

# The Prairie Horned Lark

## Newsletter of the Panhandle Bird Club

Vol. X No. 12

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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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## Christmas Bird Counts!!

Be sure to check out all the different Bird Counts being lead in the Texas Panhandle. They are listed on the back page. All levels of birders are needed and appreciated on these counts so come join in the fun – and, lend a hand on this valued project.



### Kritser Ranch (A Double Treat)

Field Trip November 14, 2009

Leader: Michael Ryan

Participants: Karen Wallace, Terry Massie, Georgia and Leon Swift, Steve Donaldson, Donna Nelson, Susan Thompson and Tom Patterson

Our birding trip to the Kritser Ranch was a double treat. We saw a respectable variety of birds and also received, courtesy of Tom Patterson, a private tour of the Kritser Ranch House. We began with the birding. It was a cloudy but otherwise pleasant day. Early on, in the 'old growth forest' around the ranch house, Terry Massie spotted a Nuthatch and Susan Thompson (I believe) spotted a Downy Woodpecker. Then, as we started our drive to explore the ranch, Terry Massie and Karen Wallace together spotted a Great Horned Owl. The owl was quite accommodating, allowing us to get an extended and unhurried view that included a good look at his or her face.

We then drove back to a small lake, the location of which I knew. There we spotted a Belted Kingfisher and a Double-crested Cormorant. Also, in a tree near the lake, we saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. We were able to use a couple of scopes to get a particularly good viewing of this bird. I was able to appreciate the limited area of red in the throat as opposed to the more extensive area in the Red-naped Sapsucker. At this point, Tom Patterson joined us and led us to another lake on the ranch by way of a somewhat tenuous back country road. On the ride to and from this lake, Mr. Patterson pointed out various bluebirds that would make periodic appearances near the road. At the lake, we saw Hooded Merganser and several Ring-necked Ducks.

Lastly, back at the ranch house, Tom Patterson took us a guided tour of the house pointing out its small treasures and some of its history including connections with such notables as Charles Lindbergh and Will Rogers.

This tour capped off our trip and finished our day.

Birds identified included:

Canada Goose  
Blue-winged Teal  
Ring-necked Duck  
Hooded Merganser  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Mourning Dove  
Greater Roadrunner  
Great Horned Owl  
Belted Kingfisher  
Golden-fronted Woodpecker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Loggerhead Shrike  
Chihuahuan Raven  
Common Raven  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Western Bluebird  
Mountain Bluebird  
Hermit Thrush  
American Robin  
Curved-billed Thrasher  
Spotted Towhee  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Northern Cardinal  
Western Meadowlark  
Great Tailed Grackle  
House Sparrow

**Bird Sightings by Connie Fordham**

Please call or e-mail Connie, with information on any unusual birds or first seasonal arrivals you see in the Panhandle. Call 655-7034 or email

[cfbirder52@yahoo.com](mailto:cfbirder52@yahoo.com)

**Anhinga**

2 on 11/1/09, FrionaRV Park, Parmer Co., Trey Barron

**Greater White-fronted Goose**

11 on 11/14/09, Sherman Co., Barrett Pierce

**Bald Eagle**

2 on 11/15/09, CaprockCanyonStPk, Brisco Co., Don Beard

1 on 11/22/09, BuffaloLkNWR, Randall Co., Steve Collins

**Harris's Hawk**

1 on 11/7/09, Stratford, Sherman Co., Barrett Pierce

**Peregrine Falcon**

1 on 11/7/09, Amarillo, Potter Co., Barrett Pierce

**Sandhill Crane**

800 on 11/14/09, Sherman co., Barrett Pierce

5,000 on 11/18/09, Panhandle, Carson Co., Mark McKinney



Anhinga drying its wings photo by Jim Stevenson

**Long-eared Owl**

1 on 11/7/09, Fm1573&Rd15, Sherman Co., Barrett Pierce

**Rufous Hummingbird**

1 on 11/14/09, Canyon, Texas, Connie Fordham



Rufous Hummingbird photo by Connie Fordham

**Hairy Woodpecker**

11/20/2009, Potter Co., Don McColl

**Black Phoebe**

1 on 11/2/09, FrionaRV Park, Parmer Co., Barrett Pierce

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**

1 on 11/14/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

**Cedar Waxwing**

5 on 11/16/09, WTAMU, Canyon, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

