



# Monthly FWAS Report

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## President's Pen

Birding can bring many pleasures, with none so sweet as the bringing together of family and friends. Case in point is the trip my father and I just got back from where we were on a quest to see wintering Baird's Sparrows in the grassland area around Marfa, TX. This bird has been on my father's "bucket list" since we missed it in previous trips – one to its breeding grounds in North Dakota, and then a subsequent trip to the Marfa area some years back.

Everything started for my father and me some 43 years ago when my father tried to find out about a very pretty bird seen near my maternal grandmother's residence in Brownwood, TX. My mother got my father a used copy of the Golden Field Guide to the Birds of North America and we noticed that the bird in question was a Painted Bunting, which just happened to be featured on the cover of that book. My father got "hooked" at that point, purchased an inexpensive pair of binoculars from what was then the first and only K-Mart in Dallas, and started his life-long passion. Well, like everything else my father did, I wanted to do it as well, so he got me a pair of those binoculars and off we went. From then on we were best of buddies and birded everywhere we went, and at every opportunity we got. He'll be the first to tell you that we complemented each other's strengths and were able to identify so many more species as a duo than we ever could alone.

Over the past several years, we have not had as many opportunities to bird together as we'd like, but we recently noticed more current information on specific locations on wintering Baird's Sparrows. We took that intelligence and also used information taken published sightings from observers in other years to develop our strategy to maximize our chances of seeing one this time. We cleared some dates on the calendar, and when the weather was optimal, I picked my father up and we struck out early one morning for Marfa, making great time. We got there, checked into our hotel, and were over to the first location we wanted to visit well before 4:00 p.m. with lots of light left. This first location was a publicly accessible research area on a ranch at the end of a road on the north side of Marfa. After walking quite slowly for 5 miles and exhausting the accessible area, we didn't get "our bird", but had a great time and saw many other species of that area such as Sage Thrasher and Black-throated Sparrow. Needless to say, by 6:30 we left there very hungry, ate like horses, and slept well.

The next morning it was onto location number two – the "traditional" location for finding Baird's Sparrow in Texas, which is grassland on either side of a road starting about 2 miles south of Marfa and continuing another 4 miles or so further south. It was still cloudy at this point of the morning, which is not supposed to be optimal as this species get reportedly more active when the sun first comes out. We crept along in the car for near a half mile, then pulled over and got out to look around a bit. As we did so, the sun started showing through the clouds – a very good sign. We got back in the car to go a bit further, and within a minute we saw about 5 sparrow-like

birds pop-up along the fence on the other side of the road. Excitedly, we pulled over and held our breath as we put our binoculars on these creatures. At first, we were dejected when we realized they had very strong white outer-tail feathers and almost wrote them off as Vesper Sparrows. However, the rest of the bird didn't exactly fit what we expect of Vesper Sparrow, and with the great looks we were afforded, it soon became obvious that these were Baird's Sparrows. Not having previous experience with this species, and not having read any descriptions that emphasize the white outer tail feathers, we almost passed up what we had spent all this time and effort to see. This is a lesson that experienced birders like us probably should not have had to learn, but learn it we did. Now, you can imagine how excited we were, and we even transferred a bit of our excitement to the border patrol agent who pulled up along side our vehicle to ask what we were doing there. If nothing else, the agent definitely had a grin on his face after we went into great detail explaining why this species was so special to birdwatchers and how this was one of the only locations in the United States you can see it in winter. As I said at the start, very sweet, indeed!

In birding news, there's a fascinating article on Snowy Owls who sometimes spread out far and wide during the winter. It's widely believed that many of them wind up far out of their "normal" range sometimes because of a lack of food, and are simply acting out of desperation. However, this article busts that myth with first hand reports from biologist who have studied wintering owls in Canada. They found (and I quote), "the average body mass of a wild adult Snowy Owl in winter was 73 percent above the emaciation threshold. Indeed, many of the owls actually put on weight over the winter by increasing their subcutaneous fat stores (fat that accumulates under the skin on birds' chests and beneath their wings and is used for both insulation and energy)." I highly recommend reading the whole article regarding these fascinating creatures at the following link:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/snowy-owls-arent-starving-two-canadian-farmers-help-bust-a-pervasive-myth/?utm\\_source=Cornell%20Lab%20eNews&utm\\_campaign=808f218c08-Cornell%20Lab%20eNews%202142017&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_47588b5758-808f218c08-304137989](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/snowy-owls-arent-starving-two-canadian-farmers-help-bust-a-pervasive-myth/?utm_source=Cornell%20Lab%20eNews&utm_campaign=808f218c08-Cornell%20Lab%20eNews%202142017&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_47588b5758-808f218c08-304137989)

