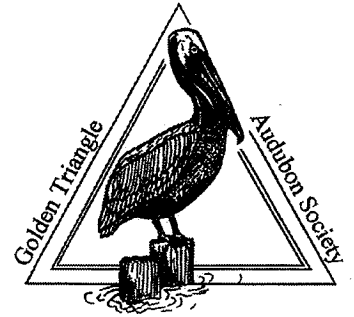


# The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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Vol. 27 No 12

December 2021

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## 2021-22 Christmas Bird Counts

In this Covid-19 era, only counts which normally have a small number of participants will meet in the morning; others will distribute all assignments in advance. Audubon's guidelines suggest restricting carpooling to "within existing familiar or social 'pod' groups."

Please help the compilers in this difficult year by enabling them to plan in the week preceding the count, and avoiding any unnecessary last minute changes. Detail of other Texas counts are available on the Houston Audubon web site at <https://houstonaudubon.org/birding/christmas-bird-counts/cbc.html>

### **Beech Creek (TXBE): Tuesday, December 21, 2021**

This count takes place in Tyler and Jasper Counties and includes Steinhagen Lake, the Beech Creek unit of Big Thicket National Preserve and Martin Dies State Park. If necessary, meet the compilers 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. Compiler: Sheila Hebert, [sheilakhebert@hotmail.com](mailto:sheilakhebert@hotmail.com) (409-767-1216). Co-compiler Phillip Hight.

### **Bolivar Peninsula (TXBP): Thursday, December 16, 2021**

This count circle in Chambers County 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](mailto:sgmayes@hotmail.com).

### **Johnson Bayou - SW Louisiana (LARB): Tuesday, December 14, 2021**

Johnson Bayou CBC has a rich history beginning in 1976 to present. Though the count is located just across the state line in Louisiana, most participants are from Texas and everyone is welcome. While much of the area is private, local landowners 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. Areas covered include beach, coastal cheniers, marsh and grasslands. 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](mailto:garymke@sbcglobal.net), telephone 409-679-1616) for more information, assignments and directions.

### **Orange County (TXOC): Saturday January 1, 2022.**

Habitat covers marsh, woodlands, and the Cow Bayou watershed. All are invited, even if you are not an experienced birder or are 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. The more pairs of eyes in a group, the more birds will be seen. Contact Gary Kelley ([garymke@sbcglobal.net](mailto:garymke@sbcglobal.net), telephone 409-679-1616), for more information.

### **Sea Rim State Park (TXSR): Thursday December 30, 2021.**

This count in Jefferson County includes Sea Rim SP, Texas Point NWR, and parts of J.D. Murphree WMA and McFaddin NWR as well as the Sabine Pass area. To participate, contact John Whittle ([johnawhittle@aol.com](mailto:johnawhittle@aol.com), 409-722-4193) at least a week in advance for assignments. Be advised that public restrooms are limited in the Sabine Pass area. Also, northbound traffic from Sabine Pass to Highway 73 is very congested from 3:30 pm to 6:00 pm on weekdays – expect significant delays. If you are able to bring a boat for either shallow lake (Keith Lake area and Murphree) or the Sabine Neches Waterway, please contact John Whittle in advance. Sponsored by Golden Triangle Audubon Society. Check the website for any last minute updates. Contact John Whittle ([johnawhittle@aol.com](mailto:johnawhittle@aol.com), 409-722-4193) for details.

### **Turkey Creek (TXTC): Saturday, December 18, 2021.**

This count in Hardin and Tyler Counties includes the Turkey Creek and Hickory Creek Savannah Units of the Big Thicket National Preserve. If necessary, meet the compilers outside the entrance to 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. Compiler: Sheila Hebert, [sheilakhebert@hotmail.com](mailto:sheilakhebert@hotmail.com) (409-767-1216). Co-compiler Nancy Angell.

## *The Brown Pelican*

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

### See Christmas Bird Count information on page 1.

**Future Programs and Field Trips. (All events are TENTATIVE!).** The latest information is always available on the web site at [goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://goldentriangleaudubon.org).

