

# The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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Vol. 29 No 10

October 2023

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**Membership Meeting**  
**Thursday October 19, 2023 7:00 p.m.**  
**Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

**A Texas Mountains Getaway – NOT the Big Bend**

**Paul and Carol Gregg**

The Guadalupe Mountains National Park is one of the least visited national parks in the United States. Paul and Carol Gregg have visited the park at least a dozen times over the years. They have hiked most of the 80 to 90 miles of hiking trails, and have photographed much of the landscape as well as wildlife, plants and birds. Camping there is mostly primitive and spending the night in higher elevations can be challenging with hikers having to hike with 50-pound backpacks. But the views at the top can be breathtaking and very much worth the strenuous hikes to get there. The park has the four highest peaks in Texas, the highest elevation being Guadalupe Peak at 8751 feet.

Paul is an advanced amateur photographer, with a genuine love for bird photography, and is retired from the Harris County Adult Probation Department, and retired from over 29 years in the U. S. Air Force active and reserve duty. Carol is retired from the oil business and is taking classes to become a Texas Master Naturalist.

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. 10 October 2023  
Issue number 298

### Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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

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## Calendar of Events

*Important Note: Field Trip notices and other events 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.

**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!

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

**Thursday October 19, 2023.** Membership Meeting. Guadeloupe Mountains National Park, Paul and Carol Gregg Further details on p.1

**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.

**Thursday November 16, 2023. Annual Meeting.** The Annual Meeting of Golden Triangle Audubon Society will take place on November 16, 2022 in the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park. At this meeting, we will hold elections for all Officer and At-Large Board positions. To contact the Nominating Committee or to nominate someone, please in the first instance email [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 November 18, 2023. 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



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rels. In some years we have seen White-tailed Kites and Merlins.

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. 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

## 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.

All new memberships after September run through the end of the following year. For new members with addresses in our territory 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 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.

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## Fall Migration Count -- Saturday 16 September 2023

We had some concerns in the run-up to the count, not only because of the ongoing drought situation but because a number of our regular participants were unable to participate. However, we welcomed several first-time participants who brought the number of observers above the average of recent years. The number of birds recorded was higher than the previous year, but below the typical numbers of a few years back. There were a respectable number of migrants in Sabine Woods supplemented by a good selection in the western part of the county to give a very encouraging total of 159 species.

The full spreadsheet with a breakdown of this year's count by area is published as a PDF file in the digital version of this *Brown Pelican*, available on the website at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org). First, as always, we comment on unusual species, species not seen, species in high numbers and those in low numbers.

Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, residents in the area, have increased over recent years, but Blue-winged Teal, largely passage migrants in our area in the early fall, although some are winter residents, were seen in much lower numbers than in recent preceding years. The count date is typically a little early for most other migratory ducks, but a Gadwall in Cattail Marsh and five on Backridge Road were the first on the fall count since 2014. Only four Mottled Ducks was the lowest total ever for the count, very disappointing for this species that is of concern. Numbers had looked as if they might have been stabilizing over the past few years and we can only hope the low number recorded this year was perhaps influenced by the inaccessibility of the suitably wet areas the ducks were using.

Mourning Dove numbers were normal, although both Eurasian Collared Doves and White-winged Doves were down. Two Inca Doves were seen.

The number of hummingbirds seen on the count varies significantly, but, anecdotally, numbers at feeders in the area have seemed normal, so perhaps the low number seen this year merely reflected the choices the observers made in where to visit.

We normally expect to find a decent number of Clapper Rails on this count, but low water levels in the accessible marshes may have driven the birds into normally deeper and less accessible marsh areas. However, it may also be that the construction of LNG plants has diminished the areas of marsh accessible to both us and the rails. Four American Coots were seen after the species as missing last year. Coots are mostly a migratory winter visitor to Southeast Texas, but most years a few can be found in summer. Twelve Purple Gallinules were fewer than last years unprecedented total of 29. The species is essentially the only waterbird species that really likes water hyacinth, so the continued large number of a species that was not found prior to 2021 is a mixed blessing indicating that there continues to be an infestation of hyacinth in Cattail Marsh.

