



# The Prairie Horned Lark

## Newsletter of the Panhandle Bird Club

Vol. X No. 4

April 10, 2009

### **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.

#### **Officers of the Panhandle Bird Club**

President:	Jim Luce	353-2525
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Records:	Connie Fordham	655-7034
Advisor:	Barrett Pierce	356-8033
Field Trips:	Susan Thompson	517-0772
Newsletter:	Judith Evans	373-6740
	judith.evans@suddenlink.net	
	Candy Myers	353-2525
	camjkl@aol.com	
Webmaster:	Ray Matlack	655-2469
	rmatlack@mail.wtamu.edu	
Web Site:	<a href="http://homedirs.wtamu.edu/~rmatlack/panhandlebirdclub">http://homedirs.wtamu.edu/~rmatlack/panhandlebirdclub</a>	

### **Field Trip to Palo Duro Canyon** **March 7, 2008**

Participants: Susan Thompson, Michael Ryan, Judith Evans, Billie Shalvey, Karen Fristoe, Joshua Wolfe, Gene Noel, Robert & Carrie King (leaders)

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; actually it was a very nice, crisp Saturday morning on March 7<sup>th</sup>, just perfect for a birding trip to Palo Duro Canyon. We arrived in anticipation of a grand birding trip. It turned out to be an abundant bird day, until the predicted harsh winds came in the afternoon, more on that later. We got to Palo Duro Canyon right at 8:00 a.m. and had to wait in line for several minutes with other excited outdoor enthusiasts. Robert drove to the overflow parking lot, while Susan ran into the park office to renew her park pass. Michael, Robert and I heard an awful racket in the bushes and went to check it out. Robert thinks he saw the black and blue of a Stellar Jay. None of us could guarantee the call was from a Stellar Jay, although it sounded blue-jay-ish. It would have been really cool to have a sighting of a Stellar Jay here in the Panhandle. Probably just wishful thinking, although the three of us agreed, Susan probably could have identified the bird in two seconds. Onward and outward.

**Let Susan know if you're planning to go to Arkansas! Don't miss it!**

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.



Fox Sparrow at PDCSP photo by Robert King



Spotted Towhee at PDCSP photo by Robert King

After the overflow parking lot, we went to the Trading Post. Its bird blind and feeder are always a popular site for bird-watching. At first, there weren't any birds to be seen; one of the people leaving the blind said a big truck had scared them all away. A Bewick's Wren made itself known, and we chased it for a while, until we spied it boasting at the top of the tree. Then, Robert and Susan turned the fountain on, and we sat back and waited for a few minutes. A ton of birds showed up. It looked a lot like elementary school recess, all the squawking and bickering for the best spot at the feeder and fountain. We were very excited at the number of species spotted there. As we were leaving the blind, there was a Curve-billed Thrasher and Canyon Towhee just ahead of us on the path back to the parking lot!

Then we drove to and parked at waterhole #1. At the picnic area we were greeted by a Ruby Crowned Kinglet. Judith played her Kinglet birdcall and whatever the recording said seemed to have ticked the bird off! He displayed his ruby colored crown, and showed us how this greenish/yellow bird got the Ruby in his name. Most of us were also able to get a good look at a Brown Creeper as he climbed up and flew down from several trees. We then explored the Hackberry Camp Area and wound our way back around the Lone Star Interpretive Theater. One of our biggest finds of the day was at the Interpretive Theater. A Brown Thrasher was drinking from a dripping faucet at the back of the Lone Star stage. We watched him for several minutes from close range as he ignored us as he quenched his thirst.

We walked back past the cars and started down the Paseo Del Rio trail. Other than wild Turkeys, not a whole lot of action here. So we cut the walk short

and went back to the cars. As we were driving off to the Chinaberry Day Use Area, we were joined by Gene Noel.

At Chinaberry we found several Golden-fronted woodpeckers and Tufted Titmice. One lady on a bike stopped and asked what we were looking at. When we told her "a Tufted Titmouse," she said she didn't know they could climb trees that high. Realizing she thought it was an actual mouse, we explained it was a bird.



Golden-fronted Woodpecker photo by Robert King

After Chinaberry, we stopped at Sunflower. This was to be our lunch spot, but they evidently are in the process of closing this section down. There were no picnic tables to be found, and most the grounds were overgrown. Along with no tables were no birds! This turned out to be a quick stop for us.

