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# E MOCKINGBIRD CHRONICLES

Newsletter of the South Plains Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Inc.

1996

3308 95th Street, Lubbock, Texas 79423 • (806) 799-2142

Volume 2 Number 6 5

## ANOTHER GREAT YEAR

...draws to a close ---

1996 has been a good year for us. We were bursting at the seams from April through October, during which time 745 protected birds, mammals and reptiles were admitted for care. (Excluding house sparrows, starlings, pigeons, and domestic



Bobcat

ducks which are not protected by state or federal law.) This was only about 30 admissions shy of our census for the entire year in 1995, and each year of the past eight has been busier than the one preceding it. Our new sign, after months of long distance planning and execution, was put up just in time for our July "Open House," attended by 133 members and friends. Five Eagle Scout projects were planned and completed on our grounds. A new roof, sunroom floor and carpet greatly improved the look of the house. An additional refrigerator and air conditioning unit were donated. We visited KLBK-TV every week for several months during the summer and took a different bird or mammal species to the morning news program. We entered the world of e-mail and the Internet, where we can network with other rehabilitators on a discussion list to stay current with wildlife information and care. We admitted sixteen "new" species this year: a Broad-winged hawk, Least bittern, Kookaburra, Hermit thrush, Red-bellied woodpecker & Red-headed woodpecker; Black-billed Cuckoo, Rufous hummingbird, Pectoral sandpiper, Double crested cormorant, Summer tanager, House wren, Hoary bat, a Mule deer, Ring-tailed cat and a Crocodile! We raised and released ten Barn owl chicks.

We had the usual number of rescues and adventures, and fielded thousands of questions about wildlife. Statistics about our admissions and educational programs will be completed shortly, and will appear in our next issue. 1997 will mark our ninth year of service to wildlife.

## MAILING LIST UPDATE

We will be updating our mailing list. If you have been receiving a complimentary copy of the newsletter and wish to continue, please consider joining. Rising postage and printing costs force us to reduce the number of copies we send. If you became a member after September 1, 1996, you will continue to receive the newsletter through 1997. Our monthly contributors will automatically be renewed. Please join by January 15, 1997 so you will not miss an issue. We need your support! We will publish a minimum of four, and hopefully six newsletters in the coming year, as our time and resources permit. **Your membership is important, and helps us continue to help wildlife.**

## O COME ALL YE BIRDERS...

The National Audubon Society, sponsor of the annual "Christmas Bird Count" is an early winter survey of birds. Most counts occur in North America. First organized in 1900 by ornithologist Frank Chapman, it is said to be the oldest and largest wildlife survey in the world. That first year there were twenty six volunteer counters. Now with over 40,000 participants, this is reported to be the farthest-ranging, most popular, and often least understood event in the birding year. The National Audubon Society also publishes the survey results. It is designed as a series of circular areas, and birders count birds within these "circles." The circle that is 15 miles in diameter, and volunteers count all the birds they see in a circle in a single day, which is within 2 weeks of December 25th. Many of the counters are dedicated amateurs. Call Jill Haukos with our local Llano Estacado Audubon Society chapter at 797-2012 for information on participation in our area's count, which will take place December 28th.

## Letter from the Director

**A Life Of Its Own...** In early 1990, Jane Stuart from the Mahon Children's Library staff called to inquire if we could do a June children's program about wildlife. Summer is our busiest time, but I agreed. Extra volunteers were scheduled to help with the program and at the Center during my absence. In the hour before we were to arrive, we admitted ten animals. Everyone was frantically running about, answering the phone and doorbell, feeding baby birds and squirrels, polishing up the animal carriers, and getting our educational animals ready for the trip across town. To my

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complete amazement when we arrived, scores of people were lined up *around the block*. Jane met us at the back door, and asked if we could please do two presentations to accommodate the crowds. We agreed. Minutes later, I stepped out to thank everyone for coming. It was truly an emotional moment for me to see so many people of *all ages* in that room, now filled to capacity. I knew then that we all had a common thread: all present *cared* about wildlife. That program set an all-time record for Library programs, with a crowd of approximately 525 children and adults. Between 1989 and 1996 the Center has done several hundred wildlife education programs for thousands of people. We never tire of what we do, and the satisfaction far outweighs the moments of disappointment and frustration. Since 1988, Center has taken on a life of its own. We are very proud of what it has become in our community.

