

# The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 29 No 9

September 2023

**Membership Meeting  
Thursday September 21, 2023 7:00 p.m.  
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

**Making Flycatcher Identification Accessible to All**

**Cin-Ty Lee**

Cin-Ty Lee spends much of his spare time following, painting, photographing and recording birds. Together with Andrew Birch, he has written numerous articles and books on the field identification of birds, most recently the Field Guide to North American Flycatchers – Empidonax and Pewees in the Princeton series. He promises a second volume covering other North American flycatcher groups in the near future. He has also published articles on Arctic and Pacific Loons, female orioles and dowitchers among other identification challenges.

Cin-Ty Lee was born in Taiwan and immigrated to the US with his family. He has a B.A. in geology from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in geochemistry from Harvard University. After a post-doctoral fellowship at the California Institute of Technology, he joined the faculty of Rice University in 2002, and is currently the Harry Carothers Wiess Professor of Geology in the Department of Geology, Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences.

We plan to have the doors open no later than 6:00 p.m., the meeting will start at 7:00 p.m. sharp.

## *The Brown Pelican*

Vol. 29, No. 9 September 2023  
Issue number 297

Golden Triangle  
Audubon Society

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

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS (2023)

#### President

Christine Sliva

#### Vice President

Steve Mayes

#### Treasurer

Harlan Stewart

#### Secretary

John Whittle

#### Directors-at-Large

Girish Doshi

Gerald Duhon

Sherry Gibson

John Haynes

Sheila Hebert

Thomas Hellweg

Gary Kelley

Dana Nelson

Dania Sanchez

### COMMITTEE CHAIRS

#### Program

Jana Whittle

#### Field Trips

Steve Mayes

#### Conservation

Gary Kelley

#### Membership, Publicity

Denise Kelley

#### Education

Volunteer needed

#### Webmaster

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

#### Facebook Administrators

John Mariani

Jana Whittle

#### Newsletter Distribution

Mary Stafford

#### Newsletter Editor

John Whittle

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

### *The Brown Pelican* is

published monthly except July by  
the Golden Triangle Audubon  
Society, P. O. Box 1292, Nederland,  
Texas 77627-1292  
email: [gtaudubon@aol.com](mailto:gtaudubon@aol.com)

## Calendar of Events

*Important Note: Field Trip notices published here are subject to last minute changes. Changes will always be posted on the web site at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org).*

### Future Programs and Field Trips.

**Thursday September 21, 2023.**  
Membership Meeting. Making flycatcher identification accessible to all Cin-Ty Lee. Further details on p1

### Saturday September 30, 2023. Field Trip to Smith Point Hawk Watch

*Note that this field trip will take place one week later than our normal Saturday after the Membership Meeting.*

It is hoped that this will be nearer the peak of Broad-wing Hawk migration but there will always be some hawks. Our leaders will be there from about 8:30 a.m. Any day from mid-September through mid or late October should produce a good number of migrating hawks.

To reach the Smith Point Hawk Watch site from Winnie, take Highway 124 south towards High Island. After 12 miles, turn right on FM1985 and follow it about 14 1/2 miles until it meets FM562. Follow FM562 14 miles southwest to Smith Point. Continue straight until almost reaching the bay, and turn left, bearing left again to the parking area next to the Hawk Watch Tower on the Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area. It takes at least 90 minutes from the Golden Triangle to reach the site. This Field Trip is much more a come and go as you wish trip, and help on hawk identification is always available on the tower during Hawk Watch season!

Our leaders may lead a group into the nearby woods looking for migrants, but you may stay on the tower if you wish. Mosquitoes are not normally a problem on the tower. Availability of food and fuel is essentially non-existent in Smith Point, so bring your lunch!

The Smith Point Hawk Watch is conducted every day from August 15 through the end of October by the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory.

Historically, the peak of Broad-wing Hawk migration was September

25, although in recent years at Smith Point, it has tended to be later and less uniform, and sometimes large numbers of Broad-wings have passed through in the first few days of October. Should a cold front pass through, the days immediately following usually have a north wind, and more migrating hawks of all species on those days.

