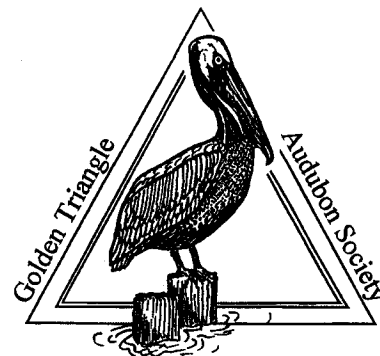


# *Brown Pelican*

**Scanned from Originals**

# The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 8 No. 9

September 2002

## Membership Meeting

Thursday, September 19, 2002  
6:30 PM, Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont

### Piecing Together the Puzzle of Louisiana's Winter Hummingbirds Nancy L. Newfield

Nancy Newfield has studied the hummingbirds that winter in southern Louisiana since 1975. In 1979, she initiated a banding project to evaluate and document the several species that spend their non-breeding season in the Bayou State. Nancy has an international reputation in hummingbirds, and has published more than 200 articles and scientific papers.

Nancy is co-author of *Hummingbird Gardens* and author of *Hummingbirds* and *Enjoying Hummingbirds More*. We expect she will have copies of these available for sale and autographing.

As usual, the doors will be open no later than 6:30 p.m., and the proceedings will start at 7:15 p.m. approximately.

## August Membership Meeting Report

Approximately 35 members and guests were present on August 15 to learn from Dick Benoit how to identify hawks or more specifically the "Diurnal Raptors of the Upper Texas Coast." Dick is the Site Coordinator for the fall Smith Point Hawk Watch, a post he has held for three years. He has been involved in the Smith Point Hawk Watch and the Spring Sylvan Beach (LaPorte) watch for the past seven years. For the twenty years preceding years, he was Hawk Chairperson for the fall hawk watch at Holiday Beach, Amherstburg, Ontario. During the last twelve years in Canada, he was Eastern Great Lakes fall regional editor for the Hawk Migration Association of North America. Dick presented slides of the thirty or so species that are seen on the Upper Texas Coast during fall migration, and gave detailed pointers on identification.

**Sabine Woods Work Day, Sat. September 7. Please Come and Help. See p.2.**

## *The Brown Pelican*

Vol. 8, No.9 September 2002

Golden Triangle  
Audubon Society

**RARE BIRD ALERT AND  
SOCIETY INFORMATION  
TELEPHONE NUMBER  
(409) 768-1340  
<http://goldtriaudubon.tripod.com>**

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## **Calendar of Events**

If you can present a program of interest to a Membership Meeting, or know of some person who can, please contact Jana Whittle at (409) 722-4193.

For more information on field trips, please contact Steve Mayes, (409) 722-5807 or the trip leader.

**Saturday September 7. Sabine Woods Work Day.** We will start about 7:30 a.m., and usually these work days do not run much beyond noon. Sabine Woods is located on Highway 87 about 4.1 miles west of the stop sign in Sabine Pass, on the north side of the highway just beyond the Petroleum Helicopters Base, and is across Highway 87 from Texas Point Refuge near its western boundary. We will try to provide at least liquid refreshment, but bring water and insect repellent. Also bring gloves, heavy duty pruning tools, machetes. We can use riding mowers, probably one chain saw and one or two push mowers for areas heavier equipment cannot reach.

**Thursday September 19 – Membership Meeting.** We have an exciting meeting with Nancy Newfield, renowned author and hummingbird expert, will talk on "Piecing Together the Puzzle of Louisiana's Winter Hummingbirds." Nancy will also have copies of her books for sale at the meeting. see front page for further details.

**Saturday September 21 – Fall Migration Count.** As usual we will be conducting a county-wide migration count in Jefferson county. We will welcome any assistance, even if it is just for a few hours in the early morning. Contact John Whittle (409-722-4193) as far in advance of the day as possible for more details or to indicate your participation.

**Saturday September 28 – Field trip to Smith Point Hawk Watch.** To reach the Smith Point Hawk Watch site from Winnie, take Highway 124 south towards High Island. After about 12 miles, turn right on FM1985 and follow it past the access road for

Anahuac NWR until it meets FM562. Follow FM562 to Smith Point. At the end of FM562, there are usually signs to the Hawk Watch. Continue straight until almost reaching the bay, and turn left on a shell/limestone oilfield road, bearing left again to the parking area. It takes at least 90 minutes from the Golden Triangle to reach the site. Your leaders will be there by 8:30 a.m., but join us when you can.

