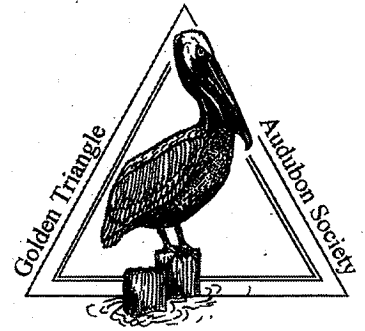


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 26 No 10

October 2020

No Membership Meeting in October

We had every hope and expectation that we would be able to hold an October Membership Meeting in the Garden Center, but it is not to be. We do expect to be able to hold the Annual Meeting and Elections on November 19.

It has been a long saga since Tropical Storm Imelda hit our area on September 19, 2019. The Garden Center took on water as it seems prone to do in this kind of event. Having gone through this with Hurricane Harvey in 2017, in September 2019 everyone was sensitized as to what needed to be done quickly to minimize the damage. The sheet rock that got wet was very quickly cut out and the cabinets removed from the storage room. Unfortunately, things have gone very slowly since then. The loss was insured, but the Beaumont City Council, as titular owners of the building, had to approve the bidding process and award the contract, and this took a few months. We had hopes of being able to use the building again early this fall. But we did not factor in Covid-19. The allowance of a 90-day period to complete the work was overridden by issues the contractor had with employees contracting the virus. In addition, the contractor had substantial damage to his workshops in Orange in Hurricane Laura. So it will be November before we can be sure we will be able to use the Garden Center. We may not have been willing or able to hold in person meetings in any case due to emergency orders by the city, county and state, but it has been frustrating for all involved. We do plan to hold field trips as normal in October and November!

The Brown Pelican

Vol. 26, No.10 October 2020
Issue number 265

Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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Calendar of Events

Important Note: Field Trip notices published here are subject to last minute changes especially in the current Covid-19 situation. Changes will always be posted on the web site at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org.

Future Programs and Field Trips. (All events are TENTATIVE!).

The latest information is always available on the web site at goldentriangleaudubon.edu.

No membership Meeting in October.

See page 1 for details.

Saturday October 17, 2020. 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. 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 on weekends in Sabine Pass. Bring lunch and drinks.

October 17 is towards the end of fall passerine 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. In past years, this has included Red-breasted Nuthatch (one has already been seen this year!) and Brown Creeper. There are always interesting birds at Sabine Woods!

The trails are clear and mostly reasonably wide, and, although some care is needed to avoid uneven ground, birding Sabine Woods is relatively easy. There are a number of strategically located benches if you need to rest for a time. Insect repellent may be needed.

Thursday November 19, 2020.

Annual Meeting. Full details in next month's issue.

Saturday November 21, 2020. Field Trip to West Jefferson County.

In recent years, this has been one of our most successful field trips. The area is well known for its birds of prey, which in past years have included Bald and Golden Eagles, Crested Caracaras and White-tailed Hawks in addition to the more "expected" Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and American Kestrels. In some years we have seen White-tailed Kites and Merlins. The area suffered extensive flooding during Imelda, so there may be abnormalities in bird populations this year. However, it has been rather dry this fall so far

The area is well known as the wintering ground of what has become a large (about 1,000 strong) flock of Sandhill Cranes and is also one of the best places to see sparrows in the area. Six years ago's trip found a Mountain Bluebird, which staying all winter. However, there is considerable concern over the apparent declines in populations of many passerine species in West Jefferson County.

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 G and A Turf Farm sign on Johnson Road at the intersection. Contact Field Trip chair Steve Mayes, gtaudubon@aol.com for further information. This will be largely a "car birding" trip, car pooling desired.



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

The E.O Siecke State Forest Newton County

In regards to public land sometimes we forget how lucky we are here in Jefferson County until a flood or a hurricane temporarily takes it away. But we are not lacking for federal wildlife reserves, state parks, municipal parks and river districts that provide us places to pursue our hobby with as much vigor as one cares to devote to it. And there is no lack of birds.

Others, like Newton County, are not as lucky. Its land is mostly privately owned and the few main roadways that run through and across are not birder friendly due to high speed traffic. Despite the length of the county the habitat is mostly monotonous with only the extremes of Deweyville to the south offering a small taste of the boggy Big Thicket and the lake of Toledo Bend to the north. The Sabine River that serves as its eastern border is only accessible by automobile at a few points along highways that cross into Louisiana. The few other roads that are shown on maps are almost all quite primitive; none are paved.