Previous years' results are at <http://hawkcount.org>, so you can do your own analysis! The exact peak day probably depends more on the weather on the migration path from Pennsylvania down to east Texas, and particularly on the two or three days prior. However, almost all migratory hawks are coming from areas further north although Broad-wings breed over almost all of the eastern half of the United States, including the Golden Triangle, but a large percentage are coming from the southern tier of Canada, even as far west as British Columbia.

Should a cold front pass through, the days immediately following usually have a north wind, and there tend to be more migrating hawks of all species on those days. For more information, contact Field Trip Chair Steve Mayes ([gtaudubon@aol.com](mailto:gtaudubon@aol.com)).

## Golden Triangle Audubon Facebook

Join us on Facebook! There is a Golden Triangle Audubon group on Facebook, moderated by Jana Whittle and John Mariani. Our aim is to provide a space for people around the Golden Triangle to share pictures, sightings, and other information about birds, other nature, and local birding sites and habitats. All levels of pictures are welcome, especially of less common birds. If you are looking for help with identification, please include the location and date of the picture, as both are important in narrowing the possibilities. Send your contribution through a Facebook message or an email to [gtaudubon@aol.com](mailto:gtaudubon@aol.com).

**Saturday October 7, 2023. Sabine Woods Work Day.** We plan to do our usual fall routine maintenance. We will be there from about 7:30 a.m. Normally, we work until about noon.

We will supply cold water and soft drinks and hope to be able to provide sandwiches for lunch.

We have a limited number of hand tools but if you have loppers or clippers, please bring them. If you have a heavy-duty riding mower and the means to transport it, please let us know in advance so we can coordinate. We may need a chain saw, but probably only one. Bring insect repellent! As this is written it has been very, it has been very draw, and consequently,

For more details, contact John Whittle at [gtaudubon@aol.com](mailto:gtaudubon@aol.com)

**Saturday October 21, 2023. 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. Meet 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, and no gasoline is available. Bring drinks.

October 21 is towards the end of fall songbird migration, but often brings a good variety of birds. A cold front may drive down the last of the warblers and the first big push of wintering birds. Some of our winter birds may be arriving, and often the woodland species that winter in the Big Thicket overshoot a little at first. In some past years, this has included Red-breasted Nuthatch and Brown Creeper. There are always interesting birds at Sabine Woods! Birding Sabine Woods is relatively easy walking.

**Saturday October 22, 2022. 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. Meet 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, and no gasoline is available. Bring drinks.

October 21 is towards the end of fall songbird migration, but often brings a good variety of birds. A cold front may drive down the last of the migrant

warblers and the first big push of wintering birds. Some of our winter birds will be arriving, and often some birds of the woodland species that winter in the Big Thicket overshoot a little at first. In many past years, this has included Red-breasted Nuthatch (sometimes staying all winter) and Brown Creeper. There are always interesting birds at Sabine Woods! Birding Sabine Woods is relatively easy walking.



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)

## Membership Dues

To simplify our record keeping, all memberships now run from January through December. Membership dues are \$20 per year. We are now accepting 2024 dues. You may pay at any membership meeting (checks preferred) or use the subscription/membership blank on the back page.

For new members joining National Audubon on line and selecting our Chapter code (W25), we receive a rebate of the entire first year's national dues, and no Chapter dues are expected for that first year.

As a reminder, dues are voluntary for National Audubon Society (NAS) members living in the Chapter's official territory, which is defined by zip codes, but covers all of Jefferson, Orange and Hardin Counties and one or two zip codes adjacent to these counties. We do also welcome NAS members in other nearby counties although their membership in NAS does not bring them to our attention.

We would very much encourage you receive the Brown Pelican electronically as this saves paper, cost and volunteer time. To start that, simply send an email to [gtaudubon@aol.com](mailto:gtaudubon@aol.com) from the address you want us to use.

