

Rolling Plains Chapter

Texas Master Naturalist

June 2024 Newsletter

<https://txmn.org/rollingplains>

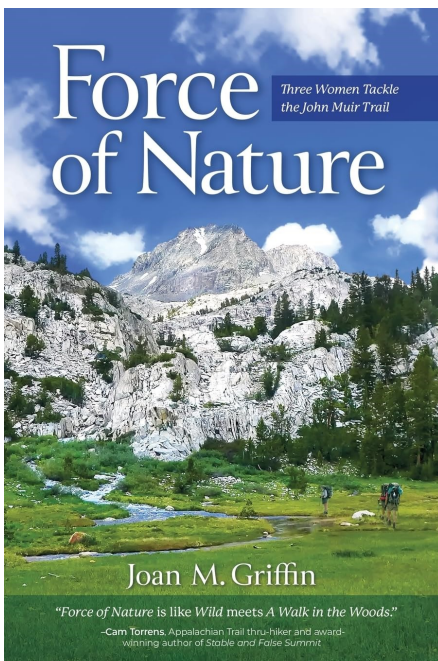
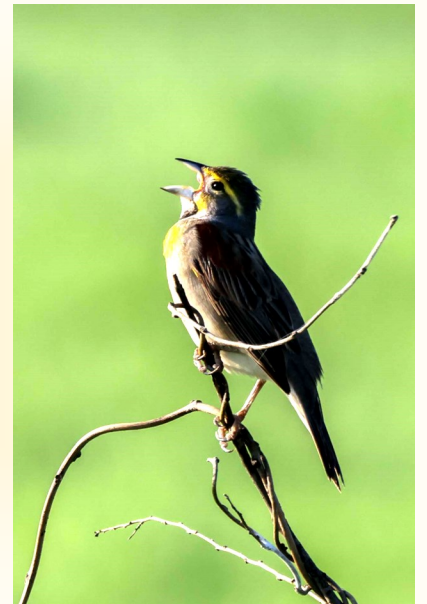
New Editor's Note

I know, when you opened this up, this is not what you're used to seeing! Unfortunately for us, with the departure of Paula Savage from our chapter, our newsletter editor went with her. We wish Paula the best on her new life's journey.

Most of you know me as the grouchy VMS admin. That's a hat I wear with pride. I wear many other hats though.

I have produced a newsletter for our local city letter carrier union for many years, continuously since 2010 and more on than off since 1992. I've also been the Secretary/Treasurer for the same local union since 2001 and for a few years in the 1990s. And I enjoy every minute of it.

I promise you I'll do my best to get a newsletter to you monthly. And, I can promise that your newsletters of the future will not be as beautiful as Paula's were. But, with your help, I'll attempt to be as informative. ~ Larry Snyder



"Lace up your hiking boots!"

Three friends, women in their fifties, set out to hike "the most beautiful long-distance trail in the world," the John Muir Trail. From the outset, their adventure is complicated by self-inflicted accidents and ferocious weather, then enriched when they "adopt" a young hiker abandoned by her partner along the trail.

The women experience the terror of lightning at eleven-thousand feet, the thrill of walking through a towering waterfall, and the joy of dancing among midnight moon shadows. For a month, they live immersed in vast natural beauty, tackle the trail's physical demands, and find camaraderie among an ensemble cast of eccentric trail characters.

Force of Nature is equal parts gripping adventure tale, personal memoir, and vivid nature writing.

President's Letter

Laura Gillis

First, I want to say thank you to Larry Snyder. Larry has agreed to edit our newsletter. I also want to say a big thank you to everyone who stepped up to volunteer this month. We had so many opportunities and so many volunteers ... I am so proud of our Chapter! We are making positive differences in our area, and I hope we can keep the momentum!

Are you planning on going to the Annual Meeting in October? How would you like a chance to keep up this volunteering momentum and make a positive difference at the state level? Our Chapter has been asked to help facilitate a "Resource Share Fair" at the Annual Meeting. This will be based on the Resource Share Fair that we held at one of our monthly meetings last year. You may recall, this event was where everyone is asked to bring information on their favorite nature resource. For instance, books, podcasts, websites, and apps for your phone. Anything you can think of that helps you enjoy nature. At our meeting, folks gave a very short review of their resource, then we took this information and compiled it into a file that we sent out to everyone after the meeting.

I am not sure what the Fair will look like at the State level, but we will find out more as we get closer. If you are going to the meeting and would be interested in helping with this, please let me know. We will get with Michelle and Mary Pearl and get things figured out. If you have any ideas on how we might streamline things to make the fair better, we would like to know that too.

