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The Hornsby Bend Update

The Hornsby Bend Community Environmental Partnership

Sept-Oct 1999

40th Anniversary of Birding Hornsby

Thanksgiving 1999 marks the 40th anniversary of the first visit to "Platt Ponds" by a birder. Since 1959 more than just the name has changed at Hornsby Bend. The treatment facility has gone from being a notorious polluter of the Colorado River to being an EPA award-winning "reuse-recycling" facility which recycles all of Austin's sewage sludge onsite without discharging any water into the river. In 1989, the Water/Wastewater Utility began its composting project at Hornsby which transforms Austin's yard waste and half its sludge into "DilloDirt" [saving the city over \$600,000 in tipping fees alone last year!]. So 1999 marks the 10th anniversary of DilloDirt, too. All of this calls for a celebration and so on Saturday November 20th the Hornsby Bend Partnership, the Austin Water/Wastewater Utility, and the Travis Audubon Society will come together for an afternoon of site tours and an evening of celebration.

The evening will consist of a dinner and a program of storytelling about birding at Hornsby over these four decades beginning at 6pm. Participants will include Victor Emmanuel [who first birded Hornsby in 1961], UT Prof. Robin Doughty [first visit 1971], Rob Fergus [who has just completed his thesis on the history of birding at Hornsby] and others. All are invited to attend and share their stories. If you want to share photos of Hornsby over the years, get them to Rob Fergus [birdchaser@hotmail.com or 478-8486] and they will be posted on the Hornsby Website as part of the celebration. John Ingram's impressive donation of his beautiful bird photographs taken at Hornsby over the years will be unveiled at the celebration [the beginning of a wildlife photo gallery at Hornsby?]. Also, EcoFair's "green-building" birding shelter [see below] at Hornsby will be dedicated on the 20th.

So plan to attend - we need volunteers to lead tours and to help with planning and the evening celebration.

EcoFair Birding Shelter

The Austin non-profit organization, EcoFair, is dedicated to teaching Austinites about ecologically sound ways of living and building and has joined the Hornsby Bend Partnership because it sees Hornsby as a great place to fulfill its mission. Its first project at Hornsby is a "green-building" project with the Sustainable Building Coalition and input from the Travis Audubon Society. Through a series of public workshops this fall EcoFair will construct a birding shelter next to Pond 2. It will be a three-sided light clay structure with a rain harvesting system and native xeriscape planting beds.

Workshop Dates:

October 16 – Rainwater Harvesting System Construction

October 23 – Light Clay Construction

They need volunteers to help on the following dates: September 25, October 2, 9, 30.

<>[If you are interested in participating contact EcoFair Executive Director Cathy Blackwood 445-4624 or cathyblackwood@hotmail.com]

New Education Projects

This school year will be a busy one at Hornsby with two new education projects with East Austin students.

EnviroMentors

The Travis Audubon Society is helping fund a monthly service-learning fieldtrip for the EnviroMentors program, which will bring the 1999 Hornsby summer youth employees back throughout the 1999-2000 school year. These Austin secondary school students constructed the new Black Willow trail and also learned about local ecology and environmental career pathways this past summer. Through funding this project, the Travis Audubon Society will help these students build upon their summer experience and reinforce the connections between school and careers. The project will be coordinated by Sam Hanes [TAS member and UT Geography undergraduate student] who was the job coach for the students at Hornsby during the summer. Sam will bring the students to Hornsby one Saturday a month for half a day of learning and trail work. Other UT students will assist him throughout the year. [more information s.hanes@mail.utexas.edu]**Hornsby Elementary School** The other new education project beginning for the Hornsby Bend Partnership this fall will bring all the 4th graders from the Hornsby Bend Elementary School for visits during 1999-2000. TAS member and Hornsby Bend resident, Stennie Meadours, is coordinating this project, which will develop over the next few years into an educational partnership with the whole school. Austin Master Naturalists, UT EnviroMentor undergraduates, and other interested folks will participate in the project this year. The 4th grade students will do field labs at Hornsby this fall and spring to study Texas ecology, history, and waste recycling. Webpages will be developed for the Hornsby Website to document their visits and allow them to continue learning about Hornsby Bend in their classroom. Stennie is looking for volunteers to help with this project [stenmead@aol.com or 276-7277].

