

Seven Falls Ranch Birding Activities for 2009

The Seven Falls Ranch had a January 2009 birding meeting with property owners. The purpose of the meeting was to expand the birding activities at Seven Falls Ranch. The following is the information, notes and surveys of the 2009 birding activities.

Starting Information:

Feeders:

Droll Yankees Bird Feeders (20 inch Model B-7F)

At HEB – Best - Hummingbird feeders made in Poteet Texas

Perky-Pet Hummingbird feeders

Thistle Sack Finch feeder

Seed:

A new metal trash can with a tight fitting lid is best for storing bird seed. The trash can needs to be stored in a dry garage. This method prevents rodents. When filling up a feeder from the seed bag, be careful to cleanup any spilt seeds.

The most common type of seed offered at feeders in North America is black-oil sunflower seed. This small sunflower seed is high in energy, has a high percentage of meat and is a very nutritious source of high quality protein. It has thin shells, making it the preferred food item for a wide variety of birds. Black-oil sunflower is among the favorite feeder foods of cardinals, chickadees, titmice, house finches, goldfinches, pine siskins, and sparrows. Scrub Jay and woodpeckers even consume these seeds at feeders on occasion.

Striped sunflower seeds are larger and thicker-shelled than black-oil sunflower. Frequently found in seed mixes, striped sunflower is a food item for large-billed birds capable of cracking the shells.

Often called "thistle" seed, nyjer (niger) is not related to North American thistle plants. This imported seed attracts Lesser Goldfinches and other finches. This very small seed needs a special thistle sack. Finches can easily cling to the sack and pluck seeds from the specially designed opening in the sack fabric. The seed is sterile.

A small, round grain, millet is commonly found in seed mixes. Millet is a favored food of many smaller, ground foraging birds. A handful of millet sprinkled on the ground will keep your juncos and sparrows happy. However, house finches will spill enough seed from your feeder to keep the ground birds happy also.

Feeding Hummingbirds:

The best commercial hummingbird feeders are sturdy, easy to clean and hang, and with a minimum number of parts that can get lost or broken. Glass is long-lasting and can be sterilized easily, but it is heavier and can shatter when dropped. Buy a bottle brush that will fit inside the neck of the bottle and an old tooth brush for cleaning. Only fill a one quart size feeder half full. Change every two to three days. Add more sugar water and feeders when you start to have more hummingbirds. Sugar water is 4 parts water to one part sugar. Do not use red dye. You can make up the sugar water ahead of time and put it in the refrigerator, it will keep for a week. Tap or well water is preferred. Do not use distilled water as it takes out too many naturally occurring minerals. Water softeners are to be avoided. They add too many minerals and salts to the water.

Water:

Birdbaths sold in garden shops make a nice lawn ornament but many are often too deep. Look for a saucer-type birdbath. You can use anything that is shallow. Put a bath at ground level. Birdbaths are generally two or three feet of the ground.

Keep the water level at 1/2 to 1 inch deep at the edges, sloping to a maximum of 2 inches deep in the middle of the bath.

If the bath is on the ground, arrange a few branches or stones in the water so that birds can stand on them and drink without getting wet (this is particularly important in winter).

Place your birdbath in the shade, under a tree. The shade keeps the water from evaporating quickly and keeps it fresher. Birds wet from bathing don't fly well, so they're more vulnerable to predators. Shrubbery nearby gives them a safe place to hide while they preen and dry off.

One of the best ways to make your birdbath even more attractive is to provide dripping water. Many birds find the sight and sound of moving water irresistible. You can buy a commercial dripper or sprayer. Or make your own by recycling an old bucket or plastic container by punching a tiny hole in the bottom, filling it with water, and hanging it above the birdbath so the water drips out.

Purchase a small scrubbing brush to clean out the birdbath basin. Use a little bleach water and let set for 30 minutes then flush out good and fill with clean water.

In the hot summer, place a water sprinkler under a tree where the water will spray into the lower limbs for an hour and wait and watch. The birds will flock to the area to take a bath and preen in the tree limbs.