But there is a hidden jewel nestled in the heart of this county just east of Kirbyville, almost the only tract of publically owned non-residential land in the County.

The E.O. Siecke State Forest is 1,722 acres divided into what could be called vignettes. There is a remnant slash pine forest, a maturing longleaf pine and a working pine plantation just at the stage of growth to be of interest to breeding Yellow-breasted Chats and Prairie Warblers.

Interested in the challenge of building a bird checklist a county like Newton presents and looking for new habitat, I discovered the little birded state forest this past summer. Starting south at the parking lot, I soon walked into a wide field of purple gayfeather dotted with emerging long leaf pine and heard the lilting, ethereal song of a Wood Thrush. There was an Eastern Wood-Pewee flycatching and feeding its young, a Common Yellowthroat calling and I saw Indigo Buntings. Numerous Acadian Flycatchers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Red-eyed, Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos were heard along the trails at Trout Creek.

Walking further north down the main trail into the forest I heard the sharp alarm calls of Summer Tanagers, saw adult and immature Red-headed Woodpeckers. A Red-shouldered Hawk whined from a row of mature pines. Wandering east on a side trail I found the pine plantation and heard Yellow-breasted Chats from all directions and finally the faint call of a male Prairie Warbler. When I reached the end of the main trail at the cross road I found a beautiful long leaf pine forest carpeted with lush ferns that was reminiscent of Angelina National Forest.

Along the way I heard Pine Warblers, numerous Hooded Warblers, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Carolina Wren and Mourning Doves. In the end I wondered what I may have missed since it was getting late in the warbler breeding season, but this state forest will surely have more delights and surprises no matter what time of year. It is an outstanding place to hike and bird.

Sheila K Hebert

Golden Triangle Audubon Society Annual Meeting

Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, 6088 Babe Zaharias Drive, Beaumont, Texas, 77705
Thursday November 19, 2020; 7:00 p.m.

The annual meeting of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society will be held on Thursday November 19, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, 6088 Babe Zaharias Drive, Beaumont, Texas, 77705

At this meeting we will hold elections for all officer positions, except President, for a one year term, calendar year 2020. The term of President Sheila Hebert continues through December 31, 2021.

The chair of the Nominating Committee, President Sheila Hebert, will welcome any suggestions for officers and board members, or you may submit written nominations in advance or make them orally at the meeting. Nominations must be made and seconded by members in good standing, and must be accompanied by evidence from the nominee that the nominee is willing to serve, if elected.

John A. Whittle, Secretary
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Report on Sabine Woods Work Day October 3, 2020

Another excellent Work Day was held on Saturday October 3 at Sabine Woods, with 20 volunteers contributing to the effort on the day. We thank each and every one of the following for their splendid accomplishments.

Andy Allen, Laura Baker, Richard Balsamo, Michael Cooper, Claudia Gilson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Denise and Gary Kelley, Steve Mayes, Andrea and Jim Nauman, Frank Ohrt, Christine Sliva, Betty Stevenson, Jana Whittle and one or two others whose names and email addresses I did not manage to record. Howard Davis and Ashley Fuselier had worked in the days before the Work Day

We got a lot accomplished. Among other things, we removed the twigs and small branches (there courtesy of Hurricane Laura) from the trails. We mowed all the trails and meadows. We trimmed the sides of all the trails inside the Woods. For the first time in about ten years, the northwest pond had dried up, and we were able to access the island in the center of it, enabling us to cut down a number of tallows and treat the stumps. The areas round the drips were cleaned up, and repairs completed on the drip systems. One bench at the drip was replaced. Some aggressive vines were removed. Quite a lot of giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*) was cut down (before it had a chance to seed). We cut down most of the excess "rattle bean" (*Sesbania drummondii*) in areas we cannot normally access. A few small areas of Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*) – non-native) were treated.

John A. Whittle

Field Trip to Smith Point – 26 September 2020

Southeast Texas is lucky in many ways as far as birding is concerned. This area has the best spring songbird migration in the country (in my biased opinion), plenty of shoreline for sea birds, wetlands for waterfowl and we are close enough to south Texas and Mexico to occasionally get the odd tropical bird. One other thing that our area has is one of the best hawk watches in the nation. Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area at Smith Point is one of the underappreciated birding gems of the upper Texas coast. It was at the hawk watch at Smith Point that the Golden Triangle Audubon held its September field trip. It is an annual tradition and always gives a unique birding experience!