A couple of weeks ago I was lucky enough to go collect fossils with our new trainees at the Miner-

al Wells fossil dig site. What a great day! It got hot but it sure was fun.

If you haven't had the opportunity to introduce yourself to our 2024 class of trainees, I hope you will make an effort to do just that. They are a wonderful group of enthusiastic "nature nerds!" They are a diverse and intelligent group, and they will be a wonderful addition to our Chapter. We still have two months of training left and members are always welcome to come to any training class. You can't count your time, but you can count on learning something new and meeting someone interesting. Classes are held on Thursday night at 7 PM.

Remember to watch the calendar, Facebook, and email for volunteer and advanced training opportunities. I hope to see you all at the June meeting.

Our June Meeting: 7 PM, Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at MSU Bolin Science Hall, room 209 (or 213 if 209 is occupied). Also, on zoom – watch for your link in your email early next week. Our program will be Robert & Karin Saucedo presenting on living with coyotes.

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Great Texas Birding Classic



Have you ever heard of the Great Texas Birding Classic? I hadn't either up until just a couple of years ago. And, if you like to look for birds, what fun! The mission of the GTBC is "To increase appreciation, understanding, and conservation of birds through education, recreation, nature tourism, and conservation fundraising."

The Birding Classic competition runs each year from April 15th to May 15th. This year, across the state, there were 210 teams participating. Those teams are made up of more than 1,200 birders.

On April 30th, the team called Wichita Wingmen departed Dennison TX at 6:30 AM headed towards Hagerman Wildlife Refuge. The Wingmen team is made up of Sue and Warren King, Penny Miller, Judy Snyder, and yours truly.

The Wingmen compete as an "Intact Flock" in the Prairies and Pineywoods West region. There are different ways to compete, Intact Flock, where the team birds together at the same time, Dispersed Flock, where the team travels separately (See Debra's report next) and then there's the Big Sit which is teams sitting in one spot and observing/recording what they see. Then there's the Human-Powered Tournament, the State Park Tour-

namment, the Sunrise to Noon Tournament, Texas Two-Step Tournament, Teen Tournaments, and Youth Tournaments.

More than 200 miles later, our birdwatching trip resulted in 76 species of birds recorded. A couple of the more interesting birds spotted were a yellow-throated warbler, glossy ibis, and prothonotary warbler.

Next year will be another chance to do some fun birding. There's a registration fee



GREAT TEXAS BIRDING CLASSIC
2024

and you get a T-shirt. This year's tee had the American Kestrel you see depicted above on it. To learn more about the GTBC, head over to <https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic>. Form a team, enjoy some birding! ~ Larry Snyder

A Report From a Member of the Dispersed Team Called

THE LOST CAWS

by Debra Halter, photos by Debra Halter

On May 1, I prepared to participate in the GTBC. As I loaded my gear in the early morning darkness, I heard the first birds of the day: American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Great-tailed Grackle, House Sparrow.



Driving through Clay, Montague, and Cooke Counties, I tallied more species: a Black Vulture flap-gliding

across the road, a Common Nighthawk flying by, a Loggerhead Shrike sitting on the telephone wire, a pair of American crows checking out a roadkill, and more.

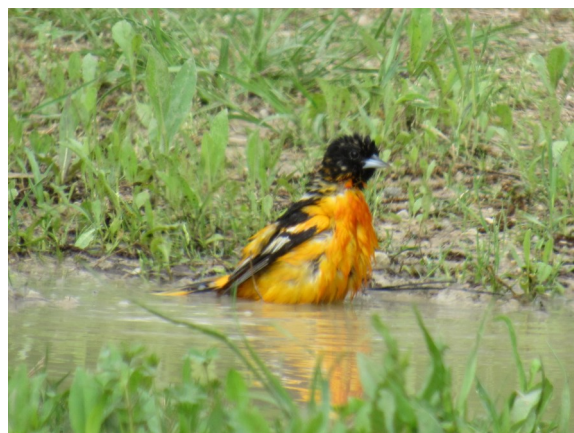
The Money Spot, and my destination, was Hagarman National Wildlife Refuge. I circled to the north side of the park, finding a few new species along the way. Cedar Waxwings and Eastern Bluebirds greeted me as I neared the Refuge. I headed to the Goode Day Use Area. Dickcissels were shouting their names from the field. At one spot, a male Painted Bunting appeared atop a dead snag. As he sang, a male Indigo Bunting landed on the same snag. I guess the Painted did not appreciate the company as he flew off, followed by the Indigo. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo clucked from the trees. Returning to the main road, I heard a woodpecker drumming. Spotting him at the top of a dead tree, a male Red-headed Woodpecker called a few times before heading to a telephone pole.

