



January/February 2022

Volume 68, Number 1

Eastern Screech Owls by Mike Scully

Over more than three decades living in Bexar County I have rarely encountered Eastern Screech Owls (*Megascops asio*), in contrast to the more often detected Barn, Barred and Great Horned Owls. The San Antonio Audubon checklist does list the Eastern Screech Owl as being similar in occurrence (“uncommon”) to Barn and Great Horned Owls, so perhaps I have been overlooking them. One recent encounter was before dawn along a walking trail in Eisenhower Park. I heard only the call and did not see the owl, but a spattering of white splashes on the pavement below an overhanging branch likely marked a frequent perch.



Eastern Screech Owl from [Wikimedia](#)

The range of the Eastern Screech Owl encompasses most of the eastern two-thirds of the lower 48 states, extending south into Northwest Mexico and north into Canada along the Saint Lawrence River Valley. Within this range, the Eastern Screech Owl occupies a variety of wooded and partially wooded habitats that offer cavities for nesting and perches from which to hunt. In the Texas Hill Country, the range of this species overlaps with that of the closely related Western Screech Owl, but here the western species occupies the higher and drier parts of the wooded drainages favored by both species.

Screech owls typically hunt from a perch low in a tree that offers an unobstructed view of the surroundings. Some genera of owls have the ears asymmetrically placed in the skull to aid in detecting prey; in screech owls the symmetrical placement of the ears suggests vision is the primary method. Typically, prey is caught after a direct flight from a perch and the owl sometimes flushes hidden prey by hovering close above.

These owls are opportunistic hunters; large insects are commonly taken, likewise in the southern parts of their range amphibians and small reptiles are preyed upon. In some locations, minnows, crayfish and tadpoles may be captured in shallow water. In most locations, birds and small mammals comprise the most important food items, although some northern

populations are so dependent on white-footed mice that their numbers cycle in response to those of their prey. Those owls living along migratory flyways and stopovers also prey upon migrant songbirds, but the extent of this predation has declined in recent decades along with the numbers of neotropical migrants.

Eastern Screech Owls are sedentary in nature, with the males defending multiple tree cavities as opposed to a single large territory. Outside of the breeding season males frequently change roosting sites to maintain a presence in the defended cavities. The familiar trill calls advertise the location of a cavity, whereas the quavering whistle calls are used when defending such a cavity against an intruder.

Eastern Screech Owls are subject to some degree of competitive exclusion and predation by Barred and Great Horned owls. Studies have shown that Eastern Screech Owls enjoy their highest nesting success rates in suburban areas, benefitting from a reduction in the number of these and other predators and less competition for prey. In these suburban settings screech owls take a higher proportion of avian prey.

Eastern Screech Owls form long-term pair bonds and occasionally roost in the same cavity outside of the breeding season. Breeding begins in mid-winter. The female chooses from among those tree cavities defended by her mate. An incident on record reports an Eastern Screech Owl succeeded in driving a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers from their partially excavated nest cavity, and yet screech owls themselves are among those native species subject to eviction by European Starlings, who direct their attention toward those cavities in more open settings.

All incubation duties are performed by the female and three egg clutches are the norm in the South, while four eggs are common further north. As is usual among raptors, the eggs typically hatch asynchronously, resulting in distinct size disparities among the young. Siblicide may occur when prey is scarce.

No nesting material is provided by the parents, as the owls accommodate any previous debris present in the cavity. An unusual behavior has been observed among Eastern Screech Owls in Texas; the adults delivered live blind snakes to the nest and these snakes then consumed insects and larvae living amid the nest debris, thus benefitting the resident owls.

