Charles Mills

THE SNIPE

The Newsletter of the
Audubon Society of Central Arkansas

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Little Rock and Lonoke CBC Results

Dan Scheiman
ASCA Christmas Bird Count Complier

For the Little Rock Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held December 18, 2021, 25 field birders and 8 feeder-watchers (with overlap between the two) braved the rain and cold to tally 16,241 birds of 85 species over a collective 52 hours and 240 miles. I expected from the start that rain and falling temperatures would make for difficult counting conditions and hence fewer birds and species. The last time the species count was so low was 2000 (before I was compiler) when it was also 85. I missed Brown-headed Nuthatch, a first for me. Surprisingly, the number of individuals was on par with last year (16,309) and there are multiple years with more species but even fewer individuals (2000, 2003, 2004, 2010, 2011, 2019 all with <=14,000 individuals). No high counts this year. Notable species with fewer than ten records were 1 Ross's Goose (6th record) and 2 Canvasback (8th).

For the Lonoke CBC held December 19th, 22 birders braved the cold and wind to tally 189,428 birds of 93 species over a collective 50.5 hours and 246 miles. That's down from last year's tally of 228,008 birds, but still a respectable number. It does break the eight-year streak of 100+ species; you have to go back to 1997 for a lower total (92 species). No high counts this year. Notable species with fewer than ten records were 5 Cattle Egrets (9th record) and 1 Osprey (5th).

Every year is different, things change, and that's why we keep counting!

A bright spot for me on both counts was seeing more Rusty Blackbirds in more places than ever before, including a flock at Interstate Park that had way more rusties than grackles. Maybe the wet weather boosted their numbers in the state. I hope it is a good sign for this declining bird. Time and data analysis will tell.

Rio Grande Valley Birding

Lance Runion

Stephanie Sexton and I signed on for a tour of the Texas Rio Grande Valley in early December since the international travel situation was still too precarious given the pandemic. We met up with Sabrewing Nature Tours for a one-week trip stopping at several birding hotspots in the Rio Grande Valley. After our arrival at the Harlingen airport, our group traveled to Oliveira Park in Brownsville to see the parrots that gather in the evening prior to roosting. We had good views of multiple species including Green Parakeets, Red-crowned Parrots, Red-lored Parrots, and White-fronted Parrots.

The following morning we started early and headed to Sabal Palm Sanctuary for our first looks at valley specialties including Green Jay, White-tipped Dove, Long-billed Thrasher, Least Grebe, Black-crested Titmouse, Olive sparrow, and Ringed Kingfisher. Most of our group had very brief looks at a Zone-tailed Hawk fly-by. Next stop was University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley to look for the previously reported Social Flycatcher. Unfortunately, no luck but we did get great views of Great Kiskadee, Green Kingfisher, numerous, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Anhingas, Summer Tanager, and a Yellow-throated Warbler. Later in the afternoon, as we headed toward the coast, we were

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White-tipped Dove | Photo: *Lance Runion*

ASCA Officers

President
Cindy Franklin
meshoppen@hotmail.com

Vice-president
Dan Scheiman
501-280-9024
birddan@comcast.net

Recording Secretary
Barry Haas
501-821-4097
bhaas@sbcglobal.net

Treasurer
Jim Dixon
501-258-1914
treasurer.ascabird@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor
Dottie Boyles
ctboyles@aristotle.net

Board Members

Lynn Christie
christie-j@att.net

Joan Ellison
joan.ellison7@gmail.com

Jane Gulley
501-225-2072
janegulley@comcast.net

D. DeLynn Hearn
501-472-8769
warblingvireo@yahoo.com

Lance Runion
lancerad2000@yahoo.com

John Webb
501-707-7742
emmgee@att.net

Christmas Bird Count Compiler

Dan Scheiman
501-280-9024
birddan@comcast.net

Conservation

Barry Haas
501-821-4097
bhaas@sbcglobal.net

Field Trip Coordinator

Karen Holliday
501-920-3246
ladyhawke1@att.net

Hospitality

Karen Holliday
ladyhawke1@att.net

Webmaster

Jim Dixon
treasurer.ascabird@gmail.com

President's Column

Happy New Year

Today I want to update everyone on the status of the ASCA field trips. Each month after our education session, ASCA conducts a brief business meeting to approve the prior month's minutes, review the Treasurer's report, hear about upcoming speakers, publish upcoming field trips, and address any old or new business that ASCA may need to address.