**Saturday, January 22, 2022.**

**Tentative Field Trip to Cattail Marsh, Beaumont.** Meet at the parking lot for Cattail Marsh at 8:00 am. The parking lot is accessed from the loop road round the main picnic areas in Tyrrell Park. Many birds can be seen from the boardwalk and nearby roads with minimal walking, **but the group will probably make a leisurely three-or-so-mile hike round the various cells in the marsh. Be advised that, while you can turn around and retrace your steps at any point, there are no meaningful "shortcuts" after you start on the levee between cells 3 and 4.** If you don't want to walk that far, there will be someone on the boardwalk to help you identify the many 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. We will try to have the Education Center open for those who do not want to make the hike.

#### Directions to Tyrrell Park From the South

Go "north" on US69/96/287 around the south side of Beaumont.

Take Texas 124 (south or west, whichever it is signed) towards Fannett (left turn under the highway).

Travel about 1/2 mile to the first light.

At the first light, turn left onto Tyrrell Park Road and go about 3/4 mile.

Turn left into the Park through the arch. Continue ahead and proceed about two-

thirds of the way round the main loop and into the well-marked Cattail Marsh parking area.

#### From IH10

Exit at Walden Road on the west side of Beaumont.

Go south of Walden Road for about 1/2 mile to the first light.

At the light go straight over Highway 124 onto Tyrrell Park Road and as above.

**Saturday February 19 2022.**

**Tentative. Field Trip to Anahuac NWR.** We plan to meet at the Visitor Information Station just beyond the entrance at 8:30 a.m. There are toilets there, accessible at all times To reach Anahuac NWR from Winnie, take Highway 124 south to FM1985. (It is 11.0 miles from IH-10 and half a mile less from Highway 73.) Turn right (west) on FM1985 and proceed about **11 miles** to the **MAIN** Anahuac NWR Entrance Road on the left (to the south). As you drive along FM1985, check any cowbird/blackbird flocks carefully for Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

The entrance to the Main Refuge is just over 3 miles down the Entrance Road. Obey the speed limits on that road and in the refuge! Watch along the entrance road especially near the south end for Crested Caracaras and White-tailed Kites. A Harris's Hawk was there in late November as well as a White-tailed Hawk.

We will probably visit both the main unit ("Old Anahuac") and the Skillern Tract, looking primarily for waterfowl and other waterbirds but also raptors and sparrows.

There are usually geese and Bald Eagles on and near the refuge in winter, and Shoveler Pond attracts large numbers of ducks.



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

Say's Phoebe and Cinnamon Teal are possibilities.

While it is not anticipated that this field trip will necessitate extensive walking, some of the group will probably walk the 550 yard (one-way)

Willows trail, and it is a 400 yard (1/4 mile) walk from the Skillern Tract parking area to the observation platform. All roads that we will use will be easily passable in ordinary vehicles. For most of the drive round Shoveler

Pond the road is one-car wide but there are a few pull-offs most of which will accommodate only three or four cars. There is space to leave vehicles close to the meeting place, and there is parking and toilets at the Skillern Tract.

## New National Audubon CEO

NEW YORK. November 17, 2021

The National Audubon Society today announced that Dr. Elizabeth Gray, currently serving as acting CEO, will become the organization's 11<sup>th</sup> leader and the next CEO. A scientist, ornithologist and global conservation leader, Dr. Gray will be the first woman to hold the CEO title in the organization's 116 year history.

"Elizabeth is a trailblazer. She's a trained ornithologist, a global climate change and conservation expert, a strong and proven fundraiser, and a seasoned organizational leader and teambuilder who has a long track record incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion in the work she leads" said Susan Bell, Audubon Board Chair and CEO Search Committee Chair. "I'm so proud to have led the search to name such an outstanding and experienced leader and the first woman to be CEO in Audubon's history. I'm looking forward to our partnership together with the board and the talented and passionate Audubon staff to address the most important conservation issues of our time."

"Becoming Audubon's CEO feels like a homecoming for me. Birds launched my career into conservation, and they opened my eyes to the importance of tackling climate change. As an early warning system for environmental threats, birds are the key to addressing the greatest conservation challenges of our time," said Dr. Elizabeth Gray, CEO of the National Audubon Society. "Birds bring me so much joy and I see that in the team at Audubon as well. Birds are a uniting force, bringing together communities across the hemisphere. Over the past six months as acting CEO, I have been honored and inspired by the opportunity to work with Audubon's outstanding staff and volunteer network, and I am looking forward to partnering together to build a brighter future for birds and the planet. As I've been known to say, bird survival is human survival."

