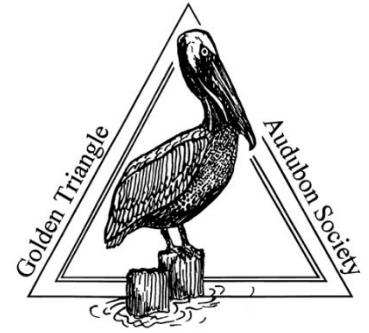


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 30 No 10

October 2024

Membership Meeting
Thursday October 17 , 2024 7:00 p.m.
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont
Amanda M. Adams, Ph.D.
Director of Research Coordination
Bat Conservation International

Dr. Amanda Adams has worked with bats for over 20 years. As Director of Research Coordination at Bat Conservation International (BCI), she maintains communication among internal and external partners for conservation research. She runs BCI's Student Research Scholarship Program and is passionate about developing capacity for bat conservation. Amanda specializes in bioacoustics and has broad research experience, particularly in behavioral and sensory ecology, and is an adjunct faculty in the Department of Biology at Texas A&M University. She received her Ph.D. from Western University in Canada and a B.Sc. and an M.Sc. from the University of California, San Diego. She completed postdoctoral research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Texas A&M University.

Bats lead to the best opportunities to protect nature anywhere in the world. Bats are vital to our world's ecosystems and economy, but hundreds of species face threats to their existence. Founded in 1982, Bat Conservation International has grown into a globally recognized conservation organization dedicated to ending bat extinctions. Working together, our goal is to redefine what is possible in global conservation, through the utilization of cutting-edge tools, technology, and training to create a real, measurable impact.

We plan to have the doors open at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will start at 7:00 p.m.

The Brown Pelican

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Issue number 309

Golden Triangle
Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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email: 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.

Saturday October 5, 2024. Sabine Woods Work Day. Canceled. We have decided that we do not need a formal Work Day this fall. However, some of the trails could benefit from some attention and we encourage all who bird the Woods to spend an hour or more with loppers and/or clippers after you finish birding. Ashley Fuselier and/or Howard Davis can point you to the areas in most need of some work.

Thursday October 17, 2024. Membership Meeting. Dr. Amanda Adams of Bat Conservational International. See page 1 for further details.

Saturday October 19, 2024. Field Trip to Sabine Woods. Leader Steve Mayes. Meet at Sabine Woods, which is 4.1 miles west of Sabine Pass on the north side of Highway 87 at 7:30 a.m. 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.

October 19 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 21, 2024. Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting of Golden Triangle Audubon Society will take place on November 21, 2024 in the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park. At this meeting, we will hold elections for all Offices except President (whose term continues through 2025) and all At-Large Board positions. To nominate

someone contact the chair of the Nominating Committee. Steve Mayes. Please in the first instance email him at gtaudubon@aol.com. Nominations from the floor will be in order but must be accompanied by affirmation, either orally at the meeting, or in writing, that the candidate is willing to serve.

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.

Saturday November 23, 2024. Field Trip to West Jefferson County. In recent years, this has been one of our most successful field trips. The area is well known for its birds of prey, which in past years have included Bald and Golden Eagles, Crested Caracaras and White-tailed Hawks in addition to the more "expected" Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and American Kestrels. In some years we have seen White-tailed Kites and Merlins. However, recent trips to the area so far this year have found very few birds. Perhaps it is still too early. We have had a series of unusual weather periods over the last 18-months or so with droughts, freezes and some very wet periods. This will be a very interesting field trip!

The area is well known as the wintering ground of what has become a large (about 1,000 strong) flock of Sandhill Cranes and most winters is one of the best places to see the wintering sparrows of the area.

Depending on whether there are flooded fields, there may be ducks and geese also.

