

through the biKNOXulars

Newsletter of the Knoxville Chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society

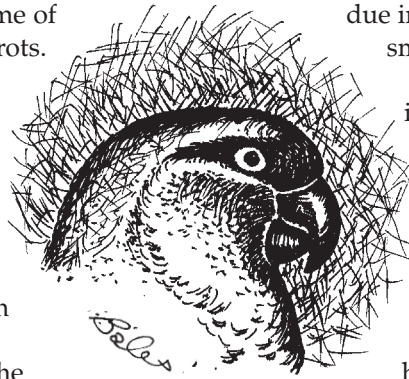
Zoo's bird curator, Mark Armstrong, to speak on Mexico's Thick-billed Parrot

The November 6 meeting of the Knoxville chapter of Tennessee Ornithological society will feature a program by Mark Armstrong, Bird Curator at the Knoxville Zoo. Mark will share some of what he knows about Thick-billed Parrots.

Mark graduated from Western Kentucky University and did some graduate work at Virginia Tech. He started at the Knoxville Zoo in 1979 as a hoofstock keeper and eventually moved to the bird department. After several years he was made Bird Curator and has been involved in various avian management programs at zoos.

Thick-billed Parrots are native to the pine forests in the mountains of central

Mexico. Known for wandering, they have occasionally been found in the mountains of Arizona and New Mexico. Thick-bills are becoming increasingly rare, due in part to habitat loss, disease and smuggling.



Recently, land conservation initiatives by the Nature Conservancy and a Mexican land cooperative have secured a breeding area for a large population of the birds.

Please join us Wednesday, November 6. Meeting starts at 7:30 p.m., but many folks show up at 7 to socialize. Light refreshments will be served.

- Charlie Muise, program coordinator

Townsend, TN • lat 35 deg, 38'23" long 83 deg, 41'22"

Mark your calendar: Local November activities

Sunday, November 10, 2 PM

Kingston Steam Plant. See page 1.

Saturday, November 16, 8 AM

UT Plant Sciences Farm. See page 2.

Saturday, November 16, 9 AM - 5 PM

Nature Photography Seminar. See page 2.

Saturday, November 23, 8 AM

Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge, Knox County.

See page 2.

Sunday, November 10, 2 PM

Kingston Steam Plant.

Leader: Harold Howell (865) 828-6302, e-mail: howellh2@bellsouth.net

Leave at 2:00 p.m. from the Stokley building on Cedar Bluff. The purpose of this trip is to view the migrating ducks, shorebirds and terns on the ponds.

We will also search the fields for sparrows and check on the Brown-headed Nuthatches in the pines near the entrance.

(Continued on page 2)

November Field Trips & Class - Let's go birding!

(Continued from page 1)

Saturday, November 16, 8 AM

UT Plant Sciences Farm.

Leader: Roger Tankersley, (865) 219-9287

Meet at the UT Vet School parking lot. The target birds at Plant Sciences Farm will be American Pipits, Rusty Blackbirds, several species of ducks and possibly Horned Larks. We will also be looking for migrating sparrows. You may want to bring something to drink. We should finish by noon.

Saturday, November 16, 9 AM - 5 PM

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY SEMINAR

A wildlife photography seminar will be held in Knoxville on Saturday, November 16, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the Pellissippi State College campus. It will be presented by Bill Silliker, Jr., variously known in the trade as the Mooseman and the Camera Hunter. The seminar is sponsored by Southern Appalachian Nature Photographers. The seminar is only \$49, which is very low for an event of this type. This seminar should be of interest to any TOS member interested in photographing birds or other animals. There won't be much on the basics of cameras, but there will be sections on equipment tips, metering methods, composition and techniques on approach to wildlife.

Here is a link where you can get additional information and sign up for the seminar: <http://www.sanp.net/> or go to Knox area Thompson Photo Stores or Fleetwood Photo stores. You must be registered by November 9 to receive lunch.

Saturday, November 23, 8 AM

Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge, Knox County.