Broad-winged Hawk migration typically peaks around the 25th-26th-27th of September in southeast Texas, but the exact timing is dependent on weather conditions along the routes the hawks take. Generally, Broad-winged Hawks do not lift off in the mornings until 9 or even 10 a.m. (They wait for thermals to develop.) Sharp-shinned Hawks, on the other hand are early risers, not relying so much on thermals, and may start passing the Hawk Watch site as early as 7 a.m.

**Saturday October 5. Sabine Woods Work Day.** See entry for September 7 for details.

### **Saturday October 12. Sea Rim State Park Beginning Birder Field Trip.**

This trip, sponsored by Sea Rim State Park, is intended for the beginning birder. Leader: John Whittle. This field trip will use the birds on the beach to help the beginning birder learn what to look for in the overall shapes and appearances of birds, and the kinds of field marks that are used in identification. The focus will be on the common gulls, terns and shorebirds along the beach – *i.e.* those species where individual birds can be studied for relatively long periods of time. This trip is open to the public. Bring binoculars (and a telescope if you have one). Meet in the parking lot in front of the headquarters building at Sea Rim State Park, which is ten miles west of Sabine Pass on Highway 87, at 9:00 a.m. A Parks and Wildlife Conservation Passport or \$2 per person day entry permit will be required. See the entry for October 26 for a second beginning birder event.

**Thursday October 17. Membership Meeting.** See next month's *Brown Pelican* for details.

**Saturday October 19. Field Trip to Sabine Woods.** A trip to look for migrating fall warblers and other neotropical migrants. Leader Steve Mayes. Meet at Sabine Woods, which is 4.1 miles west of Sabine Pass on the north side of Highway 87 at 7:30 a.m.. or join the trip in progress in the woods later.

**Saturday October 26. Sea Rim State Park Beginning Birder Field Trip.** Sponsored by Sea Rim State Park, this second trip is also intended for the beginning birder. Leader: John Whittle. See the entry for October 12 for details of the first trip. This trip will attempt to introduce the beginning birder to the less easily studied migrant and other songbirds. First, the trip will explore the boardwalk at the Willows at Sea Rim. depending on presence or absence of birds, the field trip may move on to Sabine Woods for more birding. This trip is open to the public. Bring binoculars. Meet in the parking lot in front of the headquarters building at Sea Rim State Park, which is ten miles west of Sabine Pass on Highway 87, at 7:30 a.m. A Parks and Wildlife Conservation Passport or \$2 per person day entry permit will be required.

**Thursday November 21. Annual Meeting.** 7:00 p.m. in the Garden Center at Tyrrell Park, Beaumont. In addition to elections, we will show members favorite slides.

**Saturday November 23. Field Trip to Look for Sparrows.** Further details will be decided later when it can be determined where there will be good sparrow habitat this year.

**Saturday December 14. Turkey Creek Christmas Bird Count.** Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the new Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center located on Highway 69 at FM 420 approximately seven miles north of Kountze, Texas. For more information call Park Ranger Merle King at (409) 839-2689 ext. 233.

**Sunday, December 22. Bolivar Peninsula Christmas Bird Count.** Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the old Birder's

Haven in High Island. For more details, contact Bill Graber, (409) 866-5452.

**Sunday, December 29. Sea Rim State Park Christmas Bird Count.** This is the count that we sponsor. The meeting place this year – **note new location** -- will be at the Sabine Pass Battleground State Historical Park at 7:15 a.m. To reach the park, go south on FM3322 from the main intersection in Sabine Pass (where Highway 87 turns west) for about 3/4 of a mile, and turn left into the park. Meet near the restrooms. (There is no entry charge at this park.)

**Saturday, January 4, 2003. Beech Creek Christmas Bird Count.** Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Corps of Engineers Town Bluff Dam Picnic area located on FM 92 just north of FM 1746. For more information call Park Ranger Merle King at (409) 839-2689 ext. 233.

### Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank Don and Pat Jeane, Jana Whittle, and Barbara Tilton for bringing refreshments for the August meeting. Volunteers are now solicited for the September meeting and onwards. We do not expect one person to bring everything, but please call so we can coordinate! If you can just bring drinks and cookies or something similar, please call Jana Whittle at (409) 722-4193 as soon as possible. Please help if you can!

### Subscription Renewal Reminder

Please check the mailing label on this issue. If the date on your label NOT prefixed by AU has passed, please remit your contribution of \$15 to Golden Triangle Audubon Society at P.O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292. Although this contribution towards the cost of the *Brown Pelican* is voluntary for National Audubon

Society members living in the official chapter territory, we will appreciate your support. Our official chapter territory is defined by zip codes, but is basically Jefferson, Hardin and Orange Counties and one or two localities close to those Counties.

