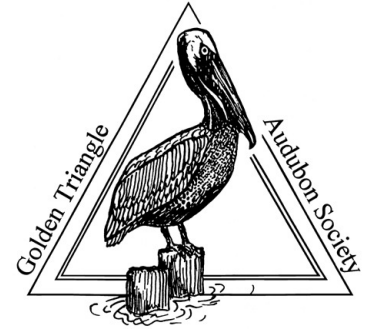


# *The Brown Pelican*



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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Vol. 22 No. 2

February 2016

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**Membership Meeting  
Thursday February 18, 2016 7:00 p.m.  
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

**Ecuador 2015: Mindo Feeder Patrol  
Photographing the West Slope's Common Birds**

**Gerald Duhon**

With the fifth highest bird list of any country on Earth numbering in excess of 1600, (almost twice that of the continental USA) in a land area the size of Colorado, including over 100 hummingbirds and tanagers each, a well developed tourist infrastructure and a new international airport, it's no wonder Ecuador has become one of the world's premier birding destinations. Especially attractive are the primary cloud forests of the country's west slope, where truly world-class birding draws tour companies and individual travelers from around the globe. Starting at over 9,000 feet and descending in a series of orchid and bromeliad clad foothill ridges and valleys, the binocular (or in this case camera) toting bird watcher can view and photograph over 400 species. The hub of all this activity is Mindo, a small but bustling village of around 4400 souls. Accommodations ranging from basic but entirely adequate on up to pricey spas are on tap. Great food and excellent birding right around town are part of Mindo's appeal, but the real draw for the bird photographer lies in the city's close proximity to a number of premier feeder installations. At places like Satchiatama Lodge, Milpe Bird Sanctuary and the Mirador at Los Bancos, spectacular range-restricted birds including Sparkling Violetear, Velvet Purple Coronet, Toucan Barbet and Flame-faced Tanager come in close enough to touch. Join GTAS member Gerald Duhon as he journeys to the land of Toucans, Hummingbirds and Tanagers to patrol fruit and sugar-water feeders, seeking to photograph the exotic common birdlife in and around Mindo, Ecuador, South America!

We will plan on having the doors open by 6:00 p.m. and the program will start at 7:00 p.m. sharp. A light supper will be available from 6:15 p.m.

## *The Brown Pelican*

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Issue number 225

### Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information  
[www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)

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## Calendar of Events

*Important Note: Field Trip notices published here should always be regarded as needing confirmation just before the date. Changes will always be posted on the web site at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org). Confirmation of the location will also normally be available at the Membership Meeting that is usually, but not always, two days prior to each trip, or by contacting Field Trip Committee chair, Steve Mayes at 409-722-5807 or [sgmayes@hotmail.com](mailto:sgmayes@hotmail.com).*

**Thursday February 18, 2016. Membership Meeting.** Gerald Duhon on Birds and Birding in Ecuador.

**Thursday thru Sunday February 12-15, 2016. Great Backyard Bird Count.** Go to <http://gbbc.birdcount.org> for details on how to participate in this count. See article in this issue for details on last year's count.

**Saturday February 20, 2016. Field Trip to Cattail Marsh in Tyrrell Park, Beaumont.** Meet at the parking lot for Cattail Marsh at 8:00 a.m. The parking lot is accessed from the loop road round the main picnic areas in Tyrrell Park in Beaumont. Some birds can be seen with minimal walking, **but the group will probably make a leisurely three-or-so-mile hike round the various cells in the marsh.** If you are unable to walk that far – there are no shorter loops – someone will remain near the entrance to help you identify the birds in the near cells. Walking is on the levees; the main ones are graveled, but some of the interior ones are mowed grass. This will be a good trip for beginning to intermediate birders, as most of the waterfowl and wading birds are relatively easy to study in the open water areas.

Cattail Marsh is probably the easiest place to see good numbers of a great variety of wintering ducks. Cinnamon Teal, a species not easy to see anywhere else close to the Golden Triangle, have been resident in an easily accessible cell near the entrance this winter. In addition, there is an active Bald Eagle nest that, while across a bayou, can be seen quite well from one of the levees. Southern Bald

Eagles typically nest from late December, and by the time of this field trip, the pair at Cattail will probably be feeding chicks.

#### **Directions to Cattail Marsh**

##### **From the south**

Go "north" on US69/96/287 around the south side of Beaumont. Take Texas 124 (west towards Fannett – left turn under the highway). Travel about a mile to the first light. At the first light, turn left onto Tyrrell Park Road and go about 1/2 mile. Turn left into Tyrrell Park through the nice new arch. Continue past the Garden Center on your left, past the clubhouse for the golf course further along on your right, and proceed about two-thirds of the way round the loop road. The Cattail Marsh parking area is accessed by means of a signed shell road on your right.

##### **From IH-10**

Exit at Walden Road on the west side of Beaumont; Go south on Walden Road for about 1/2 mile to the first light. At the light go straight across Highway 124 onto Tyrrell Park Road and follow the directions above.

**Thursday March 17, 2016. Membership Meeting.** Speaker: Bubba en Cristo on his Lagow Ranch in Chambers County.

#### **Saturday March 19, 2016. Field Trip to Bolivar Flats.**

*Important Note: Galveston County operates a parking permit program on the Bolivar Peninsula. If you park on most parts of the beach, including the part next to the Flats, you must have a parking permit on your windshield. The fee for the permit is \$10.00 a year and permits are obtainable from most merchants on the Bolivar Peninsula including the Big Store, which opens at 7:00 a.m..*

This trip will occur as spring shorebird migration is getting well under way, but while the wintering birds are mostly still present. Bolivar Flats is an internationally important shore-bird location. We know that a lot of birders are intimidated by shorebirds, but they are not nearly as difficult to identify as is sometimes alleged! This trip offers an opportunity to compare many of the "true" shorebirds with lots of help in identifying them.

Meet at the vehicle barrier at 8:30 a.m. From Winnie, take TX 124 south to High Island. At the shoreline, turn right (west) on TX 87 and proceed through Gilchrist and Crystal Beach until you reach the intersection where Loop 108 turns right (north). Turn left (the opposite way to Loop 108) along Rettilon Road. At the beach, if conditions permit, turn right (west) about 1/2 mile to the vehicle barrier. It takes at least one and a half hours to drive from the Golden Triangle. We will leave the vehicle barrier at about 8:45 a.m., although the group will be visually obvious on the flats should you be a few minutes later than that.

Some walking is necessary on this field trip. Depending on the mud flat conditions, we may visit to the North

Jetty to view the birds from that side.

We normally stop at Fort Travis park to eat lunch and use the facilities. We may stop at Rollover Pass and usually stop at High Island on the way back. We will check in High Island for any "very early" Neotropical songbird migrants. Bring drinks and lunch (or buy locally, but that is not particularly easy), sunscreen and insect repellent.

**Thursday April 21, 2016. Member-ship Meeting.** Speaker Lynn Barber, well known author and Big Year aficionado.

**Saturday April 23, 2016. Field Trip to Sabine Woods.** This trip will seek Neotropical migrants at the height of spring migration, and involves relati

vely easy walking on the trails at Sabine Woods to look for migrant songbirds, although another option is to sit at the drip and wait for the birds to come to you.



EarthShare of Texas represents Audubon Foundation of Texas and the National Audubon Society in payroll contribution programs in workplaces throughout Texas. For more information about how you can support Audubon Foundation of Texas and the National Audubon Society at your workplace, call 1-800-GREENTX, or visit [www.earthshare-texas.org](http://www.earthshare-texas.org).

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## Delivery of your Brown Pelican

### Please consider allowing us to send to you electronically!

If you are reading this in a copy we sent to you by US mail, you may or may not be reading it in a timely timeframe. It is possible, and it has happened twice in the preceding three months, that this is reaching you after the program described on page 1 has already taken place.

Of course, we could move our planned mailing date to one earlier in the month (or preceding month). But then, in some months, you will receive your copy very soon after we mail it rather than the ten or more days after that seems to be becoming the norm. In such months, the meeting notice is likely earlier than would be most convenient for you, and the other content certainly cannot be as current.

We certainly do not want to cut off any members who are unable to receive a copy electronically. At the same time, if you are able to receive an electronic copy, you can save us both expense and volunteer time. The process of getting the *Brown Pelican* to you each month involves volunteers printing the labels, folding and tabbing the copies, affixing the labels, sorting into zip code groups, filling out postal service forms, and taking the copies to the post office.