### Dr. Elizabeth Gray

Dr. Gray joined Audubon in March of 2021 as President and Chief Conservation Officer and accepted the role of Acting CEO in May 2021. Trained as an ornithologist, Dr. Gray has spent more than three decades as a dedicated conservationist, including considerable time in the field nationally and abroad. A champion of science-based conservation, her work has focused on building strong partnerships with local communities, as well as state, national and international environmental partners to protect the planet.

Dr. Gray joined Audubon from The Nature Conservancy where she served in a number of leadership roles, most recently as Global Managing Director for Climate. She has a significant track record on climate change leadership at the

national and global level including: serving as a global spokesperson for the Conservancy's climate change work at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings; launching regional programs in climate adaptation and natural climate solutions across the United States, Canada and the Caribbean; and, publishing numerous scientific papers focused on her research in climate-impacted areas such as Latin America, East Africa, Hawaii and the Pacific Northwest.

In the last six months, Elizabeth has elevated Audubon's profile at significant climate events like NYC Climate Week and COP26 and has already raised several million dollars to advance Audubon's mission. As Audubon embarks on its next strategic plan, it will build upon Dr. Gray's inclusive vision to focus the work in three interwoven pillars: Climate, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB), and Hemispheric Conservation.

Prior to her time at Audubon, Dr. Gray served as one of five members of The Nature Conservancy's Global Gender Equity Council, advising the CEO, President, and COO/General Counsel on gender issues across the organization. She founded the first urban conservation program in Washington, D.C., and has worked to empower the next generation of conservation leaders through a young professional's network and youth advocacy program. Dr. Gray earned her Ph.D. in ecology from the University of Washington and holds an A.B. with highest honors in psychology from Harvard University.

Dr. Gray will assume the role of permanent CEO immediately and she will be based in Washington, D.C.

## Bird Sightings – November 2021

*(continued from page 7)*

Western Tanager	Nov 23 Nov 27	HAS-Friendswood (1) Chris Bick CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Paul Conover
Rose-breast. Grosbeak	Nov 2	HAS-Bay Area Park (1) Richard Hauck
Black-headed Grosbeak	Nov 27-28	HAS-San Jacinto Battleground (1) Dale Wolck
Blue Grosbeak	Nov 7-8 Nov 29	HAS-Bear Creek Oark (3) Jim Hinson GAL-Boddeker Rd (1) Sonny Bratz

**Abbreviations used:** ANG – Angelina County; ANWR – Anahuac NWR; 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; NEW – Newton County; ORA – Orange County; PI – Pleasure Is, Port Arthur;; 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.

## Field Trip to West Jefferson County – 20 November 2021

The annual Golden Triangle Audubon Field Trip to West Jefferson County is one of the highlights of our field trip program. It is close to home, and always produces a nice diversity of species. The area is mostly open land, but with some trees and usually some ponds. It is winter home to a wide variety of raptor species, a large flock of Sandhill Cranes and a variety of sparrows. Wintering waterfowl can be expected where there are ponds. We select November for this field trip because normally the great majority of our wintering birds have arrived by the third week of the month. So far this year, there are a number of species that are late in arriving. The normally numerous Savannah Sparrows are present but not yet in normal numbers. We are used to these sparrows rising from the roadside edges in number in all open areas. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Eastern Phoebe and Yellow-rumped Warblers are also reduced in number, and with those species, there is concern that they did not fare well in our February freeze. Time will allow a better evaluation, but for now, we are hoping they merely dallied further north this year, and will arrive shortly.

A good portion of the trip is "car birding" looking for interesting species, but that serves the useful purpose of showing participants the "birdy" areas so that they can return another day to explore the area on their own, taking as long as needed to identify and become familiar with the resident birds. We do, however, have a number of target birds for this trip!

Approximately 15 participants gathered at our traditional meeting point, the intersection of Johnson Road and FM365 in northwest Jefferson County. We do linger there as the "local" birds wake up and begin their morning foraging activities. Johnson Road at that point used to be bordered by a brushy field on the east and a combination of a stand of pine trees and open brush on the west, but the land on the east has been developed into houses on large lots. Nevertheless, we could see a perched Red-tailed Hawk, see and hear a number of Eastern Meadowlarks, see a few Savannah Sparrows, see and hear Yellow-rumped Warblers and Sedge Wrens. A couple of Wilson's Snipe erupted from the tall grass. Snow Geese were heard in the great distance and four Sandhill Cranes could be seen low in the far distance. A Merlin flew over and perched way out in the field to the west.

