

# The Prairie Horned Lark

## Newsletter of the Panhandle Bird Club

Vol. XI No. 2

February 10, 2010

### **Panhandle Rare Bird Alert** **Connie Fordham (806 655-7034)** **cfbirder52@yahoo.com**

Please call or e-mail Connie, with information on any unusual birds or first seasonal arrivals you see in the Panhandle.

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### **PBC Field Trip to Dalhart** **January 16, 2010**

Participants: Robert and Carrie King, Susan Thompson and Peggy Duniven. Leader Jody McKenzie

I met Robert, Carrie and Susan at McDonald's, our usual meeting spot for the Dalhart trip and we headed for Lake Rita Blanca straight away. Lucky for us, the lake was partially frozen and provided an awesome view of the ducks and geese spending their winter days in Dalhart.

We parked at the water's edge and were approached by a lady as we settled in. I had noticed this lady in the parking lot at McDonald's and wondered if she was looking for us, but I did not know her. She introduced herself as Peggy Duniven and told us that she had found the club's website and knew that we would be birding the lake today so we invited her to join us.

There was no denying the identity of the large white-headed bird in the top of the tree across the lake. A Bald Eagle in all his grace and majesty graced us with his presence. Susan set up her scope for further enjoyment of this most handsome bird.

I don't know at exactly what point it happened, but I'm guessing as Susan moved her scope across the ice below the eagle she caught sight of a bobcat strolling around on the ice. I do remember the surprise in her voice as she announced what she was seeing in the scope. We viewed the bobcat with binoculars and scope for about 10 minutes. Maybe a minute or so less. As I watched him move about the ice he seemed to be strolling around as casually as any house cat. At one point he broke into a trot and our last view of the bobcat was as he picked up a goose carcass and moved into the thick cattails at the lake's edge. We must have been just far enough way so that the cat wasn't aware of us, allowing us to observe what might have been his usual winter breakfast on ice

## **Announcement!**

Connie Fordham has served graciously and skillfully in two positions for the Panhandle Bird Club for the past several years – Records and Secretary. As of this month Robert King will take on the duties of the secretary. He will handle the membership details, collect dues and prepare the newsletter for send out. When you need to send in dues or change an address, phone or email, Robert is your man. His phone number is in the box above and the address to send dues is on the back page.

We need to give a big Hurrah! to both of these folks for service that keeps our club going.

routine. This was my first close up of a bobcat and it was a thrill!

The usual Canada's, Mallard's, American Wigeons and Snow's were in attendance in great numbers. Harrier's were present and feasting on the dead geese and ducks.

I was never able to see the large number of birds dead due to avian cholera that the Amarillo newspaper reported. I have developed a habit of counting dead birds as best as I can and my highest count to date has been a total of 37 dead assorted birds. These are dead birds on the ice and on land.

The Harriers engage in a feeding style I refer to as musical hawks. They circle above other hawks feeding on the dead birds and buzz each other off of an easy meal only to be removed from their newly claimed feast by the next circling hawk. This is done with screeches of protest from those forcibly removed from a cold winter meal and today the hawks fed this way as well.

We moved to the trail head below the fishing pond which is the usual starting point for birding as we walk the lake. We saw a Spotted Towhee sitting in a tree and I'm quite sure that we have seen this species of towhee in this same general area every time we have walked this trail in the past. We also saw wrens moving in and out of view in the cattails. Susan id'ed them as Bewick and Marsh wrens. I didn't realize that these wrens spent the winter in this area and I'll be sure to look for them in the future. A Downy Woodpecker moved around a bare tree trunk above us as we walked and we saw Northern Shovelers and Canvasbacks on the water.

We drove to the backside of the lake for better viewing and had lunch there. The birding was so good and the weather so accommodating that we elected not to take time out for lunch at my home.

We saw numerous American Goldfinches enjoying the seeds of wild sunflowers and Echinacea.

We made our way back to our starting point and found three Bald Eagles in the top of a tree at the edge of the lake as we drove over the dam. I don't recall seeing eagles in any of our previous Dalhart field trips making the eagles we saw all the more enjoyable. I'll be sure to keep the eagle on my list of birds to watch for as I visit the lake the rest of the winter.

We spent nearly the entire day at the lake and saw a large number of species in a short period of time. Much to our delight it was one bird after

another with no complaint from this small group of birders.

We gave up the action at the lake as the day turned into late afternoon and drove east of Dalhart to Stratford. A Ferruginous Hawk was spotted on a power pole on our way.

