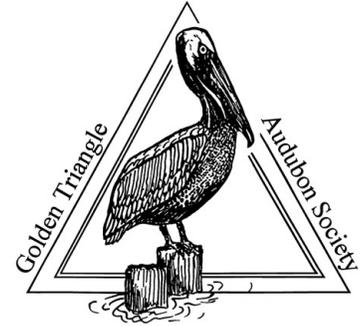


# *The Brown Pelican*



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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Vol. 21 No. 10

October 2015

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**Membership Meeting  
Thursday October 15, 2015 7:00 p.m.  
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

**Raptors  
Levie Horton**

Ranging in size from the smallest falcon, the American Kestrel with a wingspan of 35 inches, to the Bald Eagle with a wingspan of 80 inches, raptors can be seen in Southeast Texas year round. Through the summer months, the larger soaring hawk you see is the Swainson's. In the fall, Broad-winged, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks can be seen during the annual hawk migration. In winter, the Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Bald eagle, Peregrine Falcon, American Kestrel and Merlin can be found. The Red-shouldered Hawk is seen year round. Join us for a presentation of raptor photography.

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

## *The Brown Pelican*

Vol. 21, No.10 October 2015  
Issue number 221

### Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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

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##### Field Trips

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##### Conservation

Volunteer opportunity!

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Jeff Pittman ([geojeff@geojeff.org](mailto:geojeff@geojeff.org))

##### Newsletter Distribution

Mary Stafford (409-460-3653)

##### Newsletter Editor

John Whittle (409-722-4193)

([Johnawhittle@aol.com](mailto:Johnawhittle@aol.com))

### *The Brown Pelican* is

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Society, P. O. Box 1292, Nederland,  
Texas 77627-1292

## Calendar of Events

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

**Thursday October 15. Membership Meeting.** Speaker: Levie Horton on Hawks. Details on page 1.

### Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank the following for bringing refreshments in September: the Port Arthur Convention and Visitors Bureau and Darragh Castillo, Jean Beavins, Sherry Gibson, Cindy Harland, Sheila Hebert, Harrison Jordan, Denise and Gary Kelley, Steve Mayes, Dana Nelson, Phil Rogers, Gail Slocum, Joedna Smyth and Harlan Stewart., **We need volunteers to bring items for the October meeting.** (November is our Pot-luck Dinner Meeting.) 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](mailto:janafw@aol.com)) **as far in advance as possible.** Please help if you can.

**Saturday October 17. Field Trip to Sabine Woods.** 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. Waterproof footwear will probably be a good idea, especially if it is at all wet from previous rain or just heavy early morning dew. Bring mosquito repellent just in case. There are few services

available in Sabine Pass, but gasoline is available. The deli is no longer open, although Tami's has been open on Saturdays recently. Bring drinks.

The middle of October is towards the end of fall songbird migration, but often brings a good variety of birds. A cold front may drive down the last of the warblers and the first big push of wintering birds. Some of our winter birds may be arriving, and often the woodland species that winter in the Big Thicket overshoot a little at first.

Although the boardwalk was destroyed in Hurricane Ike, the trails are clear and mostly reasonably wide, and, although some care is needed to avoid uneven ground, birding Sabine Woods is relatively easy.

**Thursday November 19.** Annual Meeting and Pot-luck Dinner. Bring your favorite bird photos.

**Saturday November 21. Field Trip to West Jefferson County.** The area is well known for its birds of prey, its Sandhill Cranes and its sparrows. In wet years, there can be lots of waterfowl also.

Meet at 8 a.m. 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 (towards Nome) for about six miles. Shortly after you 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 green sign for the G and A Turf Farm on Johnson Road at the intersection. Contact Steve Mayes, [sgmayes@hotmail.com](mailto:sgmayes@hotmail.com), or call 409-722-5807 for further information.



