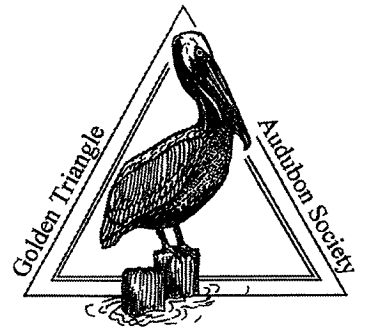


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 22 No. 12

December 2016

Christmas Bird Counts

Christmas Bird Count season is upon us. This area has more CBCs than almost any other with 20 counts conducted within 100 miles. All birders are welcome to participate in all local counts, although some compilers require that you contact them in advance to obtain an assignment. It is a good idea to contact the compiler in advance in any case. A complete list of all Texas CBCs is available on the Houston Audubon website at <http://houstonaudubon.org/birding/bird-surveys/christmas-bird-counts/upper-texas-coast.html> Details of close-by Southeast Texas counts are given below or on page 3.

The first Christmas Bird Counts were conducted in December 1900, and last season (2015-16) over 2500 counts were conducted worldwide, with 1902 in the United States. Each count is conducted in a 15-mile diameter circle on a single day between December 14 and January 5 selected by the individual organizers.

Sea Rim State Park Christmas Bird Count Thursday 29 December 2016

Please contact John Whittle at johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193 (H), and let us know you plan to attend so we can make the best possible area assignments. Otherwise, Meet in Sabine Pass at 7:00 a.m. at the intersection of Highway 87 and FM3322 in Sabine Pass if not preassigned to an area. This is at the stop sign in Sabine Pass, where Highway 87 turns west. Countdown dinner at 6:00 p.m., location to be confirmed. This count has been sponsored by Golden Triangle Audubon Society since 1995.

Orange County Christmas Bird Count Sunday January 1, 2017

Contact Gary Kelley at garymke@sbcglobal.net or 409-679-1616 or meet in Orange at 7:00 a.m. at the Service Station at the intersection of Highway 105 and FM1442.

Bolivar Peninsula Christmas Bird Count Thursday, December 22, 2016

Contact Steve Mayes at sgmayes@hotmail.com for assignment. This count covers the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge and the High Island area, and has been conducted since December 1962. Dr. William Graber compiled this count for its first 50 years.

See page 3 for details of other local counts.

The Brown Pelican

Vol. 22, No.12 December 2016
Issue number 234

Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

Sherrie Roden (409-962-7911)

Vice-President

Dana Nelson (409-790-3286)

Treasurer

Harlan Stewart (409 727-4441)

Secretary

John Whittle (409-722-4193)

Directors-at-Large

Jessica Barry (409-781-3320)

Edra Bogucki (409-835-7245)

Howard Davis (409-720-9341)

Gerald Duhon (409-899-3368)

Sherry Gibson (409-385-6302)

John Haynes (409-724-6842)

Gary Kelley (409-697-2346)

Randy Lewis (409-617-1070)

John Mariani (985-373-5016)

Steve Mayes (409-722-5807)

Christine Sliva (409-782-1832)

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Program

Jana Whittle (409-722-4193)

Field Trips

Steve Mayes (409-722-5807)

Conservation

Gary Kelley (409-697-2346)

Membership, Publicity

Sheila Hebert (409-767-1216)

Education

Volunteer needed

Webmaster

Jeff Pittman (geojeff@geojeff.org)

Facebook Administrators

John Mariani (985-373-5016)

Jana Whittle (409-722-4193)

Newsletter Distribution

Mary Stafford (409-460-3653)

Newsletter Editor

John Whittle (409-722-4193)

(Johnawhittle@aol.com)

The Brown Pelican is

published monthly except July by
the Golden Triangle Audubon
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. 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.

Christmas Bird Counts. See page 1 and the listing on page 3 of this issue.

Thursday January 19, 2017. Membership Meeting. Edward Craven on Red Wolves. Full details in next month's issue.