We know that probably a great majority of you prefer to read most materials like the Newsletter in paper form (hard copy in today's jargon). But you can save us a lot of expense and volunteer time if you will print your own copy at home.

When we email a copy to a member, we do that by attaching a copy of the Newsletter in pdf format to an email. A reader for pdf documents may be downloaded free of charge from Adobe at <https://get.adobe.com/reader/> or from a number of other providers. In recent months, the pdf copy has been about 350 KB, very modest by today's standards. However, increasingly, we have been including additional material, such as bird count results and reports, and even a field trip report not able to be included in the printed copy, in the electronic version, so it is possible the file size may increase somewhat in the future. We may also include photos.

If you would prefer not to receive an email with an attachment, and we understand some organizations do not allow downloading of attachments, we can send you an email with a link to the copy that is posted on our web site at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org).

By the time you read this, we will probably have moved our website to a new server. We plan to make available on that website a complete archive of all *Brown Pelicans* back to 1995, and copies of the reports on all our local bird counts.

We never release our members' addresses, postal or email, to any outside party. If another non-profit has a notice or other material that we consider will be of interest, we will email that ourselves to a special list that includes only those who have given their permission to be included on that list.

### How to request a change to electronic delivery.

Simply send an email to [johnawhittle@aol.com](mailto:johnawhittle@aol.com) giving the name and address that we are currently using to mail the *Brown Pelican* to you (so we can find your record) and confirm that we may email the *Brown Pelican* to you as an attachment at the email address you are using to send the message to us.

## Field Trip to Anahuac NWR – 23 January 2016

For the third consecutive year, our January Field trip to Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge was nothing short of spectacular. It was a cold start to the morning at 32 degrees as 15 participants (two more joined us a little later) assembled near the Visitor Information Station. It started off well, as most of the assembling participants had already seen two Crested Caracaras and two White-tailed Kites along the access road on their way in. The Caracaras were where the Kites usually are, near the entrance to the refuge and the Kites were near FM1985 where the Caracaras usually are, but no one complained.

It got even better, as before we had even organized ourselves, an adult Bald Eagle flew over quite low and near. The male Vermilion Flycatcher that has established its wintering territory around the entrance on each of the last three years was readily visible, apparently already finding insects to catch. An Osprey, which has been regularly fishing in the canal along the southeast side of Shoveler Pond recently, flew by, carrying its breakfast, probably seeking a quieter location to eat in peace.

We decided first to walk the boardwalk to the Willows. This boardwalk passes through good sparrow habitat, and soon the group had views of one adult and two immature White-crowned Sparrows, a few Swamp Sparrows, some Savannah Sparrows and one not altogether cooperative Lincoln's Sparrow. In addition, there were a number of Yellow-rumped Warblers, several Ruby-crowned Kinglets, two Eastern Phoebe's, a Sedge Wren, a couple of Northern Cardinals, and a Common Yellowthroat. Some participants were able to glimpse a White-eyed Vireo. Flyovers continued, and we added Snow and Ross's Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, American White Pelican, White Ibis, American Goldfinch and Tree Swallow to our growing list.

Back at the starting point, we managed to arrange ourselves into only five vehicles, and head for Shoveler Pond. Shoveler Pond almost always has a good variety of ducks and other water related species. Efforts are currently under way to control the stands of phragmites, which are not very good bird habitat to make the area even more attractive to water birds. The high water level everywhere this year has apparently significantly altered the distribution of "water birds" in many places, but this has seemingly not made a significant difference to the avifauna of Shoveler Pond. There may have been a few more ducks of the species that like deeper water, and perhaps a few less of the dabbling ducks that prefer shallower water. We proceeded along the north side of Shoveler, noting the numerous American Coots that were also plentiful everywhere else, as well as some Gadwall, Ring-necked Ducks and small numbers of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks and Blue-winged Teal. There were also many Common Gallinules and Pied-billed Grebes. As we drove along, we watched the comings and goings of the Snow Geese in the unit just to the north, probably numbering more than one thousand. Everyone loves to see large gatherings of snow geese milling around. At the first pull off we paused and got out of our vehicles to get better views of the central part of the pond, and

also to watch the geese. Periodically, the geese would take flight, and almost always, one of our sharp-eyed participants would spot a Bald Eagle somewhere close to the geese. It was to take us almost three hours to travel round Shoveler Pond, and by the time we completed the loop, we had seen seven Bald Eagles, mostly immature birds, showing us all the different plumage stages that Bald Eagles pass through on their four or five year progression to full adulthood.

Shoveler Pond is aptly named, but this year the number of Northern Shovelers, although quite substantial, has been less than is frequently the case. Less usual were a number of Redheads, mostly quite far out from the edges of the Pond. Earlier in the fall, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks had been everywhere, including until at least December, several large broods still being shepherded around by their parents. About 50 were seen in flight at one point in the field trip, but they settled back deep into the vegetation. A pair of American Wigeon did fly over, and some participants saw some Northern Pintails swimming back into the vegetation. Small numbers of Ruddy Ducks and Lesser Scaup were also noted, and no Texas Gulf Coast field trip would be complete without at least one pair of Mottled Ducks.

There were a few other species to be seen. Several White Ibis and at least five White-faced Ibis were present. Somewhat incongruously, a Brown Pelican was sitting on one of the interior berms. As always, several Great Blue Herons were scattered around the pond, and there were two Little Blue Herons, one adult and one white immature. Some participants saw a King Rail. One lonely Greater Yellowlegs was present. Passerines present in the vegetation along the sides of the canals included Orange-crowned Warbler, Eastern Phoebe, Savannah Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

After a lunch break, we headed to the Skillern Tract. The Krider's Red-Tailed Hawk – a very white variant – that has winters in the stretch of FM1985 between the access road to "Old Anahuac" and the Skillern Tract was present and seen by most. Also present were good numbers of American Kestrels, and an unusually large number of Eastern Meadowlarks. We drove slowly down the road at the Skillern Tract to the parking lot beside East Bay Bayou. The moist soil fields along both sides of the road, which are being well used by shorebirds this year were empty. It was getting late in the day, so perhaps we had spent too much time at Shoveler Pond! Near the bridge over the bayou, several Common Yellowthroats were calling. There is a lot of dense vegetation along the sides of the path to the observation platform, and it harbored a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, many Yellow-rumped Warblers, but almost no sparrows. The pond to the far south, visible from the platform, had a few ducks, mostly American Wigeon, but including Northern Shoveler and Gadwall, and a small number of Green-winged Teal. And, of course, numbers of American Coots. Two adult and two juvenile Black-crowned Night-Herons could be seen (barely) in the reeds in the back of that pond, and a Belted Kingfisher was fishing there. We could see a flock of at least 300 Snow Geese to the

*Continued on page 7*

# Bird Sightings – January 2016

For this column, we review, looking for rare and very rare species, all credible eBird and other submitted records for the Texas counties we have always covered – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine and Tyler. We also review, looking for very rare or vagrant species only, records for Chambers, Galveston (High Island and

Bolivar only) and Liberty counties in Texas, and Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes (west of the Calcasieu River only) in Louisiana.

The format of the listing is Species – Date – County-more precise location if available – (number) – Observer(s) with sometimes a comment on the reason it is noteworthy.

