



## Upcoming Events...



Volume 30 Issue 2

BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY

# Penfeathers

### March 31, 2012-

Field trip- to San Angelo lead by expert San Angelo birder Bob Zeller.

### April 5, 2012-

Regular meeting at Rose Park Senior Center—our program will feature Ryan King from the Abilene Zoo with an update on their Attwater Prairie Chicken research.



### April 21, 2012-

Field Trip— Visit Susan Jones farm in Shackelford County—details to follow on website.

### May 3, 2012-

Regular Meeting at Hutto's Cedar Gap Farm, 6:00 PM. This is a covered dish dinner as well as our regular meeting. The group will purchase meat for the dinner and members will bring side dishes. Drinks will also be furnished.

### May 19, 2012-

Field Trip— Visit Luann Aday's ranch in Jones County to do a wildlife survey. Details to follow on Website.



## Laura's Blind Feeder Patrol

Mar. 17- Wiggins

April 21- John E

Mar. 24- Dan

April 28- Dan

Mar. 31- Kim

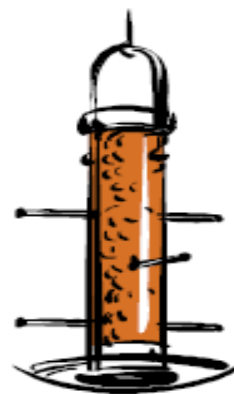
May 5- John E

April 7- Larry

May 12- Joe T

April 14- Bera

May 19- Dan



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.

FEB/MAR

## 2011 Christmas Bird Count

We had a great day for the annual Christmas Bird Count. I tried to get at least a decent picture of every species we saw yesterday but only managed discernible shots of less than half of them. Some species were fleeting glances i.e. the Greater Roadrunner and the Wild Turkey. Others were just hard to get shots and some I just forgot to try in the heat of birding. There are stories to go along with each shot but we will just suffice to show you a few pictures. I must say although that I am pretty proud of the Pyrrhuloxia shots, these are easily my best examples for that species.

I invited everyone that participated to put together a little word document for me that describes the highlight of the day for you. It looks like only Bera Johnson, Kathy Hampton, and I were so moved, so those musings are in this edition.

The pictures include a Red Fox Sparrow w/ Slate Colored Juncos, American Robins, Scrub Jay, Northern Flicker, Slate Colored Juncos, Cedar Waxwings, House Finch-American Goldfinch and Juncos, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, American Robin & Cedar Waxwings, Cardinal, House Finch, Spotted Towhee, Black Crested Titmouse, Mourning Dove, Titmouse and Goldfinch, Field Sparrow, Gadwall, Ladder-Backed Woodpecker, White Crowned Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, American Kestrel, Lark Bunting, Northern Mockingbird, Pyrrhuloxia, Eastern Phoebe, Eurasian Collared Dove and a Loggerhead Shrike.

So, my favorite moment of the day was getting the close shots of the beautiful male Pyrrhuloxia . Our group came on him in a weedy fence row. He was lovely so we fired up our I-Phones with a Pyrrhuloxia call and he was either smitten or mad because he nearly came in the Suburban. He finally came to rest on a fence across the street from us. The shoulder on that side was fairly wide so I did some illegal backwards u-turns to get positioned on the shoulder about 40 feet from our bird. I began slowly crawling up the shoulder getting closer and closer with the motto “nothing ventured, nothing gained” . Much to the amazement of all, the bird stayed put and we were all snapping shots from 8’-10’ away. As you all know, that never happens, but this time the big Suburban moving blind did the trick. As I stated previously, I was thrilled to get that series of shots.

*Joe Thompson*









## 2011 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT EXPERIENCES

### **Katharine Hampton**

Riding in the second seat as we birded, I could not always see the birds we were "enjoying." However, when Joe pulled along the side of the pavement with the Pyrrhuloxia almost in arms reach, what a view! That yellow bill with its deep curve and toothy edge, and the showy red setting off the crest and breast. Even the neutral gray was beautiful. We were so close that my little camera got a good shot.