The group moved along Johnson Road a short distance to near where it crossed Vogel Gully. There we found an American Kestrel on a power line, the first of a good number we were to see on the day. This was encouraging, as there has been nationwide concern over Kestrel numbers. The house on the bank of the Gully has for some reason always been a magnet for Brewer's Blackbirds. There were 26 on the drop line, and this group was the first of several we were to see this day. This house has one or two cows in the small field behind it, and that seems to be a requirement for Brewer's Blackbirds. Two American Crows flew by. Next to the gully, a large number of Savannah Sparrows were feeding, but this was the only area we found them in normal numbers.

Next, we proceed to Heisig Road, and birded the edge of the nice stand of trees at the intersection. The four dogs that live at the house where Heisig turns south greeted us noisily as usual, but then were content to monitor our activities from the

edge of their yard. This is probably the best opportunity on the trip for typical woodland species, and although not quite as birdy as it has been in some years, we were able to coax a number of species that we could not expect anywhere else that morning to show. Those with an ability to hear very high pitched calls alerted the group to the presence of Golden-crowned Kinglets, and they along with Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a pair of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were seen in the tree-tops. A Red-bellied Woodpecker called, and with very little effort, three were coaxed into the open. A couple of House Wrens also called to disclose their presence. As we reached the edge of the woods, we hear very distant Greater White-fronted Geese but they were apparently low and behind trees. Three more Sandhill Cranes were seen in the distance.

We then proceeded leisurely down Heisig Road. Two Red-tailed Hawks, one American Kestrel and one Northern Harrier were to be expected in the open area, but a Cooper's Hawk was the only one on the day. The Loggerhead Shrike was the second on the day, another encouraging sign. Twenty more Sandhill Cranes were seen in the distance. At the end of Heisig Road, we joined League Road and headed back north. The first substantial flock of Red-winged Blackbirds was there, along with more Red-tailed Hawks, another Northern Harrier and another 40 flyby Sandhill Cranes.

Proceeding west on Willis Road, we found another flock of 20 Brewer's Blackbirds near the intersection with FM 1406. This group was accompanied by Brown-headed Cowbirds, and this location has been a reliable spot for wintering Brewer's for several years. Crossing over FM 1406, we began looking to see if we could find some Sandhill Cranes on the ground. We did see 48 flying, but no groups on the ground. We proceeded north on Ebner Road, finding yet another flock of eight Brewer's Blackbirds. We did see another 12 Cranes there. We might have been one day early, because on the following two afternoons, we estimate that between 2900 and 3100 Cranes flew over Willis Road, west of FM 1406 heading south-southwest between about 4:10 and 5:30 pm. We have seen this behavior in past years. They may well be coming down in the area south of the south end of Ebner Road, in an area where there is no public access. If they went more than about a mile south, they went into Chambers County.

At this point, we chose a route to our lunch stop that we have not traveled on this trip in past years. We continued on Ebner onto Liberty County Road 1011, the turned back north on County Road 1010. This is a very quiet well maintained shell road with hedges on each side. Although there were a few birds, the lack of sparrows and the like was noticeable. We continued up to US 90 for the lunch break.

After the lunch break, we headed for South China Road. Broadway in China soon turns into South China Road, always worth birding. Here we encountered a flock of 300 Common Grackles, and then proceed south. One of the few flooded fields in West Jefferson County this year is east of South China Road, some distance south of the intersection with Lawhon Road. The field is apparently set up for waterfowl hunting, and many of the ducks that were there a couple of weeks prior have decided it was better to go somewhere else. However, there were about 250 Northern Shoveler in the

shallower areas and two flocks of ducks, flying around nervously, 50 Northern Pintail and probably 200 Green-winged Teal. There were however, probably 750 Long-billed Dowitchers chattering away, and about 200 Dunlin both probing the shallow water. Twenty Tree Swallows were hawking insects over the water. Three Crested Caracaras were perched on trees, and a large number of Ibis, 200 dark ibis and 40 White Ibis were working the edges of the pond. There was also one American White Pelican, the sole remaining bird from a flock of about 20 the previous week.