Saturday January 21, 2017. Field Trip. Tentatively, this will be to Cattail Marsh in Tyrrell Park, Beaumont. Meet at the parking lot for Cattail Marsh at 8:00 a.m. The parking lot is accessed from the loop road round the main picnic areas in Tyrrell Park in Beaumont. Some birds can be seen from the boardwalk with minimal walking, **but the group will probably make a leisurely three-or-so-mile hike round the various cells in the marsh.** If you are unable to walk that far, there will be someone on the boardwalk to help you identify the birds in the near cells. Walking is on the levees; the main ones are graveled, but some of the interior ones are essentially mowed grass. This will be a good trip for beginning to intermediate birders, as most of the waterfowl and wading birds are relatively easy to study in the open water areas.

Check back in the January *Brown Pelican* to be sure we have confirmed the destination for this field trip. We will include directions to Cattail Marsh in the notice in the January *Brown Pelican*, and during January they will also be posted on the Golden Triangle Audubon Society website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

Saturday February 18, 2017. Field Trip to Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Louisiana. More Details in next month's issue.

Membership Dues

To simplify our record keeping, all memberships now run from January through December. Membership dues remain at \$15 per year. We are now accepting 2017 dues. 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 on line and selecting our Chapter code (W25), we receive a rebate of the entire first year's national dues, and no Chapter dues are expected for that first year.

Report on the Annual Meeting

At the Annual Meeting of Golden Triangle Audubon Society, held in the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont, Texas on 17 November 2016, the following were elected to the listed positions:

Vice-President: Dana Nelson

Treasurer: Harlan Stewart

Secretary: John Whittle

Directors-at-Large: Edra Bogucki, Michael Cooper, Gerald Duhon, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Gary Kelley, Randy Lewis, John Mariani, Steve Mayes, and Christine Sliva.

We thank Jessica Barry and Howard Davis, both of whom did not seek re-election to the board, for their service, and welcome Michael Cooper to the board.



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.com.

Local Area Christmas Bird Counts

Listed below are all counts in Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, Tyler, Jasper and Liberty Counties and the Johnson Bayou count in Cameron Parish. We thank Houston Audubon for compiling some of the information shown below.

Johnson Bayou in SW Louisiana: Wednesday, December 14, 2016

While much of the area of this count is private, local land owners have allowed access to their property for this count, areas rarely birded and normally inaccessible to birders at other times offering a good chance for rarities. Johnson Bayou is located off Hwy 82 in Louisiana just across from Pleasure Island, TX (east of Sabine Pass). From Port Arthur take Hwy 82 east for about 15 miles into LA. Please contact Gary Kelley (garymke@sbcglobal.net, telephone 409-679-1616) for more information, assignments and directions.

Turkey Creek: Saturday, December 17, 2016

This count in Hardin and Tyler Counties includes the Turkey Creek and Hickory Creek Savannah Units of the Big Thicket National Preserve. Meet at the Big Thicket Visitor Center on US69 at FM420, about 7 miles north of Kountze at 6:30 AM. Sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com, 409-722-4193) for more information.

Beech Creek Tuesday: December 20, 2016

This count takes places in Tyler and Jasper Counties and includes Steinhagen Lake, the Beech Creek unit of Big Thicket National Preserve and Martin Dies State Park. Meet at the Corps of Engineers Picnic Area on FM92 immediately north of the intersection with FM1746 in Town Bluff at 6:30 AM. Sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com, 409-722-4193) for more information.

Galveston: Thursday, December 20, 2016

This count is open to anyone who would like to participate and all areas need more observers. This count undoubtedly produces the most species for the available land area (much of the count circle is water) of all U.S. CBCs. To participate please contact Richard Mayfield (rrichardm@verizon.net).

Bolivar Peninsula: Thursday, December 22, 2016

This count circle in Chambers and Galveston Counties includes High Island and Anahuac NWR. Newcomers are welcome to join! Compilers this year are Steve Mayes and David Sarkozi. If you are interested in participating, please contact Steve Mayes at sgmayes@hotmail.com.

Old River: Tuesday, December 27, 2016

The count covers all points within 7.5 miles of Lake Charlotte. Running through the count area is the Trinity River providing diverse habitat near water. For more information contact Count Compiler David Hanson: DHanson139@aol.com.

