

Prospectus: “A Day in Texas Woods: Tallichet Redux”

A field excursion to recreate the pathway and re-examine the observations of J. H. Tallichet on the 120th anniversary of his walk around the Austin area.

Background on J. H. Tallichet

Jules Henri Tallichet was born in Nashville in 1877. His family moved to Austin when he was seven years old. He was an eager student of birds as a youth. He was educated in Austin schools and received law degrees from the University of Texas in 1900-01. He practiced law in Austin from 1901 to 1909, thereafter moving to Houston, Texas. He made migration contributions to the U. S. Biological Survey for three years, 1892-94. George F. Simmons published a short biography of Tallichet in his seminal work, “Birds of the Austin Region” (1925, U.T Press).

A Day In Texas Woods

At the age of 15, on May 6, 1892, Tallichet undertook a day’s journey on foot in the Austin area which he would later document in an enjoyable and pertinent article titled “A Day in Texas Woods”, published in “The Ornithologist & Oologist” in July of that year. His course took him from his home at 12th and Trinity, across the university campus in the morning, north to “the edge of the prairie [which] stretches out as far as the eye can see”, thence westward across Shoal Creek, across the railroad, and up over a pass between the “mountains” thence down to the Colorado River and mouth of Bull Creek, returning along the Colorado past the base of Mount Bonnell, thence back “into the city”. He offers extensive discussion of the birds encountered en route. His evident purpose, consistent with interests of the time and the venue in which his story was published, was to seek specimens of birds, nests, and eggs, but his observations also serve to document the common and conspicuous avifauna of the time along with their habitat preferences and behavior.

Recreating Tallichet’s Path

While there may have been some literary license with the details (and authorship) of his journey, we can reasonably estimate Tallichet’s approximate path with reference to modern landmarks. My intent is to follow Tallichet’s pathway--generally--and collect observations on the modern birdlife and habitats encountered. The contrast of the face of Austin then and now will be obvious. I will also search for similarities, with emphasis on birdlife and the response of birds to changing habitats.

Output and Products

I expect to write one or more short articles on the effort, to be published in a local newsletter (e.g. Travis Audubon’s “Signal Smoke”). A longer article or extended work may be appropriate, depending on interest. An explicit goal will be to give attention to many of the parks, preserves, and research tracts which I visit along or near Tallichet’s route, emphasizing their contribution to protecting the birdlife and habitats encountered by Tallichet over a century earlier.

Reference

Simmons, George Finlay. 1925. Birds of the Austin Region. Univ. of Texas Press, Austin.

Tallichet, J. H. 1892. A day in Texas woods. Ornith. & Oolog. 17(7):106-108.