### Promoting Community Involvement in Bird Conservation

The First State Wide Annual  
Meeting of Audubon Texas  
Friday, September 13, 2002  
The Rockport Beach  
Pavilion, Rockport, Texas

Audubon Texas will hold its first-ever statewide meeting in conjunction with the Annual Rockport Hummer/Bird Celebration. This event is open to Audubon members and chapters, birding clubs and conservation organizations, as well as individuals interested in birds and wildlife and the conservation of their habitats.

This year's event will focus on sharing ideas and strategies on developing bird conservation programs at the community level, as well as how to get the community involved. We will have various Audubon leaders and presenters share their success stories relevant to community-based conservation as well as hold workshops for education and fun.

We will also conduct a meeting of the Audubon Texas Assembly on Saturday for our regional directors and chapter representatives to discuss key issues in conservation science, conservation education and public policy. On Sunday, the Audubon Texas Board of Directors will meet.

For additional information on accommodations in Rockport and the surrounding area, please contact Linda Dreeland at ldreeland@audubon.org or at the Audubon Texas Office in Austin at 512-306-0225.

## Bird Sightings – July 2002

Coverage: Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, Tyler, Jasper, Newton, Angelina, San Augustine and Sabine counties. Send Reports to: John Whittle, 3015 Nashville Avenue, Nederland, Texas 77627-6749 by the 10th of the month after or e-mail to [whittleja@hal.lamar.edu](mailto:whittleja@hal.lamar.edu) or call (409) 880-8276 or fax to (409) 880-8270. For "very rare" birds, please submit a brief account of your sighting, including a description of the bird (unless unmistakable), brief details of what it was doing, and where it was seen (if on publicly accessible property).

Format: "Common" to "abundant" birds are shown in the fashion "JEF 4 reps(25)" which means four reports in Jefferson County totaling 25 birds. Less than "common", as JEF-SW 7/5(2) ABC", which means seen in Jefferson County (JEF) at Sabine Woods (SW) on the 5th of July, two (2) birds, reported by observer "ABC" **Commentary:** There is little to comment on this month. July is typically the slowest birding month, with a lack of both observers and birds!. Perhaps the most noteworthy bird was a Sharp-shinned Hawk. This species is not known to nest any nearby.

CORMORANT, Neotropic	JEF 2 reps(9)
HERON, Great Blue	JEF 2 reps(4)
EGRET, Great	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 6 reps(65)
EGRET, Snowy	JEF 4 reps(44)
HERON, Little Blue	JEF 2 reps(75)
HERON, Tricolored	JEF 3 reps(12)
EGRET, Cattle	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 8 reps(873)
HERON, Green	JEF 6 reps(17)
NIGHT-HERON, Black-cr.	JEF 1 rep(1)
NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-cr.	JEF 5 reps(72)
IBIS, White	JEF 2 reps(9)
IBIS, White-faced	JEF 1 rep(1)
IBIS, <i>Plegadis</i>	JEF 2 reps(25)
SPOONBILL, Roseate	JEF 7/13(25) JAW; JEF-TX87 7/13(4)
	JAW; JEF 7/14(23) JAW; JEF 7/24(5) JAW; JEF-SW
	7/28(1) JAW
VULTURE, Black	JEF 4 reps(10)
VULTURE, Turkey	JEF 3 reps(19)
VULTURE species	JEF 1 rep(3)
DUCK, Mottled	JEF 7/21(6) JJW; JEF 7/28(1) JAW
HAWK, Sharp-shinned	JEF 7/14(1) JAW
HAWK, Red-shouldered	JEF 1 rep(1)
HAWK, Broad-winged	JEF 7/3(1) JAW
HAWK, Swainson's	JEF 7/17(1) JAW
HAWK, Red-tailed	JEF 7/1(1) JAW; JEF 7/14(1) JAW
BOBWHITE, Northern	JEF 1 rep(1)
GALLINULE, Purple	JEF 7/14(6) JAW; JEF 7/21(4) JJW
MOORHEN, Common	JEF 2 reps(33)
KILLDEER	JEF 4 reps(8)
STILT, Black-necked	JEF 4 reps(17)
GULL, Laughing	JEF 3 reps(98)
TERN, Forster's	JEF 3 reps(51)
TERN, Least	JEF 1 rep(1)
TERN, Black	JEF 2 reps(2)
SKIMMER, Black	JEF 2 reps(3)
DOVE, Rock	JEF 6 reps(16)
COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian	JEF 7/1(2) JAW; JEF-TX87 7/13(2)
	JAW; JEF 7/14(3) JAW; JEF 7/21(2) JJW
DOVE, White-winged	JEF 15 reps(67)
DOVE, Mourning	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 17 reps(233)
DOVE, Inca	JEF 9 reps(20)
CUCKOO, Yellow-billed	JEF 2 reps(2)
NIGHTHAWK, Common	JEF 2 reps(3)
SWIFT, Chimney	JEF 8 reps(31)
HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated	JEF-NEDR 7/23(1) JAW;
	JEF-NEDR 7/27(1) JAW
HUMMINGBIRD species	JEF 7/14(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 7/20(1)
	JAW; JEF-NEDR 7/28(1) JAW
WOODPECKER, Red-bellied	JEF 2 reps(3)
WOODPECKER, Downy	JEF 3 reps(5)
FLICKER, Northern	JEF-NEDR 7/2(2) JAW
KINGBIRD, Western	JEF 7/14(1) JAW
KINGBIRD, Eastern	JEF 6 reps(33)
FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed	JEF 2 reps(30)
SHRIKE, Loggerhead	JEF 11 reps(45)
JAY, Blue	JEF 9 reps(25)
CROW, American	HAI 1 rep(1)
CROW, Fish	JEF-SW 7/28(1) JAW
CROW, species	HAI 1 rep(10); JEF 8 reps(38)
MARTIN, Purple	HAI 1 rep(5); JEF 6 reps(219)
SWALLOW, Barn	JEF 7 reps(97)
SWALLOW species	JEF 1 rep(4)
CHICKADEE, Carolina	JEF 5 reps(8)
ROBIN, American	JEF 11 reps(15)

