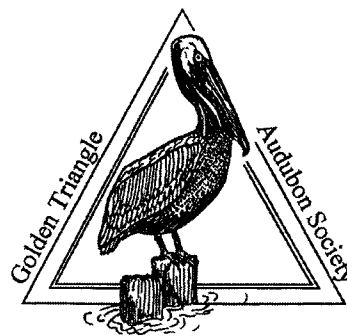


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 13 No. 10

October 2007

Membership Meeting
Thursday, October 18, 2007
7:00 PM, "The Green Barn"
adjacent to the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont

Nesting Bald Eagles in Texas: 1971 to Present

Dr. Brent Ortego
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Dr. Brent Ortego will discuss the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's monitoring and research with Bald Eagles since 1971.

Brent has worked with TPWD since 1982 in various jobs. He worked extensively with cooperative projects with the National Forests in Texas and private landowners in East Texas during the 1980s. He later transferred to the Central Coast to operate Wildlife Management Areas and today is the primary non-game biologist in South Texas for TPWD. He might be better known to you as a past president of the Texas Ornithological Society, for his involvement in the acquisition of bird sanctuaries, and for his extensive hummingbird banding at his home in Raisin, Texas near Victoria.

We will plan on having the refreshments ready by 6:00 p.m. and the program will start at 7:00 p.m. sharp.

Reminder: Upcoming GTAS Elections

Our elections will soon be upon us. President Jeff Pittman has appointed a Nominating Committee consisting of himself, John Haynes and Jana Whittle. Please contact any of these individuals with your offer to serve or suggestions for others who will be willing. Contact information can be found on page 2. All offices and board positions are up for election at our November annual meeting. The term of the President is two years; the terms of all other officers and board members is one year. We are always looking for new blood and fresh ideas. The duties are not onerous. We typically hold two full evening board meetings (in January and August in recent years), and conduct other business by email and brief get-togethers at regular membership meetings.

The Brown Pelican

Vol. 13, No.10 October 2007

Golden Triangle
Audubon Society

See Web Site for more
information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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Calendar of Events

Thursday October 18. Membership Meeting. Dr. Brent Ortego of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. See page 1 for details.

Saturday October 20. 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. Rubber boots would be a good idea, especially if it is at all wet from previous rain or just heavy early morning dew. Depending on the birds, we may also bird the Willows at Sea Rim State Park.

Saturday November 10. Operation Green Streets. The Golden Triangle Group of the Sierra Club, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, the Texas Forest Service, and Time Warner Cable, is organizing Operation Green Streets, a program to replace and replenish the urban tree canopy that was destroyed by Hurricane Rita by distributing free trees to be planted in front yards of residential homes within city limits in Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange and Tyler counties. Volunteers are being solicited to help with distribution of the trees at multiples sites within the listed counties. The distribution days will be November 10, 2007 and February 9, 2008. To volunteer to help distribute trees, you may email ogs@tfs.tamu.edu or call toll free 1-800-512-8733. For more information on the program, go to <http://operationgreenstreets.tamu.edu>

Thursday November 15. Annual Meeting. Sid and Shirley Rucker on Hummingbirds.

Saturday November 17. Field Trip to West Jefferson County This trip will explore west Jefferson County, just as the wintering birds should be arriving. The trip will likely find raptors, sparrows and Sandhill Cranes, and, depending on the presence or absence of water in the rice fields, waterfowl. Last year, this trip encountered a Red

Phalarope on South China Road while checking for a Golden Eagle that had been seen there the previous weekend.

Meet at the intersection of FM365 and Johnson Road (on the "north/west" side of Johnson Road at that intersection). From the intersection of Interstate 10 and FM365 in Fannett, proceed along FM365 in the direction that is marked as "north" (even though it is actually very nearly due west at that point) for about six miles. Shortly after you cross over the second of two bridges (this one over Ground Bridge Gully) and emerge out of the woodlands, South China Road goes to the right (east then north) and immediately afterwards, on the left, is Johnson Road. There is a sign for the G and A Turf Farm on Johnson Road at the intersection. Contact Steve Mayes sgmayes@hotmail.com, or call 409-722-5807 for further information.

Saturday December 29. Sea Rim State Park Christmas Bird Count. Please mark your calendars. More details in future issues.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank Jean Beavens, Pat and Don Jeane, Sherrie Roden, and Jana Whittle for providing the refreshments at the September meeting. **We need volunteers to bring all items for the October meeting and all spring 2008 meetings.** (As is our tradition, the November Annual Meeting will feature a pot luck dinner.) Please do not wait until the last minute to volunteer! 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 far in advance as possible.** Please help if you can!



