



# The Phalarope



A newsletter of the Midland Naturalists  
3105 E. County Rd. 144  
Midland, TX 79706

Volume 47, Number 6

June & July, 2002

## FIELD TRIPS

### **NOTE the various times for the field trips**

June 29	Butterflies & Birds	I-20 Pond	8:30 A.M.
June 29	<b>Nocturnal Field Trip</b> BRING A FLASHLIGHT	Meet at TI Pond	<b>8:45 P.M.</b>
July 6	<b>Annual Butterfly Count</b>	Merritt Residence	8:30 A.M.
July 13	Novice Butterfly Walk	Williams ~ Residence	8:30 A.M.
July 20	Novice Bird Walk	Hogan Park Sibley Trail	8:30 A.M.
July 27	Rose Acres Birds	Meet at 5-Points Store	<b>8:00 A.M.</b>
July 27	<b>Nocturnal Field Trip</b> BRING A FLASHLIGHT	Meet at 5- Points Store	8:30 P.M.
August 3	Harris ~ Tank Birds	Meet at 5- Points Store	<b>8:00 A.M.</b>
August 10	Rose Acres Birds	Meet at 5-Points Store	<b>8:00 A.M.</b>
August 10	<b>Star Party</b> Perseid Meteor Shower & listen for night calls	Meet at 5-Points Store	8:30 P.M.

For information on field trips, please call Bill Lupardus (915) 697 5276

For information on **Butterfly Walks**, please call Joann Meritt (915) 697 4604

For information on **Star Party**, please call Donna Kelly (915) 697 5276

**SUMMER FIELD TRIPS--** birds, butterflies, stars and snakes! Call the above listed Midnats for additional information about the field trips. **Joann** leads an enchanting butterfly trip. **NOTE: Bring \$3.00 (for the NABA-North American Butterfly Association) on July 6** for the Annual Butterfly walk. For the **Star Party**, bring your scope or any other telescope, lawn chair, cold drinks and bug spray. **Donna** will give us the moon and the stars. Those who want to stay late will watch the Perseid Meteor Shower. We will listen for poorwills, nighthawks, and owls. **Study shorebirds** to get ready for the trips to Rose Acres. And don't forget to bring a flashlight for the **Nocturnal Field Trips** to be led by **Allen Wimple** on June 29 and July 27.

Who says there's nothing to do in the summertime!

## MAY 2002 BIRD REPORTS

This month's species count increased to 145, compared to 127 for April; all sightings were in Midland County and include those for the Big Day Count on May 5.

**Cattle Egret:** 5/4, Midnats, Big Day. (Irregular).

**American Wigeon:** 5/2, RMS, Rose Acres; 5/4, Midnats, Big Day, Rose Acres; 5/6, RMS, Rose Acres. (Rare). As many as 8

**Green-winged Teal:** 5/4, Midnats, Faudree, Big Day; 5/18, Midnats, Louise's Pond. (Rare)

**Ring-necked Duck:** 5/2, RMS, Rose Acres; 5/4, Midnats, Big Day, (Late records).

**Mississippi Kite:** 5/1, SSC, MCC. Only 3 reports. (Common).

**American Kestrel:** A pair is raising 3 young at residence of Mary Stortz. (Check-list indicates no records after 5/10)

**Scaled Quail:** Several nests with as many as 14 eggs in the pecan orchard. (Resident).

**Black-bellied Plover:** 5/4, Midnats, Blue Barns Road. (Uncommon)

**Snowy Plover:** 5/4, Midnats, Blue Barns area. Only report. (Abundant).

**Spotted Sandpiper:** 5/2, RMS, Rose Acres. (Common) But 14 in one area may set a record.

**Long-billed Curlew:** 5/4, Midnats, Big Day, Louise's pond. (Fairly common). One report.

**Pectoral Sandpiper:** 5/18, Midnats, Louise's Pond. (Fairly common). One report.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper:** 5/18, Midnats, Louise's pond. (Fairly common). One report.

**Black Tern:** 5/18, RMS, Rose Acres. (Fairly common) 1 report.

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird:** The Hendersons' bird has developed a gorget and still comes to the feeders.

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird:** 5/4, Midnats, Big Day; 5/25, DK, Residence. (Rare).

**Olive-sided Flycatcher:** 5/4, Midnats, Big Day, Boone. (Fairly common). One report.

**Western Wood-Pewee:** 5/28, BLu, residence. (Fairly common). One report.

**Bell's Vireo:** Nesting at Boone and I-20. (Uncommon)

**Swallows:** Cliff and Barn (Common), reported 3 times. Northern Rough-winged (Fairly common) reported 1 time. Bank (Fairly Common) early May reported 1 time.

