



Volume 28, Issue 2

December 2009 / January 2010

BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY

# Penfeathers



Earth Share  
OF TEXAS

## Big Country Audubon Christmas Party

Saturday, December 5th

6:00 PM at the ...501 Ben Richey Drive (in the old Lueders Train Depot).

*Bring your favorite finger food and join us for an evening of fellowship. If you wish to participate in a gift exchange, bring a nature-related gift with a value of \$10 or less*

### Upcoming events

**Christmas Party, Sat., December 5, 2009.** Details above.

**Christmas Bird Count, Sat., Jan 2, 2010,** See story on Page 3

**Field Trip: Sat., Jan. 23, 2010,** Waste Water Treatment Plant. Depart at 8:00 AM. from McDonald's, 1201 N. Judge Ely. Come early if you would like to buy breakfast. Target birds: Black-neck Stilt, Wilson's Phalarope, and sandpipers. Bring water and snacks.

**Field Trip: Sat., Feb. 27, 2010,** Colorado City State Park. Depart at 7:00 AM. from Whataburger, 4241 South 1st St. Come early if you would like to buy breakfast. Target birds: Bushtits, Verdin, and Pyrrhuloxia. Bring water and snacks. We will plan to eat lunch in Colorado City.

**Field Trip: Sat., Mar. 20, 2010,** Abilene birding. Meet at Will Hair Park at 7:30 AM. Go by Diamond Lake and then to Lake Kirby. Target birds: Wilson's Snipe, Harris's Sparrow, and Eared Grebe. Bring water and snacks.

**Field Trip: To Ft. Davis sometime in April.** This will be an overnight trip with details to be worked out later. Look forward to this good trip!

### TIPS FOR A GREEN CHRISTMAS...

**Look for locally made gifts** - many gifts in today's marketplace come from halfway around the world, and the impact of transportation contributes significantly to greenhouse emissions and global warming. Local craft fairs and artisan shops are a good source for gifts that come without the added costs of transportation.

• **choose gifts made from recycled sources** - many individuals and small businesses have developed great products using recycled materials. Supporting these businesses helps reduce the waste stream while promoting the concept of making best use of available materials.

• **give 'battery-free' gifts** - According to the EPA, about 40% of all battery sales occur during the holiday season. Discarded batteries are an environmental hazard. Even rechargeable batteries find their way into the waste stream eventually.

## Species Profile: Rufous Hummingbird--*Selasphorus rufus*

Having the longest bird migration on earth when measured in body lengths, the Rufous Hummingbird is number one. For some Rufous Hummingbirds, their migratory range is from Alaska in Summer to the Yucatan down in Mexico in Winter. These hummers fly as much as 12,000 miles during a round-trip migration, alone. Contrary to legend, they do not migrate on the backs of geese.

Before migration begins, hummers need to eat large amounts of insects and nectar to fatten up for the flight. Each bird will gain 25-40% of their body weight before they start migration. If a larger bird gained this much, they would not be able to get off the ground. Because of these long distances traveled, the Rufous must break long migrations into segments with refueling rest stops en route. These stops average one week in length. They often times return to the same feeder year after year. Which brings up the question, how long do they live. The longest known age is 8 years 11 months.

These tiny birds, 3 3/4" long and weighing 0.2 oz. for the female and 0.1 oz. for the male, with wing span 4.3 in., with 52-62 wing beats per second are robust, incredible fliers. Like all hummers, Rufous' can hover or fly in any direction swiftly and with ease. The Rufous excels in its flying abilities even above other hummers. They are feisty little critters, constantly battling others for possession of a branch, feeder or flower. Their flying skills and pugnacious disposition enable them to chase off much larger birds. They will even challenge humans.

The shiny feathers of the adult male gorget are a beautiful iridescent reddish bronze color which they "flash" when challenged, challenging, or courting. He has a non-iridescent rufous crown, tail, and sides. His back may be rufous, green, or some of each, with a white breast. The adult female has a green back and crown, white breast, streaked throat, rufous sides and base of tail feathers, with white tips on outer tail feathers.

What a beautiful, feisty, remarkable flying jewel the Rufous Hummingbird is!

Katharine Hampton from google-rufous hummingbird migration-search



A sub-adult male Rufous Hummingbird showed up at a northeast Abilene residence in September 2005. Although not rare for September, it stayed until January 7, 2006, establishing a new Taylor County record. See picture on our web site, [bigcountryaudubon.org](http://bigcountryaudubon.org) under Pictures/Rare Birds/Rufous Hummingbird/#s 19,20,21.