Contact Mike Scully: mike.scully@nisd.net

SAAS Monthly Meeting

Thursday, January 6 | 7:00 PM | Zoom

The Land Heritage Institute: One of San Antonio's Best Kept Secrets

Presenter: Patsy Kuentz, SAAS Member

With thousands of years of rich history, the 1,200-acre Land Heritage Institute (LHI) property is



a little-known gem near the southern edge of San Antonio. In this Zoom presentation, Patsy Kuentz will introduce us to that history, how the property became what it is today, and plans for what it could become over time. She will also show us photos of some of the natural and built world there and suggest opportunities for birders to visit and appreciate it.

About Patsy: Although Patsy is a native of San Antonio, she earned her B.S. in Nursing from the University of Hawaii-Manoa Campus and then her M.B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse. Patsy spent much of her career as a regional medical clinic manager in



Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN and then owned and operated a personal historian business for about 12 years. Returning to San Antonio in 2009 in retirement, Patsy and her husband, Alan, became Texas Master Naturalists in 2010 and enjoy volunteering at several natural areas in Bexar County. They have participated in the monthly bird survey at Phil Hardberger Park for over 10 years, and Patsy was instrumental in developing the Wildscape Demonstration Garden there. She and Alan lead a number of bird walks each year in several San

Antonio locations, including the Land Heritage Institute. Having served on the LHI Board representing San Antonio Audubon Society for over eight years, Patsy also completed oral history interviews about four years ago with nine people who helped establish LHI.

Join the Zoom Meeting [Here](#)

Meeting ID: 885 7086 1086

Passcode: 078496

Click [here](#) to find your local number to dial in

SAAS Monthly Meeting

Thursday, February 3 | 7:00 PM | Zoom

Butterflies of Bexar County

Presenter: Zachary Tonzetich, SAAS Vice President



Much like birding, butterfly watching affords practitioners the opportunity to connect to the natural world and learn about the interconnectedness of life on earth. In addition, many of the skills and techniques developed for bird identification can be successfully applied to the study of butterflies. In this presentation, Zachary Tonzetich will discuss some of the basics about how to get started in butterfly watching, describe some identification tips, and recount his personal experiences finding butterflies in Bexar County over the last five years. Central Texas boasts an impressive number of butterfly species encompassing six out of the seven families that make up the superfamily *Papilionoidea* (Butterflies). This presentation will focus on the more common species found in our area, but will also touch on some examples of rarer species that occasionally show up in Bexar County. Resources for learning and identifying butterflies will also be highlighted.

About Zach: Zachary Tonzetich moved to San Antonio, TX in 2010 to begin work as a chemistry professor at UTSA. He became interested in birds shortly thereafter and that interest has grown into a *full-fledged* naturalist hobby. He recorded his first butterfly in 2016 and was fortunate enough to find his 109th species in Bexar County this past November. Some of his favorite local spots for butterfly watching include UTSA's campus and the Salado Creek Greenway north of 1604. When not in the laboratory or out in the field watching wildlife, he enjoys spending time with his wife and three children, whom he has yet to convince to take up the hobby.

Join the Zoom Meeting [Here](#)

Meeting ID: 891 2117 6493

Passcode: 391920

Click [here](#) to find your local number to dial in

SAAS Field Trips

Thursday, December 30, 8:00 AM

Government Canyon State Natural Area

Meet trip leader Zachary Tonzetich (210/232-3670, zachary.tonzetich@gmail.com) at 8 AM in the parking lot near the visitor's center. Attendees are encouraged to purchase Day Passes

ahead of time [here](#). The park is located in Western Bexar County at 12861 Galm Rd. If traveling coming from Loop 1604, exit Shaenfield Rd. and continue West until you see the entrance to the park (Shaenfield will become Galm Rd. as it crosses FM 1560). Bring water and dress appropriately (especially footwear) for rugged trails.

Wednesday January 5, 8:00 AM

Cassin Lake

Contact leader Christian Fernandez (210/415-0843) for meeting location for this walk. We will walk a new section of Greenway trail to check out Cassin Lake.