We found a picnic area just down the road from the Sunflower area. Right as we stopped, Michael spotted a Ladder Back Woodpecker. This was a nice change from all the Golden Fronted woodpeckers we saw during the day.

At this time, the wind really started picking up. We ate, then journeyed on to the turn-around. We walked a short distance, and decided that both the wind and other hikers had scared off the birds. We didn't even hear any songs or calls. We decided then that we were pretty close to finished. We made another brief stop at the Trading Post bird blind. We mainly saw the same birds that we had in the morning, but this time a Fox Sparrow joined the

bird crowd. We then went to the Pioneer Amphitheater, in hopes of finding a Canyon or Rock Wren. No birds sighted here, although we did see several tourists taking pictures in front of the amphitheater. At this point, the wind was really strong; although, as we found out a little later, not nearly as strong as it was on top of the canyon. Still, we saw quite a few birds on this outing, and it seemed like everyone was very satisfied with the trip. By the time we got back to Amarillo, the wind was so bad, you couldn't even stand up in it. We were very fortunate that it hadn't happened earlier in the day.

After arriving back at the library Robert and Carrie fought the wind to walk down to the small lake to 'pad' the list with a few water fowl!

Species List:

Snow Goose  
Canada Goose  
Mallard  
Wild Turkey  
American Coot  
Mourning Dove  
Golden-fronted Woodpecker  
Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
Chihuahuan Raven  
Black-crested Titmouse  
Brown Creeper  
Canyon Wren (Heard but not seen)  
Bewick's Wren  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
American Robin  
Northern Mockingbird  
Brown Thrasher  
Curve-billed Thrasher  
European Starlings  
Spotted Towhee  
Canyon Towhee  
Fox Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
White-Crowned Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Northern Cardinal  
Western Meadowlark  
Great-tailed Grackle  
House Finch  
House Sparrow

## Field Trip to Caprock Canyon Postponed due to "Blizzard" (or at least some very heavy snow!)

It's a very rare occasion when the Panhandle Bird Club postpones a trip due to weather. I can remember going out to bird on a winter day when the temperature was 7 degrees! But the blowing heavy snow on March 28 was just too great an obstacle and the trip to Caprock Canyon has been re-scheduled to May 2.

Susan Thompson took pictures through her window (smart girl!) of American Goldfinches feeding in the blizzard.



American Goldfinch on Susan's feeder in the snow



Goldfinch hiding in the snow!

## **Bird Report for March 2009**

**By Connie Fordham**

### **Double-crested Cormorant**

2 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res, Hansford Co., Carl Poldrack  
5 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

### **Greater White-fronted Goose**

8 on 3/14/09, Nazareth, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson  
1 on 3/16/09, S.E.Pk, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

### **Snow Goose**

180 on 3/14/09, Nazareth, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Ross's Goose**

30 on 3/14/09, Nazareth, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Cinnamon Teal**

4 on 3/14/09, Hale County, Anthony Hewitson  
2 on 3/14/09, Bovina, Parmer Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Canvasback**

1 on 3/14/09, Bovina, Parmer Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Turkey Vulture**

20 on 3/29/09, Hutchinson Co., Rudy Cadra

### **Bald Eagle**

1 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carl Poldrack  
3 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

### **Ferruginous Hawk**

1 on 3/1/2009, Hutchinson Co., Carl Poldrack

### **Rough-legged Hawk**

3 on 3/1/2009, Hutchinson Co., Carl Poldrack

### **Merlin**

1 on 3/2009, Dalhart, Dallam Co., Jody McKenzie  
1 on 3/14/09, Swisher Co., Anthony Hewitson  
1 on 3/16/09, Lk Tanglewd, Randall Co., Marilyn Hill

### **Ring-necked Pheasant**

12 on 3/1/2009, Hutchinson Co., Carl Poldrack

### **Sandhill Crane**

50 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carolyn Stallwitz  
12 on 3/14/2009, Lk Meredith, Hutchinson Co., Carl Poldrack

### **Long-billed Curlew**

238 on 3/14/09, Dimmitt, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Greater Yellowlegs**

2 on 3/14/09, Dimmitt, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Glaucous Gull**