UT-TAMU Planning Workshop at the Center for Environmental Research

On Saturday October 30th faculty and students from the University of Texas, Texas A&M University, and other Austin area higher education institutions will gather at the CER. By the end of the day, they will have drafted a plan for developing a research and education agenda for the CER. This is a follow-up workshop to one held last April, and the University of Texas Provost has asked that representatives from this workshop meet with him in November to report of results. The goal of this effort is to make the CER a center for interdisciplinary environmental research and education on urban sustainability. If you are interested in attending the workshop contact Kevin Anderson [kmattoo@hotmail.com or 443-8593]

Thoughts on Hornsby from Brush Freeman

Brush Freeman has given me permission to share the following message with you. I think that it eloquently expresses what Hornsby means to many in the Austin area and explains why we are willing to invest time and energy into protecting and improving this important community asset.

>From: Brush Freeman

>Subject: Tired of hearing about Hornsby?

>To: TEXBIRDS@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG>

Over the course of a few weeks I have received some E- mails with an implied "concern" from elsewhere that the "Hornsby Bend Waste Water Facility" seemed to be the only place in Austin that folks birded, including one such a post today. The common thread in these few notes seems to be something like, "Don't you have other places in Austin the area that are just as good?" The answer in short is a big NO! There is nothing in Austin proper or even within the nearby suburbs that even comes close to the diversity that Hornsby offers in terms of numbers of species of shorebirds. It is a very sad fact. And even though Hornsby is in decline compared to those glorious days of the 60's, 70's 80's and even very early 90's it is still the best that folks in Austin have to work with. Shorebird habitat is decreasing on a scale that is alarming, ponds are either filled with water, vegetated sludge, and/or an overcoat of dense grass or trees which leaves increasingly little for shorebirds. The drying basins will soon be the last place there where one can study these birds and one wonders how long that will be worth the effort. It is still the best there is Austin. Sure there are a lot of good riparian parks and refuges in Austin and Travis county but nothing that brings together the shorebirds, waders, ducks etc. like Hornsby

Hornsby was once well away from town and traffic but now finds itself slowly being engulfed like many similar locations that were once only on the fringe of urban areas across the U.S. Treatment plants were historically always placed well away from development but development encroaches and entreats city fathers to dismantle them or otherwise to control and/or mechanize them. A similar scenario happens when folks develop land near a long situated airport and then complain about the noise. The impacts of what the enlargement of nearby highway 973 will bring to Hornsby remains to be seen. Austin once had a diversity of birding locations equal to Hornsby, sometimes these could be found to even surpass Hornsby in quality finds.

One such location was the old Williamson Creek treatment ponds. Wonderfully different than Hornsby and sporting birds that seldom appeared on the old "Platt's Ponds". Austin's first Ringed Kingfisher, was from there, Harris Hawks were suspected to even having possibly have bred there, though that never panned out. Green Kingfishers were often found on the nearby creek, Purple Gallinule and even at least once a Pileated Woodpecker. My lifer Sabine's Gull was found there. This wastewater plant shut down in the early '80's and the city land was of course converted to a course...golf of course. The ponds are still there just across the creek

from McKinney Falls State Park and a bit upstream but I know of no one that attempts to bird it anymore. Last time I tried I was turned away as this seems to be a place for golf not birders.

Another place that used to be hot was Dalton Square across the river to the west from Hornsby where old gravel pits could still be viewed from the road and many great finds were made. Now the area seethes with dump trucks and dust and even if one tried to bird the area one could not see over the high embankments of spoil that hides every old and new pit without trespassing.

Were it not for the remnants of "Platt Ponds" now called Hornsby Bend, Austin area birders would be forced to travel to other good birding spots some distance from the city (i.e. Granger Lake, Lk. Alcoa, Bastrop Co., Eagle Lk., Attwater NWR etc) and be limited in their opportunities to do similar birding and see comparable species because of distance and the time required to do so.

San Antonio is in almost the same position if not more so with its Mitchell Lake, Both of these two great old wastewater treatment facilities & birding areas, though now out of their prime, are almost all that urban sprawl has left the birding populous. The upland and creek side city parks just can not replace them for the same degree of diversity.

Should any reader of Texbirds grow tired of hearing of Hornsby Bend and Mitchell Lake, please realize that for the most part these "wetlands" are all that the urban areas of San Antonio and Austin have to work with. Even the public enjoyment of Mitchell Lake has been hampered and curtailed with "schedules" that one must adhere to.

I hope this does not sound too preachy. It is meant solely as an explanation for those who are unaware of the circumstances folks in San Antonio and Austin have to deal with.