Earth Share
OF TEXAS

Earth Share of Texas represents the Audubon Foundation of Texas and the National Audubon Society in payroll deduction plans for charitable giving. For information, call 1-800-GREENTX or email estb@earthshare-texas.org.

Subscription Renewal Reminder

Please check the mailing label on this issue. If the date on your label NOT prefixed by "AU" has passed, or there is no other date, please remit your contribution of \$15 to Golden Triangle Audubon Society at P.O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292. The date prefixed by AU is the date your National Audubon Society subscription expires. 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.

Silent Auction

At the October meeting, we will continue the silent auction of books donated by Jeannie Lanclos and a signed numbered print of a shrimper donated by Jay Huner. The books and print will be on display from 6 p.m. on the evening of the meeting.

Sabine Woods

An extremely successful work day was held at Sabine Woods on September 8.

With great regret, the large mulberry tree in the center of the woods that had provided so much for so many birds over the years, but had progressively leaned further and further over the boardwalk in the aftermath of hurricane Rita, was cut to remove the trunk from over the boardwalk. The remainder of it is still alive, and, if it behaves like all the other mulberries, it may well grow large again. In addition, we tended to the trails, mowing those outside the woods and clearing those inside the woods. There was a lot of rain this summer, so there was a lot to do.

We thank all those who helped: Andy Allen, Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Levie Horton, Harrison Jordan, Rose Ann Jordan,

Steve Mayes, Wendy Mires, Daniel Reed, Sherrie Roden, and Christine Sliva.

John Whittle

Hurricane Humberto

In the early hours of Thursday September 23, what had been a minimal tropical storm the previous evening snuck ashore between Sabine Pass and High Island as a Category 1 hurricane. Compared to the destruction wrought by Rita two years earlier, the damage inflicted by Humberto was relatively minor, except in High Island, which likely suffered from one or more tornadoes.

Along the coast of Jefferson County, there was some minor damage, but nothing of long term significance. In all likelihood, almost all trees that withstood Rita were easily able to withstand Humberto. At Sabine Woods, there were numerous no more than medium sized branches that were down, and the boardwalk was littered with small branches. Two hackberry trees were affected. One was uprooted, falling across the main pond, while another in the entrance alleyway was broken in two. Defoliation was modest, although we doubt there are many pecans or hackberry berries left on trees. Clean up is now complete.

The Willows at Sea Rim did not fare quite as well, but willow trees are much more easily broken in any case. A good number of them suffered broken trunks about half way up, but are still hanging, and the area will not look very nice until the dead leaves fall off. It does not appear that any serious long-term damage was done. The cane and most of the giant ragweed were extensively flattened, but neither is particularly desirable. The boardwalk was somewhat obstructed, but is now clear.

We understand that the salt water intrusion into the McFaddin NWR marshes was not great, and that the accompanying rainfall washed most of it back out very quickly.

We cannot help but draw some parallels to Rita. The day after the storm, hummingbirds were very numerous. A couple of weeks later, it seems that "open country" birds are less numerous than normal.

Conservation Issues

There are two issues of concern in Texas that are currently in very active phases.

The proposal to construct a border "fence" along the southern border of the United States is being opposed, not only by those concerned about the environmental impact but by almost all other interests in the Rio Grande Valley. Almost no one believes that the fence will effectively accomplish its stated purpose. The fence, which is proposed for construction under legislative authorization which exempts the project for all environmental review – including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The "fence" is proposed to include two fences – more like walls – separated by a wide swath of cleared land. This would include mean the removal of the native vegetation, recently restored at great expense in many cases, along some of the most ecologically sensitive areas of the river bank.

The second issue is that of wind farms. While most environmental organizations are philosophically in support of producing energy from sources other than burning fossil fuels, wind power, like almost all other potential sources of power, has to be implemented with concern for environmental issues. There is a proposal led by the Kenedy Foundation, to erect between 150 and 300 wind turbines on Kenedy Ranch property east of Highway 77 south of Kingsville. This area may well be in the major migratory pathway for Neotropical migrants in the spring, hawks in the fall, and be in the migratory and wintering areas of the waterfowl and shorebirds in the adjacent Laguna Madre. Almost all environmental organization in the area, and both the King and Armstrong ranches are opposed and have formed the Coastal Habitat Alliance to oppose this project. At present no permits are required in Texas to erect turbines and the Alliance has been denied intervenor status, ostensibly because they do not own or use the land at issue – in the one aspect that does involve review and permitting – the construction of the associated transmission lines.

