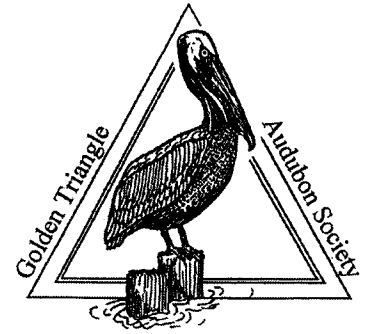


Brown Pelican

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The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 13 No. 3

March 2007

Membership Meeting
Thursday, March 15, 2007, 6:00 PM
Port Arthur Public Library
3601 Cultural Center Drive, Port Arthur
(off 9th Avenue, immediately north of Highway 73)
Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge:
It's Habitats, Management, and Biological Program
Matt Whitbeck, Wildlife Biologist, Anahuac NWR

Matt will talk first about the refuge and its management and then provide an overview of the monitoring and research taking place on the Refuge.

Matt grew up in Massachusetts, has a B.S. from Prescott College in Arizona, and obtained an M.S. from Texas A&M University in 2003, working under Dr. Keith Arnold on Fire and Seaside Sparrows. He joined the staff at Anahuac in February 1997, and assumed his present position as Wildlife Biologist in 2004.

We will plan on having the refreshments ready by 6:00 p.m. and the program will start at 7:00 p.m. sharp.

Why we are meeting at the Port Arthur Library

As our regular attendees will know, the Garden Center in Tyrrell Park is about to undergo a complete renovation and expansion, making it unavailable for our use for several months. A new maintenance building is being built to replace the old structure which was severely damaged in Hurricane Rita, and is nearing completion. This will be heated and cooled and is just about big enough for us to use as an interim meeting venue while the Garden Center is under renovation. However, at press time, the interior of this is not complete, and much finishing work remains to be done, including completion of the electrical, plumbing and the heating and air conditioning systems. The crafts people who do this work are in great demand in the local area at present, and the Board has decided it would be safer to make alternate arrangements for March. The Port Arthur Library is a very attractive facility, easily accessible from Highway 73 via 9th Avenue – it is just east of the Port Arthur Civic Center – with plenty of convenient parking. Our need to be out of the building by 8:45 p.m. has prompted us to move up the starting time to 6:00 p.m. "doors open" and 7:00 p.m. for the talk. We thank Sherrie Roden for making the arrangements with the Library. We will review the situation when the interior of the maintenance building is completed, and make a decision on the location for the meetings in subsequent months then.

The Brown Pelican

Vol. 13, No.3 March 2007

Golden Triangle
Audubon Society

See Web Site for more
information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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Calendar of Events

Saturday March 10. Marsh Madness! at McFaddin NWR. 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Activities focused on marsh activities and education for older children, including an owl program by Wildlife Rehab and Education, viewing live marsh critters, duck calling, learning to crab and fish, retriever and firefighting demonstrations. McFaddin NWR is located on Highway 87, about 10 miles west of Sabine Pass. Call the refuge office at (409) 971-2909.

Thursday March 15. Membership Meeting. See page 1 for details.

Saturday March 17. Field Trip to Bolivar Flats.

Important Note: As of January 1st 2007 the Galveston County has started the parking permit program on the Bolivar Peninsula. Any one can drive on the beach for free. But if you park on the beach you must have a parking permit on your windshield. The fee for the permit is \$10.00 a year. To get the permit you can mail a check to Galveston County Parks Department. Or you can find a merchant on Bolivar that sells them and purchase it there. The address is: Galveston County Parks Department, 4102 Main (Fm 519), La Marque Texas 77568. Attn Michelle in Parking Permits.

Meet at the vehicle barrier at 8:30 a.m. From Winnie, take TX 124 south to High Island. At the shoreline, turn right (west) on TX 87 and proceed through Gilchrist and Crystal Beach until you reach the intersection where Loop 108 turns right (north). Turn left (the opposite way to Loop 108) along Rettillon Road. At the beach, if conditions permit, turn right (west) about 1/2 mile to the vehicle barrier. It takes at least one and a half hours to drive from the Golden Triangle; more if you bird on the way! We will leave the vehicle barrier at about 8:45 a.m., although the group will be visually obvious on the flats should you be a few minutes later than that. The opportunity will exist to visit High Island on the way back. Some walking is necessary on this field trip. How much depends on how much mud flat is exposed, and this depends on both the

tide and the winds that have prevailed over the previous day or so.

March 23-25. Big Thicket Science Conference. Holiday Inn Beaumont Plaza. The topic of this, the fourth such conference, is Biodiversity, Ecology and Conservation of Natural Areas in the West Gulf Coastal Plain. Conference speakers will present the results of current biological, ecological, and environmental research and conservation efforts to understand, manage, and restore the unique biological diversity of the Big Thicket and surrounding Gulf Coastal Plain. Selected papers will be published in a supplementary volume of the *Southeastern Naturalist*. Registration, program, field trip and other information is available at www.bigthicketsc.org. The presentations on Saturday evening, March 24 7:00 to 8:30 p.m are free and open to the public. John Arvin of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory will discuss "The Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Texas" and Jerry Cook will talk on "Thicket of Diversity, the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory of the Big Thicket National Preserve."