We recommend stopping at the Stuckey's at the intersection of IH-10 and FM365 (on the short stretch of two-way service road of IH-10 - north side) to use the facilities and purchase any snacks you need. Reaching toilet facilities on this trip requires a lengthy side trip! Then meet at 8 a.m. at the intersection of FM365 and Johnson Road (on the "north/west" side of Johnson Road at that intersection). From the intersection of Interstate 10 and FM365 in Fannett, proceed along FM365 (towards Nome) for about six miles. Shortly after you emerge out of the woodlands, South China Road goes to the right (east then north) and immediately afterwards, on the left, is Johnson Road. Contact Field Trip chair Steve Mayes, gtaudubon@aol.com for

further information. This will be largely a "car birding" trip, car-pooling desired.

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 2025 dues. You may pay at any membership meeting (checks preferred) or use the subscription/membership blank on the back page. Dues paid in September or later will cover through the end of 2025.

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. Postage rates have recently increased again. To start that, simply send an email to gtaudubon@aol.com from the address you want us to use.

North American Migration Count Jefferson County 21 September 2024

Any analysis of a bird count must first attempt to evaluate any impacts on the activities of birds by weather on the day of the count, and on the day or two before. This fall count was conducted on a day of relatively pleasant weather, with few clouds, little wind and temperatures rising to only about 90 degrees away from the cooling effects along the coast. The day followed a completely dry period of some 10 days. For obvious reasons, we hold the count on a Saturday (the third Saturday of September), and that means the date can vary from the 15th to the 21st. That does not seem like a large difference, but it is significant when most migrants are believed to be influenced by the length of day and night. It may be that this count was a little lighter than average on the species that migrate early in the fall and perhaps heavier on those that migrate later. Perhaps the lack of any weather factors that might have caused migrants to "bunch up" along their routes was more a significant determinant of the numbers of migrants without necessarily affecting the number of species.

The total number of birds recorded exceeded 10,000 for the first time in three years but the totals in many of the sectors can vary dramatically depending whether some large flocks were present. The number of species seen at a provisional 164 was on the high side of normal influenced by a good showing of 11 warblers at Sabine Woods.

Both White-winged and Mourning Dove numbers were back up, perhaps not unexpected in light of the relatively dry conditions. Seven Yellow-billed Cuckoos was a higher number than usual, somewhat surprising in view of the "late" date of the count. A Chuck-will's-widow was the first in three years of a species that used to be seen more frequently on the count.

September 21 is quite late for Chimney Swifts to be still around, so two on that date was a little surprising. Hummingbird numbers appeared to be "normal," but

perhaps the coverage of both hummingbird plants and feeders is variable from year to year.

Rails, especially Clapper Rails, were surprisingly low, perhaps influenced by the lack of rainfall in the days immediately prior forcing the birds away from the more visible "roadsides." It surprises many local birders that local checklists show American Coots as present though uncommon throughout the summer and although we do see some in essentially all our fall counts.

Anecdotally, Black-necked Stilt numbers seem to be increasing. The number seen on the count was one of the highest in recent years. It is interesting to note that in the very early days of Christmas Counts on the Upper Texas Coast (UTC) in the 1960s, Black-necked Stilts were very rare. Flocks containing significant numbers are common nowadays and numbers must be regarded as still increasing.

Among the plovers, Killdeer numbers were pretty standard, scattered as usual throughout the County. The numbers of the beach plovers need some discussion. Wilson's Plovers are summer residents of the UTC beaches, but two seen on Sea Rim were still there even on the late date of the count. But this year was the first year that we did not find any Snowy Plovers on the Sea Rim Beach. A mere ten years ago, we would typically find at least ten of them. This is probably a localized change. It used to be hard to find Snowy Plovers on Bolivar Flats. Now it is easy. To suggest that the birds have moved from Sea Rim to Bolivar Flats is probably overly simplistic (especially since the beach between Sea Rim and High Island is not easily surveyed), but this is the kind of very localized information that a survey of this count uncovers. More straightforward is the Piping Plover situation. Despite their endangered status, Piping Plovers are actually quite common in winter on the beaches at both Sea Rim SP and Bolivar Flats, and there were good numbers on Sea Rim again this year. Worldwide,

population estimates for Piping Plovers (endangered in the Great Lakes area and threatened in the rest of the US) seem to be stable (and actually are slightly higher than those for Wilson's Plover, which attracts far less concern). As usual, there were some sandpipers of the genus *Calidris* and some of the generally longer legged birds of the *Tringa* genus.

