

San Antonio Audubon Society

AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

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Bushtits and Verdins by Mike Scully

Evolution and chance can certainly lead to some odd outcomes. So it is we have two little songbirds native to our area which are the sole New World representatives of their respective Old World families—the Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*) and the Verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*). What these two errant and only distantly related species also share in common is a diminutive body size, sedentary habits and the construction of elaborate nests.



Bushtit by VJAnderson - Own work, [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Bushtits belong to the Family *Aegithalidae* or long-tailed tits, with as many as 13 species collectively occurring across Temperate Eurasia and the Tropical Far East. The Bushtit is typical of the Family in that it is a social, acrobatic species with a long tail and a decidedly short bill.

Verdins belong to the Family *Remizidae* or penduline tits. Four remizid species native to Temperate Eurasia occupy wetland habitats. Our Verdin most closely resembles five species native to arid and semi-arid habitats in Sub-Saharan Africa. Remizids are small in size, have sharply pointed bills and share the habit of holding vegetation adjacent to their perch steady with one foot while foraging. In the cases of both the Bushtit and the Verdin, their nest-building habits are typical of their respective families.



Verdin by Alan D. Wilson - NaturesPicsOnline, [CC BY-SA 2.5](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/)

Bushtits occupy forest edges and brushy habitats across a range extending from British Columbia south along the West Coast to Baja, inland in mountainous areas of the west to Colorado and New Mexico and south at higher elevations to Guatemala. Three separate populations occur in Texas and are found in the Panhandle, Big Bend and the Edwards Plateau. Except for those populations breeding in the Pacific Northwest, Bushtits inhabit fairly dry areas. The tolerance of those Pacific Northwest birds to wetter Temperate situations does raise the question why the species does not occur across more of North America. The Verdin occupies a range extending from the Baja and Southern California, east through Arizona and New Mexico to include most of the Western half of Texas and south to Central Mexico. Everywhere within this range, the Verdin inhabits arid or semi-arid thorn scrub, and paloverde and mesquite woodlands.

Both Bushtits and Verdins feed upon insects and spiders gleaned from foliage. Scale insects are an important food item for these small birds. Some fruits and seeds are consumed in winter; Verdins also take nectar from flowers and hummingbird feeders. Bushtits live in flocks consisting of as many as 40 individuals. At the beginning of the breeding season, individual birds pair off within the group territory and begin the construction of elaborate hanging nests as much as a foot in length. Composed of spider silk and plant fibers, lined with feathers and downy plant material with a small opening near the top, these nests may take a month to complete. Clutches tend to be large, averaging six eggs, and the elaborate nest appears to function in heat retention. Both sexes and occasional additional helpers incubate the eggs. These insulated nests may allow the adult birds additional time off the nest to forage.

Outside of the breeding season, the members of a Bushtit flock gather together to roost, huddling together for warmth. Verdins lead a solitary existence outside of the breeding season, but conserve heat by means of individually constructed roosting nests. At the onset of the breeding season, Verdin males establish territories and breeding pairs together construct a nest, typically placed in a thorny bush and consisting of a woven ball of as many as 2,000 twigs, held together with spider webbing. This nest, as large as seven inches in diameter, is lined with soft plant material and feathers—materials

frequently obtained from roosting nests. Four eggs are the norm, only the female Verdin incubates, and both parents help feed the young.

In both species the young may remain in their protective nests for a full 18 days and are fed by the parents for another two weeks after fledging. Second broods may be reared in the same nest. The populations of both these species may fluctuate widely between years in response to weather events. Unusually cold winter weather can result in widespread adult mortality, while periods of drought can limit the insect prey necessary to raise young.

Mike.Scully@nisd.net

SAAS Monthly Meeting July 7, 7:00 PM | Zoom

San Antonio's Mitchell Lake

Presenter: Gregg Eckhardt, Environmental Scientist



Mitchell Lake Audubon Center Visitor's Center

From pioneering irrigation project to world-class birding site, Mitchell Lake has an important place in San Antonio's unique and colorful water history. Gregg Eckhardt will trace the site's development and management and outline the many exciting projects in the works for Mitchell Lake today. These include downstream constructed wetlands, potential bond program improvements, and regulatory/permitting changes.

About Gregg



Gregg Eckhardt is an environmental scientist with 33 years of experience in environmental modeling and analysis, water resource planning and development, state and federal permitting, and water treatment. As Senior Analyst for the San Antonio Water System, he is involved in the planning, operations, and management of the city's water supply and wastewater.

Join the Zoom Meeting [HERE](#)

Topic: Gregg Eckhardt, Mitchell Lake
Time: July 7, 2022, 7:00 PM Central Time
Meeting ID: 890 2167 1904
Passcode: 779168
Find your local number [here](#) to dial in

SAAS Monthly Meeting August 4, 7:00 PM | Zoom

Birding in New Braunfels: Past and Present

Presenter: Lynn Thompson, SAAS Member



Lynn Thompson will talk about some of the early bird sightings in New Braunfels when the First Founders arrived in 1845; then she will tell us about the Comal County Birders, a group that has existed since 1998; and she will discuss the top eBird hotspots in New Braunfels.

About Lynn

Lynn began birding while living in Florida in the early '90s, moving her way back across the southern states with stops in Mississippi and Louisiana. After earning a Master's Degree in Library Science in 1999 from the University of Southern Mississippi, she worked at the New Braunfels Public Library for over 20 years and retired in 2020. Having lived in Houston in the '80s, her goal was to return to Texas for the great birding, which she can do pretty much full time now. In addition to photographing birds, she enjoys studying the lives of early bird watchers and artists such as Louis Agassiz Fuertes, illustrator of *Bird Life of Texas*.

