

# The Prairie Horned Lark

## Newsletter of the Panhandle Bird Club

Vol. X No. 3

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### **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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## **Buffalo Lake NWR** **Field Trip Report**

February 14, 2009

Participants: Billy Loftin, Susan Thompson (leader)

Judith Evans was unable to lead this trip due to illness, and when she called to ask if I could fill in, I told her it was no problem.

It was COLD that morning! And there were just two of us, one of whom was Billy Loftin, KVII Channel 7 News Reporter. Billy wanted to do a news segment about the Panhandle Bird Club, but seeing as how the "club" was represented only by moi, he kindly decided to change the story angle to this: he happened to catch up with me collecting data for the Great Backyard Bird Count. (Since this was the GBBC weekend, the data from the field trip would be entered as GBBC data.)



**Great Horned Owl photo by Dave Herr**

We headed to Redpoll Cove and right away saw a Great Horned Owl, then a second one. Billy worked for a while trying to get close enough to one or the other owl to capture a good-quality image on his video camera, but the owls were having none of that. We got very nice views of them through my

# **Plan Ahead**

Susan Thompson, Field Trip Coordinator, and charter member, Rosemary Scott are cooking up a weekend trip to Arkansas to see Rosemary's birds! Save the dates: Memorial Day Weekend

**May 22-25**

We'll bird in Rosemary's area (Conway, AR) and some other possibilities are Sequoya NWR, Tenkiller Lake, Robert S. Kerr Dam, Moffitt Bottoms, Holla Bend NWR, and Bona Dea Sanctuary.

scope, but that didn't prove compatible with Billy's video camera. We also got an amazingly close and clear look at a porcupine in a low tree branch, and what made it even more special was the fact that the porcupine was wide *awake*, with his (her?) twinkly eyes tracking our every move. There weren't many other birds showing themselves at Redpoll Cove that morning – a few Dark-eyed Juncos and Mourning Doves were about it. Personally, I was excited to find loads of porcupine scat and a few owl pellets, but Billy didn't seem to take much of an interest in those things...for some reason...

Billy was on a tight schedule, so I suggested we buzz on over to the dike just to see if there were any Bald Eagles, though it was starting to be a bit late in the year to see them. But you know, even though Billy said he was in a hurry, he couldn't resist pulling over every couple of minutes, and getting out to try to capture on film a Red-tailed Hawk near a nest, or a Red-tailed Hawk flying from one perch to another, or our third Great Horned Owl of the day, or a Northern Flicker, and so on. We didn't have any Bald Eagle luck at the dike, but I was happy to see that there is still a lot of water there (believe it or not, the leftovers from that HUGE rainfall event in Hereford in late summer 2008) and hundreds of waterfowl – Northern Pintails and Northern Shovelers dominated, but there were also high counts of Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, and even Canvasbacks and Redheads. The water covered a lot of area, and many, many waterfowl were beyond scope range. There were also a few exceedingly vocal Marsh Wrens.



**Marsh Wren photo by Dave Herr**

Billy said his goodbyes at that point.

I ate my sandwich and then walked the bird trail as the weather warmed enough to allow me to shed a layer of clothing. My favorite bird moment of the day was after I stopped in my tracks because I heard a loud leaf-rustling noise. Quite loud. And nearby. It reminded me of the amount of noise an armadillo makes when it shuffles around, but I couldn't see an armadillo. I finally located the brushy spot where the loud rustling was coming from, but couldn't see anything moving. I started thinking, hmmm, a bet there's a woodrat or cotton rat or something underneath those leaves...and then I saw it was a Spotted Towhee doing an extra vigorous version of its double-hop-scratch towhee "thang." It saw me at about the same time I saw it, and it flew away like it wouldn't have been doing *that* if it had known I was watching... I wandered off the trail downhill for a while in the direction of the little bit of water from which I could hear Mallards quacking. I found more Marsh Wrens and a Song Sparrow. Then I headed back home.



**Spotted Towhee by Dave Herr**

**Bird List for Buffalo Lake NWR Fieldtrip**

- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mallard
- Blue-winged Teal
- Northern Shoveler
- Northern Pintail
- Green-winged Teal
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Lesser Scaup
- Northern Harrier
- Red-tailed Hawk

**Bird List for Buffalo Lake continued**

American Kestrel  
 American Coot  
 Killdeer  
 Ring-billed Gull  
 Rock Pigeon  
 Mourning Dove  
 Great Horned Owl  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
 Northern Flicker  
 Loggerhead Shrike  
 Chihuahuan Raven  
 Marsh Wren  
 American Robin  
 European Starling  
 Spotted Towhee  
 Savannah Sparrow  
 Song Sparrow  
 White-crowned Sparrow  
 Dark-eyed Junco  
 Northern Cardinal  
 Western Meadowlark  
 House Finch  
 American Goldfinch



Gadwall photo by Dave Herr

## Lake Rita Blanca and Thompson Grove Field Trip

February 21, 2008  
 By Jody McKenzie

I met up with fellow birders Susan Thompson, Jim Luce, Glen and Preston at the local McDonald's on a cold Saturday morning. The older I become, the less I like cold weather. Arizona, here I come someday.