Saturday, January 8, 8:00 AM

Beginners Bird Walk at Judson Nature Trails

Meet leader Barbara Sykes at the Judson Nature Trails, 246 Viesca Street. From the 5900 block of Broadway, turn west on Ogden Street and drive to the stop sign at Greeley Street. You'll see a sign to Judson Nature Trails. Turn left, go one block and turn right on Viesca, then into parking lot on left. Bring water. Please RSVP to Barbara at jntbirding@gmail.com to let her know you'll be attending.

Sunday, January 9, 8:00 AM

Crescent Bend Nature Park

Meet Sandi Wheeler (wheels5683@gmail.com) in the parking lot of the park. From San Antonio, take IH-10 east to the FM 1518 exit and go north toward Schertz. Look for a brown park sign at Schaefer Road. Turn right and go 3 miles to the park. Entrance on left before Cibolo Creek. Bring water. The park address is 12780 W Schaefer Rd, Cibolo, TX 78108. Participation requirements will be based on CDC guidelines at the time of the field trip.

Saturday, January 22, 8:00 AM

Joshua Springs Park & Preserve

Meet trip leader Zachary Tonzetich (zachary.tonzetich@gmail.com, 210/232-3670) in the parking area near the small body of water at 8:00 AM. The park is located off I-10 near Comfort, TX at 716 FM 289. If traveling north on I-10 West from San Antonio, take Exit 533 and continue on FM 289 until you reach the park (you will cross under I-10). Dress for potential cold weather. Bring water and snacks.

Wednesday, January 26, 8:00 AM

Avenue A in Brackenridge Park

Meet leader Elizabeth Walker (937/478-2811) at the end of Avenue A next to the golf course. Take East Mulberry Ave toward the San Antonio River; Avenue A parallels the river to the east.

Saturday, January 29, 8:00 AM

Stone Oak Park

Meet leaders Dodge and Lorna Engleman (210/415-1038 or 210/215-1867) in the parking lot of the [park](#) at 20395 Stone Oak Parkway. If arriving from the east on Stone Oak Parkway, there is a

turnaround after the entrance to the park, which is only accessible from the eastbound direction. We will hike the paved trails and several areas off the main paths in search of sparrows.

Thursday, February 10, 8:00 AM

Crescent Bend Nature Park

Meet Sandi Wheeler (wheels5683@gmail.com) in the parking lot of the park. From San Antonio, take IH-10 east to the FM 1518 exit and go north toward Schertz. Look for a brown park sign at Schaefer Road. Turn right and go 3 miles to the park. Entrance on left before Cibolo Creek. Bring water. The park address is 12780 W Schaefer Rd, Cibolo, TX 78108. Participation requirements will be based on CDC guidelines at the time of the field trip.

Saturday, February 12, 8:00 AM

Beginners Bird Walk at Judson Nature Trails

Meet leader Barbara Sykes at the Judson Nature Trails, 246 Viesca Street. From the 5900 block of Broadway, turn west on Ogden Street and drive to the stop sign at Greeley Street. You'll see a sign to Judson Nature Trails. Turn left, go one block and turn right on Viesca, then into parking lot on left. Bring water. Please RSVP to Barbara at jntbirding@gmail.com to let her know you'll be attending.

Sunday February 13, 8:00 AM

Hondo Nature Trail

Meet leader Christian Fernandez (210/415-0843) in the parking lot for the nature trail. Go west on Highway 90 toward the city of Hondo. In Hondo, turn right on FM 462 (Avenue M). Go 3 miles to Castro Ave. Turn left and the trailhead is on your right.

Send Us Your Bird Photos and Stories for SAAS Facebook Page

SAAS would love to share your bird photos and stories on our Facebook page. Whether you have been birding in your backyard, around the county, or places beyond, we are eager to hear from you. Share your story on our [Facebook page](#) by sending info and photos to Christine at cbsturnbull@hotmail.com.