In general, gull and tern numbers were on the low wide, perhaps at least partially owing to the limited accessibility of the East Beach at Sea Rim on count day. It was a little disappointing not to find any Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which have become quite common over the last two or three years. Both American White and Brown Pelicans must have mostly been elsewhere, although a small number of each was seen. Interesting was to find 13 Belted Kingfishers.

Among the herons and allies, two American Bitterns were seen. This is a species that is normally seen only from a boat or airboat. Twelve Least Bitterns was a high number for late September. In common with observations in the county on other days, Western Cattle Egrets numbers were lower than has become normal.

This is little to remark on in the raptor numbers. Red-shouldered Hawk numbers were low, and no White-tailed Hawks were confirmed, although we know they are firmly established in small numbers in the county. Crested Caracaras seem to be continuing to expand, with 16 being tallied.

It is always interesting to review the flycatchers that are seen on the count. The count is usually a few days too early for Vermilion Flycatchers, a relatively late wintering species in Jefferson County in any case, but this year we found two. A week later, participants on our field trip to the Smith Point Hawk Watch found three or more in Chambers County. Seven Great Crested Flycatchers was a large number for late September.

We have been interested for some time in Loggerhead Shrike numbers, having established several years ago that there has been a dramatic decrease in numbers in the western part of the county. Twenty-three this year seems likely to indicate that the numbers are no longer dropping. Even so, the shrikes that are still present are concentrated on the southern part of the county, and numbers in the open areas of western Jefferson County are still severely depressed. We have suggested that changes in the agricultural and rice farming practices there may be largely responsible, but probably not directly as shrikes feed mainly on large insects.

Both Chickadee and Ruby-crowned Kinglet numbers were above normal, but we wonder if that is partially explained by the ability of the Merlin app to detect their calls better than human ears. We do not normally record birds of these two species based solely on Merlin, but Merlin's identification of calls alerts our observers to the presence of the birds which are then seen or heard by our human observers.

September is too early to expect any of the wintering sparrows to have arrived. There were not large numbers of any migrating warbler species (except seven Yellow Warblers) but the eleven species was a good showing. The absence of any weather events on the migration route, and

the generally light wind conditions along it seems to have resulted in a more "even" flow of migrants this year.

