
WINTER 2021



The Wildlife Witness

Washington County Wildlife Society Newsletter
1305 E Blue Bell Rd, Ste. 105, Brenham, TX 77833
979-277-6212 wccwildlife.org

DRIVE THRU **Annual Stew Supper**

Friday, March 26, 2021

Please Join Us!

4:30-6pm: Pick up at the Food Court at the
Washington County Fairground
\$10/qt Chicken or Beef Stew.



WILDLIFE NEWS **INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

President's Remarks-2
A Memo about 2021 Officers
from the Board- 3
Bird Highway to Texas- 3
A Memo from the Website &
Membership Committees -5
To a Waterfowl- 6
Creature Feature : American
Robin -9

RSVP by March 23rd - Purchase or Reserve
Tickets online at wccwildlife.org. Purchased
tickets will require a printed paper ticket at
pick-up. Tickets can also be reserved by calling
Stephanie Damron, TPWD @ 979 277-6297



President's Remarks

The start of the New Year has been interesting. With Covid-19 still uncertain, your Wildlife Society board decided not to have the annual winter meeting. Instead, we will have another drive-thru meal as mentioned in this newsletter. Also, we need our members to vote on the new Society President. Thank you to Richard Thames for stepping in again. It has been a great pleasure working with all of you these past three years. I plan to stay active with the society and to continue helping the board members with society events.

I hope all of you survived winter storm Uri without any major damage. I'm noticing Spring is coming because the Robins and Cardinals are plentiful and my peach trees have buds on them already.

On a final note, Congratulations to our administrator, Faith (and Buddy) Chase on the birth of their daughter, Betsy Rose. She was born Dec. 29, 2020.

Hope to see a lot of you at the Stew drive-thru, so be sure to register online.

Celeste Dickschat

Directory

WASHINGTON COUNTY WILDLIFE SOCIETY OFFICERS FOR 2020:

PRESIDENT- Celeste Dickschat, (979) 277-2331, maroon-out@hotmail.com

VICE-PRESIDENT - Natalie James, (979) 277-8353, njames@brenhamk-12.net

TREASURER- Ginger Bosse, gbosse@ssccpa.com

SECRETARY - Charlotte Von Rosenberg, quebefarm@yahoo.com

WMA DIRECTORS 2021

GREENVINE WMA

Director - Adam Seilheimer, (979) 830-3960, texastrophyscapes@yahoo.com

Vice-Director - Cary Dietzmann, (979) 203-3942, cary@acountryliferealestate.com

SUN OIL FIELD WMA

Director - Charlotte Von Rosenberg, (512) 924-3068, quebefarm@yahoo.com

Vice-Director - Judy Deaton, (979) 277-8426, jadtmn@gmail.com

ROCKY CREEK WMA

Director - William Amelang, (979) 337-4283, williamamelang@gmail.com

Vice-Director - John Knapp, (979) 289-5533 jknapp@knappfralick.com

POST OAK WMA

Director - Jon Wellmann, (936) 419-3910, jonwellmann@live.com

Vice-Director - OPEN

MT. VERNON WMA

Director-OPEN

Vice-Director-OPEN

SANDTOWN WMA

Director - Richard Thames, (979) 278-3053, rbthames@industryinet.com

Vice-Director - Amy Thomsen, (713) 408-6135, amy.thomsen@icloud.net

NEW YEARS CREEK WMA

Director - Terry Atmar, (281) 303-6023, terry.atmar@yahoo.com

Vice-Director-OPEN

RESOURCE CONTACTS

Stephanie M. Damron, TPWD Natural Resource Specialist III, Washington & Waller Counties, (979) 277-6297, stephanie.damron@tpwd.texas.gov

Kara J. Matheney, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Agent-Agriculture/Natural Resources, (979) 277-6212, kjmatheney@ag.tamu.edu

Ben Garcia, NRCS District Conservationist, (979) 830-7123 Ext. 3, ben.garcia@tx.usda.gov

Washington County Appraisal District/Collections, (979) 277-3740

Gene Bishop, Web Administrator, g_bishop@austin.rr.com

Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator/Newsletter, (979) 820-1673, faith.wcwildlife@gmail.com

A Memo About 2021 Officer Nominations from the Board

Members can be nominated for the 2021 officer positions of President, Vice-President, Treasurer, or Secretary from now until **March 12, 2021**.

