

April 24, 2002

# The *Brown Pelican*



The Newsletter of the Coastal Bend Audubon Society

## **W**ater Rights War Rages on Faltering Rio Grande

By JIM YARDLEY  
Boca Chica, Texas, April 17, 2002  
Excerpts reprinted, The New York Times, 4/19/02

On a desolate stretch of beach on the border with Mexico, Randy Blankinship steps along what should be the edge of the Rio Grande. The river, that for thousands of years flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, now falls almost a hundred yards short. "That's the mouth of the mighty Rio Grande," said Mr. Blankinship, a state wildlife biologist, with a touch of sarcasm.

That the Rio Grande is no longer strong enough to reach the sea is just another example of the crisis that threatens the river and the international region that depends on it. Years of drought have left the area parched. A water war between farmers on both sides of the border has escalated into an international standoff. Demand for water is increasing in an area that has historically ranked among the poorest in the nation but is now trying to capitalize on growing trade with Mexico. Population is exploding on both sides of the border as new industries have been established in the past decade.

Here at the beach where the Rio Grande once spilled into the sea, Mr. Blankinship

said environmental problems were already emerging. By blocking the river from the sea, the sandbar has choked off the estuary that is the breeding ground for innumerable species. He said

*"This is a big deal, the loss of an estuary like this"*

early studies showed that populations of white shrimp and striped mullet have been severely affected. The reduced water flow has also allowed vegetation like water hyacinth and hydrilla to grow exponentially along the Rio Grande. Usually, the current would flush such vegetation away, but now it is clogging some sections of the river. "This is a big deal, the loss of an estuary like this," Mr. Blankinship said, pointing to the shallow end of the river. "And it is a bad omen for the future of the Rio Grande to see international water policy result in this."

For more information about water and the environment and to find out what you can do to help, visit the National Wildlife Federation web site at <http://www.nwf.org/texaswaterforwildlife/>

### Inside this issue:

*Sierra Club Files Lawsuit* 2

*What's Up Around Texas* 2

*Nature Notes* 3

*Sanctuary Spot* 3

*Audubon Texas Meeting in Rockport* 3

*Earth Day-Bay Day SUCCESS!* 3

*Hawk Watch Hill Construction* 3

### This Month's Speaker:

Darrell Echols,  
Resource Mgmt. Specialist  
National Park Service

**Subject:**  
Spring Migration at Padre  
Island National Seashore

**Location:**  
Corpus Christi Museum of  
Science and History  
1900 N. Chaparral

**Time:**  
1st Tuesday of the month  
6:45 pm

**All members and the general public are invited!**

## *Senate Votes To Protect Arctic National Wildlife Refuge!*

April 18, 2002, by a vote of 46 - 54, the U.S. Senate defeated a measure to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. "This is a tremendous victory for the American people. I applaud the U.S. Senate for standing up to the pro-oil drilling special interests and doing the right thing on behalf of wildlife and conservation," said **Audubon President John Flicker**. Both U.S. Senators from Texas voted against protecting the Arctic Refuge from oil drilling.

# Sierra Club Sues, Citing Violations at Padre Island National Seashore

Construction of the first BNP well has begun in the sand dunes of Padre Island National Seashore, and the Sierra Club has filed suit against the federal government arguing that government agencies have failed to adequately consider impacts to wildlife.

Fifteen miles south of the visitor center and park headquarters the first well is being drilled, and 18-wheelers and other trucks, as many as 40 per day, are routinely traveling down the beach to reach the well area.

*The dunes at mile 15 are being bulldozed and paved*

The dunes at mile 15 are being bulldozed, and a paved road will be plowed through them

to allow the trucks to pass from the beach to the well pad. The National Park Service is requiring the use of a spotter to direct truck traffic during Kemp's Ridley sea turtle nesting season due to the possibility of trucks destroying turtles and turtle nests.

In the action, filed on April 18, 2002, the Sierra Club seeks relief against Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service claiming they have failed to adequately disclose and consider the impacts that drilling this well could have on endangered sea turtles and other wildlife and that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, by concurring with a finding that the drilling of this well will have no effect on listed species, has violated the Endangered Species Act. In particular, the suit alleges that the Defendants have failed to analyze the impacts of truck traffic during sea turtle nesting season.