Species recorded: WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (123), WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (1), TEAL, Blue-winged (135), SHOVELER, Northern (3), DUCK, Mottled (14), GREBE, Pied-billed (1), PIGEON, Rock (144), COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (6), DOVE, Inca (1), DOVE, White-winged (152), DOVE, Mourning (269), CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (7), WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck- (1), SWIFT, Chimney (2), HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (79), HUMMINGBIRD species (25), RAIL, King (1), RAIL, Clapper (4), RAIL, King/Clapper (6), GALLINULE, Common (154), COOT, American (4), GALLINULE, Purple (15), STILT, Black-necked (116), AVOCET, American (31), PLOVER, Black-bellied (10), KILLDEER (76), PLOVER, Semipalmated (10), PLOVER, Piping (18), PLOVER, Wilson's (2), SANDPIPER, Upland (1), SANDPIPER, Stilt (6), SANDERLING (37), DUNLIN (10), SANDPIPER, Least (19), SANDPIPER, Western (12), DOWITCHER, Long-billed (15), SANDPIPER, Spotted (14), SANDPIPER, Solitary (3), YELLOWLEGS, Greater (6), WILLET (16), YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (4), GULL, Laughing (151), GULL, Ring-billed (14), GULL, Species (196), TERN, Least (5), TERN, Gull-billed (5), TERN, Caspian (2), TERN, Black (5), TERN, Forster's (69), TERN, Royal (15), TERN, Sandwich (7), ANHINGA (13), CORMORANT, Neotropic (162), CORMORANT, Species (1), PELICAN, Brown (4), BITTERN, American (2), BITTERN, Least (12), HERON, Great Blue (26), EGRET, Great (178), EGRET, Snowy (265), HERON, Little Blue (38), HERON, Tricolored (93), EGRET, Reddish (6), EGRET, Western Cattle (1405), HERON, Green (22), NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (6), NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (11), IBIS, White (120), IBIS, White-faced (179), IBIS, *Plegadis* (2436), SPOONBILL, Roseate (35), VULTURE, Black (110), VULTURE, Turkey (95), OSPREY (16), KITE, Mississippi (9), HARRIER, Northern (3), HAWK, Cooper's (3), HAWK, Red-shouldered (2), HAWK, Broad-winged (6), HAWK, Swainson's (7), HAWK, Red-tailed (1), HAWK species (2), OWL, Great Horned (1), OWL, Barred (1), KINGFISHER, Belted (13), WOODPECKER, Red-head (3), WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (22), WOODPECKER, Downy (16), WOODPECKER, Pileated (9), FLICKER, Northern (3), CARACARA, Crested (16), KESTREL, American (4), MERLIN (2), WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (4), FLYCATCHER, Traill's (1), FLYCATCHER, Least (4), FLYCATCHER, *Empidonax* (2), PHOEBE, Eastern (1), FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (1), FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (7), KINGBIRD, Eastern (6), FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (6), SHRIKE, Loggerhead (27), VIREO, White-eyed (19), JAY, Blue (110), CROW, American (21), CROW, Fish (10), CROW, Species (1), SWALLOW, Tree (7), SWALLOW, N Rough-wing (7), SWALLOW, Barn (26), SWALLOW, Cliff (1), SWALLOW, Cave (20), SWALLOW species (11), CHICKADEE, Carolina (40), TITMOUSE, Tufted (20), WREN, House (1), WREN, Marsh (1), WREN, Carolina (13), GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (41), BLUEBIRD, Eastern (31), ROBIN, American (1), CATBIRD, Gray (2), THRASHER, Brown (1), MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (160), STARLING, European (630), FINCH, House (2), SPARROW, Seaside (27), SPARROW, Nelson's (2), CHAT, Yellow-breasted (1), MEADOWLARK, Eastern (2), ORIOLE, Orchard (2), ORIOLE, Baltimore (3), BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (125), COWBIRD, Bronzed (6), COWBIRD, Brown-headed (21), GRACKLE, Common (775), GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (148), GRACKLE, Great-tailed (266), GRACKLE, Great-tailed/ Boat-tailed (29), OVENBIRD (1), WATERTHRUSH, Northern (1), WARBLER, Blue-winged (1), WARBLER, Black-and-white (2), WARBLER, Prothonotary (1), WARBLER, Nashville (1), YELLOWTHROAT, Com. (8), WARBLER, Hooded (1), REDSTART, American (2), PARULA, Northern (2), WARBLER, Magnolia (2), WARBLER, Yellow (9), WARBLER, Pine (2), WARBLER, Canada (2), WARBLER, Wilson's (2), TANAGER, Summer (2), CARDINAL, Northern (61), GROSBEEK, Blue (10), BUNTING, Indigo (1), BUNTING, Painted (1), DICKCISSEL (6), SPARROW, House (48), TOTAL (10167), Number of species (165), Number of Observers (15), Number of Parties (6), Number of Party-Hours (64), Party hours on foot (19.2), Miles on foot (7.3), Party-hours by automobile (46.4), Miles by automobile (395.3), Party Hours Total (60.3), Miles Total (393.2).

Participants:: Linda and Howard Davis, Sherry Gibson, Claudia Gilson, Gregory Jackson, Denise and Gary Kelley, Steve Mayes, Fritz Meyer, Gregory Reynolds, Sherrie Roden, Dania Sanchez, Elizabeth Timmer, Jana and John Whittle

Field Trip to Smith Point – 29 September 2024

Hawk watching is not for everyone even among birders. It is a waiting game and some days the wait is all for nothing as the hawks do not show up. It is all a matter of weather and winds and accurate predictions can be difficult even at sites well known for producing large numbers of hawks in the fall. And some find hawks difficult to identify as they fly high overhead. But on the right day at Smith Point no waiting is necessary! And when hawks are flying right over the observation tower, there is no better place to learn hawk identification!