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

## November Meeting Your Favorite Bird Photos

Our November meeting (November 19th), is our Annual Meeting and Potluck Dinner, at which we will conduct our elections. (Nominations for all offices and board positions are now in order.) We also plan to reinstitute our previous practice of a program by you, the members. We will invite you to provide up to a dozen of your favorite bird photos, the maximum number being somewhat dependent on how many submissions we get! The easiest formats for us to project at the Garden Center are jpg files or a short Powerpoint presentation. Please let us know that you plan to contribute.

## 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), use the membership blank on the back page of the hard copy version or simply mail to us at PO Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627.

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.

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](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org). The typical issue is currently less than 500 KB, although we are now including added additional materials to the electronic version.

## Greater Sage-Grouse

By National Audubon Society  
September 22, 2015

**COMMERCE CITY, Colo.**—Today, the Department of the Interior announced that Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections are not warranted for the Greater Sage-Grouse, an impeccably-camouflaged, robust bird that has danced its way into hearts across the American West even as its numbers have dropped from over 16 million to between 200,000 and 500,000. Currently, conservation plans for the sage-grouse include commitments from federal agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Forest Service, state wildlife agencies and private landowners. Commitments range from the investment of nearly \$500 million to protect and restore 4.4 million acres of habitat that sits on over 1,100 private properties to protections on 65 million acres of sage-grouse habitat on BLM land.

"This is a new lease on life for the Greater Sage-Grouse and the entire sagebrush ecosystem," said National Audubon Society President and CEO David Yarnold. "Unprecedented cooperation by private landowners, states, and the federal government has created a framework for conservation at a scale unique in the world. Finding a shared path forward beats scaring all the stakeholders into their corners. Of course, now all of these stakeholders have to fulfill their commitments in order to make today's decision stick." Faced with an endangered listing for the bird, stakeholders came to the table to develop a conservation strategy deemed strong enough by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to stave off ESA protections and keep the bird's recovery dependent on the current plans.

"The Greater Sage-Grouse indicates the health of the entire sagebrush ecosystem and the Western way of life," said Brian Rutledge, VP and Central Flyway policy advisor for Audubon. "During this process we have learned to not allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good, and we have arrived at a good plan for both people and wildlife."

Audubon has worked with key state and federal officials to get to today's historic announcement. From serving on the Wyoming Sage Grouse Implementation Team, which resulted in the state's strategy of protecting core habitat becoming a model emulated across the rest of the bird's range, to partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which helps private landowners implement sage-grouse protections on their property, Audubon has effectively demonstrated a commitment to protect and restore a long-undervalued ecosystem.

"We achieve more when we work together, and today's decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse proves the power in partnerships," NRCS Chief Jason Weller said. "With the support of partners like the Audubon Society, we have been able to help ranchers implement conservation strategies that improve sagebrush ecosystems, reduce risks to sage-grouse and keep working lands for working. We're grateful to Audubon for their contributions in this successful wildlife conservation effort and look forward to continued partnership to drive conservation on working lands."

In addition to the decision on the sage-grouse and integral to its conservation, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell signed into the federal record of decision, 14 Regional Management Plans put forth by the BLM earlier this year. The plans represent a key part of the federal government's role in sage-grouse recovery, and include approximately 65 million acres of sage-grouse habitat that sits on federally controlled land.

"With the BLM plans now officially in place, we finally have science-based regulatory assurance from the federal government in protecting 65 million acres of sage-grouse habitat on public lands," said Rutledge. "Now that all major players have skin in the game, we can move forward to protect a landscape that's home to not only this iconic bird but also 350 additional species of plants and animals—and people who have lived here for generations too."

More information available at [www.audubon.org/sage-grouse](http://www.audubon.org/sage-grouse).