**Magnolia Warbler:** Reported 5/12, D&AK, I-20. No previous records. No other observers.

**Prairie Warbler:** Reported 5/11, D&AK, I-20. (Accidental). One or two records since 1983. No other observers.

**Ovenbird:** 5/17, D&JM, residence. (Uncommon). Singing bird.

## JUNE 1-JUNE 15 2002 BIRD REPORTS

**Eared Grebe:** 6/5, Rose Acres, RMS. (Uncommon).

**American White Pelican:** 6/7, Rose Acres, DK. (Irruptive).

**Great Egret:** 6/7, Rose Acres, DK. (Uncommon).

**Mallard:** 6/5, Blue Barns Road, RMS. (Uncommon).

**American Widgeon:** 6/5, Rose Acres, RMS. (Checklist shows no June records) 2 birds.

**Redhead:** 6/5, Rose Acres, DK. (Uncommon).

**Spotted Sandpiper:** 6/5, Rose Acres, RMS. (Check-list

**Forster's Tern:** 6/8, Rose Acres, DK. (Checklist shows no June records).

**Black Tern:** 6/5, 6/8/ 6/14. Rose Acres, RMS, DK. Uncommon early June, few records rest of the month).

**Willow Flycatcher:** 6/9, Residence, BLu. (Checklist indicates the Willow is rare first 10 days of June, no records after that). Much care taken in calling this.

**Vermilion Flycatcher:** 6/1, 6/15. Boone and Harris Tank, Midnats. Uncommon in June).

**House Wren:** 6/1, Boone, Midnats. (Checklist shows no records in June).

**Gray Catbird:** 6/3, Residence, D&JM. (No records this early in the month). Seen later by other Midnats.

**American Redstart:** 6/3, Residence, D&JM. (Rare in June). Seen later by BRD, RMS.

**Bronzed Cowbird:** 6/1, Boone, Midnats. (Uncommon).

Rose Marie Stortz

Call Rose Marie with bird sightings: (915) 683 1976 or email [rstortz@apex2000.net](mailto:rstortz@apex2000.net)

## CHASING BIRDS IN THE HEAT

The Rio Grande Valley is not usually at the top of any-body's list for birding in the summertime; however, when rare birds show up, people come from far and near in spite of the 104 degree heat and what seems like 100% humidity. I left Midland before 6 a.m. on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June and was walking the Hiking Trail in Bentsen by 5:30 p.m., making my way to markers 16-17 where a Yellow-faced Grassquit was being reported on Texbirds. Four other people were already there and three others showed up before we saw the bird at 6:40 as it moved from dead tree to dead tree, stopping for a few minutes to sing. Thoughts of sleeping in the park in order to get an early start in searching for a second target bird were abandoned because of heat and mosquitoes; a motel, shower and 9 hours sleep was a smarter option. The park is obviously closing down; trailer sites 1-36 are open with only 3 trailers parked there and one of them seemed to be occupied by park workers. All other sites are blocked off to access. The camping area is not maintained (grass and weeds are high), though water is still available and the bathrooms are open.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> I walked in on the tour road at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge where 5 of us watched Gray Hawks, a Hook-billed Kite, a White-tailed Kite, and one Short-tailed Kite soar above the Old Cemetery. Mark Lockwood was there to confirm the Short-tailed Kite sighting and the bird fit Bill Clark's description on Texbirds. Back along the road at Willow Pond I, a female Rose-throated Becard was seen entering and leaving a football-sized nest of moss. A nesting Tropical Parula sang above the trail and a heat-suffering Clay-colored Robin sat in the shade. The ranger said summer visitors in the park have increased from the usual 2-3 to 7-8 a day because of the good birds. After nesting for years at the Patagonia Rest Stop in SE Arizona (I saw it there in the 70's), the Becard has not been seen the last few years; now the Tucson Audubon Society has just posted a notice that the bird is again being seen in the same area.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> I was back in Bentsen at 8 a.m. and, along with 3 men from Baltimore, searched for the Yellow-green Vireo. There was no problem hearing it; the bird sang almost constantly but moved back and forth from the tent camping area to the trailer area, staying in thick cover. We finally saw the bird in a willow in the open about 11:15 a.m.