There was a good turnout of Golden Triangle birders to Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area at Smith Point. Late September is the best time to see large numbers of hawks as it coincides with the peak of the Broad-winged Hawk migration. The geography at Smith Point tends to concentrate raptors along the edge of Galveston Bay as these birds generally do not like flying over large stretches of open water. But only if the winds are right and the right day is chosen! On this day, Accipiters were obvious right from the start. This genus of hawks does not rely as much on thermals as the larger soaring hawks so they often are the first raptors to become active. Small Sharp-shinned Hawks were the most common on the day but larger Cooper's Hawks were well represented as well. Though identification of these two species can be tricky, there is no better place to learn the differences than Smith Point in the fall. The differences in tail shape, wings shape and flight patterns become much more obvious when the birds are flying right overhead in numbers!

The two most common raptors seen at Smith Point are the Broad-winged Hawk and Mississippi Kite. Mississippi Kites are pointed-winged, soaring raptors that dine largely on large insects like cicadas and dragonflies (though they are not above taking the occasional bird or bat). These kites have become much more common in southeast Texas in the last 10 – 20 years becoming fairly common nesting birds in riparian areas and even in suburban backyards and parks with mature trees. These birds are more social than many raptors and will nest semi-colonially and may migrate in very large flocks. Broad-winged Hawks are small Buteos (soaring hawks) about the size of a crow. They have a varied diet that includes some insects but also a lot of warm-blooded prey like rodents and birds. They have also increased in numbers as breeding birds in recent years and many of the older neighborhoods in southeast Texas (with mature trees) will likely host a breeding pair of Broad-wings in the summer. This is a very abundant hawk species that nests all the way up into Canada and it is not uncommon for fall flocks of Broad-wings in the thousands or even tens of thousands to be seen along the Texas coast. Both Broad-winged Hawks and Mississippi Kites make very long migrations all the way to South America to spend the winter. But in fall, they are at Smith Point! The group was lucky enough to get plenty of both on this day. A small group of kites was perched in the tops of trees early in the morning but soon were soaring around as thermals formed. The Broad-wings were a little later arriving but arrive they did! Several flocks ("kettles" in hawk watcher lingo) were seen circling around Smith Point on the day consisting of hundreds of birds. There were almost constantly dozens if not hundreds of hawks in view at a time all morning!

Though the Broad-wings are by far the most numerous, there

are other raptors to see at Smith Point. Tiny American Kestrels zipped by in direct flights. A few Northern Harriers were spotted as they flew high in migration, so different than their typical low flying style seen at other times of year. Several Ospreys soared around the area. It was unclear if they were migrating or searching for a meal in the bay. A young Red-shouldered Hawk provided a brief identification challenge until the pale crescents in the wings were spotted. Bulkier Red-tailed Hawks stood out from the much smaller Broad-wings as did the long-winged Swainson's Hawk that was seen. A few Merlins zipped by the tower but did not hang around. A couple of Bald Eagles were spotted later in the day by some birders. One of the more unique (and gruesome) sightings of the day was of a feeding Peregrine Falcon. The bird was flying high over the tower and was trailing something that looked like a long string. At first it was feared that the bird may have become tangled in something like a balloon. Closer observation and photos showed something else – the Peregrine had made a kill and was feeding on the wing. What appeared to be a string was actually the entrails of its prey hanging down! The prey item was likely a small bird of some kind and was not something normally seen!

But hawks are not the only species seen at Smith Point as this area can attract migrants of many kinds. A large flock of soaring Anhingas was a crowd pleaser to be sure. A few Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were spotted near the tower and one of the first of season Eastern Phoebes turned up but, overall, songbird migrants seemed in short supply. A couple of young Yellow-crowned Night-Herons hid in the trees nearby and a huge Great Blue Heron perched in a snag some distance away. Always to be looked for at the Smith Point hawk watch, Magnificent Frigatebirds did not disappoint. These fantastic flyers are notorious for pirating food from other seabirds and a few were seen on the trip including an adult male (pouch not inflated) early in the day. So many reasons to bird Smith Point!