## Seen in our Core Counties (listed above)

Cinnamon Teal	Jan 3 on	JEF-TP (up to 6) multiple.obs
Greater Scaup	Jan 17	ANG-Ellen Trout Pk (4) Jennifer Christy (no details) unusual location
Eared Grebe	Jan 3	JEF-Murphree WMA (1) JHH
Horned Grebe	Jan 14	JAS-Sam Rayburn Res-Overlook Pk (20) Dan Jones
Least Bittern	Jan 3	JEF-McFaddin NWR (1) JAW, Patrick Walther
Green Heron	Jan 3	JEF-Backridge Rd (1) JHH, Mary Carter, Christine Sliva
Yellow Rail	Jan 3	JEF-McFaddin NWR (1) JAW, Patrick Walther
Stilt Sandpiper	Jan 7-28	JEF-TP (up to 17) JHH
Lsr. Black-backed Gull	Jan 1	ORA-Road to Bailey's (2) JJW, HS, Sherrie Roden
Groove-billed Ani	Jan 3-23(+)	JEF-Old Sabine Cemetery (4) MC, TH, others
Short-eared Owl	Jan 3	JEF-McFaddin NWR (1) JAW, Patrick Walther
Ruby-thr. Hummingbird	Nov on	HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM
	Jan 2-9(+)	JEF-Nederland (1) JHH, JAW
	Jan 8-27	JEF-Nederland (1) HS
Black-chinned Humm.	Jan 1 to ?	JEF-Beaumont (1) RL
	Jan 5 on	JEF-Nederland (1+) JHH, JJW
	Jan 12-27	JEF-Nederland (1) SM, JJW
	Jan 25	JEF-Nederland (1) HS
	Jan 1-25(+)	HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1)JM
Buff-bellied Hummingbird	Dec29-Jan14	JEF-Nederland(1) JJW, others
Anna's Hummingbird	Dec 4 on	HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM
Rufous Hummingbird	Nov 1 on	JEF-Nederland (1) HS (imm m)
	Jan 13 on	JEF-Nederland (1) HS (ad male)
	Jan 15 on	HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM (ad male)
Hairy Woodpecker	Jan 1	ORA-FM1135 (1) Bruce Bishop
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	Jan 17	JEF-TP (1) Tobias Rohmer and Claire Gallagher (no details)
Couch's Kingbird	Jan 3-4	JEF-Backridge Rd (1) JHH, Mary Carter, Christine Sliva
N. Rough-winged Swal.	Jan 24	JEF-TP (1) Joel Throckmorton
Barn Swallow	Jan 1	ORA-SE of Vidor (1) Sheila Hebert, Christine Sliva
Cave Swallow	Jan 1	ORA-SE of Vidor (2) Sheila Hebert, Christine Sliva
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Nov-Jan 10(+)	JEF-TP (1) multiple obs
Sprague's Pipit	Jan 1	ORA-SE of Vidor (1) Sheila Hebert, Christine Sliva
Wilson's Warbler	Jan 12-23	HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM
Henslow's Sparrow	Jan 28	HAI-Big Thicket Visitor Ctr area (1) Bob Dellinger (no details)
	Jan 19	SAB-Toledo Bend off FM22928 (3) Jack Kelly (no details)
Lark Sparrow	Jan 3	JEF-TX87 nr Sea Rim (1) Sheila Hebert, Jana Whittle
	Jan 19	SAB-Toledo Bend off FM22928 (3) Jack Kelly
Harris's Sparrow	Jan 19	SAB-Toledo Bend off FM22928 (3) Jack Kelly (no details)
Eastern Towhee	Jan 1	ORA-Claiborne West Pk (1) JHH, SM

	Jan 3	9(+) EF-Old Sabine Cemetery (1) SM, TH
Pyrrhuloxia	Jan 3-19(+)	JEF-Old Sabine Cemetery (1) Sheila Hebert, Jana Whittle, others
Rose-breast. Grosbeak	Jan 2-10	JEF-Nederland (1) SM, others
Indigo Bunting	Jan 3-9(+)	JEF-SW (2) MC, TH
Rusty Blackbird	Jan 1	ORA-Vidor area (12) Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson
Pine Siskin	Jan 9	JEF-Old Sabine Cemetery (2) Ron Weeks, Bred Lirette, JHH, JAW
	Jan 12-14	JEF-Nederland (1) HS

## Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

Black Rail	Jan 3	CHA-TX87 betw. Rollover Pass and High Isl.(1) Chris Butler, others
Yellow Rail	Jan 3	CHA-TX87 betw. Rollover Pass and High Isl.(2) Chris Butler, others
Groove-billed Ani	Jan 10	CHA-Anahuac NWR Access Road (1 heard) Susan Heath
Pomarine Jaeger	Jan 29	CAM-Offshore Calcasieu River mouth (1) Mac Myers, Phillip Wallace, Dave Patton
Parasitic Jaeger	Jan 29	CAM-Offshore Calcasieu Riv mouth (1) Mac Myers, Phillip Wallace, Dave Patton
Burrowing Owl	Jan 24-30	CHA-ANWR nr Frozen Point (1) multiple obs
Black-chinned Humm.	Jan 10-31	CAL-Moss Bluff (1) Jeanie Pousson
Great Kiskadee	Jan 2-29	CAL-Hidden Ponds RV Park (2) multiple obs
Say's Phoebe	Jan 23-30	CHA-FM1985 nr Skillern Tract (1) MC, TH, JJW, JHH
	Jan 23	CAL E Friesen Rd, SE of Lake Charles (1) Erik Johnson
	Jan 25	CHA-J J Mayes Trace (1) Elizabeth Aronson
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	Jan 9-10	CHA-Anahuac NWR Access Rd (1) J. Berner, D Dickert. Susan Heath
Painted Bunting	Jan 3-20	CHA-Boy Scout Woods (1) multiple observers
	Jan 8-18	CAL-Mike Hooks Rd, Westlake (1) Jeanie Pousson, Beth Kramer
Rusty Blackbird	Jan 1	LIB-W of TX146 betw Hardin and Liberty (1) Andrew Durso, Kendalynn Morris
Pine Siskin	Jan 13	CAL-Moss Bluff (1) Jeanie Pousson
	Jan 29	CAL-Moss Bluff (1) Jeanie Pousson

**Abbreviations used:** ANG – Angelina County; ANWR – Anahuac NWR; BTNP – Big Thicket National Preserve; CAL – Calcasieu Parish; CAM – Cameron Parish, LA; CHA – Chambers County; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County;; HI – High Island; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAS – Jasper County; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – Jana and John Whittle; JM – John Mariani; J&R – Jessica Barry and Randy Lewis; LIB – Liberty County; MC – Michael Cooper; RHRC – Rene Hebert and Rita Czek; RL – Randy Lewis; SAB – Sabine County; SPHW – Smith Point Hawk Watch; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thpmas Hellweg TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; WJC – West Jefferson County

# 2015 Great Backyard Bird Count Set New Species Record

*Nearly half the world's species identified in four days*

*This year's Great Backyard Bird Count is February 12-15, 2016*

Participants from more than 100 countries submitted a record 147,265 bird checklists for the annual Great Backyard Bird Count and broke the previous count record for the number of species identified. The 5,090 species reported represents nearly half the possible bird species in the world. The four-day count was held February 13-16, the 18th year for the event which is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with partner Bird Studies Canada. The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track the health of bird populations at a scale made possible by using the eBird online checklist program.

A sampling of species found by intrepid counters include Ibisbill in India, Bornean Bistlehead in Malaysia, and Magellanic Plover in Chile, complete with amazing photos. GBBC participants even reported two birds, Millpo Tapaculo and Santa Marta Screech-Owl that have not yet been described in the scientific literature as new species.

## Bitter Weather

The bitter cold, snowy weather in much of the northeastern United States and in Canada was a major factor in the 2015 count. Across the Northeast, Sunday was particularly frigid and windy, and the number of reports showed an obvious dip as some counters were forced indoors. As one participant in Québec noted, watching birds came with a price as wind chill temperatures rarely topped -20 degrees Celsius (zero degrees Fahrenheit).

For those who did brave the cold, the GBBC data will help scientists better understand the impact of the cold on bird populations. For example, scientists will be able to compare the abundance of some so-called “half-hardy” species, such as Carolina Wren and Yellow-rumped Warbler, to see if this cold winter has affected their populations.

2014's cold drove many waterfowl inland (particularly White-winged Scoters and Red-necked Grebes) in the United States, but that did not happen much in 2015. Comparing the ice cover in different regions of Canada and the northern United States between the previous winter and that of 2014-5 will give insight on the origins of these species and the potential impact to populations with last year's freezeout.

## Snowy Owl Echo

Snowy Owls are one of the most charismatic and emblematic birds of winter. They breed in Arctic regions worldwide and drop south in some winters (“irrupt”), depending on food supplies and their breeding success in the previous summer. The winter of 2013-14 was a huge year for these owls which appeared in amazing numbers across the Great Lakes states, Northeastern U.S., Atlantic Coast, and southern Canada. GBBC reports for 2015 also show a surge in Snowy Owl sightings across the same range, though the frequency of reports is about half of the previous winter's. This is a well-known phenomenon with Snowy Owls, with the year after a very large invasion known as an “echo flight.”

## Winter Finches

Winter finches—such as Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, redpolls, and crossbills—are popular among GBBC participants. These birds also “irrupt” south of their usual haunts depending on food supplies, so their numbers in a given region may change widely from year to year.

2015 was a banner year for Pine Siskins which were reported on 10.5% of GBBC checklists (see map below). Compare that to 1.2% of checklists in 2014 when most siskins stayed far north in Canada. Siskins will likely be hanging around through April and May, especially if the feeders are stocked with their favorite nyjer (thistle) seed.