*"Find a job you love and you'll never have to go to work!"* - Unknown

### **A Look Back...to the early days**

Early on, I felt I always had to "justify" what I did, and why I spent virtually all of my time doing something without pay. But, whenever I got discouraged, harried, or overworked, something would inevitably happen to give me that 'inspiration' to continue. Hopefully, we were and are doing *something* right. Since 1988, our volunteer staff has grown from 1 to 41. Debbie and Rick Tennysons' living at the Center since 1993 has provided an even higher level of care. (On site availability is not always a plus for Debbie, but she smiles and accepts whatever is brought to her, day or night!). However, we did not become an *entity* overnight. Following is a list of individuals who jump started us and helped us to follow our dream to establish a wildlife center in West Texas: Dr. Louis Mitchell purchased the land which was to become designated as a Wildlife Center; Dr. Larry Farley, Dan Leach and Lane Preston and the Animal Medical Center staff cared for our sick and injured admissions day and night, weekdays & weekends, and always without pay. Dr. Robert Berry made my first cages. Karen Eubanks was my first volunteer. Dr. and Mrs. David Close donated the funds with which we purchased our first three incubators. Mary Wesley was my only volunteer for three summers, and spent a minimum 50 hours per week volunteering. Two area Pet stores graciously allowed us discounts to purchase the supplies we were always in need of: The Pet Company, and Pets Plus. Charles Swift brought students to clean out the buildings. He also introduced me to Angela Mattison, my first high school volunteer. Mr. Virgil Wade allowed us to begin wildlife education programs in the Lubbock Independent School District. Joyce Kahn did my first wildlife records as a spreadsheet on her computer. Our local Llano Estacado Audubon Society gave us financial support. In 1991 my brother, Jay Reichard, and his fiancée Shirley Ryle (now his

wife) "computerized" us and wrote our wildlife software program, *Wildware*. This enables us to do our state and federal wildlife species and education reporting with ease. Dr. and Mrs. Robert Broselow donated the funds for the labor and materials for the three remaining downstairs mews (enclosures for our birds of prey) to have "windows." Dr. Nancy Mathews helped institute our first internship program with TTU in 1990. This program is still in effect today. Edwin Price, attorney, donated his help to incorporate us in 1992, and Mr. Jimmie Mason graciously donated his accounting services. Hope Hall lit a fire under me, and together we got the *first* newsletter rolling a year ago! (We miss Hope...she has moved from this area.)

We look back also upon the dozens of highlights and fond memories we have had over the years: the first release of a hawk; transfer of a tiny Flammulated owl to Ontario to a breeding program; raising three Ladderback woodpeckers who arrived in an Easter basket, and wouldn't stay out of our neighbors' houses when they were first released (and flew *inside* at every opportunity!) and raising deer fawns and Barn owls; being on *Texas Country Reporter* several years ago; being granted Federal permission to retain the non releasable Golden eagle in October of 1995. These are a few of the many stepping stones which bring us to the present. The joys, the sorrows, the heartaches and disappointments, and the wonderful exhilarating moments you wish you could hold on to forever. We thank you, one and all, for making us what we are today: an organization of committed and dedicated people who work for something we all believe in...we hope that our children and grandchildren will continue to see Barn Owls flying free in West Texas, and throughout our state. Happy Holidays to each of you!

Ed. Note...The Barn Owl is now "endangered" in seven Midwestern states and it is listed as a species of "special concern" in South Dakota and Nebraska. The Barn Owl is not considered part of Minnesota's avifauna, but there have been less than 10 recorded nestlings in the state.

### **VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT**

by Mary Baze

This issue volunteer spotlight is on Lisa Silen. Lisa, is originally from Ft. Worth, TX. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photography at Texas Tech University in 1986. She currently works for the Student Health Department at Texas Tech where she keeps track of student immunization records. Lisa has been helping out at the center since May of 1994. Her husband, Michael, has shared her with us every *Saturday and Sunday morning* since! Her favorite part of

### Why Can't I Shoot A Blue Jay? Part I



working with us is working with the babies, primarily the mammals. She was especially thrilled when Bobby, our resident bobcat came to live with us, although that might be a toss up from when the first fawns came to us in 1995. She enjoys the laughs, too. She recalls one morning a gentleman called and said he was bringing out a baby eagle for us to care for. When he arrived, it was a baby all right, a baby *Inca dove*! We want to say "Thanks" for the fine work, Lisa. We appreciate your caring and dedication.