If no other nominations are submitted, 2021 the vote will be based on these Board recommendations:

President: Richard Thames

Vice President: Natalie James

Treasurer: Ginger Bosse

Secretary: Charlotte Von Rosenberg

See Included Flyer for additional information on voting and Officer Elections

Bird Highway to Texas by Dee Wolff, member, Greenvine WMA

Several years ago, on Thanksgiving Day, while waiting for the turkey to be baked in our old stove, my husband and I retreated to Drunken Duck Point. This is a point on the lake which is home to some old junipers, oaks and American Beauty bushes, which are prolific with magenta berries in autumn and early winter. We had cleaned out all of the brush and swept the dirt to make an outdoor space where we hung hammocks and then tied the hammock ropes to trees in order to pull the cords and make the hammocks rock back and forth. To complete the décor, I painted some old duck decoys with vibrant colors and hung several of them upside down on the trees and fence, hence the name, Drunken Duck Point. We also hung a sign to identify this place to help friends who carry alcoholic beverages in plastic cups, find their way to the hammocks.

On this particular Thanksgiving Day, we were completely entertained and mesmerized by the number of migrating snow geese, sand hill cranes and American white pelicans flying overhead. We called their flyway, "Wolff Farm Highway", thinking that we were the luckiest folks on earth to have these beautiful creatures appear year after year directly above our house and over the lake. My husband, who has some kind of deep relationships with these birds— a special kind of "birddar", will sit up from a dead sleep in the middle of the night and say, "sand hill cranes," or "geese "and surely, I will then hear them also.

As it turns out, we were not incorrect in surmising that there is a bird highway over our farm. There are actually, four major migration pathways in North American which are used by 118 species of birds that fly across the western hemisphere each autumn and spring. The Atlantic Oceanic Route or Atlantic Flyway follows the east coast of the United States and the Pacific Oceanic Route or Pacific Flyway follows the West coast of the United States. The Central Route follows the Rocky Mountains and mid plains and is also known as the Central Texas Flyway. The Mississippi Route follows the Mississippi River.

Twenty percent of all birds are migratory. Some migrate just a few miles to find food or escape predators or because their roosting spaces have been destroyed. Some birds migrate because of cold climate and to find a place to safely lay eggs and protect their young. The majority of migrants travel broad flyways and change direction in flight in response to the force of the wind. Many migrating birds have demonstrated a strong compass sense in regard to land formations and water ways.

A few of the birds that migrate to and from Texas are flycatchers, robins, grackles, purple martins, buntings, many species of warblers, waxwings, herons, swallows, plovers, ducks, cranes, geese, pelicans and humming birds. Of the 300 known species of hummingbirds, only about twelve to fifteen species migrate. The tiny ruby throated hummingbird which we see often in our yard, will fly up to 600 miles to Mexico from the Southern United States and as far as Panama. It can store enough fat to fly 26 hours nonstop at 25 miles an hour!

Each year in late autumn, we await with great anticipation, the migration of the snow geese, the American white pelicans and the sand hill cranes. Each of these creatures is so magnificent and unique and it is a true joy to see them flying on our highway.

Snow geese are true harbingers of the changing seasons. Flocks of snow geese winter in the coastal marshes of California, Texas and northern Mexico. They fly to their southern winter homes, in huge flocks that appear in "V" formation, from their breeding grounds in the Arctic Tundra. One can first hear their honking calls from far up in the atmosphere, and then a blizzard of snowy birds appears from the clouds to travel on to their destination. The flocks of geese have "lookouts" who keep an eye out for eagles and other predators during the journey.

Bird Highway to Texas (CONT.)

Snow geese, which are sometimes called "light geese" are known for their beautiful plumage. They are 27-33" tall and have an elegant wingspan of 4'5". They are completely vegetarian and find enough grasses and grains on which to dine in the wet soil of the marshes and grasslands as they travel and then as they find winter homes.

At Winters' end, the flocks will fly back to their Artic breeding homes to prepare a shallow ground nest for their chicks. Snow geese mate for life and produce two to six eggs per year. They cover the eggs with moss and grasses to hide them from the Artic fox who are their most dangerous predator, and also to insulate them from the snow. The chicks are well developed when born, with open eyes, and feathery yellow down. They can swim and eat within the first twenty-four hours and can leave the nest within three weeks of hatching. The goslings may be able to walk up to 50 miles a day with their parents.

The magnificent sand hill cranes are equally as interesting as the snow geese. They are a species of large cranes of North American and Eastern Siberia. Of the two cranes native to North American, the sand hill crane is the smaller and the whooping crane is the larger of the two. They have the one of the longest fossil histories of birds. A species of crane that was ten million years old and related to the sand hill crane was found in Nebraska. The oldest undisputable sand hill crane fossil to have been found is 2.5 million years old.