## GBBC Top 10 Lists

Surprisingly, a Eurasian species, the Brambling, appears on the Top 10 list of most reported species for the first time ever. Since November, some of these birds have been spotted on the West Coast and others strayed even farther by turning up in Montana, Wyoming, and Ontario, with one 2015 GBBC record in North America from Washington state. But the Brambling's appearance among the Top 10 can be traced to one checklist from Germany reporting a flock estimated at one million birds. Up to three million Bramblings have been known to gather at that site.

In North America, California sits atop the leader board with the most checklists submitted and the greatest number of species, followed by Pennsylvania and New York. Ontario, Canada, is in the Top 10 for the second year in a row, nudging past Ohio and Georgia. Ontario sent in the highest number of checklists in Canada (4,218) but British Columbia reported the highest number of species (197).

Checklists from Québec in 2015 were up, largely because Regroupement QuébecOiseaux joined the eBird family this year with a regional version of eBird in the province. In many ways, the province-wide bird checklist program in Québec that began in the 1990s provided much of the inspiration for the GBBC and eBird, so we are pleased to have this partnership and look forward to growing GBBC stats in the years to come. Québec residents have submitted 1,520 checklists in 2015, a 33% increase over 2014.

Outside of the U.S. and Canada, India was once again a star performer, nearly doubling the number of checklists submitted to more than 6,800 and reporting the greatest number of species with 717.

An example of the impact one dedicated individual can have is that of Zhejko Stanimirovic who promoted the GBBC on Facebook and local listservs in Serbia. The 109 checklists and 82 species found in Serbia were a really impressive result, ranking 16th highest among the more than 100 countries that participated this year. We look forward to more growth in Serbia as each GBBC participant from this year tells their friends to join and we encourage others to follow Zhejko's model to promote the GBBC in their community.

**Top 10 most frequently reported species** (number of checklists reporting this species):

Species	Number of Checklists
Northern Cardinal	59,083
Dark-eyed Junco	59,074
Mourning Dove	48,313
Downy Woodpecker	45,399
Blue Jay	41,671
American Goldfinch	39,880
House Finch	39,241
Tufted Titmouse	38,191
Black-capped Chickadee	36,363
House Sparrow	34,564

\* All Top 10 species are North American, reflecting high participation from this region.

**Top 10 most numerous species** (sum of how many individuals were observed across all checklists):

Species	Number of Individuals
Snow Goose	1,494,937
Canada Goose	1,110,946
Brambling	1,000,047
European Starling	630,610
Mallard	579,330
American Coot	501,152
American Robin	488,063
Dark-eyed Junco	465,939
Red-winged Blackbird	432,513
American Goldfinch	364,963

\* Most of these Top 10 species are North American, reflecting high participation from this region.

**Top 10 states/provinces by checklists submitted**

State/Province	Number Species	of Number Checklists	of
California	376	8,453	
Pennsylvania	141	7,120	
New York	163	6,615	
Florida	309	5,478	
Texas	366	5,256	
Virginia	180	4,672	
North Carolina	201	4,497	
Ontario	137	4,216	
Ohio	125	4,190	
Georgia	200	4,017	

**Top 10 countries by checklists submitted**

Country	Number Species	of Number Checklists	of
United States	671	108,396	
Canada	241	10,491	
India	717	6,810	
Australia	524	812	
Mexico	653	425	
Costa Rica	559	303	
Portugal	197	193	
New Zealand	126	161	
Ecuador	784	138	
Honduras	353	133	

Thank you to the estimated more than 143,000 bird watchers around the world who participated in the GBBC in 2015. Join us again this year February 12-15, 2016!

## Field Trip to Anahuac *(continued from page 4)*

west, over in the East Unit of the refuge. One very distant Bald Eagle was spotted, as well as a White-tailed Kite and two Red-tailed Hawks.

That concluded the formal part of the field trip, but, as almost always happens, participants driving the nearby roads turn up other interesting birds. Just east of the Skillern Tract along FM1985, a Say's Phoebe was flycatching from the fences. There were Crested Caracaras in a number of places, even though there weren't any seen during the field trip itself, strictly defined. Further afield, a large Snow Goose flock, probably at least 5,000 strong was in the vicinity of Jenkins Road and FM1663 along with large numbers of Dowitchers and Dunlins, and there were also some Sandhill Cranes near FM1663 on Hamilton Lateral Road.

Here is a list of birds seen (and communicated to the leaders) between the start of the trip at the Visitor Information Station, and the conclusion at the Skillern Tract. Very likely, the numbers of many species are very conservative!

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (50); Fulvous Whistling-Duck (7); Greater White-fronted Goose (19); Snow Goose (1330); Ross's Goose (1+); Gadwall (45); American Wigeon (32);

Blue-winged Teal (16); Northern Shoveler (155); Northern Pintail (20); Green-winged Teal (5); Redhead (14); Ring-necked Duck (140); Lesser Scaup (2); Ruddy Duck (3); Pied-billed Grebe (17); Neotropic Cormorant (21); Double-crested Cormorant (2); American White Pelican (5); Brown Pelican (1); Great Blue Heron (5); Great Egret (5); Snowy Egret (8); Little Blue Heron (2); Cattle Egret (5); Black-crowned Night-Heron (4); White Ibis (9); White-faced Ibis (5); Roseate Spoonbill (2); Black Vulture (2); Turkey Vulture (6); Osprey (1); White-tailed Kite (1); Bald Eagle (8); Northern Harrier (3); Red-tailed Hawk (4); Red-tailed (Krider's) Hawk (1); King Rail (1); Common Moorhen (25); American Coot (304); Killdeer (2); Greater Yellowlegs (1); Mourning Dove (2); Belted Kingfisher (1); American Kestrel (3); Eastern Phoebe (10); Vermilion Flycatcher (1); Loggerhead Shrike (1); White-eyed Vireo (1); Tree Swallow (60); Sedge Wren (1); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (5); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (6); Northern Mockingbird (5); American Pipit (1); Orange-crowned Warbler (1); Common Yellowthroat (3); Yellow-rumped Warbler (36); Savannah Sparrow (12); Lincoln's Sparrow (1); Swamp Sparrow (3); White-crowned Sparrow (3); Northern Cardinal (2); Red-winged Blackbird (17); Eastern Meadowlark (20); American Goldfinch (2). *John A. Whittle*

## **Johnson Bayou, LA Christmas Bird Count, December 14, 2015**

### **Sponsored by Golden Triangle Audubon Society**

On Monday, December 14, 2015, the Johnson Bayou Christmas Bird Count found 119 species and 10,995 individual birds, both numbers well within the range of records since 2002. Nine observers enjoyed a very nice day in the upper 40s to lower 50s, partly cloudy and clearing through the day with a WSW breeze blowing behind a cold front. We have great cooperation from landowners and would like to thank the owners and managers of The Gray Estate, Dore' Energy, and Crain Brothers for graciously allowing access to their property for the CBC and for help from their personnel in the field in finding our way around the various gates, roads and properties.

First thing in the morning, while some of us were still getting organized, oriented and provisioned at the store in Johnson Bayou, Jana and Harlan found a Say's Phoebe on a road to the beach in the SE sector of the count circle. It's a first for this count, not seen since at least 2002, and the bird posed for Harlan to get good photo documentation. Just a bit later, Howard and Sherry saw something different among a flock of sparrows in a roadside line of brush west of Johnson Bayou, which turned out to be a Lark Sparrow, also a first for this count. Howard had asked earlier for the definition of a "write-up bird"; a bird not listed on our Johnson Bayou count checklist is a good candidate. Later in the day John Whittle turned up a Marbled Godwit from the chenier across the highway from the high school, another bird never recorded in the current series of counts.

Results with ducks were mixed. Gadwalls, Canvasbacks, Lesser Scaup and Ruddy Ducks were found in good numbers comparable to past good years, while expected Redheads, Mallards, and especially Northern Pintails were missed.

Two Common Loons seen equals the total from 2002 to 2014. Pied-billed Grebes and Neotropic Cormorants were plentiful, but only six Double-crested Cormorants were found. We tried not to count several large formations of White Pelicans in flight more than once. All the expected herons and egrets were present, Snowy Egrets being present in record numbers for this count. We also saw Black-crowned Night-Herons and a Green Heron, species seen in low numbers and not every count. White Ibis were present in good numbers but fewer than the last 3 years. Plegadis ibis (dark) species were down substantially more than the White Ibis. Seventy-three Roseate Spoonbills were a record high for the count.

Both vulture species were down a bit. We found Ospreys, White-tailed Kites, and Northern Harriers in expected numbers, as well as a Sharp-shinned Hawk and two Cooper's Hawks. Red-tailed Hawks and Kestrels were plentiful. One or two each of White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon filled out a good list of birds-of-prey, some not seen every count.