Sea Rim State Park: Thursday, December 29, 2016

This count in Jefferson County includes Sea Rim State Park, Texas Point NWR, and parts of J.D. Murphree WMA and McFaddin NWR as well as the Sabine Pass area. Please contact us in advance, as most groups go directly to their assigned areas. Sponsored by **Golden Triangle Audubon Society**. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com, 409-722-4193) for details.

Trinity River: Thursday, December 29, 2016

Areas in Northern Liberty County to be counted include the Trinity River NWR, Tarkington Prairie, and Gaylor Lake. Some folks will bird the "bottoms" so be sure to bring a sack lunch, rubber knee boots and other appropriate outdoor clothing. Hosted by the Trinity River NWR. If you have any questions you can contact the compiler Stuart Marcus at 936-336-9786 or stuart_marcus@fws.gov.

Orange County: Sunday, January 1, 2017

Habitat covers marsh, woodlands, and the Cow Bayou watershed. All are invited, even if you are n only able to bird for part of the day. Feeder watchers are welcome to participate. Let us know in advance and we will find a suitable group for you to join. Contact Gary Kelley (garymke@sbcglobal.net, telephone 409-679-1616), for more information.

Field Trip to West Jefferson County – 19 November 2016

Unusual would be the mildest word one could use to describe the fall 2016 climate in Southeast Texas. More descriptively, one would probably simply say warm and dry. As approximately 15 members and friends assembled in west Jefferson County, topic number one was the weather. Although the temperature was in the mid-forties, a mere ten degrees or so colder than the preceding day, the strong biting wind made it feel much colder. However, everyone seemed to have retrieved their winter birding outfits from storage, but nevertheless found the shelter afforded by the vehicles provided relief from time to time. The offending cold front the previous evening was accompanied by heavy rain showers in most areas, but the ground was so dry that most of the rain was quickly absorbed. By the end of the day, the temperatures had returned to pleasant if slightly cool levels, and the wind did significantly diminish.

Many of our wintering birds seemed to have taken advantage of the similarly warmer weather in their breeding areas further north and delayed their southward migration, but with the exception of sparrows, which were noticeably scarce, numbers were sufficient to provide good birding. The publically accessible parts of this area are more the South China Prairie than anything else, with only one or two small areas of normal woodland. Passerine species are always in relatively short supply, and perhaps on this day they were mostly sitting tight sheltering from the cold wind. The monocultures of eucalyptus trees planted in some tracts a decade or so ago (and apparently now being harvested) do not seem to be attractive to our native species. Presumably we will see more birds of all our wintering species in the next few days and weeks, as this cold front was the first significant one of the season.

The starting point for this field trip is the junction of Johnson Road and FM365. While waiting for the group to assemble and organize, binoculars were scanning the distant horizon in all directions. One of the prime targets for this trip is the Sandhill Crane flock which has become regular and is increasing in size in the area, and small numbers of cranes were seen in several directions. This was a good omen, as the wind was strong enough to ensure that most of them would minimize their flying time. A few Wilson's Snipe, flying in their characteristic zig-zag manner, got up from the ditch along FM365, while a few White Ibis, mostly immature birds, flew around. Tree Swallows could be seen over the pasture to the north. Six Snow Geese flew over very high. In past years, there have been several species of sparrow in the prairie grasses on the south side of Johnson Road at this location, but the mixture of grasses seems to have changed, and apart from hearing several Savannah

Sparrows, one or perhaps two Sedge Wrens were all that were hiding there this year. A small stand of pine trees on the north side of Johnson Road a little further along has in past years often harbored a Great Horned Owl. One sharp-eyed member located the perched bird, and then, possibly suspicious of multiple pairs of binoculars pointed at it, it repositioned in two short flights affording good views for everyone. A large flock of white geese, perhaps a thousand strong, and presumably almost exclusively Snow Geese, rose in the distant northwest.