The name Sand Hill refers to the habitat at the edge of Nebraska's Sandhills in the Platte River Valley of Nebraska, where these birds gather during migration. These migratory birds are very social birds that live in groups and then converge in the valley during migration. The "Valley" also acts as nesting and refueling ground between late February and early April as the birds embark on a journey to breeding grounds in Siberia, Alaska and Northern Canada.

The population of the subspecies" lesser cranes" that converge on the plain, numbering 450,000 birds, make up 80 per cent of the global population of sandhill cranes. The subspecies" greater cranes" which were once on the endangered species list because it was considered a game bird, now numbers nearly 100,000. Since the cranes are primarily a ground dwelling species, they are very susceptible to predators including foxes and coyotes to eagles and crocodiles. Since they are also very attractive to hunters, many subspecies of cranes were destroyed by humans, especially in mid twentieth century. Their desirability as a game bird nicknamed them, "the rib-eye of the sky."

The cranes are gray over all, with red foreheads, white cheeks and long, dark pointed bills. The sexes look alike but vary a bit in size. The average wing span of the cranes is 78'7" which makes them very skilled soaring birds as they glide through the air and ride the thermals. They can stay aloft for hours expending minimum energy by only occasionally flapping their wings.

Some sand hill cranes do not migrate, but stay year-round in their Southern Florida habitats, charming the residents with their beauty and haunting song. The migrating bird that mesmerizes me the most by its elegant performance is the American white pelican. These birds circle and ride the thermals as though they were choreographing a great play for Mother Nature. Each bird takes its cue from its predecessor to flap and then to soar as in a perfect synchronization of movement. They appear as though swimming in air with effortless ease.

They are huge birds with bright orange feet and distensible gular pouches (beaks) and a nine-foot wing span. The tips of their wings have black feathers, but can only be seen in flight. While they are elegant in flight, they are very clumsy on land, waddling on their heavy columnar like legs like a small chubby child learning to walk.

Most populations of American white pelicans are migratory with exceptions of birds breeding in Texas and Mexico and the central Texas coast. Their preferred habitat in Texas are shallow bays, inlets and estuaries and also manmade ponds and lagoons. They live throughout Texas but can be seen in large numbers on the Bolivar Flats Shoreland Sanctuary and Padre Island National Seashore Park. The pelicans are gregarious birds and are often associated with double crested cormorants.

The pelican is usually a silent bird, but runs and croaks on nesting grounds. Migration occurs in daylight in flocks, sometimes numbering in the hundreds and flying in "V" formation. Individuals will linger on southern breeding grounds well into late December during Fall migration. Unlike the brown pelicans who dive for fish, the white pelicans hunt and forage in groups. They will form a circle around their prey, driving the fish to the shoreline where it can be easily caught and shared.

Bird Highway to Texas (CONT.)

While they are primarily fish eaters, they will also occasionally dine on salamanders and crayfish. While the aviary kingdom was not confused by Mother Nature's timely equinox, there was some confusion in this human person's kingdom. There is hope that winter will not be the confusion of season that this year's autumn presented us. Autumn seemed sprinkled more with summer sultry days than the refreshing cool aroma of dirt and leaves that mark the season of change in color and texture of earth. Color happened in slow measure this year, the lawn lingered more green than usual, grasses took on a golden tone slowly. Then seemingly overnight, the leaves began to fall in piles of rustic brown, bits of orange and red with sprinkles of leftover green. My husband asked, "Should I blow the leaves out of the beds and yard," and I said, "No, please, I want to see the leaves, walk on them, hear them crunch under my feet so that I will know that a season has changed.

Now, while birds are resting in their winter homes, I am awaiting winter with great anticipation; cold days, days during which my hands can become stiff with cold and I can hold a steaming cup of coffee to bring them back to life. I anticipate a spirited bowl of chili, and comforting stew made with Mom's recipe.....a few carrots, cabbage, onions, and beef round steak. Homemade bread, lathered with real butter from Minnesota, dipped into the steaming bowl, would complete the meal.

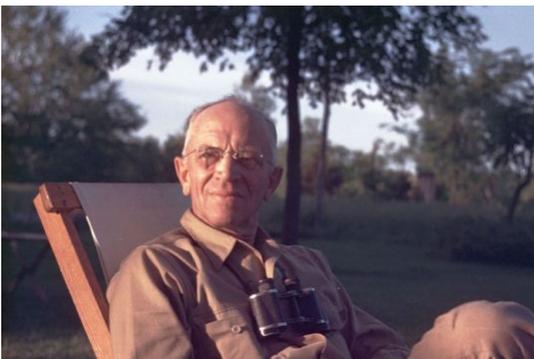
I will even share with any of our bird friends, if they are interested.

