

The Prairie Horned Lark

Newsletter of the Panhandle Bird Club

Vol. IX No. 8

August 10, 2008

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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Field Trip Report: Cross Bar Cooperative Management Area **July 26, 2008**

Participants: Judith Evans, Carrie & Robert King, Tim Stroud, Susan Thompson (leader)

It's the way things are in the Texas Panhandle – a few weeks go by and the muddiest roads you have ever seen are magically transformed to the dustiest... So we had no problem navigating the Cross Bar on this trip.

We all piled into my rather small pickup (Robert got to ride in back!) on account of its high clearance. I basically begged someone else to drive (Judith rose to the challenge) which would leave me more free to navigate with my fairly trusty GPS, and to hop out and unlock the various gates. And we were off, giving Robert a walkie-talkie to communicate with the rest of us.

The morning was cool and the light was soft. Right off, we heard Northern Bobwhites, Western Meadowlarks, and a good number of Cassin's Sparrows. Lark Sparrows were also numerous. We headed first for a spot that Ashley Long had advised me to check for Cactus Wrens singing. (Ashley is a graduate student visiting from Wisconsin who happens to be studying the nesting birds at Cross Bar – I met her when scouting for this trip and she gave me some great Cactus Wren info., including GPS coordinates for singing males and nests.) Well, the end of July *is* rather late to hear full-out singing, but we thought we'd try. We didn't hear any Cactus Wrens, but we DID hear a Northern Mockingbird running through its repertoire, which included a couple of lines of Cactus Wren song, so that counts for something, right?

Next we drove to the most reliable place for seeing Cactus Wrens – a corral with a windmill, stock tanks, and a couple of "junk piles." The Cactus Wrens like to hang out near the junk piles,



Northern Cardinal by Jim Stevenson

but no luck for us in that regard. We did see Canyon Towhees, Scaled Quail, Northern Bobwhites, Blue Grosbeaks, and a Ladder-backed Woodpecker here. I caught sight of a single Lark Bunting – unmistakable – and wondered whether he was a summer resident or early fall migrant. We also saw hundreds of Brown-headed Cowbirds near the stock tanks, arriving and departing in large flocks.

Along the roads we got close looks at Curve-billed Thrashers, and Northern Mockingbirds were quite abundant. We also saw a plain sparrow perched just a few feet from the road in a mesquite and our guess that it was a Cassin’s was confirmed as it began singing. This was a new species for the Kings’ list. We located a handful of Cactus Wren nests, some of which were undoubtedly “dummy” nests. The only active nests we ran across belonged to Mourning Doves.



American Kestrel by Dave Herr

The most unique spot at Cross Bar is the plunge pool, and there we heard two or three Painted Buntings singing, and eventually we were able to get a few sightings of the males. This bird was a “lifer” for Tim. After he got his first look, he said he could now die happy, but I noticed just a couple of minutes later he said he wanted an even better look... See what birding does to people? It makes them insatiable! We walked around in the draw until – yikes – we noticed we were collecting more than a tick or two on our pant legs! So it was onward. We had a really neat opportunity on the

path back to the vehicle to watch the interaction between a pair of noisy Loggerhead Shrikes in a cottonwood tree where their nest was likely located.

Back on the road we had two Texas Horned Lizard sightings and saw a family group of Scaled Quail. We arrived at the overlook. From our high vantage point, we looked down over West Amarillo Creek – a gorgeous view. No bird life presented itself, but still a special sight. We drove down close to the creek to seek out a bit of cottonwood shade and eat our lunches. We heard Northern Cardinals, an Ash-throated Flycatcher, and more Painted Buntings, but they stayed in their cover. The day was heating up and it was time to leave. Thus ended an adventurous morning of birding.

