

The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 21 No. 4

April 2015

**Membership Meeting
Thursday April 16, 2015 7:00 p.m.
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

Birds of Northern New Mexico

Terry Ferguson

This program will describe the birds to be found in New Mexico in a 30-mile stretch from Wild Rivers Recreation Area through Red River up to Bobcat Pass. This is an area that is not heavily birded, but has a lot of interesting mountain birds. Many of the pictures will feature birds at her extensive feeder set up in Red Rover, where one side of her house is all glass.

Terry is an avid birder, with more than 600 North American birds on her life list, and is a member of Texas Ornithological Society and American Birding Association. She was born and grew up in Orange, Texas, and graduated from Orangefield High School. She has a degree in education from Stephen F. Austin University, and taught school for 29 years. In March 2010, her husband Tracy was appointed as Superintendent of Sea Rim State Park. They lived in a trailer at the park until August 2012, when Tracy retired, and they moved to Red River. Many will remember when a Snow Bunting showed up outside her trailer at Sea Rim in June 2011 but none of us could get there because marsh fires caused Highway 87 to be closed between Sabine Pass and Sea Rim. In addition, she took the first pictures that enabled the identification of the Tropical Mockingbird at Sabine Woods in April 2012 to be confirmed.

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

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Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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Calendar of Events

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

Thursday April 16, 2015. Membership Meeting. Birds of Northern New Mexico. Details on page 1.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank Edra Bogucki, Sherry Gibson, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Harrison Jordan, Lynn Otto, Sherrie Roden, Phil Rogers, Gail Slocum, Joedna Smyth for bringing refreshments in March. **We need volunteers to bring items for the April and May meetings** Pick the meeting at which you want to help. 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. Even if you can just bring drinks and cookies or something similar, please call Jana Whittle at (409) 722-4193 (or email her at janafw@aol.com) **as far in advance as possible**. Please help if you can. We thank all those who brought or assisted in the purchase of refreshments over the last year or so!

Saturday April 18, 2015. Field Trip to Sabine Woods and Sabine Pass.

This trip will look for Neotropical migrants at the height of spring migration. We will assemble at Sabine Woods at 7:30 a.m. (You should be able to find the group if you are unable to be there quite that early.)

At Sabine Woods, there is a small parking area, with additional parking is improvised using the roadside verges.

Portable toilets are available at the entrance.

This trip will seek Neotropical migrants at the height of spring migration, and involves relatively easy walking on the trails at Sabine Woods to look for migrant songbirds, although another option is to sit at the drip and wait for the birds to come to you. However, Hurricane Ike completely destroyed the boardwalks, and the trails may be muddy and slippery if it has rained in the prior day or two. Armadillos are active, so there may be holes to avoid! There is a \$5 sanctuary pass donation at Sabine Woods for those who are not members of Golden Triangle Audubon or Texas Ornithological Society. This field trip is especially suited for not-very-experienced birders. Often, we break into smaller groups, with an experienced birder in each group.

Bring insect repellent. Most participants will bring lunch. Facilities in Sabine Pass are limited, although gasoline and very limited food are now available.

Birding in late April can be exciting. However, we cannot promise anything, as the number of birds in the coastal woodlots is highly dependent on the weather conditions over the Gulf. Immediately after a cold front passes and the following day are usually considered to be among the most likely days to have a good concentration of migrants at favored coastal locations.

Sabine Woods is on the north side of Highway 87, 4.1 miles west of the stop sign in Sabine Pass. Take Highway 87 from Port Arthur to Sabine Pass, turn right at the stop sign, and go 4.1 miles.



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

Saturday May 9, 2015. Jefferson County Spring Migration Count. We have been doing these counts since 1995. The count attempts to cover as much of Jefferson County as is reasonably possible. We welcome all participants, especially if you are able to count in the early morning from dawn through about 11:00 a.m. even if you would just like to cover your own neighborhood. It is not necessary to commit to the whole day. If you have special access to any areas within the county, we would appreciate your help! Contact John Whittle (409-722-4193 or johnawhittle@aol.com) for details or offers to help. We will be out of town May 1 through 4, but will respond to emails.