I made it back to the hotel just in time to beat the 12 noon check-out and headed for Salineno but left there because men in a motor boat kept moving up and down the river, so I got to Chapena earlier than planned. From 6:30 p.m.-8:40 p.m. I stood by the river and watched the usual birds fly by and it was only at 8:40 P. M., just as I was about to concede defeat one more time, that a pair of Muscovy Ducks flew from the reeds across the river in Mexico straight toward me as though they intended to land at my feet, swerved aside at the last minute and landed in the river. After 25 years of going to the Valley, I finally ticked off this big black duck, and if I had been standing anywhere else in the little picnic-fish cleaning area, I would not have seen it because of overhanging trees. Chasing target birds can be frustrating but it sure is fun when things go the birder's way.

**Rose Marie Stortz**

## THE BEHAVIOR OF TEXAS BIRDS

Just purchased a copy of Rylander's, The Behavior of Texas Birds. In short, it is very good and helpful and I would recommend it to anyone who has anything above a passing interest in birds. It is reminiscent, but a more expanded version, of Roger Tory Peterson's text in Texas Birds. The book provides range and distribution discussion, feeding behavior, courtship behavior, nesting information, voice, and then other behavior. There are no pictures, just text. It is quite readable and should prove useful and interesting regardless of skill level.

In my opinion, learning to i.d. a bird is an excellent skill, but hardly an end point to "knowing" about birds. Understanding their behaviors will aid in i.d. questions, but ultimately also will lead to a fuller knowledge, which will aid in understanding the conservation issues for each species, which sometimes vary tremendously.

**Jeff Mundy, President, Houston Audubon  
From Texbirds**

## A SPECIAL FIELD GUIDE

Western Medicinal Plants and Herbs by Steven Foster and Christopher Hobbs is a newly published Field Guide in the Peterson Series and is now available at Barnes & Noble. The authors have used pictures taken some years ago by Frances Williams to illustrate Spectacle Pod, Salt Heliotrope, Syrian Rue, Golden Crownbeard (commonly called Cowpen Daisy) and Yellowspine Thistle. Also included in the guide are Burr Williams's photos of Common Reed and Hairy Goldenaster.

I recommend this informative field guide for anyone interested in native plants and herbs and how they were utilized as folk medicines. Additionally, the authors desire to stimulate research into the plants's potential for drug uses today. Knowledge gained from the book will hopefully lead to better conservation practices pertaining to our native flora and their habitats.

In one paragraph of the acknowledgments there is a list of people to whom a special thanks is given and it includesŭ Burr Williams for his photos and those of his late mother, Frances Williams, a longtime member of the Texas Ornithological Society. That alone makes the book special to this MIDNAT.

With Sara's permission I have substituted the words `native plants` instead of `birds` and reiterated her apt expression from last month's Phalarope: `This is another happy occasion to remember Frances and her patience in helping some of us learn about *native plants*.\_

**Joann Merritt**

## BIRDING COLD MOUNTAIN

Bird lists of `heard birds` on television-- golf tournaments, and movies are good sources-- are a fun and different way to enjoy birds. Several Midnats have even mentioned hearing the `wrong` bird for a particular location. Last month I actually heard a Blue Jay through a speakerphone on a conference call from Dallas. He was clearer than the verbiage passing back and forth, figuratively of course!

But, the best **non-field** birding I have encountered was in April 1999 when I read the novel, Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier, (Random House, 1997). It tells the story of a Confederate soldier walking home to the Blue Ridge Mountains from the battle at Petersburg. The New York Times Book Review stated:

`In prose filled with grace notesŭ he has reset much of the Odyssey in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, near the end of the Civil Warŭ A wealth of finely realized supporting charactersŭ a memorable book. \_

The memorable supporting characters for me are the birds---they are everywhere throughout the book, almost to the point of distraction for a birder. I like to think the soldier was as entertained by them on his harrowing trek as I was encountering them in print.

Some mention of birds was foreboding, such as the title of Chapter 1, `The Shadow of a Crow` and the description ŭ (he) awoke in a mood as dark as the blackest crow that ever flew. Others references were philosophical, `...marrying a woman for her beauty makes no more sense than eating a bird for its singing. But it's a common mistake nonetheless. \_ Many birds appeared as we see them, ŭ a female cardinal with a sprig of birch in its beak flew byŭ \_ There is historic data, ŭ the river took its name from the great numbers of Passenger Pigeons that sometimes flocked there to eat the beechnutsŭ (she) had eaten many a pigeon in her youthŭ the easiest game for a child to take. Just knock them out of trees with sticks and wring their necks. \_ One of my favorites, ŭ `Pigeon Hawk` he said (to himself), as if putting a name to the birds might help him regain his footingŭ \_ as he walked a precarious pathway.