March 24, April 1, 7, 15 and 21. Yellow Rail walks at Anahuac NWR.

Hosted annually by the Friends of Anahuac Refuge, the rail walks give birders and birdwatchers the opportunity to see up to five species of rails.

Sat. March 24 7:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Sun. April 1 7:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Sat. April 7 7:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Sun. April 15 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Sat. April 21 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

The goal is to provide an opportunity to see some of the most elusive birds in Texas, the Yellow and Black Rail. We also regularly find Sora, Virginia Rail, and Clapper Rail on the walks. Sedge Wrens and Seaside Sparrows are also often seen.

Learn about rail ecology and management while searching for Yellow Rails through salty prairie habitat. Walking through marsh habitat can be challenging. Participants should wear waterproof boots (rubber boots are best). And don't forget the binoculars, insect repellent, and drinking water. Walks last from 1.5 to 2 hours

All tours begin at the Visitor Information Station. For more information, please contact the Refuge office at 409-267-3337

March 29 thru April 1. FeatherFest 2007 in Galveston. For more info see www.galvestonfeatherfest.com or call 409 392 0841 or email: vollernature@juno.com

Thursday April 19. Membership Meeting. Speaker Jace Stansbury on Purple Martins.

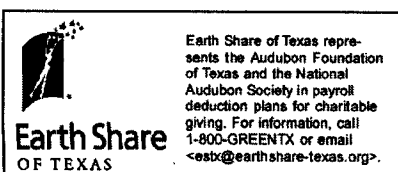
Saturday April 21. Field Trip Sabine Pass area. This field trip will look for migrant species in Sabine Woods and elsewhere. Minimal walking required. Full details in next issue.

April 27 – 30. Balcones Songbird Festival. Balcones Canyonlands NWR, 24518 FM 1431 Marble Falls, TX 78654 (mailing Address: P.O.Box 4678 Lago Vista, TX 78645); See www.balconessongbirdfestival.org for more details. Refuge Telephone (512) 965-2473; fax: (512) 267-6530.

Saturday May 12. North American Migration Count. Full details in future issues.

Subscription Renewal Reminder

Please check the mailing label on this issue. If the date on your label NOT prefixed by "AU" has passed, or there is no other date, please remit your contribution of \$15 to Golden Triangle Audubon Society at P.O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292. Although this contribution towards the cost of the *Brown Pelican* is voluntary for National Audubon Society members living in the official chapter territory, we will appreciate your support. Our official chapter territory is defined by zip codes, but is basically Jefferson, Hardin and Orange Counties and one or two localities close to those Counties.



Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank Bob Collier, Jean Hollingsworth, Lynn Otto, Needa Reed and Sherrie Roden for bringing refreshments in February. **We need volunteers to bring all items for March and all later 2007 meetings.** Please do not wait until the last minute to volunteer! We do not expect one person to bring everything, but please call so we can coordinate! If you can just bring drinks and cookies or something similar, please call Jana Whittle at (409) 722-4193 **as far in advance as possible.** Please help if you can!

Volunteers Needed

Golden Triangle Audubon has now been in existence for more than twelve years. The officers and others who have carried out the myriad of tasks that have kept the Society running smoothly would like to engage more of you in our activities.

As a conservation organization, we can and should do more to monitor the environmental impact statements and environmental assessments relating to local projects that various federal agencies are required to submit for public comment. Comments on such documents can help protect local bird habitat by keeping protection of it in the forefront. We need help in finalizing and writing our comment letters.

As the debate on climate change heats up (pun intended!), there will be many other opportunities and challenges to engage in advocacy over the next few years.

We would also welcome volunteers to help run the Society and its meetings. Let any officer or member of the board know what you would like to help with. There are many arrangements that have to be made in connection with each speaker and each meeting.

And of course, we will always welcome help in maintaining Sabine Woods. This does not need to be on a work day. Except on April weekends, this work can be accomplished whenever you have time.

Sponsor our Birdathon!

As most of you will know, the Chapters in Texas and Louisiana nominated me for the National Audubon Society (NAS) Board of Directors, and I was elected to the board in 2004 and then reelected in 2007 as an at-large member.

One of the most successful means of fundraising for Audubon, and the one I am most able to participate in, is a birdathon. Royce Pendergast has again graciously agreed to join with me in a Spring Birdathon.

A Birdathon is very similar to other "athons" you may be familiar with, such as telethons, walkathons, etc. The idea is for us to get up at the crack of dawn on a day in late April – we're planning April 16, with April 17 and May 1 as alternate days if the weather does not look as if it will cooperate -- and make a run to include the coast of east Jefferson County, Cattail Marsh, the woods of East Texas, perhaps Anahuac NWR, High Island and Bolivar Flats looking for as many species of birds as can be found. We're aiming for at least 150 species.