### THE UNITED STATES FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

**T**he U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a bureau within the Department of the Interior. It is the principle Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Their major responsibilities are: migratory birds, endangered species, certain marine mammals and fish, wetlands, habitat conservation, environmental contaminants and the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries. The FWS is divided into seven geographic regions, and the headquarters are located in Arlington, VA. The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. Kamile McKeever in Albuquerque, New Mexico is the permits administrator for our region. She has always been supportive and helpful, and for that we say thank you!

In our Next Issue: The role of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department; Hummingbirds & Hummingbird feeders; and Barn Owl nest boxes.

**T**he *Migratory Bird Treaty Act*, originally passed in 1918, was a turning point for bird conservation. Historically, plumage from many migratory birds was sought by the millinery industry to the extent that the populations of some species were rapidly diminishing. Since that time, this Act provides protection for migratory birds. Under the Act, it is unlawful to take, import, export, possess, buy, sell, purchase, or barter any migratory bird. Feathers or other parts, nests, eggs, and products made from migratory birds are also covered by the Act. Take is defined as pursuing, hunting, shooting, poisoning, wounding, killing, capturing, trapping, or collecting. There are some exceptions, and these will be discussed in Part II in our next issue. In addition, permits may be granted for various non-commercial activities involving migratory birds and some commercial activities involving captive-bred migratory birds.

### RAPTOR ELECTROCUTION

**S**ince the early 1970's, there has been increasing concern throughout the world about the losses of birds from collisions, shooting, trapping, poisoning and electrocution. Particularly, there has been increased awareness about the numbers of raptors, (birds of prey) electrocuted on power poles that have inadequate spacing between the "hot" wires. A bird is electrocuted when it contacts two energized phases at the same time, or when it simultaneously contacts grounded hardware and an energized conductor. Such problems with avian electrocutions also cause costly power outages and fires, which in turn cause expensive repair and maintenance. Birds can, however, safely land on a single wire. For the past 25 years, the utility companies, wildlife biologists, and other groups have worked together to understand the causes and develop solutions to this problem. Raptors are ecologically and biologically important. They vary in their *susceptibility* to electrocution: forest dwelling raptors rarely perch on utility poles. Small species, such as screech owls cannot span the distance between two electrical conductors to complete a circuit. Larger birds, such as the Golden eagle or Red-tailed hawk are at a much greater risk. Golden eagles are more often electrocuted than any other raptor, with their wing spans of 6-7.5 feet, and at least 11 other North American raptor species are considered vulnerable. Other factors affecting susceptibility include the bird's age, experience, weather (wet feathers increase conductivity), time of year, nesting activities, choice of prey, method of pursuit, and population density. The power poles provide perches for hunting, resting, feeding, nesting, and territorial defense.

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What is being done: Work has been done and progress has been made on conductor spacing and grounding procedures. *Modification* measures for existing lines have been implemented, and *Raptor-Safe* construction engineering designs for new or rebuilt lines have been devised. Modifications include wood perches, braces and cross-arms, inverted V raptor guards, triangular or horizontal fiberglass perch guards, flight diverters, conductor coverings and PVC devices. Nesting *platforms* have been constructed as alternate sites. Such a platform exists on the Texas Tech Research Farm in Lubbock, and was erected through the cooperative effort of our local United States Fish & Wildlife Service office, several Texas Tech student volunteers, and LP&L. Our area rural power suppliers have also cooperated to help remedy this hazard. As the world's human population grows and expands into rural areas, the impact of engineered structures on bird populations become increasingly critical.

Approximately 100 Bald and Golden eagles are electrocuted per year in the Panhandle-South Plains region plus several hundred other hawks and owls, according to Robert Lee with the FWS. The Wildlife Center has admitted seven Golden eagles over the past years having been electrocuted, and several other species as well. Power and telephone company linemen, surveyors, ranchers and people in the field can help identify and report problem poles. The United States Fish & Wildlife Service will work with the public or private Companies to make the pole raptor safe. If you find a dead bird under a pole leave the bird alone. A permit *is required* to handle or remove a carcass or nest. Note the pole number - it is often stamped mid-way on the utility pole. Note also the location in relation to landmarks and highways. To report possible electrocutions in the Lubbock area, call (806) 472-7273.

Some of the material in this article was contributed by Rob Lee of the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, who has worked with the area Utility Companies for several years to educate personnel and improve problem poles.

