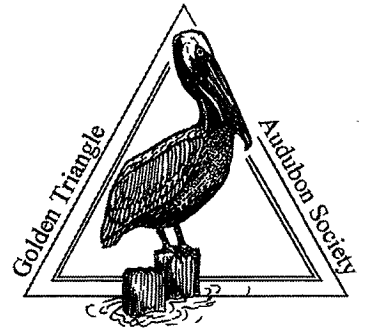


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 25 No 6

June 2019

Summer Break!

As usual, there will be no membership meetings in June or July. Our next meeting will be on **THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.** in the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont, Texas. Details of the program will be published in the August issue of the *Brown Pelican*.

The next issue of the *Brown Pelican* will be a combined July/August issue, to be published in early August.

Texas Audubon Conservation Activities

Each June, we find ourselves with this relatively small amount of space on the front page, and have tried to highlight regional Audubon conservation. We do address some local conservation issues elsewhere in this issue in our analysis of the Spring Migration Count. This time, we describe some of the very extensive Audubon Texas's Coastal Conservation program is conserving 178 islands along the Texas Coast and sustaining the bird populations that nest and forage on them.

Texas has one of the most biodiverse, yet threatened coastlines in the nation. Stretching over 600 miles, much of the Texas coast is suffering from severe erosion, lack of freshwater inflows, and pollution. This rich ecoregion is the wintering grounds and stop over sites for over 98% of the long-distance migratory bird species in North America. The coast is also a stopping ground for the litter pollution carried through Texas's river system, meaning many of the conservation issues on the coast are at the mercy of the choices made by those across the Lone Star State.

In 1923, Audubon established a system of island sanctuaries along the Texas Coast. These sanctuaries are home to 20+ species of colonial waterbirds, several of which are considered endangered or threatened. The majority of waterbirds that nest along the coast nest on an Audubon owned or leased island. Our coastal sanctuaries host the largest Reddish Egret and Roseate Spoonbill colonies in the world.

Audubon wardens and TERN volunteers manage these islands, patrolling and censusing bird populations by boat during nesting season, controlling fire ants, planting shrubs and trees, and monitoring predator activity and erosion. In addition to managing the islands, wardens communicate with local media, organize volunteers, educate citizens, and work with recreational and commercial anglers. For decades this model of community-based stewardship has sustained one of the most effective bird conservation programs in the country. Audubon's coastal management program has been recognized through the Governors' Blue Ribbon Committee on Environmental Excellence.

The Brown Pelican

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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: GTAS 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 gtaudubon@aol.com.*

Saturday August 3, 2019. Field Trip to Liberty-Dayton Area. This date is tentative. Please check the web-site a few days before.

During the first half of August each year, Swallow-tailed Kites congregate in the Trinity River bottomlands between Liberty and Dayton for two or three weeks before they migrate south for the winter.

We will meet at 8:00 AM at the McDonalds at 1923 Highway 90 in Liberty. This is on the north side of the Highway at the intersection with Travis Street, one block west of Main St. Carpooling is highly desirable on this trip. The trip will probably not last much beyond noon.

We will check the area along Highway 90 between Liberty and Dayton, perhaps several times, and also the Liberty Municipal Park area. The relatively new Knobby Knees trail and boardwalk of the Trinity River NWR can be easily accessed from the Park. The part of the trip looking for kites does not **necessitate** extensive walking, but the trail does. We will check that area for early migrants and a few other songbirds that may well nest in that area. In addition to the Swallow-tailed Kites, there will be Mississippi Kites flying low in the residential areas of Liberty north of US 90.

Thursday August 15, 2019. Membership Meeting. Details in the next issue of the Brown Pelican and, nearer the time, on the website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

Saturday August 17, 2019. Field Trip to Bolivar Flats. Meet the leaders at the vehicle barrier at Bolivar Flats at

8:30 a.m. Take Highway 124 south from Winnie about 20 miles through High Island. At the shoreline, turn right along Highway 87 and proceed approximately 25 miles through Gilchrist and Crystal Beach until you come to the intersection with Loop 108. At that intersection, turn left (south – the opposite direction from Loop 108) on Rettilon Road to the beach. If conditions permit, drive onto the sand and turn right to the vehicle barrier (about 1/2 mile). It is about a 90-minute drive from Beaumont or mid-County to the Flats.

Usually, after birding the flats, the group proceeds to Fort Travis to use the facilities and eat lunch. Most participants will bring their lunch, as options to purchase are limited.