Books:

Birds of North America, Revised and Updated: A Guide To Field Identification (Golden Field Guide from St. Martin's Press) (Paperback)
by Chandler S. Robbins (Author), Bertel Bruun (Author), Herbert S. Zim (Author),
Arthur Singer (Illustrator).

“Birds of the Texas Hill Country,” Mark W. Lockwood, 2001, University of Texas Press.

The Sibley Guide to Birds by David Allen Sibley

A note on how to use these books. First carry the golden field guide with you and flip through its pages when trying to ID a bird. After a couple of years you may have to buy another book.

Sibley Guide to Bird is heavy and is better use in the house for a better look a bird and its' marking.

Mark Lockwood's book is an excellent book. It will give you when birds will be in the hill country and their habit. The front chapter also talks about the hill county in general. You will learn more from this book than from the identification guides.

Website: [WWW. Whatbird.com](http://WWW.Whatbird.com) This is an online web site for information about individual birds. The site includes bird sounds.

Binocular: Birding binoculars have superior optics and can be expensive. The best binoculars will disappear from your awareness while you're using them, so that your attention is on the bird, not the binoculars. The mark of good binoculars is that they make you feel as if you are simply seeing through your own eyes, only closer. You can look through good optics all day long with no sense of strain.

Jack and Kay use Swift Audubon 8.5x44 wide field birding binocular.

How to Start:

Look up the weather and when the sun will rise. About 15 minutes earlier take your coffee, bird book and binoculars out on your porch, and sit and listen. You will hear the birds first then they will start to hit your feeders. Hummingbirds will be the first to their feeders.

Common seed eating birds will be American Goldfinches in their winter coat; if they stay long enough in the spring that will turn bright yellow. Carolina Chickadees and Black-capped Titmice will general come in to the feeder together and in a group. House Finches (red) will try to sit on the feeder all day spilling seeds to the ground. Northern

Cardinals, both males and females, have a black mask and large orange bill. Pyrrhuloxia has a yellow bill and is rare. An important ground bird is a Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Also on the ground and something on the feeder will be Bewick's wrens and also look for Carolina wrens. Other non-seed eating birds will also come in to the trees around your feeder. Birds flock together. Large birds will be the Mockingbird and Scrub Jay. Flickers and other woodpeckers will sometimes also come in to the feeders. Later in the summer you may get a Painted Bunting or a Summer Tanager. You will know when you have one of these since you will jump out of your skin.

These are just a few of the birds you will see. As you move away from the feeders you will see more flycatchers, barn swallows, bluebirds and lark sparrows. The summer will bring scissor-tail flycatcher and yellow billed cuckoos.

And we have not even started with hawks, caracara, sand hill cranes and black-bellied whistling ducks. There are lots of birds at Seven Falls Ranch and the surrounding ponds.

Notes: Updated List of birds, March 18, 2009

Birds observed in groups:

50 Sandhill Cranes (you can hear them at Seven Falls Ranch but they are on the ground at the entry of North Grape Creek Road)
30 to 40 Morning Doves
20 Chipping Sparrows
75 to 100 Brown-headed Cowbirds (Feeding Station, North Grape Creek Road)
15 to 20 House Finches

Large numbers of observed birds:

Northern Cardinal, 20
Caroline Chickadees, 15
Black-crested Titmouse, 15
Bewick's Wren, 10
Rufous -crowned Sparrows, 10
Eastern Phoebe, 6
American Widgeon, 15
Northern Mockingbird, 8

Whats new:

Two male Black-chinned Hummingbirds and one female
Two Eastern Bluebirds building a nest at one of the birdhouses
Friendly Roadrunner

Whats missing:

About 50 American Goldfinches showing some color however they are all gone
A male and female Rufous-sided or Spotted Towhee, they are also gone
An over winter Least Goldfinch that appears to be gone

Other observed bird:

Bobwhite, 2
Green-winged Teal, 2
Black- Bellied Tree Duck, 2
Turkey Vulture
Black Vulture, 6
Red-tail Hawk, 3
Caracara, 2
Sparrow Hawk. 2
Common Egret
Great Horned Owl
Yellow-Shafted Flicker
Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Common crow, 2
Carolina Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
White-crowned Sparrow