On October 29, 2009, a more mature male appeared at a different northeast Abilene residence's feeder. It stayed for 6 days and was seen at close range and positively identified by Kathy Hampton, Bill Hughes, Dan Symonds, and Charlene Wheeler. It was last seen on November 3, 2009. What excitement it brought for those days!

### Board Meeting Notes (11/10/09):

- ◆ Hotline phone has been moved Dan's home.
- ◆ A digital projector has been purchased with money received in memory of Laura Packer.
- ◆ Our webpage remains at [www.bigcountryaudubon.org](http://www.bigcountryaudubon.org) and Dan is working on a FaceBook page for BCAS.
- ◆ Joan expressed thanks to the members who helped with the Abilene State Park 75th Anniversary event. She also reminded members to take aluminum cans to Rescue the Animals for recycling.
- ◆ Joan has once again arranged for BCAS to take part in the Hendrick Hospice event at the Mall of Abilene. It will be on 12/06. Can Joan if you can help.
- ◆ A schedule for filling the feeders at Laura's Blind was set.
- ◆ The date of the BCAS Christmas Party was moved to Saturday, 12/05, and the location was moved to the Ben Richey Boy's Ranch facility.
- ◆ Dan is working on the Abilene area CBC.
- ◆ Attendees: Dan Symonds, Joan Howard, June Estes, Kathy Hampton, Bera Johnson, John English, Carolyn Wiggins, Harry Dahns

Reported by Carolyn Wiggins, Secretary



## Bird Tales

...bad company in the Utley woods tonight. Your local passerines have a language, it is clear and obvious for those that take the time to learn it.

I can listen to the Carolina Wrens, the Titmice and Blue Jays etc. thru my open doors and know what is going on outside. I know when they are just in-fighting over sunflower seed, being territorial, just messing around or when there is a cat, fox and most importantly a snake nearby....Nothing sets the birds off like a snake....I mean nothing. They will even stay up late to make sure they draw my attention to one. Around 4:40 this afternoon, when the woods were already in shadow and I was napping on the couch, I heard thru my open door such a hissy-fit by an assortment of passerines over a snake I had to go find the target of their concerns. It took me almost 30 minutes to do so but still the wrens, titmice, cardinals etc. were all there goading me on, goading me to rid the place of this animal. I knew within a couple of feet where it was as the titmice kept pointing to it, but I just could not see it in the dense brush. It was getting darker to the point that I had to squint to see, yet the titmice refused to hit the big roost snags until I did something. Finally just as I and the birds were about to give up I found the little rat snake about 4' up in a Yaupon. It was already getting cool so it was a bit sluggish so I captured it easily. The very moment I did so all of the birds fell silent, including the then seriously whining, crepuscular cardinals. I tell you they knew the matter had been dealt with :-)

By Brush Freeman of Port O'Connor, TX. As posted to TexBrids

## Christmas Bird Count—A Great Tradition in its 110th Year

From December 14th, 2009--January 5, 2010, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will be taking part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations, the annual Christmas Bird Count. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists will go out on an annual mission to count the birds in their area.

The Big Country Audubon Society's CBC:

As part of the National Audubon society's 110th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the Big Country Audubon CBC will be conducted on the 2nd of January. Our Count Circle is a designated 15-mile diameter circle whose farthest reaches are EN 10th south to just beyond CR 150, and from the west side of Dyess AFB east to Callahan County.

Participants will meet with their team captains at "their set time and location" to begin counting in their assigned area. All will gather at the end of the count for dinner at the Cotton Patch, 3302 S. Clack, 691-0509 at 5:30 P.M. Tally count results will be turned in at this time. Compilers for this year's count are Dan Symonds assisted by Jay Packer.

If you have participated in the past, or are interested in joining us for the first time on this count, or if you would like to come on your very first CBC, please send an email to [bigcountryaudubon@live.com](mailto:bigcountryaudubon@live.com) so that Dan can set up teams. If you consider yourself a beginner or intermediate birder and think you are not "good enough" to participate, THINK AGAIN! Not only are you better than you think, CBC needs all skill levels of people to participate. For one thing, the more eyes looking for the birds, the more birds get counted. Good spotters are definitely welcome! Plus, all teams need a recorder to write down the sightings during the day. A good recorder is worth his or her weight in warblers. Beginning birders will be placed in a counting group that includes at least one experienced birder. If you are interested in participating, please contact the web site listed above. Let's have fun on BCAS--CBC!