*Truly a Nikon Moment!*

### **Bera Johnson**

The highlight of my day came as Dan, Dr. Tom Lee, and I were driving down Autumn Sage Road south of Dyess and west of 277 when we spotted a covey of quail alongside the road. We pulled up beside them and watched for several minutes as 10 mature Bob White Quail did their thing in, under, and around a thorny thicket.

One stayed in a sandy spot on the outside taking a dust bath, totally thwarted by the fact that onlookers were watching him bathe!! He flipped, flopped, rustled, and cavorted every which way in a sandy depression as our eyes gazed in wonder. After reading negative news about how their populations were low this year because of the heat, drought, and loss of habitat, I was extremely encouraged to see this healthy covey. They represent the future, and hopefully conditions will be such in 2012 that they will be able to raise young successfully and propagate the species in Taylor County.



**Abilene Christmas Bird Count Totals— Saturday, December 17, 2011**

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Greater White-fronted Goose        | 1   |
| Gadwall                            | 34  |
| American Wigeon                    | 11  |
| Mallard                            | 225 |
| Mallard (Domestic type)            | 3   |
| Blue-winged Teal                   | 4   |
| Northern Shoveler                  | 31  |
| Northern Pintail                   | 14  |
| Green-winged Teal                  | 4   |
| Canvasback                         | 9   |
| Redhead                            | 5   |
| Ring-necked Duck                   | 7   |
| Lesser Scaup                       | 16  |
| Bufflehead                         | 12  |
| Hooded Merganser                   | 2   |
| Ruddy Duck                         | 2   |
| duck sp.                           | 10  |
| Northern Bobwhite                  | 17  |
| Wild Turkey                        | 20  |
| Pied-billed Grebe                  | 15  |
| Horned Grebe                       | 1   |
| Eared Grebe                        | 7   |
| Neotropic Cormorant                | 2   |
| Double-crested Cormorant           | 103 |
| American White Pelican             | 55  |
| Great Blue Heron                   | 22  |
| Snowy Egret                        | 2   |
| Black Vulture                      | 5   |
| Northern Harrier                   | 14  |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk                 | 1   |
| Cooper's Hawk                      | 2   |
| Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk        | 3   |
| Red-shouldered Hawk                | 1   |
| Red-tailed Hawk                    | 19  |
| Ferruginous Hawk                   | 1   |
| hawk sp.                           | 6   |
| American Kestrel                   | 33  |
| American Coot                      | 111 |
| Sandhill Crane                     | 15  |
| Killdeer                           | 11  |
| Greater Yellowlegs                 | 2   |
| Least Sandpiper                    | 3   |
| Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher | 2   |
| Bonaparte's Gull                   | 7   |
| Ring-billed Gull                   | 260 |
| gull sp.                           | 10  |
| Rock Pigeon                        | 384 |
| Eurasian Collared-Dove             | 161 |
| White-winged Dove                  | 231 |
| Mourning Dove                      | 322 |
| Greater Roadrunner                 | 1   |
| Belted Kingfisher                  | 3   |
| Golden-fronted Woodpecker          | 9   |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker           | 1   |
| Ladder-backed Woodpecker           | 17  |
| Downy Woodpecker                   | 2   |
| Northern Flicker                   | 8   |