As all of us are aware, COVID-19 disrupted life as we knew it. In person meetings and our field trips were early casualties of the pandemic. ASCA continues to conduct monthly meetings using Zoom and field trips remain suspended indefinitely. At each business meeting we talk about the current status of the pandemic and try to project forward how COVID will continue to impact life in Arkansas. As much as we humans want this pandemic to be over, we are living on virus time, and the virus is most assuredly not done with us. New Omicron variants have already been identified. It remains to be seen how the new variants will affect us. About all we can say at this point is we should expect additional waves of COVID infections as 2022 progresses.

Monthly education meetings are likely to continue to be held online due to space availability and the age and health status of our board members.

Field trips remain suspended for now. The Board has received a number of inquiries about restarting field trips this year. In any gathering of people, there will be differences of opinion regarding pandemic precautions including mask wearing, social distancing, and vaccination. While all of these actions are now personal choices, in any gathering of 10 people there are likely to be 2-3 people, if not more, who are carrying active virus. Because of how infectious the Omicron virus is, other people on a field trip could very well carry the virus back to family members who are not or cannot be vaccinated, including children under 5 years of age, people who have had a documented allergic reaction, people who are severely immuno-compromised, and people who have multiple chronic health conditions.

ASCA trip leaders can ask people to follow pandemic precautions on a field trip, but we cannot compel people to follow those precautions. There will be some who will not honor the request. Because the COVID virus continues to inflict long term debility on survivors and kills others on a daily basis here in Arkansas, the Board feels strongly that the risk of transmitting this virus to vulnerable members of our community outweighs any social benefit of restarting the field trips at this time. We will continue to assess the status of field trips during our monthly business meeting.

Cindy Franklin, ASCA President

ASCA Membership Renewal

Just a reminder, ASCA membership renewals were due January 1, 2022. Payments can be made via PayPal through the membership page at www.ascabird.org.

Checks can be made out to ASCA and mailed to Jim Dixon, Treasurer, 11805 Birchwood Drive, Little Rock, AR 72211.

Membership Level

Regular Membership – $15.00
Students/Seniors – $10.00
Family – $25.00
Supporting – $35.00
Patron – $50.00

Welcome New Members

Heidi Ashley
Lauren Anderson
Thomas Bourne
Donna Crabill
Tatiana Hendrix
Kim Hillis
Ryan Keiffer
David and Jean Parham
Evelyn Schultz

Save the Date

Mark your calendars for May 14, 2022. **World Migratory Bird Day** (WMBD).

Upcoming Programs

NOTE – All upcoming meetings will be online via Zoom. Visit ar.audubon.org/events to find and register for each meeting. Registration takes the place of a sign-in sheet. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

March 10, 2022 – Impacts of Urbanization on the Mammal and Bird Communities around Little Rock
Keane Sammon and Arianne Prodehl, Hendrix College

For the Central Arkansas Urban Wildlife Project, Hendrix College has partnered with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and the Urban Wildlife Information Network to study wildlife activity in the central Arkansas region. Their research uses data from motion-sensor game cameras to survey various animal species in urban green spaces to investigate how proximity to cities affects wildlife ecology and behavior. They will share their findings on the daily activities of mammals and how their behavior is impacted by urbanization. They will also discuss general trends of bird diversity in the parks located around the Little Rock metro area.

Keane Sammon is a senior Biology major at Hendrix College. His interests include ecology, conservation, marine biology, and ornithology. Following graduation, he plans to attend graduate school to further study conservation biology and ornithology.

Arianne Prodehl is a senior Neuroscience major at Hendrix College. Her main interests include research in ethology and animal cognition, conservation, and wildlife rehabilitation. After graduation, she plans to attend graduate school to further study cognitive ethology.

Both students are researching under the guidance of Dr. Maureen McClung, Associate Professor of Biology at Hendrix.