Sightings included `a great number of crows, or at least the spirits of crows, dancing and singing in the upper limbs\_, vultures, a `boomer` (Nighthawk), martin colony, owl, Whistling Swan, bluebird, jaybird, quail, lark, kingbird, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk. And ravens-- ŭ gathered in council at the edge of a yellow stubble field\_, peregrines-- `bursting out of the fog\_, wild turkeys, nuthatches, and titmice and even a red hen. There were approximately 36 references to birds, bird lore, and feathers in the novel.

Like the hat that was `decorated with the feathers of swallows and hawks and heron\_, belonging to one of the more colorful characters, Cold Mountain is adorned with birds. It is a literary ornithological field trip through 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

**Sara St. Clair**

## ATTRACTING SUMMER BIRDS

**Nothing attracts more birds in summer than water.** A puddle in the street where water has run from a sloping lawn, water in a shallow pan on the ground, water in a bowl on a pedestal, spray from a sprinkler, an elaborate pool with a bubbling fountain, a `creek\_ with a waterfall - birds love them all. If the water is noisy, it's even better! Some birds prefer to bathe in a fine mist spraying into a shrub or the lower branches of a tree. They sit in the spray, preening each feather. Hummingbirds love this and you will love watching them.

**Just one hummingbird feeder will do during the early part of the summer.** There are many flowers blooming now and hummingbirds prefer flowers to feeders. In addition, Black-chinned Hummingbirds catch many tiny insects. But when the migrant Rufous Hummingbirds begin arriving in late July you may need two or three feeders as they add fat for their journey. Rufous hummers are so aggressive they will keep the Black-chins away from the feeder, and each male Rufous requires his own personal feeder!

**Do ants crawl down the cord to your hummingbird feeder and down in the syrup?** Try attaching an `ant guard\_ above the feeder. It is a small receptacle into which water is placed to block the ants from the feeder.

**Do House Finches spill all the syrup from your hummingbird feeder trying to satisfy their quest for sweets?** Try an Oriole feeder. These feeders have larger perches and holes, which are more suitable for large finch bills. This summer's crop of young orioles will compete with the finches from the syrup and someday a handsome black and orange adult male Bullock's Oriole may partake, especially if you add half an orange to the menu.

**Great-tailed Grackles eat the eggs and nestlings of other birds.** Discourage them in any you can. Make noise and throw things at them. If you are feeding seeds or grain and the grackles are eating it, quit feeding! .

**American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins have gone north for the summer,** but Lesser Goldfinches stay here and some use thistle feeders. The feeding ports are so tiny that larger birds cannot get the seed. If Lesser Goldfinches are not using your thistle feeder, then the seed should be removed and the feeder cleaned and put away until September. Some thistle feeders are made of such thin plastic that House Finches and House Sparrows can enlarge the ports with thief heavy bills. In that case you might want to replace the feeder in the fall. Thistle seed (Niger) is too expensive to feed to House Sparrows!

**Frances Williams**

--from July 1997. *The Phalarope*

### KEEP THOSE HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS FILLED!

Migrating hummingbirds from the mountains will begin passing through Midland by mid-July. Because of the drought there are no few wild flowers, so your flowers and feeders will be essential to their survival. Hummers expected include the Rufous, Broad-tailed, Ruby-throated and Calliope in addition to our resident Black-chinned Hummingbirds.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird was still at the Hendersons' on June 19. If you've seen the beautiful yard and blooming plants, you'd stay too!

Eileen Piwetz at Midland showed me a Black-chinned nest with fledgling, on the branch of a red leafed Ash? Tree near her office at Midland College. It was a beautiful sight.

### TIME TO RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION to *The Phalarope*

Unless you have paid in advance, your subscription to *The Phalarope*, and your membership in Midland Naturalists, expires with this issue. If you have paid in advance, the date your subscription will expire is on your mailing label. Make your \$7.50 check to Midland Naturalists, Inc., and mail it with the form on page 7 **to the address on the form.**

## MONARCH No. AFL910 RECOVERED

What are the odds that among the 60,000 to 80,000 Monarch Butterflies tagged each fall as they fly south across North America that one of the 20 Don and I tagged at Harris ~ Pecan Orchard would be recovered?! We felt as if we had won the lottery when we received a Certificate of Appreciation from Monarch Watch stating Monarch No. AFL910 tagged 10/2/2001 in Midland County was recovered in El Rosario, Mexico by Romero Garcia-Martinez and had traveled 862 miles.