MOCKINGBIRD, Northern	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 10 reps(189)
STARLING, European	JEF 8 reps(139)
YELLOWTHROAT, Common	JEF 2 reps(2)
CARDINAL, Northern	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 8 reps(26)
DICKCISSEL	JEF 1 rep(1)
BLACKBIRD, Red-winged	JEF 5 reps(74)
MEADOWLARK, Eastern	JEF 2 reps(5)
MEADOWLARK species	JEF 2 reps(9)
GRACKLE, Common	JEF 8 reps(417)
GRACKLE, Great-tailed	JEF 11 reps(63)
COWBIRD, Brown-headed	JEF 2 reps(28)
ORIOLE, Orchard	JEF 3 reps(10)
FINCH, House	JEF-NEDR 7/9(2) JAW; JEF-NEDR
	7/11(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 7/12(6) JAW; JEF-NEDR
	7/14(8) JAW; JEF-NEDR 7/25(2) JAW; JEF-NEDR
	7/27(4) JAW; JEF-NEDR 7/28(3) JAW
SPARROW, House	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 12 reps(128)

Number of Species	67
Number of Individuals	3590

**County Abbreviations:**  
HAI Hardin; JEF Jefferson

**Location Codes:**  
BMT - Beaumont; NEDR - Nederland; SW - Sabine Woods; TP - Tyrrell Park incl. Cattail Marsh; TX87 - Texas 87 Pt. Arthur-Sabine Pass-Sea Rim.

**Observer Abbreviation**  
JAW - John Whittle; JJW - John and Jana Whittle.

### Bird Alerts

Visits to Sabine Woods have resulted in the sightings of good numbers of species of migrating warblers, starting as early as August 10. Species noted included Blue-winged Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler and Ovenbird, as well as the somewhat more predictable Hooded Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush. Prairie Warbler has also been seen. Perhaps we should not be surprised that a few individuals of the species which nest not very far north of us should wander a few miles south post-breeding. This same phenomenon is much more obvious in shorebirds. Indeed, in many shorebird species, a few individuals return very early – presumably having failed in a breeding attempt – and others, believed to be mostly one year old birds, never leave the wintering grounds, or do so for only a very short period.

Somewhat perversely, the recent wet weather seems to have made it more difficult to find these shorebirds this early fall. Many places we normally look have too much water, and the birds may well be spread over much more suitable habitat than usual. Cattail Marsh in Tyrrell Park has no ponds of the appropriate depth. The ponds near the entrance (2 and 3) have been kept dry for several months and have become overgrown with vegetation; the back ponds (4 and 5) have water which is too deep for all but Stilts and Avocets.