After reaching FM365 at the end of South China, we headed along the first section of McDermand Road. There we found three Swamp Sparrows, two Lincolns Sparrows and another two Crested Caracaras. Backtracking, we headed up South China to Lawhon Road and proceeded east. Including birds perched on electricity transmission towers, we counted no fewer than ten Red-tailed Hawks along with five Northern Harriers. Ponds on the south side near New Bethel that were being used for crawfish farming have apparently been returned to being ponds suitable for ducks or shorebirds. The number of birds was not impressive, but that may take time. The roadside hedges produced a Swamp Sparrow and two Song Sparrows, and, in a new development, there was a roost of at least 12 Black-crowned Night-Herons. Whether the roost will endure the rather heavy traffic that uses that section of Lawhon Road remains to be seen. An immature Red-shouldered Hawk was the first seen on the day, although one was heard early on. Three white immature Little Blue Herons were also the first of that species on the day. Other species adding to the day list were four Laughing Gulls, three Roseate Spoonbills and two Pied-billed Grebes. Despite that interesting selection, the number of ducks was very limited. Ten Northern Shoveler, three or four Green-winged Teal and one Mottled Ducks were all there was. At that point, we called it a day.

We always like to use these field trips to evaluate trends in local bird populations. The take aways from this trip must include the total of 45 Red-tailed Hawks. Although it is difficult to be sure we are not double counting some of the flying birds, it is clear that this will be a banner year for wintering Red-tailed Hawks. American Kestrel numbers were also good with Northern Harrier not far behind, especially good with limited standing water. Taken alone, the number of Savannah Sparrows recorded belies the actual situation. The large number of the sparrows at one location on Johnson Road skewed the numbers, and, as of yet at least, numbers are way down. Most years, driving along the quiet roads in West Jefferson County produces clouds of sparrows rising from the bushes along the sides of the roads. We did not see any White-crowned Sparrows, although we might have heard a few. The jury is also out on Eastern Phoebe numbers as that species likely has high wintering site fidelity, and is known to have suffered badly in the February freeze. Similarly, the mortality of Ruby-crowned Kinglets in the freeze is likely to have been high.

Both Northern Mockingbird and Loggerhead Shrike numbers in West Jefferson County have been cause for great concern over the last few years, and this concern predates the February freeze. There may be a glimmer of hope in respect of Loggerhead Shrikes with four seen on the relatively limited mileage of roads we covered. Northern Mockingbirds are a different story. Anecdotally, we think that Northern

Mockingbirds in residential areas are not far off normal numbers, but in the open areas, they seem to be way down. Again, we have to wonder if the freeze affected the open area birds much more than those in the residential areas, perhaps because it did not affect the availability of food associated with human activity as much as it did the "wild" food. However, we will note that the crop of wild Yaupon berries this year seems to very good, so perhaps all the current Mockingbirds will need to worry about are nomadic flocks of Cedar Waxwings stripping those bushes they have guarded so carefully. There should be enough, however, to satisfy the needs of the hatch year birds, presaging a lower winter mortality. That normal winter mortality in many passerine species is very high. The estimates are that about 90 percent of the birds hatched in a year do not make it through the winter. Of course, food availability, while likely the most important constraint, is not the only problem for first year birds. Many have not yet learned the best strategies to avoid predators.

There is no doubt that there are fewer birds in West Jefferson County than just a few years ago. This may be largely a question of what happened to the blackbirds. This year, although not very noticeable on this particular field trip, the number of Brown-headed Cowbirds is back up. We again see the large, tight, swirling flocks characteristic of the species, but probably not quite as many as ten or more years ago. The numbers may not be good news for other passerines that experience nest parasitism. On the other hand, Red-winged Blackbird numbers remain very subdued. We do not have any evidence, but we have hypothesized that changes in rice production and harvesting, in the amount grown, in the semi dwarf rice varieties now used and harvesting efficiency have greatly reduced the spilled rice that probably sustained Red-winged Blackbirds in the past.