In addition to the concerns regarding the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, concerns exist for the Piping plover, and other

wildlife. Piping plovers are federally protected birds which migrate from the Great Lakes and Canada to the Gulf Coast, wintering on South Texas shores. In January 2001, Nueces County hired BNP to analyze and comment on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife economic impact study related to the agency's designation of 7,000 acres of critical Piping plover habitat. By the time the U.S. Fish and Wildlife proposal was finalized in July 2001, the plover habitat in Nueces County had been slashed to 2,000 acres.

The Seashore and the adjacent Laguna Madre are home to 11 endangered or threatened species, including Piping plover and Kemp's Ridley sea turtles. The list also includes: Eastern brown pelican, Black-capped Vireos, Loggerhead, Green, Leatherback, and Hawksbill sea turtles, Reddish egret, White-tailed hawk, Ferruginous hawk, and White-faced Ibis. Additionally, several threatened and endangered birds migrate through the park and stop to feed and rest there, including the Aplomado falcon, American Swallow-tailed kite, Woodstork, and Bald eagle.

Oil and gas drilling within the park will not only affect habitat and animals, but also people who come to the park. The 2001 Oil and Gas Management Plan for Padre Island shows that a drilling rig 200 feet away is nearly as loud as standing next to a vacuum cleaner and that a diesel truck 25 feet away is 90 decibels-enough to stop conversations. The Seashore receives approx. 800,000 visitors per year, making it the second most visited National Park unit in Texas, and a great asset to our local tourism industry. Park surveys show that one of the top reasons people visit the park is to "experience peace and quiet!"

## What's Up Around Texas

**May 4, 2002. 9am-12noon, Brownsville, TX.** FREE Workshop. Learn what the threats are to the Sabal Palm Audubon Center & Sanctuary and what you can do to help. Contact: call Audubon at 1-800-659-2622 or e-mail [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org)

**May 3-5, 2002. South Texas Coastal Brushlands: Kenedy Ranch.** Texas Ornithological Society Field Trip, Must pre-register, FEE. Contact Brush Freeman at [brush@ONR.COM](mailto:brush@ONR.COM) or (512) 303-0046.

**March 1 – July 31, 2002.** Monitor Mexican Spotted Owls, Peregrine Falcons, and Cowbird Parasitism. Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Texas. Contact: Fred Armstrong (915)828-3251x251 or e-mail [Fred\\_Armstrong@nps.gov](mailto:Fred_Armstrong@nps.gov)

**April – August, 2002.** Rio Grande Bird Banding Station (MAPS), & Interior Least Tern Inventory, Amistad National Recreation Area, Texas. Contact: David Larson (830)775-7491x204 or e-mail [david\\_larson@nps.gov](mailto:david_larson@nps.gov); [www.nps.gov/amis](http://www.nps.gov/amis)

**March – August, 2002.** Monitor Black-capped Vireos and Golden-cheeked Warblers, Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, Austin, Texas. Minimum 12–15 field days throughout field season. Contact: Chuck Sexton (512)339-9432x26

**May – June, 2002.** Breeding bird census in various habitats on the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, Sherman, Texas. Contact: Refuge Manager, Hagerman NWR, 6465 Refuge Rd., Sherman, TX 75092-5817; (903)786-3327 or e-mail [R2RW\\_HG@fws.gov](mailto:R2RW_HG@fws.gov)

## Audubon Texas State Wide Annual Meeting

The First State Wide Annual Meeting of Audubon Texas will be held in conjunction with the Annual Rockport Hummer/Bird Celebration on Friday, September 13, 2002 at the Rockport Beach Pavilion. This event is open to Audubon members and chapters, birding clubs and conservation organizations, as well as individuals interested in birds and wildlife and the conservation of their habitats.

This year's event will focus on sharing ideas and strategies on developing bird conservation programs at the community level, as well as how to get the community involved. Various Audubon leaders and presenters will share their success stories relevant to community-based conservation as well as hold workshops for education and fun.

A meeting of the Audubon Texas Assembly will also be held on Saturday for regional directors and chapter representatives to discuss key issues in conservation science, conservation education and public policy. On Sunday, the Audubon Texas Board of Directors will meet. For more information please contact Monica Naples at [mnaples@audubon.org](mailto:mnaples@audubon.org).

## Hawk Watch Hill - Hazel Bazemore Park

Construction plans are complete for the new Hawk Watch Hill hawk observation facility at Hazel Bazemore County Park. Nueces County Parks Dept., the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, and Hawk Watch International are now beginning the funding portion of the project. They are searching for major sponsors for construction of this new world class birding facility.