Welcome New SAAS Members

Pamela Jaeger
Barbara Jones
Ron Sprouse

Local Birding Locations

MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON CENTER

10750 Pleasanton Road

San Antonio, TX 78221

Visit the [MLAC website](#) or email mlac@audubon.org or call 210/628-1639

SAN ANTONIO BOTANICAL GARDEN

555 Funston, San Antonio, TX 78209

Visit www.sabot.org or call 210/207-3250

GOVERNMENT CANYON

12861 Galm Rd, San Antonio, TX 78254

Visit www.friendsofgc.org or call 210/688-9055

CIBOLO NATURE CENTER

140 City Park Rd., Boerne, TX 78006

Visit www.cibolo.org or call 830/249-4614

JUDSON NATURE TRAILS

246 Viesca Street, San Antonio, TX 78209

WARBLER WOODS BIRD SANCTUARY

19349 Old Wiederstein Rd, Cibolo, TX 78108

Visit www.warblerwoods.org to request permission for birding

Issues in Birding Today

San Antonio Audubon Society has gathered a list of online articles you might be interested in reading concerning birds and birding.

[How Birds Survive the Cold?](#) from The Cornell Lab

[Top 2021 Policy Wins for Birds](#) from Audubon

[Feds Signal Plans to Downlist Whooping Crane](#) from BirdwatchingDaily

[Living Bird Winter 2022](#) Articles from AllAboutBirds

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center will be closed from Friday, December 24th to Sunday, January 2nd. The Center will reopen Thursday, January 6th. Birding tours take place every Sunday (except the fifth Sunday of the month or when the Center is closed for holidays) at 8:00 AM. [REGISTER HERE](#) for bird tours.

Find more events [here](#).

Fall/Winter Seasonal Hours (September 16 - February 14)

- Thursdays by appointment only.
 - Must contact us at least 48 hours prior to your requested date.
 - Email us at MLAC@audubon.org to book a time.
 - We will contact you directly to confirm.
 - Friday through Sunday, 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM.
 - Entrance gate closes 60 minutes before close.
 - Closed on major and/or Federal holidays
-

Great Backyard Bird Count February 18-21



Long-billed Thrasher by Lora Reynolds

Participating in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count (February 18-21) is easy, fun to do alone, or with others, and can be done anywhere you find birds.

Step 1 – Decide where you will watch birds.

Step 2 – Watch birds for **15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days**, February 18-21.

Step 3 – Count all the birds you **see or hear** within your planned time/location and use the best tool for sharing your bird sightings:

- If you are **new to birding**, try using the [Merlin Bird ID app](#).
- If you have **participated** in the count **before**, use the [eBird Mobile app](#) or enter your bird list on the [eBird website](#) (desktop/laptop).
- If you are **participating as a group**, see instructions for [Group Counting](#).

Read more [here](#).

SAAS Membership Form

San Antonio Audubon Society Membership/Renewal Form		
NEW	___	RENEWAL ___
		GIFT ___
Name(s) _____		
Address _____		
City/State/Zip _____		
Phone _____		
Email (required to receive SAAS newsletters and announcements) _____		

Please check type of membership you'd like:		
	___	Individual/\$20 year
	___	Household/\$30 year
If you'd like to donate, please indicate amount:		
	\$ ___	Special Projects Fund
	\$ ___	Judson Nature Trails Fund
	\$ ___	General Operating Fund
Please make check payable to: San Antonio Audubon Society.		
Send check to:	ATTN: Membership San Antonio Audubon Society 5150 Broadway San Antonio, TX 78209-5710	
Payments can also be made at saaudubon.org by clicking Donate or Membership at top of home page.		

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON NEWS

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SAAS Membership

The SAAS newsletter is sent by email only to all members who have provided an email address. You will also receive a membership renewal notice by email. We no longer mail a printed membership directory to everyone, but a PDF copy is available by email from the Membership Chair at saasforbirds@gmail.com.

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