The group may stop at Rollover Pass and will probably visit High Island on the way home, checking there for early southbound migrants

To park on the beach, you will need a Galveston County Beach Parking Permit, obtainable for \$10 from most merchants on the Peninsula. (The Big Store opens at 7:00 a.m.)

Thursday September 19, 2019. Membership Meeting. Details in the next issue of the Brown Pelican and, nearer the time, on the website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

Saturday September 28, 2019. Field trip to Smith Point Hawk Watch. Full details and directions in the next issue of the Brown Pelican. If you cannot make it on this day, note that The Smith Point Hawk Watch is staffed each day from August 1.



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

Spring Migration Count – 11 May 2019

with trend analysis for some species

This is a condensed version of the article in the digital version of the Brown Pelican, which is available on the web-site at www.goldentraiangleraudubon.org

It has long been our policy not to cancel any of our scheduled bird counts solely because of an adverse weather forecast. Quite apart from the possibility that the weather will not be as bad as the forecast (which typically presents the worst possible scenario when potentially damaging conditions are involved), our participants mostly are unable to be available on any postponed date that is close enough to the scheduled date to not become an issue in analyzing trends over multiple years. So we ran the Spring Migration Count on 11 May as scheduled. The forecast line of strong rain showers passed through the county from about 11:00 a.m. as predicted. The rain was heavy, especially in the northern sections of the county, but only lasted one or two hours. These are the hours during the day when bird activity is at a low anyway, so we believe the effect on the count, while not non-existent, was for the most part, minimal. Count day followed several days of strong south winds, and this made the beach all but inaccessible, seriously impacting our ability to count "true" shorebirds such as Sanderlings, Dunlins and to a lesser extent, gulls and terns.

Effects of hurricanes on birds are likely to be primarily effects on the habitat rather than physical effects on the birds themselves. Most hurricanes strike the area in late August or September, after most young of the year have fledged and are fending for themselves. The effect on habitat is less uniform. Obvious possible effects include loss of trees, and perhaps loss of food sources such as seeds that may be washed away, or the plants killed prior to seed production. Insects (and their eggs) and arthropods may be washed away. Normally, these effects last only a couple of years at most, as the populations recover. Birds, especially passerine birds, take a little longer to recover as clutch sizes are limited, even though more young birds may survive their critical first winter if competition for food is limited.

There have been what appears to be significant changes in bird numbers for some species that cannot be readily explained by weather events. The habitat in the open areas of the county is dominated by rice cultivation, with crawfish farming increasing in importance. The majority of rice planted in the past few years has been of one or more of the higher yielding "dwarf" or "semi-dwarf" varieties. These varieties do not grow as tall, and are more resistant to being blown over, and more efficiently machine harvestable, leaving less grain in the fields after harvesting. Red-winged Blackbirds in particular in the past fed extensively on rice grains left over in the fields after harvesting. The introduction of laser leveling of rice fields has resulted in virtually complete drainage after flooding and there are not ponds of water that stand for enough days for an arthropod community to grow making the fields are less attractive to most shorebirds, although the larger and longer legged species do still feed in flooded fields. In times past, farmers would leave the bushes and small trees that grew on the levees that typically surround the rice fields.

increasingly, they have cleared these levees, removing the cover and nesting sites used by some species. Crawfish is often grown in conjunction with rice, the crawfish operation following the harvesting of the rice in late summer.

The number of species seen on the count this year was in the middle of the range experienced in the past, reflecting largely a reasonably normal number of migrant species along the coast. The overall number of individual birds was about 3000 below normal, and the lowest since 2001. Review of the individual species indicates that numbers were down across the spectrum of species, suggesting that this could have been an effect of the weather.

Looking at individual species, the slow decline in Mottled Ducks, long a species of concern, continues, and the number seen now averages about half what it was back in the early years of the count in the late 1990s. The numbers of Rock Pigeons seem to jump after hurricanes, but a slow longer term increase may have continued even though not evident in the past two years. White-winged Doves, which started to establish in earnest in the area in 2004 may still be slowly increasing, or may be plateauing. The next two or three years will be indicative. In the early years of this count, there were significant roosts of Chimney Swifts in Beaumont. These decreased sharply in the late 1990s, possibly due to the chimneys there being removed, and moving averages suggest that numbers have continue to slowly decrease subsequently.