Notes: Updated List of birds, May 2, 2009

Birds observed in groups:

30 House finches, pine siskins, and goldfinches

Large numbers of observed birds:

Northern Cardinal, 10
Caroline Chickadees, 10
Black-crested Titmouse, 10
Bewick's Wren, 10
Rufous-crowned Sparrows, 6
Eastern Phoebe, 6, one nesting on quilt house ledge
Northern Mockingbird, 6
Mourning Doves, 10
House and Lesser Goldfinches, in full color

Whats new:

First Scissortail Flycatcher April 5, 2009
First Great Crested Flycatcher, April 25, 2009

First Painted Bunting April 28, 2009
Two Barn Swallows April 25, 2009
White Crowned sparrow
7 male Black-chinned Hummingbirds and 11 females
One Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Eastern Bluebirds have built a nest at one birdhouse with five chicks (April 28)
Setting Carolina Wren on Nest at front door (April 28)
30 Black-bellied Tree Duck at Weinheimer pond
2 Rio Grande Turkeys

Other observed bird:

Turkey Vulture, 8
Black Vulture, 6
Red-tail Hawk, 3
Caracara, 2
American Kestrel. 2
Common Egret
Ladder-backed Woodpecker, 3
Common crow, 2
Carolina Wren
Scrub Jay
Robin in Stonewall

Notes: Updated List of birds, June 20, 2009

Large numbers of observed birds:

Northern Cardinal
Caroline Chickadees
Black-crested Titmouse
Bewick's Wren
Rufous -crowned Sparrows
Eastern Phoebe
Northern Mockingbird
Mourning Doves
House and Lesser Goldfinches
Crows 18 or more
Barn Swallows
Black-chinned Hummingbirds
Turkey Vulture
Black Vulture
Red-tail Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Caracara

American Kestrel
Painted Bunting
Great Crested Flycatchers
Eastern Blue birds
Black-bellied Tree Ducks at the Weinheimer pond
Rio Grande Turkeys

What's new:

White-winged doves, 3
Lark sparrows, 5
Blue grosbeak, 1

Eastern phoebe chicks are gone from their nest.

Barn swallows are still nesting.

Great Crested Flycatchers chicks are good size and should be gone from their nests in another week

And, there are two new nests of bluebird eggs (one with 3 eggs and the other with two eggs).

Started hearing the Yellow-billed cuckoo.

Notes: Updated List of birds, July 28, 2009

The bird population is stable with no new birds to report. However, the current birds do include the following:

Yellow-billed cuckoo
Blue Grosbeak (male and female)
Lesser goldfinches
Great Crested Flycatchers
Eastern Blue birds
Rio Grande Turkeys
Lark sparrows
Painted Buntings (male, female and juvenile)

There are many juvenile birds of all types with mixed colors at the feeders.

An over active bluebird that has just finished nesting with five chicks. These same bluebirds have started another nest and have laid two blue eggs. When they get to five eggs they will sit.

No male Black-chinned Hummingbirds that can be distinguished, but there are 8 indeterminate hummingbirds that are probably females and juvenile male black-chinned hummingbirds. This next month is the time for the Hummingbirds to change over to ruby- throated from black-chinned.

If you are looking for a place to visit, the 21st Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration will be held September 17-20, 2009 in Rockport-Fulton. The web site and information is at <http://www.rockporthummingbird.com> .

About 8:30 p.m. looking at some birds that turned out to be four bats. Expect they were Mexican Free-tail.

While looking at the birds, you should have noticed that Seven Falls have many large butterflies. They include the Black Swallowtail, Pipevine Swallowtail, Giant Swallowtail, Queens, Monarchs, Buckeyes, and numerous small butterflies.

In addition, the hot weather has increased the dragonfly population and they have marvelous colors. For example, the Widow Skimmer, Roseate Skimmer, the Red Saddlebags, and the Swift Setwing. Look for them at the top of the yucca stems or anything thing that has a high perch.

Notes: Updated List of birds, August 28, 2009

It is Hot out there. The best way to look at the bird population is to take a water sprinkler and spray it up in the lower branches of an oak tree. This will bring the birds in to bathe. They will care less that you are setting on the porch looking at them.

