

The Pine Warbler



February 2010

Vol. 30, No.2

Pineywoods Wildlife February Field Trip

Piney Woods Members are invited out to Sheldon Lake State Park for a Bird Walk and Talk on Saturday, February 20 at 8:30 a.m. The trip will start in the woods and fishery ponds searching for passerines, waterfowl and waders. Then we head out to the prairie where geese (1,000+), teal (100+) and dabbling duck are all over the prairie restoration Phase II ponds. The prairie habitat is also great to spot wrens, sparrows and raptors. In addition, we will visit the lake to search for open water raptors, waterbirds, diving ducks, and passerines (Vermilion flycatcher is likely). Let's hope we spot "Lou" the Leucistic Red-tailed. Those with scopes will find them put to good use. The walk and talk will be long enough that we will stop for a break, so don't forget to bring a snack and water.



Directions: The Park headquarters is located at 15315 Beaumont Highway (Business 90), 2 miles east of Beltway 8 or 2 miles west of

Sheldon Road at Park Road 138. From Mercer Arboretum, head to Beltway 8 and travel east on Beltway 8. Turn left on Garrett Rd. for one-half-mile to Fauna. Turn right on Fauna which will become Pineland. On your left will be the Sheldon Lake levee. After two-and-a-half miles cross over the railroad tracks to a stop light. Turn left at the traffic light onto Business 90 (Beaumont Highway) for one mile to Park Road 138. Look for the flag pole on the north side of the road. There is also a brown highway sign on the right. Turn left over the railroad tracks to the park entrance. We will meet at Sheldon Lake State Park headquarters at 8:30 a.m.

- submitted by Sheena Humbird, Field Trip Chairman



Photos by Steven Stones of the Rolling Stones on MLK Day in Anahuac. American Bittern and Seagull.

Change in Directors

As Piney Woods welcomes Farrar Stockton to the Board of Directors, we also thank Steven Stones for his work for the club. He handled the website and set up the archives of newsletters.

Thanks, Steven; we appreciate your service! And thanks to all the other board members for their continuing volunteerism!

February Presentation

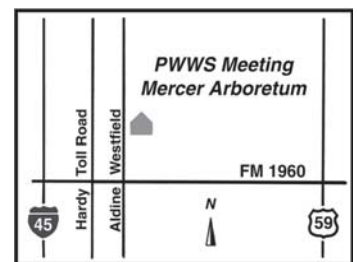
Presented by Fred Collins

Well known wildlife biologist and birder extraordinaire Fred Collins will present the program on February 16. Fred is a director at the Kleb Woods Nature Center which is the best kept secret of a peaceful place for birders in Harris County. Just Google Kleb Woods to find its location off FM 2920 near Tomball.

He is also director of the Cypress Top Historic Park, another park we need to hear more about. Don't miss this outstanding presentation.

Date: January 16
Time: Social 7:00 p.m.
Meeting: 7:30 p.m.

Mercer
Arboretum
22307 Aldine-Westfield



Try to remember when life was so tender
That love was an ember about to billow.
Try to remember, and if you remember,
Then follow. - T. Jones / H. Schmidt





Heart Happenings

Nesting season and shrimping season are both coming up fast. Texas A&M University at Galveston will be conducting patrol training soon but no details are available yet. The severe freezing weather has cold-stunned many sea turtles in the Gulf including a number of green sea turtles in south Texas. Final numbers are not available yet. Most sea turtles will recover if they are found soon enough and slowly warmed up before release.

Since February is a time of “waiting” for those of us involved in sea turtle conservation, there is time to direct attention to one of the worst and probably THE WORST insult to the world’s oceans. It is called The Great Pacific Garbage Patch. If you have access to a computer and want more details including maps about the ocean currents delivering trash to the garbage patch, go to <http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/translating-uncle-sam/stories/what-is-the-great-pacific-ocean-garbage-patch>. In a nutshell, oceans currents have deposited tons and tons of trash in the Pacific in an area thought to be as big as Texas which means it is as big as France! (Just think how huge the area is!)

Holly Bamford is director of NOAA’s Marine Debris Program which must be a depressing job. She says The Garbage Patch is difficult to study because it isn’t just one big trash island; there are billions of smaller trash islands that may be hidden underwater or spread out over many miles. The article online states that “about 80 percent of debris in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch comes from land, much of which is plastic bags, bottles and various other consumer products. Free-floating fishing nets make up another 10 percent of all marine litter, or about 705,000 tons, according to U.N. estimates. The rest comes largely from recreational boaters, offshore oil rigs and large cargo ships, which drop about 10,000 steel containers into the sea each year full of things like hockey pads, computer monitors, resin pellets and LEGO octopuses. But despite such diversity — and plenty of metal, glass and rubber in the garbage patch — the majority of material is still plastic, since most everything else sinks or biodegrades before it gets there.”