At the blinking light intersection in Stratford we turned south on 287, drove 14 miles and turned east on FM 1573 and drove about 5 miles further. We stopped at an old homestead that has proved itself to be very birdy. This is the spot where Barrett Pierce saw a Long-eared Owl. Several old, windowless and abandoned buildings occupy this property with many trees and it is surrounded by hundreds of acres of farmland. A little spooky and perfect owl territory.

I had birded here 5 or 6 times before this day hoping for the Long-eared Owl, but was never lucky enough to see it. The spot was quiet on this day as we walked the bar ditch up and down the length of the property. Juncos flew about and Meadowlarks flew their slow Stealth Bomber-like glide across the road.

We moved about 4 miles east of this property to a home on one side of the road with cattle pens on the opposite side of the road. I had hoped for Scaled Quail but no such luck.

At about 4:00 p.m. we called it a great day of birding and headed for home.



Chihuahuan Raven

Photo by Jim Stevenson

## Bird List:

Snow Goose  
Canada Goose  
American Wigeon  
Mallard  
Northern Shoveler  
Northern Pintail  
Canvasback  
Ring-necked Pheasant  
Bald Eagle  
Northern Harrier  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Ferruginous Hawk  
American Kestrel  
Rock Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Chihuahuan Raven  
Bewick's Wren  
Marsh Wren  
Spotted Towhee  
Lincolns Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Dark-eyed junco  
Red-winged Blackbird  
House Finch  
Pine Siskin  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

## Herring Gull

1 on 1/10/2010, Hale Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Lesser Black-backed Gull

1 on 1/24/2010, McDonald Lake, Randall Co., Barrett Pierce

## Golden-crowned Kinglet

1 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Eastern Bluebird

12 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Western Bluebird

4 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Mountain Bluebird

86 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

4 on 1/10/2010, Hale Co., Anthony Hewetson

76 on 1/10/2010, Motley Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Townsend's Solitaire

1 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

2 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Bushtit

8 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Carolina Chickadee

1 on 1/10/2010, Whiteflat, Motley Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Northern Shrike

1 on 1/6/2010, Thompson Grove, Dallam Co., Barrett Pierce

## Yellow-rumped Warbler

1 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Fox Sparrow

1 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Lincoln's Sparrow

2 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## White-throated Sparrow

2 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Harris's Sparrow

1 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## McCown's Longspur

300-1/6/10, Rita Blanca Grasslands, Dallam Co., Barrett

34 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Lapland Longspur

45-1/6/2010, Rita Blanca Grassland, Dallam Co., Barrett

4 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Chestnut-collared Longspur

6-1/6/2010, Rita Blanca Grassland, Dallam Co., Barrett Pierce

22 on 1/10/2010, Floyd Co., Anthony Hewetson

## Pyrrhuloxia

1 on 1/16/2010, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

## January Bird Report

By **Connie Fordham**

### Tundra Swan

2 on 1/4/2010, Motley Co., Rich Kostecke

2 on 1/10/2010, Motley Co., Anthony Hewetson

### Greater White-fronted Goose

2 on 1/10/2010, Hale Co., Anthony Hewetson

### Cooper's Hawk

1 on 1/25/2010, WTAMU, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

### Northern Goshawk

1 on 1/11/2010, Lk Meredith, Moore Co., Trey Barron

### Golden Eagle

1 on 1/7/2010, Parmer Co., Manuel DeLeon

### Long-billed Curlew

3 on 1/7/2010, Parmer Co., Manuel DeLeon

### Dunlin

1 on 1/10/2010, Lake Childress, Childress Co., Barrett Pierce

## News about the Rare Bird Alert

We are investigating different ways to distribute our Bird Alert quickly and surely. For the time being, please continue to send your sightings to Judith Evans at [judith.evans@suddenlink.net](mailto:judith.evans@suddenlink.net). If you are not receiving the Bird Alerts and want them email Judith. If you are receiving the Alerts and don't want them email Judith.

## **Guided Field Trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley with Jim Stevenson**

January 28-31, 2010 by Judith Evans

On January 27 Susan Thompson and I boarded a plane to Houston not knowing that we were going to miss out on the most spectacular winter weather of the season in the Panhandle! We rented a car and drove to Galveston where we picked up Jim at the auto repair shop. He was carrying a battery for the van which might not have been the most auspicious beginning to our trip except that he had prudently asked someone on the trip to bring some jumper cables (which came in handy later). Arriving at Jim's place west of Galveston where we going to spend the night we were greeted with a flyby of a Barn Owl which was an auspicious beginning!

