

American Redstarts

By Mike Scully

At the time of this writing (early April), the glorious annual spring migration of songbirds through our area is picking up. Every spring I keep a special eye out for one of my favorite migrants, the American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*). These beautiful warblers flutter actively through the foliage, tail spread, wings drooped, older males clad in black and orange, females and second year males in shades of gray, olive green and yellow.



For years, the American Redstart was the only species remaining in the genus *Setophaga*, until a comprehensive genetic analysis of the Family *Parulidae* resulted in this genus being grouped with more than 32 species formerly placed in the genus *Dendroica* and *Wilsonia*. The name *Setophaga* was applied to the whole by virtue of seniority. Though now grouped in a large genus, the American Redstart remains an outlier, possessing proportionately

large wings, a long tail, and prominent rictal bristles at the base of the relatively wide flat beak, all adaptations to a flycatching mode of foraging. Relatively heavy thigh musculature and long central front toes are apparently adaptations to springing into the air after flying insects.

The foraging strategy of redstarts differs from that of typical flycatchers. Redstarts employ a more warbler-like maneuver, actively moving through the foliage, making typically short sallies after flying insect prey, and opportunistically gleaning insects from twigs and leaves while hovering or perched. The wings are frequently drooped and the colorful tail spread wide in order to flush insect prey.

Among birds in general it is common for sometimes minor differences in coloration to exist, depending on the age of the bird, with full adult plumage not achieved until one or more years of age. Typically, older birds with full adult plumage, especially males, are better able to attract mates. Among most of our warblers, these age-related differences in plumage can be subtle; however, the American Redstart stands out again in that males hatched the previous year resemble females in coloration. The distinctive black and orange adult plumage of the adult males is not attained until a late summer molt.

The American Redstart is to some degree a habitat generalist, occupying a variety of mature and older second growth deciduous and mixed woodlands across most of the Eastern United States north of Florida from East Texas north to Newfoundland, and west across the North Woods of Canada. Breeding populations also occur in the Black Hills, the Front Range and parts of the Northern Plains, Rocky Mountains and Pacific Northwest.

The winter range is similarly broad, encompassing coastal Southern California south to the Baja, and the Caribbean and Southern Mexico south to Northern South America. On the winter range, too, the species is able to occupy a variety of wooded habitats. Some individual redstarts even becoming associated with human outhouses and garbage heaps, drawn by the hordes of flies. Due to this wide range and degree of ecological tolerance, the American Redstart remains one of our more common warblers.

Older males arrive on the breeding grounds first and rapidly establish territories. Females and younger males arrive perhaps a week later. Typical of our warblers, the female alone constructs the cup-shaped nest and incubates the eggs, while both sexes feeding the young. What may be unusual, though, is the degree of extra-pair copulation that has been observed. On occasion, all of the young in a given nest are sired by adjacent males. This phenomenon is more common among females whose mates occupy the more marginal breeding territories.

American Redstarts remain territorial in nature all year round. In any given area on the winter range, mature males occupy the best and most productive habitats. Females and first year males are competitively relegated to less desirable locations. Studies have indicated that those individuals occupying the most favorable winter habitats, primarily mature males, are able to return to the breeding grounds earlier in the spring, may suffer less mortality during migration and arrive in better physical condition than those individuals that wintered in less favorable habitats. These effects on mortality that arise from the quality of the habitat occupied on the winter range may account for an apparent shortage of females relative to the number of males sometimes observed on the breeding grounds.

American Redstart photo by Dan Pancamo

Contact Mike Scully: Mike.scully@nisd.net

Thursday, May 6, 2021 @ 7:00 PM
SAAS Monthly Meeting | Zoom

Tips and Techniques for Shorebird Identification

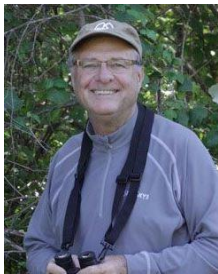
Speaker: Glenn Olsen | GOBirding Ecotours



Shorebirds can be tricky to identify for a number of reasons. Most of them molt twice a year and they can look very different in breeding plumage than non-breeding plumage. If you don't encounter shorebirds very often, your ability to remember specific characteristics may be a bit shaky. Glenn Olsen of GOBirding Ecotours teaches bird identification, gardening for birds and butterflies, and nature-related classes through Rice University's Continuing Studies Department, Houston Audubon, Katy Prairie Conservancy, and the Texas Master Naturalist program. His enlightening presentation will help you distinguish Sanderlings from Dunlins and Piping Plovers from Snowy Plovers.

