

**AT Training is offered during these sessions:****September 15, 2015**—\$10.00 for the day

Morning:	Entomology	Mike Merchant, Ph. D	2 ½ hours	9 to 11:30
Afternoon:	Ecological Regions of Texas	Joanne Fellows	2 ½ hours	12:30 to 3:00

**September 22, 2015**—\$10.00 for the day

Morning:	Archeology	Reid Ferring, Ph. D	2 ½ hours	9 to 11:30
Afternoon:	Geology and Soils of Texas	Reid Ferring, Ph. D.	2 ½ hours	12:30 to 3:00

**October 6, 2015**—\$10.00 for the day

Morning:	Aquatic Ecosystem Management	Tom La Point, Ph. D.	2 ½ hours	9 to 11:30
Afternoon:	Ichthyology	Tom La Point, Ph. D.	2 ½ hours	12:30 to 3:00

**October 13, 2015**—\$5.00 for the half day

Morning:	Mammology	Earl Zimmerman, Ph. D.	2 ½ hours	9 to 11:30
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(We're going on a Field Trip in the afternoon.)

**November 3, 2015**—\$10.00 for the day

Morning:	Herpetology	Ryan Blankenship	2 ½ hours	9 to 11:30
Afternoon:	Weather and Climate	Daniel Huckaby	2 ½ hours	12:30 to 3:00

**November 10, 2015**—\$10.00 for the day

Morning:	Urban Ecology	Brett Johnson	2 ½ hours	9 to 11:30
Afternoon:	Ornithology	Erich Neupert	2 ½ hours	12:30 to 3:00



*From Training Committee*

## Phenomenons

By Bob Ross

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erriam-Webster defines a phenomenon as someone or something that is very impressive or popular especially because of an unusual ability or quality. We have seen quite a few phenomenons in the past several months, be it the amount of rainfall, how humans have dealt with the record rainfalls, how humans worked with Mother Nature, and how humans are working with record droughts.



May 2015 was the wettest May in our area since weather statistics began being recorded 117 years ago. May 2015 was the 3<sup>rd</sup> wettest month of all the months in our area for the past 117 years. It was about a year ago that I was writing an article in *Naturalist News* about how we were in the middle of what many referred to as a 10-year-drought. Well, at least for us who live in North Central Texas, the drought has ended. Also, I hope it will be an end to the bad puns of how we are all going to mildew or how everyone is growing skin between their toes becoming web-footed.

We all have seen, in person or on television, the remarkable work done by capable humans (i.e. – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) to help with all the rising water of the area lakes and rivers, such as Lake Ray Roberts, Lake Lewisville, Lake Grapevine and the Trinity River. There has been limited flooding when all the area lakes and rivers have far exceeded their flood levels. Also, there has been limited loss of life, homes and businesses in our area with all the water we have accumulated.

We also have seen in our area how humans have worked with Mother Nature. I am speaking of the wonderful maintenance crews that worked the two recent Professional Golf Association tournaments in our area: The Colonial in Fort Worth and The Byron Nelson in Irving. These crews worked basically 24 hours a day to keep the courses ready for play at both the Colonial Country Club and the Las Colinas Country Club. I know there may be some who read this and don't care about golf or they think golf courses are a terrible use of land. Either way, give consideration to how wonderful it was to see humans remove 2-7 inches of rainfall that would fall during each night, only to have a very playable course each day for the professional golfers. We could use more human beings that know how to work with Mother Nature.

**We could use more human beings that know how to work with Mother Nature.**

While we have been so fortunate to receive our much-needed rainfall, California is experiencing a hazardous drought. Many pundits claim California will have to close the doors to the state if they continue in the present drought and don't receive enough rainfall. It is so severe in California that Governor Jerry Brown has asked every citizen in the state to cut back their water usage by 25%. California has fertile soils, wonderful micro-climates and they have become our bread basket for many different food items. But, with little rainfall the farmers are drilling new wells into their aquifers and using enough water to measurable see the water tables drop daily. A recent television reporter claimed the aquifers should be considered a savings account and only used in excessive periods of time. Yet, the folks of California are headed for bankruptcy. We should be thankful for what we have.

