. The onset of breeding may be delayed by inclement weather. It is worth noting that, in areas of range overlap, male Snow Buntings return to these same tundra areas a whole month earlier than do longspurs, risking starvation in order to claim one of the limited number of rocky crevices used by that species for nesting.

In the short Arctic summer, the brief explosion of bird-song subsides quickly as the female longspurs, nesting in near synchrony due to the time constraints imposed by the brevity of the season, settle down to incubate their three to seven eggs. Both sexes feed the young. Development is rapid, with the young able to maintain their body temperature by day four and fledging from the nest by 10 days of age. In August and September, both adults and fledged young gather in flocks and undergo a heavy molt prior to fall migration.

By virtue of being such a prominent part of the tundra ecosystem, longspurs also comprise an important prey item for a variety of Arctic predators. Ravens, foxes, weasels and even lemmings may take eggs and nestlings. Snowy Owls may capture fledged young, and both adults and young are frequently preyed upon by Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers. Gyrfalcons, Peregrine Falcons and Merlins also prey upon longspurs.

Though they are most abundant on the Great Plains, the winter range of the Lapland Longspur extends east

(Continued on p. 5)

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR: JANUARY

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, January 4, 8:00 AM

McAllister Park

Meet Bill and Marian Collins (545-6064) at the first parking lot on your left. The park is located at 13102 Jones Maltsberger north of Starcrest, just past the police station. Great place to look for winter birds.

Friday, January 7, 8:00 AM

South Salado Creek Greenway

Meet leader Brad Wier (bobby_wier@yahoo.com) in the parking lot of the new South Salado Creek Greenway, 3900 Pecan Valley Drive at Southside Lion's Park. (The playground parking lot is under construction.) Target birds are sparrows, urban bluebirds, Couch's Kingbird, Northern Flicker, and Pine Warbler. Lunch at a local restaurant. For those wanting to try for an in-town 100-species day, Brad can visit some local lakes after lunch.

Saturday, January 8, 8:00 AM

SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (342-2073) at the Judson Nature Trails. From Broadway at the 5900 block, turn west on Ogden Street to the stop sign at Greely St. and the sign to the Nature Trails. Turn left, go one block and turn right on Viesca to the parking lot on the left before the swimming pool.

Saturday, January 8, 8:00 AM

Choke Canyon State Park

Meet leader Mike Creese (479-5552) at the entrance to the Calliham Unit. Go south on I-37 to the Three Rivers exit. Obey the speed limit in Three Rivers. In town, turn west on FM 72 and go past the South Shore Unit another 10 miles. Driving time is about 2 hours. Bring lunch, water and \$4 entry fee or park pass.

Saturday-Monday, January 15-17

Big Bend National Park

Meet Bob Doe at 12:00 noon at the Big Bend National Park Visitor Center, approximately 65 miles south of Marathon. During the weekend, we will bird the desert and riparian areas along the river and higher elevation woodlands, looking for western birds such as Brewer's and Sage Sparrows, Crissal and Sage Thrashers, Western Screech-Owl, and Gray Flycatcher. Vagrants

or unusual wintering birds are always a possibility. This is primarily a camping trip; nearest lodging is at Marathon (possibly Study Butte-Terlingua). If planning on lodging, make reservations early. Please contact Bob (830-438-8399) if you plan to go.

Saturday, January 22, 8:00 AM

Haggard Ranch

Meet Metha Haggard (622-388) on her ranch in SW Bexar County. The ranch has varied habitat, brush, trees and open areas. Go south on IH-35. About 4 miles south of Loop 1604, take Exit 137 (Shepherd Road) off of IH-35. Go left over interstate, take another left onto the northbound access road. Drive 0.5 mile to the gate (#16290), where there is a cattleguard, then turn left at the fork to reach the house. Bring water and lunch. Wear sturdy walking shoes.

Sunday, January 23, 8:00 AM

Mission Espada Aqueduct Park

Meet leaders Andy and Wendy Garcia (344-4162) in the parking lot of the park. Take South Loop 410 from IH-37 to exit 44. Turn right at Espada Road and drive to the end (north) of Espada Road into the small parking lot. Looking for winter birds: hawks, sparrows, towhees, snipe etc. Note that this is a new location for SAAS field trip.