Hawk watching is a good birding activity for those birders who like to sleep in a little bit. Most hawks do not really get up and around until the day starts heating up but there are early risers. Accipiters are the main early birds among the hawks of the upper Texas coast. Cooper's Hawks and, especially Sharp-shinned Hawks may be less reliant on thermals than the buteos and will start moving early, often right after dawn. Though these species certainly will use thermals and can be seen soaring high, you can often catch them zipping over the hawk watch tower early in the morning before the Broad-winged Hawks are awake. On the field trip day, there were a few Accipiters that gave close looks to the group as they came low over the tower and parking lot. It is unclear if they were migrating or perhaps hunting for breakfast! Given the number of them that appeared to have full crops, they did not stay hungry for too long! Sharpies and Cooper's are bird eaters so the oak mottes at Smith Point are perfect hunting grounds for them. They can prey on the migrating song birds that can also be abundant at Smith Point.

Speaking of song birds, Smith Point can be an excellent migration spot for them too. The field trip day saw plenty of migrating Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and travelling groups of Blue Jays as well. Many people do not think of Blue Jays as migratory since they are in the area all year around but, in fact, large numbers of Blue Jays from more northern areas show up in southeast Texas every year. Several Blue Grosbeaks were also found on the day along with their Northern Cardinal cousins. Barn Swallows zipped by the tower in small numbers while Cliff Swallows soared at higher levels. A Common Yellowthroat chipped from the brush along the shoreline while a Gray Catbird mewed from closer to the tower. A Brown Thrasher called and the Northern Mockingbirds were obvious as usual. One of the most obvious non-raptor species at the hawk watch is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. These tiny jewels buzz and fight around the feeders located on the tower at a frantic pace and can be present in large numbers. A special treat this year was a female Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird that also put in an appearance or two at the feeders and was seen by some of the birders. A few other non-song birds seen on the day included Belted Kingfisher, Chimney Swift and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Even though the field trip day was not a great one for land bird migrants, they are still always to be looked for on a trip to Smith Point.

The most numerous raptors at the Smith Point hawk watch are generally the Broad-winged Hawk and the Mississippi

Kite. Mississippi Kites were obvious right from the start of the day as there were about a dozen of these elegant raptors perched in some dead snags not too far from the tower. All of the Mississippi Kites seen on the day were immature birds which is typical for the time of year. The adult kites leave earlier on their long trip to South America while the young birds lag behind a bit. The kites got up from their perches fairly early in the day and started soaring around, looking for a thermal or a meal. Mississippi Kites eat mostly large flying insects like dragonflies and cicadas and will catch their prey in flight or snatch them from the tree tops and then dine on the wing dropping the bits they don't like (legs and wings) to the ground. Mississippi Kites were seen on and off all day though not in the huge numbers sometimes present. Broad-wings are typical buteos, preferring not to start moving until the thermals start forming as the day heats up. These small raptors are, by far, the most numerous hawks seen at this hawk watch and at all hawk watches in eastern North America. A good day at Smith Point can bring thousands of Broad-wings to this area. Broad-wings will also eat plenty of large insects in migration but dine primarily on an assortment of small mammals, reptiles and birds when on territory. On the field trip, the Broad-wings started to appear around 10 am which is pretty typical. From then on, kettles of Broad-winged Hawks were visible for most of the day. Ranging from a just a handful of birds to a few hundred, these swirling groups of hawks soared high above Smith Point and were visible against the few clouds in the sky on a beautiful fall day. Unfortunately, few of the birds were close to the tower on this day and most of the kettles were higher up and further out than is ideal. Still, the opportunity to see a few thousand hawks in one place is always welcome even if they are not as close as hoped!

Raptors are not the only birds that move in large numbers at Smith Point. Hundreds of White Ibis were seen in this day but only one of the often more common American White Pelican. Anhingas can easily be mistaken for migrating raptors as they soar in large groups over Smith Point as well. A good look will reveal the long necks and bills of these unique water birds and there were good opportunities to see them on the field trip day. Brown Pelicans were also seen in some numbers but mostly along the shore of Galveston Bay and not soaring up with the raptors. Magnificent Frigatebirds are a special treat for visitors to the Smith Point hawk watch, try getting this species at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania! A few lone frigatebirds were eventually supplanted by one distant soaring kettle of these tropical pirates on the field trip day. Frigatebirds do make their living by stealing the food of other birds but are still great to see despite their unsavory habits! Some days at Smith Point in the fall can also produce huge kettles of migrating Wood Storks and endless streams of swallows passing by. That was not the case on this day, just more reason to come back again.

