Bird Friendly Yards Now Found in 10 Counties, Create Healthy Habitat for Birds and People

By PAM and JACK STEWART
AAS Members

What if we could turn Arkansas into America’s largest bird sanctuary by creating a statewide network of yards and parks planted with native flowers, shrubs, and trees! That’s the vision for Arkansas Audubon Society’s (AAS) Bird Friendly Yard (BFY) program. There are now certified yards in 10 counties: Washington, Craighead, Bradley, Sebastian, Garland, Pulaski, Marion, Newton, Boone, and Clark with a concentration in the Little Rock area.

Some changes have been made on the AAS Yard Birds Program webpage. A flag, plus the book of Tried and True Missouri Native Plants for Your Yard, and a link to Invasive Nonnative Plants of Southern Forests will be sent when an application (certification) form and

Cindy Franklin and Bill Burnham’s gold-certified yard in Little Rock is a haven for native insects and birds. | Photo: DONNA HAYNES
The manic pace of spring’s natural events has fully transitioned into the dog days of summer. It is during this time of year that I struggle the most to motivate myself to continue to enjoy the natural world. I have to remind myself that heat, ticks, overgrown trails, and a lack of audacious bird chorus are all signs of the verdant abundance that is summer. Summer is the height of growth, reproduction, predation, and natural drama. For birders this means our exciting pursuit of migration and flashy males proclaiming their territories is over. If you can bring yourself to listen to the quieter sounds of warning and contact calls, though, the more-serious business of brood rearing offers even more drama. I hope, like me, you can remind yourself to slow down and enjoy this quieter language of summer birds.

-ADAM SCHAFFER
President, Arkansas Audubon Society

---

**Newsletter and Membership Information**

*The Arkansas Audubon Society Newsletter is a quarterly publication of Arkansas Audubon Society, Inc., a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization, 472 Rock Creek Rd., Hot Springs, AR 71913-9261. Issue dates are March, June, September, and December.*

**PLEASE NOTE:** Announcements, articles, information, and/or photographs to be considered for an upcoming edition of *Arkansas Birds* should be submitted to the editor no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication.

The newsletter is provided to those who pay membership dues to AAS.

Send newsletter submissions to samantha.scheiman@gmail.com.

**Membership renewals are due Jan. 1 of each calendar year.**

Please enter my membership in the Arkansas Audubon Society as a:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(AAS Dues Prorated for New Members)</th>
<th>Jan-Jun 100%</th>
<th>Jul-Sept. 50%</th>
<th>*Oct. - Dec. 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Member</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
<td>$ 7.50</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Family</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing Member</td>
<td>$30.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing Family</td>
<td>$35.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining Member</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining Family</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Member</td>
<td>$ 5.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*New Memberships paid in the last quarter (Oct. - Dec.) will include full membership for the following calendar year.

**SPECIAL MEMBERSHIPS**

- Life Member of Arkansas Audubon Society (may be paid over a two-year period) $250.00
- Patron of Arkansas Audubon Society $500.00

Draw check to Arkansas Audubon Society and send to: Wayne Lynch, Treasurer, P.O. Box 2426, Hot Springs, AR 71914
BFY, continued from page 1

$20 is received, thus registering the yard. An applicant with 100 certification points will receive a green level flag, or with over 150 points, a gold level flag. For those working but whose yards aren’t yet quite bird friendly, a “Working to Become Bird Friendly” flag is available. (This will acknowledge the time it takes for plants to grow and non-native invasive plants to be removed.) A yard which later achieves a higher bird friendly level will be eligible to purchase the appropriate flag. The $20 fee covers the cost of the book, flag, and postage.

The committee is open to suggestions and offers of help to improve the program. If you’d like to get involved contact us at bfaudubon@gmail.com. We anticipate the flags will elicit questions from neighbors and passersby, presenting an opportunity to explain the BFY program. A bird friendly yard creates a habitat for birds, a healthy environment for humans, and a bridge between fragmented local ecosystems, supporting butterflies, other pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

See complete information about the AAS BFY program at www.Arbirds.org.