Dr. O.R. (Chip) Taylor, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, has been in charge of the Monarch Watch program for 10 years and during that time about 1600 butterflies have been recovered. As valuable as the data is, promoting science education among elementary and middle school students is his primary mission. Last year 100,000 students were invited in the program and Dr. Taylor refers to them, as well as the adults who participate, as "citizen scientists".

Of course, there are those who do not share his view and declare his data unacceptable but Dr. Taylor believes there is absolutely no reason student as well as adult citizen amateurs cannot collect the needed information. His optimistic outlook is "Hey, let's keep this thing going."

**Joann Merritt**

## DAVIS MOUNTAINS UPDATE

With all of the exciting news coming from parts of Texas I thought an update on the latest discoveries from the Davis Mountains might be of interest to most Texas birders. Conditions here are mostly hot and dry but the pattern will hopefully change soon. A bit of unexpected rain last week helped (first since February) but our total since Jan. 1 still only about 2.5 inches. Single day surveys started in late April but most of the significant discoveries have been this month. Information on details and contributors will be forthcoming after all of the summer's field work has been completed. These include:

a. MacGillivray's Warbler - at least 5 birds are on territory at 7,800' at the head of a steep canyon, including two pair and a single subadult male defending a territory. Strong defense of these territories was noted and breeding is occurring although still not confirmed. The area contains boulder field covered by vines and other thick vegetation and is very difficult to access not to mention the 2-3 hours it takes to get there. We will return when we expect feeding of nestlings or fledglings to occur to finally confirm Texas' first nesting record for this species.

b. Colima Warbler - pending confirmation, we now have at least 4 birds in the range including 3 singing males. An attempt will be made to capture some of the individuals and color band them so that future studies will track their occupation of habitat here. This exercise will be very difficult considering the terrain and access difficulties. We suspect that something is going with the more common Virginia's Warbler; several of the songs recorded to date do not fit either species well. This year there are not as many Virginia's breeding at the elevation occupied by the Colimas as there were last year.

c. Buff-breasted Flycatcher - a single individual has been located just up canyon from the area occupied the past three years. This bird is very difficult to follow and calls/sings only very periodically. It will require additional monitoring.

d.. Greater Pewee - the news of the season is the presence of at least 2 Greater Pewees on a remote peak in the range. These birds were discovered last Thursday, seen again Friday in thick clouds and mist and were followed intensely the past two days. Their large territory is on a 50% slope and no vocalizations were noted between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. the past two days making tracking options few. They are definitely on a well- defined territory so breeding may be possible provided one is a male and one a female. Monitoring will continue in the coming weeks. If confirmed breeding, this will provide another first for Texas.

Stay tuned later this summer for "the rest of the story". KBB

Kelly B. Bryan

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Fort Davis, Texas 79734

915-426-3721 (H), 915-238-0179 (Cell)

**NOT A trivial PURSUIT**

Joanne Merritt sent me the following after I admitted that I had missed the trivia question at a meeting at the office, 'What is the Texas State insect?'\_ Thanks, Joann! It's not a scorpion, not a mosquito, it's

**THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY**

The Monarch butterfly is as beautiful and memorable as a Texas sunset,  
Soaring above all other insects  
In it's nobility and determination  
And it's unique relationship with Texas  
Makes it a truly appropriate symbol  
Of the majestic spirit of the  
Lone Star State.

By the Texas Legislature, 1995  
\*\*\*\*\*

If you have been to an interesting location to see birds or nature or if you have a story to share with subscribers, please send your articles to Sara St. Clair, via email [sws1@cox.net](mailto:sws1@cox.net) or at 2605 McClintic Street, Midland TX 79795. Send articles and information anytime, as soon as possible, the earlier the better; the deadline varies each month depending on other obligations of the editor and circulation mgr. **Deadline for the August issue is Sunday, July 28**, but please send information sooner in the month if you are ready. Thanks for your help! Sara St. Clair

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**TIME TO RENEW!**

Is your subscription about to expire? Please renew to prevent the misfortune of missing even a single issue. See below. Most subscriptions are from August 1 through July 31. **The next Phalarope will be mailed in early August.**

**MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION TO THE MIDLAND NATURALISTS**

Annual Dues are \$7.50 per year and cover the period form August 1 to July 31and should be paid in July for the new year.

For new members wishing to join during the year dues are as follows:

From August 1 to December 31 - \$7.50

From January 1 to July 31 - discount; partial year - \$5.00

Dues include a subscription to *The Phalarope*, a monthly newsletter of the Midland Naturalists, Inc.

When subscribing, please complete the following form and send with the proper dues to:

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Midland TX 79706

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**Thank you for renewing** and joining the Midland Naturalists! Please join us for a field trip soon!