Bird List: (34 species observed)

- Scaled Quail
- Northern Bobwhite
- Turkey Vulture
- Mississippi Kite
- Red-tailed Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Rock Pigeon
- Mourning Dove
- Greater Roadrunner
- Common Nighthawk
- Ladder-backed Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Eastern Phoebe
- Ash-throated Flycatcher
- Western Kingbird
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Horned Lark
- Barn Swallow
- Northern Mockingbird
- Curve-billed Thrasher
- European Starling
- Canyon Towhee
- Cassin’s Sparrow
- Lark Sparrow
- Lark Bunting
- Northern Cardinal
- Blue Grosbeak
- Painted Bunting
- Western Meadowlark
- Great-tailed Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- House Finch
- House Sparrow

Rita Blanca Lake and Thompson Grove Park Field Trip Report, July 12, 2008

Leader Jody McKenzie

We parked at the trail head located below the kid's fishing pond at the north east edge of the lake. We consisting of: Carolyn Boyd, Rudy Cadra, Judith Evans, Carrie King, Robert King, Susan Thompson and myself, Jody McKenzie.

The day was to be hot and windy but we enjoyed cool temps as we began our short hike. Lots of chatter in the trees overhead presented Bullock's Orioles and a lone Orchard Oriole. The Orchard was a first for me. Other species noted on this trail were Western King birds, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Grackles

One bird eluded identification as it flew above rocks on either side of the trail. It simply did not present itself in such a way that we could get a full view of it. We hoped for a Rock Wren on the same rocks but had no luck. I asked Susan if the Rock Wren bobbed as it moved about and she said it bent at the knees as it moved. I had observed a Rock Wren moving about and bobbing as it moved around a small pile of flat rocks in the backyard at the home of a friend. I have been back to this home several times hoping to see the Rock Wren again, but it didn't show.

Quite possibly the most interesting species we identified on this hike was the lone Snow Goose on the far side on the water. Carolyn spotted it and suggested it might be a Snow Goose and she was spot on with the positive id made by scope. It was several feet from the waters edge, moving slowly about. Feeding, I guess? The story of how this Snow Goose came be at this location in Dalhart, Texas is story I would give anything to know.

A pair of Black Terns flew above the lake in this same general location. At 11:30 am or so we made our way back to my house for lunch.

We headed north on Highway 87 to Thompson Grove and made our usual turn east and watched for the old John Deere combine parked permanently on the north side of the road and hoped for a perching quail, but, no luck.

We did well at Thompson Grove Park. A Blue Grosbeak was spotted first thing. A Common Night-hawk sat calmly in a tree above us with its body parallel to the branch it sat. We also saw an Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbirds and a Say's Phoebe.



Say's
Phoebe
by
Dave Heer

We moved by car to the far side of the park so that we could walk a row of trees in pursuit of more birds. Many dove nests were found in pine trees on branches low to the ground, some with 2 or 3 eggs. The wind was blowing by this time and it was amazing to watch the wind rock these flimsy platform like nests without any eggs falling to the ground. Constructed of twigs, they are stronger than they look. We parted the branches of some of the cedars and found empty cup like nests of detailed construction that were low to the ground.

The best find at Thompson Grove was a nest of birds high in a pine tree. I don't know who spotted it first but we had a great time viewing the nest with a scope and trying to id the inhabitants. A white fuzzy head appeared above the nest once or twice and a large eye with maybe brown plumage attached could be seen peering from low in the nest but it was terribly difficult to id even with the scope because of the placement of the branches the nest sat upon. We viewed the nest at several angles with no sighting of adult birds. As I look back on this sighting I wonder if the eye peering from low in the nest with possibly brown plumage attached was the adult bird glaring at us in hopes that we would leave. Hawks? Owls? Just not sure on this one.

Species List

Bullock's Oriole
Orchard Oriole
Western Kingbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Grackle
House Sparrow
Red-winged Blackbird
Black Tern
Snow Goose
Mallard
American Coot

Black-crowned Night-Heron
Blue Grosbeak
Common Nighthawk
Ash-throated Flycatcher
Say's Phoebe

July Rare Bird Report

By Connie Fordham

Green Heron

1 on 7/22/2008, Gray Co., Manual DeLeon

Snow Goose

1 on 7/12/2008, Lake Rita Blanca, Dallam Co.,
Jody McKenzie

Wood Duck

1 on 7/22/2008, Gray Co., Manual DeLeon

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

1 on 7/22/2008, Gray Co., Manual DeLeon

Calliope Hummingbird

1 on 7/15/2008, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty
Schoenhals

1 on 7/16/2008, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty
Schoenhals