The only new species added to the cumulative count list this year was Black Rail. One was found in Cattail Marsh in Tyrrell Park early in the day. Not only was the distinctive call of the species heard (in response to a taped call), but the bird was seen quite well. It is quite possible this species has been present in Cattail Marsh for some time. The only way Black Rail is normally detected is by its call, usually given only during nighttime hours when access to the Marsh is not available. There have been many reports of calling Black Rails in the areas close to the entrances to Sea Rim State Park and McFaddin NWR. Once or twice, birds have been seen. Clearly there are Black Rails around, but this spring, a Northern Mockingbird was giving a near perfect imitation of the call in Sabine Woods, so caution is needed!

Low shorebird, gull and tern numbers probably resulted from the fact that the south winds had reduced the beach to almost nothing, making most of it inaccessible. It was disappointing to find only a small number of Wilson's Phalaropes, a species many of us look forward to seeing each spring. The changes in rice farming practices probably kept us from finding many of the White-rumped Sandpipers that were there – these days they hide in rice that has grown tall enough to hide them, so the low number may not reflect actual population changes. On the positive side, We are reluctant to comment on Brown Pelican trends due to the lack of beach access this year.

Cattle Egrets colonized the southern United States within

the lifetime of many of us – the earliest local records in eBird are in the late 1960s – but the range expansion was substantially complete by the time we began Migration Counts in 1994. Roseate Spoonbill numbers have been very volatile in our counts. The species is not restricted to salt water, but the populations are concentrated in salt and brackish water areas. The numbers in 2017-2018 were low, but in 2019, the numbers jumped back up closer to the long term averages.

The numbers of both species of vulture have slowly increased over the history of the count. Vultures are exclusively scavengers. However, we have no explanation to offer for the increase, other than to speculate that there may now be more roadkill. We have not done a thorough analysis, but it seems that the range of the Black Vulture has expanded southwards almost to the coast. Twenty or thirty years ago, this species was rarely seen south of Interstate 10. Turkey Vultures may also may have become more common nearer the shore, although neither vulture species is commonly seen on the shore itself.

Although extensive data is hard to come by, there can be little doubt that Swainson's Hawks have expanded eastwards along the coast in recent years. Some have speculated that this represents a reoccupation of the historical range. It was the 1980s before any were recorded in eBird in our area. It would appear that the local population continues to increase very slowly. Red-tailed Hawks have always over-summered in Southeast Texas in very small numbers, but about ten years ago, the number increased, and the larger numbers have continued, with a very large number seen this year.

Woodpeckers have been identified as likely short term beneficiaries from the tree damage caused by hurricanes. As far as Red-headed Woodpeckers are concerned, the effect may have played out in the elevated numbers of 2012-2016, and we are again seeing numbers that are more normal long-term. Red-bellied Woodpeckers on the other hand seem less affected, and along with Downy Woodpeckers, and numbers of both species have been remarkably stable. Pileated Woodpeckers have also not shown significant changes, although the last two years' numbers have been lower than long term averages.

Crested Caracara is a relative newcomer to the area, first appearing on the spring count in 2003, again in 2005 and 2006, and then continuously since 2010. The very high totals of 2017 and 2018 (11 and 13) were not repeated in 2019 with "only" five, but the species seems well established in the county nonetheless.

Eastern Wood-Pewee numbers have been highly variable, quite high 2010 to 2014 and again in 2017, but returned to normal in 2019. Great Crested Flycatchers have been more prominent in the past decade and 19 is a very good number for a day with much rain. Eastern Kingbird numbers were rarely below 75 in counts prior to 2017, and were as high as 259 in 1999 and 209 in 2000. To find 40 in 2018 (in reasonably good weather) was disturbing, but to repeat that low ebb with 41 in 2019 reinforces the concern. This species will bear watching in the next few years to see if perhaps the 2019 result was at least partially influenced by the rain, which grounds the insect population thus likely reducing flycatcher activity. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher numbers show a similar pattern on a somewhat lower base. We are always interested in this

species, since the Neches River seems to be the eastern edge of its breeding range, excepting only a cluster southeast of Lake Charles.

One Eastern Phoebe was recorded on the 2019 count. Eastern Phoebes were reported on previous counts in 2002 and 1997 only. The bird this year was seen (and heard) perched on a bush about four feet off the ground near some oaks and hackberries on the Jefferson County section of White Ranch Road in the extreme west of the county.

