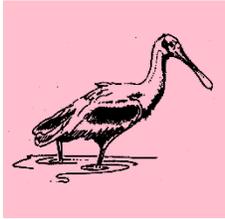


## Monthly Meeting October 6, 2014

**Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, TX**



6:30 pm [Learning Corner](#): Red Warblers of Mexico's Mountains by Joann Raine

7:00 pm [Ornithology Group](#) (OG) Business Meeting

7:30 pm [Program](#): San Blas Revisited by Mark Stackhouse

[Field Trip](#): Galveston Island West (Oct 4) East (Oct 5), 7:30 am

[Bald as a ... Bird?](#)

## Red Warblers of Mexico's Mountains

By Joann Raine

The dry pine forests of western Mexico are an extension of the Arizona range. In this area are the Red-Faced Warbler, Red Warbler, Pink-Headed Warbler, and Red-Breasted Chat that Joann will cover in her talk.

[↑top↑](#)

## San Blas Revisited: A New Look at Why Mexico's Oldest and Most Famous Birding Destination Still Has North America's Best Birding

By Mark Stackhouse

**Note: OG is planning an 11-day trip to San Blas led by Mark.**

San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico has a long history of attracting birders. Birders were visiting long before Peter Alden's book, "Finding Birds in West Mexico," sung the praises of San Blas back in 1969, causing the fame of this small Pacific coast village to explode. Mexico's first official Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was in San Blas in 1973, after many years of "unofficial" counts. The San Blas CBC still records the most species of any count in Mexico, and the highest of any count north of Costa Rica, year after year. But the ravages of time, development, habitat loss and a major hurricane in 2002 have taken their toll on this birder's paradise. Some have said that the best days of birding San Blas are in the past. Others disagree, and in his recent book, "Top 100 Birding Sites of the World," Dominic Couzens included San Blas as one of only two sites in Mexico that made his list. Just last year, James Currie, host of Nikon's "Birding Adventures TV," called San Blas one of the top five birding destinations in the world, and the best in North America, claiming it even topped any place he'd seen in Costa Rica or Panama.

So what is the real story of birding San Blas in this day? Professional birding guide and San Blas resident, Mark Stackhouse, will give his first hand insight as to the nature of birding San Blas

today, what's been lost, what's been gained, and what the future holds for one of North America's birding treasures.

**Biography:** For Mark Stackhouse, birding has been his passion since he was 5 years old. Mark says, "I can't even remember a time when I wasn't birding." Mark has enjoyed watching birds throughout the Americas, and especially likes to share the beauty of birds and nature with other people. For most of his life, he has done this through teaching and guiding others in the field, and in recent years, through his photography and writing as well.

He has now been guiding birding tours for 40 years, including 16 years in Mexico. He has guided birding tours in the western U.S, Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, and Peru. Mark also does consulting work as a biologist for government agencies and private industry, and worked as a wildlife biologist on Utah's largest ranch, where he also guided birders for 22 years. He was Director of Education at Tracy Aviary, a Salt Lake City, Utah bird park for 12 years. He attended Earlham College and Utah State University, earning degrees in Biology and Range Management. Mark fell in love with Mexico, its people, culture, landscapes, and of course its spectacular birding, on his first trip to San Blas 17 years ago. After 25 years of living in Utah, he now lives in San Blas, Nayarit, Mexico, with his wife, Elizabeth Oregón Gonzalez, also of San Blas. He can be reached by e-mail at [mark@westwings.com](mailto:mark@westwings.com)."

[↑top↑](#)

## **Galveston West (October 4) and Galveston East (October 5), Meet at 7:30 am**

### **Led by Mark Stackhouse**

Meet on Saturday, October 4 at 7:30 am at the Galveston State Park visitor center (near the dunes). Our guide will be Mark Stackhouse. We will explore the west end of the island from LaFitte's Cove to San Luis Pass or even further west.

Meet on Sunday, October 5 at 7:30 am at the Galveston Island State Park visitor center (near the dunes). We will bird the east end of the island to the ferry landing, Bolivar Peninsula, perhaps as far as High Island and Anahuac NWR. We'll decide on the exact locations based on what's hot on ebird and texbirds.