April 14, 2022 – Rails to Trails: Recreational Conservation
Matt McNair, Division of Arkansas State Parks

Matt will focus on the potential conservation benefits of an extensive rails-to-trails system in Arkansas, with rail trails providing not only a space for human recreation, but serving as corridors for wildlife, birds, and pollinators.

Matt McNair is the Director of the Outdoor Recreation Grants Program (Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism). Along with providing grant assistance and project advice to municipalities and counties in Arkansas, he has served as the Arkansas State Trails Coordinator since 2020. He is a native of Bruno, Arkansas (Marion County), and currently lives in Little Rock, where his wife owns and operates Bella Vita Jewelry. When not serving the citizens of Arkansas in his official capacity, he enjoys gardening, hiking, canoeing, and pretty much anything else to be done in the Arkansas out-of-doors.

May 2022 – No Meeting

Please note: ASCA does not hold a meeting in May. Go birding and enjoy spring migration!

Late RTHU visits LR Feeder

Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Photo: *Michael Linz*

Carol Meyerdirk reported two hummingbirds visiting her West Little Rock feeder this fall and winter. The first was an adult male Ruby-throated Hummingbird (RTHU) which arrived late October. The second came in November, but was not seen enough times to identify. It had a stippled chin.

She said the adult male RTHU was quite the bully, buzzing off the other hummingbird any time it tried to feed. Carol guessed it got tired of being chased and was last seen on December 29, 2021. The male RTHU disappeared the third week of January 2022, but reappeared during the ice/sleet storm in February. Carol suspected it had been feeding elsewhere.

Carol thanked Michael Linz and Patty McLean for stopping by to help identify and take photos of these remarkable creatures.

First Winter Nest Record

A friend of Dan Scheiman's shared photos, taken Jan 21, 2022, of a House Finch nest with two sparsely downy chicks! The nest was in a wreath on his back door. They survived the night's freezing temps, though there were originally three chicks. What's even more amazing is that in late December the pair built a nest and laid eggs in a wreath on the front door, but the eggs were thrown from the nest when wind forcefully blew the door open. The pair very quickly built a second nest and laid eggs, which he first noticed on Jan. 5. He put a lamp under the nest to provide some warmth. Dan thought finding insects would be the bigger challenge for the parents.

Rio Grande Valley

Continued from page 1

surprised to see a small flock of Groove-billed Anis and a lone Couch's Kingbird. We also had nice views of a perched White-tailed Hawk.

The following day, after a stop off to look at shorebirds, we headed to the South Padre Island Convention Centre boardwalk for a chance to see several waders including a brief look at a Least Bittern. Afterwards, we stopped at the Aplomado Falcon viewing area and had decent views of two falcons spending most of their time perched on a communications tower. Later that afternoon, we stopped at the San Benito wetlands to see the previously reported Fork-tailed Flycatcher. We had relatively good, but somewhat distant views of this cooperative bird.

Altamira Oriole | Photo: *Lance Runion*

Next day we stopped at Estero Llano Grande State Park where we viewed many of the valley specialties including Altamira Orioles, Clay-colored Thrushes, and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds. We also got leisurely views of a napping Common Paraque. That afternoon, we made our way to the Valley Nature Center to see the previously reported Golden-Crowned Warbler. We were able to get close views of the bird; actually, so close I was unable to get photographs before the bird disappeared into the tangles! We also saw several Plain Chachalacas before leaving.

We left very early the next morning and headed northwest up the valley to Salineño. This is where we had nice looks at Morelet's Seedeaters and our first views of Mexican Ducks crossing over from south of the border. We also had decent looks at desert specialties including Black-throated Sparrow and Verdin.

Our next-to-last day in the valley we visited Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park and Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center. We searched for, but missed out on the previously reported Rose-throated Becard and Hook-billed Kites, likely grounded by the windy conditions. So we headed to Quinta Mazatlan WBC to look for the female, Crimson-collared Grosbeak. After searching for hours, the bird finally cooperated with very brief looks just as we were contemplating leaving for the day.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird | Photo: *Lance Runion*

On our final day, we stopped off at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge for another shot at Hook-billed Kite, however it was not to be. After lunch, we began our trek back towards Harlingen and stopped off at a local mall parking lot known to be a roosting spot for Green Parakeets. We didn't have to wait long before the parakeets began gathering and roosting in the multiple palm trees in the area.