Leader: David Trently, dtrently@utk.edu; 974-8664 w; 531-1473 h) Leave at 8:00 a.m. from the Comcast parking lot (formerly the K-Mart parking lot) on US Highway 11E. Take the first exit from I-40 east of the junction of I-40 and I-640, turn left on US 11E and the lot is on the right at the top of the hill just before the construction for the Holston River bridge. There is also a Dollar General store in the complex.

Seven Islands is Knox County's newest wildlife refuge, and it needs a lot of serious birding to determine which species use it.



Old Migrants Never Die

Don't throw away your old Migrant issues!!! If you have any unwanted issues of The Migrant, the journal of the Tennessee Ornithological Society, please bring them to the November, or any other, KTOS meeting. We have had requests for back issues, and some of these are in very short supply or we have none of them available at all.

A few trips out there this summer have brought the species list up over 60, and, with at least one field trip there each month, it should top 100 by the end of the year. Come on out and add to that list while seeing a new place for your birding trips.

Some of the birds we can hope for: Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, N Bobwhite, should be full of Indigo Buntings and American Goldfinches...who knows what migrants (Bobolinks?)?!

We'll spend 2-3 hours birding here, mostly along a paved road, walking less than two miles. Bring something to drink.

If you have any questions you may call me.

- Best regards, Harold Howell, field trip coordinator

Sooty Tern

A rare **Sooty Tern** was found dead in a Blount County pasture in September by Steve Adair. For a complete report on the Sooty Tern's history in Tennessee, check Marcia Davis' *News-Sentinel* column dated Sunday, October 13.

Planning Meeting

There will be a business meeting, to which ALL members are invited,

Wednesday, November 6, 6 PM

in room 128 Ellington Plant Sciences Bldg. We have plenty of items to discuss, including financial issues, the Spring TOS Meeting (May 2-4), Christmas Bird Counts, current results of the questionnaire. Bring your dinner!

Bob Steffy's 1,000th bird!

Congratulations to Bob Steffy for finding the 1,000th bird for his life list. After recently returning from a trip to Alaska, Bob realized his list was stuck at 999, a most precarious place to be. Luckily, a **Wilson's Phalarope** turned up at Steve Adair's farm in Blount County. The bird pushed Bob's list to 1,000!

So you think you can identify every bird? *by David Trently*

Here's a report of an interesting lesson to hawk ID experts. Over the years, birders begin to feel comfortable with certain sets of field marks and decide they can positively identify birds based on their experience. Certainly this is usually correct, but this study shows that it may not always be so! It also shows the value of learning to ID a bird in the wild when the definite identification is known. Wish we all had such an opportunity...

The following article is taken directly from a web page by Jim Shea, <http://www.ggro.org/> who has been a volunteer with the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory in San Francisco since 1996.

Accipiter ID study

Beginning in 1995, the hawkwatch teams have participated in an interesting study that provides a quantitative measurement of the statistical reliability of the age, sex and species identification of one of the more difficult judgments that the observers must make.

In overall appearance, the Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) and the Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) are remarkably similar.

The Cooper's Hawk, which is somewhat larger than a pigeon, is larger than the Sharp-shinned Hawk, which is somewhat larger than a jay. However, female hawks are larger than the males. In the western populations, the male Cooper's partially overlap in size with the female sharpies. Moreover, accurate judgments in size are difficult to make in the field.

Consequently, other factors are generally used to make a positive identification. The differences most easily observed in the field are:

- **Flight characteristics:** The most commonly observed flight behavior is a repeated flap-flap-glide for both species. The wingbeat of the sharpie is very quick compared to the Coop.

- **Head position:** The head of the Cooper's hawk extends well beyond the line connecting the leading edge of the wings (carpal line), while the sharpie's head does not.

- **End-of-the-tail:** The tail feathers of the sharpie are very-nearly all the same length, giving it a squared-off appearance, or, if fanned, the corners are right angles. The outer tail feathers of the Cooper's hawk are shorter than the inner tail feathers, giving the tail a rounded appearance; if fanned, the corners appear greater than 90-degrees.

One can be fooled by the viewing angles, missing tail feathers, wing positions, and general inexperience, so as many factors as possible should be evaluated.