Birds seen by the leaders: Snow/Ross's Goose (two flocks by call); Greater White-fronted Goose (two flocks by call); Northern Shoveler (261); Mottled Duck (1); Northern Pintail (55); Green-winged Teal (203); Ruddy Duck (4); Pied-billed Grebe (2); Eurasian Collard-Dove (1); Mourning Dove (15); American Coot (10); Sandhill Crane (135); Killdeer (24); Dunlin (200); Long-billed Dowitcher (750); Wilson's Snipe (2); Laughing Gull (4); Neotropic Cormorant (1); American White Pelican (1); Black-crowned Night-Heron (12); Great Blue Heron (8); Great Egret (17); Snowy Egret (8); Little Blue Heron (4); White Ibis (62); White-faced/Glossy Ibis (234); Roseate Spoonbill(3); Turkey Vulture (22); Northern Harrier (8); Cooper's Hawk (1); Red-shouldered Hawk (1); Red-tailed Hawk (45); *Buteo* species (1); Belted Kingfisher (3); Red-bellied Woodpecker (3); Crested Caracara (6); American Kestrel (17); Merlin (1); Eastern Phoebe (7); Loggerhead Shrike (4); Blue Jay (1); American Crow (8); Tree Swallow (20); House Wren (7); Sedge Wren (2); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (2) Golden-crowned Kinglet (3); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (5); Northern Mockingbird (3); European Starling (4); Savannah Sparrow (67); Song Sparrow (3); Lincoln's Sparrow (2); Swamp Sparrow (5); Eastern Meadowlark (11); Red-winged Blackbird (43); Brown-headed Cowbird (365); Brewer's Blackbird (54); Common Grackle (360); Common Yellowthroat (1); Palm Warbler (1); Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler (4); House Sparrow; 64 species

John A. Whittle

# The Birdlife of Southeast Texas in Oberholser – Part 1

by Steve Mayes

*(Ed. Note: We are reprinting this part of Steve Mayes' series on Oberholser since the editor goofed and it did not appear in some copies of the digital version of the Newsletter in June.)*

*The Birdlife of Texas* by Harry Oberholser is a landmark work in American ornithology but it is relatively unknown by many birders today. Published in 1974, the two-volume set is long out of print and is quite expensive to obtain but it distilled everything that was known about birds in Texas at the time into one source and is invaluable to anyone who really wants to know more about Texas ornithology. Plus it has illustrations by legendary bird artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes! Much of the knowledge from these volumes has been passed down into other works but some of the information on old records are quite surprising and deserve to be better known. These articles will detail some of the bird records from Oberholser that I found most interesting and worth passing on to an audience that might not have access to these volumes. Specifically, the articles will focus on bird records from Jefferson County and some nearby areas.

Let's start with Red-throated Loon. Would it surprise you to learn that there are no less than seven records of this Arctic species for Jefferson County? Most of the records date between 1915 and November 27, 1936 with many representing birds shot by hunters. All appear to come from the Sabine Pass area. It is unclear if any of these specimens were preserved but it is remarkable that, with this many records they have been so rare in recent years. There is a record from near the Jefferson/Chambers County line from April 1997. There is also a record from Orange County from March 1, 1889, also supposedly with a specimen collected.

As far as pelagic birds go, there are some interesting older records. There is an Audubon's Shearwater record from May 27, 1929 with a specimen verified by Oberholser himself. There is also a Wilson's Storm-Petrel record from off the coast of Sabine Pass from April 20, 1961 though this is a sight record only with no specimen. There is also a record that Oberholser lists as hypothetical for a White-tailed Tropicbird from December 31, 1929 from the Sabine area. Though he does not come out and say it directly, Oberholser seems to suspect this record is likely a case of mistaken identity. Since there have been no confirmed records of the species for Texas to this day, he was likely correct. Also, the recent spate of Brown Booby sightings from Pleasure Island are not the first for Jefferson County as Oberholser lists a sighting from off of Sabine Pass from August 18, 1961.

How about waterbirds? There are some nice records of these as well. There is a record of Great White Heron from Orange County though the date is not clear. Ornithologists are still debating on whether this should be a separate species or lumped in with the Great Blue Heron. Either way, it is not too surprising as there is a relatively recent record from Galveston County. The story of the Cattle Egret invasion is well known, with the first Texas bird turning up on Mustang Island in November 1955. Just fifteen years later in 1970, there were thirty thousand birds breeding in one Orange County rookery! For waterfowl,

there is a record of Tundra (Whistling) Swan from Jefferson County though, again, the date is not listed. This species was apparently fairly common around Galveston Bay prior to 1900 and has turned up in recent years as close as Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge so it is another species that might be expected to turn up again nearby. Brant also has sight records from Jefferson County but no specimens. There have been additional sight records in recent years but none confirmed for Jefferson County with photos. American Black Duck has been recorded in Jefferson County multiple times with specimens shot by hunters. Though birders have not found the species lately, it is easy to imagine one appearing again and it might not be detected. American Black Duck and Mottled Duck are very similar in appearance and could easily be confused. Common Merganser is another bird with an old Jefferson County record that could turn up again. Though there are no recent Golden Triangle records, the bird has been detected in Houston in recent years.