Christine, our sharp eyed eagle spotter, arrived and reported seeing an adult Bald Eagle feeding on a road-killed Great Blue Heron along the western part of Johnson Road. So, we decided to change our plans slightly, and proceed in that direction to see if the eagle was still around and see if we could locate some cranes close to a public road. As we proceeded, we saw the first of many Eastern Phoebe and Loggerhead Shrike, a few Eastern Meadowlarks and the first of several blackbird flocks, mostly Brown-headed Cowbirds and female Red-winged Blackbirds. There were some Eastern Bluebirds, not easy to find on the South China Prairie, near a house, and a few members saw a young Vermilion Flycatcher there also. A wet field held a few Least Sandpipers and the inevitable Killdeer. Two American Crows, not particularly common in the open habitat, were seen. We reached the Heron carcass, but the eagle was no longer there, although it had clearly ripped open the breast for breakfast. Further along, the road becomes League Road, and there were perhaps 500 Sandhill Cranes south of it, not particularly close, but impressive nonetheless. There were a couple of American Kestrels on the wires, a welcome sight as they have not been very numerous in southeast Texas this year amid nationwide concern over apparently decreasing numbers.

At the corner of League Road and Old League Road, the farmhouse has hosted a male Vermilion Flycatcher was several years now, and we were able to quickly locate it, if somewhat distant. (It was closer and more cooperative when we passed by again later.) Seeing some cranes, we turned up Old League Road, and were rewarded with much closer views of about 500 more cranes, although they all took flight as our caravan approached. While the wind was making life difficult for raptors, there were Red-tailed Hawks and many Northern Harriers around everywhere on the prairie. A perched falcon proved to be a Merlin, and a flock of 60 Snow Geese flew over.

Although it is much too busy for a caravan of birders to be able to bird effectively from it, we drove down FM1406 in the hopes that perhaps the cranes east of it might be closer. Unfortunately, they had found an area

as far from any public road as any on the prairie, but the sight of a flock of an estimated 1,500 cranes was impressive. Unfortunately, there was no way to stop and view this amazing flock. A mere 20 years ago, there were no Sandhill Cranes to be seen in Jefferson or any of the surrounding counties! Heading back to the grove of trees where Heisig Road meets Johnson Road, we carefully searched for birds. But, unlike past years, it was relatively quiet, yielding only a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a couple of Yellow-rumped Warblers, one Orange-crowned Warbler, one Blue-headed Vireo and one House Wren. However, proceeding along Johnson Road, and passing the young Vermilion Flycatcher again, did not produce any new species.

Two long roads that run north-south for five or six miles through the area – South China Road and McDermand Road – constitute the traditional heart of West Jefferson County birding, so we proceeded to the southern end of South China Road. The wind may have been keeping down the raptors that often dominate birding in this area, leaving us with White Ibis, dark ibis and about 25 Great Egrets, an unusually large number. But then Christine called to point out two immature Bald Eagles soaring over the road behind us. Heading south on McDermand Road, we found a male Vermilion Flycatcher working the fences near the last row of houses on the west side – this was a new location for one. By now, the wind had dropped somewhat and we saw several Red-tailed Hawks and at least five American Kestrels. By then, it was time to head for lunch as the advertised part of the field trip came to an end.

Some of the group decided that an extension to Cattail Marsh was in order. The highlights there three Cinnamon Teal (two males and one female), 13 (!) cooperative Least Grebes, an American Bittern, as well as large numbers of Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal. First, we walked along the nice new boardwalk, providing close views of the numerous Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal as well as American Coots and Common Gallinules. The Cinnamon Teal were sleeping almost hidden in the vegetation (water hyacinth mostly, unfortunately). They almost never seem to be feeding when we see them – presumably they are night feeders. Next, the group proceeded to the south end of Cells 2 and 3 where multiple families of Least Grebes have been breeding. Least Grebes breed at any time of the year, and one adult with four young still with striped faces has been using the deeper "canal" along the northern edge of Cell 2 quite content to ignore the people gallery that often develops to watch and photograph them feeding. The group then walked the levee between cells 3 and 4 to the deep water cell (Cell 1) frequently listening to the whinny of several Sora, and one or two Virginia Rails. That northernmost cell had, in addition to Ruddy and Ring-necked Ducks, a male Bufflehead and at least three

