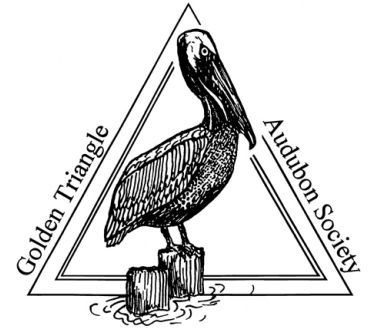


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 17 No. 9

September 2011

**Membership Meeting
Thursday, September 15, 2011, 7:00 PM
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

**"Causes of Wetland Losses and Wetland Restoration
Projects in Jefferson and Orange Counties "**

**Dr. Michael Rezsutek
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
J.D. Murphree Wildlife Management Area**

Dr Rezsutek grew up in Pennsylvania, received a Bachelor of Science degree in biology in 1987 from Allegheny College, Meadville, PA, a Masters of Science degree in biology in 1990 from Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology in 1997 from the University of Houston.

He began his current position with Texas Parks and Wildlife as Wetlands and Waterfowl Biologist for the upper coastal counties of Texas in 2001. In this post, he provides technical guidance to private landowners for improving waterfowl habitat on private land, serves on several committees working on wetland conservation issues, participates in waterfowl monitoring and surveys, and provides guidance for restoring damaged or deteriorating wetlands on TPWD owned lands in Jefferson and Orange Counties. He will be discussing causes of wetland loss and wetland restoration projects on TPWD lands in Jefferson and Orange counties.

We plan on having the doors open by 6:00 p.m. with refreshments available shortly thereafter and the program will start at 7:00 p.m. sharp.

The Brown Pelican

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Issue number 177

Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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Calendar of Events

Thursday September 15. Membership Meeting. Details on page 1.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank the Port Arthur Convention and Visitors Bureau for most of the refreshments in August. We also thank all those who brought desserts etc. **We need volunteers to bring items for all the remaining fall 2011 meetings.** 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 Jennifer Armacost at (409) 790-7222 (or email her at armacostj@yahoo.com) **as far in advance as possible.** Please help if you can! We thank all those who brought refreshments over the last year or so!

Saturday September 17. Jefferson County Fall Migration Count. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193) to volunteer to help in this county-wide count. In this count, we survey as much of the county as we are able, and all are welcome to help, even if you can only spend a few hours in the morning. We do survey in town as well as in the more rural areas, and can accommodate feeder watchers too.

Saturday September 24. Field Trip to Smith Point Hawk Watch. Our leaders will be there from about 8:30 a.m. To coincide as near as possible with the peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration (ordinarily September 25 or 26, but highly dependent on weather conditions on the hawks' migratory route), this trip will be one week later than our normal field trip schedule.

To reach the Smith Point Hawk Watch site from Winnie, take Highway 124 south towards High Island. After 12 miles, turn right on FM1985 and follow it about 14 miles (two miles past the access road for Anahuac NWR) until it meets FM562. Follow FM562 (south) another 14 miles to Smith Point. At the end of FM562, there are usually

signs to the Hawk Watch (but since the Hawk Watch is an all volunteer operation this year, there may not be any this time). 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.

Saturday October 1: Sabine Woods Work Day. We are planning a work day at Sabine Woods, mainly for the routine maintenance items; mowing the trails, trimming and pruning to keep the trails clear. Possibly also some work on enhancing the habitat by removing some less desirable plants and trees to allow more desirable species to flourish. While the recent drought stressed some of the trees in the Woods, the rain in July caused much growth, and it remains to be seen how much rain we get between now and October 1!

We plan to start around 7:30 a.m., and will probably work until about noon. Sometimes on past fall work days, we have shortened the schedule because of the presence of migrants.

Please bring work gloves and insect repellent, and whatever hand tools you have – loppers, clippers etc. We have a few, but typically not enough. We will try to provide light refreshments.

Thursday October 20. Membership Meeting. Tentative. Ducks of the Upper Texas Coast by John Haynes.

Saturday October 22. Field Trip to Sabine Woods and the Sabine Pass area (Tentative location).



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.

Sabine Woods

Even though this spring and summer were the driest in living memory, the one or two decent rains in July produced a lush growth in the woods, and the vegetation was about 2 1/2 feet tall in all the open areas and even in most of the trails inside the woods! On August 16, Howard Davis brushhogged the eastern area round the new trees and the main trails, while Gary Kelley used his riding mower to mow all the trails inside the woods and the smaller open areas in the woods. We owe them a great deal of gratitude for their efforts on your behalf in unpleasantly hot conditions.