Rufous Hummingbird

1 on 7/22/2008, Canyon, Randall Co., Monty
Schoenhals

1 on 7/22/2008, Amarillo, Potter Co., Ruth Starr

Red-headed Woodpecker

1 on 7/22/2008, Gray Co., Manual DeLeon

Hairy Woodpecker

1 on 7/24/2008, Pampa, Gray Co., Jan Elston

Eastern Kingbird

1 on 7/22/2008, Gray Co., Manual DeLeon

Gray Catbird

1 on 7/22/2008, Gray Co., Manual DeLeon

Yellow-rumped Warbler "Audubon's Race"

1 on 7/4/2008, Dalhart, Hartley Co.,
Jody McKenzie

Chipping Sparrow

1 on 7/30/2008, Dumas, Moore Co.,
Carolyn Stallwitz

Watch our Web Site and next newsletter for details
about the upcoming Annual Meeting

Ruth Beasley

From High Plains Public Radio's

Learning the Birds

Will address our club!

Let me tell you about RED SLOUGH

By Candy Myers

Jim and I have visited a lot of great birding spots and been on hand for some fabulous sights. In writing our book about birding along Interstate-40 we identified about 140 sites along the route that are worth the time to bird. Most of them are pretty good. A lot of them are really great – especially at certain times of the year. A handful are outstanding much of the year. A few are worth birding every day. Red Slough Wildlife Management Area is one of those sites and David Arbour is the guy that birds Red Slough everyday.

David is employed by the Wildlife Management Area so he probably does have to **work** on the refuge, but he is not a man to allow a bird to go unnoticed. He is a fabulous birder and a generous teacher who gladly shares the refuge with other enthusiasts. He is also a talented photographer and knows his dragonflies and reptiles. Once a week, David, and anyone who is lucky enough to accompany him, survey the refuge for birds and make a count. He reports it on the web and what follows was his report on August 5th.

From David Arbour

As has been the norm lately, it was very hot on the bird survey today. Highlights were a pair of Mottled Ducks, Tricolored Herons, and Wood Storks in unit 16, and the continuing presence of Purple Gallinule and Neotropic Cormorants. Unit 16 is the hot spot now with the northeast portion being the best. This area can be best viewed from the observation platform at the west end of Otter Lake. The water levels are dropping naturally here and mudflats are starting to be exposed. Most of today's shorebirds were seen here also. Also interesting was seeing 3 American Bitterns come flying into Bittern Lake together and land. They were probably a family group. Also saw a fledgling Least Bittern in the *Thalia* in unit 30. While looking for gallinules in unit 30, I found a Purple

Brown-headed
Cowbird

By Dave Herr



Gallinule's nest that the young I reported a few weeks ago undoubtedly came from. It was built in the middle of one of the *Powdery Thalia* (an emergent wetland plant similar to Canna lilies) clumps. Here is a complete list of all found today:

Wood Duck - 60
Mallard - 9
Mottled Duck - 2 (a pair; unit 16)
Pied-billed Grebe - 36
American White Pelican - 1
Neotropic Cormorant - 3 (Otter lake rookery & unit 30)
Anhinga - 50
American Bittern - 3 (Bittern Lake)
Least Bittern - 10
Great Blue Heron - 16
Great Egret - **625**
Snowy Egret - 275
Little Blue Heron - 175
Tricolored Heron - 9 (Most in unit 16)
Cattle Egret - 10,000
Green Heron - 20
Black-crowned Night-Heron - 2
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron - 2
White Ibis - 50
Dark Ibis sp. - 4 (at least 3 appeared to be hybrids.)
Wood Stork - 9 (unit 16)
Black Vulture - 10
Turkey Vulture - 29
Mississippi Kite - 13
Cooper's Hawk - 1
Red-shouldered Hawk - 2
Broad-winged Hawk - 1
King Rail - 1 (Bittern Lake)
Purple Gallinule - 1 adult (unit 30 *Thalia* patch.)
Common Moorhen - 13 (Most in unit 16)
American Coot - 1
Semipalmated Plover - 2
Killdeer - 12
Spotted Sandpiper - 7
Solitary Sandpiper - 4
Greater Yellowlegs - 1
Lesser Yellowlegs - 6
Upland Sandpiper - 2
Semipalmated Sandpiper - 2
Least Sandpiper - 38
Pectoral Sandpiper - 46
Stilt Sandpiper - 32
Dowitcher sp. - 2
Least Tern - 7 (Otter Lake, units 16 & 30)
Black Tern - 5 (unit 16)