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| woodpecker sp.         | 1    |
| Eastern Phoebe         | 7    |
| Loggerhead Shrike      | 3    |
| Blue Jay               | 102  |
| Western Scrub-Jay      | 2    |
| American Crow          | 5    |
| raven sp.              | 1    |
| Horned Lark            | 4    |
| Carolina Chickadee     | 7    |
| Black-crested Titmouse | 17   |
| Bewick's Wren          | 3    |
| House Wren             | 1    |
| Marsh Wren             | 1    |
| wren sp.               | 1    |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | 2    |
| Ruby-crowned Kinglet   | 3    |
| Eastern Bluebird       | 51   |
| Western Bluebird       | 10   |
| Hermit Thrush          | 1    |
| American Robin         | 376  |
| Northern Mockingbird   | 246  |
| Brown Thrasher         | 1    |
| Curve-billed Thrasher  | 3    |
| European Starling      | 450  |
| Cedar Waxwing          | 58   |
| Orange-crowned Warbler | 1    |
| Yellow-rumped Warbler  | 3    |
| Spotted Towhee         | 3    |
| Chipping Sparrow       | 25   |
| Field Sparrow          | 30   |
| Vesper Sparrow         | 16   |
| Lark Bunting           | 144  |
| Savannah Sparrow       | 10   |
| Fox Sparrow            | 2    |
| Song Sparrow           | 3    |
| Lincoln's Sparrow      | 4    |
| White-throated Sparrow | 2    |
| White-crowned Sparrow  | 323  |
| Dark-eyed Junco        | 60   |
| sparrow sp.            | 148  |
| Northern Cardinal      | 66   |
| Pyrrhuloxia            | 12   |
| Red-winged Blackbird   | 777  |
| meadowlark sp.         | 679  |
| Brewer's Blackbird     | 101  |
| Common Grackle         | 1    |
| Great-tailed Grackle   | 771  |
| Brown-headed Cowbird   | 1146 |
| blackbird sp.          | 501  |
| House Finch            | 161  |
| Pine Siskin            | 1    |
| American Goldfinch     | 81   |
| House Sparrow          | 439  |

## Successful Great Backyard Bird Count

More than 100,000 individuals recorded their backyard bird count February 17, 18, 19, and/or 20, 2012 in North America. The process was rather simple: count birds at any location for at LEAST 15 minutes--or more if you wish, write down only the HIGHEST number of each species you see together at any one time to avoid counting the same birds more than once, submit your data on a new checklist for EACH DAY you participate in the count, submit a new checklist for each NEW LOCATION (you can submit more than one checklist on a given day if you count at more than one site.) When you are ready to enter your checklist(s), go to the GBBC website at [www.BirdCount.org](http://www.BirdCount.org) and click on the big "Submit your checklists" button at the top. Everything you need to know will be clear on the web page as you enter your information. If you are a pencil and paper person, you can mail your count information to Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

During the count, the web site listed above has fascinating maps of North America showing new checklists as they come into Cornell. You might even see your light flash as your report is recorded! Now that the count is completed you can see many charts of the Top Ten species recorded most often, and the Top Ten species by numbers, the areas with the most reports, the Top Ten numbers by areas, etc. Very interesting!

If an unusual number of a particular species is reported, or if a species is considered out of range, the program is written to flag this report and volunteers are assigned to contact the reporters for them to verify their numbers species. This is the second year in a row that my report of Lesser Goldfinch has been questioned. I received an email to justify Lesser Goldfinch either with a picture or with a description of the birds. This can be annoying, but on second thought, think of all of the incorrect information that they would process if they did not question these reports. I am glad they make such an effort to report correct information.

They accepted my description. These birds were less than 5 feet from me so it was easy to describe them. In fact, I had good pictures but at that time did not know how to send them.

It was fun for me to take a new birder, JoAn Wilks, with me to the pond on Wildlife Trails, a few blocks of where I live. There we saw more species than either of us had seen in our own backyards. A lone Yellow-headed Blackbird among 54 Red-wing Blackbirds was our claim to fame there. Whenever you can, take a new birder with you. Their excitement is contagious.

Sunday afternoon a Sharp-shinned Hawk was in my backyard. I watched it dive at birds nine times, unsuccessfully. Guess what? Monday morning when I left the house at 9:00am, I had not seen one (that is, zero) birds in my yard. Needless to say Monday's count was down.

Congratulations, if you were a part of the bird count this year! If not, please consider the fun for next year and join in with the Great Backyard Bird Count!