Bird Sightings – August 2007

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 john.whittle@lamar.edu or call (409) 880-8276. 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." The range of dates for which the species was reported is shown in parentheses in a column before the sighting details or report summaries.

Commentary: Only towards the end of August do most of our observers begin birding in earnest again. The beginnings of fall migration can be seen in the shorebird and warbler areas. Towards the end of the month there was good shorebird habitat in Cattail Marsh in Tyrrell Park. We have shown all the sightings of American Robins, Gray Catbirds and Brown Thrashers since they provide pretty solid evidence that the species are in Jefferson County throughout the summer and breed there. Next month will show fall migration in full swing!

WHISTLING-DUCK, Bik-bellied (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(8)		
DUCK, Mottled (26-26)	JEF-TP 8/26(40) JAW		
TEAL, Blue-winged (26-26)	JEF-TP 8/26(101) JAW		
DUCK, Ruddy (12-12)	JEF-TP 8/12(2) JAW		
CORMORANT, Neotropic (11-26)	JEF 3 reps(51)		
HERON, Great Blue (12-27)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 1 rep(1)		
EGRET, Great (4-26)	JEF 7 reps(42)		
EGRET, Snowy (4-26)	JEF 6 reps(474)		
HERON, Little Blue (4-26)	JEF 3 reps(21)		
HERON, Tricolored (4-26)	JEF 4 reps(12)		
EGRET, Cattle (2-26)	JEF 9 reps(1212)		
HERON, Green (5-27)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 4		
reps(11)			
NIGHT-HERON, Black-crown. (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(2)		
NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-cr. (6-26)	JEF 3 reps(5)		
IBIS, White (4-26)	JEF 5 reps(35)		
IBIS, White-faced (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(46)		
IBIS, Plegadis (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(18)		
SPOONBILL, Roseate (12-26)	JEF-TP 8/12(6) JAW; JEF-		
TP 8/26(3) JAW			
VULTURE, Black (5-26)	JEF 2 reps(4)		
VULTURE, Turkey (4-26)	JEF 5 reps(13)		
KITE, Swallow-tailed (1-1)	ORA-ORG 8/1(4) JRP		
KITE, Mississippi (5-8)	JEF-BMT 8/5(1) RHJ; JEF-		
BMT 8/8(1) RHJ			
HAWK, Cooper's (24-24)	JEF 8/24(1) CSL		
ACCIPITER species (1-20)	JEF-BMT 8/1(1) RHJ; JEF-		
BMT 8/20(1) RHJ			
HAWK, Red-shouldered (2-30)	JEF 9 reps(9)		
HAWK, Broad-winged (6-30)	JEF-BMT 8/6(1) RHJ; JEF-		
BMT 8/20(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/30(2) RHJ			
CARACARA, Crested (12-12)	JEF 8/12(1) JAW		
GALLINULE, Purple (12-26)	JEF 8/12(5) JAW; JEF-TP		
8/26(1) JAW			
MOORHEN, Common (5-26)	JEF 3 reps(106)		
PLOVER, Black-bellied (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(10)		
KILLDEER (5-26)	JEF 3 reps(38)		
STILT, Black-necked (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(375)		
SANDPIPER, Spotted (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(1)		
YELLOWLEGS, Greater (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(26)		
YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(1)		
SANDPIPER, Western (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(50)		
SANDPIPER, Least (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(350)		
SANDPIPER, Baird's (26-26)	JEF-TP 8/26(2) JAW		
SANDPIPER, Pectoral (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(30)		
SANDPIPER, Stilt (26-26)	JEF-TP 8/26(50) JAW		
DOWITCHER, Short-billed (26-26)	JEF-TP 8/26(2) JAW		
DOWITCHER, Long-billed (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(250)		
GULL, Laughing (11-26)	JEF 3 reps(209)		
TERN, Least (26-26)	JEF 1 rep(20)		
TERN, Caspian (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(24)		
TERN, Black (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(345)		
TERN, Forster's (12-26)	JEF 2 reps(5)		
PIGEON, Rock (5-26)	JEF 3 reps(4)		
COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (4-31)	JEF 6 reps(23)		
DOVE, White-winged (1-30)	JEF 18 reps(84)		
DOVE, Mourning (2-26)	HAI 2 reps(28); JEF 8		
reps(237)			
DOVE, Inca (11-11)	JEF 1 rep(1)		
CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (4-30)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 4 reps(9)		
OWL, Barn (25-25)	JEF-SW 8/25(1) JCA		
SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (16-16)	JEF-BMT 8/16(1) RHJ		
OWL, Great Horned (28-28)	HAI-SILS 8/28(1) MG		
NIGHTHAWK, Common (11-11)	JEF 1 rep(6)		
SWIFT, Chimney (2-30)	JEF 5 reps(23)		
HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-thr. (1-31)	HAI 5 reps(20); JEF 38		
reps(92)			
WOODPECKER, Red-headed (12-16)	HAI-SILS 8/12(1) MG; HAI-		
SILS 8/16(2) MG			
WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (4-29)	HAI 3 reps(4); JEF 1 rep(1)		
WOODPECKER, Downy (2-30)	HAI 6 reps(8); JEF 10		
reps(12)			
FLICKER, Northern (27-27)	HAI-SILS 8/27(1) MG		
WOODPECKER, Pileated (4-30)	HAI 6 reps(6); JEF 3		
reps(3)			
WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (18-18)	HAI 1 rep(2)		
FLYCATCHER, Gt. Crested (11-25)	JEF-SRSP 8/11(1) JAW;		
JEF-BMT 8/15(1) RHJ; JEF-SRSP 8/25(1) JCA			
KINGBIRD, Eastern (4-27)	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 5		
reps(27)			
FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (4-12)	JEF 2 reps(16)		
SHRIKE, Loggerhead (2-26)	JEF 5 reps(16)		
VIREO, White-eyed (4-29)	HAI 6 reps(24)		
VIREO, Yellow-throated (28-29)	HAI 2 reps(3)		
VIREO, Red-eyed (4-29)	HAI 2 reps(5)		
JAY, Blue (12-29)	HAI 2 reps(8); JEF 2		
reps(5)			
CROW, species (4-11)	JEF 2 reps(6)		
MARTIN, Purple (4-23)	JEF 3 reps(3034)		
SWALLOW, Barn (4-26)	JEF 5 reps(49)		
SWALLOW species (25-25)	JEF 1 rep(1)		
CHICKADEE, Carolina (4-26)	HAI 3 reps(22); JEF 2		
reps(3)			
TITMOUSE, Tufted (4-29)	HAI 2 reps(18)		
WREN, Carolina (12-26)	HAI 2 reps(13); JEF 2		
reps(2)			
GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (4-30)	HAI 6 reps(18); JAS 1		
rep(2); JEF 6 reps(20)			
BLUEBIRD, Eastern (6-24)	HAI 3 reps(8); JAS 1		
rep(25)			
THRUSH, Wood (2-15)	JEF-BMT 8/2(1) RHJ; JEF-		
BMT 8/8(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/15(1) RHJ			
ROBIN, American (2-31)	JEF-NEDR 8/2(1) JAW;		
JEF-NEDR 8/4(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/6(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/7(2) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/8(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/10(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/11(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/12(2) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/31(2) JAW			
CATBIRD, Gray (1-27)	HAI-SILS 8/27(2) MG; JEF-		
BMT 8/1(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/2(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/3(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/4(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/5(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/6(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/7(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/8(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/9(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/11(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/12(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/13(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/14(1) RHJ			

