



Volume 30 Issue 1  
 Dec./Jan/ 2011/2012

# Upcoming Events...



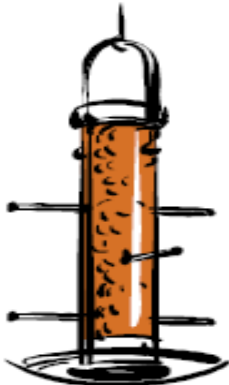
<u>Thursday, December 1, 2011-</u>	BCAS Christmas Party, Ben Richie Boys Ranch Depot
<u>Saturday, December 17, 2011 -</u>	Big Country Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count.
<u>Friday, January 13, 2012-</u>	Program by John English " Birds of the Big Country" , Abilene Woman's Club.
<u>Wednesday, April 18th, 2012-</u>	Program by John English " Birds of the Big Country" , 58th Study Club of Abilene
<u>January 10, 2012-</u>	Board Meeting, 6:30 PM, Mezamiz
<u>January 14, 2012-</u>	Field Trip to Lake Stamford, Meet at What-a-Burger on West South 1st @ 7:00 AM
<u>February 2, 2012-</u>	Regular meeting, Rose Park 7:00 PM
<u>February 18, 2012-</u>	Field Trip, TBA
<u>March 1, 2012-</u>	Regular Meeting Rose Park 7:00 PM
<u>March 13, 2012-</u>	Board Meeting, 6:30 PM, Mezamiz
<u>March 17, 2012-</u>	Field Trip, TBA
<u>April 5, 2012-</u>	Regular Meeting, 7:00 PM, Rose Park
<u>April 21, 2012-</u>	Field Trip, TBA
<u>May 3, 2012-</u>	Regular Meeting Covered Dish Dinner, 6:00 PM, TBA
<u>May 19, 2012-</u>	Field Trip, TBA



## Laura's Blind Feeder Patrol

Nov. 19 – Wiggins	Dec.31 – Randy
Nov. 26 – OPEN	Jan.7 – Randy
Dec. 3 – Joe	Jan. 14 – Wiggins
Dec.10 – John	Jan. 24 – Larry
Dec.17 – Wiggins	Jan. 28 – Randy
Dec.24 – OPEN	

We fill the feeder and maintain the bird blind at the Abilene State Park. Wish to volunteer, sign up at any regular meeting. You may wish to accompany someone first.





## *Christmas Party*

Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

6:00 PM

Ben Richie Boys Ranch Depot

The annual Big Country Audubon Society Christmas Party will be held on Thursday evening, December 1, 2011, at 6:00 PM in the Ben Richey Boys Ranch Depot.

Please bring some finger food that you think everyone would enjoy. As in the past, there will be a gift exchange and anyone that would like to participate should bring a gift valued at \$10.00 or less. The gift exchange is done by assigning numbers to the gifts and pulling numbers out of a hat. You never know what you might get.

The board members will be serving as your hosts and will provide utensils drinks and ice. Please plan to come and enjoy some good food a good time and share a few "bird" stories.

# Christmas Bird Count

## A Great Tradition in its 112<sup>th</sup> Year

From December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 till January 5<sup>th</sup> 2012, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout America will participate in a tradition that spans generations, the annual Christmas Bird Count. Birders, families, students, scientists and new comers armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists will go out on the annual mission to count the birds in their area.

## The Big Country Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count

As part of the National Audubon society's 112<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), The Big Country CBC will be conducted on Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Our count circle is a designated 15-mile diameter circle whose farthest reaches are EN 10<sup>th</sup> 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 PM. Tally count results will be turned in at this time. Compilers for this year's count are Larry Millar assisted by Jay Packer.

If you have participated in the past, or are interested in joining us for the first time on this count, please send an e-mail to [bigcountryaudubon@live.com](mailto:bigcountryaudubon@live.com) so that Larry 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 probably much better than you think, the CBC needs folks of every skill level to participate. Most importantly, the more eyes we have looking for the birds, the more birds we will count. Good spotters are definitely welcome! Plus, all teams will need a "recorder" to record sightings and keep up with the count during the day. A good recorder is "worth their weight in Warblers". Beginning birders will always be placed in a group with more experienced birders. If you are interested in participating, please contact the web site listed above. Please join in the fun of the BCAS-CBC!!

