



Highland Lakes Steward

January 2015

Volume 6, Issue 1

MISSION

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a natural resource-based volunteer training and development program sponsored statewide by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The mission of the program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas

OFFICERS

President

Chris Faught
Crisfaught1
@hotmail.com
(512) 261-6583

Vice-President

Melissa Duckworth
lissaduckworth@
gmail.com
(512) 756-2813

Secretary

Marilyn McClain
mccgrammy
@yahoo.com
(214) 235-5759

Treasurer

Blair Feller
blair.feller@gmail.com
(830) 385-2782



ANOTHER HILL COUNTRY WINTER VISITOR – THE ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER

by Joanne Fischer

The Orange-crowned Warbler is a wood warbler (Family: Emberizidae, Sub-family Parulidae) which is described by many as being one of the drabest of all warblers! Yet, although they are rather nondescript, if you are like me, you anticipate their arrival each winter and make sure that the peanut butter suet is always available for their dining pleasure.

The Orange-crowned Warbler is a small, slim warbler with plumage that can vary from gray to olive-green to pale yellow. In fact, there are actually four geographic subspecies of the Orange-crowned Warbler and each varies in coloration. This obviously can contribute to difficulties in identifying this species. Proper identification is further compounded by the fact that they have few bold markings and although they are called an “orange-crowned” warbler, there's rarely any sign of the orange crown (it is seen only when a male is threatened or involved in a territorial display)! They do have unusually thin, sharply-pointed bills (compared to other warblers). They also have a blackish line through the eye (see accompanying photos), a pale partial eyering and, if you get a glimpse of their underside, the feathers at the base of the tail are a bright yellow which is often the



brightest plumage on the bird.

Orange-crowned Warblers tend to be quiet and unobtrusive as they forage in dense shrubbery and low in trees for food. They flit rapidly through shrubs, trees and

(Continued on page 3)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Orange Crowned Warbler	1
Joanne Fischer	
February Program	2
Melissa Duckworth	
Get Well!	2
January Program	3
Highland Lakes Nature Center 2014 Review	4
Billy Hutson	
Balcones Canyonlands News, Jan. 2015	5
Joan Mukherjee	
Gallery	6
Calendar	7

Please submit pictures, articles, reports, stories, announcements, etc. to

chili865@gmail.com.

Photos should have captions and appropriate credits. The deadline for submissions to each month's newsletter is the 10th of the month and publication will be by the 15th.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

by Melissa Duckworth

Speakers at the February meeting will be Wade Hibler, leader and facilitator of "Team Quail" for Burnet County and our former Burnet County extension agent, and Rebekah Ruzicka.. Rebekah received her B.S. in wildlife and fisheries biology from Colorado State University and her M.A. in wildlife biology from Utah State University. She has worked with Dr. Dale Rollins at the Rolling Plains Quail Research Foundation on large scale projects including Operation Idiopathic Decline, a quail disease study. She currently works with Texas A & M Agrilife Extension Service.

Also present from " Team Quail" will be Isaac Carver, a member of the Bobwhite Brigade.

Beginning in the early 1990's, quail populations began to decrease steadily. Counts began in 1978 , with the last 10 years having the lowest counts. Many theories abound as to the causes of this steady decline. One of the research goals of the Texas Quail Initiative is to help shed light on some theories and provide future solutions.

The Texas Quail Initiative was funded by the 83rd Texas legislature through Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas A&M Agrilife Research. This initiative made available \$2 million through Upland Game Bird Stamp Funds.

Data is collected from monitoring activities in counties throughout Texas then analyzed to eventually help



Photo by Mike Childers

landowners and hunters increase their knowledge of these iconic birds, monitor their land effectively and increase appreciation from the general public for these once plentiful birds.

Other Highland Lakes Master Naturalists that participate in TQI are: Jerry Stacy, Billy Hutson, George Brugnoli, Melissa Duckworth and Alice Rheaume..

GET WELL!

The chapter has sent get well wishes to the following fellow Master Naturalists.

- Connie Barron – bad knee
- Judy Haralson – bad leg
- Lori Greco – fell off horse/horseback riding accident - broken ribs and collar bone, etc.

Keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

JANUARY PROGRAM

David Yeomans of the **KXAN** weather department presented a very interesting program on pertinent weather related topics at our January meeting. As he left, he took a parting shot of our happy crowd at the new digs at the Church of Christ in Marble Falls



ORANGE CROWNED WARBLER (Continued from page 1)

other vegetation gleaning food from leaves and buds. In summer their diet consists mostly of invertebrates including ants, beetles, spiders, flies and caterpillars. They are also known to seek out nectar and their sharply-pointed bills enable them to pierce the base of flowers to get at the nectar. In winter they supplement their insect diet with fruit, berries, seeds and they are common visitors at the sapwells drilled by woodpeckers and sapsuckers. They will sometimes visit backyard feeders for peanut butter suet and may even seek out sugar water in hummingbird and oriole feeders especially if the landscape includes dense brush for adequate shelter.

Orange-crowned Warblers breed from Alaska and Canada southward throughout the western states. They are medium to long-distance nocturnal migrants and winter in the southern states and Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. Orange-crowned Warblers migrate throughout Texas and they are common winter residents in the southern half of the state, including the Hill Country. In the spring most depart for their northern breeding territories although some actually remain in Texas and nest in the high elevation of the Guadalupe Mountains.

Orange-crowned Warblers are monogamous birds that nest on or near the ground in dense vegetation. Similar to many other species, the female builds the nest which is an open cup constructed of dead leaves and other coarse materials lined with finer grasses, animal hair and softer materials. A clutch consists of 4 to 5 eggs which the female incubates for 11 to 13 days. Both parents then feed the

young. They usually raise a single brood each year.

The population of Orange-crowned Warblers is considered to be relatively stable even though the North American Breeding Bird Survey reports that their numbers have declined by almost one percent per year since 1968. But even at that, they are not reported to be threatened or endangered.

In doing my research for these monthly bird articles, I always try to find something unusual or “weird” about each of the species I write about. In the case of the Orange-crowned Warbler the interesting tidbit that I found was in relation to its song. It is reported that the Orange-crowned Warbler's song is far more variable than that of other wood warblers. It is said that breeding males often form “song neighborhoods” - where a couple to up to a half dozen birds in adjacent breeding territories learn and mimic each others songs. It is said that these “neighborhood” songs can persist for years. My question regarding this interesting (weird) fact is – who conducts the research necessary to determine such things?!?!?

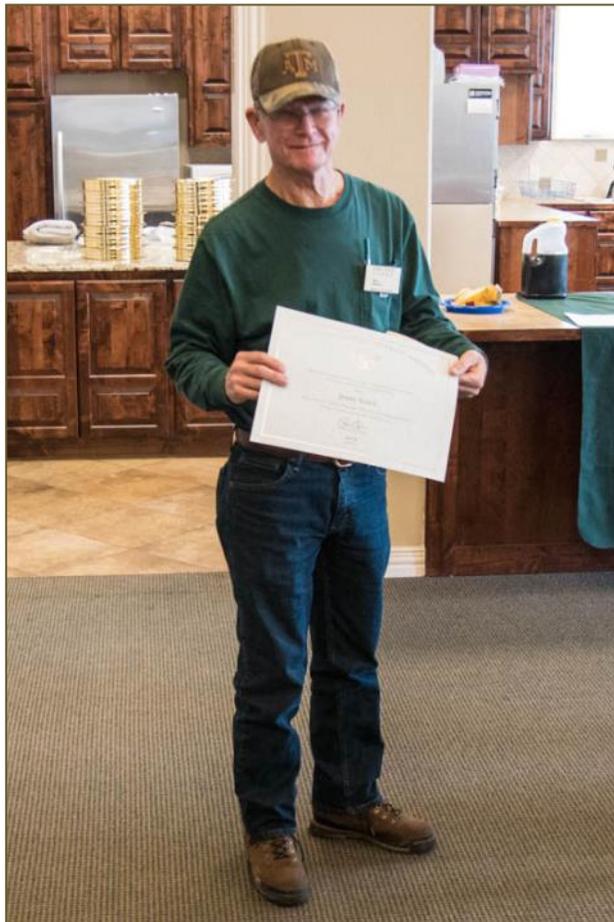
The other “tidbit” for you – did you know that a group of warblers is referred to as either a “bouquet”, “confusion”, “fall” or “wrench” of warblers. I did not know!