MOCKINGBIRD, Northern	(1-30)	HAI 1 rep(3); JEF 9
reps(75)		
THRASHER, Brown	(4-30)	HAI-SILS 8/29(1) MG; JEF-NEDR 8/4(3) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/6(4) JAW; JEF-SW 8/11(1) JAW; JEF-NEDR 8/12(2) JAW; JEF-BMT 8/30(1) RHJ
STARLING, European	(1-26)	HAI 1 rep(22); JEF 11
reps(255)		
PARULA, Northern	(14-24)	JAS 1 rep(3); JEF 1 rep(1)
WARBLER, Yellow	(11-25)	JEF-SRSP 8/11(1) JAW;
JEF-SRSP 8/25(1) JCA		
WARBLER, Black-and-white	(11-27)	HAI 2 reps(5); JEF 2
reps(4)		
WARBLER, Prothonotary	(25-27)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 1 rep(1)
WATERTHRUSH, Louisiana	(27-27)	HAI-SILS 8/27(1) MG
YELLOWTHROAT, Common	(11-11)	JEF 1 rep(1)
WARBLER, Hooded	(25-27)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 1 rep(1)
TANAGER, Summer	(25-25)	JAS 1 rep(2)
SPARROW, Seaside	(25-25)	JEF 1 rep(35)
CARDINAL, Northern	(1-25)	HAI 2 reps(39); JEF 6
reps(6)		
DICKCISSEL	(4-12)	JEF 2 reps(7)
BLACKBIRD, Red-winged	(4-12)	JEF 4 reps(22)
MEADOWLARK species	(4-12)	JEF 3 reps(7)
GRACKLE, Common	(2-12)	JEF 6 reps(13)
GRACKLE, Boat-tailed	(11-12)	JEF 2 reps(6)
GRACKLE, Great-tailed	(2-31)	JEF 9 reps(204)