Clay-colored Thrush | Photo: *Lance Runion*

It was a most enjoyable trip given the limitations we've been under for the past two years and it was nice to get as close to the tropics as we could and still remain in the U.S.

Chasing ABA Rarities

Patty McLean

One of the most exciting aspects of birding is seeing and spending time with a rare bird you've never seen before, particularly if it's in your home state or somewhat nearby. This is true for novice as well as experienced birders. For instance, remember the first time you went to see those amazing Trumpeter Swans that now call Arkansas their winter home? Fortunately, they're very cooperative, giving avid birders and even their children or companions wonderful looks and memorable sounds that are both appealing and memorable.

Every encounter with a rarity is different no matter how long you've been birding, how many birds you've seen or how many places you've been. This is especially true for me and Michael Linz, and our motto has become "amazing birds take us to amazing places," meaning it's not just about the birds but also the people we meet and the unusual places we go that makes the journey worth-while.

Reading the American Birding Association's (ABA) RARE BIRD ALERT of several rarities in Texas and New Mexico put Michael and I in Roadrunner Mode. These rare birds are Codes 3, 4 and 5, indicating there are a limited number of records of them in the United States. We put a travel plan together and off we went in early December so we could return in time to meet our Christmas Bird Count obligations.

The first target bird for our journey was a BLUE MOCKINGBIRD which was being seen along the eastern ridge of Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. Had it not been for this single bird, I doubt I would have ever visited this intriguing part of New Mexico. The Blue Mockingbird is a skulky, uncooperative large mimid that is deep blue in color with a black mask and red eye, a disguise that makes it difficult to find in the thick tangles and underbrush it prefers. A native to Mexico, in winter this ABA Code 5 bird has sporadically shown up in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. We were happy to get a few fleeting, obscured glimpses of this interesting rarity.

After enjoying our time in New Mexico, we headed to the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas to look for a few more U.S. rarities, two of which are skulkers and required a different kind of search with help from other birders. That's the grand thing about birders. They're generally so willing to share their sightings and specifics about the location with complete strangers. While there is a competitive aspect to birding at this level, most birders are wanting to share their excitement with others, particularly those who have traveled far distances to see a U.S. rarity which is perhaps the one and only time you may see the species in your lifetime. It's a real gift.

Our first Texas rarity we looked for was a female CRIMSON-COLLARED GROSBEAK that was being seen at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center, a charming sanctuary in McAllen. It had been years since I last saw one and would be Michael's first sighting of this ABA Code 4 rarity from Mexico, and within minutes of joining a group that had been waiting patiently all afternoon, it flew into the amphitheater feeding area, giving all some great looks. This female's black hood and dark green plumage made it difficult to see her in the deep thick foliage, and we quickly learned that if something flies in that looks like a blackbird, check it out. Using this practical technique, we were able to pay it forward and help several other birding groups relocate it, giving all a new bird to add to their life list.

Bat Falcon | Photo: *Michael Linz*

The next morning, a Saturday, we headed to Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park to look for a HOOK-BILLED KITE, an ABA Code 3 rarity from Mexico that periodically shows up along the Rio Grande River. To see this bird, it pays off to arrive early morning and go straight to the Hawk Tower. We happily joined a Volunteer Bird Guide who gave us some top-notch hints at identifying distant hawks in flight. It wasn't too long before another bird guide called out, "Hook-billed Kite!" It was flying in the distance, showing its wide and long tail and large bill. As the morning went on, we had a total of three different hook-bills flying beyond the tower, one close enough for Michael to snap a documentary photo.

Happy with our sightings at Bentsen, we headed to the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco where we joined

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ABA Rarities

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several strangers in a diligent search under the dark foliage and understory of this lush native shade garden. Our target was a GOLDEN-CROWNED WARBLER, an ABA Code 5 rarity from Central and South America. Fortunately, the bird occasionally chipped as it worked its way through the dense foliage, so we followed this distinct sound and practically had to lay on the ground to see it hopping around in the underbrush. Funnily enough, when we got back to the Alamo Inn B&B where we stayed, we talked to a woman who showed us her photo of the Golden-crowned Warbler that landed at her feet at a water feature in the garden. This was moments before the Center closed for the day and she was sure happy to get great up-close pictures of this life bird.