Another species of great concern, both locally and nationwide, is the Loggerhead Shrike. We have been concerned about this species for several years now, based on increasing anecdotal evidence that the number in the open areas of the western part of the county has greatly diminished. Remembering that great caution should be exercised in dealing with results for only two isolated years, we looked at the results by sector for 1996 – the first year with participant coverage close to that of recent years – and compared them to 2019. The sum of the number of shrikes in the entire western part of the county was 14 in 2019 compared to 47 in 1996. The Northern Mockingbird species counts for the same areas were 91 in 1996 and 228 in 2019. Clearly, something is affecting shrikes very differently from mockingbirds. Loggerhead Shrikes, although most famous as aggressive predators taking small rodents and smaller birds, locally feed primarily on larger species of insect, especially in the spring. There was a noticeable decrease in shrike numbers in 2009-2011 (post Ike) and a more pronounced decrease in 2018-19 (post Harvey).

Cliff Swallows began to increase in the eastern United States as early as 1975, but it was 2005 when the massive increase in Southeast Texas began. The increase may be over as most available bridges over water and other areas with water nearby, the Cliff Swallow's favored nesting site, are already occupied. Reported numbers of Cave Swallow, which often share nesting locations with Cliff Swallows, have decreased, but part of this may be the difficulty of picking out Cave Swallows in a mass of Cliff Swallows.

It is gratifying to note that Eastern Meadowlarks are now back to the numbers seen in the late 1990s. They had declined markedly in 2001-2007. That the number of Red-winged Blackbirds has remained relatively stable over the entire time span of the counts is perhaps surprising in view of the reduced numbers seen in rice growing areas. The birds may well have simply moved into the marshes in the county.

Numbers of passage migrant warblers defy analysis because of the extreme variation from year to year on the count, mostly due to weather factors. While a number of warblers do probably nest in the area, most are on the extreme southern edge of their ranges. We can note that Common Yellowthroats seem to be increasing slightly, while Northern Parulas seem to be decreasing, as their range seems to be contracting to the north.

Northern Cardinal numbers are holding steady. Significant numbers of Indigo Buntings probably breed in the county and are holding their own. Everyone will welcome the continued increase in Painted Bunting numbers, however slow the increase, and the same for Blue Grosbeaks. Dickcissel populations have had their ups and downs. The up periods of 1996 to 1999 and 2008 to 2015 have given way to modest

declines in the past year or two. It is possible that clearing of vegetation on the edge levees of rice fields is partially responsible for the recent declines.

Species recorded on count

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (133): WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (26.0): DUCK, Wood (4): TEAL, Blue-winged (54): DUCK, Mottled (20): DUCK, species (10): BOBWHITE, Northern (2): GREBE, Pied-billed (1): PIGEON, Rock (70): DOVE, Eurasian Collared- (16): GROUND-DOVE, Common (): DOVE, White-winged (100): DOVE, Mourning (180): CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (21): NIGHTHAWK, Common (26): WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck- (1): SWIFT, Chimney (21): HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (17): HUMMINGBIRD, Species (3): RAIL, King (5): RAIL, Clapper (12): RAIL, King/Clapper (1): SORA (5): GALLINULE, Common (43): COOT, American (20): GALLINULE, Purple (29): RAIL, Black (1): STILT, Black-necked (121): PLOVER, Black-bellied (8): PLOVER, Wilson's (1): PLOVER, Semipalmated (16): KILLDEER (128): WHIMBREL (5): GODWIT, Hudsonian (14): TURNSTONE, Ruddy (19): SANDPIPER, Stilt (15): SANDERLING (10): DUNLIN (146): SANDPIPER, Baird's (2): SANDPIPER, Least (38): SANDPIPER, White-rumped (87): SANDPIPER, Pectoral (20): SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (38): SANDPIPER, Western (17): SANDPIPER, Peep (88) DOWITCHER, Short-billed (45): DOWITCHER, Long-billed (38): DOWITCHER species (25): PHALAROPE, Wilson's (10): SANDPIPER, Spotted (13): SANDPIPER, Solitary (2): YELLOWLEGS, Greater (18): WILLET (35): YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (29): YELLOWLEGS species (1): GULL, Laughing (164): GULL, Ring-billed (2): TERN, Least (17): TERN, Gull-billed (1): TERN, Caspian (2): TERN, Black (28): TERN, Forster's (11): TERN, Royal (6): SKIMMER, Black (51): ANHINGA (4): CORMORANT, Neotropic (79): CORMORANT, Double-crested (1): CORMORANT species (8): PELICAN, Brown (20): BITTERN, Least (17): HERON, Great Blue (15): EGRET, Great (151): EGRET, Snowy (115): HERON, Little Blue (72): HERON, Tricolored (37): EGRET, Cattle (558): HERON, Green (50): NIGHT-HERON, Black-crown. (5): NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crown. (19): IBIS, White (64): IBIS, Glossy (1): IBIS, White-faced (31): IBIS, *Plegadis* species (125): SPOONBILL, Roseate (139): VULTURE, Black (48): VULTURE, Turkey (24): OSPREY (4): KITE, White-tailed (1): KITE, Mississippi (2): HARRIER, Northern (2): HAWK, Cooper's (1): EAGLE, Bald (1): HAWK, White-tailed (2): HAWK, Red-shouldered (11): HAWK, Swainson's (4): HAWK, Red-tailed (16): OWL, Barn (4): OWL, Great Horned (1): OWL, Barred (2): KINGFISHER, Belted (1): WOODPECKER, Red-headed (3): WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (34): WOODPECKER, Downy (20): WOODPECKER, Pileated (9): CARACARA, Crested (5): MERLIN (1): FALCON, Peregrine (1): WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (9):

FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (1): FLYCATCHER, Acadian (4): FLYCATCHER, Traill's (1): FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (3): PHOEBE, Eastern (1): FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (19): KINGBIRD, Eastern (41): FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (20): SHRIKE, Loggerhead (35): VIREO, White-eyed (38): VIREO, Yellow-throated (6): VIREO, Philadelphia (2): VIREO, Red-eyed (31): JAY, Blue (95): CROW, American (23): CROW, Fish (24): CROW, Species (8): SWALLOW, N. Rough-winged (11): MARTIN, Purple (123): SWALLOW, Tree (37): SWALLOW, Bank (4): SWALLOW, Barn (272): SWALLOW, Cliff (667): SWALLOW, Cave/Cliff (28): SWALLOW species (2): CHICKADEE, Carolina (38): NUTHATCH, Species (1): TITMOUSE, Tufted (4): WREN, Marsh (10): WREN, Carolina (36): GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (1): BLUEBIRD, Eastern (20): VEERY (3): THRUSH, Gray-cheeked (1): THRUSH, Swainson's (5): THRUSH, Wood (2): ROBIN, American (15): CATBIRD, Gray (27): THRASHER, Brown (8): MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (288): STARLING, European (197): WAXWING, Cedar (253): FINCH, House (10): SPARROW, White-throated (2): SPARROW, Seaside (16): SPARROW, Nelson's (7): SPARROW, Savannah (13): CHAT, Yellow-breasted (11): BOBOLINK (2): MEADOWLARK, Eastern (111): ORIOLE, Orchard (17): BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (347): COWBIRD, Brown-headed (77): GRACKLE, Common (69): GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (168): GRACKLE, Great-tailed (174): R (GRACKLE, Gt./Boat-tailed (99): OVENBIRD (8): WATERTHRUSH, Louisiana (1): WATERTHRUSH, Northern (3): WARBLER, Black-and-white (5): WARBLER, Prothonotary (4): WARBLER, Tennessee (4): WARBLER, Kentucky (1): YELLOWTHROAT, Common (33): WARBLER, Hooded (10): REDSTART, American (14): PARULA, Northern (5): WARBLER, Magnolia (8): WARBLER, Bay-breasted (8): WARBLER, Blackburnian (2): WARBLER, Yellow (7): WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (6): WARBLER, Pine (10): WARBLER, Yellow-throated (3): WARBLER, Black-thr. Green (3): TANAGER, Summer (2): TANAGER, Scarlet (3): CARDINAL, Northern (171): GROSBEAK, Rose-breasted (3): GROSBEAK, Blue (17): BUNTING, Indigo (17): BUNTING, Painted (15): DICKCISSEL (133): SPARROW, House (70): TOTAL INDIVIDUALS (7904): TOTAL SPECIES (182):

Number of Observers (17): Number of Parties (9-10): Number of Party-Hours - Foot (11): Number of Party-Hours - Car (55): Number of Party-Hours - Stationary (0.88): Total Party-hours (67.28): Number of Party-Miles - Foot (6.00): Number of Party-Miles - Car (342.17): Total Party-Miles (348.17)

Participants: Jessica Barry, Linda and Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson, Claudia Gilson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Harrison Jordan, Gary and Denise Kelley, Steve Mayes, Sherrie Roden, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, Jana and John Whittle.

John A. Whittle

Field Trip to Hardin County – 26 May 2019

How do you measure the success of a birding field trip? Is it the number of species seen? The total number of birds seen? Or is there something else that decides the success or failure of a field trip? On the Golden Triangle Audubon's annual field trip to Hardin County, the birds were not especially cooperative. Does that mean that the trip was a failure? Let's weigh the evidence.