The Sora was a near-miss with one, but Common Gallinules and American Coots were present in good numbers, though the latter are trending down from the irruption two years ago.

In addition to the expected shorebirds, several showed up that hadn't been seen in recent years including Ruddy Turnstones, a Dunlin, American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, and Piping Plover. There were no surprises among the gulls, but Caspian Tern was a miss.

There was only one Rock Pigeon and a few Mourning Doves while White-winged and Inca Doves were missed this year. Six Eastern Bluebirds were recorded, last seen in 2007. We saw only one each of Hermit Thrush, Robin, and Gray Catbird. No Brown Thrasher's were seen. Loggerhead Shrikes were present in good numbers. One Carolina Wren and one Winter Wren appeared, not seen in the past several years. Gnatcatchers, Tree Swallows, and Kinglets were found in good numbers. American Pipit was a miss, but the usual winter warblers were all present, including a Palm Warbler repeating from last year.

Only one Great Horned Owl and two Barn Owls were found, one after dark while returning to lock a ranch gate.

Sparrow numbers appear to be down somewhat, with exception of Savannah Sparrows and Song Sparrows. The more unusual Field and Vesper Sparrows were missed, as was Northern Cardinal. There was one Indigo Bunting after several years missed.

All the blackbirds, grackles, Eastern Meadowlark and cowbird were present in normal numbers, as was the American Goldfinch. And a half-dozen House Sparrows.

While many factors besides actual bird populations affect the results of each Christmas Bird Count, the National Audubon data from all the counts this year should shed light on how much of the variability we are seeing is due to this unusually warm El Niño winter. The variability includes several unusual sightings, quite a few misses, and multi-year trends in larger populations that are less likely to be random.

GOOSE, Snow (87); WIGEON, American (19); GADWALL (1250); TEAL, Green-winged (15); CANVASBACK (359); DUCK, Mottled (20); TEAL, Blue-winged (13); SHOVELER, Northern (31); DUCK, Ring-necked (3); SCAUP, Lesser (270); MERGANSER, Red-breasted (2); DUCK, Ruddy (177); LOON, Common (2); GREBE, Horned (1); GREBE, Pied-billed (22); CORMORANT, Neotropic (66); CORMORANT, Double-crested (6); PELICAN, American White (442); PELICAN, Brown (12); HERON, Little Blue (12); HERON, Tri-colored (21); HERON, Great Blue (32); EGRET, Great (48); EGRET, Snowy (305); HERON, Green (1); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (2); IBIS, White (129); IBIS, White-faced (36); IBIS, Plegadis sp. (7); SPOONBILL, Roseate (73); VULTURE, Black (8); VULTURE, Turkey (12); OSPREY (4); KITE, White-tailed (5); HARRIER, Northern (40); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Cooper's (2); HAWK, Red-shouldered (1); HAWK, Red-tailed (44); HAWK, Red-tailed (Kriders) (1); HAWK, White-tailed (2); CARACARA, Crested (3); KESTREL, American

(20); MERLIN (1); FALCON, Peregrine (2); RAIL, Clapper (10); RAIL, King (1); SORA (1); GALLINULE, Common (73); COOT, American (4615); SNIPE, Wilson's (8); GODWIT, Marbled (1); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (12); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (6); WILLET (3); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (16); SANDERLING (62); SANDPIPER, Least (10); DUNLIN (1); STILT, Black-necked (67); AVOCET, American (22); PLOVER, Black-bellied (5); KILLDEER (61); PLOVER, Piping (2); GULL, Ring-billed (66); GULL, Herring (3); GULL, Laughing (81); TERN, Royal (28); TERN, Forster's (37); PIGEON, Rock (1); DOVE, Mourning (18); OWL, Barn (2); OWL, Great Horned (1); KINGFISHER, Belted (19); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (1); WOODPECKER, Downy (8); FLICKER, Northern (Yellow-shafted) (10); PHOEBE, Eastern (27); FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (2); JAY, Blue (2); VIREO, White-eyed (1); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (41); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (6); THRUSH, Hermit (1); ROBIN, American (1); CATBIRD, Gray (1); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (38); STARLING, European (171); WREN, House (15); WREN, Winter (1); WREN, Sedge (2); WREN, Marsh (3); WREN, Carolina (1); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (25); SWALLOW, Tree (62); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (4); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (27); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (14); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) (54); WARBLER, Palm (1); WARBLER, Pine (4); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (7); SPARROW, Lincoln's (2); SPARROW, White-crowned (47); SPARROW, White-throated (5); SPARROW, Savannah (250); SPARROW, Song (34); SPARROW, Swamp (57); SPARROW, Le Conte's (1); SPARROW, Chipping (5); BUNTING, Indigo (1); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (829); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (111); GRACKLE, Common (33); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (136); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (57); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (27); GOLDFINCH, American (20); SPARROW, House (6); PHOEBE, Say's (1); SPARROW, Lark (1).

SPECIES, total (119); INDIVIDUALS, total (10995); Observers (9); Parties (4); Party-hours total (32.5); Party-miles total (130); Party-hours on foot (14.5); Party-miles on foot (7.5); Party-hours by car (23); Party-miles by car (119).

Observers: Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Gary and Denise Kelley, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, John and Jana Whittle.

# **Turkey Creek Christmas Bird Count – 19 December 2015**

## **Sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve.**

Fourteen observers in five parties found 2144 birds of 73 species on 19 December 2015 in very pleasant weather conditions. The number of species was the fourth highest in the 38 year history of the count, the most recent higher count being the 74 species in 2009. The number of individual birds was, however, well below average. This is easily attributed almost exclusively to the low number of American Robins, 89, the lowest since 1984. We have anecdotal evidence that there are Robins well south of their normal winter range this winter, suggesting that many of those that would otherwise have spent the winter in the Big Thicket area are further south this year. This is counter-intuitive to the evidence of global warming, but temperature is likely not the only factor influencing the migration pattern.

There was one species seen that was new to the count – Vermilion Flycatcher. We believe the wintering population of this species in Southeast Texas is increasing incrementally, so we are not surprised to find this species. There was a sizable flock of Ring-necked Ducks on Lake Hyatt, the second time in recent years that has occurred, the previous one being in 2013. Other than the Lake Hyatt and Lake Kimble in Wildwood, there are no significant sized bodies of water in the count circle. However, we do usually find Wood Ducks on Turkey Creek, as we did this year, but in lower numbers than normal. A Greater Yellowlegs around the lake in Wildwood was probably a result of the areas being so wet this fall. A Northern Harrier flying over the Turkey Creek trail was not expected, but there are several precedents for this species, albeit mostly in the early years of the count. The final unusual species was Greater Roadrunner. We have long known that there is a small population of this species in the Big Thicket area, especially in the southern parts, but this is only the fifth time one has been seen on this Christmas count.

Flyover Snow Geese have been seen in about 20 percent of Turkey Creek counts in recent years, but were more common in the 1980s. Vultures are a quintessential species of the Big Thicket, but numbers of both species were on the low side this year.

In the early years of the count, American Woodcocks were seen most years, and only a little less frequently in the early part of this century. It was, therefore, nice to see the species recorded this year by two separate parties after a three year hiatus.

The number of Blue Jays was the highest since 2008, but there were many higher counts before. When coupled with the high number of American Crows, this suggests that Corvid populations have rebounded from the effects of West Nile virus, which is disproportionately harmful to Corvids.

The numbers of Carolina and Winter Wrens were high, as were those of Tufted Titmouse, but not Carolina Chickadee. Cedar Waxwing flocks have been scarce so far this winter, but six in one group and a lone bird in another sector is very low. Yellow-rumped Warbler numbers are quite variable from year to year, and were low this year.

Sparrow numbers have been low across the area this winter, so seeing only 67 Chipping Sparrows, the lowest since 1996 was hardly surprising. Nor was the low number of White-throated Sparrows. The El Niño influenced warmer and wetter fall may have influenced this, and it is possible more sparrows will arrive when colder weather hits further north. One bright note, echoed by all our parties was the high number of Northern Cardinals.

Finally, we cannot help but note the near uniqueness of the results for a count in the lower 48 states. No Rock Pigeons, no blackbirds, grackles or cowbirds, and no House Sparrows! (This is not unusual for this count.)