Golden-crowned Warbler | Photo: *Michael Linz*

Our last evening in the area, we read a report that a BAT FALCON was seen 6 days earlier at Santa Ana NWR. The individual had posted her photo on iNaturalist asking what it was, and once birders saw this, the report went out to the birding community. So we got up early the next morning and went exploring at Santa Ana. Mostly what we found were other birders looking for the same but with no luck from any of us, so we headed home. It was several days later when a follow-up alert reported the Bat Falcon had been refound at Santa Ana. This is a bird from Central and South America, but with Christmas approaching, we decided if it was still being reported afterwards, we'd head back to look for it then. So on December 26 we headed back to the Rio Grande Valley. In addition to the falcon, a SOCIAL FLYCATCHER was being reported in the Brownsville area. This species is native to Central and South America, and we headed there first. It was difficult to locate except when vocalizing because of all the foliage blocking the view of the habitat it prefers and because it seems to stay busy changing locations throughout the day. Avid birders were connected through WhatsApp, an exceptional real-time way to keep track of rarities. The state eBird coordinator had set this up to help locals as well as visitors find rarities and get the word out to others. We signed on and were rewarded when the bird showed up within 30 minutes of us arriving, although it took an hour or so after that before it posed in the open for Michael to get a good photo showing the distinct field marks of this ABA Code 5 rarity.

Social Flycatcher | Photo: *Michael Linz*

We still had daylight, and with the ABA Code 5 BAT FALCON confirmed as the first official record for the United States, we headed straight to Santa Ana NWR, where we were rewarded with seeing the falcon fly over the treetops like a large martin. As we watched from the Hawk Tower, we received a WhatsApp notice that the bird had landed on the telephone pole across the entrance from the NWR. This location has turned out to be a favored perch just prior to its evening and early morning feedings. We went there quickly and got several photos before it got too dark and then headed back to the Alamo Inn B&B. We decided to go again the next evening and try for more photos, so we spent the day visiting some of the other nearby hotspots. When we arrived back at Santa Ana late afternoon, there was already a large gathering of birders and paparazzi waiting for the Bat Falcon to land on its telephone pole. Soon enough, it flew along the distant tree line and then onto the telephone pole. Lots of whoops and cheers ... and cameras firing off. Then as quickly as it arrived, it zoomed off the pole toward its evening feeding grounds.

During our journey, we also explored major birding hotspots and found other Texas specialties. We visited places like the National Butterfly Center and Estero Llano Grande State Park -- as well as Padre Island, Mustang Island, and Port Aransas on our way home. In addition to finding the more common Great Kiskadee, Least Grebe, Harris's and Gray Hawk, White-tipped

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ABA Rarities

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Dove, Clay-colored Thrush, Altamira Oriole, Plain Chachalaca, Green Jay, Long-billed and Curve-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, Ringed and Green Kingfisher, and White-tailed Kite, we also found a resting COMMON PAURAQUE, a small group of WHOOPING CRANES and a perched APLOMADO FALCON along the highway.

Aplomado Falcon | Photo: *Michael Linz*

Although tiring, we enjoyed the adventure, never knowing who or what we might encounter when we pulled up to a hot spot. For instance, during our visit to the Blue Mockingbird, we ran into a couple who we'd met earlier in the year during our stay in Ramsey Canyon in Arizona. The day after we left, two friends showed up to look for the mockingbird and, having seen our eBird report, texted us for tips. One friend was from Georgia, the other was Will Britton from Arkansas. They didn't know each other but ended up connecting and relocated the bird which had moved to a different but nearby area. While in Texas, we made numerous new friends and it was a special surprise to see the face of an old birding friend from Georgia who joined us in looking for the Golden-crowned Warbler.

Several other Arkansas birders have successfully made this trip to see the Bat Falcon, Social Flycatcher and Blue Mockingbird including Kenny and LaDonna Nichols. In fact, they were our spark and have recently been to Maine to see a rather stellar rarity. Will we go? Stay tuned.