Thursday May 21, 2015 Membership Meeting. Stephan Lorenz on birds of the Brazilian Amazon.

Saturday May 30, 2015. Field Trip to Hardin County: We will focus on the area north of Silsbee to look for the breeding birds of the area. This is typically a half-day trip. We plan to look for the nesting species of the area – Hooded, Kentucky, Pine, Prairie, Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chat, White-eyed, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireo, Indigo and Painted Bunting, Gray Catbird, Summer Tanager, Acadian Flycatcher, Brown-headed Nuthatch and others.

The meeting place will be at 7:00 a.m. (note the necessary early start if we are to find the breeding birds!) at the shopping center on the northeast corner of the intersection of FM92 and FM418 in the northern part of Silsbee.

Sabine Woods Work Day -- March 28, 2015

Despite the inability of some of our regular workers to join us, we accomplished almost all of what we needed in the way of essential maintenance and we should be in good shape for the critical weeks of spring migration. We were favored by just about the most comfortable weather we could have asked for. In addition to mowing all the trails and the meadow

areas that we keep cleared, trimming the bushes along the sides of the trails, filling in the armadillo excavations and treating the numerous fire ant mounds, we were able to remove over 40 of the T-posts that had supported the new trees in their earlier years. There are still a few left (eight to ten) that resisted our efforts, or where removal will possibly threaten the root system of the tree. There are also some that are in areas under water at present, for the ponds are full to overflowing. We had worked on removal of some water hyacinth from the main pond a few days earlier, and on the work day, we mopped up a couple of pieces that had been hiding on that occasion.

Like most of the eastern half of the country, we had one of the colder winters in recent memory, and a very wet March, but spring is now here, and the first migrants are beginning to trickle through. Some of the underbrush was "knocked down" by the several freezes this winter, but we believe that occasional winters like that are good for the habitat, helping keep it composed mainly of native species. However, all the rain caused a lot of growth in the meadow areas, although not particularly thick. Almost all the newer mulberry trees are budding out, and there has been plenty of moisture for the newer oaks. There are still three medium sized alligators in the main pond but we wonder when they are going to run out of food there and move on.

Those who birded after we completed the work did find some migrants. There were Louisiana Waterthrushes, Black-and white Warblers, bright male Prothonotary Warblers, nice male Hooded Warblers, more than one Yellow-throated Warbler, some Parula Warblers, a rather elusive Worm-eating Warbler, and at least three Palm Warblers including one all yellow Eastern form. Wintering warblers were represented by Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned and Common Yellowthroat. Other species noted included Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Blue-headed Vireo, Winter Wren and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

On behalf of Texas Ornithological Society and Golden Triangle Audubon Society we thank everyone who helped either on the day or in the days before: Lori Baker, Jessica Barry, Michael

Cooper, Howard Davis, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Gary Kelley, Steve Kuritz, Randy Lewis, Steve Mayes, Wendy Mires, Daniel Reed, Sherrie Roden, and Jana Whittle. Thanks to each and every one.

John A. Whittle

Sponsor our Birdathon

Once again, we will be raising money for Golden Triangle Audubon in our Birdathon. You may be assured that all your contributions will stay close to home as it were. Royce Pendergast and Ross Foreman will again be joining with me in this year's Spring Birdathon.

A Birdathon is very similar to other "athons" you may be familiar with, such as telethons, walkathons, etc. The idea is for us to start birding at the crack of dawn on a day in mid to late April and make a run from the woods of the Southern Big Thicket through to the coast of east Jefferson County. We again plan to restrict our area to Hardin, Jefferson and Orange counties. We're aiming for at least 150 species. We will pick an exact day guided by the weather forecasts. Our preferred date will be around April 25-26. We're hoping you will sponsor us at \$1.00 or more, \$0.75, \$0.50, (or whatever amount you choose) per bird species. A flat donation is also welcome. Please take the time to make a pledge today -- your donation to our Birdathon will be earmarked to support our mission of protecting our natural heritage in Texas by supporting conservation, education and advocacy. As always, Sabine Woods is high on our list of projects. (If you wish, you may earmark your contributions for a specific use.)

