



BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Penfeathers

Volume 28, Issue 4
April / May 2010

Coming Events

Thursday, April 1, 2010 - Membership meeting 7:00pm at the Rose Park Senior Center. Park Administrator Okie Okerstrom or another staff member will treat us to a presentation on the importance of Abilene State Park to the surrounding communities.

Fri & Sat, April 9- 10, 2010 - Field trip to Ft. Hood. This will be an overnight trip, please **RSVP by April 5th** in order to reserve a room and know how many HIGH CLEARANCE vehicles will be needed. If you have a high clearance vehicle (4X4 is good but not required) and will be able bring it please RSVP with that info. We will expect to depart by 5pm on the 9th. Look forward to this good trip! Target birds will be the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. Please call the hotline too.

Thursday, April 15, 2010 - Audubon Lecture Series - Dr. Tom Lee, Biology Professor at ACU will give a presentation at 6pm at the Grace Museum as the Audubon Exhibit continues.

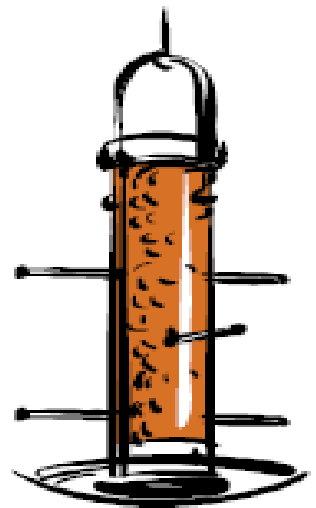
Thursday, May 6, 2010 - Our annual Spring Fling will be at the Cedar Gap Farms Birdhouse at 6:30pm. Come earlier if you wish to bird. This will be a potluck, so sign-up for a couple dishes at the April 1st meeting. BCAS will provide brisket. Target bird will be the Painted Bunting.

Laura's Blind 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.

Mar. 13 - English
Mar. 20-Wiggins
Mar.27-Millar
Apr.3- Hampton
Apr.10-Thompson
Apr.17- Johnson
Apr.24- Symonds;
May 1-Wiggins

Kathy will make a sign-up sheet for a summer feeder schedule.



Do you want to receive your newsletter by email? Email us at...

BigCountryAudubon@live.com

Longspur Invasion at Joe's House

Joe Thompson

Please refer to page 504 of your Sibley Guide to the Birds for all of the scientific information about the McCown's Longspur and the Chestnut-collared Longspur. Please refer to me, Dan Symonds, Kathy Hampton, Kim Berry and June and Dr. John Estes for how much fun it was putting these guys on our life list.

As many of you know, I live on 10 acres of mowed Coastal Bermuda grass in the middle of hundreds of acres of surrounding fields of cotton and wheat. This winter that was apparently the right combination for flocks of Longspurs to enjoy spending a few months at Joe's house.

I started noticing large flocks of hundreds of small birds flying low over the surrounding fields and occasionally landing around my house back in December. I really did not have a clue what they were so one day I spent a few hours out in the freezing wind trying to identify the little critters. After a few hours of being completely frustrated by their blazing speed and ability to completely disappear in the grass and fields one lone bird stopped for a drink out of a puddle not 20 feet away. Providence was smiling on me as this one turned out to be an adult male Chestnut-collared Longspur complete with chestnut collar, black and white striped head and nearly totally black breast and belly. You have to love it when they look like they do in the book.

I have to say that identifying these birds with binoculars and or eyes must be something done on their breeding grounds. I finally compared identifying these birds on the wing to standing on third base with a pair of binoculars and determining whether the fastball was a Wilson or a Spaulding. Not too easy.

After many frozen hours in the attempt, I finally realized that cheating was the answer. I got out my 400 MM telephoto lens, set the ISO to 1000, pre set the focus at about the right distance, positioned my self with the sun at my back and blindly took pictures of these guys as they whizzed past or erupted from the grass and fields. I assume that some of those shots will accompany this article. I sent out a few pictures to local club members and sharp eyed Dan Symonds noticed that there were two species represented. The male Chestnut-collared had the black bellies and the tail was mostly white with a black triangle insert while the McCown's had much less black on the breast and the tail was mostly white with a black T. After these photographic revelations, it became a little easier to spot these features on the wing, but not much.