*Hawk Watch Hill*, designed by McGloin-Sween Architects, is designed to be universally accessible and yet blend into the native landscape. A gently sloping pathway spirals up the hill, leading from the entry plaza past native vegetation planted on the hillside. *Hawk Watch Hill* will



promote and enhance environmental tourism, increase education and awareness of our local environment, and further the scientific study of raptors. The total construction budget is approximately \$340,000. Nueces County hopes to begin construction within one-year. If you would like to help in any way please contact Richard Gibbons at (361) 885-6248.

## Nature Notes - Texas Central Coast

**Slate-throated Redstart**, mid April 2002, Blucher Park Corpus Christi, Mesquite and Mulberry trees, Joel and Vicki Simon.

**Green Violet-Ear Hummingbird**, April 3, 2002, Packery Channel, Corpus Christi. Mel Cooksey.

**Four Mourning Warbler** records for April at Packery Channel. They are April 26, 1997, April 29, 1996, April 30 1996 (not the same bird), and April 30, 1991. Anything prior to April 26 is Guinness material! Mel Cooksey.

**Purple Sandpiper**, April 20, 2002, Copano Bay fishing pier, Rockport-Fulton. Bron Rorex.

**Calliope hummingbird**, April 2002 for several weeks, Rockport. Bron Rorex.

**Glossy Ibis**, April 7, 2002, Paradise Pond, Port Aransas. It may be a glossy/white-faced ibis hybrid! Bron Rorex.



*Glossy Ibis seen at Paradise Pond*

## Sanctuary Spot by Bill Schmidt

**4/19/02** A brief mid-morning visit. The negative results of the drought are everywhere. Very low water level in the pond with no flow-through behind the island and into the new pond addition. While the mesquites have completely greened out and are looking pretty, this cannot be said about the other shrubbery. Many new leaves have already turned from yellow to red.

Not much wildlife activity, but I encountered an Eastern cottontail on the pond road, a very young animal, maybe only a couple of months old. This proves there is always some wildlife activity. Please remember - our sanctuary is available for your enjoyment!

## Earth Day-Bay Day... Success!

The annual Coastal Bend Bays Foundation Earth Day-Bay Day celebration was a big success. Over 1800 people attended the event, held Saturday, April 20th, at Hazel Bazemore Park.

John Kargor's "Last Chance Forever" presented live raptor demonstrations, the Victoria Zoo displayed and provided educational information about our native animals, and local experts guided people on birding tours and plant walks throughout the Park. In addition many area groups provided free items from plants and trees to composting bins and windsurfing lessons.

Attendees and local dignitaries helped plant a Live Oak tree at the park, a tradition that they hope to continue each year. The weather was warm and sunny and everyone had plenty of fun opportunities to enjoy and learn about nature. **Don't miss next year!**

# The Newsletter of the Coastal Bend Audubon Society

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Non-Profit Org.  
U. S. Postage  
  
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Corpus Christi, TX

*Regular meetings:*  
1st Tuesday of the month at 6:45 pm at the  
Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History



*The Brown Pelican*

## Coastal Bend Audubon Society Board of Directors

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The Coastal Bend Audubon Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of birds and bird habitat and to education in the Coastal Bend. The organization is supported by contributions from local memberships and from the national Audubon Society.

***We are actively seeking new members.***

We can help steer the course of growth and change in our community if we work together towards education. Please contact us at (361) 885-6209 about getting involved!

This newsletter is compiled/written and published monthly. Articles of interest are gathered from various sources and compiled by the editor, volunteers, and/or contributing authors. All contributions and contributions/comments are welcomed.

I would like to become a member of to the National Audubon Society, Coastal Bend Chapter W-13.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

If you are already a member and would like to make a tax deductible contribution, please circle the category you would like your contribution applied to:

1. general fund - to be used as needed
2. education activities
3. sanctuary maintenance

The membership dues schedule is as follows:

Student/Senior	\$15
Introductory/1 year	\$20
2 year	\$30
Basic	\$35
Lifetime Individual	\$1000
Lifetime Dual	\$1500

Your membership entitles you to the National Audubon Magazine, local chapter membership, and other benefits. To join the National Audubon Society, Coastal Bend Chapter, please send this completed form and your check, payable to "National Audubon Society Chapter W-13" to Coastal Bend Audubon Society, P.O. Box 4793, Corpus Christi, TX 78469.