Tuesday, January 25, 8:00 AM

Crescent Bend Nature Park

Meet leader Sandi Wheeler (659-8168) in the parking lot of the Crescent Bend Nature 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.

Saturday, January 29

Vanishing Texas River Cruise, Burnet

Join SAAS on the Ultimate Eagle Cruise, part of the Vanishing Texas River Cruise boat tours, located near Burnet, Texas, about 2.5 hours from San Antonio. The four-hour boat trip begins at 9 AM. Lunch is included in the price of \$37.18/person. Please make your check payable to Mariann Golden (650-4312) and mail it to her at 4119 Hunters Glen, SATX 78218 by Jan. 14. We need 20 people to attend to receive the group rate. Directions: Go North on 281 to reach Burnet, about 2 hours away. From Burnet, drive 3 miles west on Hwy 29 to FM 2341. Turn right (north) for 14 miles to cruise entrance. Arrive about 30 minutes before departure. Map and more info about the cruise can be found on www.vtrc.com or you can call 1-800-474-8374.

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR: FEBRUARY

Saturday, February 5, 8:00 AM

Canyon Lake

Meet leader Bob Doe (830-438-8399) at the Valero station at the intersection of US 281 and Farm Road 306 in northern Comal County. During the morning, we will look for loons and Greater Scaup on the lake, and wintering sparrows in the lakeside brush. In the afternoon, we will bird the trails along the river below the dam. Plan on a picnic lunch at Little Jacobs Creek Park (provisions available in Canyon City).

Sunday, February 6, 8:00 AM

New Braunfels

Meet leader Bob Doe (830-438-8399) at the intersection of Farm Road 758 and Dauer Ranch Road. This trip is probably not appropriate for children or brand new birders, as we will be spending a lot of time searching for rare, local, and hard to see birds, which include longspurs, cranes, and sparrows. Lunch in New Braunfels. Directions: From San Antonio, take IH-35 north to New Braunfels. Exit at State Highway 46. Take 46 east (toward Seguin) to Clear Springs. Turn left on Farm Road 758. Dauer Ranch will be the first road on your right (1+ miles).

Wednesday, February 9, 8:00 AM

Medina River Natural Area

Meet leader Helen Rejzek (679-7437) at this park on Highway 16. The park is on the left, 4.2 miles south of Loop 410, just before the Medina River. Bring drinking water.

Saturday, February 12, 8:00 AM

SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (342-2073) at the Judson Nature Trails. From Broadway at the 5900 block, turn west on Ogden Street to the stop sign at Greely St. and the sign to the Nature Trails. Turn left, go one block and turn right on Viesca to the parking lot on the left before the swimming pool.

Wednesday, February 16, 8:00 AM

Aquarena Springs, San Marcos

Meet leader Sandi Wheeler (659-8168 or Wheels5683@satx.rr.com) at the Aquarena Springs main parking lot, which is about 50 miles from downtown San Antonio. Take IH-37 north to Exit 206, TX 82 Loop/Aquarena Springs Drive. Merge onto the IH-35 frontage road north. Turn left at Aquarena Springs Drive, go 0.9 mile, and Aquarena Springs will be on your right.

Friday-Sunday, February 18-20, 8:00 AM

East Texas

Contact Sandi Wheeler wheels5683@satx.rr.com (632-2812) to sign up for the East Texas field trip with Steve Gross. Participants will be limited to 12. Cost is \$35 per person.

Saturday, February 26, 8:00 AM

Stone Oak Park

Meet leader Mariann Golden (650-4312) in the parking lot of Stone Oak Park, located at 20395 Stone Oak Parkway. Take US 281 N and turn left at Stone Oak Parkway. Go about 1.2 miles and make a right.

Sunday, February 27, 8:00 AM

Dobie Ranch, Live Oak County

Join Sandi Wheeler at Jimmy Jackson's Dobie Ranch in Live Oak County. From San Antonio, go south on IH-37. After the intersection of US 59 & IH-37, continue south on IH-37 for about 7.5 miles and take Hwy 3024 and continue south (it runs parallel to IH-37) for 1.8 miles to arrive at Swinney Switch. Turn right (west) at Swinney Switch on FM 534 and go 3.3 miles to arrive at the Dinero Store, where we will meet Jimmy and follow him to the ranch. Please RSVP to Sandi at 659-8168 or wheels5683@satx.rr.com so we can let Jimmy know how many we are expecting.