Other raptors were seen on the day as well. An Osprey flew along the bay and dove after some seafood. A single White-tailed Kite was seen flying by. Since this is a resident species in the area, it was unclear if this was one of the locals or a migrating bird. A Swainson's Hawk was called by Bob

Baez, the official hawk counter among a kettle of distant Broad-wings but not everyone managed to find this larger species among the swirling mass of smaller hawks. Often many other species are seen during a migration day at Smith Point. Northern Harriers will soon be common and Smith Point can be a great place to see all of our usual falcon species (American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and Crested Caracara) though the field trip day was not a good one for falcons. As the season progresses, species like Red-tailed Hawk and Bald Eagle will become easier to find along with the possibility of rarer species like Ferruginous Hawk or Golden Eagle. The Golden Triangle group was likely too late for the bulk of the migrating Swallow-tailed Kites as they are early migrants often passing through in August. The Golden Triangle field trip is designed to hit the peak of the Broad-winged Hawk migration in late September but hawk watching is very weather dependent so it is impossible to predict the good days very far in advance. Ideally, the trip would fall a day or two after a cold front passes through and would feature a good north wind. This scenario provides the best numbers and diversity of raptors.

The Smith Point hawk watch provides a unique birding opportunity not available just anywhere. A spot with just the right geography to concentrate southbound raptors in the fall and often produces days with hundreds or thousands of raptors overhead is a great thing to have nearby. True, Smith Point is a little out of the way and COVID restrictions do currently limit the number of people on the tower at once but that does not change the great birding at this spot. The Gulf Coast Bird

Observatory always does a fantastic job of sponsoring the hawk watch and continues to do so even during the unique conditions of 2020. The chance to see huge kettles or Broad-winged Hawks joined by migrating Anhingas and soaring Magnificent Frigatebirds is not something to pass up. That is why the Golden Triangle Audubon Society will likely be back to Smith Point next September to experience hawk migration at its best!

The Following list includes the official hawk count for the day along with birds seen by the trip leaders:

Chimney Swift (1); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (25); Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird (1); Laughing Gull (60); Caspian Tern (1); Royal Tern (10); Forster's Tern (5); Magnificent Frigatebird (20); Anhinga (45); Neotropic Cormorant (10); American White Pelican (1); Brown Pelican (50); Little Blue Heron (1); Snowy Egret (1); Great Egret (1); White Ibis (350); White-faced/Glossy Ibis (60); Black Vulture (6); Turkey Vulture (5); Osprey (2); White-tailed Kite (1); Mississippi Kite (96); Northern Harrier (3); Sharp-shinned Hawk (72); Cooper's Hawk (19); Broad-winged Hawk (3703); Swainson's Hawk (4); Belted Kingfisher (1); Red-bellied Woodpecker (1); Blue Jay (50); Barn Swallow (20); Cliff Swallow (5); Cliff/Cave Swallow (20); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (50); Gray Catbird (1); Brown Thrasher (1); Northern Mockingbird (3); Common Yellowthroat (1); Northern Cardinal (3); Blue Grosbeak (5); Indigo Bunting (1)

Steve Mayes

Jefferson County Fall Migration Count – September 19, 2020

In September last year, flooding in the wake of Tropical Storm Imelda resulted in an inability to access large section of the county, and we were left with little choice but to cancel the 2019 Fall Migration Count. Thus, we were particularly looking forward to this year's count to investigate the effect of that storm and flooding. There was a double whammy. Imelda (19 September 2019) may well have struck before populations had recovered from Hurricane Harvey (28 August 2017). As we reported in an article in the March 2020 Brown Pelican, the December 2019 populations of several species, especially Loggerhead Shrikes, in west Jefferson County appear to have been drastically reduced. There is some hope in the numbers on this count that the declines may not be particularly long lived, although we must await more surveys. The Migration Counts cover as much of the county as we are able easily to access – there are large areas of brackish marsh along the Gulf of Mexico in McFaddin NWR that are not easily accessible – so include areas that drain rapidly as well as the flood prone western parts of the county. Below, we will compare with the fall 2018 numbers where such seems meaningful. Unfortunately, we do not have nearly as much data on any of the surrounding counties. Both Harvey and Imelda caused more flooding in Jefferson County than in any neighboring county except possibly Orange County.

The weather was good, with nothing to significantly impact the birds or our ability to locate and record them. However, it was a rather dry early fall up to count date, with relatively modest rainfall in Hurricane Laura on 27 August. The preliminary totals are 11,117 individuals of 162 species. The number of species is close to the midpoint of the recent 150-174 range. The number of individuals can be influenced by finding or not finding some of the large roving flocks of various "blackbird" species and to a lesser extent, the beach bird flocks along the shore. The number was at the lower end of the recent range.