Yards certified since last summer: Robin Buff (upgraded from Working to Become to Gold), Alan Gregory - Gold, Jane Gulley - Gold, Tom and Peggy Krohn - Gold, Mike Weatherford - Gold.

Recruitment of 5th and 6th Graders for 2017 First-Year Ecology Camp is Strong

By BARRY HAAS
Ecology Camp Treasurer

A s this is being written in late May, we are having a good year recruiting first-year campers. At last count we had 92 applications for the 100 openings, and since then we have talked to several more parents of potential campers. My great hope is that by the start of the first session on Sunday, June 11, both sessions will be completely full. That would be a nice antidote to last June when only 77 of the 100 openings were filled.

So how come we are doing so much better than last year? A number of Camp Committee members and others have done everything they could think to do to get the word out to parents or grandparents of potential campers. We also have one instructor who has turned into a Super Recruiter.

The camp brochure says we are looking for “11- and 12-year-olds,” but at the most recent Camp Committee meeting we agreed to change that wording in future brochure printings to read “current 5th and 6th graders.” If we have a 10- or 13-year old in the 5th or 6th grade prior to the June camp sessions, we’re fine inviting them to attend with the mostly 11- and 12-year-old boys and girls. With 50 first-year campers, we need them to be in a fairly narrow range re: their intellectual development.

The shortfall of first-year campers last year caused a significant hit to the amount of tuition income we received. We are cautious with camp funds and were able to withstand that income hit. We hope that was just a fluke event.

The first group of Halberg Ecology Campers arrives at Camp Clearfork on Sunday, June 11. Five days after their arrival they will have a closing ceremony and head home with their families. A second group of campers will follow the same schedule a week later. Having attended almost all the closing ceremonies for both sessions over the past two decades that I’ve had the privilege to be camp treasurer, I can attest those Friday morning closing ceremonies are joyous occasions—new friends to say goodbye to, instructors to thank for making learning so much fun, and parents who tell us either verbally or later by email what a wonderful experience “Audubon camp” was for their child or grandchild.

Where do all those former campers go? It would be a Herculean task to track them all, but we do come across some of them in unusual ways. At the recent spring meeting atop Mount Magazine, I noticed one of the park interpreters had an unusual last name. I asked him if he knew the fellow who tunes our piano and has the same last name. “Why yes, he’s my cousin”, he said, “and oh by the way, I was in the first Advanced Camp class in 2007.” Wow! He attended the Halberg Ecology Camp as a first-year camper in 2005, senior camper in 2006, and advanced camper his third year in 2007. Now he’s an interpreter teaching others. How great is that?

We appreciate donations any time of the year. Checks should be made payable “AAS Halberg Ecology Camp” or “Arkansas Audubon Society” and mailed to P.O. Box 242088, Little Rock, AR 72223. All donations are tax deductible and acknowledged by letter or email (email when possible to save on postage expense).
Spring Convention Celebrated Native Birds, Butterflies, and the Habitat that Supports Them

Held atop Mount Magazine May 12–14, the Arkansas Audubon Society spring convention was a mountaintop experience in more ways than one. A presentation from hummingbird expert Tana Beasley of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission highlighted the whimsicality and strength of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and how to attract them to your yard, while Arkansas's butterfly lady, entomologist Lori Spencer, revealed the beauty of butterflies through the lens of her life experiences, which included working to designate the Diana Fritillary as the official Arkansas State Butterfly (and teaching Arkansas legislators that fritillary rhymes with military in the process!). Enjoy a few photos from this special weekend on Arkansas’s highest point graced with Scarlet Tanagers, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, and many other delights of the natural world.