1 on 3/22/09, S.E. Potter Co., Barrett Pierce

### **Downy Woodpecker**

1 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

### **Northern Flicker**

3 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carolyn Stallwitz

### **Say's Phoebe**

1 on 3/4/09, Dalhart, Dallam Co., Jody McKenzie  
1 on 3/14/09, Swisher County, Anthony Hewitson



Vermilion Flycatcher photo by Jim Stevenson

### **Vermilion Flycatcher**

1 on 3/11/09, Palo Duro Canyon Pk, Randall Co., Mark Hassell  
1 on 3/25/09, Palo Duro Canyon Pk, Randall Co., Ray Matlack

### **Purple Martin**

1 on 3/3/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

### **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**

1 on 3/8/09, Dalhart, Dallam Co., Jody McKenzie

### **Cedar Waxwing**

1 on 3/27/09, Amarillo, Potter Co., Ruth Starr  
10 on 3/31/09, WT, Canyon, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

### **Sage Thrasher**

2 on 3/14/09, Hale County, Anthony Hewitson  
1 on 3/14/09, Swisher County, Anthony Hewitson

### **Curve-billed Thrasher**

2 on 3/26/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

### **Eastern Bluebird**

3/11/09, Palo Duro Canyon Pk, Randall Co., Mark Hassell

### **Western Bluebird**

8 on 3/12/09, Palo Duro Canyon Pk Randall Co., Mark Hassell

### **Mountain Bluebird**

20 on 3/1/2009, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carl Poldrack  
10 on 3/1/09, Palo Duro Res. Hansford Co., Carolyn Stallwitz  
3/11/09, Palo Duro Canyon Pk, Randall Co., Mark Hassell  
2 on 3/14/09, Dimmitt, Castro Co., Anthony Hewitson

### **Red-breasted Nuthatch**

2 on 3/8/09, Dalhart, Dallam Co., Jody McKenzie

### **Brown Creeper**

1-03/2009, Dalhart, Dallam Co., Jody McKenzie

### **Chihuahuan Raven**

1 on 3/14/2009, Lk Meredith, Hutchinson Co., Carl Poldrack

### **Yellow-rumped Warbler**

1 on 3/15/09, Dalhart, Dallam Co., Jody McKenzie  
1 on 3/29/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

### **Spotted Towhee**

1 on 3/30/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

**Tree Swallow**

1 on 3/25/09, Palo Duro Canyon Pk, Randall Co., Ray Matlack

**Fox Sparrow**

1 on 3/22/09, Claude Hwy, Randall Co., Marilyn Hill

**Lincoln's Sparrow**

2 on 3/17/2009, Canyon, Randall Co., Ray Matlack

1 on 3/24/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Connie Fordham

3 on 3/26/09, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty Schoenhals

**Swamp Sparrow**

1 on 3/14/2009, Lk Meredith, Hutchinson Co., Carl Poldrack

**McCown's Longspur**

20 on 3/14/09, Hub, Parmer Co., Anthony Hewitson



Greater White-fronted Goose

Several of our Panhandle Bird Club members got to see the Greater White-fronted Goose at the Southeast Park in Canyon this past month. It is a rather rare visitor to our area. Robert King shot this excellent photo of this beautiful bird.

**An Overview of Bird Migration by Jim Stevenson (who also took the pictures)**

*Jim Stevenson from the Galveston Ornithological Society sent this information to his mailing list and it was so timely and interesting I emailed and got permission to put it in our newsletter.*

He wrote: "I have been getting a lot of questions from you about migration, so I thought I would share some overview that may help with this gigantic, broad topic.

First, most migration is movement between a bird's wintering grounds and breeding grounds (spring), or vice versa (fall). If the bird also winters in our area, like House Wrens, we call them Nearctic migrants, or continental migrants. Ergo, winter residents are here from fall through spring.

Migrants that neither winter here, nor breed here, like most of the warblers, are called Neotropical migrants, because they are migrating to the New World Tropics. Many shorebirds join songbirds as Neotropical migrants. Lesser Yellowlegs mostly go to the Tropics, but Greater are Nearctic migrants, as they commonly winter in Texas.

Some birds spend the summer in our area, arriving in spring and leaving in fall, and we call them summer residents. These are species like martins, Green Herons, frigatebirds, Wilson's Plovers and so-forth. But technically, they are also Neotropical migrants.