The count date is typically a little early for wintering American Avocets to have arrived, so that none detected was not particularly unusual, although in many years, there are a few summering birds around.

Semi-palmated, Piping and Snowy Plovers were present on the Sea Rim beaches in relatively modest numbers, but two Wilson's Plovers were the first of this summer visitor to be detected on a fall count since 2016. Long-billed Curlews are not particularly uncommon in Southeast Texas. Two on Sea Rim followed two in 2021, but before that, it was 2011 since the species was detected. Dunlin are extremely common beach birds in the "winter" but are among the latest shorebirds to migrate, so not finding any by mid-September is not unusual. However, not finding any dowitchers on the count, either Short-billed on the beach or Long-billed inland is unusual and perhaps a result of the dry conditions. Despite the ease of finding them from October on, the bulk of them do not seem to arrive until quite late in September. Probably another result of the dry conditions, only one yellowlegs, a Greater Yellowlegs on Backridge Road, was seen.

Ring-billed Gulls are another winter resident species the first of which often has not shown up by the middle of

September, but this year two were seen. Herring Gulls are also expected by mid-winter, but not by mid-September. One was seen just west of Sea Rim SP. Perhaps the most significant gulls were seven Lesser Black-backed Gulls, following eight in 2022, and thereby validating their establishment as a regular part of the local avifauna. A good number of Least Terns had not left for parts south, while a good number of Black Terns also remained. Royal Tern numbers were somewhat light, but there are large stretches of shore that we are unable to census. Black Skimmers are very gregarious; we usually find a group but not this year.

It is always exciting to find flocks of migrating Wood Storks on the count, and a small flock in West Jefferson County was outnumbered by a large flock over the Salt Water Barrier in Beaumont. Before the 1990s, Brown Pelicans were not seen in the area, and certainly not in any number on the Upper Texas Coast. This year's 996 followed about 300 in 2022, both large increases over the previously normal in recent years of 100-200. Clearly, the species is no longer seriously endangered!

Great Egret numbers were a little low, doubtless an effect of the drought. Anyone who has birded the area over the last decade or so will almost certainly, even if anecdotally, suggest that Snowy Egret numbers have increased substantially. However, the numbers observed on the count in the past few years do not confirm this. We are at a loss to explain! Our area is on the eastern edge of a somewhat disjunct range of Reddish Egrets along the Gulf Coast. To our east, the Reddish Egret become quite scarce, but become much more numerous again still further east. The best chances of seeing Reddish Egret locally are in the fall, probably mostly wandering immature birds. Four has been the popular number over the last five years or so. Judging the status of Cattle Egrets is difficult, but the count this year was the lowest in ten years. However, the species is in no danger in Southeast Texas! Low numbers of both White and dark ibis are doubtless consequences of the drought.

The numbers of White-tailed Kites seem to run in cycles, and we seem to be at the low point of the current cycle as there were not any seen. The principal diet item of the species is small rodents; this may be a clue to the reason for the absence this year. The good showing of Mississippi Kites, a species that feeds mostly on insects, is more likely a result of the timing of migrant flights. Equally, on count day, Broad-winged Hawk numbers seen on the count are heavily dependent on the passage of migrating flocks. There was a good number, but no large kettle. The first Northern Harriers usually show up in time for the count, but although one or two had been seen in the area by count date, none were found on the day. The first American Kestrel to arrive in the fall usually does so right about count day, and one was seen in the western part of the county. Crested Caracaras have become firmly established in the county and eight, while not matching last year's 16, suggests that the species is, nevertheless firmly established.

Fall is the time to find migrant flycatchers on the Upper Texas Coast. Eastern Wood-Pewees were unusually numerous, and Least Flycatchers were probably slightly above normal. Great Crested Flycatchers were markedly more numerous. Eastern Kingbirds were seen in normal numbers,

but Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were scarce. The area is well within, even if near the western edge of the normal range of Eastern Kingbirds, but close to the extreme eastern edge of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Despite the differences in appearance, the two species are genetically closely related and compete for the same territories.