Although for the most part Orange-crowned Warblers are considered solitary birds, they can sometimes be found in mixed flocks with kinglets, juncos, chickadees and other warblers during migration. Look for Orange-crowned Warblers in shrubs and low-growing vegetation. And remember to put out some peanut butter suet and they may be frequent visitors to your yard in winter months.

JERRY STACY HONORED

At our January meeting, in honor of his 4,000 hours of volunteer service, Jerry Stacy received a letter from President Obama recognizing him for his outstanding service!

Congratulations Jerry!



HIGHLAND LAKES NATURE CENTER 2014 REVIEW

by Billy Hutson

Well, 2014 was another year of progress with the commencement of a NPSOT garden established behind a rock wall erected by the RPR landowners crew and dirt brought in by the help of the crew and Ray Zinder with his equipment.

We placed 3 bluebird boxes, welded and moved our information pagoda to its final resting place (still needs to be painted by a youth group needing volunteer time), made progress with our rainwater collection building which is ready to put the metal on the roof to be followed by gutters and water tank plumbing, developed plans for the bird viewing station, hosted several school, scout, university and individual community groups, got pollinator and way station recognition for our native plant garden, were featured in two local newspaper articles, discovered three wild honey bee hives, and contributed approx. 1000 hours to the MN system toward their grant money.

Plans for 2015 are to erect the bird viewing station, finish the rainwater collection system (see below), plan for the honey bee exhibition station, erect informational signs for the now permanent stations on nature hill, establish the MG demo. garden, fence out the cows, erect protective covers for the Archaeology station and the garnet, ordered and distributed shirts, hats, and badges, released several baby rabbits, opossums and screech owls, and outreached to as many groups as possible. We attained a lot of recognition and visits from the Audubon Society for our bluebird, horned owl, and Lewis woodpecker residents/visitors and hope to have many more new birds in 2015.

As a means to exhibit rainwater collection to the public for educational purposes and to water the Master Gardeners and Native Plant Society of Texas planting contributions to the nature center we have entered into the following project.

Six dedicated and often more members of the Upper Highland Lakes nature center (UHLNC) have spent at least 300 hours on the planning, preassembly for fitness, and assembly of the tubular frame building purchased locally as recycled material. During the summer the frame was preassembled with inserts in the shaded protective military building on Reveille Peak Ranch (RPR).

Once the temperatures calmed down a little we started assembling the structure on site. The site was prepared (leveled and post holes dug) by RPR staff. They delivered the pieces of the structure to the site and we got to work on the assembly and welding of the frame .

In three days of work the frame was up and welded and the postholes were cemented in place. Next mission is to install the roof and rain gutters. More as we progress!

Our new officers for the year are now VP George Brugnoli, Treasurer Jerry Stacy and Secretary Pat Campbell. My personal thanks to last years outgoing officers Ed Myatt and Minnie Eaton.

I also want to thank the members of the friends group, Master Naturalist, Master Gardener, and NPSOT organizations for making this all possible. We had a great construction crew, gardening crew, photographers and lots of help from our land owner.



—2015 will even better.