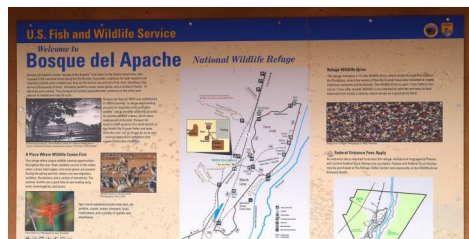
Katherine Hampton (by Joe Thompson)



# Bosque Del Apache Wildlife Refuge

The Bosque Del Apache Wildlife Refuge is located south of Socorro, New Mexico. "Bosque Del Apache" is Spanish for "woods of the Apache", referring to a time when Spanish explorers were surprised by Apache Indians hiding out in the Cottonwood groves near the Rio Grande in what is today central New Mexico. Today the "Bosque Del Apache" is the name given to this large wildlife refuge that is also a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Land Management Research and Demonstration Area. Many tools such as moist soil management, fire management and riparian and wetland restoration and management techniques are tested in this arid environment.

To most of us, The Bosque is known for its large overwintering populations of Sandhill Cranes, Geese and Ducks as well as its diverse population of all types of wildlife. Many of the published photographs of Cranes and Geese that you see in National Wildlife magazines were taken here as a result of the favorable access to these large flocks of birds.

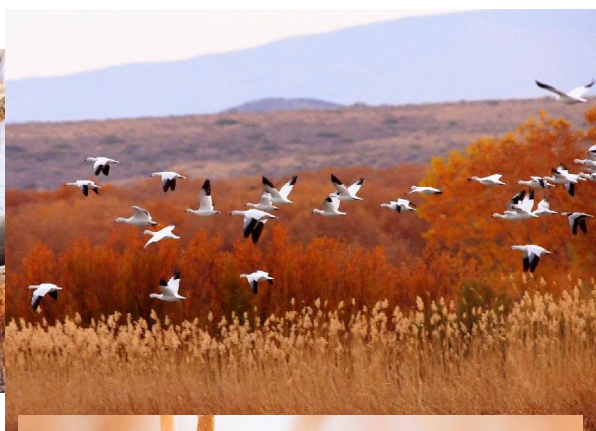




I am sure that no camera shop in the world can come close to housing the number and variety of large telephoto lenses that amass on the flight deck just before the birds come in and then back out the next morning. It sounded like Marilyn Monroe had just stepped out on to the red carpet at the debut of "Some Like it Hot". Shutters were snapping and motor drives whirring as the air filled with these majestic birds. Of course my shutter was snapping away as well and you will see some of the shots taken from the flight deck in accompanying this article.

There is a 13 mile driving loop through the refuge that opens up to a wide variety of ponds, groves, meadows and grasslands that make for any number of wildlife viewing and photographic opportunities. I was able to see Sandhill Cranes, Snow Geese, Ross' Geese, Pintails, Shovelers, Mallards, Greater Yellowlegs, Coot, Northern Harriers, Red Tailed Hawks, Kestrel, Northern Shrike, Great Horned Owl, White Crowned Sparrow, Says Phoebe, Lesser Goldfinch, Chihuahuan and Common Ravens as well as others that I have surely neglected to recall.

The Bosque Del Apache Wildlife refuge is about a 9 hour drive from Abilene and it is worth the effort. When you go, please don't forget your camera.



*Lesser Goldfinch*





This year, the 24<sup>th</sup> annual "Festival of The Cranes" is set for November 15-20<sup>th</sup>. The plans include over 100 lectures, workshops, tours, hikes and hands on activities ranging from Sandhill Crane Behavior to special photography tours. Although this publication may be a tad late for participation in this year's event, the Bosque represents a "top flight" birding destination throughout the winter especially but truly any time of year.