Mid-September is, for the most part, in the heart of migration of most vireo species though southeast Texas, but Blue-headed Vireo is an exception. Four, apparently a family party seen in north Beaumont, were unexpectedly early. These may have been part of a population that winters well south in Central America. For reasons not clear, Philadelphia Vireos are relatively rarely seen on the count, despite the count being conducted in the middle of the fall migration window for the species, so three was a good showing. A Warbling Vireo rounded out a good vireo day which included many White-eyed and several Red-eyed Vireos.

Despite being very noisy, the number of Blue Jays was a little low, while both Fish and American Crows more markedly so.

A Bank Swallow in Cattail Marsh was the first in four years. A large group of about 200 Tree Swallows over wet fields on Lawhon Road was noteworthy, perhaps concentrated there by the scarcity of wet fields elsewhere. Good numbers of Cave and Cliff Swallows were seen in Cattail March.

American Robins are in the county year-round, but our normal count day birding patterns do not spend time in the areas where they make their homes, mostly residential and other open and semi open areas. Four the first on the count since 2020. were seen in Klein Park, one of the smaller parks in Beaumont. Driving through the western and other open areas of the county this late summer left the impression that Northern Mockingbird numbers are down as there were very few on the wires or on conspicuous perches, but our count results defy that supposition. The species is easily identified by its white wing patches, and it seems that our birding routes flush them out from their alternative perches, probably in close proximity to houses. Eastern Meadowlarks have usually been very scarce on the fall count, and that only three seen was not unusual. Local meadowlarks are likely almost all migratory with the birds of summer heading south in winter to be replaced by birds from further north. It may be that mid-September is between the departure of the summer birds and the arrival of the wintering birds. Alternatively, the meadowlarks may be in heavy molt – they undergo a full molt in "late summer" – and may be remaining out of sight during this period. On count day, we encountered, county wide, a significant migration of Baltimore Orioles. Over 40 seen as compared to single figures in most years.

Mid-September is too early in the fall for any significant number of wintering sparrows to have arrived. So, the only sparrows recorded were the resident Seaside Sparrows in the coastal Spartina marshes.

The overall number of species seen on the count is almost always strongly influenced by the number of warbler species. This year, we tallied a respectable 18 warbler species (plus Yellow-breasted Chat!). Thirteen of the 18 were in Sabine Woods, meaning that there was also a good selection in places like Edgewater Park and Collier's Ferry Park in north Beaumont. A Palm Warbler in Sabine Woods was very early;

seven Canada Warblers was a high number even though the species is often almost the most common warbler in Sabine Woods in late summer. Mourning Warblers have become easier to find, or perhaps we have become better at finding them, and we now find them each year on this count.

The passage of large passerine migrants noted in connection with orioles above extended to other species, especially in west Jefferson County. High numbers of Blue Grosbeaks especially, but also Indigo Buntings and Dickcissels were recorded.

Above, we have selected some groups of species that stand out as being substantially abnormal regardless of this being a severe drought year. The results of the count enable us to see some of the effects of the drought. Everything connected to birds needs water. There just aren't any birds in truly desert areas, of which there are comparatively few in the world. A few specialized species are able to exist in near desert areas, but only those with some vegetation, however sparse.

For the most part, the water story starts with insects. Insects need water. The eggs of many species will not hatch without it. All birders know or quickly learn that rain in southeast Texas leads to a hatch of mosquitoes after one or two days. Mosquitoes are not favored by many birds, but most small insects that many passerine birds do like are similar in life history. However, many other insects are dependent on vegetation rather than people and animals, and the effects of drought on those species will typically be on a much longer time scale. To summarize, no rain means not only no insects, but almost no growth of vegetation, leading more significantly, to very little or no seed production, depriving many birds of an important food source. The exceptionally high temperatures that have prevailed over much of the summer this year, saw birds and animals seeking any shelter they could find, and was likely responsible for the birds not being on wires and exposed tree and shrub branches. Wires get hot and birds may eschew perching on them, particularly in the heat of the day. Birds can almost always find shade in the vicinity of human activities.