- Katharine Hampton

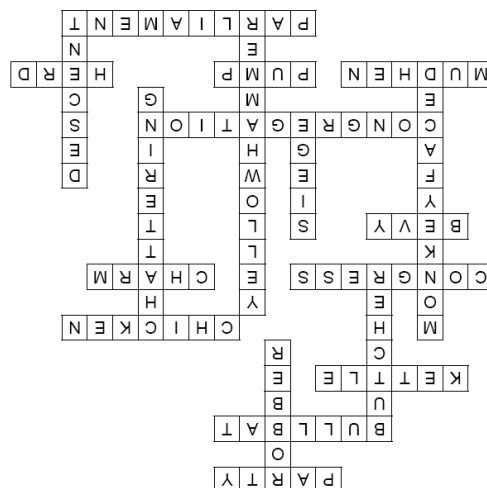
## FEEDER PATROL. . .Here's the

schedule for those who have volunteered to clean and fill the feeders at the bird blind at Abilene State Park. If you want to help, contact one of the board members.

Nov 28—Dan  
Dec 5—Bera  
Dec 9—Dan  
Dec 12—John  
Dec 19—Kathy  
Dec 26—Carolyn



Don't peek!! Solution to crossword puzzle, page 5



# Bird Tracks.....

## "Wild Goose Chase"--October 31, 2009

On a chilly, calm Saturday morning 11 birders gathered at Towne Crier. Most had breakfast before traveling to Winchester Lake in Haskell County to view the geese as they came to and landed on the lake. Since the lake is on private property, we birded from a gravel road near by. This made a good place to set Joe's telescope and the club scope between the three vehicles. We tried to encourage the geese to land on the near shore of the lake, but they refused to cooperate. At least we had "optics" to help to see them better.

Birders were Kim Berry, Linda Collins, Kathy Hampton, Bill Hughes, Bera Johnson, Larry Millar, Edna Ross, Dan Symonds, Bonnie and Joe Thompson, and Charlene Wheeler. Some were rather new birders. Everyone enjoyed sharing "optics" and pointing out pictures in guide books to identify birds and help some to get several life birds.

The most common bird was the White-fronted Goose. There were hundreds of them. They are very graceful and show beautiful colors as they circle the water with wings and tail spread. Then they put down their yellow landing gear and oh so gently settle on the water without a splash!

Two coyotes and a deer attracted much attention. Larry Millar was delighted to find a nanny goat's head and horns and one ram's horn to take back to school for his art students to draw. Kathy learned when she opened her trunk to take these out that afternoon why Larry did not want to take these items back to Abilene in the van in which he was riding. Oh well, some live and learn and some just live. Spray and air, and air, and air helped a lot!

Following is the bird list from the Winchester Lake Field Trip, October 31, 2009:

Gr White-fronted Goose - 5000	Greater Yellowlegs - 3
Snow Goose - 80	Lesser Yellowlegs - 1
Ross's Goose - 2	Least Sandpiper - 50
Cackling Goose - 4	Long-billed Dowitcher - 40
Canada Goose - 1000	Franklin's Gull - 1
American Wigeon - 20	Ring-billed Gull - 1
Blue-winged Teal - 10	Herring Gull (American) - 3
Northern Shoveler - 20	Mourning Dove - 25
Northern Pintail - 6	Loggerhead Shrike - 2
Green-winged Teal - 50	Horned Lark - 10
Lesser Scaup - 2	Northern Mockingbird - 10
Great Blue Heron - 2	European Starling - 50
Northern Harrier - 3	Lark Bunting - 10
Red-tailed Hawk - 4	Savannah Sparrow - 5
Sandhill Crane - 10	Western Meadowlark - 20
Black-bellied Plover - 1	Great-tailed Grackle - 100
American Avocet - 2	
Spotted Sandpiper - 2	

## Lake O.H.Ivie Field Trip

Six birders were welcomed at 7:00 AM on Saturday, November 11, 2009 with a gorgeous red sunrise complete with some clouds, Venus and a narrow sliver of the moon. Leaves showed the range of colors--light green, dark green, yellow, orange, red, brown and all the shades between. I do not recall ever seeing the mesquite leaves turn such a rich yellow color. Sumacs were their well known bright red.

Temperatures were pleasant, winds calm. Had there been no birds, it would have been a great day to be outdoors.

The group listed 64 species and well more than 3,000 birds. Each birder got at least one "life bird." Tom Dolan recorded Short-eared Owl and Rock Wren. Toni Dolan recorded Lark Bunting and American Pipit. Joe and Bonnie Thompson listed Lark Bunting and Franklin's Gull. Dan Symonds actually showed excitement over his new lifer, Crested Caracara.