We are working to restore the drip to full operation, but the backflow preventer in our water system has malfunctioned (again!) and, as this is written, our plumber is awaiting parts to repair it.

Our next project in the woods will be to find and plant hackberry trees to replace those killed in Hurricane Ike. We prefer local trees from the Texas coastal plains (probably more accurately described as sugarberries) and we think we will do better transplanting them at a relatively early stage. If you know of somewhere where there are lots of young trees that we could dig up and transplant, please let us know.

Because of the time it takes to produce and distribute the *Brown Pelican*, we don't usually try to use these columns as a means to disseminate bird movement information. That we do by means of our Bird Alerts, which we distribute by emails to those who have so requested, and post on the web site at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org. But we will note that migrants were starting to pass through the Woods in mid to late August, with Flycatchers, as always, featuring prominently. A few warblers were also trickling through. Although conditions in our area have been hot and dry, much of the rest of the country, including the areas where most of the migrants we see each spring and fall nest, have been unusually wet. So far at least, we have not seen any abnormalities in either the timing or number of migrants. The migrants do seem to be finding food in the Woods.

New Bird Names and Sequence

In North America, bird names (both common and scientific) and the sequence in which they are listed for scientific and semi-scientific purposes are determined by the Checklist Committee of the American Ornithological Union (AOU). In each July edition of *The Auk*, the Committee announces its most recent decisions. Generally, we have implemented these changes almost immediately.

In most recent years, most of the changes have not affected those who do not routinely use the scientific names, although there were a couple of major changes in the sequence for the various bird families. This year, although the changes to common names are minimal, there are some changes in sequence that will almost completely change the sequence in which the warblers are listed.

The name change that will appear most frequently in our columns is that of the Common Moorhen back to Common Gallinule. This decision is a consequence of a reversal of a decision 25 years ago that the very similar Old World and New World birds were a single species.

In the case of the warblers, as a result of extensive DNA analysis, many warblers have been assigned to different genera, and the genera themselves have been extensively "shuffled." Very few warblers retain the scientific name by which they were known before July! Only occasionally do we need to refer to scientific names in these columns, because of the standardization of the common names by the AOU. The common names of the warblers are not being changed, so only the change in sequence will be noticeable.

The increasing ease of sequencing DNA will doubtless result in changes to many more families of birds in the next few years, as DNA evidence supplants the morphological (shape, structure, color and pattern) features as the most important indicator of relationships. It is perhaps ironic that the common names of birds are proving to be more "stable" than the scientific names, long touted as less subject to change.

Renewable Energy Siting Update

We have received the following outline of recent Audubon work on wind and other renewable energy sources.

First: Some good news. Audubon has been instrumental in providing a step forward for bird-friendly power grid development.

You can find new resources to plug-in to our work improving the siting of transmission infrastructure across the U.S.: <http://bit.ly/qsGx1P> And, here is an overview of our involvement across the organization:

Audubon's national policy office, with support from Chapter leaders, continues to play a lead role in moving the federal wind guidelines process toward a successful conclusion. We are working to influence the national debate over the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and its applicability to wind development, to support efforts to strengthen and expand protections for the Greater Sage-grouse in the West, and to support Chapter-led efforts to improve siting on the local level, such as our support for Texas Chapters and their efforts to address the proposed Baryonyx development along the Texas Gulf Coast. We also are closely tracking the multi-state, multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan for the 200-mile-wide migratory corridor of the endangered Whooping Crane.

If you have questions, comments, or input regarding any of Audubon's involvement in renewable energy siting issues, or would like to coordinate with us or get further involved, please feel free to contact me at mdaulton@audubon.org or Connie Mahan, Director of Grassroots, at cmahan@audubon.org.

*Mike Daulton
Vice President of Government
Relations, National Audubon Society*

Field Trip to Bolivar Flats

Squeezed out of this issue through lack of space was the report on the field trip to Bolivar Flats on August 20, 2011. We have posted this on the website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org.