Raptors have started to trickle through. Mississippi Kites have been seen over Beaumont, and a few Broad-winged Hawks have also been seen (in addition to the local breeders).

## Field Trip to Bolivar Flats – August 24, 2002

August might not seem like a good time to be outdoors in Southeast Texas, but late summer is really the start of our 'Fall' migration. It was to catch a glimpse of this spectacle that a half dozen or so birders met at Bolivar Flats for the August field trip. Shorebirds are often the earliest and latest of migrants. You can find migrant shorebirds either coming or going just about any time of year and Houston Audubon's Bolivar Flats Sanctuary is as good a place to see them as anywhere. Most people may think of warblers and tanagers when the word migration is mentioned but the shorebird migration on the upper Texas Coast is just as spectacular.

The birding starts quickly at the Flats as Ruddy Turnstones and Laughing Gulls were visible as soon as the group left their vehicles. A White-tailed Kite put on a fine show, first perched on a pole in the marsh then demonstrating its 'kiting' flight style directly overhead. The first of many Reddish Egrets of the day were seen, all of them of the dark form typical of this area. Sanderlings explored the waterline.

Moving out onto the Flats, more birds revealed themselves. The first Horned Lark of the day was found. This bird is hard to come by in Jefferson County but they seem to be flourishing here. A group of young Herring Gulls displayed their brownish plumage while several species of terns zipped by overhead. The occasional Barn Swallow was also noted.

Plovers are always one of the highlights of this trip and the group was not disappointed. Numerous Piping and Wilson's Plovers were joined by a few Semipalmated and Snowy Plovers. The larger Black-bellied Plovers, some still in breeding plumage, also put in an appearance. No Killdeer were seen on the beach but they were seen later in the day making for a six plover day – not too shabby.

Terns were well represented with Caspian and Royal Terns obvious. Sandwich Terns were surprisingly easy to find but Forster's Terns were strangely absent. A few Common Terns loafed on the beach. Black Terns, some still in black plumage others already in winter white, were around in small numbers along with Least Terns. A group of 30 or more Black Skimmers showed their strange, elongated bills in the back of a group of birds.

"Peeps" were not especially evident on the day but a few Western Sandpipers and at least one probable Semipalmated Sandpiper were located. Yellowlegs explored a small pond on the beach along with Dowitchers (all, apparently, Short-billed). Diligent searching among the throngs of birds finally produced an American Oystercatcher. Of course, after the first was found, four more eventually turned up though all of them at a distance. Marbled Godwits probed the mud alongside numerous Long-billed Curlews. A lone Whimbrel was spotted despite his attempts to hide behind a tuft of grass. Brown Pelicans were present in good numbers and two American White Pelicans were a nice find.

Leaving Bolivar Flats is always difficult (though certain birders seem to enjoy showing up very late and leaving early but don't worry Rose Ann, I would never mention any names) but other birds awaited. Places like Port Bolivar and Yacht Basin Road often yield surprises. A quick glimpse was had of a Clapper Rail at Port Bolivar, while Bob's Road held a female Belted Kingfisher and a young Scissor-tailed

Flycatcher. Yacht Basin produced a Forster's Tern (finally) along with distant glimpses of Pelicans and other birds.

The few remaining birders decided to hit High Island and the East Bay Bayou unit of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge on the way home. Boy Scout Woods was alive with little flying things, unfortunately they were mostly mosquitoes. Fighting off the onset of West Nile Virus a few nice birds were spotted including Hooded and Blue-winged Warblers and a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers. East Bay Bayou was pretty empty, though a lone Black-necked Stilt put in an appearance. A Purple Gallinule was seen in the roadside ditch on the way out of the refuge.

Leaving a birding trip from Bolivar Flats is always satisfying. You can pretty much guarantee that you will see a ton of birds and there is usually a surprise or two along the way. Picking up a couple of migrating Broad-winged Hawks over Highway 73 on the way home made parting a little easier but the next trip to Bolivar will still be eagerly anticipated.

