

Washington County Wildlife Society

Enhancing and conserving wildlife in Washington County through landowner education.

1305 E. Blue Bell Road • Brenham, Texas 979.277.6212 www.wcwildlife.org

July 2021

Spring/Summer Issue



Join us for our

2021 Annual Fundraiser

Free Will Donation Dinner



Beef and Chicken Fajitas
with all the trimmings.



A dessert table will be available so please bring your favorite dessert!

Friday - September 3, 2021

American Legion Hall

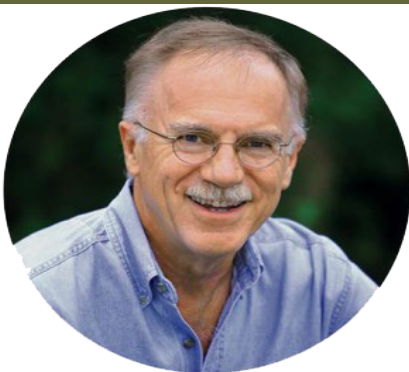
903 North Park • Brenham Texas

Social - 5:30 p.m. Dinner and Meeting - 6:15 p.m.
Guest Speaker - 7:00 p.m.

Bucket Raffle and Door Prizes

R.S.V.P. - 979.277.6212 or online www.wcwildlife.org

Guest Speaker - Merlin D. Tuttle - Bat Ecology, Behavior and Conservation



Merlin D. Tuttle is an American ecologist, conservationist, writer and wildlife photographer who specializes in bat ecology, behavior, and conservation. He is credited with protecting the Austin Congress Avenue Bridge bat colony from extermination. Tuttle is currently active as founder and executive director of Merlin Tuttle's Bat Conservation in Austin, Texas.

Washington County Wildlife Society

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*From the
Washington County
Wildlife Society President
Richard Thames*

Greetings all!

WCWS would like to thank everyone who attended and participated in our Spring Showcase on May 14th. There was about 75 – 85 folks to hear a presentation by **Ben Garcia**, NRCS-Texas on soil health and testing. **Charlotte von Rosenberg** and Judy Deaton, Sun Oil WMA on backyard habitat for pollinators, Jake Gaskamp, Wildlife Systems Consulting on native plants and forbes, along with Elliot Marek and Eli Saunders, Texas Brigades, on Leopold's 5 tools for habitat management. Special thanks to the sausage cooks and wrappers plus beverages from Mike Hopkins Distributors.

As some may already know, Lone Star Wildlife Rescue (LSWR), owned and operated by **Rebecca McKeever**, officially closed May 10th of this year. Rebecca has been rehabbing in Texas for 27 years, not including work in Ohio and New York. In her words, "I want to thank everyone who has helped me help wildlife...whether as a donor, cage builder, transporter, fellow rehabber or veterinarian. I care deeply for the animals and will always worry about them, but my life has changed much in the last several years. I still have birds in my care and will see their rehab through to release. It will be bitter sweet, but I hope I made a difference. Thank you all!" LSWR and Rebecca were WCWS's "go to" place for injured or orphaned wildlife. She was a past presenter at our annual meeting and fundraisers, always a crowd favorite with her raptors! She will be deeply missed, WCWS wish the best for her in her future! We have an article on page 5 which covers our thought processes to search for options on services and resources for Washington and surrounding counties.

WCWS was honored to award scholarships to three deserving Brenham Senior High School graduates, **Ben Bosse**, **Jacob Counts** and **Rowdy Weidemann**. Special thanks to **Celeste Dickschat** for representing WCWS at the award ceremony. Speaking of Celeste, a tip of the hat and a round of applause for serving as the Society's President these last 3 years, especially the last one in 2020. With all that was going on during the pandemic year, Celeste kept the Society moving forward, which allowed for WCWS to have a very successful fundraiser last August as our first drive-thru meal.

Which bring us to this year's fundraiser. We are delighted to have **Merlin D Tuttle**, who specializes in bat ecology, behavior and conservation, as our guest speaker! Save the Date for Friday, Sept 3rd at the American Legion Hall in Brenham. Social to start at 5:30 pm followed by a "free will" dinner at 6:15 pm. The fundraiser will include a bucket raffle and door prizes. You can RSVP online at wcwildlife.org or call the AgriLife office 979 277-6212. More details to follow. Come join us, bring friends and family!

Richard Thames

ENVIRONMENT

Endangered Whooping Cranes Nest In Texas For The First Time In More Than A Century

Two pairs of whooping cranes nested on private land in Jefferson and Chambers counties this year. It's believed to be the first time the endangered birds have nested in Texas since the 1800s.