COWBIRD, Brown-headed	(5-25)	JEF 2 reps(32)
ORIOLE, Orchard	(11-25)	JEF 3 reps(32)
FINCH, House	(3-30)	HAI 8/8(3) MG; HAI-SILS 8/12(5) MG; HAI-SILS 8/29(1) MG; JEF-BMT 8/3(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/4(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/6(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/7(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/10(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/13(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/18(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/21(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/23(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/25(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/30(2) RHJ
SPARROW, House	(2-12)	JEF 6 reps(54)

Number of Species	108
Number of Individuals	9137

County Abbreviations:

HAI — Hardin; JAS — Jasper; JEF — Jefferson; ORA — Orange

Location Codes

BMT — Beaumont; MCFW — McFaddin NWR; NEDR — Nederland; ORG — Orange; SILS — Silsbee; SRSP — Sea Rim State Park; SW — Sabine Woods; TP — Tyrrell Park incl. Cattail Marsh; TX87 — Texas 87 Pt. Arthur-Sabine Pass-Sea Rim SP; TXPT — Road to Pilot Station at Texas Point

Observer Abbreviations

CSL — Christine Sliva; JAW — John Whittle; JCA — John C. Arvin; JRP — John and Rebecca Phelps; LG — Lana Gau; MG — Melanie Goetsell; RHJ — Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan

Field Trip to the Smith Point Hawk Watch September 22nd, 2007

The hawk watch owes us! The birds don't seem to recognize things like that but it's true. In the last few years, the Golden Triangle Audubon Society's annual pilgrimage to Smith Point has met with a variety of problems. This has always been a boom or bust kind of trip but the last few attempts have been ridiculous: from rain outs to hurricanes to just poor showings, the hawk watch has not paid off. Would this change in 2007? Would it finally be a bonanza trip or would the group get skunked again? Well, it turns out that the schizophrenic nature of the hawk watch was more on display than ever because, we got both.

The morning of September 22nd dawned pleasant enough with a slight north breeze, just the kind of thing a hawk watcher hopes for. Arrival at the tower saw that a pretty good crowd was already present as several birding groups had outings to Smith Point planned for the day. A few hawks were obvious early. The occasional Sharp-shinned Hawk or Cooper's Hawk would buzz by the tower. A few Broad-winged Hawks soared around the oak mottes but there was not too much activity. This, however, is pretty normal. Most migrating hawks like to use thermals to make their journey easier. Thermals are rising columns of warm air that the birds can ride to gain altitude then glide for a distance until they can find another thermal. In this way, the birds travel from thermal to thermal as best they can and avoid flapping flight as much as possible. Unfortunately for the hawks, the ground has to heat up for a while before thermals can form so they are not normally found until 10am or so. So the group enjoyed the few passing raptors that happened by ... and waited.

A group from Houston decided this would be a good time to check out some of the other birding spots around Smith Point and left the hawk watch tower. But the Golden Triangle collection of this odd-looking species for our area. Laughing and Ring-billed Gulls loafed along with Forster's, Royal,

group waited. A few young Mississippi Kites gave good showings to the assembled birders. A couple of male Magnificent Frigatebirds soared along the coast line. One of these notorious pirates carried a fish (probably stolen from another bird) and was being harassed by a Laughing Gull in a strange role-reversal. Numerous Ruby-throated Hummingbirds buzzed the feeders hung on the tower boldly coming within a few feet of birders (sometimes closer). Unlike in some past years, passerine migrants were scarce and not easily seen from the tower. A few Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were seen and heard but no warblers or other land birds. This was not a good sign. If there were no land bird migrants, would the hawks show up?

The group from the Houston Outdoor Nature Group returned at this point, with a few good bird sightings (thanks to Adam Wood and John Arvin) so the Golden Triangle group decided to try their luck as well. Traveling down a nearby road a couple of special birds were quickly spotted on a telephone line stretched over the road: Couch's Kingbirds. A pair of these colorful flycatchers nested in the Smith Point area this year and fledged at least two offspring. In the past, this was a bird limited to deep south Texas but, like a number of other species (Great Kiskadee, Crested Caracara, White-tailed Hawk, etc.), its range seems to be slowly creeping up into our area. The group enjoyed scope filling views of these cooperative birds. A barren field also provided some nice birds. A small group of Buff-breasted Sandpipers worked the field along with the more usual Killdeer. Buff-breasted Sandpipers are not exactly rare on the upper Texas coast but are always a nice find, especially in the Fall.

