

From time to time Travis Audubon receives requests from individuals, landowners, and businesses for assistance in learning about birds on their property. Someone may have seen a bird they've never seen before or don't recognize. Other folks may just want to share the beauty of their property with other like minded individuals and may be interested in conserving their property for future generations. Others may want to reduce taxes by applying for wildlife exemptions or to generate revenue to sustain their property or provide income. Whatever their motivation, these folks' goals are consistent with what we do at TAS, which is to promote the enjoyment, understanding, and conservation of native birds and their habitats. This is a story of how members of the TAS Field Trip Committee (FTC) responded to two requests this summer.

.....Camp Wood property write up

After leaving the Camp Wood area, the "survey team" headed to Bandera, the Cowboy Capital of the World", to visit the Twin Elm Guest Ranch (TEPhoto1) at the request of the manager, Kathlyn Cunningham. A visitor to the Ranch suggested that Kathlyn should have a "Bird Watching Weekend". Kathlyn contacted Jeff Patterson to invite TAS folks to the Ranch.

Twin Elms is located a couple of miles west of Bandera along the Medina River (TEPhoto2). Judith even stayed at the ranch when she was a child! The busy season for the ranch is the summertime when visitors come from all over the world to ride horses and experience ranch life. There are several cabins at the Ranch (I stayed in the Lone Ranger room) along with places for RVs and trailers, and an outdoor community gathering spot. The main office includes a nice gift shop with a kitchen and dining room.

We met Kathlyn as soon as we arrived. After we got settled in our cabins, Kathlyn took us on walking tour of the undeveloped portions of the property consisting of some grassy-shrubby fields and riparian woodlands along a dry creek bed that's a tributary to the Medina River. Kathlyn also invited us to the final rodeo of the season that was happening that night on the Ranch. Many of the Ranch's visitors would either be attending or participating in the event. Our spirits were willing but our flesh was weak so we didn't attend. We had gotten up very early that day and were pretty tired after the several hour drive from Camp Wood to Bandera. So, we retired early (hey it's a ranch and early gets the worm and all that!). We were excited about getting an early start the next day. We birded for about an hour and a half and returned to the dining room where Kathlyn had cooked up a ranch breakfast consisting of the best biscuits and gravy I've had in a long time as well as scrambled eggs, bacon and coffee (TEPhoto3). After breakfast she joined us for a hike along the Medina River (TEPhoto4).

We ended up seeing 28 species in a little over 3 hours. Highlights included Yellow-throated Vireo, house wren (an early migrant that Lee correctly identified by song), a female Black-capped Vireo seen by Deb, Eastern Bluebird, and Vermilion Flycatcher.

We talked more with Kathlyn about promoting birding on the property. She said she was interested in increasing visitation to the ranch outside of peak summer visitation. We agreed with Jeff Whitlock that starting off with a bird festival would be a huge undertaking. So we suggested that she get her feet wet by promoting the Ranch as a birding destination. The cabins, horses, and dining area would provide for a birding experience of a different kind. And, the property is located along the very scenic Medina River so fishing and tubing can provide other recreational alternatives for the entire family just outside of Bandera. We also discussed the possibility of future TAS trips to this very exciting destination. In fact, Judith talked about arranging for a birding by horseback trip (TEPhoto5) Look for future trips to this area.



TE Photo 1 – Dennis Palafox birding Bandera style!



TE Photo 2 - Twin Elms is located along the scenic Medina River.



TE Photo 3 – Judith, Deb and Lee enjoy a ranch style breakfast.



TE Photo 4 – Kathlyn Cunningham, Twin Elm Manager, shows us some highlights of the Ranch.



TE Photo5 – Birding at Twin Elm reminds Judith of her days visiting the ranch as a child.