[KATIE WATKINS](#)

| POSTED ON MAY 21, 2021, 4:17 PM



Courtesy of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

A pair of whooping cranes in Jefferson county. They were one of two couples to nest in southeast Texas this year — for the first time in recent history.



Courtesy of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

A whooping crane nest in Jefferson County. Whooping crane nests can stretch 3 feet across.



Courtesy of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

A trail camera view of a whooping crane in Louisiana. Whooping cranes are the tallest birds in North America, standing up to 5 feet.

populations helps mitigate risk — you don't want to put all of your whooping crane eggs in one basket, so to speak. "If there was a late-season catastrophic storm, if there was some kind of catastrophic oil or chemical spill, that has the potential to be very devastating for that one population of whooping cranes," said Zimorski. "But if you have other populations of whooping cranes at separate locations, then you still have whooping cranes elsewhere — you haven't lost all of your cranes." That's also one of the reasons conservationists are happy the Louisiana flock is expanding its range into southeast Texas.

In the past 10 years, the Louisiana flock has grown to include more than 70 adult birds. "We've made some good progress," Zimorski said. There have also been challenges. For one, a total of 14 birds have been shot and killed by people. "We expect there's going to be birds that don't survive," Zimorski said. "But what we did not expect is that we have had a lot of mortality due to people shooting and killing the cranes." Another challenge with rebounding the population is that whooping cranes are slow to reproduce. The birds will typically lay two eggs in their nest, but frequently only one will survive. And for newer couples, it can take a few attempts to successfully raise a chick. "We have to be patient with whooping cranes because everything with them is slow, it takes a long time," Zimorski said.

James Gentz leases farmland in Jefferson County, where he grows rice and raises crawfish on shallow wetlands.

Two years ago, a pair of whooping cranes started hanging out in his fields. "They're beautiful to look at," he said. "You'd just be sitting there watching them, while you were crawfishing."

Standing nearly 5 feet tall, whooping cranes have fluffy white feathers with red coloring on their faces. They're one of the rarest — and tallest birds — in North America.

Gentz said he feels lucky to have the endangered birds on his land.

And this year, the pair did something extra special: they built a nest. They were one of two whooping crane pairs to nest in southeast Texas this year. It's believed to be the first time whooping cranes have nested in Texas since the 1800s, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Wade Harrell, the Whooping Crane Coordinator with U.S. Fish & Wildlife, said it's a big win for conservationists.

"It's really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for someone working in the conservation field to get to see an endangered species like this setting up a nest, and hopefully reproducing, in a location where they haven't been in generations and generations," he said.

The feather trade, habitat loss, and a lack of hunting laws in the early 1900s all contributed to the birds' decline, Harrell added. "They were kind of getting caught from all angles in terms of the actual taking of individual birds," he said.

By the 1940s, just 16 whooping cranes were left in all of North America. They were listed as an endangered species when the Endangered Species Act was signed into law in 1973. And efforts since then to rebound the population have been slowly working.

Now, there are more than 600 whooping cranes in the wild. The biggest flock is one that nests in Canada and winters in Texas at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. But the birds found nesting in Southeast Texas are part of a different non-migratory flock that was reintroduced in Louisiana in 2011.

Sara Zimorski, a wildlife biologist with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, has worked with that flock since the beginning. She said one of the reasons that flock was reintroduced is because having multiple crane

Endangered Whooping Cranes Nest In Texas For The First Time In More Than A Century

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The Louisiana flock will often nest twice in a season, but even that's not a guarantee of success. Unfortunately, though the pairs in Texas both nested twice this year, neither was successful in raising a chick, according to Zimorski.

Gentz, the farmer in Jefferson County, said this week's storm dumped more than 7 inches of rain on his fields. When he went to look for the cranes, they were gone. "It was very disappointing to me. I mean I just almost was in tears," he said. "I was just so excited for them to nest." But Zimorski said they'll try again next year. "Every little bit of experience they gain helps them in the future," she said.

Yes Sir, He Really is a Purple Finch *by Lori Buffum - Texas Master Naturalist - GLC*



Like many fellow chapter members, I participated in the February Great Backyard Bird Count. What a great opportunity to pay attention to all the different birds that share our little piece of the Earth and in the process, to contribute our field research data to the many scientists around the world who are studying our avian companions. Since November, I have also been logging birds for Project Feederwatch, so have been taking photographs and checking IDs through iNaturalist.

When I first spotted the "raspberry splashed" bird on the sunflower feeder, I got out binoculars and guide books to determine who this guy was. We've seen House Finches occasionally, mixed in with the many Goldfinches and Pine Siskins that spend the winter here, but this guy's coloration was shade and pattern. This visitor was solitary and rather elusive so getting a photo was a challenge. After several observations and posting a couple of decent photos to iNaturalist, and conferring with neighbors, I was convinced the new guy was a Purple Finch (*Haemorhous purpureus*). And I began to see his mate come with him so, once again with iNaturalist help, learned to identify the female by her striped breast and extended blonde eyebrow streak.

