

## The Coming Winter

The hills are alive with the sights and sounds of the coming winter. Following the quiet lull between seasons the winter migrants have arrived in central Texas. There is no missing the incessant calls of blue jays. White crowned sparrows, northern flickers, ruby crowned kinglets and yellow-rumped warblers have made the journey back from their breeding grounds too. The soft, sweet song from the dense rose bush turns out to be a winter wren. So tiny. Cranes and geese are heard if not seen overhead going south. This is not to say all the summer birds are gone. Hummingbirds are still buzzing around the plethora of blooms brought on by the recent rains. Just as we are revitalized by the cooler temperatures resident birds that stay year round seem to be invigorated and therefore more in evidence. It is time to fill the feeders and have the binoculars handy.

The monarchs have been traveling through on their incredible journey. Drought and record cold temperatures in conjunction with the reduction in the milkweed plants along the migration route are all factors that have led to declining numbers of monarchs over the last decade. Though their range extends from Canada to Mexico, we remain hopeful that their numbers will replenish in the coming years since at least in some local areas, they have been plentiful.

The ichneumon wasp has been the topic of conversation recently among the Bird & Nature Club folks. It has an interesting life cycle which is documented in a U tube video shared by Terry Fischer along with his excellent photos of some local ichneumons. It seems amazing that a little known insect could consume a man's entire life and take him all over the world. To think that the rumored "buried treasure" that was hidden at the last minute before the advance of the Russian army in a field outside Warsaw in Poland during World War II contained not gold, but pinned specimens of the ichneumon wasp is evidence of how Mother Nature has a deep and abiding pull on some of us. It is a fascinating story for those who are interested in the environment and history. *The Snoring Bird, My Family's Journey Through a Century of Biology* by Bernd Heinrich is available at Rylander Library in San Saba.

The world of nature provides and inexhaustible source of spiritual and esthetic delight. October in the Hill Country is proof of that. Go outside & play.