A visit to Robbins Park added numerous species to the trip list. Nine American Oystercatchers was an excellent Caspian and Sandwich Terns. Least Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones scrambled for hidden food items while Great Blue

Heron and Great Egrets patiently waited for the food to come to them. A host of Grackles and Eurasian Collared-Doves worked the area. But it soon came time to head back to the hawk tower.

By this point, many of the throng of visitors present early on had thinned out. Several of the Golden Triangle group had also called it a day deciding to try greener pastures elsewhere or to attend to other business. But these people left too soon. It was not exactly a torrent of hawks that showed up soon after lunch time but it was definitely an interesting afternoon! It began innocently enough with more small numbers of Accipiters and Broad-wings coming by. An American Kestrel or two was also seen and a nice kettle of Anhingas were on good display. Then the kettles of Broad-wings started to show. Most of these were smallish groups (20 – 50 birds) first spotted in the extreme distance by the sharp eyes of one of the paid hawk counters or the unpaid volunteer counter, Joseph Kennedy. But one kettle, especially, was a highlight. It was first seen as a cloud of moving dots in front of a distant cloud, invisible to the naked eye. As they slowly drifted closer however, the birders left at the tower were treated to a kettle of over four hundred hawks! The group was mostly Broad-winged Hawks but there were a few Swainson's Hawks mixed in for good measure. Certainly not as big as kettles of hawks get at this great birding site but still an excellent and entertaining treat for the assembled group.

Small kettles of Broad-wings continued to put on a show and a few Northern Harriers and Red-tailed Hawks soared by. At least one, young Red-shouldered Hawk also put in an appearance. But as the hawks seemed to be dwindling in numbers and the afternoon drifted away, the group decided to call it a day. Before heading for home, a quick trip was made back to the Robbins Park area again to look for a Yellow-headed Blackbird spotted earlier by Joseph Kennedy. Although this colorful bird was not found (at least by most of the group), a Merlin was added to the trip list.

So, it was not the thousands of hawks that can sometimes be seen but it was better birding at Smith Point than the

Golden Triangle Audubon Society has seen in recent trips. And the slow morning, active afternoon seemed to really sum up what you get during hawk migration: feast or famine or, sometimes both in one day! Still, as enjoyable as it was, I say that Smith Point still owes us a really big day. Why not come to the Smith Point field trip next September and see if it happens?

The following species were recorded on the trip:

The **official raptor counts** recorded for the entire day were:

Osprey (1), Mississippi Kite (57), Northern Harrier (12), Sharp-shinned Hawk (40), Cooper's Hawk (44), Broad-winged Hawk (1042), Swainson's Hawk (4), Red-tailed Hawk (1), American Kestrel (14), Merlin (2), Unidentified Accipiter (3).

While we were on the **Hawk Watch tower**, we ourselves recorded:

American White Pelican (4), Brown Pelican (10), Anhinga (3), Magnificent Frigatebird (7), Little Blue Heron (1), Tricolored Heron (2), White Ibis (50), Plegadis Ibis (10), Black Vulture (10), Turkey Vulture (5), Red-shouldered Hawk (2), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (10+), Blue Jay (2). Tree Swallow (20++), Northern Rough-winged Swallow (1+), Cliff/Cave Swallow (1), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (3)

Along **Hawkin's Camp Road**, we found Couch's Kingbird (3) and Buff-breasted Sandpiper (6).

At and around **Robbins Park**, we noted American White Pelican (3), Brown Pelican (15), Great Egret (3), Great Blue Heron (2), Black-bellied Plover (4), American Oystercatcher (13), Ruddy Turnstone (28), Least Sandpiper (25), Laughing Gull (20+), Ring-billed Gull (1), Caspian Tern (3), Royal Tern (5), Sandwich Tern (1), Foster's Tern (3), Eurasian Collared-Dove (30) and grackles (100+).

En route to and from Smith Point, it was a good day for Crested Caracaras. One party had five along FM1985 near the East Bay Unit/Skillern Tract of Anahuac NWR, others saw one along FM562, and two along the Anahuac NWR access road!

Steve Mayes

Jefferson County Migration Count – 15 September 2007

In 2005, we completed the Migration Count a week before Hurricane Rita passed over the area. This year, Hurricane Humberto passed over two days before count day. The power down to and along the coast was still in the process of being restored on count day, but there was little substantial impediment to access. What the hurricane did do was dump a lot of water on the area, and many areas away from the coast were still under water and not birdable. That meant that shorebird habitat was particularly scarce, as Cattail Marsh in Tyrell Park was overflowing. We were "saved" by a couple of harvested rice fields that were holding water in the vicinity of the Texas A&M Agricultural Extension Station near China. Reports from the coast the day before the count indicated a good variety of warblers in the coastal areas, and the weather was very favorable for birding.