11/22/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

**Gray Catbird**

11/5/09, PaloDuroCanyon St.Pk, Randall Co., Stephanie Barko

**Eastern Bluebird**

8 on 11/14/09, Paloduro Lk, Hansford Co., Barrett Pierce

**Mountain Bluebird**

11/5/09, PaloDuroCanyon StPk, Randall Co., Stephanie Barko

45 on 11/14/09, Paloduro Lk, Hansford Co., Barrett Pierce

8 on 11/22/09, BuffaloLkNWR, Randall Co., Steve Collins

**Townsend's Solitaire**

2on 11/14/09, Hansford Co., Barrett Pierce

**Hermit Thrush**

1on11/15/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

**Spotted Towhee**

1 on11/29/09, Amarillo, Randall Co., Mim Evans

**American Tree Sparrow**

14on11/14/09, PaloDuroLk, Hansford Co., Barrett Pierce

**White-throated Sparrow**

11/20/09, Potter County, Don McColl

**Dark-eyed Junco**

11/22/09, Canyon,Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

**McCown's Longspur**

11/14/2009, PaloduroLk, Hansford Co., Barrett Pierce

**Lapland Longspur**

11/20/09, Potter County, Don McColl

**Chestnut-collared Longspur**

11/5/2009, PaloDuroCanyon St.Pk,Randall Co., Stephanie Barko

many 11/7/09, Moore & Sherman Co., Barrett Pierce

11/14/2009, Paloduro Lk,Hansford Co., Barrett Pierce

**Rusty Blackbird**

1 on11/2/09, FrionaRV Park,Parmer Co., Barrett Pierce

**American Goldfinch**

1on11/22/09, BuffaloLkNWR, Randall Co., Steve Collins

from domestic stock are frequently seen in many other areas. In the East, they may be told from the wild ones by their white tail tips, and lack of any discernable brains, though the Southwestern Wild Turkeys also have white tail tips. Of course, in many places, such as in Texas, Wild Turkeys have become quite tame, but they are *smart* enough to know they are in no danger.



Wild Turkey

photo by Jim Stevenson

## The Scoop on Turkeys

A little “dropped knowledge” from Jim Stevenson on Benjamin Franklin’s favorite bird.

First, the Wild Turkey is the largest member of the Galliformes order in North America, and one of our heaviest bird species. Other turkeys include the beautiful Oscillated Turkey of Central America, complete with a blue head and red bumps, like measles.



Oscillated Turkey photographed at Tikal National Park in Guatemala by Jim Stevenson

While the range of the Wild Turkey is spotty, due to overhunting and habitat loss in many places, turkeys

I frankly don't know why turkeys have bare heads, as this is usually reserved for birds that stick their heads in gross places, like vultures in animals' bodies and storks in murky water. This does not detract from their beauty, though, as we all know the absence of hair, er, feathers on one's head can be very attractive. Oh, and the beard... ;)


Of course, it's the meat of the turkey that we really care about. Galliformes have dark meat on their legs, but unlike doves and waterfowl, light breast meat. The latter means they have fewer power-producing cells in their flight muscles, meaning less stamina. Galliformes like turkeys can fly great - I mean really fast - but just for a few hundred yards. This is why you will find their maps in the field guide depict them as nonmigratory (usually purple), as they could never migrate from one geographic location to another.

Galliformes feed by constantly scratching the ground, which is why they have dark meat on their legs (always my favorite). This order also has a raised hallux (hind toe), to keep it from getting in the way of their scratching.



## History



 Frank Chapman, birder, who first proposed the Christmas Bird Count.

Turkeys cannot sing, so males use their showy tails and iridescence to gain the female's graces. Their wattle and beard no doubt play a role as well, along with their unique gobbling. Upon reflection, I find it only distantly related that those who partake of too much turkey, with the related dressing and such, also wind up with pretty large tails.

It is mildly regrettable that the term "turkey" is associated with stupidity, not unlike other bird names such as booby, loon, drongo and so-forth. I'm sure there are Middle-easterners who feels the same way (and the odd close proximity of Turkey and Hung(a)ry). Turkeys are actually regal, bright birds to whom much is owed them historically. And we have repaid them by evolving them into an annual ovenbird.

Male turkeys are larger than their hens, getting nearly four feet long and about sixteen pounds. Hens are more like nine inches shorter and about seven pounds lighter. Gobblers are also more colorful, and in spring, are the only turkeys that are allowed to be (legally) shot. Domestic turkeys are often heavier than their wild cousins (same species), as they get little exercise and are bred for size (extra size).

Wild Turkeys have spread somewhat further north, a bit into Canada, though probably not tied to global warming like many species. They have spread even more westward, and have re-appeared in a few areas in the East as well, where they had previously disappeared. I believe quite a few can be found in the Washington, DC area, where they are hale and hearty.

### The Christmas Bird Count

Most of the information in this article comes from the Wikipedia website.

The **Christmas Bird Count** (CBC) is a census of birds in the Western Hemisphere, performed annually in the early Northern-hemisphere winter by volunteer birders. The purpose is to provide population data for use in science, especially conservation biology, though many people participate for recreation.

Up through the 19th century, many North Americans participated in the tradition of Christmas "side hunts", in which they competed at how many birds they could kill, regardless of whether they had any use for the carcasses and of whether the birds were beneficial, beautiful, or rare. At the end of that century the U.S. ornithologist Frank Chapman, an officer in the recently formed National Audubon Society, proposed counting birds on Christmas instead of killing them.