The following birds were recorded on the trip: Turkey Vulture (1); Broad-winged Hawk (2); Purple gallinule (1); Herring Gull (6); Laughing Gull (16); Laughing Gull (1000); Caspian Tern (4); Royal Tern (10); Royal Tern (1000); Sandwich Tern (300); Forster's Tern (1); Common Tern (2); Least Tern (25); Black Tern (20); Black Tern (1); Black Skimmer (65); Neotropic Cormorant (17); Neotropic Cormorant (8); American White Pelican (2); Brown Pelican (15); Brown Pelican (100); Magnificent Frigatebird (4); Roseate Spoonbill (2); White Ibis (1); White Ibis (3); White Ibis (19); Great Blue Heron (1); Great Blue Heron (4); Great Egret (15); Great Egret (4); Great Egret (3); Snowy Egret (4); Snowy Egret (10); Snowy Egret (1); Reddish Egret (16); Tricolored Heron (6); Tricolored Heron (1); Little Blue Heron (1); Cattle Egret (53); Cattle Egret (1); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (1); Clapper Rail (1); Black-necked Stilt (3); Black-necked Stilt (1); Short-billed Dowitcher (46); Semipalmated Sandpiper (1); Western Sandpiper (5); Sanderling (45); Marbled Godwit (37); Greater Yellowlegs (1); Lesser Yellowlegs (1); Willet (1); Willet (6); Willet (4); Long-billed Curlew (6); Long-billed Curlew (1); Whimbrel (1); Black-bellied Plover (1); Black-bellied Plover (35); Killdeer (1); Semipalmated Plover (50); Piping Plover (20); Snowy Plover (1); Wilson's Plover (13); Ruddy Turnstone (1); American Oystercatcher (8); Mourning Dove (9); Mourning Dove (1); Mourning Dove (1); White-winged Dove (4); White-winged Dove (1); Turkey Vulture (3); White-tailed Kite (1); Belted Kingfisher (1); Chuck-will's-widow (1); Common Nighthawk (1); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (1); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (1); Eastern Kingbird (2); Great Crested Flycatcher (2); Horned Lark (8); Blue Jay (2); European Starling (9); European Starling (4); Meadowlark species (1); Great-tailed Grackle (23); Great-tailed Grackle (10); Boat-tailed Grackle (4); Northern Cardinal (3); Barn Swallow (37); Tree Swallow (25); Loggerhead Shrike (5); Loggerhead Shrike (1); Blue-winged Warbler (1); Hooded Warbler (2); House Sparrow (3); Northern Mockingbird (4); Northern Mockingbird (2); Northern Mockingbird (1); Carolina Wren (1); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (1).

*Steve Mayes*

# West Nile Virus and Birds

*There has been much media induced hysteria over the spread of West Nile Virus. Presented below, lightly edited and slightly abridged, are two posts from the Louisiana Birding List Serve LABIRD. These posts provide excellent summaries of the present state of knowledge.*

*This information should help you deal intelligently with someone whose suggestion is to attempt to kill every mosquito and every crow and Blue Jay. One important points to note is the very low incidence of serious consequences of infection, probably much lower than a typical influenza outbreak. Another point of interest is that the mosquitoes that can carry the virus are found around human habitation, not in the marshes and swamps! The long term consequences of excessive use of pesticides are not likely to be favorable towards the environment.*

Date: Sat, 17 Aug 2002  
From: David Muth <dmuth@BELLSOUTH.NET>  
Subject: West Nile Virus, Birds, and Us Poor Victims of Nature Red in Tooth and Proboscis

I have been doing a little research into West Nile Virus, and while I claim no expertise, I will try to summarize a little bit that I've learned. Also, see the CDC Web Site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/#about>

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a flavovirus related to a number of encephalitis-causing viruses. Its closest local relative is St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE), another mosquito-borne virus that has been quietly infecting (and rarely) killing people here for as long as all of us have been alive. Indeed, WNV is considered by some the old world counterpart of SLE.

WNV was first isolated and identified from a woman in the West Nile District of Uganda in 1937. That strain of WNV did NOT cause infections which led to life-threatening encephalitis (brain-swelling) or meningitis (swelling in the spinal-column/brain). The first instance of human "meningo-encephalitis" associated with WNV was in Israel in 1957 (a fact now understood to be significant only in retrospect). It was not detected again until Algeria in 1994, Romania in 1996-97, the Czech Republic in 1997, Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998, Russia in 1999, the U.S. 1999-2002, and Israel in 2000. Otherwise, old strain WNV is all over the old world, seemingly not killing anybody. (I will leave it to you to guess whether the temporal and geographical gaps here are real, or rather reflect gaps in adequate medical coverage and monitoring). The strain of meningo-encephalitic WNV that showed up in New York in 1999 is most closely related to strains from the Middle East.