In closing, the 21<sup>st</sup> of this month will be the First Day of Summer: The Summer Solstice. The Summer Solstice is the beginning of summer in the Northern Hemisphere and will begin on the 21<sup>st</sup>, at 11:38 a.m. CDT. The Solstice start time is determined when the Sun reaches its farthest point north of the Equator.

The word solstice is from the Latin *solstitium* (sol meaning "sun" and stitium meaning "to stop"). The Sun appears to stop at this time, and again at the Winter Solstice. We notice the Sun is higher in the sky throughout the day, and its rays strike Earth at a more direct angle, causing the warming we refer to as Summer. The Summer Solstice is the day with the most sunlight during the entire year.

## My Summer Confusion

*Scott Kiester*

Down Houston way, one of the signs of summer, along with sauna like weather, is the arrival of great crested flycatchers (*Myiarchus crinitus*). These are handsome beasts about the size of a bluejay, bright



*Great Crested Flycatcher*

yellow belly, grey breast and neck, russet wings and tail. They also have shaggy russet crest. You don't see them much, they hang out in the very tops of the tree canopy and loop out to grab a bug from the air every so often. Usually about all you'll get is a quick flash of yellow or reddish-brown as they fly through the trees. They are a raucous folk however, with a variety of loud short calls, the most common is a loud single note; WHEEP! You would expect the Aggies to have bred a maroon and white one that calls WHOOP! by now, but to my knowledge they haven't.

As you all know, Deb and I moved up here a couple of years ago for the express purpose of spoiling grandkids. Not long after, I was out walking and I saw a great crested sitting on a power line. This doesn't happen, so to say the least I was intrigued. First thing I noticed was that the crest was down. This is normal, most of the time the crest isn't erect like you see in all the nice professional photos, and a great crested looks more like this;

Like any good birder I'm thinking, it's supposed to be, but birds generally so they are known to act out on occasions these are very secretive critters, and the wire in plain sight. Of course since institutional the bins are in their case in under the wire squinting away trying to wind puffs just enough that the little his balance. AHA! The outer tail feather. That's the exterior retricies for the ornithologist. This point I know it's not a great crest-tail. But what the heck is it?

Once back at the casa I promptly completely ignoring two phone messages from our software users (Hey, I know that's was birding!). I did have a second clue, I call just as it left the wires. Pik, pik, PADIK, vaguely flycatcherish to me, a series of short, sharp, distinct notes. So I started there with the "Big Sibley's."

Bless their greedy souls, Audubon publishes two versions of Dave Sibley's excellent field guide. An 8" x 5" one that isn't too heavy and neatly fits into my lumbar pack, along with two water bottles, an extra set of bins, just in case, and a couple of other field guides. Along with the smaller one, Audubon also publishes a 10" x 7" version, the "Big Sibley's" which is absolutely identical to the small one, and weighs a ton.... Not a field guide that one carries in the field, *but you gotta have it; the drawings are soooo much larger and the details soooo much clearer!*



*Great Crested Flycatcher with crest lowered*

"Well, this bird isn't where I haven't read the field guides." It was weird though, this one was just sitting on a power line. So I'm out for my morning commute. So I'm standing in my office. So I'm standing get a better look, and the guy has to fan his tail feathers are trimmed in white! Biologically correct, LOL. At the end, no solid russet brown

grabbed for the field guides, sages and three emails from what I get paid for, but this had heard the mystery bird pik, pa, PEEKaboo. This sounded

The Lovely Deborah refers to my lumbar pack as the “butt bag.” Not chic perhaps, however it is very handy when birding or hiking, which even she and the members of the “family fashion police”, our three daughters, have had to admit.

Since it’s June, the following snippet is for all us dads with girls.

“Dad, you’re not really going to wear that shirt with those slacks out to dinner to such a nice restaurant, are you?” Mind you, all of ours are grown and married so you would think they would have given up on me by now, and they have husbands to worry about. Alas, they inherited my genes for persistence in the face of adversity.