Spring 2011 Migration Summary

Once again, we present, largely in tabular form, a summary of the sightings of passerine neotropical migrants. We have combined all the species into a single table, even though we know this results in small print. (If you have access, the pdf version of the *Brown Pelican* on the web at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org can be made larger quite easily.) By omitting subheadings, we have been able to present the table on one page this year. The species are listed in "taxonomic" order. (We should note here that the order here does **not** reflect the changes published in the July 2011 in the Fifty-second Supplement to the American Ornithological Union's Checklist of North American Birds.) We have again included four species (Gray Catbird, Orange Crowned Warbler and Yellow-rumped Warbler and Palm Warbler) that do winter in the immediate area because there appear to be significant numbers of these species migrating through. For the Yellow-rumped Warblers particularly, many of the March sightings could well be wintering birds.

The methodology, similar to that employed in previous years, was as follows. We considered four "locations": Sabine Woods, the road to the former Pilot Station at Texas Point, Sea Rim State Park and Highway 87 west of the entrance, and points elsewhere on Texas 87 west of Sabine Pass. (There were very few reports of passerine migrants again this year from the road to the Pilot Station or from Highway 87 west of Sea Rim, because these areas have not recovered from Hurricane Ike, but we retain the ability to consider these locations in the future.) If there were multiple reports for any given location on any given day, the highest count for each species submitted by any of the observer groups was used. This process probably does not produce a perfect result, but we believe it eliminates most "double counting" of birds that would otherwise occur. (That having been said, we think that "counting" birds in a habitat such as Sabine Woods probably results in significant undercounting of any species present in any number. It probably, however, is quite accurate when only a small number of birds of a given species are present.) The counts for each of the three locations were added to determine the total of that species reported on that day. It should be noted that a bird that stays for more than one day may show up on the table for each of the days that it is present. No attempt has been made to account for such extended stays. This is probably most obvious for the McGillivray's Warbler, as it seems almost certain that it was one bird seen on two consecutive days!

In reviewing the results, it should be noted that May always presents a challenge. Although radar observations confirm that there are many birds that migrate across the Gulf of Mexico in the first half of May, the numbers that are seen in the coastal stopover sites is usually quite small. The winds in May are generally consistently more favorable – have a greater southerly component – and fronts bringing northerly winds at the coast become very rare. In addition, it is suggested that the inherited pressures to reach the breeding grounds become stronger as the days lengthen. Both tend to cause birds that are able to continue to bypass the coastal sites and continue further north before stopping to rest and refuel.

Like last year, there were many more reports from Sabine Woods than any other site. Many reports were the combined efforts of several observers, compiled on site at the time or very shortly afterwards, so the number of actual reports does not in any way reflect the number of observers or observer groups. We include only "first hand" reports to one of our regular observers, although postings to *TEXBIRDS* are used where appropriate. We try very hard to include all credible reports that we receive, but it is sometimes very difficult to keep up, especially in the second half of April, and we apologize to any whose reports did not make it into our database. We thank the following observers who regularly submitted reports or contributed to the combined reports: John Haynes, Howard Davis, Steve Dillinger, Terry Ferguson, Steve Mayes, and John and Jana Whittle. Others whose reports were used include: Kitty and Jim Anding, John Arvin, Richard Atkins, Gail and Fred Casteel, Cody Conway, Louis Debetaz, Gerald Duhon, Pat and Don Jeane, Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan, Steve Kuritz, Dwayne Litteer, Carol Lynn Loker, Sally and Chuck Moffet, Sherrie Roden, Kelley Sampeck, Harlan Stewart, Tex Wells and others who posted on *TEXBIRDS*. Our apologies to anyone we may have omitted.

There were a few sightings that involve species that were seen on only one day. These were: an Olive-sided Flycatcher on 14 April, a Great Kiskadee (perhaps not a migrant in the same sense as others) on 24 April and again 14 May, a Western Tanager on 20 April and five Bobolinks on 7 May

We now have data for each year since 1996 compiled under the same procedure. Estimating overall populations is not something that it is possible to do, since the fraction of migrants detected along the coast is strongly affected by weather. However, the data should allow comparisons of relative populations if species migrating within the same time period are compared. Because of the loss of many coastal trees and shrubs in the storm surge of Ike, more migrants may be concentrating in Sabine Woods, where they are more likely to be detected and reported. And perhaps more than anything else, we should be able, over time, to determine if any species are migrating earlier (or later) than they used to. Copies of all previous compilations are available upon request as .pdf files.