The trip started as is traditional in a parking lot in Silsbee where everyone gathered to carpool and learn the plan for the day. But there were a few birds to look at here as well. Some of these birds found in town would not be available during the

rest of the field trip that travels through more heavily wooded areas. A Chimney Swift fluttered overhead and two Barn Swallows zipped by as well. Some Fish Crows made identification an easy task by repeatedly giving their nasal two syllable calls. A cattle Egret, not always easy to find in the Silsbee area, was seen by all. A Killdeer made its presence known with the usual noisy calls while a White-winged Dove was more reserved. A House Sparrow chirped from nearby and was dutifully noted for the day list. A large group of birders had assembled by now and they were ready to bird their way through the wilder areas of Hardin County!

Heading down Gore Store Road, a couple of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons flew overhead to give a nice start to the trip even if only the lead vehicles got to see them. This field trip is unique in that there are few planned areas for the birding. The group generally stops at obvious creek crossings but otherwise, just listens for birds along the back roads and stops when something of interest sings. One of the most vocal species on the day was White-eyed Vireo. Though they were not often seen, the vireos were singing at almost every stop on the day. Northern Cardinals were also fairly common on the day and Carolina Wren was heard on a several occasions but never came out for a look. A Pine Warbler trilled from the tree tops. Pine Warbler was heard at a number of stops but fewer were seen. Luckily, a few did cooperate with the group and gave great looks including a particularly dark marked male that could almost have been mistaken for a Prairie Warbler! Blue Jays were easily seen and heard on the day and American Crows replaced the parking lot Fish Crows. A pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos flew over the road and they would not be the last seen or heard on the day.

A nice flock of White Ibis flew over one of the stops. Water birds are always at a premium on trips into the Big Thicket as they are not nearly as easy to come here by as they are closer to the coast. Great Egret was also seen on the day and a few birders got looks at a pair of Wood Ducks as they flushed from a creek. Blackbirds, unavoidable on most field trips are also few and far between on this trip so a sighting of a single Brown-headed Cowbird was appreciated (sort of). Raptors are normally seen on this trip at least in small numbers. On this day, they were harder to find. Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures were easily found but as for "real" raptors, a couple of Mississippi Kites were the only representatives. The group missed the Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrels often seen on this trip and the hoped-for Swallow-tailed Kite was also a no show.

But this is really a trip looking for nesting songbirds and there were some nice birds seen and heard but there were also many misses. Red-eyed Vireos were heard on several stops and did give some looks to the group as well. Yellow-throated Vireo, usually seen in this area, was not found. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were seen in small numbers and Carolina Chickadee was found though Tufted Titmouse remained absent. A brilliant red Summer Tanager was appreciated by all as it came out to survey the birders. A vivid blue Indigo Bunting gave great looks to the group but no Blue Grosbeak or Painted Bunting was recorded this year. Flycatchers seen included a very persistent Acadian Flycatcher that allowed for plenty of opportunities for vocal and visual identification, a couple of Great Crested Flycatchers (one heard and one seen) and a striking Scissor-tailed Flycatcher seen on a wire on the way back to the meeting place. Woodpeckers were found though perhaps in lower than usual numbers. A single Pileated Woodpecker was heard by a few birders and a Downy woodpecker was located. Red-bellied Woodpecker was noted in a few locations but was not found in great numbers and a single Red-headed Woodpecker was seen by only part of the group.

Nesting warblers are always a focus of the trip. Around a dozen warbler species nest in the Big Thicket and at least ten

species are possible on the route taken on this field trip. Hooded Warblers are usually the most common as they are heard singing from roadside thickets. They were the most common of the warblers on this trip as well though they were not singing in the usual numbers and proved much harder to see than normal with only fleeting glimpses of one or two birds. Swainson's Warbler is a much sought-after resident of this region and is a particular target of this trip. The group heard several of these shy warblers singing from their riparian habitats but not a single one would come out for a look. Prothonotary Warbler did come out for the group and, in fact, showed off for the birders for as long as anyone cared to look! The photographers in the group were very appreciative and this bird was well documented by all of them. Prairie Warbler is another target of this field trip and the group checked out the young pine tree stands that the species favors for nesting. It took a little work but one Prairie Warbler eventually showed off for the group as it sang its buzzy song from nearby trees. A few Yellow-breasted Chats (not technically a warbler) were heard and one was briefly seen by some members of the group. But what of Yellow-throated Warbler? Northern Parula? Kentucky Warbler? All no shows along with the rest of the warbler family.