Mitchell Lake

Monthly Birding Tours

No reservation necessary

Every 2nd Sunday: 8:00 AM (Jan. 9, Feb. 13)

Every 2nd Tuesday: 8:00 AM (Jan. 11, Feb. 8)

Every 3rd Sunday: 8:00 AM (Jan. 16, Feb. 20)

Bird count/survey: Every 4th Saturday:

8:00 AM (Jan. 22, Feb. 26)

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

\$3 for members

For more information: mlac@audubon.org

or (210) 628-1639

Bexar Audubon Meeting: Bluebird Boxes

Thursday, January 20, 6:30 PM, at TriPoint, 3233 N. St. Mary's at Hwy 281. "Providing Habitat for Bluebirds & Other Small Cavity Nesting Birds," presented by LeAnn Sharp, Texas Bluebird Society. For details, call Patty at 210-837-0577.

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON MONTHLY MEETINGS

BIRDING IN THE LAND OF OZ! WITH BOB DOE

January 6 • Thursday • 7:00 PM
Lion's Field • 2809 Broadway

Bob Doe will present photos of his recent trip to Australia. Bob has been an active birder in the San Antonio area, and SAAS member for 15+ years. He has been SAAS president twice and served as field trip chairman for several years. He has arranged and led trips with SAAS members to Oregon/Washington, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, and recently along the US/Canadian border, from Michigan to Washington.

BIRDS OF THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY PRESENTED BY BILL LINDEMANN

February 3 • Thursday • 7:00 PM
Lion's Field • 2809 Broadway

The Texas Hill Country and the Edwards Plateau cover only 17 percent of the state; however, the region has 40 percent of the flora and 67 percent of the bird species found in Texas.

This rich diversity can be attributed to a number of factors, including overlap of eastern and western bird species' ranges, northward expansion of southern species, and excellent numbers of wintering sparrows, hawks and waterfowl.

Variation in topography, rainfall, temperatures and geology also contribute to the diversity of both plants and birds. The Powerpoint presentation will feature many of the exceptional birdlife of the region and will include species normally found in the Trans-Pecos, East Texas, lower Rio Grande Valley and South Texas and North Texas.

Bill Lindemann retired to Fredericksburg, TX in 1994 and is a passionate promoter of the historical and natural preservation in the Texas Hill Country through education, outreach and example.

Welcome New SAAS Members!

Cynthia Dillard & Family----210-698-2407
28134 Royal Ascot Dr.
Fair Oaks Ranch, TX 78015-4652

Gilberto Garza-----210-865-2598
12226 Bois Darc
San Antonio, TX 78245-3305

Vince & Kitty Zamora-----210-651-9319
9915 Trophy Oaks Dr.
Garden Ridge, TX 78266-2813

OTHER BIRDING EVENTS

Birding Guide Training • SABG • Saturday • 1/8 • 9 AM-2 PM

San Antonio Botanical Garden (SABG) is offering Bird Walk Training to teach volunteers to guide walks here on the third Saturdays. Bring lunch and SABG will provide drinks and dessert to share. RSVP to Cindy Sims cindy.sims@sanantonio.gov by 1/3/11.

Beginning Bird Walk • Saturday • 1/15, 2/19 • SA Botanical Garden • 9-10:30 AM

Meet at the Carriage House for this monthly walk. Free for SA Botanical Garden members; non-members \$7/adult. 555 Funston. 207-3250.

Cibolo Nature Center Programs

CNC in Boerne offers many birding programs

throughout January and February. Dates, times and descriptions are available at <http://cibolo.org>

Winter Birds of Government Canyon • Sunday • 1/16 • 8:30 AM-1 PM

Join Steve Hawkins on a walk to discover the wintering birds of this awesome natural area. Limited to 15, RSVP between Dec. 16 and Jan. 15 by email to reservations@friendsofsgc.org. Include name, age and guardian if under 18, e-mail address and telephone number for each reservation. (210) 688-9055, ext. 291. More info at www.friendsofsgc.org

Kids Birding 101 • Mitchell Lake • Saturday • 1/29 • 9-11 AM

Learn bird ID, habitat, and how to use binoculars. We'll take a hike to practice what we've learned. Free but space is limited; RSVP is required. For more information or to RSVP, email mlac@audubon.org

Lapland Longspurs (Continued from p. 1)

across the Midwest and Great Lakes region to the Atlantic Coast, and also south to the Gulf Coast from East Texas to Mississippi. A separate part of the winter range encompasses the West Coast from British Columbia south to Southern California.