## Species seen

GOOSE, Snow (145); DUCK, Wood (2); DUCK, Ring-necked (80); GREBE, Pied-billed (1); CORMORANT, Double-crested (4); HERON, Great Blue (2); EGRET, Great (2); VULTURE, Black (20); VULTURE, Turkey (73); OSPREY (1); HARRIER, Northern (1); HAWK, Cooper's (1); HAWK, Red-shouldered (14); HAWK, Red-tailed (4); COOT, American (1); KILLDEER (22); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (1); WOODCOCK, American (5); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (2); DOVE, Inca (9); DOVE, Mourning (5); ROADRUNNER, Greater (1); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (5); KINGFISHER, Belted (4); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (1); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (35); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (33); WOODPECKER, Downy (26); WOODPECKER, Hairy (5); FLICKER, Northern (4); FLICKER, N. (Yellow shafted) (4); WOODPECKER, Pileated (35); KESTREL, American (13); PHOEBE, Eastern (18); FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (1); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (1); VIREO, White-eyed (3); VIREO, Blue-headed (6); JAY, Blue (66); CROW, American (216); CHICKADEE, Carolina (69); TITMOUSE, Tufted (56); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (16); CREEPER, Brown (1); WREN, Carolina (50); WREN, House (13); WREN, Winter (5); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (5); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (8); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (73); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (110); THRUSH, Hermit (30); ROBIN, American (89); CATBIRD, Gray (4); THRASHER, Brown (8); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (20); STARLING, European (20); WAXWING, Cedar (7); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (21); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (1); WARBLER, Pine (74); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (27); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped.(Myrtle) (53); SPARROW, Chipping (67); SPARROW, Field (7); JUNCO, Dark-eyed (3); JUNCO, Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) (14); SPARROW, White-throated (60); SPARROW, Savannah (1); SPARROW, Song (7); SPARROW, Lincoln's (1); SPARROW, Swamp (4); TOWHEE, Eastern (5); CARDINAL, Northern (159); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (14); GOLDFINCH, American (149); SPECIES, total (73); INDIVIDUALS, total (2144); Number of observers (14); Number of parties (5); Party-hours on foot (13.50); Party-miles on foot (11.45); Party-hours by car (27.90); Party-miles by car (140.20); Total Party hours (41.40); Total Party miles (151.65)

Participants: Jim Armacost, Michael Cooper, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Randy Lewis, Gene Marsh, Steve Mayes, Sherrie Roden, Wanda and Charles Smith, Harlan Stewart, Jana and John Whittle.

## **Beech Creek Christmas Bird Count – 28 December 2015**

### **Sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve.**

Twelve observers in five parties found 3652 birds of 68 species on 28 December 2015 on a day following an evening and night of heavy rain. In sharp contrast to the earlier Turkey Creek count in the southern part of the Big Thicket, the number of species seen was very low, the lowest since 1987. The number of individual birds was the fourth lowest in the 38 year history of the count. This number is much more variable, but it is worth noting that two of the lower counts were in very recent years. There have not been any wholesale changes in the land habitat within the count circle, although the level of Steinhagen Lake has varied markedly, and the lake level over the last decade has been maintained at approximately 70 percent of capacity, the period including an almost complete drawdown in 2006-07.

Species found in large and variable numbers on this count include American Coot, American Robin and Double-crested Cormorant. American Robin numbers have been low across the region this winter. We have anecdotal evidence that there are Robins well south of their normal winter range this winter, suggesting that many of those that would otherwise have spent the winter in the Big Thicket area are further south this year. This is counter-intuitive to the evidence of global warming, but temperature is likely not the only factor influencing the migration pattern. American Coot numbers were within normal ranges, despite evidence from counts not much further south that they are very numerous this year. Double-crested Cormorant numbers were very low.

There were no new-to-the-count species this year, and relatively few of the species we see occasionally that would be worthy of note. Species missing this year included many of the ducks, although the large Canvasback flock was present. To a considerable extent, this has been the region-wide experience, although the one species that has been particularly prominent along the Upper Texas Coast, Gadwall, was not found on this count. Sparrow diversity was low, as has been the experience region-wide this winter. One bright note was the high number of Northern Cardinals, in keeping with experience this winter elsewhere in the Big Thicket.

Both species of vulture were present in well above average numbers, as were both expected *Accipiter* species, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawk. Woodpecker numbers mimicked last years except for more Northern Flickers and fewer Pileated Woodpeckers. The number of Blue Jays was good, and there was a high number of American Crows, suggesting that Corvid populations have rebounded from the effects of West Nile virus, which is disproportionately harmful to Corvids.

The numbers of Carolina and Winter Wrens were high, as were those of Tufted Titmouse, but not Carolina Chickadee. Cedar Waxwing flocks have been scarce so far this winter, and six in one group and a lone bird in another sector is very low. Yellow-rumped Warbler numbers are quite variable from year to year, and were low this year.

Sparrow numbers have been low across the area this winter, so seeing only 67 Chipping Sparrows, the lowest since 1996 was hardly surprising. Nor was the low number of White-throated Sparrows. The El Niño influenced warmer and wetter fall may have influenced this, and it is possible more sparrows will arrive when colder weather hits further north.

Finally, we cannot help but note an unusual experience for a count in the lower 48 states. No Rock Pigeons, very few blackbirds or grackles, and no cowbirds or House Sparrows! (This is not unusual for this count.)

#### Species seen

DUCK, Wood (5); WIGEON, American (1); PINTAIL, Northern (1); CANVASBACK (286); REDHEAD (40); DUCK, Ring-necked (18); GREBE, Pied-billed (17); CORMORANT, Double-crested (16); CORMORANT,

[species] (4); ANHINGA (1); PELICAN, American White (7); HERON, Great Blue (1); EGRET, Great (31); EGRET, Snowy (3); VULTURE, Black (123); VULTURE, Turkey (115); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (3); HAWK, Cooper's (4); EAGLE, Bald (2); HAWK, Red-shouldered (9); HAWK, Red-tailed (6); GALLINULE, Common (2); COOT, American (1002); KILLDEER (2); SNIPE, Wilson's (3); GULL, Ring-billed (11); TERN, Forster's (63); DOVE, Inca (10); DOVE, Mourning (26); KINGFISHER, Belted (3); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (44); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (9); WOODPECKER, Downy (14); WOODPECKER, Hairy (1); FLICKER, Northern (22); WOODPECKER, Pileated (12); KESTREL, American (5); PHOEBE, Eastern (32); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (1); VIREO, Blue-headed (1); JAY, Blue (54); CROW, American (180); SWALLOW, Tree (6); CHICKADEE, Carolina (57); TITMOUSE, Tufted (32); WREN, Winter (4); WREN, Carolina (14); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (3); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (11); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (34); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (112); THRUSH, Hermit (8); ROBIN, American (94); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (38); STARLING, European (6); WAXWING, Cedar (68); LONGSPUR, Lapland (); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (12); WARBLER, Pine (20); WARBLER, Yellow-r.(Myrtle) (86); SPARROW, Chipping (352); SPARROW, White-crowned (2); SPARROW, White-throated (54); SPARROW, Swamp (8); TOWHEE, Eastern (2); CARDINAL, Northern (188); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (11); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (44); GRACKLE, Common (5); GOLDFINCH, American (191); SPECIES, total (68); Number of Individuals (3652); Number of observers (12); Parties (5); Party-hours on foot (6.00); Party-miles on foot (7.10); Party-hours by car (20.50); Party-miles by car (133.75); Party-hours by boat (3.00); Party-miles by boat (3.00); Party-hours total (29.50); Party-miles total (143.85).

Participants: Mike Barnes, Mary Carter, Sherry Gibson, Sheila Hebert, Christine Sliva, Wanda and Charles Smith, Anupama and Girish Udaykumar, Jeremy Webster, Jana and John Whittle.

## **Orange County Christmas Bird Count, January 1 2016**

### **Sponsored by Golden Triangle Audubon Society**

On Friday January 1, the Orange County CBC recorded 136 species, the best number since the current series of counts began in 2002. With 10 observers, the field effort was a bit less than in 2015. The day was a cool one in the 40s, with a NNE breeze though-out the day and occasional light precipitation. We have great cooperation from landowners and would like to thank the owners of two large private parcels, Odum Interests and Hawk Club, on the southeast edge of the circle, for the second year. We also thank The Brown Estate, Pinehurst Gardens, and Mr. G. Langham for access to their property. With more area to cover and fewer observers, the number of species found was a pleasant surprise. The number of individual birds seen was down from last year, due mainly to the large numbers of Coots and Yellowlegs sp. seen last year behind the Entergy power plant, which we did not visit this year.