We're hoping you will sponsor us at \$1.00, \$.75, \$.50, or (or whatever amount you choose) per bird species. A flat donation is also welcome. Please take the time to make a pledge today -- your donation to our Birdathon will be earmarked to support Audubon's mission of protecting our natural heritage in Texas and the nation by supporting conservation, education and advocacy. Again this year, half of the funds we raise will be designated for Audubon Texas activities and programs, and the other half for NAS. Checks should be made out to Audubon Texas and all contributions are, of course, tax deductible. Local business people and businesses are often very receptive to this kind of fund raising and we would welcome any suggestions of where we might find receptive potential supporters. We appreciate all of you who contributed generously last year, and hope you will consider Please contact me at 3015 Nashville Ave, Nederland, TX 77627 or at john.whittle@lamar.edu or 409-880-8276 (W) or 409-722-4193 (H) with your pledge and your suggestions.

John A. Whittle

Bird Sightings – January 2007

Coverage: Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, Tyler, Jasper, Newton, Angelina, San Augustine and Sabine counties. Send Reports to: John Whittle, 3015 Nashville Avenue, Nederland, Texas 77627-6749 by the 10th of the month after or e-mail to john.whittle@lamar.edu or call (409) 880-8276. For "very rare" birds, please submit a brief account of your sighting, including a description of the bird (unless unmistakable), brief details of what it was doing, and where it was seen (if on publicly accessible property). Format: "Common" to "abundant" birds are shown in the fashion "JEF 4 reps(25)" which means four reports in Jefferson County totaling 25 birds. Less than "common", as JEF-SW 7/5(2) ABC", which means seen in Jefferson County (JEF) at Sabine Woods (SW) on the 5th of July, two (2) birds, reported by observer "ABC." The range of dates for which the

species was reported is shown in parentheses in a column before the sighting details or report summaries.

Commentary: One feature of the listing this month is the large number of entries for Orange County. Most of these come from the Orange County Christmas Count courtesy of the compiler, Ken Sztraky. We would certainly like to receive more reports from not only Orange county but also Tyler, Jasper, Newton, Angelina, San Augustine and Sabine Counties. Although there have been enough reports over the years to provide a reasonable picture of the bird life in these counties, but we do not have nearly the detailed picture that we have for the coastal counties. We need to monitor these counties for any signs of changing migration patterns caused by climate change.