BALCONES CANYONLANDS NEWS, JAN 2015

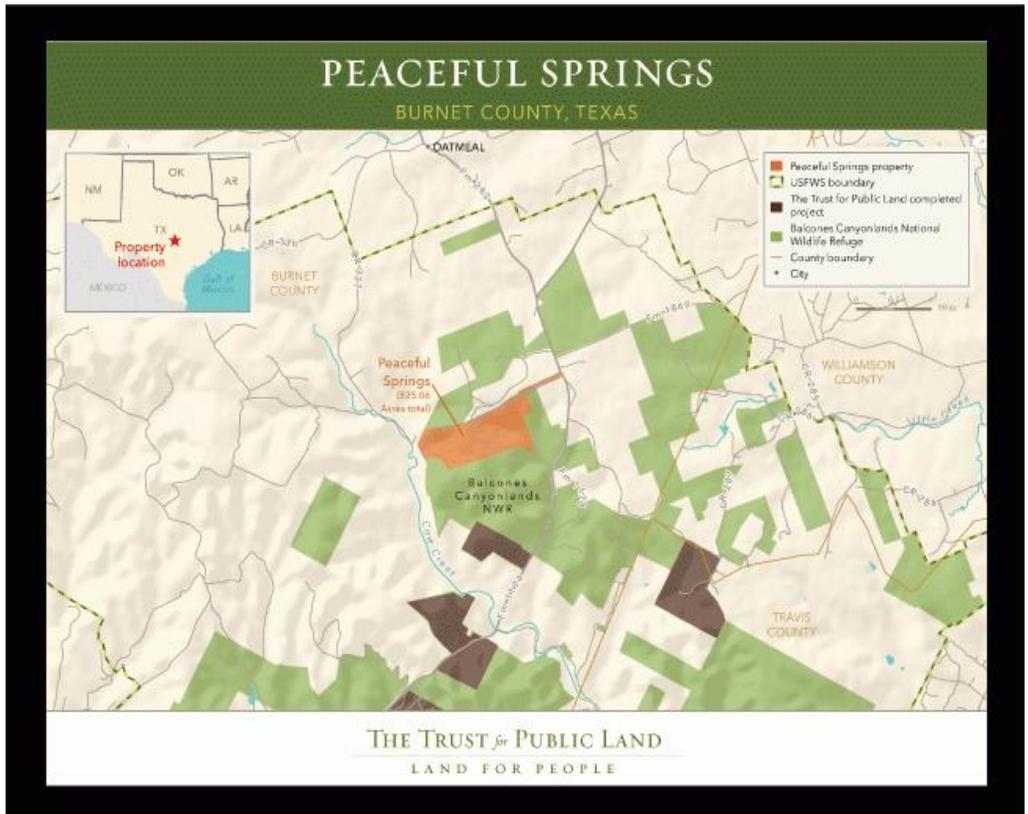
by Joan Mukherjee

Halleluja!

The Trust for Public Land on New Year's Eve acquired Peaceful Springs and will transfer it to the Refuge as soon as sufficient money has been accumulated to complete the purchase price. As of Nov 1st, TPL had \$1.5 million of the \$3 million purchase price. The Friends group added \$100,000 from their land acquisition fund and are now seeking further donations to make up the difference. As you can see from the chart below, the 525 acres of Peaceful Springs fills a big gap in the Refuge holdings.

The Balcones Christmas Birdcount was conducted on Dec 15th. It was a beautiful day and my team walked all day. We were all excited when a zone tail hawk swooped down right in front of us and soared out over the creek. We couldn't quite believe our eyes but looking at 5 different books, we decided that was what it had to be---we are on the very edge of its territory. We got hot and tired walking and sat on a big log in a shady glen and the birds came to us. It was there that Kay Zagst spotted a brown creeper for us, another real treat. One hundred species were reported at the countdown.

On January 2nd Deborah Holle, refuge manager, retired. David Maple will be interim manager. Deborah has been the first and only manager of Balcones and built it to its current size and capability. She developed a fire crew who not



only work at Balcones but help out throughout the USA. The RV volunteer program, the Friends group, Children's Programs, Sparrow Fest, Songbird Fest, Swift Fest and Refuge Day have all been organized with her help and encouragement.

A replacement for Rob Iski has been hired and will come on board this month. And surprise, she is Cindy Fronk who used to work at the Fish Hatchery who many of us already know. We look forward to working with her here at Balcones. We are beginning to schedule our spring programs and planning our Environmental Education program for Feb. 19th. Anyone who has not taken it and would like to help teach the Children's programs should put that date on their calendar. It is an all day program and qualifies for AT.

GALLERY



Yellow rumped Warbler

by Lori Greco



Pelicans and friend

by Sue Kersey



Sue Kersey's Sunset picture earned a \$100 award in the KVUE/IBC Bank Weather Snapshot Contest.

HLMN MEETINGS SCHEDULE 2015

By Cris Faught

Chapter Meeting 1:00pm

07 January 2015
 04 February 2015
 04 March 2015
 01 April 2015
 06 May 2015
 03 June 2015
 July No Meeting
 05 August 2015
 02 September 2015
 07 October 2015
 04 November 2015
 02 December 2015

Christmas Party

Board Meeting 10:30am

Board Meeting
 Board Meeting
 Board Meeting
 Board Meeting