Neotropical migrants may be divided into two groups easily, depending on the route they take. Much is made of trans-Gulf (t-G) migrants, and indeed, being on the coast when these brave sojourners make landfall is a miraculous event. They leave usually around dusk in places such as Yucatan or Venezuela, and begin arriving on our shores late morning to early afternoon the next day. They navigate using the stars mostly, and hopefully get a favorable wind.

But many birds we see migrating are actually flying *around* the Gulf, and not crossing it at all. These are circum-Gulf(c-G) migrants, and there are quite a few. Most herons and egrets (not Greens, apparently) are c-G (Yellow-crowned but not Black-crowned Night-herons), and may often be seen in flocks flying parallel to the coastline in late March and early April.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Some ducks also fly c-G a lot, like Blue-winged Teal and shovelers, and Fulvous Whistling-ducks (others occasionally). Black-necked Stilts may also be seen flying in this way, which always looks a little odd.



Black-necked Stilts

All these circum-Gulf migrants fly out over the water a few hundred yards, but other c-G migrants fly over land, also paralleling the coastline. Swallows are the most conspicuous, racing past representing several species. Small flocks of Lesser Yellowlegs are also conspicuous over land, and to a lesser extent, Wilson's Phalaropes. There are plenty of other odd examples, such as Swallow-tailed Kites.

It does seem like there may be more circum-Gulf movement in fall than spring, and some species like Eastern Kingbirds appear to often take different routes in the two migration seasons (c-G in fall; t-G in spring). Baltimore Orioles and Ruby-throated Hummers may be examples of this, to a certain extent.

As you might have guessed, circum-Gulf migrants don't just go down the Texas coast. Many utilize the Florida coast, as I observed for decades, but they head more to the West Indies (etc.) than to Central America. So, between the two groups, they literally go "around" the Gulf of Mexico.

Little Blue, Tri-colored and Yellow-crowned Night Herons are circum-Gulf migrants, along with Cattle, Snowy and Great Egrets. Green Herons are trans-Gulf, and the Reddish Egret (note odd white feathers) just follows the food along the coast, not really "migrating."



Little Blue Heron

OK, this is the basics for bird migration, and I hope it helps some of you."

### Report on the great email newsletter delivery experiment!

On March 28 I decided that I would finally get what email addresses that I had together and have a try at emailing the newsletter. I had a rather large number of emails and gamely attached the newsletter to them all and punched "Send". The first thing that I noticed was that I was getting some "bouncebacks" which I had expected. I was making a list of these no-good email addresses when I noticed that the returned emails were kind of repeating themselves and that they were piling up at a fantastic rate in my Inbox. I started deleting the repeats but working as fast as I could I couldn't keep up! As soon as I would get them cleared out another big batch would arrive. I was getting sort of frantic when I began to get another kind of return on my experiment. These were emails from the people who did get the newsletter email – some of them 28 times! Somehow, having that large number of returned emails had kept the original in my Outbox and the darn program just kept trying to deliver it! Finally

got it straightened out but it was kind of exciting there for awhile!

I will continue sending out both the email version and the postal version (except for the people who have already told me that they want the email version or the postal version exclusively) for a couple of months. You can decide how you like it and let me know whether you want one or the other or both.

If you did not get the email version around the last of March, send me your email address and I will add you to the recipients. My email is: [judith.evans@suddenlink.net](mailto:judith.evans@suddenlink.net)

### **Field Trips!**

We have some great field trips coming up. See the back page for details. There's a trip to Canadian for Lesser Prairie Chickens. Some of us went to New Mexico last year and if you haven't sat there at dawn, listened to that eerie booming and then witnessed the elaborate dancing moves don't miss this opportunity to have that experience with a much shorter trip!



Lesser Prairie Chicken photo by Judith Evans

Also on tap is a visit to Rosemary's place in Arkansas scheduled for the Memorial Day weekend. You can call Susan Thompson or Jim Luce for more information about this trip.

### **More pictures from the Palo Duro Canyon Field Trip by Robert King!**



Gene, Carrie, and Billie on the trail!



Friends



King of the Hill

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 April, and May, 2009

**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.**

**2 MAY 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**

**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 Sequoia 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.**