With thousands of hawks and hundreds of Anhingas and lots of other birds to choose from, the Smith Point hawk watch is something all southeast Texas birders should experience. And every day can be different at this legendary spot with the species mix changing with the weather and as the season grows later. One can usually find lots of Broad-wings and Mississippi Kites here but Smith Point also produces rarities like Hook-billed Kite, Golden Eagle and Harris's Hawk so anything can happen! So if you happen to be a birder and you happen to be in southeast Texas in late September (or even October), Smith Point is definitely worth a stop – you never know what you will find!

The following species were recorded by the trip leaders (with raptor numbers from the official hawk counter):

American White Pelican (6); Brown Pelican (40); Magnificent Frigatebird (3); Neotropic Cormorant (18); Great Blue Heron (1); Great Egret (1); Western Cattle Egret (5); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (2); White Ibis (40); Black Vulture (2); Turkey Vulture (6); Osprey (7); Mississippi Kite (83); Bald Eagle (2); Northern Harrier (7); Sharp-shinned Hawk (190); Cooper's Hawk (76); Red-shouldered Hawk (1); Broad-winged Hawk (3412); Swainson's Hawk (1); Red-tailed Hawk (5); Crested Caracara (1); American Kestrel (16); Merlin (4); Peregrine Falcon (3); Killdeer (2); Laughing Gull (25); Royal Tern (15); Mourning Dove (7); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (25); Belted Kingfisher (1); Eastern Phoebe (1); Blue Jay (6); Northern Rough-winged Swallow (20); Cliff/Cave Swallow (10); Barn Swallow (12); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (3); Northern Mockingbird (1)

Steve Mayes

Western Cattle Egret

The powers that be have recently separated the Cattle Egret into two species, the North American one as the Western Cattle Egret. The plumage differences between the Eastern and Western Cattle Egret are not extensive, primarily the extent of the orange coloration on the head and neck in breeding plumage – much greater in the eastern than in the Western. The colonization of basically the entire habitable world south of about 40 degrees North by the species pair is a most interesting story. The species originated in Africa, probably somewhere in West Africa, and its spread over about 150 years has been remarkable. While the Sahara Desert seems to present an understandable barrier to northward expansion, there are Cattle Egrets in the Iberian Peninsula, especially along the Atlantic coast. There are a few records from further north in Europe. The winters in the interior of Europe are much colder than along the maritime coasts. The species is a typical “shorebird” in that it is capable of long-distance flights.

Perhaps the least expected was an initial crossing of the South Atlantic. One of the shortest crossings is from the area of Natal, Brazil to Sierra Leone, about 1,900 miles, and there is documentation of the arrival of Cattle Egrets in northeast South America in 1877 and 1882. (The North Atlantic crossing from the UK to Newfoundland is actually about 100 or 200 miles shorter, but the weather is much more forbidding!) The arrival of a single bird is not enough to initiate spread of a species, and the 1877 and 1882 reports, apparently from Guyana and Suriname, suggest that small flocks from African Cattle Egrets is part of the reasoning behind the separation of the now two Cattle Egret species.

From the original “land-falling” flocks, the species spread northward into mainland North America, reaching Florida in 1941. This raises the possibility that the species followed the route of a number of other species through the island chain of the Lesser Antilles and then through the Greater Antilles (Puerto Rico, Hispaniola and Cuba) into Florida. It should be noted that breeding in Florida was apparently not confirmed until 1953. From Florida, the species spread northwards and slowly westwards across the southern US. Although first recorded in Texas in 1954, and on some Texas Christmas counts in 1956, it was 1960 before Cattle Egrets were considered established along the Gulf Coast as far west as the Upper Coast.

In the Americas, the species is now found between 40 degrees north and 40 degrees south, meaning that is not common in the US north of, say, Illinois or Pennsylvania, although in summer there is an interesting “concentration” in the Dakotas. It is a bird of moist grasslands, so it is not common in either New England or in the mountainous West. In the initial expansion into “mainland” USA away from Florida, it appears that the species was not highly migratory. While Cattle Egrets are now certainly present on the Gulf Coast in winter, the numbers are very much reduced over the summer numbers, and a migratory pattern seems well established, apparently as far as Mexico and Central America. The Florida birds seem to go to the Greater Antilles,

presumably ingrained from the original arrival route. The Cattle Egrets in South America migrate south of their breeding range.