We drove to my home to drop off my vehicle and made our way to 13<sup>th</sup> and Rock Island with Susan at the wheel. Barrett suggests this area because of the potential to catch sight of a Mountain chickadee or a Juniper Titmouse spending the winter in Dalhart.

To further enhance the chance of some good birds in this area, I had previously contacted a friend and requested permission to place a feeder in the alley between Denrock and Rock Island. Permission granted but the only activity I had witnessed to this day was a squirrel. No birds for the five of us at the feeder today but, I continue to monitor this feeder and keep it full in hopes of seeing birds I don't find in my neighborhood.

We opened a gate in the alley north of the feeder and walked into a large lot with trees around the border. Owl pellets were found under a pine tree, but we found no birds. To the immediate north of this lot is a stucco home and we walked into the side yard and Susan heard a nuthatch. Two Red



White Crowned Sparrow by Dennis Garrison

### Have You Got an Idea for a Field Trip?

If you have access to a private ranch or other birding spot or have a favorite place to bird that you would like to suggest for a Panhandle Bird Club Field Trip, please contact Susan Thompson at 517-0772 or [suthomps@sbcglobal.net](mailto:suthomps@sbcglobal.net).

breasted Nuthatches to be exact! She also spotted a Brown Creeper very close by. I really enjoyed watching the creeper considering that the last time I saw one was nearly 3 years ago in North Carolina. We got back into Jim's vehicle and drove north watching high and low for birds. Eurasian Collared Doves were everywhere and Preston spotted a chickadee but it flew away before we could get a positive identification.

Our next destination was the north side of Rita Blanca Lake. As we drove into the lake area we saw Eastern Bluebirds and Susan identified one Mountain Bluebird. Susan and Jim set up their scopes in a parking lot below the 55 Plus Club building and above the north side of the lake and we saw Canada geese, American Wigeons, Mallards, a few Northern Shovelers, and Cacklings. Northern Harriers flew about as we viewed the lake and it's occupants.

I have decided that my best winter birding at the lake and probably good for other birders as well is when the lake is frozen with only a small patch or two of open water. The geese and ducks tend to stand in one spot with little movement. Some are sitting on the ice, heads tucked under wings, some are taking advantage of the open spots of water but mostly they seem content to stand and not move around very much. Sorting through these unmoving geese and ducks with binoculars is so enjoyable and beautiful. The smaller Cackling geese are easy to identify while standing next to the larger Canada geese and the assorted colors of these creatures are brighter and prettier against the icy background. As the late afternoon sun shines across this icy scene the geese and ducks seem to be on a picturesque display for all who want to enjoy them.



**Male and Female Redheads by Dave Herr**

Having enjoyed the view from the north side we drove to the south side of the lake. The south side is my favorite spot. The shy Northern Pintails were enjoying this more quiet side of the lake when we pulled up and as usual they made their way out into the lake and away from the shore as we moved about and set up scopes. We saw one lone Bufflehead in the distance, several Gadwalls, Ruddy ducks, a small group of Redheads and several Lessor Scaup. The Redheads are my favorite and I see them nearly every time I bird from the south side of the lake in the winter.

We went back to my house for lunch and warmer temps at about 11:45.

Our next stop was Thompson Grove Park. Two Forest Service trucks were at the park when we arrived and had been cutting down dead trees. One Forest Service employee warned us not to get too close to a certain tree they were going to remove and then discovered it was full of hornets on the inside. Several hornets lay at the base of the tree and were not very active due to the cold temperature. The warning was appreciated.



**American Tree Sparrow by Jim Stevenson**

Thompson Grove did not have a lot of birds for us. We spent several minutes observing an American Tree Sparrow moving about on the ground. We walked around the park for a short while and then drove over to the row of cedars on the west side of the park. We walked a row of

cedars hoping for owls but no such luck. Susan, Glen and Preston saw a Hermit Thrush. Jim and I were walking in a different area and missed the thrush. We located the large pine tree that held a nest of baby hawks that we saw last summer and remembered the many dove nests we saw last summer also.