In 1900, 27 observers took part in the first count in 25 places in the United States and Canada, 15 of them in the northeastern U.S. from Massachusetts to Philadelphia. Since then the counts have been held every winter, usually with increasing numbers of observers. For instance, the 101st count, in the winter of 2000–2001, involved 52,471 people in 1,823 places in 17 countries (but mostly in the U.S. and Canada). Last year's CBC (2008-09) gathered data from 2,124 Counts and reported 65, 596, 663 birds!

The Audubon Society now partners with Bird Studies Canada, the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory of Texas (responsible for CBCs in Mexico), and the Red Nacional de Observadores de Aves (RNOA, National Network of Bird Observers) and the Instituto Alexander von Humboldt of Colombia.

The greatest number of bird species ever reported by any U.S. location in a single count is 250, observed on December 19, 2005 in the Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh count circle around Matagorda and Palacios, Texas.

## **Methods**

Each individual count is performed in a "count circle" with a diameter of 15 miles or 24 kilometers. At least ten volunteers, including a compiler to manage things, count in each circle. They break up into small parties and follow assigned routes, which change little from year to year, counting every bird they see. In most count circles, some people also watch feeders instead of following routes.

The results are by no means as accurate as a human census. Not all the area even in the count circles is covered, and not every bird along the routes is seen or identified. Big flocks can't be counted precisely. Also, telling whether a bird has been counted twice can be difficult. The rules address this problem by prohibiting counting birds when retracing one's route, except for species that the party hasn't seen before. Also, when a large roost of some species occurs in a count circle, an expert estimates the number for that species during the morning or evening and usually no individuals are counted at other times. Observers can attempt to keep track of flocks of mobile birds such as crows, and can use their judgment, even sometimes recognizing an individual bird or at least that two birds of the same species are different individuals.

The results, providing data on winter ranges of birds, are complementary to those of the Breeding Bird Surveys.

## **Participation**

Participation is open to all. Observers pay a \$5 fee (except feeder watchers, U.S. and Canadian participants under 19 years old, members of Bird Studies Canada, and Latin Americans in their home countries). The fee supports compilation and publication of the data. U.S. participants who pay or who are 18 or under receive a copy of the issue of *American Birds* that summarizes the results and includes articles on trends and regions.

## **From Connie Fordham**

All of us were interested in the amazing birds being seen at the Friona RV Park and wetlands in Parmer County. These birds included the White Ibis, Black Phoebes, Rusty Blackbirds and the Anhingas seen last month by Trey Barron (the speaker for our annual meeting.) Connie Fordham got information on how to get to the RV Park from the Chamber of Commerce in Friona and passes it along to us.

"It is located on North 214. If you are on Highway 60 you will turn north at the Fast Stop and go about 1/4 mile, it will be on the west side of 214. The phone number for the city is 806-250-2761. I am glad your group has been able to see some different birds.

Thanks  
Chris Alexander  
Chamber VP"



White Ibis

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

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

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

## Field Trip Calendar for December, 2009 and January, 2010

Here are all the dates and compiler contact info. for the upcoming Texas Panhandle area Christmas Bird Counts. For questions about meeting places and times, or field parties, contact the compiler.

- **Amarillo (includes Tanglewood, Boy Scout Camp & Palo Duro State Park)**
  - December 19, 2009 (Saturday) Tom Johnson is the primary compiler and the contact person: 806-622-2656, 806-236-9614. Tom will lead a group in Lake Tanglewood. Connie Fordham (806 655-7034) is leading a group at Camp Don Harrington on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Meet there at 7:30
- **Lake Meredith West (includes Kritser Ranch)**
  - December 20, 2009 (Sunday)
  - Michael Ryan is the compiler and contact person: 806-359-3987.
- **Buffalo Lake NWR (includes roads north of Umbarger and SW of Canyon)**
  - December 26, 2009 (Saturday)
  - Joe Cepeda is the compiler and contact person: 806-651-2584, [jcepeda@mail.wtamu.edu](mailto:jcepeda@mail.wtamu.edu)
- **Lake Meredith East**
  - December 31, 2009 – New Year's Eve (Thursday)
  - Susan Thompson is the compiler and contact person: 806-352-7463, 806-517-0772. (Barrett Pierce is leading.)
- **Quitaque (includes Caprock Canyons State Park)**
  - January 2, 2010 (Saturday)
  - Joel Reese is the compiler and contact person: 806-684-2395, [jdreesetexas@yahoo.com](mailto:jdreesetexas@yahoo.com).

**16 JAN 2010** Thompson Grove and Rita Blanca Lake. Meet at Southwest Branch, Amarillo Public library parking lot nearest to McDonald Lake at 6:20 a.m.. (Note early meeting time). The alternate meeting spot is McDonalds on Hwy 87 in Dalhart at 8:30 a.m. Bring Lunch. **Leader: Jody McKenzie.**