Hooded Mergansers. And two times, Christine drew our attention to an adult Bald Eagle flying over the bayou to the northern area where apparently they are building a (new) nest. There is no evidence that there are more than two adult eagles around, so chances are this is the same pair as in previous years, apparently considering a new house. The Western-type or Rufous morph Red-tailed Hawk that has wintered along the north edge of Cattail Marsh in three out of the last four years put in an appearance. The group then continued its loop back to the entrance, flushing a few Wood Ducks and some Mallards in the process. Most of the other expected winter residents of the Marsh were also seen.

The following list of species seen in West Jefferson County may not be complete:

Snow Goose (66); White Goose (1000); Great Blue Heron (3); Great Egret (40); Snowy Egret (10); Cattle Egret (1); White Ibis (247); *Plegadis* species Ibis (20); Black Vulture (1); Turkey Vulture (14); Bald Eagle (2 imm); Northern Harrier (8); Red-tailed Hawk (9); American Kestrel (16); Merlin (1); Sandhill Crane (2540); Killdeer (24); Least Sandpiper (10); Peep Sandpiper (2); Wilson's Snipe (6); Laughing Gull (6); Eurasian Collared-Dove (1); Mourning Dove (3); Great Horned Owl (1); Red-bellied Woodpecker (1); Eastern Phoebe (12); Vermilion Flycatcher (3); Loggerhead Shrike (8); Blue-headed Vireo (1); American Crow (2); Crow species (2); Tree Swallow (10); House Wren (1); Sedge Wren (1); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (5); Eastern Bluebird (2); Northern Mockingbird (1); European Starling (51); American Pipit (1); Orange-crowned Warbler (1); Savannah Sparrow (8); White-throated Sparrow (3); Red-winged Blackbird (320); Eastern Meadowlark (9); Brown-headed Cowbird (405); Blackbird species (120).

The following species were recorded in Cattail Marsh.

Wood Duck (6); Gadwall (4); Mallard (12); Mottled Duck (6); Blue-winged Teal (260); Cinnamon Teal (3); Northern Shoveler (55); Northern Pintail (15); Green-winged Teal (550); Ring-necked Duck (15); Bufflehead (1); Hooded Merganser (3); Ruddy Duck (75); Least Grebe (13); Pied-billed Grebe (3); Neotropic Cormorant (50); American Bittern (1); Great Blue Heron (1); Great Egret (1); Snowy Egret (2); Little Blue Heron (2); Black-crowned Night-Heron (3); White Ibis (2); *Plegadis* species Ibis (15); Roseate Spoonbill (48); Turkey Vulture (6); Bald Eagle (2 adults); Northern Harrier (2); Cooper's Hawk (1); Red-tailed Hawk (3); Red-tailed (Rufous) Hawk (1); American Kestrel (2); Virginia Rail (2); Sora (8); Common Moorhen (20); American Coot (75); Black-necked Stilt (5); American Avocet (32); Spotted Sandpiper (1); Lesser Yellowlegs (8); Laughing Gull (30); Forster's Tern (3); Pileated Woodpecker (1); Eastern Phoebe (3); Red-winged Blackbird (50).

John A. Whittle

Bird Sightings – November 2016

For this column, we review, looking for rare and very rare species, all credible eBird and other records for the Texas counties we have always covered – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine and Tyler. We also review, looking for very rare or vagrant species only, records for 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 the reason it is noteworthy other than being a rare species for the area.

Commentary: A relatively quiet month, enlivened by an end-of-the-month sighting of a Ringed Kingfisher on Adams Bayou at Shangri-La in Orange. Reportedly, it has been present for about a week.