-Samantha Scheiman, newsletter editor

Dickcissel at Cherokee Prairie Natural Area during a convention field trip. | Photo: SAMANTHA SCHEIMAN

Birders scan for Rufous-crowned Sparrows atop Mount Magazine at sunrise. | Photo: ROBIN BUFF
Your Trust at Work: AAS Trust Report

By DAN SCHEIMAN
AAS Trust Chair

I'm calling on all members and past grant recipients to help grow the Endowment-Memorial Fund to $200k by the 50th anniversary in 2022. We need about another $40k within four years. Investment income from the fund pays for grants like the ones below. Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to: Barry Haas, Treasurer, P.O. Box 242088, Little Rock, 72223. My thanks to those who have donated, and a special thanks to Dr. Ragupathy Kannan who continues to use his overseas birding tours as a fundraiser for the Trust.

At the spring 2017 meeting the Trustees gave 7 awards totaling $3,184.

- Alyssa DeRubeis (M.S., University of Arkansas at Fayetteville) was granted $244 to compare the value of restored grasslands to remnant sites for nesting and non-breeding birds.
- Emma Gaither (B.S., Hendrix College) had her pot sweetened with $400 to study the effect of noise interference on waggle dance communication and honey bee foraging.
- Stephanie Nefas (M.S., Arkansas Tech) takes home $450 to document evidence of disturbance on Least Tern breeding behavior and reproductive success.
- Northwest AR Master Naturalists will supply Chimney Swifts with a tower on the campus of John Brown University for $450.
- Ozark Natural Science Center has $700 in seed money to grow a native plant and bird observation garden.
- Mitchell Pruitt (M.S. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville) netted $540 to continue tracking Northern Saw-whet Owls.
- John Veon (B.S., Hendrix College) will wager $400 on whether wintering waterfowl are disturbed by traffic noise.

Goal of $200,000 by 2022 Set for AAS Trust Endowment-Memorial Fund

By BARRY HAAS
AAS Trust Treasurer

The Arkansas Audubon Society Trust Endowment-Memorial Fund continues to increase. It has reached $157,662 on the way to a hoped-for goal of $200,000 by the Trust’s 20th anniversary in 2022. That leaves a little over $42,000 to reach that goal.

Ragupathy Kannan, one of the trustees, leads bird tours (to Belize and Panama this year). He donates to the Trust for each person who joins his tours. That allows him to send a generous check for $1,000 or so once or twice a year. Since he set the $200,000 goal, he is doing everything he can to help the Trust reach it.

Why the great support for the Trust by Dr. Kannan? He’s giving back since he received one of four 1991 grants approved by the Trust to study the “Conservation Ecology of the Great Pied Hornbill.” Dr. Kannan, and Dr. Doug James, also received a grant in the Fall of 1996.

Donations to the Trust are tax deductible and always welcome. Checks should be made payable either “Arkansas Audubon Society Trust” or simply “AAS Trust” and mailed to me at P.O. Box 242088, Little Rock, AR 72223.
Member News: Trips South of Arkansas Yield Cool Birds; New Mt. Magazine Book Published

By DOTTIE BOYLES
News of Members Editor

Working with Arcadia Publishing, Arkansas State Parks Interpreter Don Simons has produced a new book about Mount Magazine. Images of America: Mount Magazine compiles images from many sources to tell the story chronologically. He included a short chapter about the history of wildlife, including birds, on the mountain. Don was on hand to sign copies during the Arkansas Audubon Society’s spring meeting which was held at Mount Magazine State Park, May 12–14. The book is available at the state park visitor center or can be ordered online at www.arcadiapublishing.com. All proceeds go to the Mount Magazine Action Group (MtMAG) whose volunteers work on trails, litter cleanup, gardens, and special events.