Very early the next morning the rest of the birders arrived –a motley crew whom we would get to know fairly well over the next four days. We finally got our gear and luggage loaded up and we all piled into the van for the trip to Harlingen which would be our headquarters. We were barreling along in the dark when Jim invited us to guess what the first bird we saw would be. There were several guesses (a grackle, a house sparrow and so forth) but the first bird seen turned out to be an American Crow.

Jim Stevenson is a fabulous bird spotter. As we continued down the road he would call out identifications right and left after the barest glance. We saw our first glimpses of the Crested Caracara as we whizzed by but I, at least, would need the closer looks we got later to say I had truly “seen” that wonderful bird. Our first stop was in Matagorda where we paused to look at a great many ducks and relatives at a series of ponds. Hundreds of Gadwalls, Coots, Shovelers, Canvasbacks, Teals and more all massed in one spot made quite a sight in the early dawn.

The afternoon birding of our first day was done at Estero Llano Grande State Park, part of the World Birding Center. The World Birding Center is a network of nine sites along 120 miles of river road from South Padre Island west to Roma, with habitats ranging from dry chaparral brush and verdant riverside thickets to freshwater marshes and coastal wetlands. Estero Llano Grande is the largest wetlands site in the network. We saw an amazing collection of birds there – 63 species in all! The

lake yielded 8 varieties of ducks; Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants; Great Blue, Little Blue, and Tricolored Herons; White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Common Moorhen (one of many lifers for me) Spotted, Stilt and Least Sandpipers, and other shorebirds. On the walking trail we got our first look at the famed Green Jay, and also a Golden-fronted Woodpecker, a Vermillion Flycatcher, a Great Kiskadee; Swamp, Lincoln's, Savannah and Lark Sparrows and Long-billed Thrasher and many more. It was a feast of birds! Back at the Visitor's Center we were getting some good looks at a Buff-bellied Hummingbird when a park naturalist approached and said he could show us a Common Pauraque. He led us to some underbrush and there, barely discernable, was that Pauraque sleeping the day away!

After a long day of driving and birding we headed for Harlingen where we elected to eat first and check in to our hotel second (not a hard choice!). As we got out of the van two small birds flew over – green parakeets! Perfect ending for our first day!

On the second day, with another very early start, we headed for Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. A description from the website tells us how important this area is: “...In a region of Texas some call the last great habitat, thorn forest intermingles with freshwater wetlands, coastal prairies, mudflats and beaches. Here, where tropical and temperate zones overlap, the endangered ocelot silently hunts within the brushlands, white-tailed deer browse on a banquet of plants, aplomado falcons soar above the grasslands and nearly half of all the bird species found in the continental United States rest, feed, nest and migrate.” We didn't see the ocelot but we did see a large number of birds there. Outstanding for me was my first good look at the Crested Caracara along with Black Vulture, White-tailed Hawk, Harris's Hawk and White-tailed Kite.

All of my non-birding friends envied me for my trip to the Valley because they imagined that I would be basking in warm sunshine. That was definitely not the case! It was what I would call COLD in the Valley! On this day of birding we toiled around Cameron County and saw a great many birds, including new birds for the trip: Aplomado Falcon, Gull-billed Tern, Couch's Kingbird, Ruddy Turnstone, Long-billed Curlew, Sanderling, and Western Sandpiper – but we did this birding from inside the van.

Later in the day the sun came out and in slightly warmer conditions we were turned loose to bird at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Brownsville Fish Hatchery. This was a delightful spot in the waning light of the day – beautiful woodlands and ponds. Accompanied by two very friendly dogs we wandered around and managed to see 11 species of birds, including the Eastern Phoebe – another new bird for the trip.

Our third day of birding we began at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most biologically diverse regions in North America where subtropical, gulf coast, great plains and Chihuahuan desert meet. We saw a huge variety of birds, including the find of the day – the Clay-colored Thrush – spotted by Susan. Other new birds were Blue-headed Vireo, Green Kingfisher and Altamira Oriole. We also got good looks at the Plain Chachalaca. It's hard to get a good look at the Chachalaca because he is kind of secretive and flies quickly across any open spot in the trail.

Next on our list was Anzalduas Park where we also were able to overlook the Diversion Dam there which diverts the Rio Grande at that spot. Birds we saw in the park included a Great Horned Owl and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Another thrill of the day was spotting the Peregrine Falcon in Weslaco – a bird I had not seen except on someone's wrist! He just flew around and posed on a telephone pole for us.