GOOSE, White-fronted	(1-1)	ORA 1 rep(23)			
GOOSE, Snow	(1-13)	JEF 2 reps(2137); ORA 3			
reps(242)					
GOOSE, Ross's	(1-13)	JEF-TP 1/13(2) JAW; ORA			
1/1(3) OC1; ORA 1/1(3) OC3					
DUCK, Wood	(1-1)	ORA 1/1(1) OC3; ORA			
1/1(25) OC5					
GADWALL	(1-28)	JEF 2 reps(30); ORA 2			
reps(20)					
WIGEON, American	(7-28)	JEF 3 reps(11)			
MALLARD	(7-28)	JEF 3 reps(29)			
DUCK, Mottled	(7-13)	JEF-TP 1/7(2) JAW; JEF-TP			
1/13(4) JAW					
TEAL, Blue-winged	(1-28)	JEF 4 reps(82); ORA 1			
rep(10)					
SHOVELER, Northern	(7-28)	JEF 4 reps(2625)			
PINTAIL, Northern	(7-28)	JEF 3 reps(71)			
TEAL, Green-winged	(7-28)	JEF 3 reps(580)			
CANVASBACK	(1-1)	ORA 1/1(2) OC3			
REDHEAD	(1-1)	ORA 1/1(2) OC1			
DUCK, Ring-necked	(1-13)	JEF 2 reps(85); ORA 2			
reps(19)					
SCAUP, Greater	(7-13)	JEF-TP 1/7(7) JAW; JEF-TP			
1/13(2) JAW					
SCAUP, Lesser	(1-28)	JEF 3 reps(155); ORA 1			
rep(21)					
BUFFLEHEAD	(1-28)	JEF 2 reps(13); ORA 1			
rep(11)					
GOLDENEYE, Common	(28-28)	JEF-TP 1/28(1) SM			
MERGANSE, Hooded	(1-7)	JEF-TP 1/7(1) JAW; ORA			
1/1(5) OC1; ORA 1/1(1) OC5					
MERGANSE, Red-breast.	(1-7)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 1 rep(41)			
DUCK species	(6-6)	JEF 1 rep(3)			
DUCK, Ruddy	(7-28)	JEF 4 reps(955)			
LOON, Common	(1-7)	JEF 2 reps(2); ORA 1 rep(1)			
GREBE, Pied-billed	(1-21)	JEF 3 reps(12); ORA 5			
reps(17)					
GREBE, Eared	(28-28)	JEF 1 rep(2)			
PELICAN, Amer. White	(1-21)	ORA 4 reps(50)			
PELICAN, Brown	(1-7)	JEF-PI 1/7(30) JFW; ORA			
1/1(4) OC1; ORA 1/1(6) OC5					
CORMORANT, Neotropic	(1-13)	JEF 1/1(1) OC1; JEF 1/6(33)			
JAW; JEF 1/13(1) DHM; ORA 1/1(39) OC1; ORA 1/1(15) OC5					
CORMORANT, Double-crest	(1-13)	JEF 2 reps(4); ORA 3			
reps(23)					
ANHINGA	(1-7)	JEF 1/1(1) OC1; JEF 1/7(1)			
SM; ORA 1/1(1) OC1; ORA 1/1(1) OC3; ORA 1/1(1) OC5;					
ORA-BC 1/1(1) OC1					
HERON, Great Blue	(1-14)	JEF 5 reps(10); ORA 6			
reps(21)					
EGRET, Great	(1-13)	JEF 5 reps(215); ORA 5			
reps(60)					
EGRET, Snowy	(1-13)	JEF 6 reps(177); ORA 3			
reps(26)					
HERON, Little Blue	(1-1)	ORA 2 reps(5)			
HERON, Tricolored	(1-1)	ORA 1 rep(1)			
EGRET, Cattle	(6-7)	JEF 2 reps(6)			
HERON, Green	(1-1)	JEF 1/1(1) OC1			
NIGHT-HERON, Black-cr.	(1-1)	ORA 1 rep(18)			
IBIS, White	(1-13)	JEF 3 reps(117); ORA 1			
rep(9)					
IBIS, White-faced	(13-13)	JEF-TP 1/13(12) JAW			
IBIS, Plegadis	(1-13)	JEF-TP 1/7(3) JAW; JEF-TP			
1/13(20) JAW; ORA 1/1(13) OC1					
VULTURE, Black	(1-6)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 4 reps(8)			
VULTURE, Turkey	(1-14)	JEF 5 reps(37); ORA 4			
reps(18)					
OSPREY	(1-13)	JEF 2 reps(2); ORA 3 reps(9)			
KITE, White-tailed	(6-7)	JEF 2 reps(2)			
EAGLE, Bald	(5-28)	JEF-TP 1/5(1) JM; JEF			
1/13(1) JAW; JEF-TP 1/28(1) CLL; ORA 1/21(1) WWL					
HARRIER, Northern	(1-14)	JEF 3 reps(13); ORA 2			
reps(3)					
HAWK, Sharp-shinned	(6-6)	JEF 1/6(1) JAW			
HAWK, Cooper's	(1-10)	ORA 1/1(1) OC1; ORA 1/1(1)			
OC2; ORA 1/1(1) OC5; ORA-ORG 1/10(1) KS					
HAWK, Red-shouldered	(1-31)	JEF 8 reps(8); ORA 4			
reps(14)					
HAWK, Red-tailed	(1-31)	JEF 8 reps(68); ORA 5			
reps(12)					
HAWK, Red-tail. (Kridler's)	(7-13)	JEF 1/7(1) JAW; JEF 1/13(2)			
JAW					
KESTREL, American	(1-28)	JEF 6 reps(60); ORA 4			
reps(12)					
FALCON, Peregrine	(13-13)	JEF-TX87 1/13(1) DHM			
RAIL, Clapper	(1-7)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 1 rep(1)			
MOORHEN, Common	(1-10)	JEF 2 reps(27); ORA 3			
reps(29)					
COOT, American	(1-28)	JEF 4 reps(1490); ORA 3			
reps(410)					
CRANE, Sandhill	(8-8)	JEF 1/8(120) JP			
PLOVER, Black-bellied	(6-13)	JEF 3 reps(115)			
PLOVER, Snowy	(13-13)	JEF-SRSP 1/13(45) DHM			
PLOVER, Semipalmated	(1-1)	JEF 1 rep(2); ORA 1 rep(3)			
PLOVER, Piping	(13-13)	JEF-SRSP 1/13(10) DHM			
KILLDEER	(1-14)	JEF 3 reps(10); ORA 5			
reps(43)					
OYSTERCATCHER, Amer.	(7-7)	JEF-TXPT 1/7(2) SM			
STILT, Black-necked	(7-7)	JEF 1 rep(6)			
AVOCET, American	(7-7)	JEF 1 rep(12)			
SANDPIPER, Spotted	(1-7)	JEF 2 reps(2); ORA 2 reps(3)			
YELLOWLEGS, Greater	(1-13)	JEF 3 reps(13); ORA 2			
reps(16)					
WILLET	(1-1)	ORA 1 rep(10)			
YELLOWLEGS, Lesser	(1-7)	JEF 2 reps(11); ORA 1 rep(1)			
YELLOWLEGS species	(7-7)	JEF 1 rep(2)			
SANDLERLING	(13-13)	JEF 1 rep(10)			
SANDPIPER, Western	(1-1)	JEF 1 rep(20)			
SANDPIPER, Peep	(1-10)	ORA 3 reps(235)			
SANDPIPER, Least	(1-1)	JEF 1 rep(2); ORA 1 rep(26)			
DUNLIN	(1-13)	JEF 3 reps(1350); ORA 1			
rep(2)					
DOWITCHER, Long-billed	(1-7)	JEF 3 reps(161)			
DOWITCHER species	(1-13)	JEF 1 rep(1000); ORA 1			
rep(100)					
SNIFE, Wilson's	(1-14)	JEF 1 rep(3); ORA 1 rep(8)			