# Jefferson County Migration Count – 19 September 2015

The fall Jefferson County Migration Count is a county-wide count conducted on the Saturday of the third full weekend in September. This year's count therefore fell on September 19, relatively late in the month. Those who recall last year's count report will remember that we devoted quite a bit of space to the abnormal results that we found – a low number of species and a low number of individual birds. While we cautioned last year that one year's results do not establish a pattern, two years' worth do begin to establish a trend. Again this year, the number of individual birds was low, albeit a little higher than last year, and the number of species about the same low figure of 150. All our observers again remarked on, to put it simply, the lack of birds.

Weather can always be a factor. We had another pleasant, if somewhat warm day for the count with little wind, no rain and few clouds. Really nice weather may actually reduce the number of birds detected, as they are able to feed and thus satisfy their appetites fairly early in the day. They can then spend the rest of the day resting in secluded locations. The weather in the days and weeks preceding can also be a factor, probably affecting migrant species more. Although migration is believed to be triggered by the so called photoperiod, the relative length of day and night, the driving force for fall migration is to find a suitable location to spend the winter. Adequate food is high on the priorities for wintering birds, made more important by the presence of, for many species, perhaps three or four times as many birds as headed north in the spring when the juveniles of the year are included. (The highest mortality among many bird species occurs in the first winter, when young birds fail to find enough food and to develop the skills to avoid predators.) Fall migrants are probably more opportunistic as compared to spring migrants, driven as the latter are by the urge to find the best breeding habitat to enable reproduction. Fall migrants may well linger in an area with good food supplies, which usually depend on insect populations and seed production, both typically dependent on the summer weather. Thus if food is readily available, they may delay or slow down their southward journey.

All that having been said, we still need to explain the lack of birds in September last year and this. Last year, we did not, on an anecdotal basis at least, see any noticeable decrease in wintering birds later in the year, and Christmas Bird Counts tend to confirm that. So what are we to suggest? That our summer birds left on schedule, while our wintering birds arrived late is a very real possibility. Those of us in southeast Texas know there really isn't a normal year, climate wise. This year it was dry, then suddenly very wet, and then dry again. For many species, we do not know if the birds here in the summer are the same birds as are here in the winter, and in fact we suspect that many are not. The northernmost breeding birds almost always retreat some distance south for the winter – who could blame them – while the southernmost breeding birds may like warmer weather and go even further south.

We also would note that our impression of the lack of birds may be influenced by a few highly visible species. Thus, the low number of Great-tailed Grackles and Red-winged

Blackbirds, and both were low, may have strongly influenced our opinion. Beyond those two species, it seems that many species were detected in numbers, which, while not extraordinarily low, were on the low side. The overall total number of birds was the second lowest since 2007, a year in which the number of species was, nevertheless quite high. The number of species seen on the fall count is strongly influenced by the number of migrants around, dependent as that is on local and relatively short-term weather effects. The availability of eBird reports has enabled us to include a more comprehensive list of "count week" birds, helping present a more representative listing of migrants.

In mid-September, Blue-winged Teal excepted, very few of our wintering waterfowl have appeared, but it is unusual not to find even a single Gadwall or Northern Shoveler. Whistling-Duck numbers seen on count day were on the low side, but the local populations have not seemed to be anything but normal. Pied-billed Grebe numbers and those of Neotropic Cormorants were higher than in recent years.

In general, heron and egret numbers were quite healthy. Great Blue Herons, which tend to be found as lone birds in the moister parts of the county, were high. Cattle Egrets were seemingly everywhere in large flocks, as has been the norm in recent years. The species has now spread over most of the temperate and tropical world; the migration patterns are complex, with some populations sedentary and others more strongly migratory. When the species first colonized our area fifty or so years ago, the local populations were largely sedentary, and easily found throughout the winter. As the species spread north in the United States, the more northerly breeding populations flew south for the winter. It seems as if our local birds joined in the migration and nowadays, the vast majority of them leave for the winter, and it is difficult to find a Cattle Egret here in December. Our numbers at the time of both the spring and fall migration counts may well include many birds in migration. Ibis numbers very greatly from year to year. This year's were on the low side, but this may reflect the lack of accessibility of the areas that remain wet during dry spells.