The Least Grebes continue conspicuously at Cattail Marsh with at least 13 birds (possibly at least one more) apparently comprising several families. Least Grebes nest whenever conditions are favorable, but are generally very secretive, staying hidden in marsh vegetation for much of the time. However, the ones in Cattail Marsh are not shy continuing to feed in the deeper water along the edge of the

cells unperturbed by the presence of people on the adjacent levee road. A few hummingbirds have shown up; hopefully there are more to come. American Woodcocks are present in small numbers in winter, but the November 6 bird in Louisiana was significantly early, and the overall number of sightings is encouragingly high. Judging by the reports below and those on eBird, this year is shaping up to be an irruptive year for Red-breasted Nuthatches, with well above average numbers making their way south in Texas almost to the Gulf Coast. The Burrowing Owl at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge has returned for a second year, although recently it has been spending most of its time out of sight in its winter burrow.

We have noted in past issues and elsewhere in this issue that many of our wintering species were not present in September and October in the numbers that we have come to expect. It is still not clear whether the numbers have yet increased to normal. However, they have certainly increased from the very low numbers observed in mid-September. One key indicator species is the American Kestrel, and there is an article on the status of this species elsewhere in this issue. Anecdotally, Red-tailed Hawks, some of which are still on the move in December, seem to be increasing in number to a level comparable to those of recent years.

Seen in our Core Counties (listed above)

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|
| Cackling Goose | Nov 9 | SAB-Sabinetown David Bell |
| Canada Goose | Nov 11 | SAB-S. Part of Toledo Bend Res. (14) Barbara and Dennis Trujillo |
| | Nov 26 | SAB-Sabinetown David Bell |
| Cinnamon Teal | Nov 4-27 | JEF-TP (up to 6) multiple obs. |
| Least Grebe | Nov 3-21+ | JEF-TP (up to 13) multiple obs |
| Glossy Ibis | Nov 3 | JEF-TP (1) HS (rare) |
| | Nov 25 | JEF-TP (1) SM, TH (rare) |
| American Woodcock | Nov 13 | HAI-Sandylands (1) J. Armacost |
| | Nov 21 | JEF-Sabine Ranch (1) Cliff Shackelford |
| | Nov 24 | JEF-SW (1) SM |
| | Nov 25 | JEF-SW (2) JHH, TH |
| Ruby-thr. Hummingbird | Nov 2-26 | HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM |
| | Nov 13-14 | JEF-Nederland (1) HS |
| Black-chinned Humm. | Nov 20 | HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM |
| Rufous Hummingbird | Nov 7-14 | JEF-Nederland (1 Nov 7-9, 2 Nov 10-14) HS |
| | Nov 26-27 | SAB-Sabine NF nr Roads 3121 and 242 (1) Pauline Tom |
| Rufous/Allen's Humm. | Nov 1-14 | JEF-Nederland (1) HS |
| | Nov 20-22 | HAI-Rose Hill Acres (1) JM |
| Ringed Kingfisher | Nov 29 | ORA-Adams Bayou (1) Cody Conway |
| Least Flycatcher | Nov 26 | JEF-SW (1) JHH (late) |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | Nov 5 | JEF-TP (1) JHH, SM |
| | Nov 24 | JEF-SW (1) SM |
| | Nov 26 | JEF-SW (1) JH, Todd White |
| Northern Waterthrush | Nov 11 | JEF-SW (1) SM (late) |

Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

| | | |
|---------------|--------|--|
| Cinnamon Teal | Nov 12 | CHA-FM1985 (2) Richard Watson |
| | Nov 26 | CHA-ANWR (1) Kirsten Tucker |
| Brown Booby | Nov 16 | CAM-Calcasieu Lake (1) David and Tina Trahan |
| Glossy Ibis | Nov 9 | CHA-ANWR-Shoveler Pond (1) JAW |