The main new bird using this method has been the summer tanager. A bright red male and two greenish females have visited the sprinklers at the same time.

Our over active bluebird has a nest with five chicks. The chicks are getting larger and should be out of the nest in another week. This is the third or fourth group of chicks from the same birds.

There is one male Black-Chinned Hummingbird that is still around. The ruby- throated hummingbirds are starting to come in. Two males have been spotted at the same time with several females. They are petty jumpy at the feeders, but will probably settle down in a week or two. Remember that this is migration time.

If you are looking for a place to visit, the 21st Annual Hummer/Bird Celebration will be held September 17-20, 2009 in Rockport-Fulton. The web site and information are at <http://www.rockporthummingbird.com> .

The hot weather has increased the dragonfly population especially in the morning heat and evening heat. They have marvelous colors. They are difficult to look at with your binoculars so look for them at the top of the yucca stems or anything thing that has a high perch. Instead of removing the dead yucca stems, trim off the dead leaves and leave the narrow stalk tip for a perch. Another way is to drive a short half inch pvc pipe into the ground where you can see it from your porch and in the sun. Then put a bamboo stake in the pvc pipe. If there is a little moisture around, the dragonflies will perch. If you scare them off they will generally return to the same spot. Also remember that if a cloud comes over and offers shade, all the dragonflies will disappear.

Notes: Updated List of birds, October 5, 2009

This is migration time for our summer birds to move further south and the northern birds to arrive as our winter birds. You may see a bird you have never seen before such as the Wilson's Warbler. This bird showed up for a day and moved on. It was the first warbler seen at Seven Falls. He was pale yellow with a pale black cap. All the fall warblers look alike because their colors are faded.

Black chinned hummingbirds but the ruby throats have been migrating and are plentiful. Kay and Jack counted 16 at the feeders one Sunday morning. They are currently down to about 4 ruby throats, 2 of them juvenile males. We should see some rufous hummingbirds this month with an orange jewel throat and rusty sides.

Hawks are migrating and you may see groups of hawks and vultures together migrating.

Watch for the appearance of these birds circling tightly in a thermal updraft like something boiling in a cauldron. This is a kettle and is a term that birdwatchers use to describe a large number of birds wheeling and circling in the air. The kettle may be composed of several different species at the same time.

Jack has a group of six male cardinals and four female cardinals at the feeder yesterday. There are a number of resident birds that are active, such as the rufous crowned sparrow, house finch, chickadees, and titmice.

October is the month in which we will get a number of migrating butterflies. The rains have brought out all the flowers and we should see a lot of Monarchs. The white mist plants are ready to bloom. Expect a number of small one-inch or less butterflies to be covering the plants.

The rosemary is also blooming with a blue flower that the butterflies will cover. A few Queens are hitting the blue mist flowers.

From The Texas Agricultural Extension service “Butterfly gardening in Texas.”

Butterflies are most abundant from spring through fall. Several species of butterflies-- monarchs, cloudless sulfurs and snout butterflies-- migrate during late summer and fall. Plants that flower throughout the summer and into October and November attract migrating butterflies.

Nursery flowers that are excellent nectar sources include white mist flower, *Eupatorium wrightii*, white; blue mist flower, *Eupatorium greggii*, bluish-purple; lantana, *Lantana* spp., in assorted colors; scarlet sage, *Salvia coccinea*, red; Indigo spires sage, *Salvia* x ‘Indigo spires,’ blue; butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, orange; and Mexican mint marigold, *Tagetes lucida*, yellow-orange. Two native plants that attract butterflies are the common buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, a white native, water-loving shrub, and gayfeather, *Liatris* spp., a spiked purple flower common along roadsides.

Now is the time you can clean your bird nesting boxes for next year but be careful because the red wasps may have moved in.

Notes: Late Birding Report, December 9, 2009

As you may have noticed, there are fewer birds at your feeders. Caroline Chickadees and Black-crested Titmice are still coming in but the other birds seem to have disappeared.