South of Dalhart, as Susan, Jim, Glen and Preston made their way home, Susan saw a group of birds flying in circle and Jimmy Woodard had told her that when you see this a Merlin might be chasing them. They pulled off the highway and over a railroad track and saw a Merlin flying in the area. The Merlin perched on a yucca branch giving everyone a good view.

This was simply one more day of great birding and I look forward to joining members of the club again in the spring for another field trip to Dalhart.

Snow Goose  
Ross's Goose  
Cackling Goose  
Canada Goose  
Gadwall  
American Wigeon  
Mallard  
Northern Shoveler  
Northern Pintail  
Green-winged Teal  
Redhead  
Lesser Scaup  
Bufflehead  
Ruddy Duck  
Great Blue Heron  
Northern Harrier  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Rough-legged Hawk  
American Kestrel  
Merlin  
American Coot  
Rock Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Great Horned Owl  
Northern Flicker  
Loggerhead Shrike  
Chihuahuan Raven  
Horned Lark  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Brown Creeper  
Eastern Bluebird  
Mountain Bluebird



Merlin photo by Kent Woodruff

Hermit Thrush  
European Starling  
American Tree Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Meadowlark Sp.  
Great-tailed Grackle  
House Finch  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

## NEAT BIRDING TIDBIT

By Susan Thompson

Thanks to my friend and coworker, Jimmy Walker the falconer, we had a neat birding moment on the way home from Dalhart. Glen, Preston, Jim, and I were driving back home along Boys Ranch Road when we saw one of those “schools” of birds – you know what I’m talking about? When I write “school” of birds, I mean one of those tight flocks of birds (generally blackbirds of some sort) that are moving up, then down, right, then left, in a synchronized manner. They very much resemble a school of fish. Well, Jimmy had mentioned to me once that he could just about guarantee that whenever you see one of those “schools” of birds going this way and that, there’s a merlin hunting them – that’s why the birds are “schooled-up” – it’s an anti-predation measure (same reason fish do it). So I said, “Hey Look At That School Of Birds Right There Let’s See If There’s A Merlin Around Them Can Anyone See A Merlin Hunting Them ??

**Let’s Stop!!!**” and despite my near incoherency which is partially attributable to several helpings of caffeinated beverages that day, Preston understood and his sharp eye spotted a shape rocketing off to the top of a hill, perching on a yucca pod as we pulled over. (Some of you may know where this place is – the hill was right by the one with the “dinosaur” sculpture made of auto parts.) Anyway, we got our scope on the bird and sure enough, it was a Merlin! We got a long look, even though it was a far-off look. No doubt. That Jimmy Walker knows stuff!

# Rare Birds for the month of FEB

## By Connie Fordham

### Common Loon

5-2/22/09, LkMeredth,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Eared Grebe

1-2/22/09, LkMeredth,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Wood Duck

3-2/23/09, Cactus Playa,Moore Co., Eric Carpenter

### Common Goldeneye

6-2/22/09, LkMeredith,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Common Merganser

4-2/22/09, LkMeredth,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Bald Eagle

1imm-2/22/09, LkMeredth,Hutchinson Co., Anthony

### Red-shouldered Hawk

1-2/23/09, LkRitaBlanca,Hartley Co., Eric Carpenter

### Rough-legged Hawk

1-2/22/09, BuffaloLkNWR,Randall Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Golden Eagle

1-2/22/09, Fritch,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Merlin

1-2/22/09, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson

1-2/22/09, Claude,Armstrong Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Peregrine Falcon

1-2/23/09, Cactus Playa,Moore Co., Eric Carpenter

### Scaled Quail

2/9/09, Amarillo,Potter Co., Don McColl

### Killdeer

1-2/26/09, Dumas,Moore Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

### Long-billed Curlew

1-2/20/09, N. Swisher Co., Ray Matlack

### Greater Yellowlegs

1-2/22/09, Claude,Armstrong Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Herring Gull

1-2/22/09, LkMeredth,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Bonaparte's Gull

3-2/22/09, LkMeredth,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Long-eared Owl