### SPECIES PROFILE

#### Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

**T**his eagle is one of the most magnificent birds of prey. It is very agile in the air, considering its large size and wingspan of nearly 7 feet. Females are noticeably larger than males. The bird is dark brown overall with golden highlights on the nape. The eyes and beak are dark and the legs are feathered down to the massive talons. Immature birds have white patches on the tail that become less and less apparent after each molt. It has been known that eagles stay with the same mate for life. They sometimes return to the same nesting site year after year. The nests are made of sticks and branches on steep cliffs, mountainsides

and occasionally, in tall trees. Normally, two whitish blotched eggs are laid and incubated in about 43 days. The female does most of the nest tending, but the pair share in hunting and feeding the young. The eaglets are hatched with downy feathers but, are fully feathered and ready to fledge at 65-70 days. This regal bird is found in North America, Eurasia and northern Africa. They are found in a variety of habitats, especially in remote areas. Their breeding success is dependent on prey densities. They prefer rabbits and other mammals, although they will feed on carrion. Golden eagles are still subject to illegal shooting due to the erroneous belief that they are a serious threat to livestock. At certain times of the year, these eagles will be seen in remote areas of the South Plains.

### — THE EAGLE —

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands,  
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from the mountain walls, And like a  
thunderbolt he falls.

### ATTRACTING BIRDS TO YOUR YARD

**B**eginning with this issue, and throughout 1997, each newsletter issue will have an article relating to "Attracting Birds..." Some of the subjects that will be covered will be more bird feeding tips, types of feeders, backyard habitat, Hummingbirds and hummingbird feeders, identifying birds, window collisions, squirrels at feeders, and "undesirable" birds at the feeder.

Perhaps the most appealing thing about birds is simply *watching* them. Reportedly, over 65 million Americans enjoy this activity. It is the second fastest growing hobby, after gardening. Backyard bird *feeding* is an equally satisfying activity, as well as a convenient way to attract and enjoy wildlife. Birds have the greatest need for supplemental feeding in winter. How do our "hand-outs" affect the birds? Little research has been done on that question. But we do know that some birds-- cardinals, mockingbirds and tufted titmice -- have extended their winter range northward, perhaps because of an increased availability of food at feeding stations. There is no indication however that backyard bird feeding has had a negative effect on wild bird populations as a whole.

To attract birds to your yard, you should provide food, water, shelter & cover. A *water source* is essential. Many birds will bathe on the chilliest of days. Water features are most effective when they are shallow (less than 2" deep) and clean. If the water is dripping or moving, it becomes even more attractive. Fountains or water containers should be placed out in the open where birds can see predators coming. Provide cover *nearby*-wet birds cannot fly well, if at all. Birds not

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only need places in which to hide from predators, but to escape severe weather. Be very careful about pesticides and herbicides used in your yard, or better yet, don't use them. What do the birds like to eat? This will depend on the species. Each bird species has its own unique food requirements, and these may change as the bird matures and the seasons change. Many birds eat a variety of live foods, including fish, reptiles, insects and rodents. However, many are also fond of seeds, and other things we provide for them. In winter, many songbirds feed on seeds of grasses, shrubs, trees and weeds. You must also consider the *feeding habits* of the birds you are trying to attract: doves are generally ground feeders; finches and sparrows depend mainly on seeds the year around. Some birds reject seeds during the nesting and breeding season, and seek out insects when they and their offspring have a greater need for protein. Goldfinches and pine siskins will be attracted to hanging mesh bags filled with thistle. Mockingbirds and House finches can be attracted by offering bits of apple or orange. So, if you are trying to attract certain species, you will have to offer their preferred foods, and much study has been done on food preferences of wild birds.\* The most important factor in setting up a successful feeding station is to offer a variety of foods in the proper setting. The use that a bird feeder gets depends on the proximity of excellent habitat. Sunflower seed, a high energy food, is the number one choice of most songbirds. It will attract the greatest number of species, including jays, cardinals, woodpeckers and chickadees. Be sure your feeder is easy to fill, easy to clean and it should protect the seed from rain and snow. Look for a manufacturer's guarantee. Cracked corn, milo and millet (white millet is preferred over red) or other mixed seed scattered on the ground or on a tray type feeder will attract cardinals, juncos, doves, sparrows, jays, quail and pheasants. Read the label and beware of "bargain" brands that contain seed the birds often won't eat, such as milo, wheat, oats, rye or rice. Buy mixes that contain black-oil sunflower, (this type is preferred over black stripe sunflower seed, which has a thicker seed coat and is more difficult for smaller birds to crack), white proso millet, peanut hearts, cracked corn and safflower. Some people also have good luck with suet feeders, especially in the colder areas. Suet attracts woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice and mockingbirds. Remember that birds such as Cedar waxwings, robins, mockingbirds don't usually come to feeders because they don't care for seeds! Try offering soaked raisins or currants. Robins in our area are especially attracted to water on the very cold snowy days. Buy seed in large quantities...it is much cheaper that way. Check listings for mills and feed stores. Keep feeders clean and dispose of moldy food to avoid possible harm to the birds. Store your seed in tight watertight and rodent proof containers. If you worry about seeds germinating in your lawn, try just planting sunflower...they are easy to spot, and if a few do come up in your garden, let them grow to produce more sunflower seeds - late in the season as they dry, the birds will thank you!