## Sabine Woods Update

We included a report on recent maintenance and development activities at Sabine Woods in the July/August issue. We are pressing ahead with planning to extend our water line out to the western part of the Sanctuary. The prices of the materials required are significantly higher than we initially expected, and will stretch our budget. We thank our volunteers for continuing to water the relatively new live oak trees.

We believe we have, so far, been able to keep all the newer (18-months after transplanting) oaks from drying out excessively. We thank the following for working on the watering and water system repair Dania Sanchez, Christine Sliva, Gary Kelley, Howard Davis, Ashley Fuselier and Andy Allen and any others we were not told about.

## The Current Drought

You may be wondering what effect the current drought is having or will have on the birds that we see in Southeast Texas. One unusual aspect of this drought is that it appears to be happening in an El Niño year. Water temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific are above normal – usually one of the first indicators of an El Niño event. But normally, an El Niño results in a wetter climate over the southern and southwestern United States, although the effect is normally more pronounced in winter.

The last time there was a drought in Southeast Texas of significance that became obvious to us all was that of 2010-11. We had planted the oaks (and the mulberries) in the east of the sanctuary. So we had to water those oaks under unpleasant conditions but it was not quite as hot.

What effect does the drought have on birds? Birds need water to drink and like water to bathe so as to reduce feather mites. In Southeast Texas, birds associated with water are not likely to run out of water sources, even under drought conditions, but they will be more restricted in location and area, meaning the birds will be concentrated in fewer and smaller areas. Less direct an effect, the lack of water, means fewer insects which may in turn cause passage migrants not to delay their onward journey.

## Field Trip to Liberty -- 5 August 2023

Traditionally, the August field trip to Liberty has been to look for staging Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites that favor this section of the Trinity valley in late summer. As these two species, once quite scarce on the upper Texas coast have multiplied and spread their ranges the trip has changed. The Liberty trip has become more of a search for early migrants and late nesting species of various kinds at Liberty Municipal Park and the surrounding area. A good group of Golden Triangle birders braved the brutally hot weather to look for these birds.

Hot and dry are the common conditions across the state of Texas and this held true in Liberty. Starting in the municipal park, the birders trekked toward the “Knobby Knees” trail through a heavily wooded area. A couple of House Finches perched on a backstop were a nice start. The first surprise was a Solitary Sandpiper at a cattle pond on the edge of the woods (the second surprise is that there was still water in the pond!). The bird was well seen by the group and even did its “touchdown” signal with its upright wing display upon landing a few times. A nice little group of wading birds were found around the pond as well. A large Great Blue Heron perched in a tree while Snowy and Great Egret were along the edge of the pond along with a Little Blue Heron. A young Tricolored Heron joined the group and White Ibis were also found. A smaller Green Heron flew away from the area squawking.

The main objects of the trip were found pretty early in the trip even if they were not that cooperative. A Mississippi Kite was spotted first and it even perched high in a tree in the park. But it was in a spot that made it difficult to get a look at it and not all of the group got good looks before the bird disappeared. While walking further, a Swallow-tailed Kite was spotted soaring just above the trees. It circled several times around the group giving glimpses through the trees but it did not stick around long.

Moving further into the wooded area, some of the common woodland birds of the area were obvious. Northern Cardinals were obvious from the start in every variation of their plumage. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was fairly cooperative for the group. Carolina Wrens scolded the birders and even occasionally came out into the open for a look. American Crows called from overhead, a call distinct from the nasal call of the Fish Crows more common through most of Jefferson County. A nice find early on was a female Summer Tanager high in a tree being harassed by two begging juveniles – evidence of breeding in the park. White-eyed Vireo called from the thickets though were difficult to observe. Yellow-throated Vireo was also heard and Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse were well seen. Red-

bellied Woodpecker and Pileated Woodpecker were both detected by the group.