As is normal, the count day was before we expect many of the wintering ducks to arrive. The number of Mottled Ducks, a species of some concern over the last decade or more, was double to alarmingly low seven in 2018. Both species of Whistling-Ducks are now firmly established in the county.

All dove and pigeon numbers were low – Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove and White-winged Doves, and perhaps more of concern, Mourning Doves. It is perfectly possible that they are more susceptible to adverse outcomes from the storms.

Whip-poor-wills are a relatively rare migrants through Southeast Texas, so we were please to record one for the first time in the approximately 25-year history of the count. They are an order of magnitude less common than Chuck-will's-widows with which they share a preference for open forest habitat, which are probably declining. It is surprising that we do not find more Chucks, and we found none this year/

We were pleased to find a good number of Chimney Swifts after missing the species in 2018. By fall, they tend to have congregated into large roosts in chimneys and the like, into which they descend very quickly in the evening. These roosts are often in areas that are not obvious targets for our counters. Hummingbird numbers do not seem to be in any trouble, but the numbers that are found on our counts continue to decline.

Rail numbers were perfectly normal, but Common Gallinule numbers were about four times those of recent years. The cause of this was the concentration of well over 100 in Cattail Marsh near the boardwalk. Although duck weed affects many other species by reducing open water, the Gallinules apparently find it an attractive foodstuff. Although it is likely not of concern, four American Coots is a very low number for the count. Duckweed is listed as a food that coots like, but they also require some open water. No doubt, as the fall progresses, there will be more open water, and the large rafts of coots we are used to seeing in winter will be there.

American Avocets are normally quite numerous by mid-September. One this year follows none in 2018. This year, access to the Sea rim Beach was very limited, and a lot of the birds will have recognized that they would not be disturbed on the beach east of the visitor facilities. However, Snowy Plovers were often found on the west beach in some numbers, but unfortunately it seems as if they have abandoned that area. There were none on count day. Three Solitary Sandpipers was a good showing for a species that stands by its name, and is found only about every third year on the count.

This year, it seems that all Least Terns had already departed (unless the last few were hiding in the inaccessible east beach at Sea Rim). A group of Black Skimmers was seen near the ship channel, the first in three years. Brown Pelicans were plentiful.

Brown Boobies are being seen year round along the Upper Texas Coast with increasing frequency, so it is not really surprising that we added the species to the all-time count list. However, what is surprising was the spectacular way it was added, with 44 being identified on and around the gas production platforms in Sabine Lake just off the North levee of Pleasure Island. The nearest location where significant numbers are found is the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, with smaller numbers on many coastal structures between there and southeast Texas. They are strong flyers. Nesting is apparently restricted to predator-free islands in tropical seas, but as far as we know, there are no nesting records for the United States. The birds breed when four or more years old, so pre-breeding age birds may wander far from the nesting locations. Another Sulid species, the Northern Gannet, occurs in winter along the Gulf coast, but the nearest nesting colonies of that species are in the Canadian Maritime provinces. It will be interesting to find out where the Brown Boobies seen along the Gulf Coast nest.

Reddish Egrets are generally found in the county only in the fall and are usually immature birds. We hope that perhaps they may become more year-round in the area, but the problem may be that they prefer smallish offshore islands for breeding. Each year it seems we either have White Ibis or dark Ibis in numbers in the county, but not both. This year, White Ibis numbers are seen to be lower than 2018, while dark Ibis (Glossy/White-faced Ibis) much higher. Roseate Spoonbills were exceptionally scarce this year.

Fourteen Ospreys almost doubled the highest number in prior years. During the count, a White-tailed Hawk nest with two adults feeding a chick was discovered west of Ebner Road, and right on the Jefferson/Liberty County line. We were pleased to find two Swainson's Hawks after none in 2017 or 2018. In fact, one of them was in the vicinity of the White-tailed Hawk nest.

We did not do well on owls this year. For the first time in many years, we found no Great Horned Owls. The Barn Owls we have come to rely on were not to be found. Yet we did find three Barred Owls, a species normally difficult to find south of Hardin County. The presence of 13 Crested Caracaras shows that the population of this species in the county continues to increase.

Low Eastern Kingbird and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher numbers do lead to questions about whether the insect populations were low, although perhaps it is not valid to make such judgments using probably migrating birds. After the dismal showing of Loggerhead Shrikes in our January analysis, it was somewhat reassuring to find 28, although many of these were in the southern tier of the county. Twenty-eight is still only about one-half of the numbers in recent years, and a much smaller fraction of the number in the 1996-2005 era, and the decline in the western part of the county is very worrisome.