### IN A NUTSHELL

1. Provide water and keep it ice-free
2. Set feeders on the south side of your house if possible
3. Place feeders within 20 feet of cover, but a safe distance from low shrubs where cats can hide.
4. Use feeders with designs that protect the seed from rain, snow, or sprinklers.
5. Fill feeders early in the morning
6. Use mixes with a high sunflower millet and corn count.
7. Buy bird seed mixes and sunflower seed in bulk quantities to stretch your dollar.
8. Choose some feeders for use only by small birds.
9. Do not use pesticides and fungicides while maintaining a feeding area.
10. An easy fruit feeder can be constructed with a (barbecue) skewer - tie to a limb with a bread tie, push an orange or apple half up onto the sharp end. Add a cork to keep it in place. Be patient...it will attract Mockingbirds and House finches and perhaps Orioles.

### TROUBLESHOOTING

**E**liminate hiding places around feeders where cats and other predators can hide. Feral cats and your neighbor's tabby are a serious threat to nestlings, fledglings and roosting birds. Too often, the presence of just one cat on the prowl near your feeder can take the enjoyment out of your backyard bird feeding experience. It has been suggested that bell collars help. Also, a rhinestone collar that catches light and flashes exaggerated motion sometimes works, as birds are wary of approaching unidentified moving objects. (However, this *doesn't* help young fledges and birds still in the nest). Confinement is, of course, safest for the pet and wildlife. Several species of hawks also prey on small birds-the most common being the Sharp-shinned hawk and the Cooper's hawk. (We have these two hawk species in Lubbock). Yes, it is upsetting for some people to watch a hawk carry off a sparrow or finch from one's feeding table, but this is, after all, the scheme of predator-prey relationships in nature. Consider yourself fortunate to see one of these raptors right in your own backyard. They too, play an important role in the natural community! Provide lots of places for small birds to seek shelter (dense shrubbery, etc.) if hawks are a problem, you can cease feeding for a few days. If Blue jays are giving alarm calls, and not even one bird can be seen at the feeders on the coldest of days, it usually is a good indication that a hawk is nearby.

\*The most comprehensive report on the relative attractiveness of various commercially available wild bird seeds is entitled, "Feeding Preferences of Wild Birds at Feeders." (This was carried out by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to *verify* the surprising results of 'Special Scientific Report 233' entitled "Relative Attractiveness of Different Foods at Wild Bird

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Feeders"). The reports are based on research conducted in Maryland by Dr. Aelred Geis, and then expanded nationwide. His findings have been cited in almost every major book written on bird feeding in the past 10 years, including the Ortho Series on attracting birds, and the Audubon Society publications.

### A CHRISTMAS TREE FOR THE BIRDS

**A** Christmas tree for the birds can be simple or elaborate. Decorating a tree can provide a banquet for birds and can be a fun way to celebrate the season, for youngsters and adults alike. With a little imagination, many foods can be adapted to hang on the tree! Attach pieces of oranges and apples to branches; string marshmallows on small sized wire. Loop red ribbon through powdered doughnuts and cookies with holes in the middle; Spread peanut butter on pine cones, and dip in a seed mixture; string whole peanuts or unbuttered unsalted popcorn using dark heavy-duty thread (tie off the ends) and drape on tree; String cranberry, grape or dried fruit bits; fasten chunks of corn on the cob. Sprinkle seed at the base of the tree and it won't be long until the birds discover it!