About Glenn Olsen

Glenn served on the Houston Audubon Board as Vice President of Education. He co-founded the Wildscapes Workshop through the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) where he served as president of the Houston Chapter and the State NPSOT. His articles on birds, plants, butterflies, gardening, and landscaping have appeared in the Houston Chronicle, The Naturalist, The Native Plant Society Newsletter, and various gardening newsletters.



He has led field trips or presented programs for the Texas Ornithological Society, Houston Audubon, Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, Galveston Featherfest, Rockport Hummer/Bird Festival, Houston Arboretum, the Native Plant Society and others. Glenn has led trips to the exotic locales of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Amazon Rainforest, Honduras, Costa Rica and the hottest birding locations in the United States.

To Join the Zoom Meeting

Click [here](#) to access Zoom May 6 @ 7 PM.

Meeting ID: 848 1920 5546

Passcode: 116379

To dial in: 1 (346) 248-7799

Photo credits: Least Sandpiper and Snowy Plover by Lora Render.



Thursday, June 3, 2021 @ 7:00 PM
SAAS Monthly Meeting | Zoom

Shrikes

Speaker: Susan Heath | Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Sue Heath, Director of Conservation at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, will be the guest speaker for our June 3 presentation about shrikes.

About Susan Heath

Sue is a native Texan who returned to the state in 2007 after being transplanted to Virginia for 24 years. She received a Master's in Biology from George Mason University for her work on wintering waterfowl on the Northern Virginia Piedmont and a Ph.D. from the same institution in the spring of 2008. Her dissertation involved the effects of pesticides on birds that nest in agriculture in the north central states. At GCBO, she coordinates all conservation research including American Oystercatcher Stewardship, Beach Nesting Birds, Non-breeding shorebirds, Motus Tower Network, Eastern Willet Migration, and the Smith Point Hawk Watch.

To Join the Zoom Meeting:

Click [here](#) to access Zoom on June 3 @ 7 PM.

Meeting ID: 870 3347 2908

Passcode: 599314

To dial in: 1 (346) 248-7799

Photo credit: [Loggerhead Shrike](#) by Terry Ross

Warbler Woods Field Trip May 4



Our first field trip in over a year is scheduled for Tuesday, May 4 at 8:00 AM at Warbler Woods, Don and Susan Schaezler's 124-acre bird sanctuary. The trip is limited to 10 participants and social distancing and masks are required. RSVP to Sandi Wheeler at wheels5683@gmail.com.

Directions to Warbler Woods in Cibolo, Texas:

Take IH 35 toward Austin

Exit # 178, turn right FM 1103

Go to next light and turn right on Old Wiederstein Rd

Go past school and then to large green mailbox on left

19349 Old Wiederstein Rd.

Click [here](#) for map

Welcome New SAAS Members!

Denise Dahm
Priscilla Lopez
Derrick Mims
Rush Roberts
Gretel Sanchez

Send Us Your Bird Photos and Stories for SAAS Facebook Page

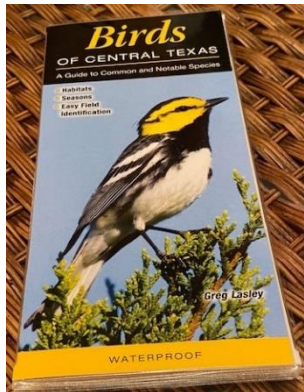
SAAS would love to share your bird photos and stories on our Facebook page. Whether you have been birding in your backyard, around the county, or places beyond, we are eager to hear from you. Share your story on our [Facebook page](#) by sending info and photos to Christine at cbsturnbull@hotmail.com.

SAAS-Y NOTES

Remembrances

We sadly note the passing of two friends of the birding community.

Greg Lasley, an accomplished photographer, birder, and dragonfly enthusiast, passed away January 30, 2021, at his home in Dripping Springs following a lengthy illness and hospitalization. Greg, 71, was a prolific poster to iNaturalist, uploading almost 40,000 observations of 4,462 species and identifying species in 454,529 photos for



others. Greg was guest speaker at our annual banquet in 2018. His photo of a Golden-cheeked Warbler is on the cover of the laminated Birds of Central Texas brochure available in area grocery stores. Greg's photos of birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects have appeared in dozens of books, magazines, and field guides. Our condolences to his family and friends; the naturalist community will miss him greatly. Read tributes to Greg in [this iNat blog post](#).



