

# THE BULLETIN

*Belterra Community News*

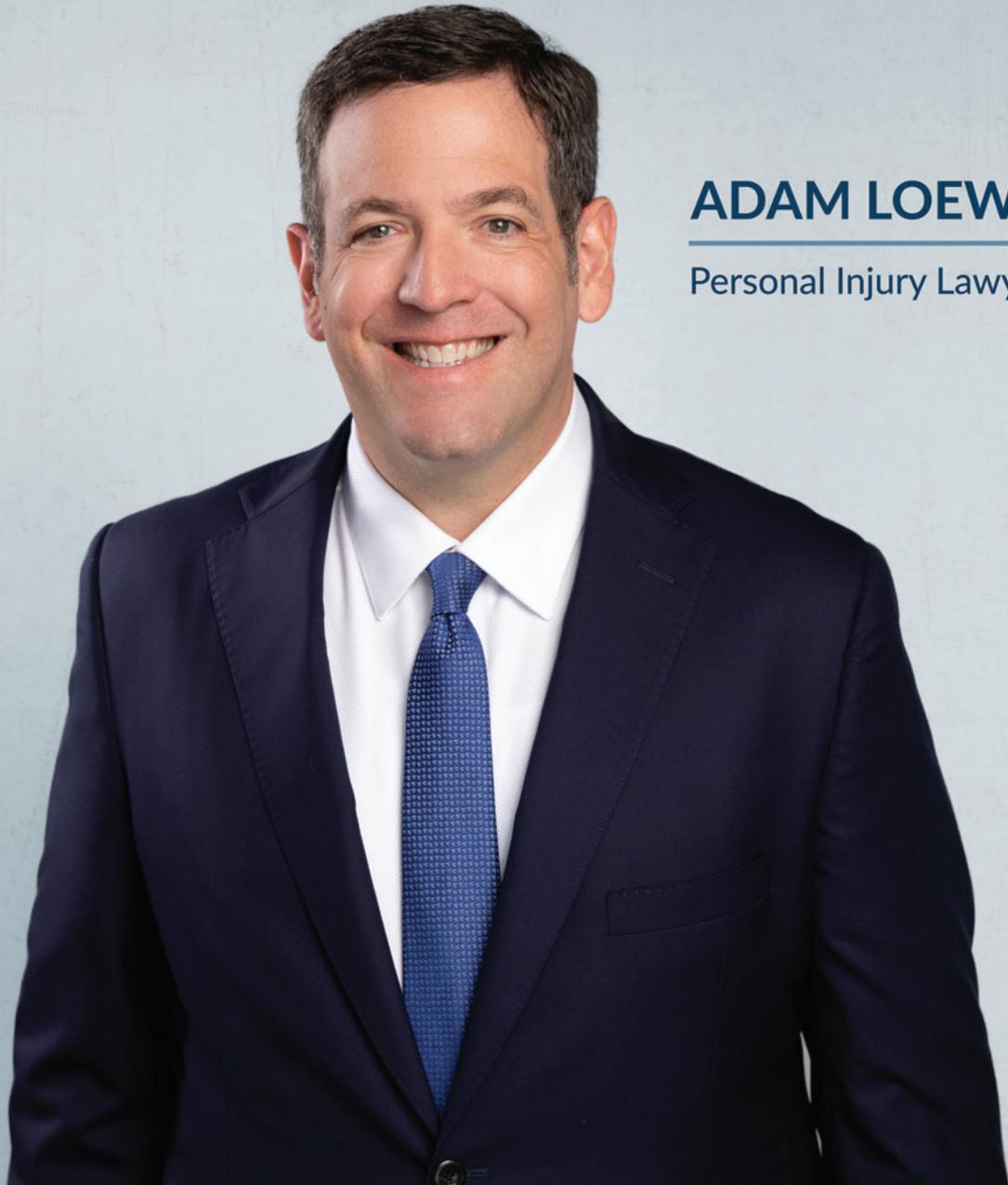
January 2021 Volume 3, Issue 01

News for the Residents of Belterra



HAPPY NEW YEAR

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# THE GREAT FISHERMAN

By Cheryl Conley, TWRC Wildlife Center



When one mentions raptors, there are a few species that people are very familiar with like owls, eagles and hawks. The osprey, however, isn't a familiar species to most people even though it is one of the most widespread raptors in the world. They are found on every continent except Antarctica.