Here is a link to the annual appeal to fill board member positions for the 2017 – 2018 FWAS season – please click on <http://www.fwas.org/showthread.php?2884-FWAS-needs-new-Board-Members> to read it. A list of duties is included so you know will know what to expect. Paula Thomas ([paula\\_lea.thomas@yahoo.com](mailto:paula_lea.thomas@yahoo.com)), Jean Ferguson ([woboril@yahoo.com](mailto:woboril@yahoo.com)), and Karen Rice ([kl.rice@verizon.net](mailto:kl.rice@verizon.net)) have been assisting me as part of the nominating committee.

## Programs

### **March Member Meeting Thursday, 3/9/2017**

Join us on Thursday, March 9 for the next member meeting. The subject will be "Horny Toads" as presented by Alexis Ackel. Learn more about our Texas state symbol! This presentation will focus on conservation genetics of the Texas horned lizard and estimation of population size for management. Our speaker graduated from TCU (where else?) with an MS in Environmental Science. She also has an MS in Information Science. She is a wildlife enthusiast, teaches yoga, and has 2 dogs.

### **April 2017 Member Meeting**

On Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, our meeting subject will be “Doing an Alaska Big Year” as presented by Lynn Barber. Lynn will talk about her birding travels and adventures around Alaska during her 2016 big year in our largest state, and will show slides of the over 300 species of birds seen around Anchorage area, the Homer and Kenai areas, Dutch Harbor, Adak, the Pribilofs, Central Alaska, and Barrow. Many of you will know Lynn as a former president of FWAS. Lynn was born in Wisconsin and has lived in Oregon, North Carolina, Texas, South Dakota, and now Alaska. Her books *Extreme Birder: One Woman’s Big Year* (2011) and *Birds in Trouble* (2016) were published by Texas A&M University Press. In addition to doing a North American Big Year in 2008, she has also done state big years in Texas (2005), South Dakota (2012) and Alaska (2016). Other avocations include bird painting and photography, hammered dulcimer, baking cookies and church activities. She is married to David Barber, a meteorologist who works for the US weather service in Anchorage. If you want Lynn to bring a book for you to the Fort Worth Audubon meeting on April 13th, please contact her at [dalybar@aol.com](mailto:dalybar@aol.com), telling her which book(s) to bring for you (\$30.00 per book). She will also take book orders at the meeting and ship books to you later if you prefer. There will be no extra charge for the shipping.

### **Annual Member’s Slide Show Meeting in May**

Did you go bird watching and take photos or video in some exotic locale or in your backyard during the last year? Please consider sharing your adventures with us at the May General Meeting Member’s Slide Show. Jim Jones will organize the material into a Power Point presentation for this meeting on May 11, 2017 and the deadline for getting your photos and videos to him is May 5, 2017. Please send your submissions by E-mail at [jim\\_jones@fwas.org](mailto:jim_jones@fwas.org), or deliver them on a USB thumb drive or CD at our April meeting. In recent years, several members have used online photo storage and sent Jim a link to them. Whatever your method, please be sure to include identification of the bird species or activity, and where the photo was taken. Also, please reduce the photo size before sending them. Many online sites will reduce the file size for you, but if you send them directly from your camera’s uploaded file they are usually very large and it takes lots of extra time for Jim to reduce multiple images before using them. If there are any questions, contact Jim by E-mail ([jim\\_jones@fwas.org](mailto:jim_jones@fwas.org)).

## **Membership**

If you haven’t renewed your membership for the year or wish to join, you have some options. If you are coming to the meeting, simply bring your checkbook and save the postage – our membership chair Glenda Keilstrup will be on hand to collect your renewal dues. The amount is \$25.00 for a single membership, and \$35.00 for a family membership. If you prefer to use a credit card, you’ll need to do that online as we do not have a way to process credit transactions otherwise. Simply go to [www.fwas.org](http://www.fwas.org) and look for the “Join FWAS/Membership Options/Pay Now” section on the left side of our Homepage to get started.