GULL, Laughing reps(208)	(1-13)	JEF 2 reps(120); ORA 3	GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (1-13)	JEF 2 reps(5); ORA 2 reps(3)
GULL, Bonaparte's	(1-1)	ORA 2 reps(10)	BLUEBIRD, Eastern (1-21)	HAI 1 rep(3); JEF 5 reps(68);
GULL, Ring-billed reps(139)	(1-13)	JEF 3 reps(276); ORA 3	ORA 5 reps(48)	
GULL, Herring reps(3)	(1-13)	JEF 2 reps(32); ORA 2	THRUSH, Hermit (1-10)	ORA 6 reps(25)
TERN, Caspian	(1-6)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 2 reps(2)	ROBIN, American (1-29)	HAI 1 rep(12); JEF 17
TERN, Forster's reps(102)	(1-1)	JEF 1 rep(15); ORA 3	reps(1056); ORA 8 reps(885)	
TERN, Royal	(1-7)	JEF 1 rep(2); ORA 1 rep(1)	CATBIRD, Gray (1-1)	ORA 1/1(7) OC2; ORA 1/1(3)
SKIMMER, Black	(1-1)	JEF 1 rep(3)	OC3; ORA 1/1(6) OC5	
PIGEON, Rock reps(96)	(1-6)	JEF 2 reps(25); ORA 2	MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (1-31)	JEF 6 reps(94); ORA 8
COLLARED-DOVE, Euras.	(1-21)	JEF 4 reps(20); ORA 1 rep(3)	reps(100)	
DOVE, White-winged	(1-21)	JEF 4 reps(30)	THRASHER, Brown (1-10)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 4 reps(9)
DOVE, Mourning ORA 4 reps(67)	(1-21)	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 6 reps(94);	STARLING, European (1-14)	JEF 5 reps(173); ORA 6
DOVE, Inca	(1-21)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 1 rep(8)	reps(50)	
OWL, Barn	(7-7)	JEF-SW 1/7(1) SM	PIPIT, American (1-13)	JEF 2 reps(50); ORA 1 rep(4)
OWL, Great Horned	(7-7)	JEF-SW 1/7(1) SM	WAXWING, Cedar (1-31)	JEF 4 reps(170); ORA 3
HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-thr JM; ORA 1/1(1) OC2	(1-26)	HAI 1/5(1) JM; HAI 1/26(1)	reps(42)	
HUMMINGBIRD, Black-ch 1/6(1) RHJ	(6-27)	HAI 1/27(1) JM; JEF-BMT	WARBLER, Orange-crown. (1-10)	JEF 1 rep(2); ORA 6 reps(24)
HUMMINGBIRD, Rufous	(3-30)	HAI 1/5(1) JM; JEF-BMT	WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (1-25)	JEF 4 reps(23); ORA 7
1/3(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/4(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/5(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/7(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/8(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/14(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/15(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/16(3) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/17(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/19(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/20(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/21(3) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/25(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/27(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/29(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/30(2) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/31(2)			WARBLER, Pine (1-30)	JEF 22 reps(86); ORA 4
			reps(68)	
			WARBLER, Palm (5-28)	JEF-TP 1/5(1) JM; JEF 1/6(1)
			SM; JEF-TP 1/28(2) SM	
			YELLOWTHROAT, Common (1-1)	ORA 2 reps(5)
			TANAGER, Summer (3-25)	JEF-BMT 1/3(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/5(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/6(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/14(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/20(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/23(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/24(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 1/25(1) RHJ
			TOWHEE, Spotted (13-13)	JEF-SW 1/13(1) DHM
			TOWHEE, Eastern (1-1)	ORA-BC 1/1(1) OC1
			SPARROW, Chipping (1-28)	HAI 1 rep(42); JEF 3 reps(31);
			ORA 1 rep(25)	
			SPARROW, Field (1-1)	ORA 1/1(5) OC3
			SPARROW, Vesper (1-7)	JEF 1/7(5) JAW; ORA 1/1(1)
			OC5	
			SPARROW, Savannah (1-28)	JEF 6 reps(201); ORA 5
			reps(187)	
			SPARROW, LeConte's (6-6)	JEF 1/6(1) SM
			SPARROW, Seaside (7-7)	JEF 1 rep(1)
			SPARROW, Song (1-28)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 2 reps(11);
			ORA 3 reps(13)	
			SPARROW, Swamp (1-28)	JEF 1 rep(5); ORA 3 reps(34)
			SPARROW, White-throated (1-31)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 21 reps(97);
			ORA 5 reps(85)	
			JUNCO, Dark-eyed (1-27)	JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 1 rep(7)
			CARDINAL, Northern (1-21)	HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 3 reps(4);
			ORA 6 reps(73)	
			BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (1-13)	JEF 3 reps(1030); ORA 5
			reps(446)	
			MEADOWLARK, Eastern (1-13)	JEF 1 rep(2); ORA 3 reps(22)
			MEADOWLARK species (6-14)	JEF 4 reps(46)
			BLACKBIRD, Rusty (1-1)	JEF-PI 1/1(5) RHJ
			GRACKLE, Common (1-13)	JEF 4 reps(1370); ORA 3
			reps(238)	
			GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (1-1)	ORA 4 reps(111)
			GRACKLE, Great-tailed (1-21)	JEF 5 reps(299); ORA 4
			reps(100)	
			COWBIRD, Brown-headed (6-7)	JEF 2 reps(26)
			BLACKBIRD species (6-13)	JEF 2 reps(119)
			FINCH, House (1-31)	HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 22 reps(89)
			GOLDFINCH, American (1-31)	HAI 1 rep(32); JEF 24
			reps(1048); ORA 5 reps(125)	
			SPARROW, House (1-13)	JEF 2 reps(2); ORA 3
			reps(40)	
			Number of Species	169
			Number of Individuals	26233
			County Abbreviations:	
			HAI - Hardin; JEF - Jefferson; ORA - Orange	
			Location Codes	
			BC - Bridge City; BMT - Beaumont; GROV - Groves; NEDR - Nederland; ORG - Orange; PI - Pleasure Island, Port Arthur; PTA - Port Arthur; SILS - Silsbee; SRSP - Sea Rim State Park; SW - Sabine Woods; TP - Tyrrell Park incl. Cattail Marsh; TX87 - Texas 87	