As of late March, the last of the Longspurs seem to have moved along; but, the memory of the veritable invasion will last a lifetime. The best estimates of numbers at the peak were 600 birds with varying distribution from 2 to 1 Chestnut-collared to 2 to 1 McCowns. I tripped a lever with my report to The Great Backyard Bird Count as they will not accept a report of over 200 Chestnut-collared Longspurs without documentation. I sent them the pictures and the numbers were accepted.

I can only hope that this was not a one time occurrence. Believe it or not, it is hardly even spring and now I can't wait for next winter. Birding is a strange and wonderful hobby that leads us to some strange and wonderful places with strange and wonderful friends. Thanks to everyone that helped me identify these birds and came out to help enjoy them.

McCown' Longspurs photographed by Joe Thompson



Chestnut-collared Longspurs photographed by Joe Thompson



Species Spotlight...

Great Kiskadee

Pitangus sulphuratus



The Great Kiskadee is a large (8.8 in. long, weight 2.2 oz.) tyrant flycatcher. It breeds in open woodlands with some tall trees, including cultivation and around human habitation, from southern Texas and Mexico to Uruguay and central Argentina, and on to Trinidad.

An adult Great Kiskadee has a stout black bill. The head is black with a strong white stripe above the eye and with a white chin, and with a concealed yellow crown stripe. The bird "reveals" this yellow crown stripe to look like a crest when challenging or when courting. The wings, back and tail are brown with strong rufous fringes. Its flashy bright yellow belly and shrill, exuberant call (kis-ter-DEE) along with the head and body colors make the Great Kiskadee easy to identify.

The nest, built by both sexes, usually in a tree or on a telephone pole, is a shaggy ball of twigs with a carefully constructed smooth round side entrance and smooth nest cup. The typical clutch is two to three cream eggs lightly blotched with reddish brown. They are incubated by the female. Both parents feed the babies.

They eat insects caught in flight, small rodents, fruit and berries, dog food, and they fish for and eat fish.

from Wikipedia--Great Kiskadee

Abilene Sightings

On March 16, 2010, a Great Kiskadee was sighted on Cedar Creek in Will Hair Park in northeast Abilene. This species normally breeds and lives in the far south Rio Grande Valley, Mexico, and points south. One individual (or individuals) seems to prefer the Cedar Creek area of Abilene.

Several questions remain unanswered. Is this the same bird that was here several times in the past including in September and December of 2006; in April of 2008 and 2009, and again this year on March 16? Or, are there different birds? Or, does the bird reside here all year? We have only seen one bird at a time. We have heard it call numerous times. We need your help to answer these questions. This bird is easy to I.D. Please report any sightings with date, location, (picture if possible), your name and phone number to bigcountryaudubon@live.com or call a BCAS member. We will appreciate your help in answering these questions. Thanks.

Katharine Hampton

ALERT: Be on the lookout for the TRUE sign that spring is here-- a sighting of The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. How exciting that will be!

2010 GBBC Results

Great Backyard Bird Count February 12-15, 2010

Abilene's Results : 37 Species 29 Checklists

Species [taxonomic]	# of Birds	# of Checklists
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	1
American Kestrel	2	2
Ring-billed Gull	16	1
Rock Pigeon	70	6
Eurasian Collared-Dove	16	8
White-winged Dove	516	14
Mourning Dove	72	21
Inca Dove	27	7
Greater Roadrunner	1	1
Blue Jay	28	10
American Crow	1	1
Carolina Chickadee	2	1
Tufted Titmouse	3	2
Carolina Wren	1	1
Eastern Bluebird	1	1
American Robin	22	7
Northern Mockingbird	14	8
Brown Thrasher	2	1
European Starling	104	8
Cedar Waxwing	16	2
Yellow-rumped Warbler	2	2
Spotted Towhee	1	1
Lincoln's Sparrow	3	3
White-throated Sparrow	1	1
White-crowned Sparrow	8	2
Dark-eyed Junco	28	3
Northern Cardinal	20	11
Pyrrhuloxia	1	1
Western Meadowlark	4	1
Common Grackle	138	5
Great-tailed Grackle	173	13
Purple Finch	1	1
House Finch	138	14
Pine Siskin	90	8
Lesser Goldfinch	29	4
American Goldfinch	227	14
House Sparrow	236	22