In mid-September, most hawks are either just arriving for or moving south for winter, and the numbers seen on the count were generally unremarkable. No Sharp-shinned Hawks were identified, but there were six *Accipiters* not identified as to species. Ten American Kestrels is a good number for mid-September when they are just arriving. Crested Caracara numbers seem to be stabilizing.

The turf farm on Highway 326 in Nome has become the place to find the migratory "grasspipers" (and Golden Plovers also). This year, we found both Buff-breasted Sandpipers and Upland Sandpipers there.

Least and Gull-billed Terns are often not easy to find by count day, so it was nice to find both again. Black Terns numbers were lower.

We found a good number of owls. We know where to look for Barn Owls, and usually hear Great Horned Owl, but it was unusual to have four Eastern Screech-Owls reply to calls. Finding four Barred Owls was also an unusually high number.

On the other hand, it is unusual not to find either a Common Nighthawk or a Chuck-will's Widow, although a Chuck was detected during count week.

Woodpecker numbers were good, with Red-headed and Pileated particularly so, presumably still benefitting from the trees damaged in the recent hurricanes.

Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were plentiful again, as were the various *Empidonax* flycatchers. The conventional wisdom is that these flycatchers do not call – the easiest way to identify them – during migration, but this year, many of them have called, and we were able to confirm three Acadian Flycatchers and one Alder Flycatcher that way. The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher can often be identified by plumage, and one of those was seen.

Crow numbers, both American and Fish were high, and Blue Jay numbers were at an all-time high, suggesting that West Nile Virus, to which Corvids are especially susceptible, is no longer a significant problem. One hopes the population has developed a greater resistance to the virus.

As we noted above, the number of migrants is often strongly dependent on the short-term local weather situation. This affects the warblers more than any other group of species, and including the "count week" species enables a better picture of overall migration. Pride of place goes to a Black-throated Gray Warbler – a western species, very rare in this area, normally wintering along the western part of Mexico, but one somewhat prone to vagrancy along the entire Gulf coast. This one was found in the Salt Cedars where the willows at Sea Rim used to be. Mourning Warblers have been numerous this fall, and one was seen in Sabine Woods on count day. Also found on count day were multiple Wilson's Warblers. It is nice to have this species plentiful again. A good number actually wintered in Jefferson County in 2011, but the species has been scarce since then.

We also noted above that Red-winged Blackbird and Great-tailed Grackle numbers were severely depressed. However, Northern Cardinal numbers were substantially above recent norms. House Sparrow numbers were, however, somewhat below normal. There used to be huge Brown-headed Cowbird flocks in west Jefferson County, but we have not seen them since the hurricanes.

Preliminary Count results: (cw means seen count week – i.e. in the three days prior to or the three days after count day): WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (49); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (14); DUCK, Wood (9); DUCK, Mottled (37); TEAL, Blue-winged (512); TEAL, Green-winged (1); GREBE, Pied-billed (40); CORMORANT, Neotropic (289); CORMORANT, Species (180); ANHINGA (10); PELICAN, Brown (102); BITTERN, Least (3); HERON, Great Blue (44); EGRET, Great (226); EGRET, Snowy (218); HERON, Little Blue (50); HERON, Tricolored (72); EGRET, Reddish (4); EGRET, Cattle (2992); HERON, Green (14); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (3); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (10); IBIS, White (676); IBIS, Glossy (1); IBIS, White-faced (22); IBIS, *Plegadis* (138); SPOONBILL, Roseate (50); VULTURE, Black (72); VULTURE, Turkey (91); VULTURE species (6); OSPREY (3); KITE, White-tailed (cw); KITE, Mississippi (6); HARRIER, Northern (2); HAWK, Cooper's (3); HAWK, Accipiter species (6); HAWK, Red-shouldered (12); HAWK, Broad-winged (4); HAWK, Swainson's (2); HAWK, Red-tailed (1); CARACARA, Crested (6); KESTREL, American (10); RAIL, Clapper (23); RAIL, King (1); SORA (2); GALLINULE, Purple (1); GALLINULE, Common