### NOTES.....

**O**n November 16, TPW and FWS gave us permission to transfer an Eastern Screech owl here from a rehabilitator in Biloxi, MS. The little fellow was either born blind, or fell from the nest early on, sustaining a severe head injury. Only 8" tall, he will be used in our educational presentations.

- ◆ On December 5th, John Pronk of WFAA-TV (an ABC television affiliate on Channel 8 in Dallas) spent the morning with us to do a special news piece. He focused on the Canada Geese that are now abundant in our area. We went to Lake Ransom Canyon to film and release one of our Geese which had been "rolled" by a car, and had recovered! The piece was to air in various places across the U.S. on December 13th or 16th!
- ◆ Apologies to Erik Gransberg, one of our Eagle Scouts, who built shelves and modified our aluminum barn several months ago. His name was inadvertently omitted from the last newsletter. Erik was given his Eagle Scout award November 17. He, with the help of his mother, also assembled a Barn owl puppet, which we use to feed our small chicks. This prevents imprinting, and the owlets do not see human faces.
- ◆ Congratulations to our volunteers Beth Bodden on her recent engagement, and to Leigh Furlow on her upcoming marriage. Also congratulations to Heather Walls, our LHS student, on her acceptance to Texas A & M next fall.
- ◆ Leanna Smith, Board member of the local Llano Estacado Audubon Society recently attended the Bird

Life of Texas Symposium in Austin. One of the presentations was from the Texas Records Committee and their official number of birds in Texas is 598 species. This number is the "accepted" number of valid sightings of wild (not escaped) species in Texas.

- ◆ "Casper," our educational Barn owl was "adopted" by Kita Lloyd, and "Sierra," the Golden eagle, was adopted by Trey Barker. They "met" out birds at a Barnes & Noble educational presentation in October.
- ◆ Please remember our Building Fund - at the present time we have only a little over one thousand dollars in it, but we hope it will grow! It is earmarked for a freestanding on site Nature Education Center, where all of the day to day functions including educational programs, would take place... and out of Debbie's house.

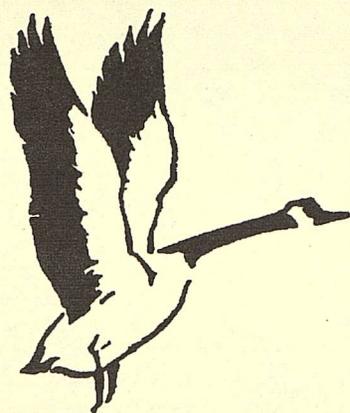
### Thank You!

To **Lois Tanner** of **TechType**, for typesetting this newsletter, and donating this service to us for the past year! Thank you again to **Mr. Stephen Thrash** of **HubNet** for donating Internet access, which we use each and every day for wildlife information. To **Renee Meunier** who did a wonderful slide presentation for "Science Day" at TTU recently; To our local **Audubon** chapter for continued support; To our members who have renewed already for 1997: **Wendell and Karen Medlin**, **June Ducker**, **Dr. James Shotwell**. To **Super K-Mart (Ron Trimble**, Manager, and **Gaylene Sanders** in Receiving), for donating supplies. Also thanks to **Target Stores, Inc.** for supplies. To **Edgemeer Elementary** in Plainview for cash donations of over \$100.00, and **Springlake-Earth ISD** for cash donations also over \$100.00 and supplies; to **Carla Davis** for supplies, and **James Cokendolpher** for hay. Thanks to **Brownie Troop #187** and **Cub Scout Troop #210** for donated supplies. **Pam Thomas's LHS Science** class contributed \$25.00. Supplies were also given to us from **Monterey Church of Christ** Golden Rays, **Shallowater Elementary 4th grade** students, **Sugar & Spice Preschool**, and **Indiana Baptist Church Preschool**. Special thanks also to **Mike Bowlin** for the wonderful A-J article which appeared November 24, 1996 and to **Russel Gould**, and **Chris Buford** of **United at 50th & Indiana** for donating items for our Volunteer Christmas party, and to **John Kimbley** for donating spirits for our spirits! Thank you also to **Mr. Jimmie Mason** of **Mason Warner, Co., P.C.** for their ongoing accounting assistance. Last but not least to **Drs. Farley, Leach & Preston** and the staff at **Animal Medical Center**. Dr. Farley also recently donated their old Xerox copier to us, which is in great condition! Thanks to **Sandy Shannon** for giving two subscriptions to the Mockingbird Chronicles for her family: To Mrs. Eunice Shannon, in memory of Dr. Emmet Shannon, and the Mr. & Mrs. Norvell Johnson.