Checks should be made out to Golden Triangle Audubon Society and all contributions are, of course, tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. We appreciate all of you who contributed generously last year, and hope you will consider supporting us again. Please contact me at 3015 Nashville Ave, Nederland, TX 77627 or at johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193 with your pledges.

John A. Whittle

Membership Meeting Report

19 March 2015

On Thursday, March 19th, at 7:00 at the Beaumont Garden Center, at our monthly Golden Triangle Audubon meeting, John Haynes and Harlan Stewart presented a program of the Warblers of Sabine Woods. They had pictures of 40 various warblers and John Haynes talked about each one of them and told when they are seen there, and where they migrated from. The birds on the powerpoint were in the order of the most frequently seen birds at Sabine Woods to the least frequently seen bird. The most frequently seen warbler is of course the Common Yellowthroat. I wish every person who enjoys seeing warblers could have seen this program. One of the other wonderful things about the presentation is that there was a graph at the bottom of each species seen that said when they appear during a calendar year. Please write in the comments other things that you liked about the program.

Comment 1: It really helped me prepare for my first spring migration as a birder. Also the info on when, where, and what behavior to look for in each species was great. I enjoyed it, and so did my non-birding spouse.

Comment 2: I liked learning about their different behaviors and the subtle distinctions between similar species. Now maybe I can tell a Louisiana from a Northern Waterthrush!

Comment 3: Many thanks to John for his expertise and Harlan for the beautiful photos. I haven't been to Sabine Woods in a while and can hardly wait to get out there to see these birds out in the field. The presentation will make it much easier for me to identify the warblers I do find. Thanks, again.

Please go to Golden Triangle Audubon Facebook to find out information about current activities, meeting reports, meeting dates, field trip dates and bird sightings at Sabine Woods. If you are not on Facebook, you can always go to goldentriangleaudubon.org on the web.

How to Begin Birding

Nicholas Lund

This was first published on the National Audubon Web site on January. 25, 2015. We know that a large number of our members have never actually gone out birding. This brief article should help you get started. Birders of all ages and levels of experience are welcome on our field trips. The Pril field trip to Sabine Woods is especially suited to beginning birders.

Like birds, but don't know how to make the leap to becoming a birder? Here are three easy steps to get you into the field. I'm biased, but in my opinion, birding is the Greatest Pursuit

Available to a Citizen of the Modern World. It's basically a lifelong scavenger hunt played across the entire earth. It's equal parts science and poetry, hoots of triumph and quiet reflection, adventures to far-flung corners of the world and discoveries in your own back yard.

Your life is going to be better with birds in it. If you've always loved birds but never known how to actually make the leap, here's how to begin.

1. Get Excited — and Read Up

So, there's no rush. While aching knees or backs will eventually force your peers to hang up their skis or mountain bikes, birders can bird for as long as they can walk, roll, or look out a window (I'm genuinely excited to impress my peers at whatever nursing home I eventually get put into). Take a moment to learn about what you're getting into.

Start by getting your hands on a field guide. Any book will do as long as it has pictures of each bird and maps of their range. Keep this book in a place where you'll be able to leisurely flip through it for a couple minutes each day—the bathroom works as well as your nightstand. What are the different kinds of birds? Where do they live, and in what seasons? Don't worry at this point about how to identify anything, just focus on figuring out what's out there.

To supplement your field guide examination, learn some things about avian biology and the sport of birding. Watch all of the BBC's Life of Birds series, hosted by your new hero David Attenborough. Learn about why birds are birds, and how they've evolved into such incredible creatures. Read *The Big Year* by Mark Obmascik (unsurprisingly, the book's better than the movie), and learn about the extreme end of this hobby—not as something to emulate (yet) but as a point of reference. Excited yet? Good, let's go to step two.

2. Gear Up

A great thing about birding is how little equipment you need to actually do it. To get started, you really just need something to hold to the eye to make those far-away little birdies a bit bigger. In the beginning, you don't need to worry about what kind of binoculars you're using. All you've got is a pair of hulking, 14-pound black plastic behemoths from your mom's house? Use them. Little opera glasses that you hold to your face with a stick? They'll work. One of those extending telescopes that fit in your pocket? Get ready to run through the woods like some sort of bird-watching pirate. If they make far away things seem a little less far away, use them for now.