WNV is a type of virus known as an "arbovirus" which just means "arthropod-borne"--it has no taxonomic meaning, unlike "flavovirus" which refers to a group of genetically related species. It lives and breeds in birds, but, to get from one bird to another it needs a vector; in this case, a mosquito that sucks blood from birds. There is no other known form of transmission. A bird develops the infection and after the virus reaches clinical levels in the bird, the bird develops "significant viremia" for 1-4 days, which seems to mean that

during that period there is enough virus circulating in the bird's blood that a mosquito can get a big enough dose to enable it to pass the virus along to the next victim of the mosquito's hunger. If the bird survives the infection, lifelong immunity is assumed.

Since its introduction into the US, probably in 1999 or slightly before, more than 110 species of birds have been found to harbor the virus, from Ruby-throated Hummingbirds to Cooper's Hawks, House Finches, and, most famously, crows and jays. See the CDC Web Page at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/birdspecies.htm>

So, where do we come in? WNV can infect humans, as well as horses, and probably other mammals. That seems to happen because a mosquito that feeds on birds and harbors the virus also feeds on us. In Louisiana, there are about 60 species of mosquitoes, at least 40 of which are known to be capable of being infected with WNV. But just being capable of infection does not mean they are capable of acting as vectors.

Consider: you need a mosquito that feeds on both birds and mammals, and that shortens the list considerably. You need a mosquito that is an efficient vector; in other words, one where the virus can pass from the digestive tract into the circulatory system, and then into the saliva in sufficient numbers that a mosquito can deliver enough virus to the next victim to cause an infection.

The jury is still out, but right now the overwhelming suspicion among researchers for the vector mosquitoes are members of the genus *Culex*, especially the "house mosquitoes." For us in Louisiana that means the Southern House Mosquito -- *Culex quinquefasciatus*, closely related to the Northern House Mosquito, *C. pipiens*, implicated in the New York outbreak. Other *Culex* may or not be involved, and there is some suspicion that members of the genus *Aedes*, such as *Aedes aegypti* of Yellow Fever fame, and *A. albopictus* the so-called "Asian Tiger" a newly arrived immigrant that bites you during the day and carries Dengue Fever in Asia, might be potential vectors. No proof yet, though.

The Southern House Mosquito lives largely in and around human habitation. If you live in city or suburb, it is the beast that bites you at night. They breed in small, predator free, ephemeral bodies of water, like those in gutters, old tires, plant holders, and bird baths. They don't breed in ponds, lakes, rivers, swamps or marshes, or anywhere else that predatory fish or insects live.

What happens after a mammal gets infected? Well, usually nothing. Less than one percent of those infected develop "severe" illness. No one has a clue what percentage of people bitten by an infected mosquito get infected. Of that less than 1 percent that get a severe illness, somewhere between 3-15 percent, depending on the study, die. All of those who die seem to be suffering from some condition, usually related to old age and infirmity, that suppresses the immune system. Despite the phrase that the media keeps repeating about the very young and very old being most at risk, there are NO known cases of infant mortality from WNV in the U.S.

For the virus, mammals are thought to be dead ends. That is, we are not thought to develop the amount of virus in the blood

to develop "significant viremia" like some birds, that will enable an uninfected mosquito biting us to pick up the disease.

Supposedly. But if that leaves you wondering how the disease got to New York, you are not alone. You might be wondering: How did WNV get here? If humans aren't effective hosts, than are we to believe that a bird or birds, in the throes of the virus and viremic, a condition that supposedly lasts only 1-4 days, migrated to or was transported to New York? How did it get from New York to Louisiana? By migratory birds, supposedly. But if that is true, then birds must be capable of continuing to transmit the virus to mosquitoes long after they've withstood the infection and ceased to be viremic. But if that's true, then why are outbreaks, even in the old world, so episodic? Why isn't there just a general background level of infection?

I ask all this because its important when we consider the question--why wouldn't most of us be better off getting the infection now, rather than later when we'll be decreasingly able to withstand it? Isn't the CDC doing a massive public health disservice by promoting low-level hysteria, encouraging parents to douse their kids with *DEET* every time they leave the house (but clean it off when they come back in. Ha! What kids are those? In my neighborhood my son runs with a pack of ten year olds that move in and out 5-6 different houses a dozen time a day. Ridiculous advice.)

Anyway, it seems to me that if WNV is now here to stay, I'd rather be exposed as soon as possible. And I certainly detest every second of my life when I am forced to wear that horror, *DEET*. Furthermore, the idea that a dose of *DEET* will last more than for a few minutes of even moderate activity outside in the summer, in the south, is also completely ridiculous.