Which brings me to an email conversation I had with an eBird data-checker named Ken.

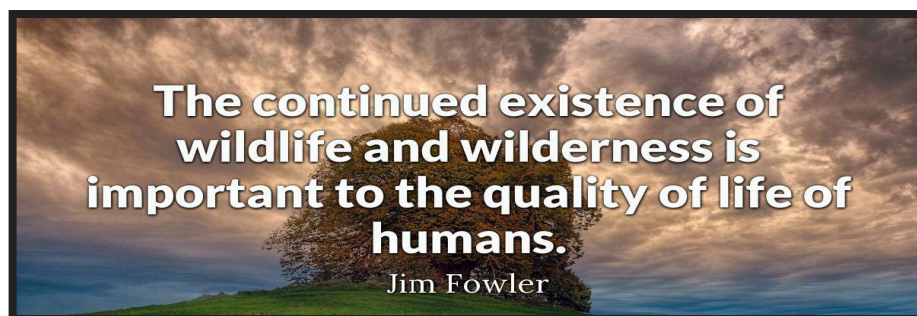
KEN: "Dear Lori Buffum, Thank you for being a part of Great Backyard Bird Count. To help make sure that eBird can be used for scientific research and conservation, volunteers like me follow up on unusual sightings as a part of the eBird data quality process. I am writing about the following observation:

Species: Purple Finch

The species or count that you have reported is unusual at this date and location. Could you please edit your checklist to add field notes or a description of the bird in question? . . . Photos and audio recordings are the best possible supporting information, so if you do have those please do upload them to your checklist. Once your checklist has been edited . . ., I will be able to give this sighting additional consideration . . .your sightings help to make eBird useful to millions of people each year and powering eBird science around the world."

LORI: "Thanks for the note, Ken, and the opportunity to clarify my observations. Regarding the purple finch, I've been seeing the male come sporadically to our feeders for several months and then began seeing a female on occasion. I confirmed my ID through iNaturalist for both the male and the female. I have added several photos to the checklist you referenced. Just yesterday, I saw a male and 3 females at the sunflower feeder at one time! It has been interesting to observe this species - they seem so solitary compared to the Goldfinches and Pine Siskins who are here in great numbers during the winter. In addition to the GBBC, I am participating in Project Feederwatch so my purple finch observations also appear there. Take care and thanks again for helping make the data the best quality it can be."

And that's one of my citizen scientist stories for this season. I encourage you to share yours!



WILDLIFE REHABILITATION - Current Resources and Challenges

Michael Golden, Sandtown WMA – Wildlife Rehabber and Wildlife Artist

Already this year, Washington County has survived a record-breaking freeze, excessive rain with flooding, and damaging winds. These weather events, especially after drought conditions, have had a harsh effect on wildlife and their habitat.

On top of these events, wildlife rehabber **Rebecca McKeever** also retired earlier this year, creating a need for wildlife rehab advice, service, and resources for several counties, including Washington. We are grateful to Rebecca for all the wildlife she has saved and released over many years.

Generally, people who are seeking help for an animal they have found have a love for wildlife as well. We often get asked how people can help, or how they can get involved. We understand that not many people can make the commitment to be a hands-on rehabber, but there are many other ways you can be a friend to wildlife, as well as to wildlife rehabilitators.

Currently, the closest places for wildlife rehab are **Austin Wildlife Rescue** (with admitting in both Austin and Elgin), **Wildlife Center of Texas** in Houston, **Friends of Texas Wildlife** in Magnolia, and **All Things Wild Rahab** in Georgetown. Contact information can be found at the end of the article.

With the interest and cooperation of neighboring counties, WCWS is currently exploring ideas to identify, support and encourage licensed wildlife rehab services closer to home.

Please note, Texas Wildlife Rehabbers can only accept native species. Feral hogs, even the babies, cannot be accepted. Released pets and exotics cannot be accepted. Typically, only nonvenomous snakes are accepted for rehab.

For starters, WCWS is asking for help with the following:

1. Identify any currently licensed rehabbers in the Washington and surrounding counties.
2. Identify anyone with rehab experience who might be interested in assisting or volunteering, even with transporting.
3. Identify any veterinarians who are willing to offer x-rays or stitches if needed.
4. Identify things like flight cages, supplies, or equipment should a local "rehab center" become a reality.

Driving an hour or more to deliver an injured or orphaned animal, bird, or reptile can often be a dealbreaker. But if you are willing to deliver the animal the rehab facilities can provide meds and triage at first, followed by food and clean cages for 1-3 months for orphans or serious injuries. Rehab facilities can also treat pain and provide appropriate euthanasia if required.