Highlight this year was probably the rather shy McGillivray's Warbler seen in Sabine Woods on 18 and 19 April. Two Canada Warblers on 24 April were early, but 15 on April 27 was a remarkable spring showing for a species many of us do not see until they pass back through in August. Palm Warblers regularly winter in the area, but the continuing presence of both Eastern and Western Subspecies, in numbers through about 20 April, and in smaller numbers through the middle of May was unprecedented for this area. Note that you will need to add up the entries in three rows if you want to determine the totals for Palm Warbler. The subspecies of those shown as "Palm Warbler" was not reported. *Catharus* thrush numbers were a little disappointing this year and did not come anywhere close to matching last year's exceptional numbers, but Gray Catbirds were very numerous over the last few days of April and the first few days of May.

John A. Whittle

Bird Sightings – July 2011

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 johnawhittle@aol.com or call (409) 722-4193. For "very rare" birds, or very much out-of-season species, 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: As usual in July, very little birding was undertaken by our regular contributors. We are grateful to our regular feeder watchers for their sightings.

From time to time, the American Ornithological Union's Checklist Committee makes changes to keep the checklist in accord with the latest genetic research. We have incorporated the latest changes into the databases used in this column. The only effect this month is the change of the name of the North American Common Moorhen back to Common Gallinules. In the future, you will see that the sequence in which the Warblers are listed has changed very significantly

WHISTLING-DUCK, Blk-bell.	(9-27)	JEF 2 reps(52)
BOBWHITE, Northern	(3-3)	HAI-SILS 7/3(1) MG
STORK, Wood	(17-17)	JEF 7/17(30) SM
CORMORANT, Neotropic	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(3) JA
BITTERN, Least	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(2) JA
HERON, Great Blue	(5-8)	JEF 2 reps(2)
EGRET, Great	(5-19)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 3 reps(9)
EGRET, Snowy	(1-9)	JEF 4 reps(12)
HERON, Tricolored	(1-9)	JEF 3 reps(10)
EGRET, Cattle	(9-9)	JEF 1 rep(10)
HERON, Green	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(6) JA
NIGHT-HERON, Black-crown.	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(2) JA
NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-cr.	(8-20)	JEF-MURW 7/8(1) JA; JEF-NEDR 7/20(2) JJW
IBIS, White	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(1) JA
SPOONBILL, Roseate	(1-8)	JEF 5 reps(10)
VULTURE, Black	(8-9)	JEF 2 reps(4)
VULTURE, Turkey	(1-8)	JEF 2 reps(2)
KITE, Swallow-tailed	(4-10)	HAI-SILS 7/4(4) DMW; HAI 7/10(1) JM
KITE, Mississippi	(1-25)	HAI 7/1 thru 7/16(2) JM; JEF-BMT 7/9(3) RHJ; JEF-BMT 7/11(1) JM; JEF-GROV 7/25(2) HD
EAGLE, Bald	(25-25)	ORA 7/25(1) CSL
HAWK, Cooper's	(22-25)	HAI-SILS 7/22(1) MG; JEF-GROV 7/25(1) HD
HAWK, Broad-winged	(4-19)	JEF 2 reps(2)
CARACARA, Crested	(9-9)	JEF-TX87 7/9(1) SR
RAIL, Clapper	(9-9)	JEF-TX87 7/9(1) JJW
GALLINULE, Common	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(1) JA
STILT, Black-necked	(1-8)	JEF 2 reps(26)
WILLET	(1-1)	JEF-MURW 7/1(4) JA
GULL, Laughing	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(1) JA
TERN, Forster's	(9-9)	JEF-TX87 7/9(2) JJW
SKIMMER, Black	(9-9)	JEF-TX87 7/9(4) JJW
PIGEON, Rock	(9-11)	HAI 1 rep(9); JEF 1 rep(71)
COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian	(5-13)	HAI 1 rep(3); JEF 1 rep(1)
DOVE, White-winged	(4-31)	HAI 2 reps(5); JEF 23 reps(216)
DOVE, Mourning	(1-26)	HAI 10 reps(90); JEF 3 reps(8)
DOVE, Inca	(9-26)	HAI 3 reps(6); JEF 1 rep(3)
CUCKOO, Yellow-billed	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(1) JA
OWL, Great Horned	(9-30)	JEF-SW 7/9(1) JJW; JEF-BMT 7/30(1) RHJ
OWL, Barred	(22-22)	HAI-SILS 7/22(1) MG
NIGHTHAWK, Common	(9-9)	JEF-SW 7/9(2) JJW; JEF-TX87 7/9(2) JJW
SWIFT, Chimney	(4-30)	JEF 6 reps(36)
HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-thr.	(1-31)	HAI 11 reps(21); JEF 16 reps(20)
HUMMINGBIRD species	(2-4)	JEF 3 reps(3)
WOODPECKER, Red-bellied	(1-20)	HAI 8 reps(25); JEF 2 reps(3)
WOODPECKER, Downy	(1-21)	JEF 6 reps(6)
WOODPECKER, Pileated	(1-31)	HAI 4 reps(5); JEF 1 rep(1)
FLYCATCHER, Gt. Crested	(9-9)	JEF-SW 7/9(1) RAJH
KINGBIRD, Eastern	(1-9)	JEF 3 reps(5)
FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed	(9-9)	JEF-TX87 7/9(1) JJW