Audubon Frontera was another great spot for birds. There we sat for more than an hour at their feeders watching warblers, (Nashville, Orange-crowned, and Wilson's), an ovenbird, little Inca Doves and White-tipped.

We ended the day at the Valley Nature Center where I saw my favorite lifer bird of the trip – the Black-and-white Warbler. I just have a special feeling for that bird!

One of the target birds for the trip was the Red-crowned Parrot said to be nesting in Weslaco. We had driven around trying to find it at dawn and were not successful. A young man that we met at the Valley Nature Center assured us that they flew over his apartment every night on the way to their roosts. So we followed him home and took up the watch. An hour and a half later all we had to show for the wait was a dead battery in the van! This is where the jumper cables came in handy!

On the last day Jim took us to the Salineno Feeders. This seems to be a private spot maintained by a couple who keep up the feeders and which

attracts a great number of beautiful birds. This is where we got our best looks at the Green Jay, 3 kinds of Orioles (Altamira, Hooded and Audubon), and Great Kiskadees. They were just spread out like a feast for our eyes (and cameras!)

After hitting a few more spots deep in the Valley we headed for Galveston on a fast track so that people could get home and back to their ordinary lives. Susan and I had elected to stay over with Jim Stevenson and catch a plane the next day and we got a little bonus. Jim took us out to San Luis Pass Beach and gave us a little lesson on shorebirds and gulls before we left for Houston! It was a fantastic trip – Susan was the recorder and recorded 162 species!

- American Crow
- Northern Harrier
- Great Egret
- Great Blue Heron
- American Robin
- Crested Caracara
- American Kestrel
- Eurasian Collared-Dove
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Common Grackle
- European Starling
- Turkey Vulture
- Belted Kingfisher
- Bald Eagle
- Canvasback
- Ruddy Duck
- American Wigeon
- Black-necked Stilt
- Gadwall
- Green-winged Teal
- Blue-winged Teal
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Northern Shoveler
- Northern Pintail
- American Coot
- Mourning Dove
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Northern Mockingbird
- Laughing Gull
- Neotropic Cormorant
- Herring Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- Rock Pigeon
- House Sparrow
- Great-tailed Grackle



Black Vulture Photo by Dianne Lee

Sandhill Crane  
 Eastern Meadowlark  
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker  
 Eastern Phoebe  
 Brown-headed Cowbird  
 Brewer's Blackbird  
 Horned Lark  
 Snow Goose  
 Harris' Hawk



White-tailed Kite Photo by Dave Dolan

White-tailed Hawk  
 Long-billed Dowitcher  
 Stilt Sandpiper  
 Little Blue Heron  
 Snowy Egret  
 American Avocet  
 Spotted Sandpiper  
 Tree Swallow  
 Roseate Spoonbill  
 Couch's Kingbird  
 Double-crested Cormorant  
 Savannah Sparrow  
 American White Pelican  
 Black-crowned Night-Heron  
 White Ibis  
 Common Ground-Dove  
 Orange-crowned Warbler



Great Kiskadee Photo by Dianne Lee

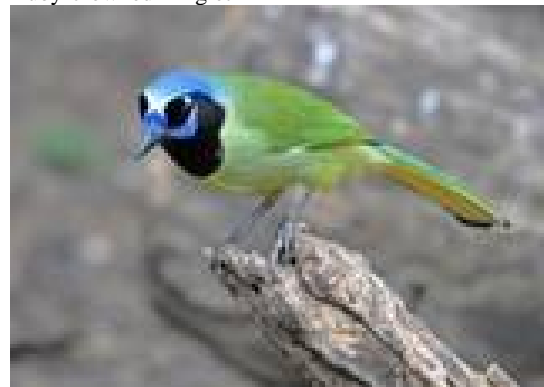
Yellow-rumped Warbler

Ring-necked Duck  
 Common Moorhen  
 Vermilion Flycatcher  
 Tropical Kingbird  
 Least Grebe  
 Tricolored Heron  
 Least Sandpiper  
 Killdeer



Buff-bellied Hummingbird Photo by Dave Dolan

Common Pauraque  
 Red-winged Blackbird  
 Lark Sparrow  
 Common Yellowthroat  
 Lincoln's Sparrow  
 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck  
 Mottled Duck  
 Wilson's Snipe  
 Black-crested Titmouse  
 Purple Martin  
 White-eyed Vireo  
 Townsend's Warbler  
 Plain Chachalaca  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet



Green Jay Photo by Dave Dolan

Long-billed Thrasher  
 Carolina Wren  
 American Pipit  
 Red-shouldered Hawk  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
 Swamp Sparrow  
 Green Parakeet  
 Northern Cardinal  
 Curve-billed Thrasher  
 House Wren  
 Olive Sparrow  
 Greater Yellowlegs