Most Frequently Reported Birds in the US

Rank	Species	Checklists
1	Northern Cardinal	53448
2	Dark-eyed Junco	48643
3	Mourning Dove	45491
4	Downy Woodpecker	39629
5	Blue Jay	39438
6	American Goldfinch	38153
7	Tufted Titmouse	36073
8	House Finch	33039
9	American Crow	30621
10	Black-capped Chickadee	29772

Most Numerous Birds in US

Rank	Species	Individuals
1	American Robin	1850082
2	Canada Goose	748356
3	Snow Goose	534219
4	American Crow	526820
5	European Starling	513211
6	American Goldfinch	429155
7	Dark-eyed Junco	373856
8	Common Grackle	373479
9	Red-winged Blackbird	291185
10	Mourning Dove	289775

For more information go to the following website: <http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/top10>

YOUNG BIRDERS MEETING

On March 6th the initial out- reach for a " Young Birders Group" was held at Johnston Elementary School.

The purpose for this initial meeting was to determine the level of interest these students might have. The schools Garden Club was a logical place to start as the children are already interested in Nature. Fourty five(45) students were in attendance plus their teacher Jean Dotson.

Present were **Joy Harsh** Education Director from the Zoo, **Stephanie Martinez**, ACU Biology student and **Larry Millar** of Big Country Audubon.

Joy did a general bird talk then showed a female Kestrel from the zoo. The students were very interested in this live bird. Next Larry presented the idea of a " Young Birders Group" and introduced Stephanie Martinez. She spoke about what it takes to be a successful birder and her interest in birds. Following this was a Q & A session and the kids asked lots of good questions. This was a very bright and enthusiastic group.

Their teacher Jean Dotson passed out information sheets to the students and the meeting was adjourned.

Larry received six info sheets before the students left. This was a good sign that the kids wanted to be involved. The meeting was a great success!

The next step is to set a first field trip date and round up binoculars and field guides.

Larry Millar

FROG SOUNDS

is a book written by Brian "Fox" Ellis about modern haiku. You remember haiku is a traditional Japanese form of poetry that has enjoyed popularity in America for more than 100 years.

The idea is to write about one scene or one event using nature to inspire, to stir a feeling or thought. Rhyming is not required. Haiku is brief; often, but not always, three lines of 5-7-5 syllables. Below are two examples:

(1)

blanket of snow everywhere
tree, red focal point
singing his "chew, chew, chew" song

(2)

popcorn trees, light and airy
fluffy white, rose, pink
soon some will add mint flavor

Try writing your own haiku.

Submit it to bigcountryaudubon@live.com
or mail it to: Big Country Audubon Society,
P.O. Box 569, Abilene, Tx 79604.

We will include the best in the June-July Penfeathers.

Katharine Hampton

Board Meeting Minutes, March 9, 2010

The meeting was brought to order by Vice President, Larry Millar, in the absence of President, Dan Symonds. Members present were Larry Millar, John English, Joan Howard, Charline Wheeler, Kathy Hampton, & Carolyn Wiggins. Minutes of the last meeting were summarized & approved.

We are receiving a small amount of money at Laura's Blind.

Thank-you notes were received for donations to the Grace Museum for the John James Audubon exhibit and Ben Richey Boys Ranch for use of the new building for our Christmas party.

Laura's Blind Feeder Schedule was set. Kathy will make a sign-up sheet for a summer feeder schedule. Members will be asked to volunteer to help with the feeders over the summer.

Larry Millar presented information on an up-coming youth birding program.

Larry has discussed placing Big Country Audubon Society labels on area store bird seed bags.

Submitted by Carolyn Wiggins





BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON
SOCIETY
PO BOX 5694

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



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