One area that we have learned to visit shortly after sunrise is the bottomlands of Pine Island Bayou at Old Sour Lake Road, where the bayou forms the County line in the northwest

part of the County. This year's findings there were particularly interesting. Unusually for migrating flycatchers, those there were quite vocal, facilitating identification. There were two Acadian Flycatchers, a Willow Flycatcher, a Great Crested Flycatcher and a couple of Eastern Wood-Pewees. To complete the flycatcher picture, an Olive-sided Flycatcher was in Sabine Woods, and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were seen in two areas. The only warblers around were Pine Warblers, and there were other expected woodland species.

Although apparently holding fewer birds than the day before, Sabine Woods did produce 16 warbler species, including a Mourning Warbler. The Willows at Sea Rim SP produced one additional species, while a patch of woods on the southern part of South China Road that has been very productive this fall held an immature Chestnut-sided Warbler. Various areas in the western part of the county south of FM365 produced seven different warbler species. Overall, the count recorded 19 different species of warbler.

White-eyed Vireos were found almost everywhere, locating them being greatly facilitated by the very characteristic and oft repeated vocalization. Red-eyed Vireos were found in several locations and there was a Warbling Vireo in Sabine Woods. A very early Blue-headed Vireo was found in Beaumont.

Ducks were a very difficult group this year, with very deep water in Cattail Marsh and much water elsewhere. We did not find any Northern Pintail or Green-winged Teal, this year, although both species of Whistling-Duck continue to thrive. Herons and egrets were found in numbers very comparable to previous years. Green Herons were reduced from last year's high count, while both Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Heron counts were up.

Hawk numbers were not impressive, although the pair of Crested Caracaras that live along the coast between Sea Rim and Sabine Pass were seen. There have also been a pair of White-tailed Hawks in that area, and one was seen count day. Ironically, no White-tailed Kites were seen! We did record one American Kestrel, one Merlin and one Peregrine Falcon.

Rail numbers were low last year, but this year, both King Rail and Sora returned to the list. As noted above the inland shorebirds were difficult to find, and while the number of species was only a little lower than in a typical year, the total number of individual birds was very much lower. On the beach, where the "true" shorebirds are, Ruddy Turnstone was missing, while to compensate there were Red Knots.

Gulls and terns – potentially more impacted by the hurricane than other species – were not significantly reduced from normal. As is becoming usual, all the Sandwich Terns and Least Terns had already left, but Common Terns were present.

A Black-billed Cuckoo at the Willows at Sea Rim State Park was a very good find, and a new species to the count. Owls were very hard to find, with the Great Horned Owl and Barn Owls not seen in Sabine Woods.

Swallow numbers in the count are very variable from year to year. This year, we found lots of Bank Swallows (in Cattail Marsh mainly) but no Cliff Swallows. Perhaps they were still hiding under bridges.

Scarlet Tanager is not always an easy species to find in the Fall, but one was seen along with a few Summer Tanagers. The count is generally too early to pick up many sparrows, but this year, we did find Lark Sparrows in two places, and the resident Seaside Sparrows in excellent numbers in the coastal marshes. Blue Grosbeaks were numerous in the open area in the western part of the county. Baltimore Orioles were seemingly everywhere with a surprising total of 62. Ironically, no Orchard Orioles were seen.

The overall total number of species seen was 166, less than last year's 173, but close to the average of recent years.

Species seen: WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (117); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (93); DUCK, Wood (3); DUCK, Mottled (13); TEAL, Blue-winged (318); SHOVELER, Northern (7); DUCK, Ruddy (1); GREBE, Pied-billed (35); PELICAN, American White (17); PELICAN, Brown (21); CORMORANT, Neotropic (150); CORMORANT, Double-crested (9); CORMORANT, Species (1); ANHINGA (8); BITTERN, Least (2); HERON, Great Blue (37); EGRET, Great (232); EGRET, Snowy (257); HERON, Little Blue (23); HERON, Tricolored (30); EGRET, Cattle (1090); HERON, Green (14); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (12); NIGHT-HERON,