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|---|
| | Nov 10 | CHA-ANWR (1) David Sarkozi |
| | Nov 16 | CHA-ANWR-Shoveler Pond (10) JAW |
| Red Knot | Nov 26 | CAM-Holly Beach (1) Nicholas Pederson |
| American Woodcock | Nov 6 | CAM-LA82 5 mi E of Sabine Lake (1) Kathleen Rawdon |
| Burrowing Owl | Nov 5-23+ | CHA-ANWR-Frozen Point (1) multiple obs. |
| Buff-bellied Hummingbird | Nov 11 | CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Edward Raynor |
| Least Flycatcher | Nov 12 | CHA-ANWQR (1) Graham Montgomery |
| Say's Phoebe | Nov 27 | GAL-BF (1) Kurt Nguyen |
| Great Kiskadee | Nov 4-8 | CAL-Hidden Pounds RV Park, Sulphur (2) multiple obs |
| | Nov 3 | CAL-Sam Houston Jones SP (1) Judson Lessiter |
| | Nov 12 | CAL-Sam Houston Jones SP (1) Edward Raynor |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | Nov 12 | GAL-Smith Oaks (1) Peter Deichman |
| | Nov 12 | CAL-Peveto Woods (1) Justin Bosler |
| | Nov 25 | GAL-Smith Oaks (1) Timothy White |
| Bronzed Cowbird | Nov 12 | CHA-ANWR (1) Andy Jordan |

Abbreviations used: ANWR – Anahuac NWR; BF – Bolivar Flats; BTNP – Big Thicket National Preserve; CAL – Calcasieu Parish; CAM – Cameron Parish; CHA – Chambers County; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – Jana and John Whittle; JM – John Mariani; LIB – Liberty County; MC – Michael Cooper; ORA – Orange County; RL – Randy Lewis; SAB – Sabine County; SH – Sheila Hebert; SM – Steve Mayes, SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; TXPT – Texas Point NWR; TYL – Tyler County; WJC – West Jefferson County

Climate-Threatened Birds

Tracking Kestrels One Feather at a Time

By Dora Chi, from Audubon website August 01, 2016

Ed. Note: This fall, American Kestrels failed to show up in normal numbers in the second half of September. In our fall migrations counts, we have seen periods of two or three years when there were very low numbers by the time the counts were conducted in mid-September, but the numbers have always increased to normal by the end of the month or shortly after. This year, at the end of November, we are still concerned that numbers have not increased to normal. This was a warm fall, cold fronts are only now pushing all the way to the coast, and we may yet have normal numbers this winter. However, this article describing widespread concern over American Kestrel populations nationwide and the means to measure them has become of significant local interest.

For Janet Eschenbauch, her daughter-in-law Amber, and their close crew of volunteers, the month of July is so much more than backyard barbecues and beachside frolicking. July means waking up at dawn, piling into a beat-up green Subaru, and rumbling 50 miles into the Wisconsin grasslands. It means spending days peeking into wooden boxes for signs of American Kestrels, banding the birds, and collecting data about North America's smallest falcons, which have been on an inexplicable decline for the past 50 years.

Eschenbauch, who leads Central Wisconsin Kestrel Research, says that in typical years, at least 40 percent of the kestrels they encountered were returners, recognizable by the tiny bands she secured around their legs. "Those were the birds that were going all the way down to Missouri and Mississippi [to winter], and they were coming [back] either to the exact same box or a box half a mile away," she recalls. "I mean, you could count them. They came back years and years and years."

Recently, however, she has noticed a new pattern emerging. During years with erratic weather, a phenomenon slated to grow in frequency with climate change, she recorded plummets—in one case, from 56 percent in 2012 to 23 percent in 2013—in the numbers of returning kestrels among the nest boxes.

While what is driving this change remains a mystery, Dr. Julie Heath, an ornithologist and associate professor at Boise State University, points to one possibility: climate change. "We have a lot of evidence that kestrels are changing their migration patterns," says Heath, who studies how climate change is impacting migratory bird ecology, the movement of migratory birds.

However, there is no way to know unless monitors can track the birds during their seasonal journeys, a feat that is traditionally done through bird banding. But for a project of this large scale, Heath rules out bird banding. "When you band birds, very few birds are recaptured or recovered to collect information about from movements," she says, citing the USGS Bird Banding Lab, which recorded a dismal 1.66 percent of banded American Kestrels were recaptured or recovered between 1960 and 2016 in the United States.