Many water bird species need shallow standing water. Fortunately, in southeast Texas, there are always some remaining ponds, fed in part by water from rivers and canals used to enable rice production. But this standing water is often in locations that are not readily accessible to birders.

Northbound spring migration is clearly driven by the urge to reach the breeding grounds as soon as possible to occupy the most favorable territories to commence breeding, with the lengthening duration of daylight being an important signal to commence migration. Fall migration is less regimented and much more variable from year to year, with departure from the breeding grounds probably influenced as much by the availability of food as any other factor, although weather and daylight hours may still be secondary signals

## Birds Recorded

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (405); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (2); TEAL, Blue-winged (35); GADWALL (6); DUCK, Mottled (4); GREBE, Pied-billed (8); PIGEON, Rock (291); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (18); DOVE, Inca (2); DOVE, White-winged (39); DOVE, Mourning (279); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (4); Nighthawk, Common (1); SWIFT, Chimney (11); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (28); HUMMINGBIRD species (17); RAIL, King (2); RAIL, Clapper (8); SORA (1); GALLINULE,

Common (110); COOT, American (4); GALLINULE, Purple (12); STILT, Black-necked (46); PLOVER, Black-bellied (14); KILLDEER (92); PLOVER, Semipalmated (3); PLOVER, Piping (4); PLOVER, Wilson's (2); PLOVER, Snowy (3); CURLEW, Long-billed (2); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (4); SANDERLING (56); SANDPIPER, Least (16); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (12); SANDPIPER, Western (1); SANDPIPER, Spotted (3); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (1); WILLET (11); GULL, Laughing (1473); GULL, Ring-billed (2); GULL, Herring (1); GULL, Lesser. Black-backed (7); GULL, Species (4); TERN, Least (28); TERN, Caspian (10); TERN, Black (37); TERN, Forster's (99); TERN, Royal (253); STORK, Wood (82); ANHINGA (29); CORMORANT, Neotropic (280); PELICAN, Brown (996); HERON, Great Blue (39); EGRET, Great (152); EGRET, Snowy (139); HERON, Little Blue (10); HERON, Tricolored (33); EGRET, Reddish (4); EGRET, Cattle (1701); HERON, Green (17); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (23); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (3); IBIS, White (155); IBIS, White-faced (26); IBIS, *Plegadis* (34); SPOONBILL, Roseate (10); VULTURE, Black (49); VULTURE, Turkey (103); VULTURE species (20); OSPREY (6); KITE, Mississippi (18); HAWK, Cooper's (3); HAWK, Red-shouldered (13); HAWK, Broad-winged (27); HAWK, Swainson's (3); HAWK, Red-tailed (4); OWL, Great Horned (2); OWL, Barred (2); KINGFISHER, Belted (5); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (5); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (18); WOODPECKER, Downy (8); WOODPECKER, Pileated (9); CARACARA, Crested (8); KESTREL, American (1); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (2); WOODPEWEE, Eastern (20); FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (7); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (1); FLYCATCHER, Traill's (5); FLYCATCHER, Least (5); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (11); PHOEBE, Eastern (2); FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (1); FLYCATCHER, Great. Crested (19); KINGBIRD, Eastern (23); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (17); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (41); VIREO, White-eyed (17); VIREO, Yellow-throated (1); VIREO, Blue-headed (4); VIREO, Philadelphia (3); VIREO, Warbling (1); VIREO, Red-eyed (3); JAY, Blue (98); CROW, American (26); CROW, Fish (10); CROW, Species (18); SWALLOW, Bank (1); SWALLOW, Tree (210); SWALLOW, N Rough-wing. (3); MARTIN, Purple (8); SWALLOW, Barn (111); SWALLOW, Cliff (78); SWALLOW, Cave (20); SWALLOW species (20); CHICKADEE, Carolina (29); TITMOUSE, Tufted (5); WREN, Marsh (1); WREN, Carolina (15); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (57); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (20); ROBIN, American (4); CATBIRD, Gray (1); THRASHER, Brown (7); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (197); STARLING, European (771); SPARROW, Seaside (16); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (5); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (3); ORIOLE, Baltimore (43); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (61); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (43); GRACKLE, Common (172); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (98); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (159); GRACKLE, Gt.-tailed/ Boat-tailed (20); OVENBIRD (1); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (1); WARBLER, Black-and-wh. (11); WARBLER, Tennessee (2); WARBLER, Nashville (2); WARBLER, Mourning (2); WARBLER, Kentucky (1); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (7); WARBLER, Hooded (5); REDSTART, American (1); PARULA, Northern (2); WARBLER, Magnolia (1); WARBLER, Yellow (3); WARBLER, Palm (1); WARBLER, Pine (13); WARBLER, Yellow-throated (1); WARBLER, Canada (7); WARBLER, Wilson's (2); TANAGER, Summer (1); CARDINAL, Northern (72); GROSBEAK, Blue (48); BUNTING, Indigo (53); BUNTING, Painted (3); DICKCISSEL (36); SPARROW, House (4).