Thanks to research from National Geographic, Wikipedia, List of Everything, Cornell Labs, and Texas Parks and Wildlife.

A Memo from the Website and Membership Committee

As you have participated in our events through the last half of 2020 you may have noticed our website has changed. One of the updates included is a secure website. This means that when you enter your payment information it is now protected from hackers and malware, or simply the "bad guys" who want your card information. We are also no longer working with paypal and you are now asked if you would like to pay a credit card processing fee. The Wildlife Society has ALWAYS paid credit card processing fees, but we have never asked you to pay them. Now you have the option to cover those costs for us so that we can give more of the dollars you, as members, contribute back to you through education, youth, and the community. We do realize that if you want to give a larger donation this fee can become quite high, in that case you may mail your donation in. Paying the credit card processing fee is optional, you don't have to pay the fee. If you don't want to pay the fee, the Wildlife Society will pay the fee, just as we have in the past.

For simplicity during this transition, we have included a paper renewal form and envelope if you would prefer to mail in your renewal. Thank you so much for your patience during this transition as we all learn how to use the new website. If at any time you need assistance, you may contact Faith Chase by phone at 979-820-1673, email: faith.wcwildlife@gmail.com or Richard Thames by phone 512-657-3814 or email: rbthames@industryinet.com



"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively the land."

~The Land Ethic, A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

To a Waterfowl

by William Cullen Bryant

Whither, 'midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day
,Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight, to do thee wrong,
As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chaféd ocean side?

There is a Power, whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,—
The desert and illimitable air
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold thin atmosphere;
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end,
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form, yet, on my heart
Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He, who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must trace alone,
Will lead my steps aright.



Creature Feature: American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)

by Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator & Newsletter Editor

Oh man have I seen a lot of robins recently! Especially over our undesirable snow days! As a child, I always thought it was special to see a robin. I guess because I would see them in story books, but not ever in person. Of course now I know that is because they only migrate into Texas for the winter.

Robins are a member of the thrush family and can be easily recognized by their short round bodies, long thin legs, and bright red/orange breast. Their backs and wings are a brownish gray and they also have a white patch under them. As with most birds the females are less vibrant in color.

Robins are very vocal! Their song is a about 10 or so clear whistles assembled from a few often-repeated syllables. It is usually described as *cheerily, cheer up, cheer up, cheerily, cheer up*. The syllables rise and fall in pitch but are delivered at a steady rhythm, with a pause before the bird begins singing again. At dawn, the song is more rapid. Their call is a mumbled *cuck* or *tuk* to communicate with each other or a sharp *yeep* or *peek* as an alarm call. They also make a repeated *chirr* that rises in volume and can sound like a laugh or chuckle. And females will also sound an alarm when sitting on their nest that sounds like an aggressive *clack*.

American Robins live for some part of the year across the entire North American Continent. Robins are strong, straight, and fast fliers. You will often see robins in groups in trees or on the ground. They like to flick their tail feathers and cock their heads as they look around, like a curious dog. If you ever see them staring into space they are looking for earthworms.

Robins eat earthworms, insects, berries, and some snails. When they can find fruit with insects in it that's a real score. They have even been seen eating shrews, small snakes, and aquatic insects on occasion!

In the spring, males sing, raise and spread their tails, shake their wings and inflating their white-striped throats to attract female mates. As the Robins pair up, you may see a male and female approach each other holding their bills wide open and touching them, almost like a kiss...well for birds.

Female Robins choose the nest site and build the nest from the inside out. (I'm glad the female robin isn't building my house!) Once completed her nest is between 6 and 8 inches across and 3 to 6 inches deep. She will lay 3 to 5 eggs for each of her possible 3 clutches, producing up to 15 hatchlings a year. We are all familiar with those small blue speckled eggs they lay (see photo below)

American Robins have a healthy population across their range, but often fall victim to pesticide poisoning since they spend lots of time on manicured lawns where chemicals are regularly applied. Those "pests" are their primary diet so those chemicals build up in their bodies quickly. Locals have also reported that robins do not know that the naturalized china berries are toxic, causing them to appear to "randomly" drop dead.

"American Robin Identification, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology." , All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Robin/id.

Photo Credits: Robin, Ashley Bradford, Macauly Library
Robin Nest, Chris Helzer, The Nature Conservancy