Mourning Dove - 12
Yellow-billed Cuckoo - 4
Ruby-throated Hummingbird - 14
Belted Kingfisher - 1
Downy Woodpecker - 1
Eastern Kingbird - 2
White-eyed Vireo - 2
Bell's Vireo - 1
Blue Jay - 1
American Crow - 10
Fish Crow - 3
Cliff Swallow - 65
Barn Swallow - 7
Carolina Chickadee - 1
Tufted Titmouse - 1
Carolina Wren - 6
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - 3
Northern Mockingbird - 1
Common Yellowthroat - 7
Yellow-breasted Chat - 1
Northern Cardinal - 5
Blue Grosbeak - 3
Indigo Bunting - 8
Painted Bunting - 2 juv. (adults have migrated.)
Dickcissel - 3
Red-winged Blackbird - 20
Orchard Oriole - 4

Odonates:

Common Green Darner
Royal River Cruiser
Prince Baskettail
Four-spotted Pennant
Halloween Pennant
Common Pondhawk
Blue Dasher
Eastern Amberwing
Slaty Skimmer
Roseate Skimmer
Wandering Glider
Spot-winged Glider
Black Saddlebags

Herps:

Red-eared Slider
Green Treefrog
Blanchard's Cricket Frog
Southern Leopard Frog
Bronze Frog
Bullfrog

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/ouachita/natural-resources/redslough/index.shtml>

David's Photo Galleries:

<http://www.pbase.com/sloughbirder>

This is a synopsis of our write up for

RED SLOUGH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, Idabel, Oklahoma

Red Slough is an extraordinary wildlife refuge located at the southeast corner of Oklahoma in the Ouachita National Forest. Over 290 species of birds have been identified there.

The 5800 acres of wetland, lakes, woodland and scrub is actively managed to provide suitable habitat for a diverse collection of resident and migrating birds. The land was formerly used as a rice farm, so the WMA is divided by levees into numerous small units. Mud flats provide excellent habitat for migrating shorebirds in the fall. The wetlands provide appropriate breeding grounds for a large number of water birds, the woodlands bring in warblers and other passerines during migration as well as to breed and the grasslands and scrub provide desirable habitat for a variety of sparrows.

Red Slough is divided into lakes and numbered fields, forests, and wetlands as shown on the map. When the levees were constructed the dirt needed to build them up was removed from adjacent 'borrow pits' which now remain as water-filled ditches throughout the refuge. The area is managed by sequential discing of the fields and subsequent burning of the scrub with annual flooding of specific areas to create optimal habitat for birds. Management activities are rotated between the various units so that good habitat somewhere on the refuge is available for the various species as needed each year.

There are numerous parking lots throughout the refuge. Most birders leave their cars and hike along the mowed levees. Nine viewing platforms have been constructed and allow good views of the surrounding lakes, wetland and scrub. Birders are free to explore the entire refuge except for the area around the lakes during the waterfowl resting period from October 15 to January 31. Entry there is prohibited at that time.

The major hazard at Red Slough is Fire Ants that make hills on the levees. Watch where you step and avoid the ant hills at all costs. The ants will run up your legs and inflict painful bites if you inadvertently stand on one of their soft mounds. The rangers suggest that birders wear heavy tight fitting socks pulled up over the hem of your pants to prevent the ants from getting under your clothes.

You will see cautionary alligator signs at the refuge, but if you stay on the levees you are

unlikely to encounter the alligators or the rattlesnakes and cottonmouth moccasins that also occur at Red Slough.

Bittern Lake is one of the most popular birding areas at Red Slough. It has three viewing platforms and can be a nice loop hike. Common Moorhen, King Rail and Purple Gallinule breed in this area. Least Bittern nests among the cattails. Birders frequently see floating Pied-billed Grebe nests in the ditches around Bittern Lake. Prothonotary Warbler may nest in bluebird boxes here and Orchard Oriole is common in the summer. Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons and Green Heron roost in tall willow trees south of this viewing platform.