(31); COOT, American (9); PLOVER, Black-bellied (8); PLOVER, Snowy (8); PLOVER, Semipalmated (5); KILLDEER (131); STILT, Black-necked (106); AVOGET, American (37); SANDPIPER, Spotted (6); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (11); WILLET (26); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (9); YELLOWLEGS, species (4); SANDPIPER, Upland (3); SANDERLING (87); SANDPIPER, Western (1); SANDPIPER, Least (78); SANDPIPER, Peep species (20); SANDPIPER, Stilt (21); SANDPIPER, Buff-breasted (3); DOWITCHER, Short-billed (1); DOWITCHER, Species (18); GULL, Laughing (462); GULL, Ring-billed (2); GULL, Species (550); TERN, Least (2); TERN, Gull-billed (4); TERN, Black (44); TERN, Forster's (113); TERN, Royal (5); SKIMMER, Black (3); PIGEON, Rock (171); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (34); DOVE, White-winged (106); DOVE, Mourning (313); DOVE, Inca (10); OWL, Barn (2); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (4); OWL, Great Horned (2); OWL, Barred (4); WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck- (cw); SWIFT, Chimney (37); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (48); HUMMINGBIRD, Rufous (1); HUMMINGBIRD species (10); KINGFISHER, Belted (8); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (15); WOODPECKER, Golden-fronted (1); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (35); WOODPECKER, Downy (24); FLICKER, Northern (2); WOODPECKER, Pileated (18); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (cw); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (9); FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (1); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (3); FLYCATCHER, Alder (1); FLYCATCHER, Least (4); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (5); FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (8); KINGBIRD, Western (1); KINGBIRD, Eastern (29); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (53); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (66); VIREO, White-eyed (37); VIREO, Blue-headed (1); VIREO, Warbling (1); VIREO, Red-eyed (4); JAY, Blue (214); CROW, American (44); CROW, Fish (10); MARTIN, Purple (cw); SWALLOW, Tree (20); SWALLOW, Bank (2); SWALLOW, Cliff (27); SWALLOW, Cliff/Cave (10); SWALLOW, Barn (51); SWALLOW species (54); CHICKADEE, Carolina (20); TITMOUSE, Tufted (9); WREN, Carolina (21); WREN, Marsh (1); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (41); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (cw); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (4); THRUSH, Swainson's (cw); THRUSH, Hermit (cw); ROBIN, American (9); CATBIRD, Gray (6); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (227); THRASHER, Brown (8); STARLING, European (333); OVENBIRD (cw); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (4); WARBLER, Black-and-white (6); WARBLER, Tennessee (1); WARBLER, Nashville (2); WARBLER, Mourning (1); WARBLER, Kentucky (cw); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (12); WARBLER, Hooded (6); REDSTART, American (1); WARBLER, Magnolia (2); WARBLER, Yellow (2); WARBLER, Black-throated Blue (cw); WARBLER, Prairie (cw); WARBLER, Black-throated Gray (1); WARBLER, Black-throated Green (cw); WARBLER, Canada (3); WARBLER, Wilson's (4); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (1); SPARROW, Lark (3); SPARROW, Seaside (43); TANAGER, Summer (1); CARDINAL, Northern (167); GROSBEEK, Blue (18); BUNTING, Indigo (10); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (130); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (1); GRACKLE, Common (206); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (90); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (147); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (49); BLACKBIRD species (45); ORIOLE, Baltimore (5); FINCH, House (8); SPARROW, House (110); TOTAL (11084); Number of species (150); Number of Observers (17); Number of Parties (10); Number of Party-hours (61.59); Party hours on foot (21.48); Miles on foot (13.93); Party-hours by automobile (43.54); Miles by automobile (457.2); feeder watching (not incld in totals) (6.7); Participants 2015: Laurie Baker, Jessica Barry, Michael Cooper, Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Harrison Jordan, Denise Kelley, Gary Kelley, Randy Lewis, Steve Mayes, Christine Sliva, Joedna Smyth, Ken Sztraky, John Whittle.