A small flock of Rusty Blackbirds was found in Vidor, mixed in with Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds. A Sprague's Pipit, Hairy Woodpecker and Great Horned Owl were also documented.

Duck observations were up this year with additions from the Odum Interests and Hawk Club properties. These included Gadwalls, Mallards, a few Mottled Ducks, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teal, Shovelers, Pintails, and Canvasbacks. Other ducks were seen in smaller numbers. Ruddys and Redheads were missed.

All the expected herons and ibis were found except Roseate Spoonbill. Six Bald Eagles were recorded, exceeding the 4 seen in 2015. Spotted Sandpiper was back this year, but we missed Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, and American Woodcock for the first time in several years. Perhaps this is due to not covering exactly the same habitats with the same effort from year to year. A small flock of Dowitcher species appeared after 3 years of no sightings.

Other waders and shorebirds were found in the usual small numbers, though thirteen Willets was a good increase over recent years. We saw the expected gulls, terns, and doves.. There were two Lesser Black-backed Gulls observed.

Three Great Horned Owls were a surprise, none being seen on this count since 2008. Our usual Belted Kingfisher and woodpeckers were present, with a new addition, a Hairy Woodpecker. Numbers of birds-of-prey were in the normal range, though only one Northern Harrier was sighted.

White-eyed Vireos and Blue-headed Vireos were up from recent years. Cave Swallows repeated their appearance last year, and a Barn Swallow was a first. No Marsh Wren was recorded, but the expected smaller Passerines were present, with Eastern Bluebirds and Cedar Waxwings in

very good numbers. Black-and-white Warbler was a miss, but 10 Palm Warblers were a first! Eastern Towhee made its occasional appearance, as did thirty-four House Finches, high for a bird seen in small numbers every few past years.

GOOSE, Greater White-fronted (96); GOOSE, Snow (40); GOOSE, Ross's (1); GADWALL (101); MALLARD (49); DUCK, Mottled (4); TEAL, Blue-winged (25); SHOVELER, Northern (128); PINTAIL, Northern (176); TEAL, Green-winged (402); CANVASBACK (5); DUCK, Ring-necked (5); SCAUP, Greater (4); SCAUP, Lesser (1); BUFFLEHEAD (3); GOLDENEYE, Common (5); MERGANSER, Hooded (4); MERGANSER, Red-breasted (6); DUCK species (3); LOON, Common (3); GREBE, Pied-billed (27); CORMORANT, Neotropic (234); CORMORANT, Double-crested (33); ANHINGA (3); PELICAN, American White (18); PELICAN, Brown (36); HERON, Great Blue (24); EGRET, Great (47); EGRET, Snowy (44); HERON, Little Blue (3); HERON, Tri-colored (2); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (2); IBIS, Plegadis species (129); VULTURE, Black (30); VULTURE, Turkey (30); OSPREY (18); HARRIER, Northern (1); HAWK, Cooper's (2); ACCIPITER species (1); EAGLE, Bald (6); HAWK, Red-shouldered (8); HAWK, Red-tailed (13); RAIL, King (1); RAIL, Virginia (3); SORA (1); RAIL species (3); GALLINULE, Common (18); COOT, American (364); STILT, Black-necked (2); PLOVER, Semipalmated (2); KILDEER (43); SANDPIPER, Spotted (5); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (4); WILLET (13); YELLOWLEGS species (4); SANDPIPER, Least (40); SANDPIPER, Western (20); SANDPIPER species (25); DOWITCHER species (15); GULL, Laughing (42); GULL, Ring-billed (217); GULL, Herring (2); GULL, Lesser Black-backed (2); GULL species (4); TERN, Caspian (13); TERN, Forster's (20); TERN, Royal (4); SKIMMER, Black (25); PIGEON, Rock (38); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (108); DOVE, Inca (7); DOVE, White-winged (148); DOVE, Mourning (95); OWL, Eastern Screech- (2); OWL, Great Horned (3); OWL, Barred (2); KINGFISHER, Belted (16); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (4); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (44); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (12); WOODPECKER, Downy (19); WOODPECKER, Hairy (1); FLICKER, Northern (Yellow-shafted) (6); WOODPECKER, Pileated (4); CARACARA, Crested (5); KESTREL, American (2); MERLIN (1); FALCON, Peregrine (2); PHOEBE, Eastern (27); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (23); VIREO, White-eyed (4); VIREO, Blue-headed (4); JAY, Blue (116); CROW, American (24); CROW species (2); SWALLOW, Tree (257); SWALLOW, Cave (2); SWALLOW, Barn (1); CHICKADEE, Carolina (35); TITMOUSE, Tufted (6); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (5); CREEPER, Brown (2); WREN, House (8); WREN, Winter (2); WREN, Sedge (2); WREN, Carolina (25); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (6); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (3); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (34); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (112); THRUSH, Hermit (15); ROBIN, American (540); CATBIRD, Gray (14); THRASHER, Brown (10); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (90); STARLING, European (264); PIPIT, American (1); PIPIT, Sprague's (1); WAXWING, Cedar (125); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (13); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (4); WARBLER, Palm (10); WARBLER, Pine (127); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) (253); SPARROW,



Chipping (162); SPARROW, White-crowned (1); SPARROW, White-throated (38); SPARROW, Vesper (1); SPARROW, Savannah (96); SPARROW, Song (12); SPARROW, Swamp (26); TOWHEE, Eastern (1); CARDINAL, Northern (120); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (1001); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (153); BLACKBIRD, Rusty (12); GRACKLE, Common (201); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (69); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (107); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (20); FINCH, House (34); GOLDFINCH, American (107); SPARROW, House (30).

SPECIES, total (136); INDIVIDUALS, total (7756); Observers (10); Parties (5); Party-hours total (44.3); Party-miles total (167.5); Party-hours on foot (15.75); Party-miles on foot (11.5); Party-hours by car (28.55); Party-miles by car (156).

Observers: Bruce Bishop, Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Steve Mayes, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, John and Jana Whittle.

## **Sea Rim State Park Christmas Bird Count – 3 January 2016**

### **Sponsored by Golden Triangle Audubon Society**

Twenty five observers found 25,479 birds of 159 species on the Sea Rim State Park Christmas Bird Count. The number of species was the highest post-Hurricane Ike total and significantly above the longer term average. The number of individual birds was in the middle of the normal range, which is, however, heavily influenced by the dramatically varying numbers of Snow Geese that are seen on count day.

We thank McFaddin and Texas Point NWRs and especially Patrick Walther, J.D. Murphree WMA (Mike Rezsutek), and landowners, especially those at the end of Backridge Road, (Jeanette Sanders, Lane Plauche and Wayne Chadwick) for allowing access and providing extensive assistance. With everybody's help, coverage of the count circle was very good. Additional observers in boats would be the only way to improve on it!

This was probably the most exciting count in terms of rare and unusual birds since we restarted the count in 1995. Three of the most sought after species that were on publically accessible property remained to be seen by many observers in the subsequent days, and some are probably still present. The interesting and unusual species we found included the following. A female Pyrrhuloxia, a first record for Jefferson County as far as we can determine, was found at the entrance road to the old, small cemetery (McGaffey Cemetery, but it is not signed in any way) that is three miles west of Sabine Pass on the north side of Highway 87. This bird is still being seen relatively easily as of January 14. In a classic case of what is known as the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect (named after a roadside rest stop in Patagonia, Arizona, where the first US record of Rose-throated Becard led to birders visiting the site also finding Thick-billed Kingbirds and Gray Hawks) birders who came late on count day to see the Pyrrhuloxia found three Groove-billed Anis (four were seen by searchers the next day) in the same location. These birds were seen for at least five days thereafter, co-operating for photographs like no other Anis we have ever encountered in this area. As if that wasn't enough, observers who came to see the Pyrrhuloxia the following day found three species that we missed on count day – White-crowned Sparrow, Inca Dove and Red-shouldered Hawk.

Two Indigo Buntings, one with significant amounts of blue, were found in the area of the new oaks in the east part of Sabine Woods. These birds were still present on January 7, and may have stayed much longer. A Red-breasted Nuthatch was seen in the pines on the east side of Sabine Woods. This bird had been seen on and off for at least six weeks, and has been seen subsequently, but it is not vocalizing, and has not been easy to find. A Couch's Kingbird was found at the very end of Backridge Road. It was found on private property, but was seen, and its identity confirmed, the following day from the public road. A Lark Sparrow was seen on the side of the road near the entrance to the Marsh Unit at Sea Rim State Park.