I had the opportunity to visit Bosque Del Apache for the first time on November 11-12<sup>th</sup> this year. My visit was relatively quick as it was just a short extension of a business trip planned in the area. Even though there were few hours available for my stay I was able to fit in what I learned was a "must see" at the Bosque. The fly in-fly out of the overwintering Sandhill Cranes, Snow and Canada Geese is a daily occurrence in one of the large main impoundments. Very large flocks of these as well as other waterfowl fly into this body of water in mass every evening to spend the night in the relative protection the water affords. When the sun rises the next morning, the birds fly out in massive groups as they head off to their respective feeding grounds. There is an observing platform on the northwest end of the impoundment that is called "the flight deck". This deck is situated to give you a great vantage point for viewing and photographing the twice daily spectacle of the fly in-fly out.



*Say's Phoebe*



*Juvenile Red Tail Hawk*



*Northern Flicker*



*All Pictures by Joe Thompson*





## *The Call of the Sandhill Crane*



Jack London wrote, "The Call of The Wild", but birders in North America and extreme NE Siberia tilt their heads and search the sky when they hear the deep, rolling trumpet and rattling "call of the Sandhill Crane". The flexing lines of flying Cranes that outline the invisible thermals has a hypnotizing effect on birders who strain to see where the birds touchdown. Most years these long lines can be seen moving south over the Big Country.

The Sandhill Crane is a 47" tall, gray bird with a 79" wing spans that frequent open grasslands, meadows, and wetlands. They are often seen feeding in marshes and grain fields. They congregate in huge numbers, sometimes as many as 450,000 in migration. The adult male's average weight is 10 pounds. He has a long neck that is kept straight in flight, has legs that trail back in flight, gray body, red forehead, white cheek, and tufted feathers over the rump.

They do not breed until they are 2-7 years old. It can live up to 20 years. Mated pairs of Cranes have a dramatic courtship dance: dipping, bowing, leaping, and flapping while giving wild bugling cries. They engage in "unison calling". The Cranes stand close together, calling in a synchronized and complex duet. The female makes two calls for every single call of the male. Mated pairs stay together year around, and migrate south as a group with their offspring. One can see thousands of Sandhill Cranes at "Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge" where the annual "Festival of the Cranes" is held in November.... a good place to hear "The Call of the Sandhill Crane".

Katharine Hampton

Credits: Sibley, David Allen. The Birders Year, Calendar: 2005. November. Web sites: All About Birds.  
Wikipedia

## *Bird Conservation At Home*

An article by this title was written by Bob Johns, the Director of Public Relations for American Bird Conservancy. It is published in the Nov/Dec issue of Bird Watchers Digest and is recommended reading. This is a summary of that article:

"It would be great if all bird watchers implemented all of these solutions; choose shade grown coffee, keep their cats indoors, reduced their pesticide use and treated their windows to reduce collisions. But if all bird watchers simply did one of them, we would still save lives of millions of birds each year. So the next time you fill up your feeders and birdbaths and you have that notion of wanting to do more, give one of these tips a try. You'll be making a difference."

Submitted by Katherine Hampton



## *The Big Year* and the Little Bird



2011 was an interesting year for birding aficionados in the Abilene area. On October 14<sup>th</sup> a new movie called, "The Big Year" debuted across the US and here in Abilene. This movie is a comedy adaptation of the book by the same name written by Mark Obmascik in 2004. The movie which starred Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson plus an incredible cast of supporting actors promised to be a slapstick comedy with this lineup of comedy prodigies but proved to be a fairly accurate portrayal of the pitfalls and pratfalls of those members of the birding community that choose to pursue "a big year".

As you all probably know, a Big Year is defined as collecting a list of the most species of birds you can sight and identify in North America within one calendar year. This quest can be a casual personal endeavor as a challenge to yourself all the way up to massive obsession with the intent of identifying the most species ever seen within these parameters in recorded history. The Big Year movie is about three guys, Stu Preissler, Brad Harris and Kenny Bostick who, unbeknownst to each other, set out to break the record in 1998.