The group was surprised to find there was still water in the usual wet, swampy area along this trail. There is a boardwalk here that has been a good are for the group in the past sometimes producing Prothonotary Warbler or Louisiana Waterthrush. There was no such luck on this day but there was an Acadian Flycatcher in the area, one of several in the park. The lone warbler found was a calling Northern Parula. After taunting the birders for a while, it eventually came out for some decent looks. A longer than usual hike back out to the park took its toll on the assembled birders along with the brutal heat. And it was decided to head to the lunch stop after a break to rest, cool down and rehydrate. After lunch, some of the group made the short trip along Highway 90 between Liberty and Dayton to search for more kites. Most birders came up empty but a few got additional looks at a Swallow-tailed Kite or two as they soared just above the trees. Swallow-tailed Kites on migration, as most of those seen in August in the immediate Liberty area are, eat dragonflies and other large insects. With the very much reduced areas of shallow water this year, dragonfly populations are quite low and the kites likely quickly press on southwards in search of more productive feeding areas instead of hanging around the Trinity River bottoms as they do when food is more plentiful there than it is this year.

The trip was successful in finding its target species and a few migrants but it was rough birding. With triple digit temperatures and high humidity, birding conditions were difficult, even dangerous and remained so throughout the month. It was a good reminder to the birders to get out early, get finished early, hydrate well and don't overdo it!

The following species were noted on the trip:

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (2); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (1); Killdeer (2); Solitary Sandpiper (1); Great Blue Heron (1); Snowy Egret (1); Little Blue Heron (1); Tricolored Heron (3); Cattle Egret (1); Green Heron (1); White Ibis (2); Black Vulture (1); Turkey Vulture (1); Swallow-tailed Kite (1); Mississippi Kite (1); Red-bellied Woodpecker (3); Pileated Woodpecker (1); Acadian Flycatcher (3); White-eyed Vireo (1); Yellow-throated Vireo (1); Red-eyed Vireo (1); American Crow (4); Carolina Chickadee (5); Tufted Titmouse (2); Barn Swallow (2); Carolina Wren (4); European Starling (15); Northern Mockingbird (4); House Finch (2); Northern Parula (1); Summer Tanager (3); Northern Cardinal (4).

*Steve Mayes*

## Field Trip to Bolivar Flats – 19 August 2023

The August field trip to Bolivar Flats is always hot but never has it been as hot as the 2023 version of the trip. An extended heat wave unlike anything seen in recent years had been boiling Texas for weeks and it showed no signs of letting up for the Golden Triangle Audubon field trip. The fact that the Saturday

after the third Thursday of the month – our normal field trip date -- was quite early in the month probably didn't help! Still, the beach is a better place than most during this time as it is a few degrees cooler than inland areas and there is a constant breeze that helps cool any birders brave or foolish enough to be

out. Five birders were brave (or foolish) enough to try Bolivar Flats for this trip!

A Long-billed Curlew was one of the first birds detected. The largest of our shorebirds, this curlew is conspicuous and easy to recognize with its long, decurved bill. It is especially easy when there are no Whimbrels around to possibly confuse it with! The beach is generally the easiest place to see these large shorebirds but migrants can be found in pastures and flooded fields as well. Sanderlings are a constant companion on the beaches of the gulf coast and there was not a shortage of them on this day. Variable in plumage depending on the time of year, Sanderlings work the water line and roost above the high tide line. Willets are also a constant at Bolivar Flats. Whether it is eastern Willets in the summer or western Willets in the winter or a combination of both during migration, they are always present and usually loud. Western Willets are taller and longer legged with longer bills than their eastern counterparts which tend to be shorter and stockier. There are some experts who believe that the two forms should be separate species but for now they are still lumped together.