Golden Eagle is a bird that has been detected in Jefferson County in recent memory but there is a record with an apparent specimen from Hardin County as well. The bird was taken in November which is a logical time for the species to turn up though the year it was taken is not mentioned. No other rare raptors are reported from the area but it is interesting to note some of the changes over time. Swallow-tailed Kite was reported in rapid decline in the state by the early 1900's and the last confirmed nesting until recently was from the 1910's. It was not until the 1980's that Swallow-tailed Kites started to slowly return to the area. In 2021, they are again breeding in numerous counties in southeast Texas including Orange and likely Jefferson, Hardin and Liberty as well. One of the last successful Bald Eagle nests in Texas before recent years was from Orange County in 1971. After that, the species became very rare anywhere in the state and it was years before breeding was recorded again. Now, there are multiple nests in the area including Jefferson and Orange Counties. Ospreys nested in Port Arthur back in 1925. There are no confirmed records of nesting in Jefferson County in recent years but summer records of birds suggest the possibility. Though the population of Crested Caracaras has undoubtedly increased and expanded in the state over the years, there is actually a nesting record for Jefferson County from before 1974.

Attwater's Greater Prairie-Chicken is an extremely rare species of the upper Texas coast now reduced to two small populations in Galveston and Colorado Counties. It once ranged over much of the Texas coast and into Louisiana and included populations in Jefferson and Orange Counties. There is a confirmed record with a specimen from Orange County from 1883 but the last Jefferson and Orange County birds were gone before 1937. There were apparently a few remnant Prairie-Chickens in Harris, Waller, Brazoria and Fort Bend Counties as late as 1972 but development and other issues quickly eliminated these populations.

Part two of this article was published in the September 2021 issue and part three in the October 2021 issue. These Newsletters are available at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org)!

# Bird Sightings – November 2021

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. In most cases, we do not include birds that are "heard only."

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:** No space for any comments this month!

## Seen in our Core Counties (listed above)

Blue-winged x Cinnamon Teal	Nov 29	JEF-TP (1) HS
White-winged Scoter	Nov 22-26	ANG-Ellen Trout Par (2) Gary Hunter, mult obs
Ruby-thr. Hummingbird	Nov 18	HAI-Nr FM421 west of Lumberton (1) Kelly Walker
Purple Gallinule	Nov 1-21	JEFTP (2) HS, mult obs
White-tailed Kite	Nov 21	HAI-Old Sour Lake Road (1) Deadra Moore
Bank Swallow	Nov 6	JEF-TP (1) Loren Albin, Tyler Ficker, Eric Ripma
American Redstart	Nov 6	JEF-SW (1) John-Rice Cameron
Northern Parula	Nov 6	JEF-SW (1 male) SM
Black-thr. Green Warbler	Nov 28	JEF-SW (2) Wes Hoyer
Wilson's Warbler	Nov 26	JAS-FM1747 Bob Friedrichs
Summer Tanager	Nov 28	JEF-SW Wes Hoyer
Western Tanager	Nov 9,23,29	ANG-Lufkin (1) Gary Hunter