The interior marsh habitat of McFaddin NWR often produces species that are not seen anywhere else in the count circle. This year's species were a Least Bittern -- a lingering bird of a species that nests in the refuge, but normally migrates south for the winter; a Short-eared Owl and a Yellow Rail, both species that winter in small numbers on the refuge but are difficult to detect.

We had not seen Bald Eagle on this count since January 1998, somewhat surprising in view of the increasing frequency of sightings in west Jefferson County and Chambers County, often in associated with large flocks of geese. However, we found one adult and one immature bird this year. White-tailed Hawks are also increasing in the area, as they spread slowly eastward. There were three sightings on count day.

The most significant aspect of late fall and winter birding in Southeast Texas this year was the very wet conditions that prevailed. This particularly affected waterfowl, especially ducks,

and the effects can be seen in the count results. The most common theme elsewhere in the region has been the preponderance of Gadwall in the duck populations. Paradoxically, the number of Gadwall seen on the count was significantly low. We did not find any wild Mallards, and the number of Northern Shovelers, although increased over last year, was well below the long term average. The numbers of Northern Pintail and Green-winged Teal were exceptionally low. On the other hand, Canvasback and Redhead numbers were both substantially increased over the last few years. Canvasback numbers were returning to levels of a few years ago, but Redhead numbers were the highest since the count was reinstituted (with the circle moved significantly eastward) in 1995.

Despite not finding Common Loons in the usual place off the south levee of Pleasure Island (although there was one just a little north of the edge of the count circle), the number of loons elsewhere in the circle was high. American White Pelican numbers were low, while Brown Pelican numbers were normal.

Finding one Reddish Egret is encouraging, as we had previously seen signs that the gap, encompassing most of coastal Jefferson County and western Cameron Parish, in the distribution of this species was filling in. Great Blue Heron numbers were disappointingly low, extending a downward trend seen over the last few counts. Black-crowned Night Herons were not numerous, as we did not find a large roost this year. Ibis numbers were low, perhaps reflecting the extensive areas of standing water further inland and the absence of shallow water areas in the count circle.

We cannot fail to note the extremely large number of American Coots, something that is region-wide this year. American Avocets were found in good numbers, principally along the shore.

We found a high number of Long-billed Curlews this year after missing the species last year, but we again failed to find any Whimbrels wintering along the Texas Point beach. Because of the high water levels, there was not much in the way of "wader" habitat, and the numbers of many of these species were on the low side.

Failing to find Gull-billed Tern was disappointing – possibly they were further inland and therefore outside the circle. Numbers of the true shorebird gulls and terns were within normal limits.

Carolina Wrens have apparently retreated from the count circle. Sedge Wren numbers were low, most likely because they did not favor the areas of Texas Point NWR that burned earlier in the fall.

Most of the expected sparrow species were found, although numbers of many (especially White-throated, Savannah and Song and Swamp Sparrows) were low, paralleling experience further inland this winter. It was disappointing not to find any Nelson's Sparrows this year. On the other hand it was encouraging to find a flock of Chipping Sparrows, the first since 2010, but a species that we used to find more often. American Goldfinches are present in good numbers along the immediate coast this year.

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (3); GOOSE, Greater White-fronted (170); GOOSE, Snow (6443); GOOSE, Ross's (22); GADWALL (364); WIGEON, American (24); DUCK, Mottled (41); TEAL, Blue-winged (20); SHOVELER, Northern (127); PINTAIL, Northern (15); TEAL, Green-winged (112); CANVASBACK (320); REDHEAD (37); DUCK, Ring-necked (35); SCAUP, Greater (1); SCAUP, Lesser (617); SCAUP, Species (187); BUFFLEHEAD (12); MERGANSER, Hooded (26); MERGANSER, Red-breasted (40); DUCK, Ruddy (429); DUCK, species (100); LOON, Common (6); GREBE, Pied-billed (58); GREBE, Horned (2); GREBE, Eared (1); CORMORANT, Neotropic (315); CORMORANT, Double-crested (82); CORMORANT species (13); PELICAN, American White (143); PELICAN, Brown (138); BITTERN, American (1); BITTERN, Least (1); HERON, Great Blue (52); EGRET, Great (151); EGRET, Snowy (189); HERON, Little Blue (8); HERON, Tricolored (33); EGRET, Reddish (1); HERON, Green (1); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (10); IBIS, White (235); IBIS, White-faced (23); IBIS, Plegadis species (39); SPOONBILL, Roseate (96); VULTURE, Black (36); VULTURE, Turkey (88); OSPREY (14); KITE, White-

tailed (6); HARRIER, Northern (34); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (2); HAWK, Cooper's (7); EAGLE, Bald (2); HAWK, White-tailed (3); HAWK, Red-shouldered (cw); HAWK, Red-tailed (38); RAIL, Yellow (1); RAIL, King (1); RAIL, Clapper (6); RAIL, Virginia (3); SORA (2); GALLINULE, Common (29); COOT, American (6182); STILT, Black-necked (38); AVOCET, American (851); OYSTERCATCHER, American (2); PLOVER, Black-bellied (66); PLOVER, Snowy (24); PLOVER, Semipalmated (21); PLOVER, Piping (18); KILLDEER (108); SANDPIPER, Spotted (2); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (11); WILLET (142); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (4); YELLOWLEGS, species (4); CURLEW, Long-billed (59); GODWIT, Marbled (3); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (9); SANDERLING (153); DUNLIN (726); SANDPIPER, Least (42); SANDPIPER, Western (62); DOWITCHER, Short-billed (31); DOWITCHER, Long-billed (15); DOWITCHER, species (4); SNIPE, Wilson's (18); GULL, Bonaparte's (16); GULL, Laughing (397); GULL, Ring-billed (1092); GULL, Herring (24); TERN, Caspian (65); TERN, Common (6); TERN, Forster's (170); TERN, Royal (193); SKIMMER, Black (9); PIGEON, Rock (197); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (6); DOVE, Inca (cw); DOVE, White-winged (11); DOVE, Mourning (45); ANI, Groove-billed (3); OWL, Barn (2); OWL, Great Horned (6); OWL, Short-eared (1); KINGFISHER, Belted (29); WOODPECKER, Golden-fronted (1); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (12); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (4); WOODPECKER, Downy (15); FLICKER, Northern (5); CARACARA, Crested (5); KESTREL, American (29); MERLIN (4); FALCON, Peregrine (3); PHOEBE, Eastern (39); FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (2); KINGBIRD, Couch's (1); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (66); VIREO, White-eyed (3); VIREO, Blue-headed (2); JAY, Blue (27); SWALLOW, Tree (554); NUTHATCH, Red-breasted (1); WREN, House (8); WREN, Sedge (44); WREN, Marsh (8); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (33); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (12); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (73); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (10); THRUSH, Hermit (8); ROBIN, American (2); CATBIRD, Gray (11); THRASHER, Brown (9); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (66); STARLING, European (507); PIPIT, American (6); WAXWING, Cedar (13); WARBLER, Black-and-white (1); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (39); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (30); WARBLER, Palm (1); WARBLER, Pine (18); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (196); WARBLER, Yellow-r.(Myrtle) (2); SPARROW, LeConte's (9); SPARROW, Seaside (20); SPARROW, Chipping (12); SPARROW, Lark (1); SPARROW, White-crowned (cw); SPARROW, White-throated (17); SPARROW, Vesper (2); SPARROW, Savannah (175); SPARROW, Song (8); SPARROW, Lincoln's (2); SPARROW, Swamp (67); TOWHEE, Eastern (1); CARDINAL, Northern (39); PYRRHULOXIA (1); BUNTING, Indigo (2); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (631); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (70); GRACKLE, Common (54); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (193); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (205); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (108); GOLDFINCH, American (87); SPARROW, House (23); SPECIES, total (159); INDIVIDUALS, total (25476); Observers (25); Parties (9); Party-hours total (67.00); Party-miles total (164.48); Party-hours on foot (31.11); Party-miles on foot (20.58); Party-hours by car (29.39); Party-miles by car (100.70); Party-hours by airboat (3.50); Party-miles by airboat (35.00); Party-hours by 4-wheeler (3.00); Party-miles by 4-wheeler (8.20)

Participants: Jessica Barry, Mary Carter, Michael Cooper, Howard Davis, Nancy Fisher, Craig Geoffroy, Bill Graber, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Denise and Gary Kelley, Lauren Lescure, Randy Lewis, Steve Mayes, Karen McCormick, Frank Ohrt, Sherrie Roden, Bob Sanger, Jenny Shuffield, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, Patrick Walther, Jana and John Whittle.