Tree Swallows are usually reasonably plentiful by count day, but this year's five (and 2018's same number) is much lower than in the past. Anecdotally, numbers last winter did not seem low, but time will tell. The absence of Cliff Swallows is strange, as all evidence is that the breeding population in the county continues to increase. The possibility that the relatively dry early fall significantly inhibited the species of insects that swallows feed on, thus causing early departure for points south, cannot be discounted.

Red-breasted Nuthatches are usually found in the area in very limited numbers, and more in the more wooded areas just north of Jefferson County. However, one is known to have spent last winter in Sabine Woods and vicinity, and before that one or two "overshooting" migrant birds were seen. However, they have mostly headed back north to coniferous woods of the Big Thicket. The one on count day has been followed by up to four in the last few days of the month, and it will be interesting to see if any stay all winter. There are only a few pine trees in Sabine Woods, but the birds also made use of the oaks. Brown-headed Nuthatches are also difficult to find in Jefferson County, although increasingly easy in the areas just north. One was seen in the riparian area of Pine Island Bayou in the north-east of the county.

Northern Mockingbird numbers were about half what they were a decade or so ago. Just as with shrikes, the habitat changes wrought by the flooding of Harvey and Imelda may be at least partly to blame. Based on anecdotal evidence, we surmise that the decline is more marked in the bushes round the edges of fields than it is on the birds living around houses. To some extent, the fence lines around fields have been cleared and this may have been a factor. Eastern Meadowlarks have always been difficult to find in September, and we are pleased to report finding eight this year whereas many recent years have produced none or at most one. We have previously speculated that the meadowlarks we see in summer go south in winter to be replaced by birds that bred further north, and that the September hiatus is a result of the summer birds leaving before the wintering birds arrive. Red-winged Blackbirds have long been a conspicuous part of the avifauna, and the numbers on the last three of four years have been low. So we were gratified to record a very significant increase – well over double – the 2018 number.

Many birders become almost obsessed with the number of warblers, although this is not really meaningful for year to year comparisons because of the vagaries of wind and weather. This year's number was 20, plus one more (Yellow-breasted Chat) for those who have not forgiven the American Ornithological Society for removing that species from the warbler family. Cerulean Warbler – a very rare migrant in southeast Texas – was added to the all-time list of species seen on the count.

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (209); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous. (44); DUCK, Wood (3); TEAL, Blue-winged (181); DUCK, Mottled (15); PHEASANT, Ring-necked (); GREBE, Pied-billed (22); PIGEON, Rock (125); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (13); DOVE, Inca (4); GROUND-DOVE, Common (); DOVE, White-winged (51); DOVE, Mourning (176); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (4); EASTERN Whip-poor-will (1); SWIFT, Chimney (35); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (13); HUMMINGBIRD species (2); RAIL, King (1); RAIL, Clapper (23); GALLINULE, Common (219); COOT, American (4); STILT, Black-necked (62); AVOCET, American (1); PLOVER, Black-bellied (7); KILLDEER (88); PLOVER, Semipalmated (6); PLOVER, Piping (3); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (2); SANDERLING (135); SANDPIPER, Least (59); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated. (8); SANDPIPER, Peep species (20); SANDPIPER, Spotted (7); SANDPIPER, Solitary (3); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (8); WILLET (4); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (68); YELLOWLEGS, species (1); GULL, Laughing (771); GULL, Ring-billed (1); GULL, Species (109); TERN, Gull-billed (2); TERN, Caspian (1); TERN, Black (12); TERN, Forster's (157); TERN, Royal (40); SKIMMER, Black (18); BOOBY, Brown (44); ANHINGA (2); CORMORANT, Neotropic (202); CORMORANT, Species (3); PELICAN, Brown (185); BITTERN, Least (3); HERON, Great Blue (23); EGRET, Great (191); EGRET, Snowy (141); HERON, Little Blue (71); HERON, Tricolored (57); EGRET, Reddish (4); EGRET, Cattle (2651); HERON, Green (9); NIGHT-HERON, Black-cr. (2); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-cr. (3); IBIS, White (771); IBIS, Glossy (1); IBIS, White-faced (149); IBIS, Plegadis (848); SPOONBILL, Roseate (7); VULTURE, Black (55); VULTURE, Turkey (150); OSPREY (14); KITE, White-tailed (2); KITE, Mississippi (1); HARRIER, Northern (3); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (3); HAWK, Cooper's (2); HAWK, Accipiter species (1); EAGLE, Bald (1); HAWK, White-tailed (3); HAWK, Red-shouldered (5); HAWK, Broad-winged (6); HAWK, Swainson's (2); HAWK, Red-tailed (4); OWL, Barred (3);