SHRIKE, Loggerhead	(13-22)	HAI 2 reps(2)
VIREO, White-eyed	(5-9)	HAI-SILS 7/5(2) MG; HAI-SILS 7/9(2) MG; JEF-MURW 7/8(1) JA
JAY, Blue	(1-31)	HAI 11 reps(98); JEF 7 reps(9)
CROW, American	(3-22)	HAI 3 reps(7)
CROW, Fish	(29-29)	JEF-BMT 7/29(2) JAW
MARTIN, Purple	(7-9)	JEF 4 reps(230)
SWALLOW, Barn	(3-9)	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 1 rep(5)
CHICKADEE, Carolina	(4-26)	HAI 5 reps(10); JEF 5 reps(7)
TITMOUSE, Tufted	(4-18)	HAI 5 reps(14)
WREN, Carolina	(3-18)	HAI 2 reps(4)
WREN, Marsh	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(2) JA
GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray	(9-11)	HAI 2 reps(2)
BLUEBIRD, Eastern	(5-14)	HAI-SILS 7/5(2) MG; HAI-SILS 7/8(2) MG; HAI-SILS 7/13(2) MG; HAI-SILS 7/14(3) MG
ROBIN, American	(1-30)	JEF 4 reps(7)
CATBIRD, Gray	(2-30)	HAI-SILS 7/5(1) MG; JEF-BMT 7/2(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 7/4(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 7/30(1) RHJ
MOCKINGBIRD, Northern	(4-31)	HAI 2 reps(8); JEF 8 reps(16)
THRASHER, Brown	(1-30)	HAI 7 reps(8); JEF 6 reps(7)
YELLOWTHROAT, Common	(1-9)	JEF-MURW 7/1(5) JA; JEF-MURW 7/8(9) JA; JEF-SW 7/9(2) JJW
SPARROW, Seaside	(8-8)	JEF-MURW 7/8(7) JA
CARDINAL, Northern	(1-28)	HAI 12 reps(780); JEF 8 reps(16)
BUNTING, Painted	(11-12)	HAI 7/11(1) KSA; HAI 7/12(1) KSA
DICKCISSEL	(1-1)	JEF-MURW 7/1(1) JA
BLACKBIRD, Red-winged	(7-9)	JEF 3 reps(99)
GRACKLE, Common	(8-25)	HAI 1 rep(3); JEF 2 reps(3)
GRACKLE, Boat-tailed	(7-8)	JEF 2 reps(21)
GRACKLE, Great-tailed	(8-15)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 2 reps(3)
COWBIRD, Brown-headed	(1-13)	HAI 7 reps(25); JEF 1 rep(1)
ORIOLE, Orchard	(7-9)	JEF-MURW 7/7(9) JAW; JEF-MURW 7/8(4) JA; JEF-SW 7/9(20) JJW
FINCH, House	(1-31)	JEF 20 reps(79)
SPARROW, House	(4-31)	JEF 15 reps(113)
Number of Species		78
Number of Individuals		4912

County Abbreviations:

HAI — Hardin; JEF — Jefferson; ORA — Orange

Location Codes:

BMT — Beaumont; GROV — Groves; MURW — J. D. Murphree WMA, west of Taylor Bayou; NEDR — Nederland; SILS — Silsbee; SW — Sabine Woods; TX87 — Texas 87 Pt. Arthur-Sabine Pass-Sea Rim SP

Observer Abbreviations:

CK — Cody Conway and Kelley Sampeck; CSL — Christine Sliva; DMW — Debby McWhorter; HD — Howard Davis; JA — Jim Armacost; JAW — John Whittle; JFW — Jana Whittle; JJW — John and Jana Whittle; JM — John Mariani; KSA — Kelley Sampeck; MG — Melanie Goetsell; RAJH — Richard Atkins and John Haynes; RHJ — Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan; SM — Steve Mayes; SR — Sherrie Roden.