Moving away from the vehicle barrier, one of the first species noted was a Piping Plover. Pale backed with orange legs and a stubby bill, this is a pretty common wintering bird on Texas beaches despite being an endangered species. A Wilson's Plover was spotted soon after. A slightly larger plover with longer, dull pink legs and a longer, heavier bill, Wilson's is a summer bird on the flats. A Semipalmated Plover quickly joined the plover parade. Very similar to the Piping in size and build, it can still be easily told apart as it is much darker brown on top than the pale Piping Plover. It took more searching to find a Snowy Plover but the group eventually made a clean sweep of the small plovers. Snowy is almost as pale as Piping but has dull legs and a longer, thinner bill. Snowy often favors areas of the beach further from the water than the Piping does. Just to round it off, several Black-bellied Plovers were also seen. Much larger than the small plovers discussed earlier, this bird is quite variable in plumage depending on the season. In the winter, it is quite dull – gray above and white below. In the summer, it has an all-black belly and an almost checkered back.

Other shorebirds were also easily found on the trip. A few colorful Ruddy Turnstones were located but they were not common. Least Sandpipers were more abundant and were joined by some Western Sandpipers as well. A couple of Greater Yellowlegs were found and were even kind enough to give their distinctive three-note calls. Marbled Godwits were found in small numbers early with more being seen near the end of the flats. These shorebirds are almost as large as the curlew and have a similar coloration. They are easily distinguished from curlews however by their long, straight to slightly upcurved bills. They are the only other curlew likely to be seen on the Upper Texas Coast in the fall but close attention should still be paid to them because one never knows when something rare will show up! Black-necked Stilts were also located near the end of the walk along with another largely black and white shorebird, the American Oystercatcher. The Oystercatcher is an odd-looking bird with a bright orange bill that is perfect for (you might have guessed) prying open oysters and other shellfish. They are rarely seen in large numbers but the flats are still one of the best places on the upper Texas coast to see them.

Gulls were not present in large numbers on this day but the usual suspects were located. Laughing Gull is the most common of the summer gulls and were easily seen. Ring-billed Gull is more plentiful in winter but there are always a few around and they were seen on the trip. A few large Herring Gulls were also located. Royal Terns were the most common of terns on the flats with no close challengers. A few large Caspian Terns were noted including a begging juvenile or two. Sandwich Terns with their yellow-tipped bills were spotted along with smaller Forster's Terns. Even smaller Black Terns and Least Terns were also seen but in small numbers. Black Skimmers were seen but remained quite distant from the birders.

Reddish Egrets are always a highlight of any Bolivar Flats trip and they were present in good number. Both typical dark individuals and a few white-morph birds were seen on this day. White morph birds used to be very rare on the Upper Texas Coast, but have become more common in recent years. The characteristic "dancing" feeding behavior was not on full display on this trip but it was seen in small doses. Most of the usual other herons and egrets were also seen including large Great Blue Herons, colorful Tricolored Herons and cooperative young Yellow-crowned Night-Herons.

Heading back to the vehicles, a Horned Lark was briefly seen a few times by the group. The flats are the best place in the area to find this species. Horned Larks are abundant in west Texas and in the Panhandle in winter but are quite scarce on the Upper Texas Coast and very difficult to find in Jefferson County! With a brief timeout to look at some tiny Pygmy-Blue Butterflies, the group was off to lunch. A stop at Rollover Pass (can we still call it that if there is no pass?) produced lots of Brown Pelicans and more of the same birds seen on the flats. After lunch, a brief stop was made at Smith Oaks but it was afternoon at that point and too hot and still to continue birding. The group called it a day and, even though there was a small turnout, all agreed it was still a great (but very hot) day!

The following species were noted on the trip:

Brown Pelican (150); Neotropic Cormorant (30); Great Blue Heron (3); Great Egret (8); Snowy Egret (20); Little Blue Heron (5); Tricolored Heron (25); Reddish Egret (15); Cattle Egret (25); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (3); White Ibis (30); Roseate Spoonbill (26); Turkey Vulture (1); White-tailed Kite (1); Cooper's Hawk (1); Swainson's Hawk (1); Clapper Rail (3); Common Gallinule (1); Black-bellied Plover (15); Snowy Plover (2); Wilson's Plover (4); Semipalmated Plover (18); Piping Plover (5); American Oystercatcher (3); Black-necked Stilt (3); Greater Yellowlegs (4); Willet (20); Long-billed Curlew (3); Marbled Godwit (12); Ruddy Turnstone (2); Sanderling (65); Western Sandpiper (5); Least Sandpiper (20); Laughing Gull (20); Ring-billed Gull (3); Herring Gull (3); Least Tern (4); Caspian Tern (8); Black Tern (6); Forster's Tern (10); Royal Tern (45); Sandwich Tern (6); Black Skimmer (25); Rock Pigeon (10); Mourning Dove (10); Common Nighthawk (5); Empidonax sp. (1); Eastern Kingbird (2); White-eyed Vireo (1); Blue Jay (3); Horned Lark (2); Barn Swallow (8); Carolina Wren (5); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (1); Northern Mockingbird (6); European Starling (20); Northern Cardinal (5); Red-winged Blackbird (10); Great-tailed Grackle (10)

*Steve Mayes*

# Merlin Is Magical, but It Still Makes Mistakes

By Alice Sun, Audubon Magazine, August 23, 2023

*As the popularity of the app's Sound ID feature grows, so do concerns about how imperfect artificial intelligence impacts a trove of scientific data.*

As a volunteer reviewer for eBird, Tim Carney's role is to review bird observations logged in multiple counties in Maryland to ensure they are as accurate as possible. In a typical migration season, he might receive up to 50 reports of uncommon species that require him to email users for additional documentation.

But in the past couple of years, Carney says, his workload has grown dramatically. Dubious reports have poured in without sufficient evidence to support them. Carney says that's because more birders have been attributing their identifications to Merlin Sound ID, a tool created, like eBird, by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

For the most part, the Merlin app's Sound ID feature, launched in 2021, is a birder's dream. Activate it, and it transforms the bird sounds it hears into images that depict pitch and volume. The app then renders a real-time species identification, using artificial intelligence trained to read those images, called spectrograms. The experience is so seamless, people have taken to calling Sound ID "Shazam for birds."

Yet, impressive as the tool is, Merlin Sound ID can make mistakes. And when eBird users rely solely on the technology to make identifications, reviewers are swarmed with unexpected and sometimes questionable observations. The potential consequences go beyond mere irritation: The possibility of misidentifications sneaking through has experts concerned for the integrity of eBird's high-quality data source, which is not only valuable for birders but also important for science and conservation.

When Cornell launched Sound ID, the idea was to create a space separate from eBird where beginners could learn the complexities of birding by ear. Merlin project manager Drew Weber says the feature "is a way of providing a safe playground for people to get acquainted with bird identification," and to help them build up skills to eventually contribute to community science.

Some Merlin-based submissions to eBird, however, have raised eyebrows in the birding community. Reports of unusual species automatically populate the platform's rare bird alerts, which are then emailed to users in the area. As a result, these errors are highly visible. Birders have taken to social media to point them out. For instance, a Little Ringed Plover in Arkansas (native to Europe) and a Plush-crested Jay in a backyard in Michigan (native to South America), both misidentified by Merlin, were listed in the past few months.

It's the slip-ups involving native species, however, that most worry experts. The Philadelphia Vireo, for instance, is an uncommon migrant over much of North America, but its song is extremely similar to the more common Red-eyed Vireo. Even experienced birders have trouble discerning the two, says Wisconsin eBird reviewer Jason Thiele. And Philadelphia Vireos identified by Merlin have significantly increased the number of submissions eBird reviewers are seeing for the more elusive species. Carney, the reviewer in Baltimore, has seen a huge spike in reports just in the past year, forcing him

to spend more time tracking down evidence.

It's not yet clear if or how these reports have affected eBird's data quality. Jenna Curtis, project leader at eBird, says the team at Cornell is looking into what role Merlin might play in contributing to bias in the database—or removing it. In fact, it's likely that birders have historically under-detected Philadelphia Vireos and that Merlin is helping to correct that oversight, according to Weber. The Merlin team has also noticed increased detections of high-pitched species like Tennessee Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Weber notes, which are likely underrepresented in eBird's data because they're easily missed by birders with high-frequency hearing loss.