Pt. Arthur-Sabine Pass-Sea Rim SP; TXPT – Road to Pilot Station at Texas Point

Observer Abbreviations

CLL – Carol Lynn Loker; DHM – Gerald Duhon, John Haynes, Steve Mayes; JAW – John Whittle; JFW – Jana Whittle; JM – John Mariani; JP – John Park; KS – Ken Sztraky; OC1 – Orange Co CBC - Bridge City/Pt Neches (John and Jana Whittle, Sherrie Roden); OC2 – Orange Co CBC – NE Quadrant (Bruce Bishop); OC3 – Orange Co CBC - Claiborne, Stark (Gary Kelley, Steve Mayes, Jeff Pittman); OC4 – Orange County CBC – Orange (Royce Pendergast); OC5 – Orange Co CBC – Entergy area (Don Jeane, Sherry Gibson, Ken Sztraky); RHJ – Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan; SM – Steve Mayes; WWL – John and Jana Whittle, Jeannie Lanclos.

New Splits and Lumps?

In a paper published in the UK Journal of Molecular Ecology in February, J. Bonner and T. Collins have provided the first results from a project to "barcode" the DNA of all known bird species, suggesting some species which may need to be split, and also some species which are very closely related.

DNA barcoding involves determining the sequence of the bases in DNA in a short stretch of the mitochondrial DNA, a gene that codes for the enzyme cytochrome c oxidase 1. This sequence has proven to be an excellent indicator of different species, with about eight percent or more of the bases differing between different species and typically 1.25 percent or less variation between individuals of the same species. It has, however, been criticized as not being broad enough based, and is possibly of limited use at the genus and family level. Nevertheless, there is likely to be some considerable value to using both traditional indicators such as morphology (color markings), vocalizations and mating patterns, and DNA barcodes. The barcodes may have significant value when two populations of very similar species are geographically isolated from each other. Earlier work, principally by Sibley and Ahlquist, used a DNA hybridization technique to estimate the evolutionary divergences between species and families. In this method, the DNA of a species – in this case, a complete DNA molecule from the organism itself, not from the mitochondrion – is heated to separate into single strands, which are then allowed to cool and combine with single strands from another species. The degree of similarity of the two strands is estimated based on the temperature required to separate the two strands. Because it uses the entire DNA molecule, and is thus influenced by differences in all genes, this method will likely continue to find use in estimating the similarities and differences between families.

Using the barcode method, fifteen taxa currently regarded as species are indicated as apparently containing more than one species. Fourteen of these contain forms that differ in appearance or vocalization and therefore are not likely to be controversial. The fifteenth, the Solitary Sandpiper is a surprise, although two geographically separated subspecies have been generally recognized.

The other potential splits, with indications of the different populations recognized by methods other than by DNA barcodes, are:

Northern Fulmar (Pacific and Atlantic forms).
Western Screech-Owl (Pacific, Great Plains and Mexican).
Warbling Vireo (Eastern and Western forms).
Mexican Jay (Arizona and Texas forms).