February–March 2017, Bill Burnham and Cindy Franklin joined a Wings tour and spent 26 days in southern South America. After a quick birding trip to Iguazu Falls, the trip participants boarded the Star Princess cruise ship in Buenos Aires. After a stop in Montevideo, Uruguay, the ship traveled south along the coast of Patagonia, made a side trip to the Falkland Islands, and circled around fog-shrouded Cape Horn twice before stops at Ushuaia and Punta Arenas. The ship proceeded north through the Chilean fjords and eventually docked at Valparaiso where Bill and Cindy finished their trip viewing assorted Chilean endemics from sea level to the high Andes near Santiago. Their total trip list was 406 species. Highlights included a pair of White-tailed Kites, several Swallow-tailed Kites, Florida Scrub-Jay, Crested Caracara, Bachman’s Sparrow, and a life list of large, wading water birds living noisily together, many on nests with eggs or young. They also saw about 30 alligators ranging from 6 to 12 feet long, lying in the sun, waiting for something to happen. Anything.

Lance Runion traveled to Costa Rica for a one week birding tour from March 13–20, sponsored by Swarovski Optik. Day one of the trip began just north of the capital of San Jose in Heredia at the Hotel Bougainvillea with a relaxed ramble of the gardens where quite a few birds were seen. These included nice looks at a Montezuma Oropendula, Fuguensis Pygmy-owl, and Lesson’s Motmot. The following day they visited the La Paz Waterfall Gardens and Cinchona overlook and had great up-close views of Violet Sabrewing, Green-crowned Brilliant, and Rufous-tailed and Black-bellied Hummingbirds. The next few days were spent in the Pacific lowlands of southwestern Costa Rica near the town of Tarcoles. The weather was quite hot and humid, it never rained, and the bird diversity was impressive. They experienced nice views of large, colorful birds right on the hotel grounds including the crowd favorite, Scarlet Macaws. The boat tour down the Tarcoles River was another highlight with a great diversity of shore and wading birds. The pick of the group was the flashy American Pygmy Kingfisher and the crocodiles! After six days in Costa Rica, Lance counted 250 species, with 186 lifers!

At the end of March Dan and Samantha Scheiman spent a week birding the Caribbean slope of Honduras, their third stint with High Lonesome Bird Tours. They stayed at Pico Bonito Lodge, one of the top ecolodges in the world and the best place in the world to see Lovely Cotingas. The group saw 3 glowing-blue males within 30 minutes of arriving! A roosting Great Potoo awaited them as well. A full day at the lodge’s gardens and lowland rainforest netted Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Black-cowled Oriole, a pair of sleepy Vermiculated Screech-Owls, and a Blue-crowned Chlorophonia that came down from the highlands. Among the mangroves of Cuero y Salado Reserve, they saw 5 kingfisher species.
including American Pygmy and successfully spied three secretive waterbirds: Russet-naped Wood-Rail, Boat-billed Heron, and Agami Heron. Driving through the desert of Aguan Valley they worked hard to see a Lesser Roadrunner but couldn’t get the calling Lesser Ground-Cuckoos to come out of hiding. Arriving at the Honduran Emerald Reserve they immediately saw its namesake hummingbird, Honduras’s only endemic. At Rio Santiago Nature Resort they savored the sight of a family of Spectacled Owls plus another Honduran highlight, the Keel-billed Motmot. Lancetilla Botanical Garden was by far the birdiest location with a long list including Passerini’s and Crimson-collared Tanagers, Barred and Great Antshrikes, and great looks at two skulkers—Slate-headed Tody-Flycatcher and Rufous-breasted Spinetail. On their last full day they enjoyed Bay Island birds such as White-crowned Pigeon and Yucatan Vireo, then snorkeled on a reef in Cayos Cochinos Marine National Park. The group tallied 242 species, 50 lifers for Dan, 65 lifers for Samantha.

On April 1st, Kelly Chitwood and her family attended the annual fundraising picnic at Briarwood Nature Preserve, also known as Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve, in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. The azaleas and pitcher plants were in full bloom as well as scores of other rare native plants. Not only did they wish to visit the preserve, but they wanted to visit with Loice Lacy. Loice was there signing autographs of her books; the latest is about Richard Johnson, protégé of Caroline Dormon. They had a great time and purchased a couple of azalea species. They also ran into Rosalee Overby, who lives in Louisiana and often posts to ARBIRD-L. The fundraiser was special because the preserve was dedicated to the National Register of Historic Places. There were multiple door prizes announced after the picnic lunch. Rick won first, then they called Emma, and when the grand prize rolled around, they called Kelly's name! She gets to spend one night at the Writer’s Cottage at Caroline Dormon. Kelly said she plans to drink lots of coffee so she doesn’t fall asleep and miss one minute of it! Loice sends everyone her best.