Join the Zoom Meeting [HERE](#)

Topic: SAAS August 4 Meeting Lynn Thompson

Time: August 4, 7:00 PM Central Time (US and Canada)

Meeting ID: 842 7950 0147

Passcode: 491457

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

SAAS August Field Trips

PLEASE NOTE: The Saturday, June 18th evening field trip to Warbler Woods has been cancelled due to the high heat in the forecast.

At this time, we don't have any field trips planned for July. We will not have field trips to Crescent Bend Nature Park or the Beginners Bird Walk at Judson Nature Trails in July and August. If you're interested in leading a field trip, please contact Christian Fernandez (christian1253@yahoo.com or 210/415-0843).

Sunday, August 21, 8:00 AM

Rodriguez County Park

Meet leader Zachary Tonzetich (zachary.tonzetich@gmail.com or 210/232-3670) in the parking lot for the trailhead, 2123 Rodriguez Ave. The park is located off of Old Hwy 90 (Enrique M. Barrera Pkwy). If coming from the west on US 90, take the exit for Old Hwy 90, which is just past Military Rd. Stay in the left lane to take the overpass to Old Hwy 90. Take a left when you see the Econo Inn Lackland. If you are coming from downtown on US 90, take the Callaghan Rd. exit. Turn right on Callaghan and take a left at the first light. Go 1.2 miles to Rodriguez Ave and take a right. Bring water and bug spray.

Sunday, August 28, 8:00 AM

John James Park

Meet leader Christian Fernandez (christian1253@yahoo.com or 210/415-0843) at 3910 Rittiman Road. We will meet in the parking lot and walk dirt paths along Salado Creek. Bring water and bug spray.

Welcome New Members!

Mary Dierolf
Grave's Online Comic Store
Peggy Haley
Melissa Jackson
Mike and Val Lyons

SAAS-Y Notes

Georgina Schwartz donated \$17.05 to SAAS, which she received from recycling aluminum cans donated by members. (Special thanks to Joan and Lynn Lasswell.) Although she is not going on many birding trips, she is selling Duck Stamps for SAAS, continuing to recycle cans, and giving away free Bexar County Bird Checklists. You can reach her at gbird@att.net.

New Duck Stamps Available!



The 2022-23 Federal Duck Stamp, this year featuring a pair of Redheads, is available for purchase from June 24 through December 15, 2022, or as long as supplies last.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service produces the Stamp, which raises approximately \$40 MILLION in sales each year. These crucial dollars are deposited into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, and they go toward the acquisition or lease of habitat in the National Refuge System from willing sellers. Eighty-five years after the Stamp was established, sales of the Duck Stamp to hunters, bird watchers, outdoor enthusiasts, and collectors have raised more than \$1 BILLION. This amount has gone to conserve SIX MILLION acres of wetland and grassland habitat for birds and other wildlife, providing meaningful opportunities to enjoy our National Wildlife Refuge System.

Duck Stamps still cost only \$25 (the face value) each. **You can buy your Duck Stamps by mail by adding just \$1 extra *per order* for as many stamps as you want to purchase at one time.**

To purchase your stamps, send your order with the following information:

- Your Name
- Your Mailing Address
- Check made payable to San Antonio Audubon Society for the total number of stamps in your order, plus \$1 postage and handling per order.

Mail your information and check to:

Georgina Schwartz
3006 Belvoir Drive
San Antonio, TX 78230


Your Duck Stamp shows that you support Migratory Birds and their Habitats AND it will admit you to any National Wildlife Refuge that charges an entry fee.

EVENTS & PROGRAMS JUNE 2022



Mitchell Lake
Audubon Center

[Register at mitchelllake.audubon.org/events](https://mitchelllake.audubon.org/events)



Storytime Make & Take Craft
Saturday, June 25
Drop-in between 8:00am - 12:00pm
FREE with entry ticket



Sunday Bird Tours & Beginner Bird Walk
Sunday Tours: June 5, 12, 19, and 26
Saturday Walk: June 25
8:00 am
\$10 for Non-members | FREE for Members



2nd Saturday Habitat Work Day
Saturday, June 11
8:00-11:00am
FREE - RSVP Requested

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.

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

[Mitchell Lake Audubon Center](#) is open Tuesday through Thursday, 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM and Friday through Sunday, 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM. 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](#). Visit the MLAC [website](#) or email mlac@audubon.org or call 210/628-1639.

Issues in Birding

We've collected an assortment of current articles that may be of interest to you related to birding and environmental issues.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act bill has gone to the U.S. Senate for a vote. Please let your senators know you want them to vote YES! Read [more](#).

Avian Influenza Outbreak: Should You Take Down Your Bird Feeders? Read [more](#).

Bird Ranges Shifting Northward: Audubon Study. Read [more](#).

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.friendsofsgc.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

San Antonio Audubon Society Leadership

San Antonio Audubon Society

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[Zachary Tonzetich](#), Vice President
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TO JOIN SAAS OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP, CLICK [HERE](#)

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.

Click [here](#) for online membership form and payment.

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.

San Antonio Audubon Society Newsletter

Editor: Lora Reynolds

Newsletter Distribution: Lora Reynolds

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