## Field Trip to Smith Point Hawk Watch 26 September 2015

It is well known that a trip to the Smith Point Hawk Watch is often a boom or bust situation. Some days there are thousands of hawks soaring over the tower. Some days there are very few. It is all very dependent on weather, including weather at Smith Point and at points well north of the area. The Golden Triangle Audubon Society has experienced both of these ends of the spectrum on past trips so what would this year's trip be like? Well, unfortunately, a lot closer to bust than boom.

We have timed this trip to coincide with the historic peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration over our area, or to be strictly accurate, the Saturday closest to that peak. September 25, give or take a day or two in response to nearby weather, used to always be the peak. But two years ago, in 2013, something strange happened. There were about 2,000 Broad-wings on September 24, but very few in the days immediately following. Everyone was chagrined and thought that the bulk of the Broad-wings had bypassed Smith Point, presumably to the north. Then between October 17 and 23, over 15,000 Broad-wings were counted. Not a minor change in timing but a more than three week change! In 2014, there was no semblance of a September 25 peak, and, indeed, only about 1,500 Broad-wings were recorded in all of September. Then, between 15 and 20 October, there were several days with more than 20,000 Broad-wings! It may well be that 2015 is shaping up to follow the new pattern. The next two or three weeks will tell!

While this day was a disappointment for those participating in the field trip, it was not all wasted. Although there were few hawks, most of them orbited around the Smith Point area for some time, and we were able to study the difference between Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, and see the very different wing and tail shape of the Broad-winged Hawk., and the pointed wing shape of the few Mississippi Kites around. A few American Kestrels mostly flew by without delay, and two Peregrines also did.

As always, we looked for passerine migrants as well, and early on, several Baltimore Orioles perched near the top of a nearby oak. A small drip attracted a Nashville Warbler, a Wilson's Warbler and the first Chestnut sided Warbler we have seen this fall.

*John A. Whittle*

### **Migrants 26 September 2015**

3 Osprey; 1 Northern Harriers; 31 Sharp-shinned Hawk; 29 Cooper's Hawks; 1 Red-Shouldered Hawk; 56 Broad-winged Hawks; 12 American Kestrels; 2 Peregrine Falcon, 22 Mississippi Kites

### **Smith Point Year to date as of September 26**

Black Vulture 0; Turkey Vulture 0; Osprey 38; Bald Eagle 1; Northern Harrier 30; Sharp-shinned Hawk 242; Cooper's Hawk 208; Red-shouldered Hawk 31; Broad-winged Hawk 4177; Red-tailed Hawk 17; Swainson's Hawk 89; Ferruginous Hawk 0; White-tailed Hawk 0; Harris's Hawk 0; Zone-tailed Hawk 0; Golden Eagle 0; American Kestrel 52; Merlin 19; Peregrine Falcon 20; Prairie Falcon 0; Crested Caracara 0; Mississippi Kite 4634; Swallow-tailed Kite 97; White-tailed Kite 2; Hook-billed Kite 0; unidentified Buteo 3. Total 9660.

## Report on Sabine Woods Work Day 5 September 2015

Fifteen volunteers braved the humidity and the mosquitoes on the Saturday of Labor Day Weekend to prepare Sabine Woods for the rest of the fall migration season. Birding has been quite good since about mid-August, and we look forward to another good fall migration season at the best and best maintained migrant birding spot on the Upper Texas Coast.