David Oakley and Mitchell Pruitt joined Kim Smith and Ragupathy Kannan who led a Costa Rica birding tour May 24–June 1 to raise funds for the Arkansas Audubon Society Trust. The tour was a grand success with over 300 species of birds and $1,200 raised for the trust endowment. Highlights of the tour included: spectacular views and stunning videos of a Resplendent Quetzal at nest in the cloud forests; tracking down an Unspotted Saw-whet Owl in the Paramo at 10,000 feet elevation; 27 species of hummingbirds, including many high-altitude endemics; great views of Scarlet and Great Green Macaws, (over ten species of psittacids); 15 species of Tanagers; and great nightly encounters with poison-dart frogs and many other rainforest herps. Twenty birders from all over the country participated in the trip.
Distribution and Abundance of Arkansas Birds

The Fall Season: August 1 – November 30, 2016

By KENNY NICHOLS
Member, Bird Records Committee

Of the numerous Black-bellied Whistling-Duck reports, exceptional were confirmed breeding in Lonoke, 5 Aug when two adults and eighteen young were observed at Anderson’s Minnow Farms near Lonoke (Kenny & LaDonna Nichols) and a very high count of 157 birds at Nichols Fish Farms, Lafayette 16 Sep (Charles Lyon, Jeff & Jean Trahan).

An impressive 56 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks were counted 10 Sep at Choctaw Island WMA West Unit, Desha (Cindy Franklin, Dan Scheiman, Lance Runion, m.o.b.).

An amazing 12,004 Greater White-fronted Geese, 600 Ross’s Geese and 13,500 Green-winged Teal were tallied at Bundrick Farms, Lafayette 16 Nov (CL, JefT, JeaT).

Very rare in fall, a single adult male Cinnamon Teal was discovered 7 Sep at Bald Knob NWR, White 2 Sep (K&LN).

Rare and nearly annual, two Glossy Ibis were carefully identified at Alice Sidney Fish Farms, Chicot 11 Sep (Randy Robinson, Michael Linz).

Rare but apparently increasing, White-faced Ibis were noted in small numbers throughout the season in Lafayette with the highest count being 41 birds seen 9 Nov at Bundrick Farms (CL, HH).

Most interesting of the numerous Roseate Spoonbill reports was that of 16 birds at Anderson’s Minnow Farms, Lonoke 9 Sep (K&LN); a single bird on the county line north of Swifton 16 Sep (Kenneth Thaxton III, Chris Clark) that marked a first for both Jackson and Lawrence; and 34 birds at Nichols Fish Farms, Lafayette 11 Sep (CL, Rosemary Seidler).

A Swallow-tailed Kite soaring over Benton 21 Aug was a first for Saline (Nina Bai).

Rare, local and very secretive, both King and Virginia Rails were noted at Bundrick Farms, Lafayette 12 Oct (CL, JefT, JeaT).

Rare and very local, 23 Common Moorhens were at Bundrick Farms, Lafayette 30 Sep (CL, JefT, JeaT, RS).

There were four Sandhill Crane reports for the season: an interesting sighting of five birds flying below the observer high atop Mount Magazine, Logan 10 Sep (Don Simons); a single west of Morrilton 14 Oct (Cody Massery) was a first for Conway; two at Bundrick Farms, Lafayette 23 Oct (CL); and five birds in a now traditional location just east of Little Rock, Pulaski 23 Nov (Devin Moon).

Formerly considered quite rare in the southwest corner of the state, small numbers of Black-necked Stilts were noted throughout the season in Lafayette, with a high count of 43 at Nichols Fish Farms 21 Sep (CL, JefT, Mike Weber).