Yellow-crowned (3); IBIS, White (420); IBIS, White-faced (104); IBIS, Plegadis (778); SPOONBILL, Roseate (22); VULTURE, Black (32); VULTURE, Turkey (45); OSPREY (2); KITE, Mississippi (1); HARRIER, Northern (1); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Red-shouldered (8); HAWK, Broad-winged (7); HAWK, Swainson's (3); HAWK, White-tailed (1); HAWK, Red-tailed (2); CARACARA, Crested (2); KESTREL, American (1); MERLIN (1); RAIL, Clapper (19); RAIL, King (1); SORA (1); GALLINULE, Purple (3); MOORHEN, Common (73); COOT, American (2); PLOVER, Black-bellied (35); PLOVER, Snowy (11); PLOVER, Semipalmated (3); PLOVER, Piping (11); KILLDEER (93); STILT, Black-necked (131); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (27); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (50); WILLET (12); SANDPIPER, Spotted (10); GODWIT, Marbled (1); KNOT, Red (2); SANDERLING (49); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (10); SANDPIPER, Western (15); SANDPIPER, Least (35); SANDPIPER, Pectoral (5); SANDPIPER, Stilt (5); DOWITCHER, Long-billed (4); DOWITCHER, Species (2); GULL, Laughing (366); GULL, Ring-billed (3); GULL, Herring (4); TERN, Gull-billed (12); TERN, Caspian (122); TERN, Royal (57); TERN, Common (5); TERN, Forster's (107); TERN, Black (110); SKIMMER, Black (1); PIGEON, Rock (248); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (50); DOVE, White-winged (93); DOVE, Mourning (350); DOVE, Inca (6); CUCKOO, Black-billed (1); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (3); OWL, Barred (2); NIGHTHAWK, Common (2); WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck (1); SWIFT, Chimney (63); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (219); HUMMINGBIRD species (1); KINGFISHER, Belted (15); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (41); WOODPECKER, Downy (21); FLICKER, Northern (1); WOODPECKER, Pileated (12); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (1); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (21); FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (2); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (3); FLYCATCHER, Willow (1); FLYCATCHER, Traill's (2); FLYCATCHER, Least (2); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (17); PHOEBE, Eastern (1); FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (1); FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (15); KINGBIRD, Eastern (15); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (11); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (85); VIREO, White-eyed (30); VIREO, Blue-headed (1); VIREO, Warbling (2); VIREO, Philadelphia (1); VIREO, Red-eyed (10); JAY, Blue (68); CROW, American (16); CROW, Fish (7); CROW, Species (2); SWALLOW, Tree (56); SWALLOW, N. Rough-winged (76); SWALLOW, Bank (24); SWALLOW, Barn (147); CHICKADEE, Carolina (39); TITMOUSE, Tufted (8); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (2); WREN, Carolina (37); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (1); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (47); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (47); THRUSH, Swainson's (1); ROBIN, American (11); CATBIRD, Gray (1); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (164); THRASHER, Brown (3); STARLING, European (858); WARBLER, Blue-winged (3); WARBLER, Nashville (3); WARBLER, Yellow (5); WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (1); WARBLER, Magnolia (2); WARBLER, Yellow-throated (2); WARBLER, Pine (26); WARBLER, Prairie (1); WARBLER, Black-and-white (9); REDSTART, American (6); WARBLER, Prothonotary (1); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (6); WARBLER, Kentucky (2); WARBLER, Mourning (3); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (7); WARBLER, Hooded (3); WARBLER, Wilson's (3); WARBLER, Canada (8); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (5); TANAGER, Summer (5); TANAGER, Scarlet (1); SPARROW, Lark (2); SPARROW, Seaside (21); CARDINAL, Northern (116); GROSBEAK, Blue (9); BUNTING, Painted (1); DICKCISSEL (6); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (210); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (9); MEADOWLARK, Species (10); GRACKLE, Common (204); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (241); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (105); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (109); ORIOLE, Baltimore (62); FINCH, House (6); SPARROW, House (120); TOTAL (9618); Number of species (166); Number of Observers (14); Number of Parties (9); Number of Party-Hours (54.01); Participants 2007 Althea Bythewood, Gerald Duhon, Joe Halbrook, John Haynes, Harrison Jordan, Ray Jordan, Rose Ann Jordan, Steve Mayes, Jeff Pittman, Sherrie Roden, Ken Sztraky, Colt Westbrook, Jana Whittle, John Whittle

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Unfortunately, almost all the local and regional telephone Rare Bird Alerts have been discontinued in favor of various Internet based means of distribution.

The Texas-wide Rare Bird Alert, maintained by Houston Audubon Society, is available on their web-site at <http://www.houstonaudubon.org/> and each new alert is posted on the TEXBIRDS listserv. The archives of this listserv can be accessed at <http://listserv.uh.edu/archives/texbirds.html> It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives.

Transcriptions of many current and recent email alerts are available on the 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 very early issues.

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