Western Scrub Jay (Pacific and Eastern forms).
Common Raven (found worldwide and classified into eight or more subspecies).
Mountain Chickadee (Pacific and Rocky Mountain forms).
Bushtit (Pacific and Interior forms, plus the Black-eared Mexican form).
Winter Wren (Eastern, Western, Bering Sea and European among many others).
Marsh Wren (Eastern, Western and Worthington's forms).
Bewick's Wren (Eastern, Pacific and Interior West forms).
Curve-billed Thrasher (Texas and Arizona forms).
Eastern Meadowlark (Eastern and Lillian's forms, long overdue to be split!)

The species determined to be closely related will be much more controversial, even as the DNA differences are very small compared to the typically eight percent difference between species. Some of the gulls may currently be regarded as species on the basis of not very reliable morphological characteristics, and there are many birders who would welcome some lumping in that family! Many others will likely not be accepted because they demonstrably meet the classical criteria as species under the biological species concept (groups of freely interbreeding natural populations that are reproductively isolated from other such groups"). The complete list (with the percentage differences indicated):

Snow Goose and Ross's Goose (99.8 %, but relatively easily separated visually).
American Black Duck, Mallard and Mottled Duck (99.4 %, and very prone to "hybridization").
Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal (100.0 %, fairly frequently hybridize, despite the color differences).
King and Common Eider (99.7 %, surprising).
Sharp-tailed Grouse, Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens (99.7 %, geographically separated).
Western and Clark's Grebes (99.7 %, but separate recently because of very limited interbreeding).
Laughing and Franklin's Gulls (99.3 %, have different breeding habitat preferences, but mix on migration).
California, Herring, Thayer's, Iceland, Lesser Black-backed, Western, Glaucous-winged, and Glaucous Gulls (99.8 %, sure to be one of the most controversial, although some perhaps not totally unexpected for some of these species).
Red-naped and Red-breasted Sapsucker (99.4 %).
Black-billed and Yellow-billed Magpies (99.5 %, perhaps not entirely surprising in view of geographic separation).
American and Northwestern Crows (99.5 %).
Townsend's and Hermit Warbler (99.5 %, not unexpected with well documented frequent hybridization in the limited areas of breeding range overlap).
Golden-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows (99.7 %, surprising in view of significant overlap of breeding ranges).
Dark-eyed and Yellow-eyed Junco (99.7 %).
McKay's and Snow Bunting (99.9 %, although I have seen two paired McKay's in a field with perhaps 50 pairs of Snow Bunting!)
Great-tailed and Boat-tailed Grackles (99.2 %, although assertive mating (no mixed pairs) was first demonstrated in Sabine Pass).
Common and Hoary Redpoll (99.7 %, and probably the least controversial of the possible lumps!)

Field Trip to Sheldon Lake – 17 February 2007

Sheldon Lake State Park occupies the site of a former State Fish Hatchery, and became a state park after a period as a Wildlife Management Area. It is located just north of US 90 and just east of Beltway 8 on the east/northeast side of Houston. An Environmental Learning Center has been developed based on the fish hatchery ponds and buildings. The park also includes Sheldon Lake itself, created as a World War II reservoir for the Baytown area. Nowadays, Houston draws drinking water from Lake Houston via a canal bisecting the park. Agricultural fields within the park were leased out for farming, but are now being restored to tall grass prairie.

On a bright, clear, somewhat crisp morning, six members of Golden Triangle Audubon joined our hosts, Nancy and Don Fisher and two other members of the Friends of Sheldon Lake for our first ever field trip to the park. Because of activities taking place during the morning at the Environmental Learning Center, we met at the maintenance area on the north side. While we were preparing to start the trip, two flocks of Cedar Waxwings, totaling about 70 birds flew over. There were a number of American Robins around and two Eastern Bluebirds were already looking for insects on the ground under some isolated trees. As we started out, we located a nice male Merlin, recorded on the park checklist as rare, perched near the top of a tree. American Pipits were found in the agricultural field to the west. We then proceeded along a trail through a swampy area, picking up many of the expected woodland species. These included Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Hermit Thrush, and Golden-crowned Kinglets among others. It was interesting to see and hear Fish Crows, a species that has expanded west of the Trinity River only in the last few years. As we returned to the starting point, we found a male Purple Martin, the first of many that we were to see over the water during the day. Looking at the ducks on a pond which had unfavorable lighting earlier, we found Ring-necked Ducks and Gadwall, along with the inevitable American Coots.

We then proceeded to a parking lot in the northwest corner of the Lake off Garrett Road. A large white bird soared overhead and was quickly identified as a Red-tailed Hawk! This leucistic bird had one dark primary on each wingtip, and a very slight reddish tinge to the upper tail; otherwise it was pure white. It landed in tree across the road, but was immediately attacked by crows, took off and circled over us before soaring north out of sight. Birding with care along Garrett Road itself, we found a few Northern Shovelers, some Blue-winged Teal and an Anhinga – the first of many – in Carpenter's Bayou north of the road.