TOTAL individuals (9172).  
Number of species (159); Number of Observers (18); Number of Parties (12); Number of Party-Hours (67.0); Party hours on foot (22.0); Miles on foot (11.8); Party-hours by automobile (42.4); Miles by automobile (330.7); Party Hours Total (64.4); Miles Total (342.5).

Participants Bonnie Berard, Howard and Linda Davis, Liz Dennis, Jimmy Bryan, Ashley Fuselier, Sherry Gibson, Claudia Gilson, Kenyan Guidry, Johnny Johnson, John Haynes; Denise and Gary Kelley, Helen Kent, Frank Ohrt, Jessica Barry Rogers, Dania Sanchez, Harlan Stewart, Liz Timmer, John Whittle

*John Whittle.*

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

Each September, Golden Triangle Audubon runs a Field Trip to the Smith Point Hawk Watch. For practical reasons, this field trip has to be scheduled months in advance. To some extent, perhaps a large extent, the days with the heaviest hawk flights are dependent on the weather between Pennsylvania and the rest of the northeast and Smith Point. Smith Point is at the tip of a headland projecting into Galveston Bay and separating East Bay and Trinity Bay. Many hawks will not cross large bodies of water, so they funnel into the Point, often milling around, before preceding round Trinity Bay to reach the other side and then continue southwards. Broad-wings proceed south after breeding principally using two routes, one using the narrow land route over Detroit and the other over the mountain ridges of Pennsylvania. The former probably exclusively travel south and reach the coast of the Gulf of Mexico just north of Corpus Christi and are counted as they pass over the Hazel Bazemore Hawk Watch just west of Corpus Christi. The latter takes advantage of the lift provided by the ridges of the Appalachians and reach close to the Gulf of Mexico before heading a little further west and making a southward turn. These are the birds that are seen at Smith Point.

At least 12 members traveled to Smith Point and joined the throng of observers that included two other organized groups. The numbers of the various hawk species were not outstanding, but the weather was very pleasant with modest northeast winds early in the morning shifting to east-south-east as the day progressed. The only complaint about the weather was that there were few clouds. It is much easier to detect hawks with a cloud background! Northeast winds are favorable for hawk migration, but perhaps after multiple days with such winds, the pipeline was nearly empty.

Historically, the peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration has been around September 25 or 26. We essentially always schedule our field trips on Saturdays. Because there has been some indication that the peak might be shifting slightly later, we selected September 30 rather than September 23. It is too early to draw any firm conclusions, but this year there was a 15,948 Broad-wing day at Smith Point on the very early date of September 17. Totals of 3,139 on September 26 and 3,440 on September 27 suggest that we should continue to schedule as near September 26 as the calendar allows. The six Broad-wings we did see were fairly near and low. Unfortunately, there are not any Hawk Watches that we know of between Pennsylvania and Smith Point, so advance warning of large flights is not forthcoming. It is typically at least five days of flight from Pennsylvania to Smith Point, and it seems clear that rain and adverse winds can cause migrating hawks to stay in place to await more favorable conditions.