>>Best to all,

>Brush Freeman

The September Bird Survey from Stennie Meadours

The Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory

On September 11, 1999, twenty birders gave their eyes, ears, energy and time to the Hornsby Bend monthly bird survey, sponsored by the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory and the Travis Audubon to identify a record (in three months of the count) 100 species in approximately 11 hours (no owling hours). There 8species of ducks, 8 raptor species, 15 shorebird species and 7 warbler species. Misses included Inca Dove, Common Grackle, Ruddy Duck and Owls(we did have Barn Owl feathers).

First my thanks to Travis Audubon, Bob Warneke, Kevin Anderson and others for their support in publicizing this count and to the City of Austin, Water and Wastewater, Hornsby Bend Management, Bill Sellstrom for their cooperation and support. As has been proven on many other counts, the number of species identified is directly related to the number of participants. Thanks to all of you, I had an extra-special birthday(birthday)! Can we top these numbers in October?

Participants for this count included: John Rosford, Audrey Harvey, Rick Harman, Mary T. Parker, Tim Fennel, Jeffery Hanson, Bob Warneke, Brush Freeman, Judi Williamson, Trent Miller, Kevin Kellar, Russ Nelson, Joseph and Zosia Hunt, Ingrid Huskey, Yvonne Kleypas, Jay Costello Andrew and Jennifer Leeper, and Stennie Meadours, compiler.

Eared Grebe -1

Double Crested Cormorant - 1

Great Blue Heron - 2

Great Egret - 2

Snowy Egret - 2

Little Blue Heron - 1

Cattle Egret - 15

Green Heron - 15

Black Crowned Night-Heron - 3

Black Vulture - 3

Turkey Vulture - 6

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck - 5

Wood Duck - 4

Blue-winged Teal - 220

Northern Shoveler - 75

Green Winged Teal - 1

Redhead - 1

Lesser Scaup - 3

Osprey - 2

Northern Harrier - 1

Cooper's Hawk - 1

Red-shouldered Hawk - 3

Swainson's Hawk - 1

Red-tailed Hawk - 5

Crested Caracaras - 1

American Kestrel - 1

American Coot - 4

Semipalmated Plover - 1

Killdeer - 38

Black-necked Stilt - 1

Greater yellowlegs - 1

Lesser Yellowlegs - 1

Solitary Sandpiper - 2

Spotted Sandpiper - 20

Sanderling - 1

Semipalmated Sandpiper - 3

Western Sandpiper - 6

Least Sandpiper - 250

Baird's Sandpiper - 2

Pectoral Sandpiper - 6

Stilt Sandpiper - 2

Buff-breasted Sandpiper - 2

Wilson's Phalarope - 6

Rock Dove - 1000

White-winged Dove - 60

Mourning Dove - 44

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - 1

Common Nighthawk - 1
Chuck-will's-widow - 2
Chimney Swift - 10
Ruby-throated Hummingbird - 1
Belted Kingfisher - 1
Red-bellied Woodpecker - 3
Downy Woodpecker - 1
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher - 1
Olive-sided Flycatcher - 1
Willow Flycatcher - 4
Least Flycatcher - 4
Great Crested Flycatcher - 2
Eastern Kingbird - 2
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - 28
Loggerhead Shrike - 6
White-eyed Vireo - 22
BlueVireo - 2
American Crow - 20
Purple Martin - 30
Tree Swallow - 4
Northern Rough-winged Swallow - 15
Bank Swallow - 2
Cliff Swallow -40
Cave Swallow - 3
Barn Swallow - 100
Carolina Chickadee - 20
Tufted Titmouse - 1
Carolina Wren - 23
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - 6
Eastern Bluebird - 3
Northern Mockingbird - 17
European Starling - 100
Nashville Warbler - 3
Yellow Warbler - 30
Yellow Breasted Chat - 4
Black-throated Green Warbler - 1
Black and white Warbler - 1

Mourning Warbler - 1

Wilsons Warbler - 3

Summer Tanager - 1

Lark Sparrow - 1

Northern Cardinal - 40

Indigo Bunting - 6

Dickcissel - 4

Red-winged Blackbird - 1000+

Yellow-headed Blackbird - 1

Great-tailed Grackle - 300

Orchard Oriole - 4

Baltimore Oriole - 12

House Sparrow -1

To get involved with the work of the Hornsby Bend Partnership, attend any of the events described above or Attend our monthly meeting – the first Wednesday of each month [Sept 1, Oct 6, Nov 3] in the CER at 6pm or contact me... [Kevin M. Anderson](#)

For more info on the Hornsby Bend Partnership contact [Kevin Anderson](#)

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