I really loved the movie as it turned out show a dazzling number of birds in some of the most beautiful country in North America. Having just been to High Island, in eastern Texas this spring, it was fun to see this trio traverse the same steps and recreate an experience that I and many of us may have also shared. I am still stupefied that this movie ever got produced and released. I consider "The Big Year" to be a gift to the birding community and the world at large as it spends tons of cash to capture the spirit of birding and the extremes some birders compulsively experience in the quest for birds. In the end a stunning 745 different species were identified in a result unlikely to ever be bested.

This quest played out in much smaller but rather enigmatic way right here in Abilene this summer. As most of us know The Big Country Audubon Society as it exists today is in no small part due to the tireless effort of Laura Packer over a number of years. We and her family are still doing our best to adjust to losing her in 2009. Her legacy looms large in Abilene through all of those that she affected with her enthusiasm for birding. Not the least of these legacies is the continued efforts of her husband Randy Packer in service to The Big Country Audubon Society and her son Jay Packer who through his years of exposure to the hobby as well as formal education has become our local "guru" of bird identification.

Against this historical backdrop, the events that played out this summer were all the more exciting and fitting. Enter the appearance of the Green Violetear Hummingbird.

This summer while Jay was visiting his dad and engaging in casual conversation a bright Hummingbird caught Randy's attention. Although this sight was not that unusual as the garden outside the kitchen window had been lovingly planted and crafted by Lara Packer to attract hummingbirds this bird seemed different. "Oh my gosh!" Jay exclaimed as his trained eye immediately eliminated the common Black Chinned and occasional Ruby Throated Hummingbird from the list of possibilities. This was a rare sighting of a Green Violetear which is more commonly a Mexican, Central and South American species. Although there are occasional spotty sightings of this bird in Texas, to have one in your own yard is a rare treat indeed.

After Jay and Randy relished in the sight of the bird working through their flowerbed, Jay did his duty and reported the sighting on the North American Rare Bird Alert system as well as sending out an e-mail to our local club members. Although there were several visitors from far and wide to Randy's garden over the next day or so, the most notable was John Vanderpoel

John Vanderpoel was working on a "Big Year" when the news of the Green Violetear sighting in Abilene came across his computer screen. A Denver Colorado resident and the creator of "The Advanced Birding Video Series with John Dunn" John had just returned home from a few frustrating near misses of other rare birds in Arizona. Undaunted John called Randy to confirm that the bird was still present and booked his flight. Indeed when John showed up the bird cooperated, posed for a few pictures and became the 664<sup>th</sup> bird species on his quest for his own personal best, big year.

Many members of the Big Country Audubon Society were also lucky enough to run over to see the Green Violetear. I was also able to respond to the "Bat Signal" in time to gather my gear and head over the Randy's place to see and photograph this incredibly bird which made number 405 on my "life list".

It just seemed so fitting that these two events coincided in Abilene this year. To me it all really added up to another "thank you" due to Laura Packer for the planting of her garden, both botanical and personal.





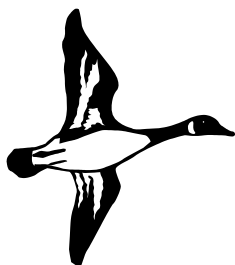
## BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY

<i>President</i>	Larry Millar
<i>Vice President</i>	Joe Thompson
<i>Treasurer</i>	Randy Packer
<i>Secretary</i>	Carolyn Wiggins
<i>Membership</i>	Randy Packer
<i>Education</i>	John English
<i>Field Trips</i>	Jay Packer
<i>Publicity</i>	Esta Wigginton
<i>Recycling</i>	Joan Howard
<i>Member-at-Large</i>	Bera Johnson
<i>Newsletter Editor</i>	Joe Thompson

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.

Hotline: 325-691-8981

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



Big Country Audubon Society

P.O. Box 569

Abilene, TX 79604

Big Country Audubon Society		
Chapter Membership Application		
Please enroll me as a member of the Big Country Audubon Society		
Name: _____		
Address: _____		
City _____	State _____	Zip _____
<b>Individual membership:</b>		
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
<b>Family Membership:</b>		
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
<b>Student Membership:</b>		
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		