The disgraceful Great Pacific Garbage Patch entangles and kills seals, sea a turtles and many other animals. With more fishermen from developing countries now using plastic for its low cost and high durability, many abandoned nets can continue fishing on their own (or ghost fishing) for months or years. One of the most controversial types are bottom-set gill nets, which are buoyed by floats and anchored to the sea floor, sometimes stretching for thousands of feet. As we all know, almost any marine life can be endangered by plastic, but sea turtles seem especially susceptible. In addition to being en-

tangled by fishing nets, leatherbacks often swallow plastic bags mistaking them for jellyfish, their main prey. Sea turtles and other marine animals can also get caught up in a variety of other objects. Small surface debris made up on plastic resin pellets flat for many years and wreak havoc on sea birds. Another frightening aspect is photo degradation which happens as sunlight breaks down floating debris. The surface water thickens with suspended plastic bits often containing colorants and chemicals.

So what is going to be done about this horrible cancer on the ocean? It can’t be “just scooped up” and the cost is far more than one country can handle. People and agencies continue to fly over the garbage patch to assess it while researchers work to figure some way to deal with it. An “adventure ecologist” David de Rothschild plans to sail around the garbage patch in a boat made entirely of recycled plastics. His journey is intended to highlight the connection between plastic trash on land and plastic trash at sea but it isn’t going to shrink the garbage patch.

The key is to stopping the growth of The Great Pacific Garbage Patch before it kills thousands more creatures and poisons the ocean even more, is the education of human beings. While there’s still much we don’t understand about the garbage patch, we do know that most of it is made of plastic. And that’s where the problems begin. Everyone in every country must be aware of what is happening and stop contributing to this terrible problem silently growing bigger in the Pacific. Its growth must be stopped.

Record Numbers of Cold Stunned Sea Turtles Found in Texas

The following information was submitted to the Padre Island Moon newspaper by Dr. Donna Shaver at the Padre Island National Seashore:

From January 9-14, 425 sea turtles were found “cold stunned” on the Texas coast. This is more than have been found during any other cold stunning event documented in Texas since the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network was established in 1980. This new record more than doubles the previous record of 175 cold stunned turtles found during 2007. In fact, the 425 stranded sea turtles found in these six days this year is more than found stranded in Texas for the entire year during 24 of the last 30 years. *next page*



Playa Grande Refuge leatherback sea turtle nest area, photo by Carlos Hernandez

Every few years, south Texas experiences freezing air temperatures which incapacitate sea turtles. The species affected most is the green sea turtle. Sea turtles cannot regulate their body temperature. During these, "cold stunning" events, the turtles float to the surface and some wash ashore, driven by strong prevailing winds. While in this coma-like condition, they can succumb from prolonged exposure to the cold and predation. However, if they are found rapidly and transported to rehabilitation facilities, there is a good chance that they can be revived and released after waters warm.

The cold stunned turtles found from January 9-14 included 423 green sea turtles and two loggerhead sea turtles. All turtles found were juveniles. Middle and south Texas bays and channels provide important developmental habitat for juvenile green turtles. However, when water and air temperatures become very cold, the green turtles inhabiting these waters become vulnerable to cold stunning. Those that cannot find refuge in pockets of deeper, warmer water of the bays and channels, or escape to warmer waters in the Gulf of Mexico, can fall victim to cold stunning.

Many people helped over a wide area. The 425 cold stunned turtles were found from east Matagorda Bay to the U.S./Mexico border. Sizable numbers were found in east Matagorda Bay, the Port Aransas/Corpus Christi area (canals, Upper Laguna Madre, Corpus Christi Bay, etc.), the Land Cut (north and south), and the Port Isabel area. Almost all of these were located in inshore areas (canals, bays, estuaries, passes, etc.).

Searching for cold stunned turtles, responding to reports, and aiding with transport, documentation, tagging, medical treatment, and release has been a massive undertaking involving over 100 people and numerous institutions.