So, I do my best to be sartorially accurate and Bless her heart, Deb doesn’t bat an eyelash at the fact that I own more than a hundred field guides. Ya work these things out over 38 years.

Back to the narrative. I started in flycatchers and thumbed through. Behold! the Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), yellow belly, whitish breast and neck, grey head and back. Dark grey tail with **White Edged Outer Feathers**. I’d never seen one. They are something of a rarity in Houston and not at all in the Midwest where I grew up. YEAH, a new bird! Species 374 on Scott’s all-time hit list.

OK, a bit more data on our two look-a-likes.

**The great crested flycatcher** is a common bird of eastern North America, we are about at the western edge of its current range. They are summer residents of all the states east of the Great Plains, generally arriving by early May and departing by late September. Some spend the winter in southern Florida and Cuba, but most travel to southern Mexico, Central America, and northwestern South America. They live along the edges between habitats, so they don’t need big stretches of unbroken forest canopy to thrive. That means that logging and development that increase forest fragmentation actually work to their advantage as their populations seem to be slowly increasing. The great crested exploits a niche higher in canopy to avoid direct competition for food with other flycatchers. Their hunting perches require an unobstructed view of potential prey and unobstructed flight paths to them, whether the prey are in the air or on leaves or twigs. From high up, they swoop out for prey, using multiple dead-branch perches with a backdrop of foliage for cover. In contrast, when the male sings, it’s to be heard, not to see or be seen. He picks a singing perch within the canopy, well away from branch ends. A secondary-cavity nester, the great crested flycatcher is the only cavity-nesting flycatcher of eastern North America. It uses a wide variety of nesting cavities, including naturally occurring hollows in live trees created by branch scars and knotholes, cavities in dead trees excavated by woodpeckers, and a variety of human-made structures. Much has been written about this species’ frequent use of shed snakeskin in the nest, which may be adaptive in regions where nest predation is high. Other items with a similar appearance (like wrinkly plastic wrappers) are sometimes used.



Western Kingbird

**The Western Kingbird** is a conspicuous bird of open habitats that breeds in the western United States and winters in southern Mexico and Central America. Though known as birds of the West, Western Kingbirds tend to wander during fall migration. They show up along the East Coast, between Florida and Newfoundland, every autumn—but only rarely during the spring. In 1915

Western Kingbirds began spending winters in Florida, where they are now regular winter residents. They occupy a variety of environments; riparian forests, savannahs, shrublands, pasture and fields, and suburbs. Key habitat features of their breeding locales include open areas for feeding near trees and shrubs for nesting and perching; human-made structures such as utility poles are also used for nesting. Typical of tyrant flycatchers, this kingbird forages by aerial hawking and perch-to-ground flights, often with acrobatic flying maneuvers. Originally known as the Arkansas Kingbird, its name was changed to be more descriptive and to adapt to common usage. The western kingbird vigorously defends a small territory around its nest against other flycatchers and potential predators. It often mobs hawks and owls that perch or fly nearby. Males are most active in defense, using a harsh buzzing call during attacks. Several nonvocal displays, such as bill-snapping and raising and revealing the red crown feathers, are seen during aggressive behavior. The breeding range has expanded gradually since the late 1800s, when settlers began altering habitats, western kingbirds were able to spread eastward across the northern mixed-grass prairies of the Dakotas and southern Canada due to the planting of trees. In other areas, such as Texas, range expansion was made possible by forest clearing and the proliferation of utility poles and wires. Recent survey data indicate that populations are increasing slightly across most of the nesting range.

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 "I've never been lost, but I was mighty turned around for three days once."  
 — *Daniel Boone*  
 .....

"Gettin' a bit crowded in here, don'cha think"?



This is Dorothy Thetford's last family portrait of her Eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) before their next-day fledging on May 12. She has carefully and faithfully documented—orally and photographically—these little bluebirds from when they were just a gleam in their father's eye to now when the babies are on the verge of leaving home; and after all, that's what we expect of all well-bred and well-trained little ones.