If you do find an orphaned baby bird or squirrel/opossum and cannot locate the nest to return it to the mother, you can place it in a box or container. Remember to punch holes for air circulation. An old T-shirt is always best to place on the bottom. An old sock filled with white rice and microwaved 20-30 seconds can be placed under the T-shirt or next to the mammal to keep it warmed. DO NOT try to give food or water, especially to baby birds.

Animals that are dehydrated, ill, emaciated, and/or hypothermic cannot digest food or formula, so feeding them can in fact kill them. Improper feeding can cause severe gastric upset as well as a host of other issues. For any animal found, warmth is the most important thing.

There are many things you as a property or homeowner can do to prevent the need for rehabbing in the first place, for instance:

- ✓ Try to avoid trimming or cutting down trees during squirrel and bird nesting season.
- ✓ Be aware that during April thru June fawns may be in hiding.
- ✓ Many migratory birds nest in Washington County, and it is against the law to disturb migratory birds.
- ✓ If you find a tree fallen from a storm, check for squirrel, owl, woodpecker nests and other babies.
- ✓ Use non reflective decals on large windows to prevent birds from crashing into windows.
- ✓ Don't leave fishing line (with hooks) where water birds or turtles can swallow them.
- ✓ Cover containers of automotive coolant after working on vehicles to prevent raccoons and skunks from drinking it.

Please consider volunteering with a rehabber or at a rehab center. This can include helping hands-on with animals in care, answering phones, help with animal transport, help with fundraising (*Vitally Important*), or help with administrative tasks.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions at m-golden@sbcglobal.net or (713) 854-6577.

[Austin Wildlife Rescue](#) (Austin, Elgin) 512-472-9453
[Wildlife Center of Texas in Houston](#) (Houston) 713-861-9453

[Friends of Texas Wildlife](#) (Magnolia) 281-259-0039
[All Things Wild Rahab](#) (Georgetown) 512-297-0806

By Stephanie Damron, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

The logging form enclosed in this newsletter can be folded and taped for mailing and returned to Stephanie Damron, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, for analysis. Any questions concerning this process should be directed to Stephanie at (979) 277-6297. Additional forms may be obtained at the TPWD office located at 1305 East Blue Bell Road. Again, this is an important activity for anyone with 1-d-1 wildlife exemption and you are encouraged to participate.

[illegible]

by Faith Chase



An average adult maximum shell length of 13.2 cm (5.1") for males and 27.7 cm (10.9") for females. The shell, or carapace, is olive to greenish brown with a dark mid-line keel that reaches its highest point on the second vertebral scute. The marking of the keel can vary from a continuous dark stripe to a broken one. Light yellow to orange concentric lines are present on the carapace. The posterior marginal scutes are serrated. The plastron, or underbelly, and bridge is creamy yellow and can vary with some having dark markings along the seams and others also having dark patches on the plastron. This variation can be found among specimens within the same population. The head is dark green with several yellowish-white to reddish orange stripes bordered with black. One stripe forms a crescent behind and below the eye preventing any other stripes from reaching the eye. The thickness and coloration of this crescent varies among populations. In some localities the crescent may be broad and thin in others. A medial stripe extends from the snout towards the back of the head. The chin has a medial spot and several thin stripes. Asides from being substantially larger than males, mature females develop very large heads which accommodate muscles necessary to crack and feed upon fresh water mussels. Aside from the males being diminutive in size compared to females their heads are much smaller and allow them to seek out their preferred prey of aquatic invertebrate.

WCWS - Supporting local youth through scholarships.



2021 Scholarship Recipients Presentation by Celeste Dickschat

Pictured Left to Right

BISD Recipient - Ben Bosse

BISD Recipient - Jacob Counts

BISD Recipient - Rowdy Weidemann

Bucket Raffle Donations



Your Society's Summer Banquet Fundraiser will have bucket raffles.

During the banquet, members will be able to purchase tickets to put in the bucket of the items of their choice. We are looking for donated items that will strike the attention of our WILDLIFE members. (ex: bluebird houses, deer feeders, wine sets, duck callers, sheath knives, bed & breakfast stays, \$25 or more gift cards, lawn/gardening supplies or decorations, deer corn, event tickets, homemade jellies/canned items/baked goods, or other great ideas of yours, etc.)

If you can help donate or have questions about donating, please contact Celeste Dickschat at 979-277-2331 or maroon-out@hotmail.com.

You may leave your donated items at Stephanie Damron's TPWD office or the Agri-Life office.

Thank You for your support!

PLACE
STAMP
HERE



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