Uncommon to rare in fall, 27 American Avocets were counted at Bald Knob NWR, White 14 Aug; a single was observed roosting with a flock of gulls on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 11 Nov (both K&LN); and 20 were seen at Nichols Fish Farms, Lafayette 26 Oct (CL, HH).

Just the sixth occurrence for the state, a Snowy Plover was photographed at Camp Nine, Desha 7 Sep (Dick Baxter).
Rare and endangered, two unbanded adult **Piping Plovers** were at Saul’s Fish Farms, *Prairie* 17 Sep (K&LN); another unbanded individual was studied at Joe Hogan State Fish Hatchery, *Lonoke* 18 Aug (JN. m.o.b.).

Very uncommon in migration, a **Willow** was at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 13 Aug (K&LN).

Only the eighth occurrence for the state, a **Long-billed Curlew** was at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 5 Sep (Tamalyn Wortham).

**Marbled Godwits** are rare fall transients. Two were at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 13 Aug (K&LN, Bob Harden); one was at Joe Hogan State Fish Hatchery, *Lonoke* 21 Aug (LR); and one was north of Arkansas City, *Desha* 9 Sep (K&LN).

Rare migrant **Ruddy Turnstones** were at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 13 Aug (K&LN) and west of Mayflower, *Faulkner* 16 Aug (TW).

Rare in fall, a **Sanderling** was at Nichols Fish Farms, *Lafayette* 21 Sep (CL, JefT, MW).

Rare anywhere in the U.S. outside of Alaska and a first for the state, an adult **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was photographed at Joe Hogan State Fish Hatchery, *Lonoke* 15 Aug (K&LN).

An amazing 93 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** were counted at West Ark Sod Farms, *Crawford* 25 Aug (JN).

Rare but annual, a single **Red-necked Phalarope** was at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 27 Aug (DS, Samantha Scheiman, Karen Holiday, m.o.b.); three were present at the same location 3 Sep (David Ray, Jim Dixon); and a single was photographed at Boyd Point WTF, *Jefferson* 1 Sep (CL).

Very rare and just the ninth for the state, a juvenile light-morph **Parasitic Jaeger** discovered on Lake Dardanelle, *Yell* Sep 10 Sep (K&LN) was videotaped the next day (Sasha Bowles) and continued through 21 Sep. Another ligh-morph juvenile was found 20 Sep on Millwood Lake, *Hempstead* (Charles Mills).

**Sabine’s Gull** is a rare and nearly annual fall migrant. A juvenile was on Millwood Lake, *Hempstead* 24 Sep (CL); another juvenile was below Dardanelle Lock & Dam, *Yell/Pope* 16 Sep and yet another juvenile was on Lake Dardanelle, *Yell* 13 Oct (both K&LN).

A second-cycle **Laughing Gull** was at Millwood Lake, *Hempstead* 25 Sep (CL, ChM); another was photographed at Dardanelle Lock & Dam, *Yell* 5 Oct (CoM). Just the eight occurrence for the state, a **Royal Tern** was at Cook’s Landing, Little Rock, *Pulaski* 19 Aug (JD, KH).

Rare, early and an unusually high count, three **Black-billed Cuckoos** were seen and heard near Marianana, *Lee* 1 Aug (Leif Anderson).

Once again, researchers from the University of Arkansas banded **Northern Saw-whet Owls** at Ozark Natural Science Center, *Madison*. Overall, an incredible 19 birds were netted with the first capture 20 Oct and the last 2 Dec (Mitchell Pruitt, Kim Smith, Melyssa St. Michael).

A ** Rufous Hummingbird** was observed visiting a feeder in *Faulkner* 25 Nov (Locke & Porter Vaughan, Gail Miller, ML).

An incredible 10,000 **Purple Martins** were observed coming to a roost at the Port of Little Rock, *Pulaski* (David Hoge, CF).

Rare but now regular and steadily increasing, a single **Cave Swallow** was at Millwood Lake, *Hempstead* 20 Sep (ChM); an impressive 17 were counted southwest of Ashdown, *Little River* 23 Sep (CL).

