

Fort Worth ISD Elementary Science Department Project

## Selecting the Official Bird of the City of Fort Worth

By Jim Jones, Education Chair



Last fall, FWAS was contacted (through our website) by Rocco Williams, Core C & I Coordinator of Science. Rocco was formulating a plan to inspire elementary science students (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade level) about their natural environment. His plan was to select the Official Bird of Fort Worth. However, Rocco admitted he knew little about birds and birding, let alone about what birds are commonly seen in Fort Worth. After some discussion, I suggested that he download the Bird Observation Checklist found on our website under the Resources tab.

In December, Rocco contacted me that he narrowed his bird selection to the six species in the above photo (Great Egret, Barred Owl, Eastern Bluebird, Carolina Chickadee, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Red-shouldered Hawk.) He invited me to the department's meeting with all of the FW ISD Science teachers where the project was introduced. I was invited because I offered my services to come to the schools to discuss and introduce the students to bird watching in North Texas and the bird their class was studying. I do not know how Rocco assigned the bird species to each school. Perhaps a random drawing?

I believe 18 schools (of 81 Elementary schools in the district) took on the project after asking their students if they wished to be involved. Beginning in late January, I began visiting the schools, either in-person or by live streaming on Zoom. I gave a 45-minute

talk and PowerPoint presentation about who and what are bird watchers, bird species in our area, how to identify birds from their characteristics, and discussed the attributes about their assigned bird species. Over the course of 3 weeks, I spoke to 11 schools and about 275 students. (Additionally, one school's principal also asked me to do a modified presentation for her 4 Kindergarten classes with 20+ students in each class.)

The schools are now preparing a 15-minute presentation for their bird species to be presented before a panel of judges on March 6. The school selected as the best presentation will then go to a meeting of Fort Worth's City Council. (Rocco had already discussed this project with some city council members before he contacted me in the Fall. He said they were excited about this project getting young citizens enthused about how governments work.) I do not know what will happen after that...perhaps an official announcement...lots of on-line comments suggesting some other bird. I personally was pleased with the excitement and questions about wildlife and habitat that were shown during my visits.