Probably arising in part from their abundance, several major mortality events affecting Lapland Longspurs on the winter range have been observed, most associated with winter storms. As many as 5 million were estimated to have perished in one blizzard event across the Northern Plains and an estimated 10,000 individuals were found dead along Interstate 35 in North Texas following a snowstorm. Thousands at a time have also been found dead after overnight collision or disorientation events associated with bright lights and tall structures during inclement weather.



Female Lapland Longspur
by Ansgar Walk

A much greater threat to the species, however, may be a changing climate. Although extinction seems unlikely, massive reductions in numbers resulting from a widespread loss of tundra habitat may be imminent.

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

OTHER EVENTS

Bare Branches • Eisenhower Park • Saturday • 1/8 • 10 AM-Noon

Come join us for a walk with city forester, Michael Nentwich, to explore our trees in winter. *Free tree to the first 20 families!* Call 372-9124 or email peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov for reservations and information. Suggested donation: \$3.00 per individual/\$5.00 per family. Eisenhower Park, Harris (Mass Pavilion), 19399 NW Military Hwy.

Nature Walk • Eisenhower Park • Saturday • 2/5 • 10 AM-Noon

Join Bill Woller, who grew up chasing cows in this area, for a brisk walk in the park. Reservations are suggested; walks occasionally change.

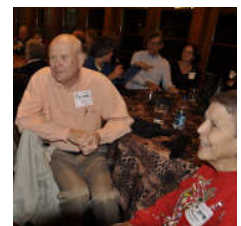
To make reservations, call 372-9124 or email peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov. Limited to 15 people. Meet near the restrooms. A donation of \$2 per person, max \$6/family is suggested. 19399 NW Military Hwy.

Fossils 101 • Eisenhower Park • Saturday • 2/12 • 10 AM-Noon

Augie Frkuska, local educator/amateur paleontologist, and some of his "fossil geek" friends will introduce you to the fine fossils that abound in our ground. Call 372-9124 or email peggy.spring@sanantonio.gov for reservations and information. Suggested donation: \$3.00 per individual/\$5.00 per family. Harris (Mass Pavilion), 19399 NW Military Hwy.

SA AUDUBON HOLDS HOLIDAY DINNER AT SAN ANTONIO ZOO

Patsy and Tom Inglet made arrangements for a wonderful fajita dinner at the SA Zoo on December 2, to which Bexar Audubon members were also invited. The evening featured a very interesting bird and wildlife photo presentation by professional photographer Rolf Nussbaumer. Below are a few photos of the event, taken by SAAS member Dick Fortenberry.



ON THE WING IN JANUARY

by Sheridan Coffey

January is a great month to get out and bird off the five pounds (or more) that I gain over the holidays. There is little migration going on, but it's a good month to look at winter residents and perhaps find a rare wanderer. The weather can vary from needing a heavy coat to wearing short sleeves, which adds variety.

This is a great time to find a rare gull. Almost everyone calls them sea gulls when they are children, so we tend to associate these birds with the coast. We are close enough to do some gulling on the coast, but the local lakes are a great place to find some great birds. Since moving to San Antonio, I have seen Glaucous Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull, along with the usual Ring-billed and Bonaparte's. Even if there are no rarities, taking time to pick through the seemingly endless variations in Ring-billed Gulls will aid you in learning molt patterns and ages. (A certain amount of masochism is necessary.)



Duck numbers are usually good in January. The best part of ducks is they sit still, as long as you are careful to approach without flushing them. A few rarities that might show up in January are Eurasian Wigeon, scoters and Long-tailed Duck. A bird that has been documented in Texas one time, but almost certainly turns up more often, is the Eurasian form of Green-winged Teal. This is considered a separate species in Europe, and almost certainly will be split in the future. It is easy to overlook in a flock, as it is very similar, but if you check, it is definitely possible to pick one out if present. A good field guide will show the differences.