And that's it! Some form of binoculars and that field guide you bought earlier are plenty to get started. As you get better, you may want to invest in a nice camera or a spotting scope (for the really far-off birds), but they're by no means required.

3. Get Out There

The time has come to actually get outside. The first experience is important; if you're overwhelmed, or you don't quite "get" what you're supposed to be doing, you may not return for a second chance. So start with a plan.

Here's what I recommend: pick a bird and go find it. Use that
Please see [Begin Birding on page 7](#)

Global Study Reveals the Extent of Habitat Fragmentation

Shattered forests are bad news for birds' survival.
Published on the National Audubon web-site Mar 20, 2015

The planet's forests are shrinking, and it's playing out to the tune of massive species losses, a new study shows. And birds could be one of the biggest fatalities.

In the landmark study, published in *Science Advances*, researchers across the globe used results from seven separate experiments carried out in five continents to posit that habitat fragmentation is rife. Ultimately, they found that 70 percent of global forests lie within just half a mile of their edges, exposing woodland species to human developments and agriculture. Even worse, almost 20 percent of forested land has just 100 meters (the equivalent length of a football field) to buffer it from the outside world. "That means almost no forest can really be considered wilderness," said study leader Dr. Nick Haddad from North Carolina State University, in a press release.

When raveled ecosystems are whittled down, they're less able to support the species that comprise them. As a result, habitats around the world are losing 13 to 75 percent of their biodiversity. This study shows that forest ecosystems are particularly at risk of losing their flora and fauna.

In the United States, Audubon and other conservation groups recently signed on to a campaign to shield the country's largest stretch of forest, the Boreal forest, from this very fate. The Boreal Birds Need Half initiative seeks to protect the hundreds of bird species that are seasonal residents of this 3,500-mile-long tract of largely pristine forest that runs across from Alaska to the eastern seaboard. The habitat is vital to almost half of North American birds, 300 of which use it as a breeding base in the spring. "That Boreal forest is incredibly important, especially since the abundance of forest birds is at its peak there," says Curtis Smalling, director of land bird conservation for Audubon North Carolina. Logging and energy development are the biggest threats, causing millions of boreal acres to be cleared on an annual basis.

For birds, a football field's worth of forest just doesn't cut it: larger swathes promote breeding success and buoy bird populations. "In forests in particular, it's not just about their own particular territory, but a lot of species are also looking for a specific 'patch size'," Smalling says.

For instance, "if you have less than 70 percent forest cover at a landscape scale, Golden-winged Warblers don't like it." The same is true for songbirds like Vesper Sparrows and Cerulean Warblers, who respectively seek territory that's at least 40 hectares and 200 hectares in size. There's also the entire "edge effect" to consider: The more habitat shrinkage that occurs, the more birds will be exposed to predators and contaminants lurking on the outskirts.

Just as Haddad and his co-authors emphasized in the study, Smalling says it's important to look after fragmented habitat, even if it's not idyllic to wildlife. Smalling is part of the team that runs Audubon's Eastern Forest Conservation Initiative to protect birds in the eastern United States, which is mostly designated as a forest biome. "The effects of fragmentation are

probably felt the largest here," Smalling says. By training foresters and landowners to be bird-friendly, the team aims to uphold what's left of forests and maximize their value to birds.

The new numbers on global habitat degradation may be shocking, but they also reveal what needs to be done, says Smalling. "Working to protect and conserve these big forest blocks is really critical and needs to continue. As for fragmented forests, "it really points to the fact that we shouldn't give up on those habitats."

Membership Dues

To simplify our record keeping, all memberships now run from January through December. Membership dues remain at \$15 per year. You may pay at any membership meeting (checks preferred) or use the subscription/ membership blank on the back page.

Dues for all members will be for the period ending on December 31. The memberships of new members joining in August or later in the year will extend to the end of the following calendar year. For new members joining National Audubon using the membership blank printed on the back page of each printed issue of the *Brown Pelican*, we receive a rebate of the entire first year's national dues, and no Chapter dues are expected for that first year.