1-2/22/09, PaloDuroRes,Hansford Co., Eric Carpenter

### Short-eared Owl

1-2/19/09, Silverton,Swisher Co., Ray Matlack

2-2/21/09, E.Perryton,Ochiltree Co., Eric Carpenter

### Northern Flicker

2/5/09, Amarillo,Potter Co., Don McColl

### Ruby-crowned Kinglet

2/7/09, Canyon,Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

### Cedar Waxwing

2/7/09, Canyon,Randall Co., Connie Fordham

### Winter Wren

1-2/21/09, Hemphill Co., Eric Carpenter

### Sage Thrasher

1-2/22/09, Carson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Mountain Bluebird

several 2/22/09, Lipscomb Co., Eric Carpenter

2-2/22/09, Borger,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

5-2/22/09, Lamb Co., Anthony Hewitson

2-2/22/09, Fritch,Hutchinson Co., Anthony Hewitson

### White-breasted Nuthatch

2-2/21/09, WolfCrkPk,Ochiltree Co., Eric Carpenter

### Brown Creeper

1- 2/22/09, Pampa, Gray Co., Dennis Palmitier

### Northern Shrike

1-2/21/09, WolfCrkPk,Ochiltree Co., Eric Carpenter

1-2/22/09, PaloDuroRes,Hansford Co, Eric Carpenter

### American Tree Sparrow

few 2/21/09, Lipscomb Co., Eric Carpenter

sev. 2/22/09, PaloDuroRes. Hansford Co., Eric Carpenter

### White-crowned Sparrow

2/7/09, Canyon,Randall co., Monty Schoenhals

### McCown's Longspur

5-2/22/09, Claude,Armstrong Co., Anthony Hewitson

5-2/22/09, VigoPk,Swisher Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Lapland Longspur

6-2/22/09, VigoPk,Swisher Co., Anthony Hewitson

### Pine Siskin

2/7/09, Canyon,Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

1-2/11/09, Dumas, Moore Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

1- 2/15/09, Dumas Moore Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

15-2/27/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

### American Goldfinch

2/7/09, Canyon,Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

4-2/15/09, Dumas,Moore Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

10- 2/27/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

## *Sutton Center Bald Eagle Nest Camera 2009*

<http://www.suttoncenter.org/eaglecam.html>

Here is an awesome website of live video feed of a nesting pair of bald eagles (who currently are watching over four eggs) at Sooner Lake in Stillwater, OK. This is too good not to share! The home website is of the Sutton Avian Research Center. From Barrett Pierce

## **2009 nesting season events:**

- 6 February: First egg is laid!
- 9 February: Second egg is laid!
- 13 February: Third egg is laid!
- 24 February: Black trash bag blows into nest.
- 25 February: The trash bag blew away!

Estimated hatching date is around 15 March,  
give or take a few days.

The following information was taken from  
their website.

## Bald Eagle Nesting Information

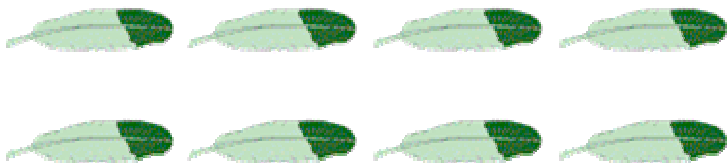
Sexual maturity and breeding generally coincide with attaining adult plumage (head and tail becoming all white, beak yellow, and the eyes white), from 3 to 5 years of age.

Nest site selection and building can begin as early as late September in Oklahoma. Several nests may be constructed by a single pair in the same territory.

Nests are typically located in one of the taller trees in an area, just below the crown, about 3/4 the way up the tree, against the trunk or in a sturdy fork of the tree. Assorted interwoven sticks up to 1 inch or more in diameter make up the bulk of the nest. The nest is lined with soft grass, moss, or other fine materials. Nests can take months to complete, are added to each year, and in exceptional cases can end up weighing several tons.

One clutch of 1-3 eggs is laid per year. However, a replacement clutch may be laid in the event of a loss during laying or early incubation. Incubation begins sometime from December or January in Oklahoma and lasts for 33.5 days, while the hatching process can take up to 2 days. If more than one egg is present, the others hatch at intervals of 2-3 days. This results in eaglets of different sizes with the first hatched eaglet being the largest, a difference that is maintained until growth is completed before fledging. After fledging eagles may gain weight, but they do not grow very much larger dimensionally. Female Bald Eagles, as with many birds of prey, average larger in size than males; however, there can be an overlap between the sizes of the sexes. Size is almost the only visible difference between them. Eagles nesting in the northern part of their range also average larger in size than those from the southern parts of their range.

About a third, on average, of Oklahoma Bald Eagle nests fail, either during incubation or brooding, for mostly unknown reasons. Causes of nest failure could be due to food shortage, inclement weather, human disturbance, predators, and environmental contaminants.



## Development of Young

**Week One:** At hatching, the young are covered with a light gray down and have limited mobility. Their eyes, dark brown in color, are closed, but open after a few hours. The female parent does the majority of the brooding while the male parent provides most of the food for the family.

Aggressive antagonistic behavior can appear shortly after hatching wherein the oldest, largest eaglet tries to dominate or even kill its sibling(s).