The accipiter ID study works as follows. The process begins when the banding blind nearest to Hawk Hill captures an accipiter. Shortly before releasing the bird, the banders radio the Hawkwatch leader that a release is about to occur. The leader gathers all hawkwatchers who can be spared to watch the release point. The banders radio a countdown for the release time.

The hawkwatchers watch the released bird for as long as is practical, and then fill out a form documenting their judgments as to the species, sex and age, and what factors they used to reach this judgment; "unidentified" is also an acceptable ID. The hawkwatchers don't have to identify themselves on the form. During the first year for the study, the results were not released until the end of the year. In successive years, after the forms are collected, the banders radio the details on the bird that was released.

The first year's results showed that male sharpies and female coops were correctly identified in a high percentage of the time. However, identification of female sharpies and male coops were incorrect nearly fifty percent of the time. In the second year, identification reliability improved in all categories, with the female sharpies and male coops being correctly identified most of the time, but the number of "unidentified accipiters" increased greatly.

Clearly, learning the results of the first year of the study made the hawkwatchers much more careful with the certainty of their judgments.

For additional information, go to <http://home.attbi.com/~jh1mb1shea/hawkwatch/hawks.html>



Presidential Perch

Participation in the KTOS questionnaire in the October newsletter was quite good! I'm still hoping to get a few more turned in before we do some serious reviewing of our chapter. Mail them to me or bring them to the November meeting. One thing to consider now - there is a lot of interest in moving the start time of our meetings up to 7:00 p.m.

We're going to be needing volunteers to help with the TOS Spring Meeting. Feel free to let me know you'd like to help in some way. More on this in the next newsletter.

If you go on a trip at Thanksgiving and do some birding, think about writing a report and getting it in the newsletter. We'd love to hear your stories.

- David Trently, President KTOS

Memories of Tennessee in Alaska *by Marie Oakes and Jerry Hadder*

Like many other visitors to Alaska, we were touring Denali National Park on a seventy-five mile shuttle bus trip.

During this crisp autumn day, with the 20,320 foot snow-covered peak of Mt. McKinley often in clear view, we saw brown bears, moose, caribou and Dall sheep. We came upon strolling groups of Willow and Rock Ptarmigans and were able to identify individuals by the presence or absence of reddish markings above their eyes.

On the return leg of the trip, we disembarked to hike through a boreal forest to the aptly named Horseshoe Lake. As we meandered down the winding trail, we heard tantalizing chit-chit, chit-chits in the distance. Suddenly, we saw one, then dozens of the chit-chiters in the tops of spruce trees, busily extracting cone seeds.

With crossed bill tips and broad white wing bars, the males were bright pink and the females olive-gray with a yellowish tinge.

These White-winged Crossbills were on our most-wanted list for this trip. Among the most numerous birds of Alaskan forests, we never tired of seeing these beautiful creatures during our vacation. As we watched the sociable White-winged Crossbills, we fondly recalled a spring morning in Tennessee when we enjoyed watching their close relatives—Red Crossbills—doing acrobatics on the cones of spruce trees on Mt. LeConte.

Seeing Red Crossbills is one of the special pleasures that alert Tennessee birders can dependably enjoy by visiting Newfound Gap, Indian Gap and other high elevations in the Great Smoky Mountains.



*White-winged Crossbills:
one Marie and Jerry's most-
wanted Alaskan birds.*

Phone Numbers to Remember - *Courtesy of Ron Hoff*

U.T. Plant Sciences Farm - Bobby Mckee: (865) 573-3856

Kyker Bottoms - Bill Smith, manager: (865) 856-8691

Dead Birds for Study - David Buehler: (865) 974-8845

UT is looking for certain bird species to prepare study skins. Birds killed by flying into windows or otherwise should be placed in a zip-lock freezer bag with a note about when and where the bird was found, and include your name and phone number. Carcasses should be kept on ice or frozen to reduce deterioration. Drop the birds off at 274 Ellington Plant Sciences on the Ag Campus. David A. Buehler, Associate Professor- Wildlife Science. UT

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