Instead, to find out where the birds go, Heath and other scientists are hoping to extract the answer by analyzing bird DNA with a technique that scientists at UCLA have dubbed genoscoping. The theory goes that migrating bird populations will return to breed in the same geographic region and will end up sharing similar pieces within their genetic codes. Scientists use these genetic variations to identify bird sub-populations

based on their geographic origins, by creating a map, or genoscape. The DNA samples come from feathers collected by volunteers and, unlike in banding, there is no need to recapture or recover the same birds. "That means that every bird that's captured becomes a piece of information, versus only very few," says Heath.

In a 2014 study led by Dr. Kristen Ruegg, an evolutionary biologist at UCLA, researchers succeeded in genoscoping another migratory bird, the Wilson's Warbler. Heath approached Ruegg, who co-leads the Bird Genoscape Project, and suggested this method be applied to study the declining American Kestrels. Today, under the Bird Genoscape Project, the American Kestrel Genoscape project is a budding effort supported in collaboration by the Peregrine Fund's American Kestrel Partnership, Hawk Life International as well as researchers at Boise State University and UCLA. The American Kestrels are just one of several bird species being examined in this growing genoscape initiative, which received seed funding in 2015 to study six species.

At this moment, the American Kestrel Genoscape project is in its early stages, with 2016 being the first year that researchers are conducting broad sampling across North America. "We're just starting to figure out what does the [genetic map] look like for American Kestrels," says Heath, who says they are trying to answer preliminary questions like, "Where do we want to look on their DNA to find [genetic markers]? And what sort of diversity do we find across North America with different breeding populations?"

Along with Eschenbauch, Heath estimates about 30 groups ranging from Canada to Idaho, including a few Audubon chapters, are contributing kestrel data for genoscoping. This summer in Wisconsin, Eschenbauch plucked feathers from 36 kestrel clutches living in boxes managed by Central Wisconsin Kestrel Research as well as Madison Audubon Society (MAS), which runs the largest kestrel nest box monitoring program in the state. Brand Smith, the MAS nest box program coordinator, describes how Eschenbauch led volunteers in such a well-organized manner that the anticipated two-day affair required less than one.

Most likely, the feathers collected this summer will not be analyzed until next year. Heath says they are busy reviewing the preliminary samples from last season and hopes the panel will be finished within a year. "We have to first make the tool," she explains. Then maybe, with help from scientists and citizen scientists around North America, "we can understand annual cycles and bird movements and start to think about conservation across the year."

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

FIRST CLASS MAIL

NATIONAL AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP FORM

To join the National Audubon Society,
please visit the following web-site

https://secure.audubon.org/site/Donation2?f_id=8080&8080.donation=form1.

A minimum donation of \$20 is required to receive membership benefits which include+ AUDUBON magazine, published five times per year. Your gift to Audubon is tax-deductible except for \$10 allocated to AUDUBON magazine for a one year membership. Please allow 6-8 weeks to receive your first issue. The web form provides a drop-down list of chapter codes for the member to use to give credit to a specific chapter. The Golden Triangle Audubon code is W25.

Alternatively, you may mail your payment to Golden Triangle Audubon at P.O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas. Please include your mailing address, email address (if any) and telephone number.

Brown Pelican SUBSCRIPTION/ MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please complete this form or include the information on or with your check. Mail to Golden Triangle Audubon Society, P. O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292 or bring to any Membership Meeting. Subscriptions from National Audubon members with mailing addresses outside our official territory, and others wishing to subscribe are \$15 per year (Jan-Dec). Members with addresses within our official territory are also asked to contribute \$15 if they are able.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel No: _____

BIRD ALERTS

Bird Alert information is now best found on the Internet. One of the best sites is eBird.org. On the home page, click on Explore Data, then on Explore Hotspots, then enlarge the map and click on one or more of the hotspots in the area you are interested in. Or click on explore a Region where you can enter a county and state.

Many interesting Texas bird sightings are posted on **TEXBIRDS**. The archives of this listserv are at www.freelists.org/archive/txbirds. It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives, which include all recent postings. National rare bird sightings are posted on **Facebook ABA Rare Bird Alert**.

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 at texasbirds.org/BirdingLocations.php