Beyond the scope of this article is a detailed description of the spread of the Eastern species into India, Southeast Asia and Australasia. The expansion in Asia is not well documented, and in any case, the geography is less amenable to range analysis, but the species spread into Australia (an island, albeit a very large one) in 1948. The trans-Tasman flight from Sydney to Auckland, New Zealand at 1,400 miles is longer than most people would estimate, and it was 1963 before the species was recorded in New Zealand. However, there is evidence that there is nowadays a surprising regular migration of Cattle Egrets from the coast of Australia southeast to New Zealand for the winter season. This is one of the few instances where Cattle Egrets apparently routinely make long distant flights over water.

Seeing Cattle Egrets in Southeast Texas apparently on migration seems well established, providing evidence that they migrate in small-to medium flocks. There is anecdotal evidence that the egrets do sometimes “cut the corner” and fly over water, and are sometimes seen on offshore oil rigs.. Oil rigs are not necessarily as inhospitable to Cattle Egrets as might be thought. There is a company that offers pest control services for offshore oil rigs, specifically mentioning, cockroaches, bed bugs and rats and mice, any of which would be seen as food by the Cattle Egrets!

There are Cattle Egrets in Southeast Texas essentially year-round, although the numbers in winter are typically low. They can typically be found near bayous and on the shores of larger bodies of water. Some of the flocks seen in Southeast Texas in spring and fall are almost certainly migrants, breeding further north, but wintering further south.

The Cattle Egret prospers in relatively temperate climates. It is found in relatively dry areas, more so than most members of the heron family, although typically nesting in trees and shrubs near water, feeding principally on invertebrates. Locally, Cattle Egrets breed on the trees in islands in medium sized ponds, such as Shoveler Pond in Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, and in Clay Bottom Pond in Smith Oaks in High Island. They likely nest in Cattail Marsh in areas protected by wide ditches.

Its diet normally consists mostly of insects. When associating with grazing animals in fields, this is normally large insects, especially grasshoppers, crickets, flies; also frogs, spiders, moths. Elsewhere they may feed on crayfish, earthworms, snakes, nestling birds, eggs, sometimes fish.

As the name implies, the species is often found in association with cattle, taking advantage of the insects kicked up by the foraging animals, and also behind the mechanized implements of today’s farming. A tractor with a mower is sure to attract a good number of Cattle Egrets in summer. Cattle Egrets quite frequently perch on the backs of cattle looking for insects. The cattle in general are very tolerant of the birds. Cattle Egrets in general seem to prefer cows over horses. Perhaps the horses are more prone to move rapidly

Bird Sightings – September 2024

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: Inevitably, a September report includes a good sprinkling of southbound migrating warblers and other songbirds that are “early.” One obvious reason that some of these birds move early is that their breeding attempts failed. Their winter quarters are their ancestral home, so the impetus after the failure is to head home. It has been repeatedly explained to us that migrant songbirds head north in spring to find be the first to reach favorable availability of food sources for breeding, but there is another side to this. The mortality of young birds is much greater during their first winter than in subsequent years, although competition to find the most favorable wintering territories is not the only factor.

Local Counties (listed above)

Western Grebe	Sep 24	ANG-Sam Rayburn/TX103 (1) Gary Hunter
Calliope Hummingbird	Sep 10	ANG-Lufkin (1) Kathy and Gary Hunter
Common Loon	Sep 30	SAA-Lake Sam Rayburn (1) Johnny Johnson
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Sep 3,9	JEF-SW (1) Dania Sanchez, Keir Randall
Nelson' Sparrow	Sep 21	JEF-SW (1) Greg Reynolds, Jonathan Breaux
Eastern Towhee	Sep 27	ANG-Lufkin Westwood Bend (1) Katrina Echols
Magnolia Warbler	Sep 4	ORA-Neches River area opp Colliers Ferry Park (1) Andrew From
Black-thr Gray Warbler	Sep 7-8	JEF-SW (1) SM, mult obs
Blackburnian Warbler	Sep 8	JEF-SW (1) mult obs
	Sep 2	JEF-SW (1) Dania Sanchez, Jonathan Breaux