It was with some trepidation that we scheduled this work day and as the day approached, scattered showers were in the forecast, as they had been for several days. As we reached the Woods, we found there had been no rain, although two or three miles inland the story was quite different, even at the early hour, and there were showers scattered over the local area for most of the day. The Woods were one of the few places in the area that were rain free during daylight hours. Indeed, as we write this at 8:30 PM on the 5th, radar shows a completely isolated shower progressing most unusually from west to east along the shoreline, and apparently the Woods made up for its escape earlier in the day. We are quite used to the "sea breeze front" forming shortly after sun up and moving inland, and often, as on this day, not producing any precipitation until it works its way further inland. Thunderstorms rolling in from the east are a normal summer phenomenon, and of course we are used to showers advancing south or southeast in association with cold fronts, but to have a lone shower moving along the coast from west to east is very unusual.

The insect population has mercifully been very modest this fall, and the deer flies, although present and increasing somewhat as September progressed, have not driven birders out of the woods, as can happen some years.

Four hackberry trees had come down across trails since the last work day in May, and these were dealt with. In fact, these were the only trees that we know of that came down in that time frame, and, of course, all fell across trails. None were very large, but all were alive before they came down, and we hated to lose them. We presume the root structures of these trees were weakened by the storm surge of hurricane Ike in 2008, and we hope these are the last living trees that we lose.

Every work day, trail maintenance is a necessity. The shrubs along the edges of the trails sense the openness of the trails, and extend new branches into the space to take advantage of the available sunlight. But to keep the trails passable, we have to trim these branches back. Some grasses and forbs also tend to take advantage of the sunlight, and we also have weed eat these. All trails are now clear and in good shape. Gary Kelley came down a few days later, and completed a few tasks that had escaped attention on the work day itself.

We had the back area of the sanctuary professionally brush hogged to keep it clear of woody vegetation, but we look after the several meadow and other open areas and main trails ourselves with riding mowers, and this task was accomplished.

We thank all our volunteers: Andy Allen, Michael Cooper, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Gary Kelley. Steve Mayes, Wendy Mires, Frank Ohrt. Colin Prosen, Sherry Roden, Scott Ryan, Christine Sliva, and Harlan Stewart.

## Bird Sightings – September 2015

In this section of the Newsletter, we now generally limit the report to birds justifiably shown as rare or very rare on the published Upper Texas Coast checklist for the week of the sighting, but we also try to mention any particularly high numbers as well as any sightings that may be of special interest for reasons other than those mentioned.

We have reviewed all credible eBird and other submitted records for the Texas counties we have always covered – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine and Tyler. We also reviewed, looking for very rare or vagrant species only, records for nearby counties or parts of counties that are easily accessible to and often birded by birders in our core Golden Triangle Audubon area. These are Chambers, Galveston (High Island and Bolivar only) and Liberty counties in Texas, and Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes (west of the Calcasieu River only) in Louisiana.

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

September is a month that does not usually produce many birds that can be classified as rare or very rare on the date in question. Fall migration is a much more drawn out affair compared to spring migration and many of our migrants are no rarer than uncommon at any point in the month. Even some of those that checklists show as rare may be more common than that designation implies, as it is only recently that the coastal area was birded at all in early September.

Some of the more noteworthy birding highlights of the early fall season are mentioned in the report on the Migration Count elsewhere in this issue. Among warblers, there have been lots of reports of multiple Mourning Warblers. While it is quite likely that local birders have become somewhat more adept at finding this skulking species, we have to believe that there were also more around than in most years. Wilson's Warblers have made a welcome comeback into the area, after two years of very sparse sightings. On the other hand, Waterthrushes have been notably absent unless most of the Northern Waterthrushes are still to come, something that history suggests is unlikely. The *Catharus* thrushes (Swainson's, Gray-cheeked and Veery) are never detected in large numbers in fall migration, and we have no reports of Gray-cheeked or Veery in the local area this fall. There have been a few reports of Swainson's (and one of an early Hermit Thrush).