Rare and declining, single **Bewick’s Wrens** were at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 5 Nov (Paula Channell) and east of Bear Lake, *Little River* 22 Oct (CL, JefT, JeaT, RS).

Two **Swainson’s Thrushes**, near Marianna, *Lee* 1 Aug were a month early (L.A).

Late warblers were a **Tennessee** and a **Bay-breasted** at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 5 Nov (PC); a **Palm** at Woolsey Wet Prairie, *Washington* 12 Nov (CL, JefT, JeaT, RS); and a **Black-throated Green** visiting a bird bath in Little Rock, *Pulaski* 3 Nov (Elizabeth Shores).

A **Nelson’s Sparrow** photographed at Bundrick Farms, *Lafayette* 7 Oct (CL, JefT, JeaT) was the season’s only report of this rare and difficult-to-find sparrow.

A bird thought to be a hybrid **Rose-breasted X Black-headed Grosbeak** was photographed visiting a feeder in Harrison, *Boone* 29 Sep (Sally Jo Gibson).

Rare in fall, a female **Yellow-headed Blackbird** photographed at Nichols Fish Farms 11 Sep was a first for *Lafayette* (CL, RS).

A **Great-tailed Grackle** at Nichols Fish Farms 21 Sep was just the second for *Lafayette* (CL, JefT, MW).

Rare, local and sporadic, five **Red Crossbills** were observed at Moccasin Gap Rec Area, north of Dover, *Pope* 7 Oct (L.A).
Big Lake IBA: Bigly Important for Birds

By DAN SCHEIMAN, Ph.D.
Bird Conservation Director, Audubon Arkansas

What was once the free-flowing Little River system is now a big wetland fed and surrounded by ditches. Yet it is this extensive wetland habitat that makes Big Lake an Important Bird Area (IBA), as designated by Audubon Arkansas.

Site Description

Big Lake IBA is comprised of the 11,038-acre Big Lake National Wildlife Refuge (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) and the adjacent 12,320-acre Big Lake Wildlife Management Area (Arkansas Game & Fish Commission). The once free-flowing river system was changed to a shallow lake and swamp by the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811–12. Today the area contains a mixture of typical bottomland forest—tupelo, willow, buttonbush, and cypress—surrounded by upland hardwoods such as oak, elm, and hackberry. Flooding the area for waterfowl hunting in the wildlife management area is accomplished by gravity flow from Ditch 28, which separates the state from federal areas.
Ornithological Summary

The area is an island of natural habitat in an agricultural and urban landscape. It is used extensively by breeding birds, including many species of concern such as King Rail, both night-herons, Northern Bobwhite, Red-headed Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, and Prothonotary Warbler. Big Lake provides critical wintering habitat for ducks; peak numbers in January and February can exceed 200,000, the majority being Mallards, but also keep an eye out for a few American Black Ducks among them. Wood Ducks are year-round residents and annually raise approximately 2,500 young in natural cavities and nest boxes. Hooded Mergansers, Bald Eagles, and Osprey also nest there. Rare bird records include all three scoters, Red-breasted Merganser, Roseate Spoonbill, and Red Phalarope (shown at left).

Conservation Issues

The most serious threats to avian habitat at Big Lake are siltation and agricultural run-off from the farmlands to the north. Big Lake is part of an extensive drainage/flood control project which extends well into the bootheel of Missouri. Water from over a million acres of intensively farmed land enters the refuge through a number of large manmade ditches. This water carries trash, debris, silt, and chemicals, affecting water quality and wildlife habitat. Excessive flooding in late spring has also eliminated much of the natural understory vegetation, including cane. It is likely that this site may have once supported substantial populations of Bachman’s and Swainson’s Warblers. To alleviate some of the problems, the Army Corps of Engineers built a bypass ditch to divert some of the runoff around the refuge. Summer drawdowns by area managers help improve vegetation for spawning fish and wintering waterfowl.