So, there were some really nice birds seen on the trip. But there were also a lot more misses than usual. The birds were not singing in the usual numbers and even the ones that were located seemed reluctant to come out. The likely explanation is just bad timing. It is possible that many of the species were sitting on eggs or busily attending to baby birds. Birds at that stage of the nesting cycle may be less territorial than those in earlier stages and therefore less likely to be seen and heard. So, does that mean that the field trip was a failure? The birders present did not think so! It turns out that, though numbers of species and birds is important, the most important component to a field trip is the people involved. The birders involved made the best of the trip and all had a good time with good company and a few nice birds. Who could ask for more? And they can always come back and try their luck again at the trip next year!

The following species were recorded by the trip leaders; doubtless one or two others were seen by other participants. : Wood Duck (2); White-winged Dove (1); Mourning Dove (1); Chimney Swift (1); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (4); Great Egret (2); Cattle Egret (3); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (2); White Ibis (35); Black Vulture (9); Turkey Vulture (4); Mississippi Kite (2); Red-headed Woodpecker (1); Red-bellied Woodpecker (2); Downy Woodpecker (1); Pileated Woodpecker (1); Acadian Flycatcher (1); Great Crested Flycatcher (2); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (1); Blue Jay (5); American Crow (4); Fish Crow (2); Crow Sp. (2); White-eyed Vireo (10); Yellow-throated Vireo (1); Red-eyed Vireo (5); Barn Swallow (4); Carolina Chickadee (2); Carolina Wren (7); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (2); American Robin (1); European Starling (5); Brown Thrasher (1); Northern Mockingbird (2); Common Grackle (1); Yellow-breasted Chat (3); Prothonotary Warbler (1); Swainson's Warbler (6); Hooded Warbler (8); Pine Warbler (7); Prairie Warbler (3); Summer Tanager (1); Northern Cardinal (11); Indigo Bunting (1); House Sparrow (2)

Steve Mayes

Bird Sightings – May 2019

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 records for Chambers, Galveston, Harris and Liberty Counties in Texas, and Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes in Louisiana.

The format of the listing is Species – Date – County-and brief location information if available – (number) –

Observer(s). If more precise location information is needed, it can often be obtained by using the bird species map feature to find the sighting in eBird, opening the checklist, and using the map function to display the location as precisely as the observer provided.

Commentary. Very little space this month, but we must comment on the Black Turnstone, seen by very few, and the Gray Kingbird, seen by many although it was also a one day wonder.

Seen in our Core Counties (listed above)

Canada Goose	May 6	HAI-Sandylands (1) Rich Kostecke
Green-winged Teal	May 25, 29	JEF-TP (1) HS
Ring-necked Duck	May 10-11	LIB-CR2321 in Dayton (1) Colette Micallef
Black Rail	May 2	JEF-McFaddin NWR (1) Bruce Barnhart
	May 6	JEF-SRSP (1) Jim & Deborah Hailey
	May 11	JEF-TP (1) JHH
Black Turnstone	May 3	JEF-SRSP (1) Jojo Morelli
Crested Caracara	May 15	HAI-Old Sour Laker Rd (1) Rich Kostecke (continuing bird),
		JEF-SW (1) mult obs
Great Kiskadee	May 4-9	JEF-Hiwy 87 SRSP to McFaddin (1)
Gray Kingbird	May 6	Gerald Duhon, Steve Mayes, Thomas Hellweg, mult obs
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	May 5	HAI-Gore Store Rd (1) mult obs
White-throated Sparrow	May 12	ANG-Lufkin (1) Gary Hunter
Blue-winged Warbler	May 10	JEF-SW (1) JHH