As a reminder, dues are voluntary for National Audubon Society members living in the Chapter's official territory, which is defined by zip codes, but basically covers all of Jefferson, Orange and Hardin Counties and one or two zip codes adjacent to these counties. We do welcome members in other nearby counties!

Your dues cover the cost of printing and mailing the *Brown Pelican* to you, and help fund our other activities. We urge you to help us do more by receiving your *Brown Pelican* as a PDF attached to an email if you do not already. We will continue to post the Newsletter on the GTAS website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org. The typical issue will be less than 500 KB so it is not a large file. Please send an email to johnawhittle@aol.com with your request, including the name we currently send the printed copy to, and the email address you want us to use.

Contributions to the Brown Pelican

Contributions for the Brown Pelican are always welcome, and we would especially welcome more articles on conservation and related issues, particularly those with a local flavor. We can help with the final details if you get all the facts together.

There are always events of interest to our members. Local Parks, Preserves and Wildlife Refuges frequently are preparing habitat and management plans, and are always provide final drafts for public comment. Brief summaries of important proposals would be a valuable addition to the *Brown Pelican!*

Birding Road Trips

John and I got back recently from an eight day birding trip. It is a great way to see all parts of our world and look for birds in various areas. This time we chose to combine looking for winter birds in the panhandle of Texas and going to look for the Common Crane which is a bird from Russia.

For people who haven't done many birding road trips, please know that it is fun first of all. Some people make elaborate plans, and others just pack and leave. We chose to pack and leave on this trip, but we knew our goal was to go try and see the Common Crane that was first spotted on November 18th. I remember John and I talking about it after supper one night in November. I said that we should go to see it and he said if it stays we should go when there aren't so many people going to see it. And it was true. Not one birder was there looking for the crane in February when John located it near Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge. So I thought why not write an article of how to do birding on road trips.

The first thing that John did was to find out where the Common Crane has last been sighted on eBird. He found the name of the road. So we headed out from Nederland, using our GPS, but we stopped at Hagerman Wildlife Refuge because it was on the way and we spent the night in Sherman.

When we first went on birding road trips in the early 90's, we used Jim Lane's Guide. His guides would tell you which roads to turn on, and to check out unknown roads, but he only had two books. One for the Rio Grande Valley and the other for Texas coast. After he passed away, his son updated them and now they are listed as Lane/ABA books.

Another good source is Ed Kutac's Birders' Guide to Texas. Other than those, we first get out the Roads of Texas Atlas. John likes that one because it has the counties and the county roads shown on it. For this trip to the panhandle, we checked out the weather first to make sure they weren't predicting heavy snow. If there is a dusting of snow, we just wait until it warms up before we get out in the morning. Out of the eight days, it snowed on the car twice while we were there, but after nine, the roads were clear, so it did not hinder our birding. .

On this trip, we knew that one of our farthest destinations would be around Muleshoe NWR. So we looked at the atlas and chose the refuges, state parks, NWR's, that we knew would either be near our route on the way or on the return trip. We had planned on it taking possibly three days to see the Common Crane. We had heard that it took some people a week to find it. After spending the night in Sherman and birding Hagerman, we continued to drive to Plainview. We drove to see the Common Crane from there. John spotted the crane at the site that had been on eBird. Someone had seen it within the last eight days there. Yes, it took about 20 minutes which is not too bad considering there were 4,000 Sandhill Cranes that he waded through looking through his scope.

After that we were off the hook to have to spend three days there. That day we did go to Muleshoe NWR and birded small county roads. The next day we went to Caprock Canyon and Palo Duro Canyon which are both beautiful, but not too many birds when the temps are in the 30's. After spending two nights in Plainview, we drove to Amarillo and birded in that

area. There is one particular road that we like to bird in the area, that has prairie dog towns and Ferruginous Hawks like to eat Prairie Dogs. So if you find the prairie dog towns, you are almost sure to see Ferruginous Hawks and sometimes Rough-legged Hawks. Each time we have been in the winter, we have seen several of them and it gives us a chance to study them. Since we were four hours from Red River, New Mexico, we called our friend, Terry Ferguson, who agreed to meet us halfway in Clayton, New Mexico to bird with her at Clayton State Park. In her New Mexico bird guide, it said it was good place for ducks and Canada Geese. Little did we know that this was an unusual year there. The ranger at the park said that ducks came a month late and left a month early. So, there were not many birds there, but we did see about 200 Canada Geese which were really nice to see. There were a few other birds there, but after a few hours, we headed over to a few other places nearby. Very few birds were found. We did enjoy birding and visiting with Terry though.