(Way to go Dan!) Kathy Hampton did not even try to hide her rejoicing over an unexpected Short-eared Owl that, at mid-morning, took flight right by us as we searched for the Rock Wren we were hearing. Check the bird list for several other "really good" birds that we saw. All agreed that it was a great, fun day to be outside and bird! Birds are on the move. Be on the lookout!

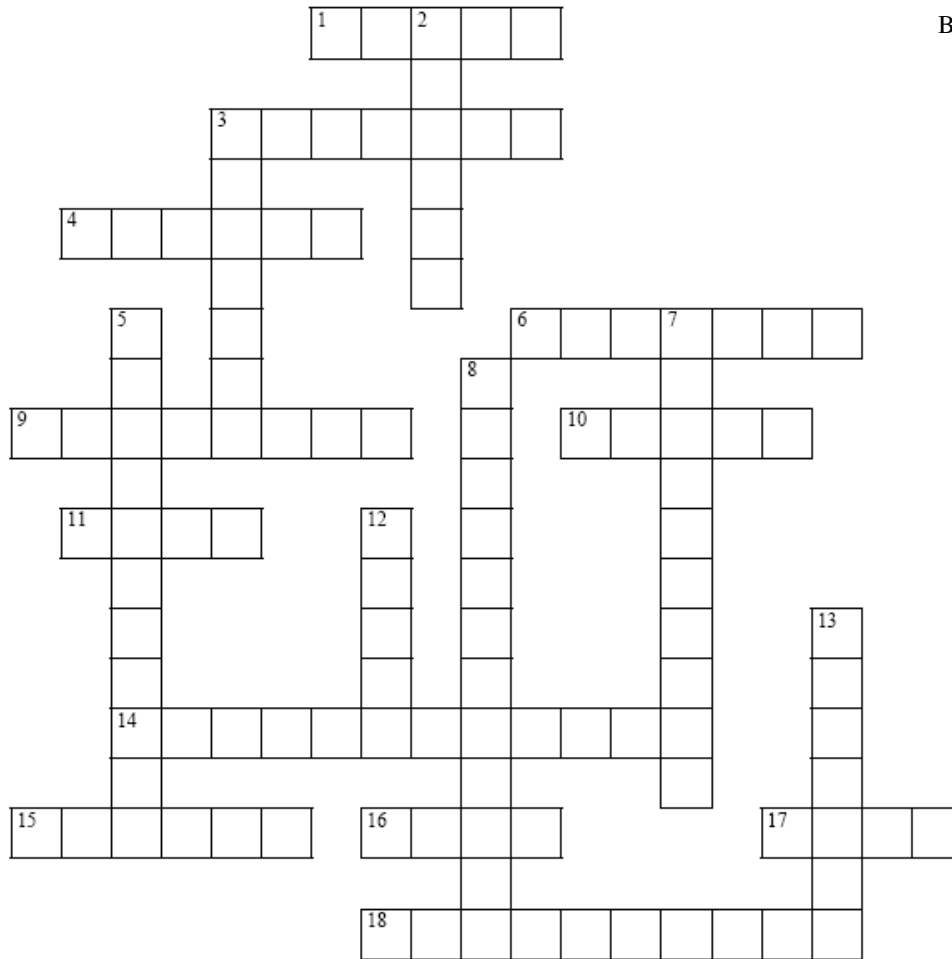
As many of you know, Dolores Owens and I have been working in Fort Worth since our employer relocated there. We've had little time to bird since most weekends we both return to Abilene. On Sunday, November 15th, we visited the Fort Worth Nature Center. The several thousand acres of wildlife preserve represent several distinct habitats, including tallgrass prairie, hardwood bottomlands, mesquite thicket, limestone escarpment, and more. We chose a trail and hiked for a while. While not rare for that area, Tufted Titmice were kind of a treat since we are so used to seeing Black-crested Titmice. Northern Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were seen. There were also lots of Yellow-rumped Warblers. There were ducks on the lake, but the lack of a scope limited ID of waterfowl. There's a visitor center with several interesting displays.

We hope to share this beautiful preserve with Big Country Audubon for a field trip. I have a feeling it will be a great place for spring migration!