Broad-wings are not the only hawks to migrate over Smith Points. Thirteen Mississippi Kites were seen on the day. The species does not congregate in large kettles to the same extent as Broad-wings, but over 5,000 had been tallied between about September 10 and the field trip date. As the season progressed, *Accipiters* (Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks) became more prominent in the totals after September 17. Sharp-shinned Hawks tend to pass over early in the morning, and this day was no exception with most having passed over

before the majority of the Golden Triangle Audubon participants had arrived at Smith Point. After the middle of September falcons start appearing over Smith Point, and eleven American Kestrels were seen. Merlins were also prominent with five, including one which was able to dig its talons into a Sharp-shinned Hawk and take it down into the trees in front of the tower! An unusual sighting was of two Ospreys flying close together. Ospreys are quite common in winter, but they are almost always solitary. Three Northern Harriers and two Red-tailed Hawks were a little on the early side, but certainly not unprecedented for the end of September.

There are always "non-hawk" species to look at. White Ibis is commonly seen and a mixed adult/immature flock flew over. There were swallows around, Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows for sure and perhaps others. The shrubs south of the tower were favored by three Northern Mockingbirds and probably two Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. The poles and railings of the piers just west of the tower were being used by a good number of Royal Terns, a smaller number of Forster's Terns and a few Laughing Gulls. Some Brown Pelicans were around.

Many of our members also visited Robbins Park, which had more terns, a few Willets and some Black Skimmers. Early visitors to the park had an American Oystercatcher with a numbered band. It turned out it had been banded by Susan Heath on Tiki Island in Galveston. That represented the fastest information response to a banded bird report that we had ever seen!

The journey from the Golden Triangle area to Smith Point passes along some of the best birding roads in Chambers County. In particular, several raptor species not seen at Smith Point on this day were found. In the morning, on FM1941, not too far from Highway 124 was what was almost certainly a less-than-adult White-tailed Hawk. This was not the first White-tailed Hawk to have been seen along this stretch of FM1941.

Shoveler Pond in Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge is a nearby birding spot close to the route back home. In order to eliminate some undesirable vegetation, the Pond was completely drained earlier in the year. Some water was put back in a few weeks ago, but most of the Pond was still dry until sometime in the week of the field trip. The water level is now approaching normal, but after the long period without any water in it, it will take some time before the habitat returns to normal. The various food items that will sustain the species that normally reside in Shoveler Pond will need time to recolonize the area, and reproduce to increase the amount of food available. Nevertheless, it was good to see yellowlegs and a few other shorebird species present, albeit in limited numbers. The alligators apparently moved out when the Pond dried up, but none seem to have returned yet.

Day Totals. (Official Counts for the Hawk Species at Smith Point)

Osprey 2; Northern Harrier 3; Sharp-shinned Hawks 85; Cooper's Hawk 23; Red-tailed Hawk 2; Swainson's Hawk 2; American Kestrel 11; Merlin 5; Mississippi Kite 13. Total Hawks 152.

*John Whittle*

# Bird Sightings – September 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. We hope this will better focus on the birds that are truly unusual – not normally seen in the area at all or drastically out of normal time of occurrence.

## Local Counties (listed above)

Gadwall	Sep 1	JEF-TP (1) HS
Limpkin	Sep 2-17	HAI-Johns Lake (3+) Johnny Johnson, mult obs
	Sep 11	JEF-TP (2) HS
Common Loon	Sep 7	SAB-Island Point @ Cypress Bend (2) Dvid Bell
Blue-headed Vireo	Sep 15	JEF-SW (1) Greg Reynolds
Red-headed Nuthatch	Sep 16	SAA-nr CR454 (1) Jim Burrough
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Sep 18	ANG-Angelina Co Airport (1) Gary Hunter
Magnolia Warbler	Sep 3	JEF-SW (1) SM