**Week Two:** The second down plumage, darker in color, begins to replace the first. At the end of this period thermoregulation is attained; that is, the eaglet can maintain its own body temperature under normal weather conditions without brooding from an adult.

**Week Three:** Black contour feathers on back, shoulder, breast and wings begin to emerge.

**Week Four:** Maximum body growth nearing completion; flight feather development underway.

**Week Five:** Male and female parents bring relatively equal amounts of food. Parents begin spending more time away from the young and often perch in nearby trees.

**Week Six:** Young are able to tear pieces of food off and feed themselves, and begin to stand and walk.

**Weeks Eight - Twelve:** Nestlings begin "branching". They flap their wings while perched on the nest and hop onto nearby branches, practicing and building up flight muscles, coordination, and landing skills. Most of Oklahoma's Bald Eagles fledge between 11 and 12 weeks after hatching. After the first flight the eaglets may return to the nest a few times to spend the night (roosting) or to get food brought there by the adults.

Some nestlings fall to the ground and remain there before gaining flight ability. Parents usually continue to feed the young on the ground; but in this location, the chicks are highly vulnerable to predation.

After fledging the young are still dependent on the adults to feed them for a period of up to a couple of months until they gain the experience and skills to find and catch their own food. Radio-telemetry studies of a few Bald Eagles reared in Oklahoma show that they migrate north during the hottest months of the summer to cooler climates such as the Great Lakes area or Canada.

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: Connie Fordham, 2404 11<sup>th</sup> Ave., Canyon, TX 79015

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ New: \_\_\_\_\_ Renew: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Field Trip Calendar for March, April, and May, 2009**

**28 MAR Caprock Canyons State Park:** Meet at 7:20 a.m. at the west side of the Southwest Branch Amarillo Public Library parking lot (nearest to McDonald Lake). Alternate meeting spot will be at Park Headquarters, Caprock Canyons State Park, at 9:00 a.m. There is an entrance fee. Bring lunch. **Leader: Joel Reese**

**11 APR McBride Canyon:** Meet at 7:20 a.m. at the west side of the Southwest Branch Amarillo Public Library parking lot (nearest to McDonald Lake). Alternate meeting spot will be at the intersection of Hwy 136 and the turn-off to Alibates/McBride Canyon (right by the big Alibates sign) at 8:15 a.m. We'll try for some migrating passerines – if I'm remembering correctly, Barrett once had a 5 warbler day at McBride Canyon in springtime. Bring lunch. **Leader: Susan Thompson**

**26 APR Lesser Prairie Chickens near Canadian: "dark & early" on a SUNDAY Morning:** By reservation only, limited to 7 participants; cost is \$100 payable to our guide, Dick Wilberforce; call Geri at 806-323-5397 to reserve a spot; checks may be mailed to 15129 FM 3044, Canadian, TX 79014. We'll meet at the Visitor's Center in Canadian at 4:30 a.m. on Sunday morning. Since few people will be willing to leave Amarillo at 2:30 a.m., we have reserved Kim's Cottage (a B&B at 212 Main St.) for the previous night of April 25, at a cost of \$95 per room, payable upon checkout. (This is one of the more economical options compared to the local hotel rates, influenced as they are by the explosion of oilfield work in the area!) After reserving a spot, please let Susan know whether you will be staying at Kim's, and if so whether you want a room-mate. Dick will take us to a blind right on the lek itself so we shouldn't need spotting scopes in the blind.. Afterward, he will take us for some general birding. Consider dinner at the Cattle Exchange (<http://www.cookya.com/>) and a movie at the Palace Theatre (<http://www.palacetheatre.com/>). **Coordinator: Susan Thompson. Guide: Dick Wilberforce.**

**22-25 MAY Conway, Arkansas area (a.k.a. "We're Going to See Rosemary at Her Place!"):** We'll drive much of Friday, stopping to bird in a few spots along the way, and stay in Ft. Smith Friday night. We'll bird in Arkansas all day on Saturday and Sunday. We'll drive all the way back on Monday (little to no birding planned on return trip). Specifics will firm up as the time gets closer but possible places to bird in Eastern Oklahoma and Western Arkansas include Sequoya NWR (Bald Eagles nest there), Tenkiller Lake, Robert S. Kerr Dam, Moffitt Bottoms, Holla Bend NWR, Lake Conway, Bell Slough, and Bona Dea Sanctuary. We should be able to find some eastern species in prime nesting time. Rosemary has invited us to stay at her house on Saturday and Sunday nights, and is even offering to feed us! We will eat sack lunches and at restaurants, too.

**Coordinator: Susan Thompson. Leaders: Jim Luce & Rosemary Scott.**