Another question I have is this--if, as the CDC believes, the prime culprits are House Mosquitoes, why apply *DEET* during the day? These mosquitoes are strictly nocturnal--that is why they spray for mosquitoes at night. And what about spraying? One has to wonder about the consequences of massive increases in spraying. Even worse is the idea that many rural areas, which have no spraying program, are now being brow-beat into starting one. Remember that the culprits are not those hordes of mosquitoes that assault you during the day when you are afield birding. They are the ones that lurk around your house at night. It is true that mosquito spraying in long established urban programs, like here in New Orleans, has gotten very sophisticated. They've gone to "ultra low volume" applications, they monitor strains for resistance and change chemicals, they target breeding areas with bio-larvicides, etc., etc. But what is going to happen when the Air Force starts spraying? God help us.

Those of you who believe that even modern low-levels of mosquito spraying don't have some effect on non-target species are surely being naive. Try to find a firefly in my backyard. There were fireflies in suburban New Orleans 40 years ago, at the dawn of spraying. I used to catch them, but they are gone. Do not imagine that these consequences are not magnified up the food chain. This is a trade off I'm probably willing to live with, but I'm not sure I'm willing to put up with a massively increased spraying program to spare me from a nearly non-existent threat that they can't save me from in the long run, anyway.

And I shudder when I think of the long-term health consequences of all that *DEET* being sprayed on small

children. There is a reason the CDC tells you to wash it off when they come back inside.

Date: Sun, 18 Aug 2002

From: "Joseph C. Kennedy"

<JosephKennedy@COMPUSERVE.COM>

<snip>.....The main vector is the *Culex* mosquito which has evolved to become a storm drain/sewer mosquito. It is able to overwinter as far north as New York City in the drains to emerge in nice weather and the spring to bite things and start the cycle all over. Rainfall, wind, the pattern of freezes all affect the cycle but it normally takes time to build up a population of infected birds/mosquitoes so that there is a significant chance of a human bite creating disease. The encephalitis viruses therefore tend to be a late summer/early fall occurrence. If there are weekly heavy rains all summer, the larva are flushed out and never can build up a large population. A dry summer is actually good for these [Mosquitoes] since the drains get water in small amounts from lawn watering, car washing etc.

The recommended prevention is constant testing of birds for the presence of the virus (this long antedates West Nile), year round spraying inside storm sewers to minimize *Culex* populations and local nighttime spraying when the virus is identified in a bird population. The arrival of the tiger mosquito makes the above ground spraying less effective [as a virus control mechanism] and may change the occurrence of the virus. There is very little or no above ground spraying except where there is an identified large number of bird carriers in an area. One or two night time truck sprays usually control the situation unless the weather really uncooperates.

How case one in a local area occurs is still unclear. An infected bird does not carry the virus long enough to overwinter, they either die or get well. There may be a couple of birds who do carry it or who live near a sewer and get bitten during the winter. Mosquitoes can inherit viruses through the egg and a small group could start a new cycle.

The old theory which still hangs around in the papers now is that the virus is carried by migrating birds. This is not all that likely. Longer distance migrants need to be healthy to migrate far and sick birds do not migrate. But some just getting sick could. The theory that SLE, EEE and WEE go south of the border in birds to spend the winter and then come back is still followed but has never been demonstrated.

Back around 1970 when I was banding I worked with a team with the Public Health Service that was attempting to find migrant carriers arriving near Venice that would affect the local birds. This was done for several years. Early in the spring, there was no background encephalitis in the local jays, grackles etc but by late summer it would be present. No migrants were infected out of several thousand [tested]. There was no background encephalitis in local birds before or after migration. There was encephalitis later in the summer. Either migrants did not bring it or do it so rarely that it cannot be detected. Or there is another source such as a "Typhoid Mary" type of carrier that has not been identified such as armadillos or possums. It could be migratory bats that also can harbor other viruses for long periods with no effect on them. Some bats nest in holes where there would be some protection from mosquitoes but then roost in the open later in the summer.



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## RARE BIRD ALERTS

Below is a listing of Rare Bird Alert telephone numbers for nearby areas. Transcriptions of some current tapes are available on the World Wide Web on Siler's Birding on the Net at <http://birdingonthe.net/hotmail.html>. Detailed information (maps and text) on birding sites on the Upper Texas Coast is also available on the Web at <http://www.texasbirding.net>. This includes all the Jefferson County hotspots published in early issues.

### Golden Triangle (409) 768-1340

Texas (Houston)	(713) 369-9673
Abilene	(915) 691-8981
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Ft. Worth (N. Cent)	(817) 329-1930
Lubbock	(806) 797-6690
N. E. Texas	(903) 839-4804
Rio Grande Valley	(210) 969-2731
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