The plan was to next proceed to one of the fishing platforms along the west side of the lake along Fauna Road, which becomes Pineland Road after a short distance. When we arrived at the parking area, we realized we were one car short. Contact was made by telephone, and the rest quickly returned to the intersection of Garrett and Fauna to view two Harris's Hawks that Sherrie Roden had spotted! The birds were perched but after a while, took off and flew over us and the Lake, thus adding a species to the park checklist. Harris's Hawk is not an expected species, but one was seen on the Sea Rim Christmas Count and the species maybe the next Valley

"wanderer" in East Texas, following Couch's Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Least Grebe and Crested Caracara and others. While we were enjoying the Harris's Hawks, an adult Peregrine Falcon flew purposefully by.

When we eventually reached the fishing pier, we found a male Vermilion Flycatcher catching insects from a perch on some trees on a long narrow island some distance out in the lake. Also seen were an Osprey, at least eight Anhingas and at least one distant Canvasback. A stop a little further down the lake produced most of the Purple Martins seen on the trip and five more Anhingas.

The rest of the trip was centered on the old fish ponds and restored prairie around the Environmental Learning Center. The levees separating the ponds have trees and understory (all too much of which is privet) and we were able to add a number of species including Brown Thrasher and Pine Warbler.

Moving to one part of the prairie, we can across a mixed flock of geese, which turned out to contain six Cackling Geese (the recently split small versions of the Canada Goose) and at least three Ross's Geese among the more numerous Snow Geese.

While moving to another part of the prairie alongside the canal, we found two Palm Warblers. When we reached the overlook, we discovered about 250 Green-winged Teal in a pond, along with three Greater and two lesser Yellowlegs. A flock of 150 American White Pelicans was orbiting in the distance while two Cooper's Hawks cavorted over a distant tree line. On the way back, we "lost" the same vehicle again. This time, they had found a cooperative Sprague's Pipit, which was photographically documented for another addition to the park checklist. Finally, just as we were leaving headquarters at 5 p.m., there were three Chipping Sparrows under a tree.

Birds recorded: Pied-billed Grebe (6); Ring-billed Gull (6); Laughing Gull (20); Anhinga (15); Neotropic Cormorant (1); American White Pelican (150); Mallard (10); Gadwall (40); Green-winged Teal (250); Blue-winged Teal (7); Northern Shoveler (3); Wood Duck (heard only); Canvasback (5); Ring-necked Duck (25); Ruddy Duck (3); Snow Goose (70); Ross's Goose (3); Cackling Goose (6); White Ibis (20); Great Blue Heron (6); Great Egret (6); Snowy Egret (1); Tricolored Heron (1); Little Blue Heron (3); Common Moorhen (4); American Coot (22); Peep Sandpiper (2); Greater Yellowlegs (4); Lesser Yellowlegs (2); Killdeer (9); Mourning Dove (2); Turkey Vulture (3); Black Vulture (12); Cooper's Hawk (2); Harris's Hawk (2); Red-tailed Hawk (5); Red-shouldered Hawk (4); Peregrine Falcon (1); Merlin (1); American Kestrel (3); Osprey (1); Downy Woodpecker (2); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (2); Red-bellied Woodpecker (1); Eastern Phoebe (8); Vermilion Flycatcher (1); Blue Jay (1); Fish Crow (5); Red-winged Blackbird (54); Meadowlark species (4); Savannah Sparrow (12); White-throated Sparrow (3); Chipping Sparrow (3); Swamp Sparrow (5); Northern Cardinal (3); Purple Martin (22); Tree Swallow (35); Cedar Waxwing (70); Blue-headed Vireo (1); Orange-crowned Warbler (6); Yellow-rumped Warbler (155); Pine Warbler (2); Palm Warbler (2); Common Yellowthroat (2); American Pipit (11); Sprague's Pipit (1); Northern Mockingbird (4); Brown Thrasher (1); Carolina Wren (3); House Wren (1); Carolina Chickadee (7); Golden-crowned Kinglet (4); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (10); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (6); Hermit Thrush (2); American Robin (30); Eastern Bluebird (2); 78 species.

John A. Whittle

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Unfortunately, almost all the local and regional telephone Rare Bird Alerts have been discontinued in favor of various Internet based means of distribution.

The Texas-wide Rare Bird Alert, maintained by Houston Audubon Society, is available on their web-site at <http://www.houstonaudubon.org/> and each new alert is posted on the TEXBIRDS listserv. The archives of this listserv can be accessed at <http://listserv.uh.edu/archives/tebirds.html> It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives.

Transcriptions of many current and recent email alerts are available on the Siler's Birding on the Net at <http://birdingonthe.net/hotmail.html> Detailed information (maps and text) on birding sites on the Upper Texas Coast is also available on the Web at <http://www.texasbirding.net>. This includes all the Jefferson County hotspots published in very early issues.

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