To learn more about ABA rarities or to see what's showing up around the country, sign up for the eBird ABA Rare Bird Alert at https://ebird.org/alert or visit https://aba.org/rba.

BirdAR Birdathon

Dan Scheiman
Birdathon Coordinator

Registration is now open for Audubon Delta's BirdAR Birdathon. Birdathons all over the country engage thousands of birders in raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for bird conservation. The BirdAR Birdathon is a competitive search for birds plus a fun way to raise money for Audubon Delta's bird conservation and environmental education work in Arkansas.

Like last year, two team categories are available to provide everyone the opportunity to participate in a way that is safe and comfortable. Group Birdathon teams consist of two to five participants who will bird together anywhere in the state ($250 fundraising minimum). Backyard Birdathon teams are an individual or household who bird from the comfort of their home ($100 minimum). All teams have a full 24 hours on the date of your choosing between Monday May 9 and Sunday May 22. BirdCast (https://birdcast.info) can help you pick a great day for migration. On Thursday June 2, all teams are invited to join in for an evening virtual Bird Bash where teams will share experiences and we'll announce prizes for Most Species (Group), Most Species (Backyard), and Most Money Raised. In addition, team members will receive a t-shirt, sticker, and car door magnet letting onlookers know you are a volunteer birder (also handy for CBCs, etc.)

Last year's Birdathon was a success, despite the coronavirus, thanks to 10 teams that together tallied 212 species and raised over $10,500!

Registration forms can be found at http://ar.audubon.org/bird-ar. The dead-line is April 15. The sooner you register your team the sooner Audubon Arkansas will create your team's profile page to make fundraising easier, e.g. friends and family anywhere in the world can donate online.

I'm looking forward to competing with you for a good cause.

Audubon Society of Central Arkansas
P. O. Box 6213
Sherwood, AR 72124

Forwarding and return postage guaranteed.
Return service requested.

A Eurasian Tree Sparrow visits a feeder in Mississippi Co., a first state record for Arkansas.
Photo: *Dan Scheiman*

Audubon Society of Central Arkansas

Chapter Only Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

E-mail address _____

ASCA Dues Proration for New Members

Membership Level	Jan-Mar 100%	Apr-Jun 75%	Jul-Sep 50%	Oct-Dec* 100%
__Student/Senior	$10	$ 7.50	$ 5.00	$10
__Regular	$15	$11.25	$ 7.50	$15
__Family	$25	$18.75	$12.50	$25
__Supporting	$35			
__Patron	$50			

*New memberships paid in the last quarter (Oct-Dec), will include full membership for the following calendar year.

All membership renewals are due January 1 of each calendar year and can be paid online via credit card at www.ascabird.org or mail a check to the address below.

Make check payable to ASCA and mail to: Jim Dixon, Treasurer, 11805 Birchwood Drive, Little Rock, AR 72211. Please note that "Chapter Only Members" will not receive *Audubon* magazine. To receive *Audubon* magazine, you will need to join the National Audubon Society (NAS).

Address changes should be sent to the following: If Chapter Only Member, notify both Leon Brockinton, c/o Brockinton Company, LLC at P.O. Box 6213, Sherwood, AR 72124, and Jim Dixon, Treasurer, 11805 Birchwood Dr., Little Rock, AR 72211. If NAS member, notify both Brockinton Company and NAS at P.O. Box 51001, Boulder, CO 80322-1001.

THE SNIPE is published quarterly by the Audubon Society of Central Arkansas. Our mission is to encourage programs and activities supporting all things natural, wild, and free, especially birds, bird habitat stability and improvement, as well as to promote fellowship among members, educate and inspire the public, and champion the highest standards of ethical outdoor conduct.

Reporting a Banded Bird

To report a bird with a Federal Band or Color Marker you can visit the U.S. Geological Survey website: www.reportband.gov/.

Find an Injured Bird?

For a listing of an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission authorized Migratory Bird Rehabilitator in your area, visit their website: http://www.agfc.com/species/Documents/migratorybird_rehablist.pdf.