## Nearby Counties

Common Nighthawk	Nov 23	HAS-Memorial area (1) Stephen Falick
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Nov 2	GAL-Clear Creek Nature Pk (1) Geordie Escheribach
Calliope Hummingbird	Nov 23	GAL-Friendswood (1) S. Bratz
Limpkin	Nov 6-28	HAS-Sheldon Lk SP (7) mult obs
Pomarine Jaeger	Nov 30	GAL-offshore SE of Galveston (1) Shane Cantrell
California Gull	Nov 9-27	GAL-Apfel Park (1) James Rieman, mult obs
Iceland (Thayer's) Gull	Nov 22-23	GAL-Apfel Park (1) James Rieman mult obs
Wood Stork	Nov 7	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Ray Porter
	Nov 14	HAS-Archbishop Fiorenza Park (6) Walter Allmandinger
	Nov 20	HAS-Willow Waterhole (3) J&C Miles, Mary Ann Beauchemin
	Nov 21	CHA-ANWR exact location not given (1) Nicole Foley, Tyler Scott
	Nov 30	CHA-Smith Point Hawk Watch (3) Susan Heath
Brown Booby	Nov 2-30	HAS-Baytown Nat Ctr (20) mult obs
Harris's Hawk	Nov 8, 21-28	HA-ANWR Access Road (1) G. Yoder, O. Fonseca, mult obs
Broad-winged Hawk	Nov 23-30	CHA-Smith Pt Hawk Watch (up to 5) Winnie Burkett, J.Kennedy
Red-naped Sapsucker	Nov 5	HAS-Armand Bayou Nature Ctr (1) mult obs
Greater Pewee	Nov 2-30	HAS-Bear Creek Pk (1) mult obs
Least Flycatcher	Nov 20	CAL-Traud Road (1) James Smithers. Madeline Wainscott
Western Kingbird	Nov 2	CAM-SE of Lake Charles (1) James Smithers
	Nov 6, 27-30	CAM-Peveto Woods (4) Dan Lane, mult obs
	Nov 24	CAM-Cam Prairie NWR Visitor Ctr (1) Eric Ripma
Yellow-throated Vireo	Nov 3	CAM-Peveto Wds (1) Robt Heise

Philadelphia Vireo	Nov 6	HAS-Pine Gully Park (1) Debbie Repasz, Davis Clay, J&C Miles
Wood Thrush	Nov 2	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Jody Shugart
	Nov 2	HAS-Friendswood (1) Chris Bick
Sage Thrasher	Nov 6	CAM-Willow Is (1) J. Smithers
Purple Finch	Nov 18	GAL-Carbide Pk (1) Richard Liebler
Clay-colored Sparrow	Nov 18-23	HAS-Exploration Green (1) Chris Bick
Henslow's Sparrow	Nov 29	HAS-Intercont Apt (exact location not given (1) Scott Atkinson
Spotted Towhee	Nov 17-21	HAS-Sharp Road (1) Jim Hinson, Dale Wolck, mult obs
Orchard Oriole	Nov 21	HAS-J P Landing Pk (1) Jim Hinson
Bullock's Oriole	Nov 7	HAS-Bear Creek Pk (1) Jim Hinson
Baltimore Oriole	Nov 21	HAS-El Franco Lee Park (1) Brad Lirette
	Nov 23	GAL-Santa Fe (1) Katherine Carlson
Ovenbird	Nov 2	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Cin-Ty Lee
Northern Waterthrush	Nov 28	CAM-Cam Prairie NWR Visitor Ctr (1) James Smithers
Tennessee Warbler	Nov 7	HAS-Hermann Park Bayou Parkland (1) Don Verser
	Nov 12	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) James Smithers
Nashville Warbler	Nov 22,28	CAM-Peveto EWoods (1) James Smithers, Madeline Wainscott
Hooded Warbler	Nov 4	HAS-San Phillippe/Voss (10) Ryan Call, Evan Chastain
American Redstart	Nov 6	HAS-Sheldon Lake SP (1) Ray Porter
Northern Parula	Nov 3	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Robert Heise
	Nov 4	HAS-Friendswood (1) Chris Bick
	Nov 20	CAL-Lorraine Park (1) James Smithers. Madeline Wainscott
Magnolia Warbler	Nov 28	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Paul Conover
Yellow-throated Warbler	Nov 6	CAM-Willow Is (1) Charlotte Chehotsky
	Nov 18	CAL-Lake Charles (1) David Bradford
	Nov 28	CAL-Lake Charles (1) Paul Zimmerman
Prairie Warbler	Nov 2-3	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) mult obs
	Nov 27	CAM-Oak Grove Sanct (1) Paul Conover
	Nov 23	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Clayton Leopold
	Nov 30	HAS-Hermann Pk (1) Cin-Ty Lee
Black-thr. Green Warbler	Nov 18	HAS-Baytown Nat Ctr (1) Chuck Davis, D. Hanson, D. Wolck,
Hepatic Tanager	Nov 27-30	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1 imm) Brad Lirette, mult obs
Summer Tanager	Nov 22,27-29	CAM-Peveto Woods (1 fem) James Smithers, mult obs

*(continued on page 3)*

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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 TEXBIRDS listserv. Archives of the listserv are at [www.freelists.org/archive/texbirds](http://www.freelists.org/archive/texbirds). It is not necessary to subscribe to 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.