Lorie Black

# FOLK OR GROUP NAMES FOR BIRDS

By Dolores Owens



## ACROSS

- 1 GROUP OF JAY
- 3 FOLK NAME COMMON NIGHTHAWK
- 4 GROUP OF RAPTORS
- 6 \_\_\_\_ HAWK FOLK NAME FOR RED-TAILED HAWK
- 9 GROUP OF RAVENS
- 10 GROUP OF FINCHES AND HUMMINGBIRDS
- 11 GROUP OF QUAIL
- 14 GROUP OF PLOVERS
- 15 FOLK NAME AMERICAN COOT
- 16 MARSH \_\_\_\_ FOLK NAME AMERICAN BITTERN
- 17 GROUP OF WRENS
- 18 GROUP OF OWLS

## DOWN

- 2 CAMP \_\_\_\_ FOLK NAME GRAY JAY
- 3 \_\_\_\_ BIRD FOLK NAME NORTHERN SHRIKE
- 5 \_\_\_\_ OWL FOLK NAME BARN OWL
- 7 GROUP OF STARLINGS
- 8 FOLK NAME NORTHERN FLICKER
- 12 GROUP OF BITTERNS AND HERONS
- 13 GROUP OF WOODPECKERS

Would you like to receive *Penfeathers* via email? Please email [lorie.black@suddenlink.net](mailto:lorie.black@suddenlink.net).

**Have you paid your dues yet? Our membership year began on September 1st.**



BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY

P O BOX 569

ABILENE, TX 79604

## BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY

President – Dan Symonds  
Vice-President – Larry Millar  
Treasurer – Kathy Hampton  
Secretary – Carolyn Wiggins  
Membership – Charline Wheeler  
Education – John English  
Field Trips – June Estes  
Publicity – Esta Wigginton  
Recycling – Joan Howard  
Member-at-large – Bera Johnson  
Newsletter Editor: Lorie Black

Big Country Audubon Society meetings are held at Rose Park Senior Activity Center on the first Thursday of October, November, December, February, March and April. Meetings are free and open to the public.

Hotline: 325-691-8981

Web Page: [www.bigcountryaudubon.org](http://www.bigcountryaudubon.org)



### Big Country Audubon Society

#### Chapter Membership Application

Please enroll me as a member of the Big Country Audubon Society

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

#### Individual membership:

One year—\$20.00

Prorated Dues:

If you join in Sep, Oct, Nov

Dec, Jan, Feb

\$15.00

Mar, Apr, May

\$10.00

Jun, Jul, Aug

\$ 5.00

#### Family Membership:

One year—\$30.00

Dec, Jan, Feb

\$22.50

If you join in Sep, Oct, Nov

Mar, Apr, May

\$15.00

Jun, Jul, Aug

\$ 7.50

#### Student Membership:

One year—\$10.00

Dec, Jan, Feb

\$ 7.50

If you join in Sep, Oct, Nov

Mar, Apr, May

\$ 5.00

Jun, Jul, Aug

\$ 2.50

All dues renew on September 1st

Mail to: Big Country Audubon Society, P O Box 569, Abilene, TX 79604



## Member Photos



During his photo trip to Yellowstone and the Tetons John English captured this amazing image of a Buffalo taking a dust bath as a coyote slips cautiously by.



Say's Phoebe was one of the many species found on the BCAS field trip to Lake Ivie. Photo by Joe Thompson



A Gray Jay was lured to John's hat with peanuts...Or was that his "regular" birding hat in Yellowstone?



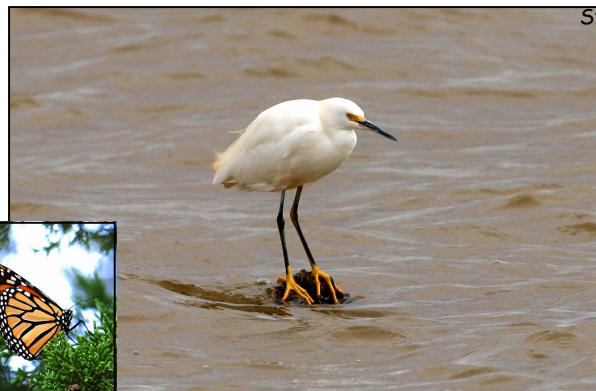
John English photographed this Ruby-throated Hummingbird in his backyard.



Randy Packer accepts a plaque designating the bird blind at Abilene State Park as *Laura's Blind*.



Monarchs at Cedar Gap Farm. Photo by Joe Thompson



*Oh, them golden slippers...* This photo Joe Thompson took at Kirby Lake illustrates one of the best field marks on a Snowy Egret.

If you have photos to share, email to Lorie Black at

[lorie.black@suddenlink.net](mailto:lorie.black@suddenlink.net)