## Nearby Counties

American Wigeon	Sep 10	GAL-Amoco Pond (2) WE
Redhead	Sep 24-29	HAS-Paul Rushing Park (2) mult obs
American Flamingo	Sep 3	GAL-Bolivar Flats (5) mult obs
Common Ground Dove	Sep 22	HI Cemetery (1) WE
	Sep 25-30	GAL-Galveston Is SP/EI Lago Rd (1) Kyle O'Haver, Dean Silvers; Keith Alderman, mult obs
	Sep 27	HAS-EI Franco Lee Park (1) Ellie Hajovsky, Stephanie T`
	Sep 30	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Steve Rogow, James Wallace
Black-chinned H'bird	Sep 4	GAL-9-mile rd (1) Jamie Schubert
Broad-tailed H'bird	Sep 20	HAS-Rice Univ (1) mult obs
Anna's Hummingbird	Sep 26	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Cin-Ty lee, Grant Parajuli, Leo Costello
Allen's Hummingbird	Sep 22-26	HAS-Copperfield Area (1) mult obs
Limpkin	Sep 10-30	GAL-Magnolia Ridge retention basin (3) WE, mult obs
Sandhill Crane	Sep 16	HAS-J P Landing Park (35) Linda Martin-Rust
	Sep 17	HAS-Atascosita (6) Corey Spouse
	Sep 29	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (20) Dean Silvers
American Golden-Plover	Sep 1-3	HAS-J P Rushing Pk (1) Letha Slaigle, mult obs
Red-necked Phalarope	Sep 5	CAM-Rutherford Beach (1) Charlotte Chehotsky
Glossy Ibis	Sep 1-30	HAS-Sheldon Lake (1) mult obs
Brown Booby	Sep 8	CAM-offshore (1) Jeffrey McCrary
Parasitic Jaeger	Sep 25	CHA-Offshore from El Jardin Beach (1) John Berner, Dale Wolck, Andrew Hamlett, Letha Slaigle
Franklin's Gull	Sep 13	GAL-Galveston Is SP (1) Dean Silvers
Lsr Black-backed Gull	Sep 10	CHA-Charmbers County Beach (1) Steve Glover

Ladder-back. W'pecker	Sep 4	HAS-J P Landing Park (1) Michael Kuzio, mult obs
Western Wood-Pewee	Sep 10	GAL-Shaman Rd (1) Cin-Ty Lee
	Sep 27-30	GAL-Galveston Is SP (1) Dean Silvers, mult obs
Alder Flycatcher	Sep 21	HI Smith , mult obs
Say's Phoebe	Sep 23	Oaks (10) WE CAM-Sabine NWR Blue Goose Trl (1) Lynn Hollerman
Ash-throated Flycatcher	Sep 9	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Jamie Schubert
	Sep 11-12	Bear Creek Park (1) Jimm Hinson, Timothy Freiday
Tropical Kingbird	Sep 2	CAM--Trosclair Road (1) Esme Rosen
Couch's Kingbird	Sep 1-19	HAS-Pine Forest Country Club (2) Timothy White
	Sep 11	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Jim Hinson
	Sep 19	HAS-Cypresswood (1) John Hale
	Sep 23	HAS-Copperfield Area (2) Andrew Hamlett
	Sep 24	HAS-J P Landing Park (1) Jessica Burroughs, Michelle Radtkin
Bell's Vireo	Sep 10	CHA-nr. FM565 (1) Paul Fagala
	Sep 16	HAS-Sheldon Lake (1) Justin Sandt
	Sep 27	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Margaret Farese
Marsh Wren	Sep 26	CHA-Smith Pt Robbins Park (2) Wes Brownimg, Michael Womer
Swainson's Thrush	Sep 8	GAL-HI Smith Oaks (1) Brian Anderson
Chipping Sparrow	Sep 16	HAS-Bear Creek Park (1) Drew Dickert
Golden-winged Warbler	Sep 3	GAL-Lafitte's Cov (1) Richard Liebler
Orange-crowned Warbler	Sep 30	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Esme Rosen
Blackburnian Warbler	Sep 2	HAS-EI Franco Lee Pk (1) Hengxing Zou
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Sep 16	GAL-LaMarque (1) Scott Buckel
	Sep 22	GAL-HI Boy Scout Woods (1) WE
Bullock's Oriole	Sep 14	HAS-Sharp Rd (1) Letha Slaigle, Karen Goodger
Black-headed Grosbeak	Sep 27	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Cin-Ty Lee, Leo Costello, Barbara Stern

**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.

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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.