Another popular hike is west along the levee from the north parking lot on Mudline Rd to the viewing platform east of Otter Lake. Look over the lake for ducks and grebes.

Fall migration from July through September is best for seeing shorebirds. Units that were disced and later flooded and then are drying out during migration are most attractive to the shorebirds.

Yellow Rail is seen in the fall, especially during October. It may linger into early winter. Look for it on the west side of Unit 6. This grassland area is also good for hawks. Short-eared Owl has been seen at dusk in winter on Unit 6.

Many sparrows winter at Red Slough. Look around the parking areas and along the roads, especially in stands of the feathery, light-colored Panicum grass. LeConte's Sparrow is easy to locate near the south parking lot on Mudline Rd, especially early on an overcast morning. Savannah Sparrow is the most common sparrow in winter but Field, Vesper, Fox, Song, Lincoln, Swamp, White-throated, and White-Crowned Sparrows are also likely to be found.

During spring you may see American Bittern, American Golden-Plover and other shorebirds. Units 30 and 44 are good bets during the spring and may yield Peregrine Falcon, Mottled Duck, Black-Necked Stilt and Wilson's Phalarope.

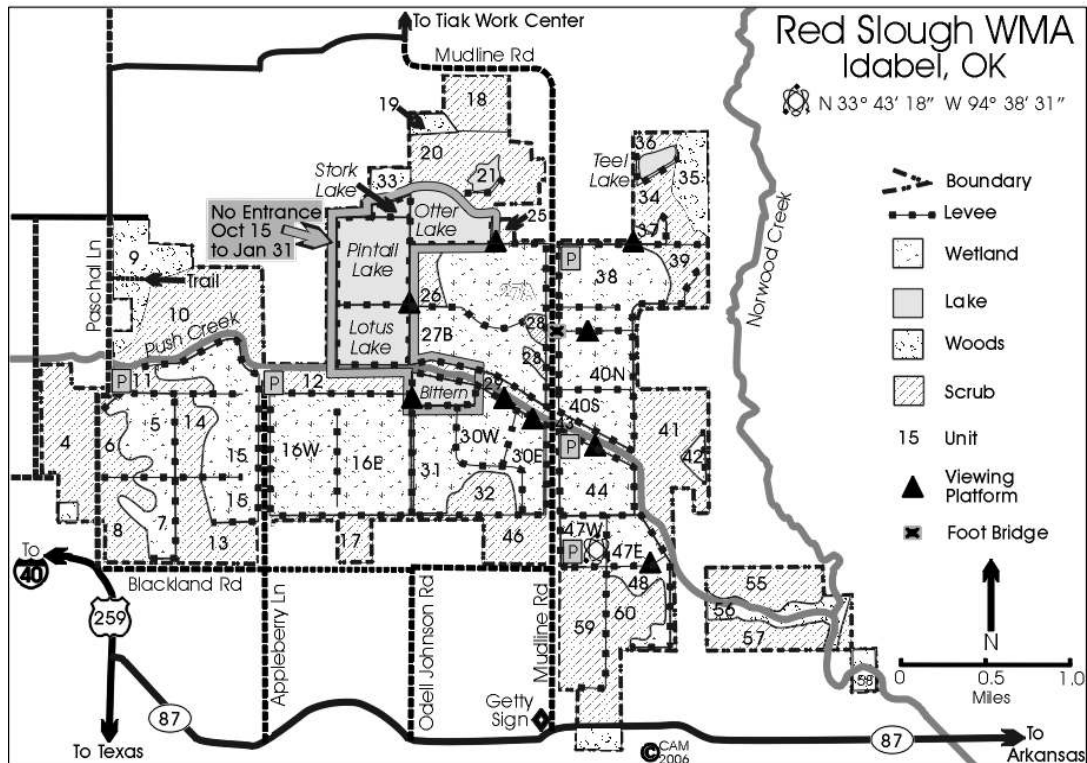
During June and July look for resident marsh species and breeding Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Anhinga, herons, and egrets. The best birding is probably around the lakes. Wood Stork and Roseate Spoonbill are early breeders farther south but may be found at Red Slough from June through September. Willow Flycatcher nests in Unit 21 and north of Otter Lake.