Like all raptors, the osprey is a large bird with a hooked beak and sharp talons, both

of which are used to catch their prey and tear it apart to eat.

About 99% of the osprey's diet is made up of fish so it only makes sense that they nest near water along the coasts and large lakes. Occasionally they can be seen along rivers. They build their nests at the tops of dead trees, buoys, chimneys, and even atop power poles. Like the bald eagle, they use the same nest year after year but can be seen making minor repairs each spring.

They are amazing to watch as they glide over water looking for a fish. Sometimes they plunge so forcefully into the water that they are totally submerged. After catching a fish, they arrange the fish so it faces upright with the head forward.

The osprey is a great fisherman, successfully catching a fish one out of 4 tries. They have a much higher success rate than it's relatives like the eagle. Sometimes eagles watch and when an osprey catches a fish, the eagle will attack the osprey causing it to drop the fish. Easy meal for the eagle! Benjamin Franklin said in 1784 that "bald eagles are too lazy to fish for himself.....and does not get his living honestly." True then, true today.

Ospreys generally mate for life but they will find a new partner should their partner die or disappear during spring migration.

If you'd like to watch an osprey nest, there are many online. The Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey has an osprey cam that you can watch here: <http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/education/ospreycam/>. In the New Jersey area, nest building begins in early April and eggs are laid from mid-April to early May. You can watch the eggs hatch and observe Mom and Dad caring for the babies. It's interesting and educational.

TWRC Wildlife Center is a 501(c)(3) organization located in the Spring Branch area of Houston. Since 1979, we have been committed to providing quality emergency care and rehabilitation for injured, ill, orphaned and displaced wildlife. We are proud to be making a difference for the wildlife in our area.

[www.twrcwildlifecenter.org](http://www.twrcwildlifecenter.org)

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# NATURE WATCH

## A CHARM OF FINCHES

by Jim and Lynne Weber



*Lesser Finch*

At times, winter in Central Texas may seem a bit drab, colorless, and dreary, but the season is usually brightened by members of a beautiful and diverse group of birds called finches. These small, seed-eating birds have an undulating flight, and flocks of them often roam south in the winter.

Found primarily west of the Balcones escarpment, Lesser Goldfinches (*Spinus psaltria*) are present year-round, but are more likely to be seen at bird feeders in the colder months. At 4.5 inches long, males have an entirely black crown and back, white wingbars, and are lemon yellow below, while females have olive backs, black wings with whitish wingbars, and duller yellow underparts. They can gather in groups of up to several hundred at a time, and are most commonly found in Texas and California.

The American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) is a slightly larger bird that is less common but typically present here from November to March. At 5 inches long, males have a bright yellow body, a black cap, and black wings with white wingbars. Females are duller overall, with an olive body and black wings with prominent white wingbars. They are the only finch that molts its body feathers twice a year, in late summer and then again in late winter in preparation for breeding season.

Most gregarious are the Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*), a 5 inch long finch with prominent brown streaking and yellow at the base of the tail and in flight feathers. At first they may appear mostly grayish-brown, but they flash their yellow markings as they explode into flight

or flutter while feeding. Typically present from December through March, flocks of Pine Siskins may congregate at bird feeders one winter and be completely absent the next. Their behavior is highly nomadic and their presence is erratic across North America in winter in response to available seed crops. In fact, some individuals may stay near a dependable food source and breed far south of their normal breeding range, which is in Canada, the northern U.S., and higher elevations of the west.



*Pine Siskin*



*American Goldfinch*



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