## Field Trips

Current upcoming field trips are listed as follows:

- *Birding walk and count along the Trinity River on Sunday, April 9, 2017, led by Tom Haase.* Meeting time will be 7:00 a.m. for coffee at Starbucks, Trinity Commons, 3000 S. Hulen St. #143, Fort Worth, TX 76109 (near Wild Bird Center). By 7:30 a.m. we'll drive the short distance to park on Bellaire (off Hulen) near the bridge that crosses the tributary of the river. The trail is a paved. From there we will walk along the river to just under the bridge at the Chisholm Trail Parkway (Toll Road). We are across the river from the Press Cafe and future home of "The Shops at Clear Fork" and should be done by 10:00 a.m. Please RSVP to Tom Haase at [tom.haase@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tom.haase@sbcglobal.net) or 817-229-4987. Let Tom know whether you will meet him at Starbucks or at the trail. For more details go to <http://www.fwas.org/showthread.php?2865-Trinity-Bird-Count-1-21-2017>.

Please keep checking back to the following link to our Website for a listing and details of new birding field trips as they get announced, as well as full details to existing field trips:  
<http://www.fwas.org/forumdisplay.php?10-Upcoming-Field-Trips>

## Grants

The FWAS board met on Thursday, May 2, and among the business we discussed and approved were 3 community grants made possible with funds we received on North Texas Giving Day. These grants support the efforts of local conservation organizations to further the mission statement of FWAS *to promote awareness, appreciation and understanding of birds and other wildlife while preserving and protecting their natural habitats.* On behalf of the board of FWAS, we wish to thank everyone who gave so generously to FWAS to make these grants possible.

## Miscellaneous

### **Fort Worth Regional Science & Engineering Fair Report**

On Monday, February 20, 2017, five volunteers from FWAS joined Jim Jones to judge student science and engineering projects for a Conservation Award at the 2017 Fort Worth Regional Science and Engineering Fair held at UTA College Park Center. The volunteers were Karen Rice, Mary Sanford, Chuck Voelker, Chuck Baskin, and Shiela Shallcross. FWAS donated \$400 to this year's event and has provided judges for over 10 years. Thank you to our FWAS chapter-only members for their continued financial support. The funds we receive allow FWAS to fund community events like this and help them to continue each year.

The judging process included reviewing a list of approximately 400 student projects and thinning the list down to about 40 that (by their title) met the FWAS mission statement of addressing environmental, conservation and wildlife concerns. We offer an award for both middle school and high school levels.

This year we chose the project *Veto the Mosquito* by T. Jade-Higgins, M. Obanigba and B. Chapman, students at Summit International High School. The team studied the effects on *Aedes aegypti* eggs when water is treated with kairomones from the *Gambusia* fish. They proved that larvae developmental duration was shortened which reduced the sexual size dimorphism. This result caused a lower number of egg production.

At the Middle School level we ended up with two notable projects. The award went to *Keystone...Dominoes? A Study of the Centrochelys Suicate* by B. Westbrook from the North Texas Academy of Higher Learning. The student observed and filmed the activities of an African Spurred Tortoise and the benefits this 40kg to 90kg adult tortoise has on its habitat and plant life as it burrows into the soil. The 7-day video of the tortoise's activities was riveting.

Honorable mention went to a second middle school project: *Impact of Tree (Canopy) Cover on Particulate Matter 2.5 Levels* by K. Morton of the Holy Family Catholic MS. Using data collected by a TCEQ Air Monitoring and Weather Station, and a Hold Peak Laser PM2.5 meter, the student showed that parks and streets with tree cover had lower airborne particulate matter levels than similar areas with little to no tree cover.

If you would like information on how to take part in future events like this, or are qualified by past employment or college degree to join one of the 'category judging panels', please see Jim Jones at the general meeting for contact information. The fair is held each year in the middle of February. In addition, you can E-mail Jim at [jim\\_jones@fwas.org](mailto:jim_jones@fwas.org).

### **Tarrant County 2016 Big Year Final Tally**

Thanks to all who participated in all or part of our Tarrant County Big Year for 2016 and here are the results (finally):

- 1) Charley Amos with 224 species
- 2) Missy McAllister-Kerr with 215 species
- 3) Gail Morris with 211 species
- 4) Chuck Baskin with 193 species
- 5) Mary Lee Johnson with 154 species
- 6) Thomas Haase with 147 species
- 7) Hesper Fang with 139 species
- 8) Richard Hix with 117 species
- 9) Karen Trost with 80 species
- 10) Kristy Simon with 75 species

For a complete species list go to <http://www.fwas.org/pdfs/2016TarrantBigYear.pdf> to check it out!