Dennis Shepler, an artist who created the illustration of a Yellow-throated Warbler for the Texas Ornithological Society T-shirt, passed away in Houston on February 18 at the age of 74.



Can Recycling

Thanks to those who have contributed aluminum cans for recycling, Georgina Schwartz made \$3.85 for SAAS at the recycling facility.

2020 Christmas Bird Count Results

We included a link to the 7-page report of our 2020 Christmas Bird Count results in a recent email to members, but if you would like a more condensed version listing just the 127 species seen and the names of the 33 CBC participants, you'll find the document [here](#).

City Nature Challenge 2021



Join Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Master Naturalists, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, and many others in a fun challenge to see which city can document the most species during April 30 - May 3. It is easy to participate by joining an event or making observations on your own using the iNaturalist app. With the iNaturalist app, you just take a picture of a plant or animal, and the community will help identify which species it is. Any observation in the greater metropolitan area of San Antonio will count during the four day challenge. You can participate by exploring the life in your backyard, in your local park, or on a field trip with your local naturalist group. You can also help with IDs for other people's observations to increase our species count, come to a bioblitz, or even hold your own event. Click [here](#) to join the project through iNaturalist so your observations will be included.

Recent Early Migrant Sightings in San Antonio

Spring is in the air, and with it the excitement of another migration season. Although late April through mid May is typically the most active time of year for migrating songbirds in our region, several San Antonio birders have already been party to some noteworthy avian visitors. The usual hotspots such as the San Antonio Botanical Garden have hosted a nice collection of early spring migrants, but so have the yards of SAAS members. If you aren't already receiving daily rare bird alerts from eBird, you can click [here](#) to sign up for them by county and an email will be sent to your inbox every day a rare species is reported. Some of our local birders have provided photos for us to feature in this newsletter.

Row #1: Derrick Mims: Female Hooded Warbler at SA Botanical Garden on April 8 and Palm Warbler at Friesenhahn Park on April 11.

Row #2: Dina Perry: Male Hooded Warbler at SA Botanical Garden on April 4 and Louisiana Waterthrush at James Park on March 15.

Row #3: Lora Reynolds: Blue-winged Warbler, backyard in NC San Antonio on April 13. **Dina Perry:** Franklin's Gull, Timberwood Park on April 13.

Row #4: Lila Theis: Painted Bunting (L) and Blue Grosbeak (R), backyard in NW San Antonio on April 16.

Row #5: Christian Fernandez: Wood Thrush at SA Botanical Garden on April 13. And a photo from **Alan Kuentz** for comic relief: Black-crested Titmouse bathing in bird water feature at Hardberger Park, Blanco Rd. on April 9.





Click [here](https://ebird.org/globalbigday) for information about Global Big Day on May 8, 2021.

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center



The Mitchell Lake Audubon Center (MLAC) is open with normal operating hours (Friday - Sunday, 7am - 3pm). Please review the new COVID-19 guidelines at our [Plan Your Visit webpage](#). Purchase your tickets today [HERE](#).

Please note, due to a long-term SAWS wetland project, the majority of ponds are dry at this time. However, the lake has a considerable amount of water. [Click Here](#) for additional information. [Check eBird for up-to-date bird sightings](#). Programs for May and June were not available at the time of this newsletter's publication, but you can check the [Events Page](#) on the MLAC website for updates.

MLAC is also seeking volunteers and trip leaders for the guided bird tours on weekends. Call 210/628-1639 or email mlac@audubon.org if interested in helping out.

SAAS Membership

The SAAS newsletter is sent by email only to all members who have provided an email address. You will also receive a membership renewal notice by email. We no longer mail a printed membership directory to everyone, but a PDF copy is available by email from the membership secretary at saasforbirds@gmail.com

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San Antonio Audubon Society Membership/Renewal Form

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How did you hear about us? _____

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(s): Individual (\$20 per year)
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We need and appreciate your financial support. Please indicate additional donations below.

Donation: Special Projects Fund \$ _____
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