When Merlin Sound ID does make a mistake, it's often an issue of audio length. The app analyzes sound in three-second intervals, but making an accurate identification sometimes requires a longer snippet of birdsong. Confidently distinguishing Philadelphia from Red-eyed Vireos by ear, for instance, requires tuning in to subtle differences in the cadence of their songs that unfurl over time. Merlin also struggles with mimics like Northern Mockingbirds: By analyzing vocalizations in short intervals, the tool often ends up identifying the species that the bird is mimicking. "Merlin doesn't have that kind of memory currently, but that's something we can investigate in the future," says Weber.

Experts still encourage birders to submit the species they hear to eBird, as long as they can make a confident identification. This means also seeing the bird if possible, especially for easy-to-mix-up species. Curtis and Weber also urge anyone who submits Merlin-based observations to upload sound recordings from the app along with their eBird checklists. Those files not only give reviewers further evidence to check, but also train Merlin's algorithm to make more accurate identifications in the future. If submitting a longer recording, users should include a timestamp in the notes to specify when the vocalization in question happens, says Carney. eBird also provides a set of guidelines for using Merlin.

The Merlin and eBird teams are also making changes within the app, designed to improve how the two platforms interact. Merlin now reminds users to turn on their phone's location services to narrow down possible identifications to birds that occur in that area. The team has also created resources to help make it easier to upload Merlin recordings to eBird.

Navigating these issues will be an ongoing learning experience as Merlin Sound ID evolves, Curtis notes. "It's funny," she says, "you think about a paper field guide, the way most people learned how to bird up until recently—there's no pop-up messaging. There's no banner there to tell you that should exercise caution." Technology is pushing birding in exciting new directions, but it's not quite a substitute for learning to identify birds the old-fashioned way: by spending time in the field and learning from other birders.

# Bird Sightings – August 2023

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:** We are now not including sightings of migratory species which are "merely" one week "early" or

"late" relative to their normal migration window.

The eBird Alerts from which we compile the sightings each month are derived from "raw" submissions that mostly have not been reviewed by the eBird reviewer(s) for the county in question. We do ourselves review any details that are provided with the sighting and try to keep up with any withdrawals of identifications. However, in the last few days of each month, there is not enough time for any "outside" review to have taken place and been acted on. We also omit any sightings of very rare species reported without any details.

To follow on from the *Audubon* article on the preceding page, we need to repeat our policy that we do not normally include sightings based solely on hearing (or recording) Perhaps the *Merlin* program will be developed to a point where we will feel comfortable in using its identification, but that time has not yet come.

## Local Counties (listed above)

Gadwall	Aug 26	JEF-TP (1) HS
Limpkin	Aug 12	JAS-Martin Dies SP (1) Phillip Hight
	Aug 12,18	TYL-Magnolia Ridge Park (1) Angela and Chris Bailey, Gabe Hargrove
Northern Harrier	Aug 22	ANG-VFW Pond Lufkin (1) Gary Hunter
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	Aug 27	JEF-Port Arthur (1) Greg Jackson
American Redstart	Aug 19-23	ORA-nr FM1131 (1 fem) Angela Clark
Black-headed Grosbeak	Aug 29-30	JAS-CR443, Kirbyville (1) Vicky Newby