Last month – late October and November – is a time when they birds are changing over from summer to winter migrants. You will begin to see more ducks on the pond and with the ducks come different hawks. You should see 30-50 birds in a flock since this is migration time. For example, Jack had a flock of 30 or more American Goldfinches at his feeder and bird bath for a few hours and then they move on. With the goldfinches were another 20 or so, Chipping sparrows. The Lesser Goldfinch feeder has shown no activity but groups of 20 or more Lesser Goldfinches have been observed still on the ranch. Other birds included the Spotted Towhee in the rosemary, robin, mockingbird, and cardinal. All of them are deep in the brush.

Around the house, are Rufous-crowned sparrows, Bewick's Wrens, and Carolina Wren and Eastern phoebes. All of the hummingbirds have finally left. The last to go was a Rufous hummingbird that stayed for a couple weeks. There is no further activity the hummingbird feeders and now is the time to taken them down for cleaning and storage. Plan to put your hummingbird feeders out again by St Patrick’s Day, March 17, 2010.

Ducks observed are will be on the various ponds around Seven Falls. 50 or more Black-bellied tree ducks are on the Weinheimer Tank (1627), as will as 30 to 40 American Widgeons, two Redheads, and 2-6 Ring-necked Ducks. There are also group of Killdeer, Meadowlarks, and White-crowned Sparrows. Of interest is 15-20 Sandhill Cranes have

been seen. Generally, Sandhills have not been seen until late in January. They seem to like the field across from the intersection of North Grape Creek Road and 2721.

50 are more Rio Grande Turkeys and 5 to 10 Bluebirds have also been observed.

Different hawks and vultures that are around are Black Vultures which are in groups, Caracara, Broad-winged hawks, Red-tail hawks, and American Kestrels. You will also notice on the fence lines a bird that looks like a mockingbird. However, it is a Loggerhead Shrike. This is the only songbird that is a predator.

Last, around the stock feeding stations, are large numbers of brown-headed cowbirds. They will be in groups of more than a 100. Look at the dark male birds and you will easily see the dark brown head in contrast to the black body with green gloss.

The freezing weather has made the red wasps somewhat dormant and it is time to start cleaning out your birdhouses. Nesting will start early in March.

Document Name – Bird Count 2009
Seven Falls Ranch Wildlife
Bird Count taken December 29 – 31, 2009

American Kestrel, 4
Northern Caracara, 2
Northern Cardinal, 1
Black-crested Tufted Titmice, 3
Carolina Chickadee, 21
Yellow-shafted Flicker, 1
Northern Mockingbird, 4
Berwick's Wren, 2
American Goldfinch, 8
Eastern Bluebird, 8
Field Sparrow, 6
Eastern Phoebe, 3
Loggerhead Shrike, 1
Ruby crowned Kinglet, 1
Rufous-crowned sparrow, 2
Spotted Towhee, 1
Great Blue Heron, 1
Common Egret, 4
Belted Kingfisher, 1
American Widgeon, 30
Killdeer, 8
White-crowned Sparrow, 30
Chipping Sparrow, 30
Brown-headed Cowbird, 300 birds

Mourning Dove, 8
Meadowlarks, 20
Black Vulture, 8
Red-Tail Hawk, 1
Double Crest Cormorant, 30
American Widgeon, 15
Sandhill Crane, 21
Greater Yellowlegs, 4
Western Scrub Jay, 6
Common Crow, 4
Song Sparrow, 10

Texas Hummingbird Round Backyard Survey

Seven Falls Ranch participated in the Texas Parks and Wildlife's "Texas Hummingbird Round Backyard Survey." This is a weekly hummingbird observations survey. Information about the survey can be found at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/texas_nature_trackers/hummingbird_roundup/

General survey results for Seven Falls were as follows:

First Hummingbird of 2009 was a black-chinned on March 7.
Black-chinned hummingbirds were observed from March 7 through August 31.
Largest number observed at one time was 21.
Ruby-throated hummingbirds were observed to have a spring and fall migration.
Spring migration included first bird on March 28 and continued until May 23.
Fall migration started August 22 until October 17.
A Rufous Hummingbird was observed from October 24 through November 14