Next stop was the low water crossing at Meyers Creek. Lined with Great and Snowy Egret waiting for a fish to be washed over, water was rushing over it. It was moving too fast and deep for me to consider driving through it, so I backtracked

and went to the main entrance. A pair of Gadwall lingered in the pond. Multiple Indigo and Painted Buntings sang along the roadside, hidden from view. As I retraced my route, I spotted a flock of four Wild Turkeys trotting down the road ahead of me. An approaching car made them turn around and trot faster back towards me, until they found an opening in the fence line and escaped.

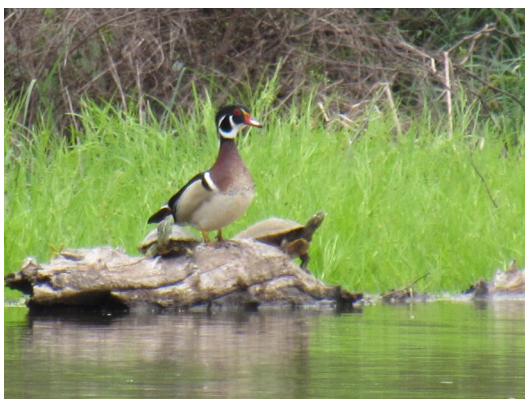
Back onto the Refuge, I travelled along Wildlife Drive. After recent rains in the area and rainfall from upstream on the Red River, the water level was very high. There were not any mud flats so the odds of finding shorebirds were low. I did spy two Lesser Yellowlegs were feeding along the shorter grass near the water's edge. A marshy area contained Blue-winged Teal and a few lingering Northern Shovelers. A very large flock of Red-winged Blackbirds flew up and landed in a grove of trees. I heard the distinctive call of the Yellow-headed Blackbird and finally spotted some amongst the Red-wings. Four Bobolinks were calling from the field to my east. Everything was green, with lots of hairy vetch blooming around the road. Sulphur butterflies were everywhere. An Eastern Kingbird was hawking the field and snatching butterflies, fueling up for the migration north.

(Continued Next Page)



(Continued from previous page) Tern and Egret Roads usually yield some shorebirds, but the water was too high. I did flush a Turkey Vulture who flew down the road. I hated to disturb it, but there was no other way to go. It finally flew off across Lake Texoma. Coming upon a marsh area, I spotted a female Wood Duck with eight downy ducklings in tow. She hurried them into denser grass. The Blue-winged Teal nearby kept a wary eye on me as I passed.

Mostly Little Blue Heron and Snowy Egrets with a few Cattle Egrets combed the flooded fields. Scanning the roadsides, I



saw what I thought was log lying across a paved low water crossing. But then it moved! It was a Spotted Gar trying to go across.

Unfortunately, it chose the highest spot to cross and got half-way across and could go no further. As Spotted Gar is my favorite fish species, I got out to help. The crossing was only 2-3 inches at its deepest but moving quickly. The gar was very cooperative and let me gently push it along until there was enough water to get going again. Back to the task at hand. Just down the road, a male and female Blue Grosbeak checked out a wet field. Wildlife Drive dead ended, and I turned onto Bennett Lane.

Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmouse called from the woods. A Red-tailed Hawk sat on a dead tree. A Prothonotary Warbler and Red-eyed Vireo serenaded me. A muddy puddle beside the road was the perfect bird bath for a male Baltimore Oriole.

At the low water crossing and marsh at the bend of Bennett Lane, a Virginia Rail grunted from dense cover, two Eastern Wood-Pewees called, as well as Northern Cardinal and Carolina Wren. A Red-shouldered Hawk yelled "Kee-er" from the dense trees.

Turning onto one of the roads leading to the oil well pads, I spotted a Spotted Sandpiper standing on some floating tree branches, a Red-eared Slider beside it. A male Eastern Bluebird flew up from a nest box. A Nashville Warbler called near the road, giving me a quick view before it left. Back in the depths of the swamy areas, a male Wood Duck cautiously watched my passage. Heading back through the Refuge to get

to other areas, I spotted several Wilson's Phalaropes fly up and land in the dense grass. As they fed, they would look up occasionally, giving me a glimpse of them. Further down, a White-faced Ibis had captured a small catfish.