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet  
 White-tipped Dove  
 Lesser Scaup  
 Long-billed Curlew  
 Willet  
 Forster's Tern  
 Redhead  
 Osprey  
 Red-breasted Merganser  
 Black-bellied Plover  
 Caspian Tern  
 Short-billed Dowitcher  
 Dunlin  
 Western Sandpiper  
 Lesser Yellowlegs  
 Greater White-fronted Goose  
 Cooper's Hawk  
 Brown Pelican  
 Western Meadowlark

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
 Great Horned Owl  
 Merlin



Peregrine Falcon Photo by Dianne Lee



Aplomado Falcon Photo by Jim Stevenson

Black-chinned Hummingbird  
 Wilson's Warbler  
 Inca Dove  
 Nashville Warbler  
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
 Ovenbird  
 Black-and-white Warbler  
 Lesser Goldfinch  
 Black Phoebe  
 Audubon's Oriole  
 Hooded Oriole



Pyrrhuloxia Photo by Dianne Lee

Gull-billed Tern  
 Ruddy Turnstone  
 Sanderling  
 Semipalmated Plover  
 Marsh Wren  
 White-winged Dove  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
 Green Kingfisher  
 Clay-colored Thrush  
 Blue-headed Vireo  
 American Goldfinch  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk

Chipping Sparrow  
 Greater Roadrunner  
 Northern Bobwhite  
 House Finch  
 Vesper Sparrow  
 Clay-colored Sparrow  
 Cactus Wren  
 Bewick's Wren  
 Eastern Bluebird  
 White-faced Ibis  
 Yellow-crowned Night-Heron  
 Short-eared Owl



Altamira Oriole Photo by Jim Stevenson





The Prairie Horned Lark

**Panhandle Bird Club**  
**1213 S Bryan St**  
**Amarillo, TX 79102**

Application for membership in the Panhandle Bird Club \$15.00 Annually September 1 to August 31  
Make checks payable to Panhandle Bird Club. Mail to: Robert King, 4809 Journey, Amarillo, TX 79117

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ New: \_\_\_\_\_ Renew: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## Field Trip Calendar for Late Winter and Spring

**20 Feb 2010 Buffalo Lake, Summerfield Playa (near Hereford) and Friona RV Park.** Meet at entrance to Buffalo Lake NWR at 8 a.m.. We will eat lunch at Rafter J's in Umbarger. **Leader: Peggy Trosper**

**27 Feb 2010 Lake Meredith** (Some of you may have seen the date as Feb. 28 on the email Jan.newsletter. **Note change to Feb. 27**) Meet at 7:20 a.m. at the east side of the Southwest Branch, Amarillo Public Library parking lot (nearest to McDonald Lake) Bring lunch. **Leader: Judith Evans**

**20 March 2010 Cactus Lake near Dumas and Palo Duro Lake by Spearman.** (Tentative) Meet at Southwest Library at 6:20 a.m. or at McDonalds in Dumas at 8:00 a.m. Take a lunch. **Leader: Carolyn Stallwitz.**

**23-25 April 2010 (Note changed date! Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge:** The Wichitas are located in SW Oklahoma and this NWR is one of the oldest in the nation. The largest breeding population of the federally endangered Black-capped Vireo occurs here. We will bird the refuge and also nearby Hackberry Flats. Onsite accommodations will include a tent-camping group campsite reserved exclusively for our trip participants with picnic area and shelter (shelter has electric) at a shared total cost of \$30 per night. Or you may choose a hotel in Lawton. (4 hotel options are: Baymont Inn, 1203 NW 40th - \$93 + tax - 580-353-5581; Hampton Inn & Suites, 2610 NW Cache Rd - \$124 + tax - 580-355-8200; Springhill Suites, 3 SE Interstate Dr - \$126 + tax - 580-248-8200; Holiday Inn Express, 209 SE Interstate Dr - \$126 + tax - 580-248-4446; All four hotels offer some of the following discounts: AARP, AAA, Seniors, and retired military.) Local birders Kurt and Sharon Meisenzahl will be our guides. **Leader: Billie Shalvey**

**15 May 2010 Hawk's Nest Ranch** Meet at SW Library at 6:20 a.m. It is about a 2 hour drive to the ranch in Collingsworth County. An alternative meeting spot is the Outpost in Clarendon at 7:20 a.m. Bring lunch. **Leader: Georgia Swift**