After that we birded Lake Meredith which has more water in it than last year. We saw very few birds there either. On the return trip, we stopped at places that were near the main road we were traveling.

We spent a night in Waco and headed back to make it in time for our GTAS meeting. Some of the birds that we saw on our trip, which are harder to see here in the winter time are: Common Crane, Canada Geese, Horned Larks, Western Meadowlarks, Lewis' Woodpecker, Ferruginous Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, and Burrowing Owls.

When we travel, we try not to go on freeways as much as possible because it is hard to bird in a car at 75 miles an hour when there is traffic. Of course, that is the fastest way, but as the people who have taken birding trips with us, if the GPS says it will take 4 hours to get from point A to point B, it will normally take at least an hour more because we stop for birds. Yes, we did get stuck behind many logging trucks, two different houses being moved, farm equipment, etc., on two lane highways, so please understand that it is really different traveling on those less traveled roads.

So to sum it all up, Roads of Texas Atlas or maps, eBird reports, birding checklists from various parks and NWR's which you can find online, local Audubon checklists, Texbirds archives, and a GPS are some of the things that help us while on these trips. Birds being there and weather are never guaranteed. At <http://www.aba.org/siteguides/na.html> is a book about how to plan birding trips which I just found while looking for different guides. There are birding guides for nine different states on the ABA site also. Some are better than others.

On this trip, we did not make hotel reservations ahead of time because we wanted to have the freedom of dodging weather systems if possible and if we needed to take longer to find the crane. We did not have a problem finding hotels, because it was mid-February and not many people were traveling then.

Hope this helps you try going in a car on a birding trip because it is very rewarding to see all parts of our world and the different species of birds there. *Jana Whittle*

Field Trip to Bolivar Flats – 21 March 2015

Luck has generally been on the side of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society when it comes to weather on field trips. Sure we have had a rain out (and there was that little hurricane ...) but, by and large, there has been a pretty remarkable string of decent weather days for our birding expeditions. But no run of good luck can last forever and things looked ominous for the annual March field trip to Bolivar Flats. Rain was looming on the horizon (literally). Lots of rain. Could the trip be pulled off before the weather hit? Well ...

It looked at first as if the worst of the rain might miss the immediate coast and give the group a window of a few hours in which to see the sights of Bolivar Flats. With that optimistic point of view in their heads, the birders bravely headed away from the vehicle barrier and out onto the flats. And weather or no weather, there were lots of birds! American Avocets were immediately apparent as is often the case at this world class shorebird destination. Dozens were seen feeding in the surf and flying by. Further out on the flats, thousands of additional Avocets were eventually located, some coming into breeding plumage. The spectacular flocks of American Avocets wintering at Bolivar Flats are truly one of the birding wonders of the region, not to be missed by any birder. But there was much more, and much of it was close to the vehicle barrier, pushed up the beach by a high tide. A flock of small “peep” sandpipers was close by and careful scrutiny revealed both Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers in it. Least Sandpipers would be located a little further down the beach. All this in no more than a light drizzle!

Moving further out onto the flats, a small group of Horned Larks eventually gave remarkably good views to the birders. Bolivar Flats is by far the easiest place to get this species anywhere close to the Golden Triangle. A Long-billed Curlew plied its trade near the water’s edge while many Marbled Godwits fed in the shallows. As always, both Brown Pelicans and American White Pelicans were easily seen loafing on the beach in good numbers. Colorful Ruddy Turnstones sifted through the debris at the high tide line while pale Sanderlings raced after the retreating waves. Willets and Dunlin were found along with three bold American Oystercatchers, not always a guarantee on the beach. Was it raining a bit harder now?