KINGFISHER, Belted (8); WOODPECKER, Red-head. (12); WOODPECKER, Red-bell. (11); WOODPECKER, Downy (11); WOODPECKER, Pileated (1); CARACARA, Crested (13); KESTREL, American (3); MERLIN (2); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (1); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (5); FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bell. (1); FLYCATCHER, Traill's (1); FLYCATCHER, Least (3); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (3); FLYCATCHER, Gt. Crested (1); KINGBIRD, Eastern (4); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tail. (11); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (28); VIREO, White-eyed (11); VIREO, Red-eyed (9); JAY, Blue (111); CROW, American (31); CROW, Fish (21); CROW, Species (2); SWALLOW, Tree (5); SWALLOW, N Rough-wing. (3); SWALLOW, Barn (42); SWALLOW, Cliff (8); SWALLOW, Cliff/Cave (30); SWALLOW species (11); CHICKADEE, Carolina (23); NUTHATCH, Red-bellied (1); NUTHATCH, Brown-head. (1); WREN, Marsh (2); WREN, Carolina (15); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (54); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (11); THRUSH, Swainson's (3); ROBIN, American (1); CATBIRD, Gray (5); THRASHER, Brown (2); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (114); STARLING, European (418); SPARROW, Seaside (5); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (1); BLACKBIRD, Yellow-head. (2); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (8); ORIOLE, Baltimore (3); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (195); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (353);

GRACKLE, Common (295); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (102); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (448); GRACKLE, Gt.-tailed/ Boat-tailed (2); BLACKBIRD species (41); OVENBIRD (1); WARBLER, Worm-eating (1); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (6); WARBLER, Black-and-wh. (7); WARBLER, Prothonotary (2); WARBLER, Tennessee (3); WARBLER, Nashville (1); YELLOWTHROAT, Com. (25); WARBLER, Hooded (1); REDSTART, American (11); WARBLER, Cerulean (1); PARULA, Northern (2); WARBLER, Magnolia (9); WARBLER, Blackburnian (1); WARBLER, Yellow (8); WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (2); WARBLER, Pine (3); WARBLER, Yellow-throat'd (1); WARBLER, Canada (2); WARBLER, Wilson's (1); CARDINAL, Northern (68); GROSBEAK, Blue (22); BUNTING, Indigo (2); BUNTING, Painted (3); SPARROW, House (66); TOTAL (11117); Number of species (162); Number of Observers (14); Number of Parties (7); Number of Party-Hours (29.9);

Participants: Michael Cooper, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Denise and Gary Kelley, Todd McGrath, Steve Mayes, Sherrie Roden, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, Jana and John Whittle

Bird Sightings – September 2020

For this column, we review, looking for rare and very rare species, all credible eBird and other records reported to us from nearby Texas counties – 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: Yet another tropical weather event came and went, but tropical storm Beta on September 21-23-had very

little if any impact on our area.

The most startling sighting was that of at least 44 Brown Boobies on and around one gas platform a few hundred yards off the North Levee of Pleasure Island. Although small numbers have been present in Louisiana for some time now, especially on the Pontchartrain Bridge, and here in extreme Southeast Texas, a number in the forties is unprecedented.

Even though many, if not most fall migrants exhibit much wider migration windows than they do in the spring, there are a good number of warbler sightings that are outside the normal period. Cerulean Warblers are downright rare in the fall on any date, as are Blackpoll Warblers, although fall Blackpolls are difficult to distinguish from pale Bay-breasted Warblers. The outbreak of Veeries in the Houston area in the second half of September is remarkable, as none of the *Catharus* thrushes are seen in any number in fall migration on the Upper Coast.