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### THE CANADA GOOSE

Every October, many South Plains residents anticipate the arrival of our winter visitors: the Canada Geese. One day you see them, appearing first as tiny specks against the sky, as they travel into Texas to their wintering grounds. Then, you hear their unmistakable honking in the



distance. Few species mark the changing of the seasons as distinctively as the Canada goose. This species is the most widely distributed and the most recognizable goose in North America: it has a black face and a long black neck separated by a distinctive white "chin strap." The plumage of Canada geese is patterned in black, brown and white.

They have black legs, feet and bills. At least eleven subspecies of Canada geese occur in North America. They range in size from a little larger than a mallard, to the giant Canada goose, nearly as large as a swan. Exactly how many "races" exist depend on what criteria are used to determine race. Many biologists simply speak of small and large geese, with each category encompassing several subspecies. These birds tend to use the same migration routes and wintering grounds year after year. Geese are imprinted to their wintering area and adults lead their young to a wintering site. When the young mature, they, too, will lead their young to the same place to winter. Lubbock is on the "Central Flyway" and this region is a vital wintering area for this species. Geese return here each year regardless of our water situation.

The Canada geese that naturally winter in Texas must complete two arduous journeys each year. During migration, the geese may fly as high as 8,000 feet and normally fly at speeds of about 30-40 m.p.h., although they may reach speeds of 60 mph, and even higher for brief periods. They may cover several hundred miles between stops. Geese can easily walk and feed in fields and therefore are able to use a wide variety of habitats. Flocks of geese usually feed in large, open fields. Sharp-eyed sentinels stand guard while others graze for grain. The thrill of migrating geese is as impressive during springtime as it is in the fall. Great flocks rise high into the sky, headed for northern places few of us have ever seen. In our area, the geese start leaving in late February. Most Canada geese return to their northern breeding grounds with family units still intact, but shortly after their arrival, the yearlings leave their parents. Canada geese mate in their second or third year and usually remain together as long as both birds are alive, which may average around ten years. On the breeding grounds, (this encompasses a large area on

the Northern coast of the North American mainland and islands in the Arctic Ocean) they wait until the snow and ice melt and then begin their nesting. Canada geese use a variety of nest sites including open tundra, small islands, tree stumps and cliffs. All nest sites have an open view of the water. The geese lay from one to twelve eggs, but usually four to seven, which they incubate for four weeks. The male (gander) never sits on the eggs, but stands guard nearby. The downy goslings leave the nest and feed themselves hours after hatching, but the parents continue to watch over them. When goslings are four weeks old their adult plumage begins to appear, and they are able to fly at eight or nine weeks old. The *adult* geese molt their flight feathers when the young are one to two weeks old. For the next thirty days the adults are flightless as their new feathers grow. The shortening days and frosts of early autumn then signal the geese to prepare again for the journey south.

The number of these birds wintering on city lakes in Lubbock has grown over the years, peaking at near 97,000 geese during January of 1993. Many of the geese are attracted to the reliable water, and handouts, at the city parks.

Some material for this article was graciously given by Jim Ray, Regional Migratory Bird and Wetlands Biologist. Jim works for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and is based in Canyon, TX. He does population estimates research, and works with landowners on habitat management.

### GOOSE COLLAR PROGRAM

by Jill Haukos

In 1989, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Program began a 5-year program to determine the relative survival and distribution of the numbers of North American geese. The species of geese includes the Canada Goose, Ross's Goose, and Snow Goose. The program involves the trapping of geese and the placement of a brightly colored collar with large black numbers around their necks. These collars are easily viewed through spotting scopes or binoculars and the information from the collars as well as locations from which the geese were viewed provides valuable data for both state and federal biologists. The viewing of the geese is done, not only by professional biologists, but by volunteers, as well.

The Southern High Plains of Texas plays host to a plethora of waterfowl, including between 300,00 and 500,000 Canada Geese annually. The Llano Estacado Audubon Society members have become active in assisting the Goose Collar Program. Biologists provide volunteers with report forms to complete if any collared birds are seen. These forms are available from the local LEAS chapter, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, and Dr. David Haukos, Regional Migratory Bird Biologist.

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