A Black-throated Gray Warbler was found on the migration count on September 19 at the location where the Willows used to be at Sea Rim, and a Black-throated Blue was present in Sabine Woods on September 16. Adding those to the two Cape May Warblers on September 12 made for a very satisfying middle of the month for our warbler aficionados.

Golden-Plovers are very rare fall migrants – they use a much more easterly migration path in the fall – but several have been seen in the general area this year, along with several further east in Louisiana.

### Seen in our core Counties (listed above)

Mississippi Kite	Sep 14-23	JEF-SW (up to 5 a day)
Amer. Golden-Plover	Sep 24	JEF-Doguet Turf Farm, Hwy90@TX326 (1) rare in fall
Buff-breast. S'piper	Sep 19	JEF-Doguet Turf Farm, Hwy90@TX326 (2) late
	Sep 24	JEF-Doguet Turf Farm, Hwy90@TX326 (1) very late
E. Whip-poor-will	Sep 26	JEF-SW (1) MC, TH
Rufous Humm'bird	Sep 14 on	JEF-NEDR (1) HS, male
Blue-headed Vireo	Sep 12	JEF-SW (2) multiple obs.
	Sep 19	JEF-SW (1) SM
Hermit Thrush	Sep 16	JEF-SW (1) JHH
Nashville Warbler	Aug 30 on	JEF-SW (peaking at 4 so far)
Mourning Warbler	Aug 15 on	JEF-SW (peaking at 10 on Sep 12)
Cape May Warbler	Sep 13	JEF-SW (2) multiple ons
Blk.-thr. Blue Warbler	Sep 16	JEF-SW (1) JHH
Blk.-thr. Gray Warbler	Sep 19	JEF-SRSP Willows (1) MC, TH, JHH, SM
Wilson's Warbler	Aug 30 on	JEF-SW (peaked at 3 on Sep 12) multiple obs,
Lark Sparrow	Sep 10	JEF-SRSP Willows (2) JAW
	Sep 12	JEF-Old Sabine Cemetery (3) MC, JH, SM
	Sep 18	JEF-SW (2) Gary Binderim
	Sep 19	JEF-McFaddin NWR (3) MC

### Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

American Bittern	Sep 1	CHA-ANWR (1) Robert Qually (early)
	Sep 3	GAL-High Is. Smith Oaks (1)

	Sep 7	CHA-ANWR (1) Kyle Linderner
Amer. Golden-Plover	Sep 8	GAL-Bolivar Flats (2) Tim White
	Sep 12	GAL-Bolivar Flats (2) Kyle Linderner
	Sep 20	CHA-ANWR Deep Marsh (1) Roger Moyer
Lsr. Black-back. Gull	Sep 8	GAL- Bolivar Flats (2) Kyle Linderner
	Sep 9	GAL-High Is. Beach (1) Joel Throckmorton
E. Whip-poor-will	Sep 13	CHA-SPHW (1) D.Hanson, Susan. Heath. Karl Poetzi
Bell's Vireo	Sep 13	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Dan O'Malley
Blue-headed Vireo	Sep 13	GAL-High Is. Smith Oaks (1) Joel Throckmorton
	Sep 13	CHA-SPHW (1) David Hanson

**Abbreviations used:** ANWR – Anahuac NWR; BTNP – Big Thicket National Preserve; CAM – Cameron Parish, LA; CHA – Chambers County; CS – Christine Sliva; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAS – Jasper County; JAW – John Whittle; JB – Jessica Barry; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – Jana and John Whittle; JM – John Mariani; MC – Michael Cooper; MDSP – Martin Dies State Park; ORA – Orange County; PI – Pleasure Island; RL – Randy Lewis; SPHW – Smith Point Hawk Watch; SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; WJC – West Jefferson County.

Golden Triangle Audubon Society  
P. O. Box 1292  
Nederland, Texas 77627-1292

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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](http://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>.