Piping Plovers were found almost immediately and their darker lookalikes, the Semipalmated Plovers, were seen soon after. Snowy Plovers were located next and then their larger billed cousins, the Wilson’s Plovers came into view. The larger plovers also put in a good showing. Black-bellied Plovers (in their dull winter plumage) were obvious on the beach and a few of the birders found some American Golden-Plovers in a field along Rettilon Road before hitting the beach. Golden-Plovers generally prefer fields over sandy beaches but what were those plovers just down the beach? It turns out, a few American Golden-Plovers turned up on the flats as well and were enjoyed by the assembled birders. Definitely, raining a bit harder now, getting hard to keep the water off the optics!

A couple of American Wigeon zipped up the coast followed by a few Blue-winged Teal. Royal and Forster’s Terns were easily found along with Laughing, Ring-billed and

Herring Gulls. Black Skimmers were seen both resting on the beach and foraging low over the water dragging their bill on the surface in their characteristic feeding style. Hundreds of other birds lay further out on the flats but ... there was no denying it now, it was pouring and time to head for the cars!

Sure the group got soaked. Yes, everyone drove home in serious rain and had to avoid street flooding. It’s true that there were many birds that could not be seen because of the weather. Was it worth it? YES! Hundreds of birds (thousands if you count just the Avocets) were seen and identified by the group despite the poor conditions. Was it a perfect field trip? No, but any bird outing that produces plovers, avocets, oystercatchers, skimmers, sandpipers and other birds in these kinds of numbers has to be considered a success. So, come join the Golden Triangle Audubon Society for the April field trip to Sabine Woods. Sure it could rain, but maybe it will bring a fallout with it!

A conservative list of species/numbers seen by the field trip leaders:

Gadwall (3); American Wigeon (2); Mottled Duck (3); Blue-winged Teal (4); Northern Shoveler (4); American White Pelican (125); Brown Pelican (50); Great Blue Heron (2); American Avocet (3000); American Oystercatcher (3); Black-bellied Plover (10); American Golden-Plover (10); Snowy Plover (4); Wilson’s Plover (4); Semipalmated Plover (18); Piping Plover (6); Willet (15); Long-billed Curlew (1); Marbled Godwit (50); Ruddy Turnstone (20); Sanderling (25); Dunlin (25); Least Sandpiper (15); Semipalmated Sandpiper (20); Western Sandpiper (15); “Peep” sp. (50); Long-billed/Short-billed Dowitcher (30); Laughing Gull (50); Ring-billed Gull (1); Herring Gull (5); Forster’s Tern (1); Royal Tern (50); Black Skimmer (100); Horned Lark (3); Savannah Sparrow (4); Red-winged Blackbird (2); Eastern/Western Meadowlark (2); Boat-tailed/Great-tailed Grackle (2)

Steve Mayes

Begin Birding (continued from page 4)

field guide you bought and pick a bird you’ve never seen before — one that you’re reasonably sure lives nearby at that time of year—and go find it. There are a lots of resources you can use to determine what birds have been seen nearby, like the “explore data” section of eBird or postings on your local birding listserv. Then just go out into the actual world and start looking until you find it.

Believe me, the accomplishment you’ll feel when your chosen bird is all of a sudden flapping or paddling or sitting in front of you, no longer a flat image in the book but a living creature—that feeling is what this is all about. You’ll recapture it with every new species you find.

And that’s it, you’re a birder! There are a lot of ways to proceed from here—finding buddies to bird with; chasing your first rarity; taking your first trip out of state—but all those will come naturally once you’ve gotten started.

Congratulations on your new hobby—I’ll see you in the field.

Golden Triangle Audubon Society
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Brown Pelican SUBSCRIPTION/ MEMBERSHIP FORM

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RARE BIRD ALERTS

Unfortunately, almost all the local and regional telephone Rare Bird Alerts have been discontinued in favor of various Internet 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 www.freelists.org/archive/texbirds. It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives, which include all recent postings. Postings for the last two weeks are also available at <http://birding.aba.org/maillist/TX>.

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..>