Seen in our Core Counties (listed above) September 2020

Gadwall	Sep 3	JEF-TP (1 female) HS (cont bird)
Lsr Black-backed Gull	Sep 4	JEF-SRSP West (2) Todd McGrath (one 2nd yr; one 3rd yr)
Brown Booby	Sep 19-30	JEF-PI (prob about 45) Jana Whittle, Harlan Stewart, Sherrie Roden, mult obs
Rufous/Allen's Humm.	Sep 5	JEF-Hamshire (1) Christine Sliva
Virginia Rail	Sep 4	ORA-Bailey's Fish Cap (1) Tony Frank (heard only)
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Sep 19,29,30	JEF-SW (up to 4) Michael Cooper, mult obs
Bobolink	Sep 26	JEF-SW (1) Barbara Stern
Cerulean Warbler	Sep 19-20	JEF-SW (1) mult obs
Blackpoll Warbler	Sep 26	JEF-SW (1) Barbara Stern

Nearby Counties – September 2020

Gadwall	Sep 5	HAS-Hollister at Little York (10) John Bartos
Black-billed Cuckoo	Sep 26	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Drew Dickert
Lsr. Black-backed Gull	Sep 2-3	HAS-Morgan's Pt (1) Stuart Nelson
Great Black-backed Gull	Sep 15 Sep 30	GAL-Bolivar Flats (1) Doug Petrie GAL-Beach nr San Luis Pass (1) Jodi H
Sooty Tern	Sep 18	HAS-Seabrook-Back Bay (1) Vernon Fridy
	Sep 22	GAL-Galveston IS SP (1) Ricard Liebler
Glossy Ibis	Sep 27	LIB-Abbotts Creek Rach (1) Mike Riley
Harris's Hawk	Sep19	CHA-Smith Point Hawk Watch (2) Bob Baez, mult obs
Ladder-back. W'pecker	Sep 5	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Richard Liebler
Yellow-bell. Sapsucker	Sep 29	HAS-Huffman (1) Bonnie de Grood
Couch's Kingbird	Sep 26	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Jum Hinson, Drew Dickert
	Sep 26-29	HAS-Pine Forest Country Club (1) Timothy White (continuing)
Bell's Vireo	Sep 21	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1)Jim Hinson, Stuart Nelson
Warbling Vireo	Sep19	HAS-Christia V Adair Park (1) David Sarkozi
Veery	Sep 23	HAS-Russ Pitman Park (1) Mark Meyer, Barbara Stern
	Sep 23	HAS-Christia V Adair Park (1) David Sarkozi

	Sep 23-25, 28	HAS-Rice Univ (3) Cin-Ty Lee
	Sep 26	HAS-Armand Bayou Nature Ctr (1) Farokh Jamalyana
	Sep 29	HAS-Russ Pitman Pk (1) Evan Chastain
Hermit Thrush	Sep 29	HAS-Sheldon Lake SP (1) Kathie Holder
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Sep 28	GAL-Friendswood (1) Dan Hailey
Cedar Waxwing	Sep 16	HAS-El Franco Lee Park (3) Steve Rogow
Pine Siskin	Sep 28	HAS-Katy (1) Richard Tebo
American Goldfinch	Sep 13	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Nina Rach
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Sep 30	CAL-Corbina Rd (1) Charlotte Chehotsky
Bullock's Oriole	Sep 27	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Cin Ty-Lee, Barbara Stern, Janet Neath
Golden-winged Warbler	Sep 24	HAS-Baytown (2) Mickey Redus
Swainson's Warbler	Sep 23-24	HAS-Central Northwest (1)Travis Ly
Orange-crown. Warbler	Sep 13	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Nina Rach
Blackburnian Warbler	Sep 22	HAS-Bliss Meadows Park (1) Dale Wolck
	Sep 22-24	HAS-Russ Pitman Park (1) Mary Ann Beauchemin
	Sep 23	HAS-Woodland Park) Mary Goldsby
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Sep 12	HAS-Bay Area Park (1) Elizabeth Timmer
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Sep 24	HAS-Mercer Botanic Gardens (2) Christy Jones
Scarlet Tanager	Sep 18	HAS-Christia V. Adair Park (1) David Sarkozi
	Sep 25-26	HAS-UH Clear Lake Nature Trail (1) Farokh Jamalyaria
Rose-breast. Grosbeak	Sep 20	HAS-Seabrook (1 fem) Philip Robinson (very marginally early)

Abbreviations used: ANG – Angelina County; ANWR – Anahuac NWR; BF – Bolivar Flats; 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; LIB – Liberty County; MC – Michael Cooper; NEW – Newton County; ORA – Orange County; PI – Pleasure Is, Port Arthur;; PW – Phillip Wallace; SAA – San Augustine Co.; SAB – Sabine County; SH – Sheila Hebert; SM – Steve Mayes, SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; 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.

Many rare bird sightings in Texas are posted on Facebook Texbirds or on the TEXTBIRDS listserv. Archives of the listserv are at www.freelists.org/archive/texbirds. It is not necessary to subscribe 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.