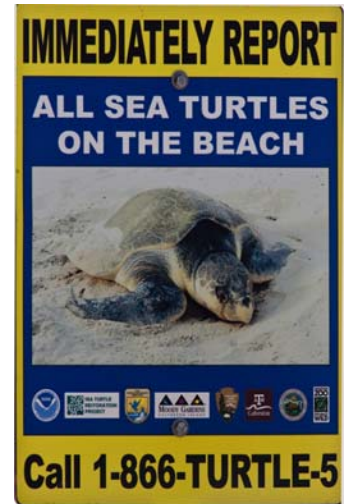
Live turtles saved. Of the 425 sea turtles found cold stunned, 154 of the green turtles and one of the loggerheads were located alive. Most of the live individuals were found in the Port Aransas/Corpus Christi and Port Isabel areas. In contrast, most of the turtles that were found in east Matagorda Bay and the Land Cut were dead by the time that Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens located them. These areas were difficult to search and access by boat or foot and because of the difficulty in access, most of the dead turtles found there were left in place.

Live stranded turtles have been transported to authorized facilities to receive medical evaluation and care. Thanks to the hard work of many people, most are expected to survive and ultimately be released. Locally, the live turtles were transported to the ARK and when capacity was reached at that facility, some of the healthier turtles were transferred to the Texas State Aquarium. Currently, about 70 live turtles from this cold stunning event are being held locally. Those that survive will be released after their medical conditions are stabilized and water temperatures warm.

Eighty-one live turtles from the Port Isabel area were taken to

Sea Turtle, Inc. and the Coastal Studies Lab. Water temperatures rose there, so 63 of the turtles were released from January 12-13. Eighteen remain in care at Sea Turtle, Inc. and will be released in the upcoming days and weeks.

Green turtle population rebuilding Green sea turtles were commercially harvested in Texas during the 1800's. However, by 1900, their numbers had declined to the point that the turtle processing industry collapsed. Both over-fishing and severe freezes are thought to have caused the population decline. In the 1970's, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the green turtle as a "Threatened" species in Texas. Green sea turtles require 30-50 years to reach maturity, so it will take many years for the population to rebuild. However, after many years of conservation, the population of green turtles is increasing in Texas. The magnitude of this cold stunning event is an indicator of this increase. The green turtles saved thanks to the hard work of many people during this cold stunning event will help continue the rebuilding of this population.



Green Bank Program

The Green Bank at Greenbriar and 59 has a program where they make contributions to environmental non-profits when new accounts are opened, <http://greenbank.com/resources/programs-for-non-profits>. This program is available to member agencies of the Citizens Environmental Coalition. Both HEART and Piney Woods are members of CEC. HEART will receive \$50 because someone opened a bank account and wanted to help sea turtles. If you have a spare \$50,000 lying around and open an account with the Green Bank, you can choose HEART, Piney Woods or another non-profit CEC member to receive \$50.

Board Meeting Time Again

February 9 is board meeting time again. Carole Allen will host the event which will begin at 7 p.m. She is at 3902 Gladebrook Court in Oak Creek Village. (That's the subdivision just across from Home Depot on FM 1960 West. Turn onto Gladebrook Drive and drive straight back six streets until you can make a right turn into Gladebrook Court.)

PWWS needs a new education chairperson, someone with energy, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness. The challenge is how to "hook" more people into protecting our environment. Contact Al Barr, president.



Piney Woods Wildlife Society
 P.O. Box 189
 Spring, Texas 77383-0189

Piney Woods Wildlife Society Field Trips

Sheldon Lake State Park
Bird Walk and Talk on Saturday
February 20 at 8:30 a.m.



2010 Board of Directors

President.....Al Barr
 1st Vice President.....Carole Allen
 2nd Vice President.....Jean and Mike Drummond
 3rd Vice President.....Carlos Hernandez
 Secretary.....Carole Frascella
 Treasurer.....Jim Lacey
 Director (term expires 2010).....Bill Fortney
 Director (term expires 2011).....Dick Lee
 Director (term expires 2011).....Farrar Stockton
 Past President.....Kathy Coward

Numbers of Interest

Heart Hotline.....281444-6204



The Pine Warbler is published monthly, September through May, by The Piney Woods Wildlife Society, Inc. and Copperhead Publishing.

For membership information write to us at P.O. Box 189, Spring Texas 77383-0189. Annual Dues: \$15.00 per household.

Publisher: Allison Marks
Publish1@copperheadfarms.net or
jdfagm@swbell.net
 P.O. Box 131776 Spring, TX 77393

The deadline for submissions is the 25th of the previous month, earlier if possible. Always add "PWWS" in the subject line. All emails will be resonded to with in 3 days. If you do not recieve a response please call 832 717-3276. All articles are subject to approval by the PWWS Board.

Please send new address changes and corrections to Mike Drummond at drummond@thedrummonds.com and add PWWS to the subject line. Thank you.

Visit: <http://pineywoodswildlifesociety.org>