Checking at several other spots in Grayson County yielded no new species. Returning to Wichita Falls, I picked up a few more species in my backyard. All told, I observed 78 species:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Wild Turkey, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, White-winged Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Virginia Rail, American Coot, Wilson's Phalarope, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Western Cattle Egret, White-faced Ibis, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, Mississippi Kite, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, White-eyed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Bewick's Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, House

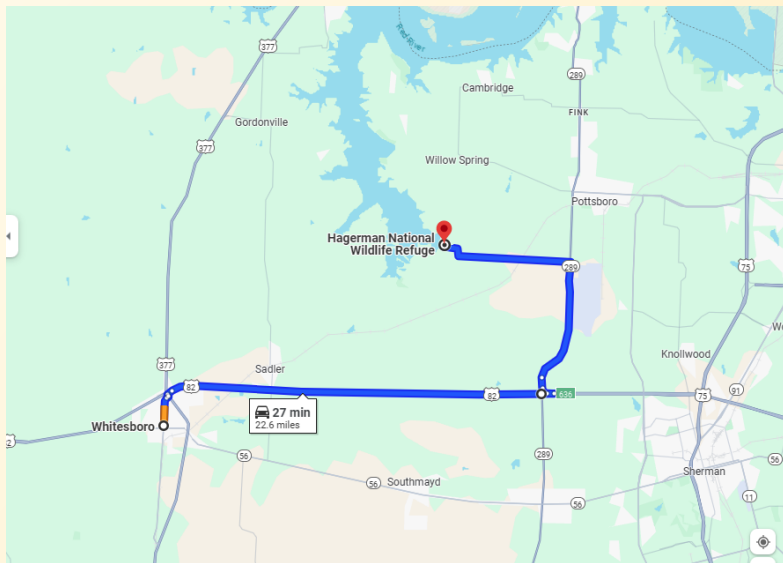


Finch, American Goldfinch, White-crowned Sparrow, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Baltimore Oriole, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Common Grackle, Great-tailed Grackle, Prothonotary Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, Dickcissel, and House Sparrow.

Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge

On the previous pages, Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge was mentioned. If you've never visited, it's well worth a day trip to see what's there.

Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge (HNWR), a haven for migratory birds and other wildlife, lies in northwestern Grayson County, Texas, on the Big Mineral Arm of Lake Texoma, on the Red River between Oklahoma and Texas. ⁽¹⁾ This National Wildlife Refuge is made up of water, marsh, and upland habitat. Visitors can hike, observe wildlife, hunt, and fish throughout the year.



The main focus at HNWR is providing a winter home for thousands of waterfowl. The Canada goose is the predominant species; the population of this species can exceed 7,500 during fall, winter, and spring. Other species include the greater white-fronted goose and snow goose, with a few of the smaller Ross's goose.

The HNWR is located within the Central Flyway, a route traveled annually by numerous species of waterfowl and other migratory birds. The refuge enjoys a reputation as a premier bird-watching destination in North Texas. Although a total of 316 bird species has been recorded on the refuge since it was established in 1946, recent surveys show 273 different bird species are regularly found at HNWR, of which 80 species nest and 193 are migratory.

Painted buntings, cardinals, scissor-tailed flycatchers, blue grosbeaks, eastern meadowlarks, northern mockingbirds, blue jays, and red-bellied woodpeckers are common nesting birds. Neotropical migrants such as warblers, tyrant flycatchers, tanagers, orioles, sparrows, and others pass through them each spring and fall, with many of these species remaining to nest. Game birds on the refuge include the mourning dove, northern bobwhite, and wild turkey. Many declining species either occasionally or commonly occur on the refuge including the American golden plover, prothonotary warbler, painted bunting, and Hudsonian godwit. The refuge attracts 15 species of raptors during the fall and spring migration periods, including the osprey, rough-legged buzzard, Swainson's hawk, Northern Harrier, sharp-shinned hawk, and Cooper's hawk. The refuge provides excellent wintering habitat for Bald Eagles, particularly along Lake Texoma. Nesting raptors include the red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, Mississippi kite, American kestrel, and the broad-winged hawk.

To get to HNWR, head east on Hwy 82 towards Sherman TX. Just before you get to Sherman, about 13 miles after Whitesboro, you'll come up on Hwy 289. Watch for the sign, take that exit, turn left (N) onto Hwy 289 and again, watch for the sign. You'll see an airport on your right and the refuge road will be on your left. Have fun and watch your speed!

Find Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge on Facebook, there's also a FB page for Hagerman photography.

Bring a cooler and plan to stop in Muenster and visit Fischer's Market. They're closed on Sundays so plan accordingly. You gotta pick up a strudel and some cheese curds. If you're hungry, after your birding, give Dieter's BBQ in Lindsay a try. That's west of Gainesville .