Nearby Counties

Gadwall	May 6	CAM-Cameron Prairie NWR (1) Josh Lefever (injured)
	May 7	CAM-Rockefeller SWR (4) John Herbert
Ring-necked Duck	May 1	GAL-Texas City (4) Kelly Schaeffer
	May 18-24	LIB-CR2321 (1) Colette Micallef
Lesser Scaup	May 4	HAS-Archbishop Fiorenza Pk (12) Jerry Chen
Eared Grebe	May 4	HAS-Warren Ranch Lake Area (1) Karl Poetzi
Horned Grebe	May 3-4	GAL-BF 17th St Jetty (1) Michael Pease, mult obs
Black Scoter	May 2-17	CAM-various locations from Peveto Woods to Rutherford Bch (up to 16)
Surf Scoter	May 5	CAM-Holly Beach (1) mult obs
Sandhill Crane	May 30	HAS-Terry Hershey Park (1) Sue Orwig (heard only)
Pomarine Jaeger	May 11	CAM-Holly Beach (1) Jay Huner
	May 24-30	GAL-Appfel Park (1) Chuck Davis, Brandon Nidiffer, mult obs
	May 28	CAM-Rutherford Bch (1) K. Barnes
Sooty Tern	May 24	GAL-West Galveston Bay (2) Susan Heath
Brown Booby	May 3	GAL-Texas City Dike (1) Brian Henderson mult obs
Northern Gannet	May 2	GAL-BF (1) William Vanderpoel
Northern Harrier	May 4	CAM-Willow Is (1) Mark Meunier
	May 12	HAS-John Paul Landing Park (1) Greg Page
	May 14	HAS-US90 SW of Dayton (1) Letha Slaigle
	May 18	HAS-Sharp Rd (1) Mark Kulstad
	May 26	HAS-San Jacinto Battleground (2) Tommy Duvall
Ladder-back. Wpecker	May 8	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Paul Sivon
Great Kiskadee	May 7-8	CAL-Sam Houston Jones SP (1) Deanna Griggs, David Booth
	May 3	CHA-ANWR (1) Richard May
	May 12	CHA-Beach City (1) Brian Berry

Couch's Kingbird	May 2-27	HAS-Pine Forest CC area (1) Timothy White, Steve Gast
	May 9	GAL-Friendswood (1) Kris Cannon
	May 12-19	HAS-Peckham Park (2) Hank George, Drew Dickert
Tropical/Couch's K'bird	May 4	CAM-Sabine NWR-Blue Goose trail (1) Josh Lefever (reported as Tropical, but did not vocalize)
Western Kingbird	May 6	CAL-Rossignol Rd (1) Josh Lefever, Garrett Behrends
	May 11	CAL-Hwy 90 at Davis Rd (1) Judson Lassiter
Plumbeous Vireo	May 6	HAS-Memorial Area (1) Sue Orwig, John Berner
Chihuahuan Raven	May 12	CAM-Rutherford Beach (1) Paul Conover, Dave Patton
	May 29	GAL-Hwy87 nr High Is (Richard Gibbons)
Red-breasted Nuthatch	May 10	HAS-Clear Lake (1) Dale Wolck
Hermit Thrush	May 25	HAS-Glenwood Cem.(1) Jennifer Bristol (no details or photo)
American Goldfinch	May 8	CAL-French Settlement (1) Beth Kramer
	May 16	HAS-Houston Arberetum (1) Kelsey Low
Yellow-headed Blackbird	May 10	HAS-George Bush Park (1 male) Letha Slaigle
	May 12	HAS-NW Lake Houston (8) Joseph Masters
Louisiana Waterthrush	May 3	CHA-ANWR Jackson Woodlot (1) David Hanson
Connecticut Warbler	May 5	CAM-Oak Grove Sanctuary (1) Robert Dobbs
Tennessee Warbler	May 31	HAS-Texas Medical Center *(1) John O'Brien
Orange-cr. Warbler	May 4	HAS-Edith L. Moore Sanct. (1) Nathaniel Pylant
	May 4	HAS-Northside area (1) Dorothy Worrell (no details)
	May 6	HAS-River Oaks area (1) Stanley Almoney
Yellow-cr. Warbler	May 13	HAS-Archbishop Fiorenza Pk (1) Letha Slaigle
Western Tanager	May 4-5	CAM-Peveto Woods (2 males) Robert Purrington, David Booth
	May 13	HAS-JohnsonSC-Mall Area (1) Steven Berenzweig
Black-headed Grosbeak	May 10	GAL-Dos Vacas Muerta (2 male+fem) Shantel Porterfield

Abbreviations used: ANG – Angelina County; 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; HAS – Harris County; HI – High Island; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAS – Jasper County; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – Jana and John Whittle; LIB – Liberty County; MC – Michael Cooper; NEDR – Nederland; NEW – Newton County; ORA – Orange County; PI – Pleasure Is, Port Arthur; RL – Randy Lewis; SAA – San Augustine Co.; 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.

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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 forms of 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.

Detailed information/maps on birding sites in Texas is available on the Web at <http://www.texasbirds.org/birdingLocations.php>. This leads you to the maps of the various eBird hotspots. You can also subscribe (free) on eBird for email alerts for all rare birds reported in a specific county.