The Next Marsh Restoration Project in the Lower Neches WMA along Highway 87/73

An area of the Old River Unit of the Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area between Highway 87/73 and the Entergy power plant in Orange County, east of the Neches River, is currently being flooded with up to two million cubic yards of dredge spoil from the nearby Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW). This area is mostly shallow, open water between the highway and the Entergy power plant. The area is tidal and is protected by a saltwater barrier at the Entergy cooling water canal. A large pipeline for dredge spoil slurry has been laid on the surface along the east side of the highway, under the highway through an existing culvert, and across open water toward the power plant. The other end of the pipe runs along the power plant canal to the dredge, which is currently working in the GIWW at the mouth of the Old River. The stretch of the GIWW to be dredged is over four miles long and crosses the upper end of Sabine Lake from the point where the Neches River flows into Sabine Lake to the point where the Sabine River flows into it. This stretch was filled in with sand and silt by wave action from Hurricane Ike, reducing the channel depth from an average of 32 feet down to 18 feet and limiting the size of ships that can use the Port of Orange.

As ominous as it all looks, this is a marsh restoration project by the Port of Orange and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) that benefits the Port's need to keep the GIWW open to deep-draft ships, and helps TPWD recover marshland from the effects of manmade saltwater intrusion.

TPWD expects the project to assist the return of about 500 acres of open water to the conditions prior to industrial development and channeling of area waterways, when the marshes southwest of Bridge City were fresh and covered with emergent vegetation such as cattails, bulrushes, and Jamaican sawgrass. As channeling and subsidence allowed brackish water into this environment, the freshwater vegetation died and tidal action eroded the organic soils, resulting in the shallow, non-productive expanses of open water we see today.

Dredging and pumping are expected to continue through this Fall, followed by a period of two to three years during which the dredge spoil settles, dries and compacts down to

about 1.2 feet above the NAVD 88 sea level datum. Salt-tolerant emergent marsh vegetation will colonize the spoil or may be planted, and there are plans to assist the return of black drum and other species to the channels and ponds that will develop as the dredge spoil compacts. If it proceeds according to plan, in a few years the new marsh will resemble a similar remediation project completed a few years ago and before Hurricane Ike, on the east of Highway 87/73, where TPWD monitoring now shows a vital ecosystem with a good mix of emergent vegetation, canals and ponds, and good populations of fish, birds, and animals.

TPWD and Port of Orange personnel have held two town-hall meetings in Bridge City to explain the beneficial nature of the project and address citizen concerns. At the most recent meeting on August 16, 2011, Jim Sutherlin and Mike Rezsutek of TP&W explained to long-time local duck hunters and fishermen that the project is a marsh restoration and not a dredge spoil dump. The containment levee that surrounds the project to contain the dredge spoil in its liquid state is only 2.5 feet above datum. Nearly 11,000 feet of lower "training levees" have been built to help distribute the spoil. The borrow canals for these levees are expected to remain low as the spoil settles, resulting in drainage and fish access corridors. As the spoil settles to its target elevation, the containment levees will be breached and their boards removed to allow drainage and tidal exchange.

Unfortunately, while the spoil is settling and dewatering, and as re-vegetation occurs, it will resemble a vast, inaccessible mudflat, for about two years. Other short term effects include some turbidity in the popular bank fishing area along Hwy 87/73, some fish kill in the project area, and loss of access to the area for safety reasons. Once vegetation is established, the marsh will be re-opened and accessible by water for public use, including hunting, fishing and birding, within the rules of the Lower Neches WMA. TP&W staff emphasized that they plan to re-open the area as soon as possible.

This article was abstracted from a presentation by Dr. Mike Rezsutek of Texas Parks and Wildlife and a project document provided by the Port of Orange.

Gary Kelley

Important Notice

As noted last month we have decided that the time has come to offer electronic delivery of the *Brown Pelican* in lieu of hard copy and now offer four alternatives, listed below. Please check the option that you want and return the form to us at P.O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292 --your current mailing label is on the reverse of this form. You may email us at GTAudubon@aol.com Please include your name and address as it currently appears on your mailing label. If you are requesting a mailed copy, we do request that you contribute at least \$15 per year if you are able.

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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/> Email alerts are also available for a fee. Most rare bird sightings in Texas are posted on the TEXBIRDS listserv. Archives of the listserv are at <http://lists.texbirds.org/texbirds.html> It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives, which include postings up to the most recent.

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>.

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