The platform overlooking Units 44 and 40 can be great for Least Bittern and Black-bellied Whistling Duck. Black-bellied Whistling Duck is best seen early in the morning as it flies off to feed.

Brown-headed Nuthatch has not been seen in Red Slough, but it is reliably found in the tall pine trees around the Forest Service's Tiak Work Center about 11 miles away. Pine Warbler and Chipping

Sparrow are also seen here. In summer you may find Eastern Wood-Pewee and Yellow-throated Warbler.

Many unusual birds have been seen at Red Slough. In recent years birders have identified Tundra Swan; Least Grebe; Glossy Ibis; Crested Caracara; Black Rail; Piping Plover; Red Knot and Vermilion Flycatcher.



Lake Hefner and Lake Overholser are popular birding sites in Oklahoma City. On our way to Red Slough the group will visit the lakes. Matt Jung made the following post on the web August 9: **NW OKC** (Lake Hefner, Eldon Lyon Park and county roads to Rose Lake). Had 42 species plus one unidentified Empidonax and the Mute Swan – escapee w/clipped primaries, ¼ mile west of inlet at Hefner

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Canada Goose | Eurasian Collared-Dove | Northern Cardinal |
| Mallard | Red-headed Woodpecker | Indigo Bunting |
| Great Egret | Downy Woodpecker | Yellow Warbler |
| Great Blue Heron | Northern Flicker | European Starling |
| Little Blue Heron | Eastern Kingbird | Baltimore Oriole |
| Snowy Egret | Western Kingbird | Common Grackle |
| Cattle Egret | Scissor-tailed Flycatcher | Long-tailed Grackle |
| Mississippi Kite | American Crow | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Red-tailed Hawk | Blue Jay | House Finch |
| Killdeer | Cliff Swallow | American Goldfinch |
| Spotted Sandpiper | Barn Swallow | Horned Lark |
| Northern Bobwhite | Carolina Chickadee | Dickcissel |
| Mourning Dove | American Robin | Chipping Sparrow |
| Rock Dove | Northern Mockingbird | House Sparrow |

The Prairie Horned Lark
Panhandle Bird Club
1213 S Bryan St
Amarillo, TX 79102

Application for membership in the Panhandle Bird Club \$12.00 Annually September 1 to August 31
Make checks payable to Panhandle Bird Club, Mail to: Connie Fordham, 2404 11th Ave., Canyon, TX 79015

Name: _____ New: _____ Renew: _____ Telephone: _____ email: _____
Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Field Trip Calendar for Aug, Sept, and Oct 2008

30 AUG–1 SEP Red Slough Wildlife Management Area (SE Oklahoma): This area, part of the Ouachita National Forest, is one of Jim & Candy's favorite birding spots. We will leave Amarillo on Saturday morning, bird in Oklahoma City (Lakes Hefner and Overholser) Saturday afternoon, and then drive the 2 ½ hours to Idabel. We will bird Red Slough all day Sunday (guided by local birder Dave Arbour) and drive back to Amarillo on Monday. The best motel in Idabel is Comfort Suites (580-286-9393). There is also a Quality Inn and Microtel. For more details as the date approaches, contact Susan Thompson, Jim Luce, or Candy Myers.

Leaders: Jim Luce & Candy Myers

Red Slough official site: www.fs.fed.us/r8/ouachita/natural-resources/redslough/index.shtml

Dave Arbour's personal photo gallery: www.pbase.com/sloughbirder

6 SEP Canyon Area Sites: 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 at Braum's in Canyon at 7:45 a.m. We'll bird the best spots in the Canyon area, including a few playas (if any have water!). Bring lunch. **Leader: Judith Jones**

20 SEP Lake Rita Blanca and Thompson Grove: Meet at 6:20 a.m. at the west side of the Southwest Branch Amarillo Public Library parking lot (nearest to McDonald Lake). **(NOTE EARLY MEETING TIME)** Alternate meeting spot will be at the McDonald's in Dalhart on US 87 at 8:30 a.m. Bring lunch. **Leader: Jody McKenzie**

11 OCT Lake Tanglewood: 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 Lake Tanglewood front gate at 8:00 a.m. Bring lunch. **Leader: Tom Johnson**