Galveston Island State Park can be reached from Interstate 45 by exiting right onto 61st Street and traveling south on 61st Street to its intersection with Seawall Boulevard, and then right (west) on Seawall (FM 3005) 10 miles to the park entrance. For more information, see <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/galveston-island>.

[↑top↑](#)

## **Bald as a ... bird?**

**By Hart Rufe (First Published September 1, 2014 by Hart Beat and St. Lucie Audubon Society with permission)**



***Looks like this Northern Cardinal didn't need a crest to start a family***

Recently I ran into an old friend whom I had not seen for several years. He was/is a very handsome man who always had a magnificent mane, arguably his most outstanding physical feature. On this occasion, however, he was absolutely hairless, bald as the proverbial cue-ball. How do you greet a person whose appearance has changed so drastically? Flabbergasted: “Oh my God, what happened to your hair?” Incredulous, as to a five year old who has just taken a scissors to his head: “Why did you ever do that?” Sympathetic, thinking cancer: “You poor man, are you all right?” Or perhaps a weak attempt at Humor: “Did they catch the Indians that did that to you?” I went with Simple Statement: “I hardly recognized you.”

One word answer: “Alopecia!” as though that explained everything. After our reunion I went to my trusty encyclopedia in my pocket and found “*alopecia totalis*,” an autoimmune disorder that causes the sufferer to lose all the hair on his head. Sometimes the hair completely returns, more often it does not. Sympathy for my friend would definitely have been appropriate, but probably unwelcome. See: [www.hairlosstalk.com/alopecia/alopecia-totalis.php](http://www.hairlosstalk.com/alopecia/alopecia-totalis.php).

Sympathy, if not pity, was definitely the reaction we felt for a male Northern Cardinal that showed up under our feeders with the same *alopecia totalis* condition. Accustomed to cardinals with crowning crests (or is it “pileated” - [stlucieaudubon.org/hartBeat/hb140701pileated.html](http://stlucieaudubon.org/hartBeat/hb140701pileated.html)), this poor, pathetic fellow would seem to be at a distinct disadvantage in the dating/mating scene. Nevertheless, he seems to have been successful, for three weeks later he was, indeed, feeding young. (*right*)

We now know that in humans an autoimmune disorder causes the condition, but what causes it in birds? While the balding condition in birds is apparently more common than thought, (although this was my first experience with such a sight in many decades of avid birding,) it is not well studied, nor do ornithologists completely agree on the cause. All do agree that it is not caused by



the bird being hen-pecked, for such abuse would not cause the complete loss of feathering observed. Four possible or probable explanations are suggested:

Most likely, the bird is going through an irregular feather molt, losing all the head feathers at one time rather than incrementally as might be normal and expected;

Second most likely, the bird has a bad case of feather mites, tiny arthropods that feed on feathers. As birds can normally preen away such pests, the head is one area they are unable to reach in their preening process, and hence the mites can gorge themselves until all the feathers are gone, after which they then migrate into feather areas where they are dispatched by the preening host;

But less likely, the bird is suffering from nutritional deficiencies;

Some avian disease or injury trauma, but there does not seem to be any evidence to support this explanation.

All ornithologists agree that the bird will grow a complete new head-dress in a matter of a few weeks, and will have a normal appearance thereafter. Or until the same thing happens again the following year, which apparently does sometimes, happen.



We did not see our bald-headed cardinal very often, and if he is still in our area and has now grown a new bright red crest, we would be hard-pressed to pick him out from the various



cardinals that visit our feeders each day. As for my handsome human friend, I am not likely to see him again for several years, so I will just have to wait to see if he was as fortunate as the birds in growing a new crest. Reminds me of the old riddle: What is it that a man never wants to get, but once he gets it, he never wants to lose it? Sure, you know the answer – a bald head!

For more information on bald birds, see: [www.farmanddairy.com/columns/scott-shalaway/solving-the-mystery-of-what-causes-bald-cardinals/15565.html](http://www.farmanddairy.com/columns/scott-shalaway/solving-the-mystery-of-what-causes-bald-cardinals/15565.html), and [www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrisg/nature/nw98/baldbirds.html](http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrisg/nature/nw98/baldbirds.html)



*Click photos for larger versions*

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[↑top↑](#)