## Nearby Counties

Northern Shoveler	Aug 3	GAL-Texas City Spur 197 (1) Richard Liebler
Common Ground Dove	Aug 8	HAS-Wildwood Lake, Tomball (1) David Land
Black-chin. Hummingbird	Aug 4	HAS-Villages of Bear Creek (1) Texas Bird Family
Sora	Aug 7-8	GAL-8/9 mi Rd (1) Richard Liebler
	Aug 21	CAM-Lacassine NWR Wildloof Loop (1) Darlene Eschete
Limpkin	Aug 1	TYL-Magnolia Ridge Park (2) mult obs (continuing)
	Aug 7	GAL-Magnolia Ridge Retention Basin (1) WE
Wilson's Snipe	Aug 31	HAS-J P Landing Park (2) John Paul
Pomarine Jaeger	Aug 19	GAL-Ferry Rd (1) Drew Sattler
Upland Sandpiper	Aug 1	GAL-Galveston Is SP (1) Nathaniel Watkins
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Aug 4	GAL-Bolivar Flats (1) Nathaniel Watkins
Glossy Ibis	Aug 5-26	HAS-Sheldon Lake (1) mult obs
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Aug 23	GAL-Galveston Is SP (1) Kyle O'Haver
White-tailed Hawk	Aug 26	CAL-Friesen Rd, Lake Charles (1) Clyde Massey
	Aug 29	CAL-Fruge Rd (1) Mac Myers
Ringed Kingfisher	Aug 27	CHA-off El Jardin Beach (1) Steve, Rogow, Andrew Hamlett, Richard Rulander
Eastern Phoebe	Aug 5	HAS-Highland Res (1) (Unconf) Ray Porter

Ash-throated Flycatcher	Aug 18	GAL-Galveston Is SP (1) Robert Becker
Vermilion Flycatcher	Aug 28	GAL-Hominghaus Rd (1) Keith Alderman
Great Kiskadee	Aug 18	GAL-Port Boiivar (1) Caraline Golson
Couch's Kingbird	Aug 31	HAS-Pine Forest Country Club (2) Timothy White
Bell's Vireo	Aug 15	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Grant Parajuli, Siddharth Bharadway, Cin-Ty Lee
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Aug 28	HAS-Houston Arboretum (1) Christine Mansfield
American Goldfinch	Aug 9	GAL-Clear Creek Village (1) Jackie Farrell
Lark Bunting	Aug 31	CAM-Rutherford Beach (1) David Booth, mult obs
,Chipping Sparrow	Aug 25	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Margaret Farese
Nelson's Sparrow	Aug 24	HAS-El Jardin Park (1) Andrew Hamlett, Richard Rulander
Baltimore Oriole	Aug 19	HAS-Clear Lake(1) Tony Frank
Worm-Eating Warbler	Aug 26	HAS-Edith Moore Sanctuary(1) Jason Zinn
Nashville Warbler	Aug 15	HAS-Archbishop Fiorenza Park (1) Letha Slagle
	Aug 24	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Robert Becker, WE
McGillivray's Warbler	Aug 30	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Richard Liebler
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Aug 26	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) James Schubert
Golden-cheeked Warbler	Aug 14	HAS-Birnam Wood, Spring (1) Lizzy Lopez
Wilson's Warbler	Aug 15	HAS-Baytown NC (1) Ray Porter
Western Tanager	Aug 19	GAL-HI Eubanks Woods (1) mult obs

**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; SM – Steve Mayes, SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; TYL – Tyler County; WE – Wyatt Egelhoff; WJC – West Jefferson County.

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

## FIRST CLASS MAIL

### NATIONAL AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP FORM

#### Membership Form

To join the National Audubon Society, please complete this form and return with Introductory Membership fee of \$20 (payable to the National Audubon Society, or indicate you wish to be billed) to National Audubon Society, Memberships, PO Box 97194, Washington, DC 20090-7194. To use this form to give a membership as a gift, please complete the form and indicate your name in the appropriate space. Payment should accompany gift memberships.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Gift from: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed  Please bill me

Golden Triangle Audubon C3ZW250Z

### *Brown Pelican* SUBSCRIPTION/ MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mail to Golden Triangle Audubon Society (GTAS), P. O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292 or bring to any Membership Meeting. National Audubon Society (NAS) members with addresses within our official territory are automatically GTAS members without further payment, but are asked to contribute \$20 if they are able since we only receive a very small amount from NAS after the first year.

Subscriptions from NAS Members with mailing addresses outside our official territory, and others wishing to subscribe are \$20 per year (Jan-Dec).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

eMail or Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

### 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.