Sparrows are another group that you can work on. Working country roads and creek sides, you should be able to "pish up" 10 or 11 species, more if you are lucky. Just remember that structure is every bit as important as field marks. A "stick pin" on the chest can mean Song Sparrow, but it also can mean Vesper, Savannah and several other species. Look at the tail length, the way the tail moves, facial pattern, size, habitat and behavior. If you start feeling overwhelmed, just remember it could be worse. You could be doing gulls!

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.

Judson Nature Trails, 11/13

Led by Georgina Schwartz. Species of note: Golden-fronted and Downy Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, House Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet.

Mud Creek Park, 11/16

Led by Bill Swartjes. Message #16977. Species observed: 21. Species of note: Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Western Scrub-Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Meadowlark.

Warbler Woods, 11/20

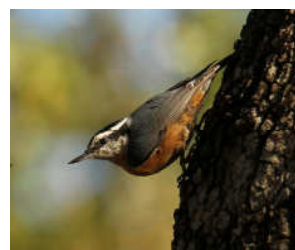
Hosted by Don and Susan Schaezler, reported by Sandi Wheeler. Message #17000. Species observed: 37. Species of note: Northern Harrier, Greater Yellowlegs, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, Spotted Towhee, several sparrow species.

Crescent Bend Nature Park, 11/28

Led by Sandi Wheeler. Message #17037. Species observed: 52. Species of note: Merlin, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Pine Warbler, Spotted Towhee, several sparrow species, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch.

Castroville Regional Park, 12/4

Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #17063. Species observed: 46. Species of note: Green Kingfisher, Vermillion Flycatcher, Winter Wren, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow.



Red-breasted Nuthatch
by Lora Render

Angel of Goliad Trail, 12/5

Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #17070. Species observed: 47. Species of note: Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hybrid Black-crested/ Tufted Titmouse, Eurasian Collared-Doves,

(Continued on p. 7)

Golden-crowned Kinglets, White-throated Sparrows, and Long-billed Thrasher.

O.P. Schnabel Park, 12/7

Led by Helen Rejzek. Message #17097. Species observed 28. Species of note: Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Long-billed Thrasher.

Judson Nature Trails, 12/11

Led by Keith Bartels. Message #17121. Species observed: 34. Species of note: Five woodpecker species, including a Northern Flicker and seven Downy Woodpeckers; six Golden-crowned Kinglets and two bright yellow adult Pine Warblers.

SAAS-Y NOTES

Recognizing Outgoing Board Members

Many thanks to Barbara Kyse, Tim Katafias, and Mariann Golden for the time, energy, and effort they devoted to SAAS during the past few years serving on the SAAS Board of Directors.



SAAS Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday • January 4 • 6:30 PM

Meet at the Carlyle Condominium, 7887 Broadway. Info: Dahn Windhorn, naturenut7@hotmail.com or 382-5968.

February Board Meeting: TBA

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON NEWS

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

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San Antonio Audubon Society

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



SAAS Membership Renewal

For those of you still receiving your SAAS newsletter by U.S. Postal Service, the first line of your mailing label includes your membership type and the date your current membership expires. This is the only "notice" you will receive; if your membership expires, we must stop sending you the newsletter. Therefore, please pay attention to the expiry data on the label and renew when appropriate. We want you to continue participating in and supporting SAAS efforts.

If you receive the SAAS newsletter by email, you will receive a membership renewal notice by email at the appropriate time. We hope you enjoy receiving the newsletter in color, and thank you for helping us contain costs by avoiding the printing and mailing of your newsletter.

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SAN ANTONIO, TX 78209-5710

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

San Antonio Audubon Society Membership/Renewal Form

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Please be sure your e-mail address is correct.

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

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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:

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or Online at: <www.saaudubon.org/membership.html>

or E-mail <members@saaudubon.org>

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

SAAS MONTHLY MEETINGS (See p. 4)
Jan. 6: Australia Birds • Feb. 3: Hill Country Birds
7:00 PM • LION'S FIELD • 2809 BROADWAY