Nearby Counties

Snow Goose	Aug 24-Sep 12	HAS-Bliss Meadow Park, Pasadena (1) continuing
Gadwall	Sep 7	CHA-Smith Pt (8) Joseph Kennedy
Common Ground Dove	Sep 23-24	GAL-Settegast Rd (1) Dennis Cooke, Keith Alderman
	Sep 24	HAS-EI Franco Lee Park (1) Robert Morgan
Black-chinned Humm'bird	Sep 10	CHA-Smith Pt HW (3) Bob Baez, Joseph Kennedy, Teresa Connell
	Sep 12	GAL-HI Boy Scout Woods (3) Bradley Ober
Anna's Hummingbird	Sep 26	CHA-Smith Pt Hawk Watch (2) David Hanson
Allen's Hummingbird	Sep 19-23	HAS-Houston-Copperfield (1) Steven Williams, mult obs
Sandhill Crane	Sep 23	Bear Creek area (1) Vickie Crutchfield
Bonaparte's Gull	Sep 12	GAL-La Marque (11) Brian Young
Franklin's Gull	Sep 28	GAL-Rollover Pass (1) Jonathan Breaux
	Sep 30	HAS-EI Jardin Park (1) Richard Rulander
California Gull	Sep 7-9	GAL-Bolivar Flats (1) WE, mult obs
Glossy Ibis	Sep 7	HAS-EI Dorado Retention Pond (1) Chris Bick, mult obs
White-tailed Hawk	Sep 7	CAL-LA397 at Ward Line Rd (1) Charlotte Chehotsky, Randy Frederick

Western Wood-Pewee	Sep 21	CAM-Willow Is (1) mult obs
	Sep 25-27	GAL-HI Boy Scout Woods (1) WE, Jonathan Breaux
	Sep 24-25	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Richard Liebler, mult obs
Alder Flycatcher	Sep 25	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) mult obs
Say's Phoebe	Sep 8	CHA-Smith Pt Hawk Watch (1) Joseph Kennedy
	Sep 8	CHA-Anahuac NWR (1) Norman Welsh
	Sep 23-24	CAL-Lake Charles (1) Charlotte Chehotsky
	Sep 25-27	GAL-Moody Gardens (1) Richard Liebler, mult obs
	Sep 30	HAS-UH Katy (1) mult obs
Great Kiskadee	Sep 2-8, 23	GAL-57-Acre Park (1) Lisa Hardcastle, mult obs
Couch's Kingbird	Sep 2-4	HAS-Pine Forest CC (2) Timothy White
Cassin's Kingbird	Sep 26	CAM-Holly Beach (1) Esme Rosen
Bullock's Oriole	Sep 11	GAL-HI Smith Oaks (1) WE
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Sep 26	HAS-Rice Univ Campus (1) Grant Parajull
Chipping Sparrow	Sep 9	GAL-HI Boy Scout Woods (1) WE
Blackburnian Warbler	Aug 30-Sep 5	HAS-Houston Arboretum (1) Khloris Wren, Claude Durand
	Sep 7	HAS-Jesse Jones Park (1) Alicia Mein-Johnson, Ken Beeney, Joan Parker
	Sep 9	HAS-Pine Brook Wetlands (1) Letha Slaigle
	Sep 30	HAS-Memorial Area (1) Sue Orwig
Blackpoll Warbler	Sep 28	CAM-Sabine NWR Wetland Walkway (1) James Smithers
Yell-rump (Myrtle) Warbler	Sep 24	GAL-HI (1) WE
Townsend's Warbler	Sep 11	GAL-Lafitte's Cove (1) Paul Sivon, Richard Liebler

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; LIB – Liberty County; 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. 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.