## Conservation Suggestions from World Wildlife

1. **PUT ON A SWEATER.** Remember, when you turn up the heat in wintertime, your furnace is probably burning fossil fuels. A sweater or a nice warm robe will keep you even warmer and will help conserve resources and reduce climate change.
2. **PUT ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER.** One hundred years ago, 99.9% of people got by without cars. They took the train; they lived near their workplaces...and they walked. Using fuel-efficient cars is important, but we can save even more fuel simply by driving less.
3. **GO FOR SECONDS.** Recycling doesn't mean only separating your cans and bottles, it can mean using things a second (or a third) time. That nice padded envelope you got in the mail, for example? Instead of throwing it away, scratch out the address, tear off the stamps and use it again.
4. **WATCH YOUR WASTE.** Items you may be throwing away can contaminate the soil and water for thousands or millions of years. Your community probably has special disposal procedures for things like used oil and batteries. Ink cartridges can probably be recycled where you bought them. And many of the new super-efficient light bulbs contain mercury, so proper disposal is crucial. Check with the store where you buy them.
5. **PAPER OR PLASTIC.** Bring your bags with you! By taking reusable bags to the grocery store, you can cut down on the 350 bags the average American uses each year and reduce needless deaths of marine life caused by plastic bags that end up in streams, rivers and oceans.
6. **BYOB.** Last year Americans went through about 50 billion plastic water bottles.. Fill up a reusable water bottle at home and bring it with you. Don't like the taste of your water? Buy a filter! (Remember, much of the bottled water sold today is filtered tap water anyway...)
7. **FLIP 'EM OFF.** In much of America we can't even see the stars anymore, due in part to all the electric lights. Keep the light on in the room you're in, but keep the rest of your house dark. You'll find the dark is soothing.
8. **GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR ROOTS. PLANT A TREE!** Good for the soil, good for the birds, good for reducing climate change--and good for the air you're breathing!
9. **GET OFF.** Catalogs are great when they're from companies you like to order from. But if you're getting catalogs from companies you don't buy from, call them and tell them to get you off their list--and that's an order.

## ***Field Trip to Kirby Lake***

***January 14<sup>th</sup> 2012***

Relatively wet and poor weather influenced us to stay close to home for this field trip. Temperatures were in the 20's to 30's and it was windy so we mostly birded from my Suburban as we circumnavigated the lake. The intrepid group included Dan Symonds, Bera Johnson, Charlene Wheeler and Joe Thompson. I would say that our list of 29 species for the 3 hour field trip was about average for the time of year. Standouts for us included a **Verdin** and an **American Pipit**.

### **Cast Members in order of their appearance:**

American Kestrel - 1  
Red Wing Blackbirds - 200  
Northern Harrier - 1  
Ring Bill Gulls - 60  
American Coot - 37  
Gadwall - 24  
Shoveled - 2  
Green Wing Teal - 6  
Field Sparrow-1  
White Crowned Sparrow - 9  
Killdeer - 3  
White Pelican - 75  
Rock Pigeon - 2  
Belted Kingfisher - 1  
Pied Billed Grebe - 3  
Double Crested Cormorant - (no note)  
Mallard - 4  
Lincolns Sparrow- 2  
Northern Cardinal - 2  
Mockingbird - 3  
Greater Yellowlegs - 2  
American Robin - 2  
American Pipit - 1  
Ladder Back Woodpecker - 1  
Savannah Sparrow - 2  
Coopers Hawk - 1  
Yellow Rump Warbler - 1  
Meadow Lark (sp) - 1  
Verdin - 1



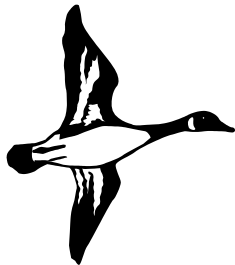
## **BIG COUNTRY AUDUBON SOCIETY**

|                          |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
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| <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: 325-480-1089

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 |                |           |