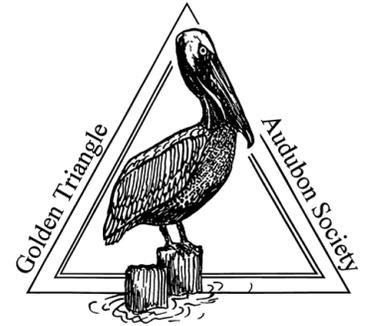


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 17 No. 10

October 2011

**Membership Meeting
Thursday, October 20, 2011, 7:00 PM
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont
The Ducks of Southeast Texas
John Haynes
Haynes Financial Services**

Most of you will already know or have heard of John Haynes' expertise in identifying ducks. John will cover the ducks that are normally seen locally, and explain the various field marks and flight patterns that enable their identification even at great distances. This presentation will be very timely, coming as it does just before most species of ducks begin to arrive to spend the winter in our area. John will illustrate his talk with slides.

John grew up in Port Arthur, and now lives in Nederland. He is a past president of Golden Triangle Audubon, and has been birding in the area for many years.

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

Upcoming GTAS Elections

Our elections will soon be upon us. President Jim Armacost will be appointing a Nominating Committee. Please contact him with your offer to serve or suggestions for others who will be willing. Contact information is on page 2. He will forward your suggestions to the chair of the Committee. All offices and board positions are up for election at our November annual meeting. The term of the President is two years; the terms of all other officers and board members are one year. We are always looking for new blood and fresh ideas. The duties are not onerous. We typically hold two full evening board meetings (usually in January and July or August), and conduct other business by email and brief get-togethers at regular membership meetings.

We would like to be able to do more in several areas. As an example, we would like to increase our activities in environmental education. There are many other activities where additional active helpers would be welcome. We will find something that fits with your interests and available time! Contact any current officer or board member!

The Brown Pelican

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Issue number 178

Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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Calendar of Events

Thursday October 20. Membership Meeting. Details on page 1.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank all those who brought refreshments for the September meeting. Sherrie Roden is bringing spaghetti for the October meeting. Please consider bringing something that will complement this, or a dessert or drinks. Please do not wait until the last minute to volunteer! **We need volunteers to bring items for all the spring 2012 meetings.** We do not expect one person to bring everything, but please always call so we can coordinate! If you can just bring drinks and cookies or something similar, please call Jennifer Armacost at (409) 790-7222 (or email her at armacostj@yahoo.com) **as far in advance as possible.** Please help if you can! We thank all those who brought refreshments over the last year or so!

Saturday October 22. 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 in Sabine Pass, but gasoline is now available and the deli is open.

The middle of October 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.

Although the boardwalk was destroyed in Hurricane Ike, the trails are clear and mostly reasonably wide, and although some care is needed to avoid uneven ground, birding Sabine Woods is relatively easy.

For those so inclined, it is possible, tide permitting, to drive much of the beach of Sea Rim State Park.

Thursday November 17. Annual Meeting. We will have our annual pot luck dinner, and conduct our elections. The program will be on wintering hummingbirds in the local area, and will be a combined effort of Rose Ann Jordan, Steve Kuritz, John Mariani, Harlan Stewart and Jana Whittle.

Saturday November 19. Field Trip to West Jefferson County. This has been a very popular trip in past years, finding Sandhill Cranes and a good variety of birds of prey. Full details in next issue.

Christmas Count Dates

The following dates for local Christmas Bird Counts have been set. Full details will be given in the next issue and will be posted on the GTAS web site as they become available.

Saturday December 17. Turkey Creek (Big Thicket area north of Kountze). This count is sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Wednesday December 21. Bolivar Peninsula (High Island and Anahuac NWR areas)

Wednesday December 28. Beech Creek (centered on Steinhagen Lake) This count is sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve.

Sunday January 1. Orange County. (This count includes Bridge City, Bessie Heights and surrounding areas.)

Tuesday January 3. Sea Rim State Park (Sea Rim/J. D. Murphree WMA/Texas Point NWR/McFaddin NWR). This is the count Golden Triangle Audubon sponsors.



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

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 such date, please remit your contribution of \$15 to Golden Triangle Audubon Society at P.O. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292. We will appreciate your support even if you receive the *Brown Pelican* electronically.

However, we need to make it clear that contribution towards the cost of running the Chapter and producing the *Brown Pelican* is voluntary for National Audubon Society members living in the official chapter territory. 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.

If you would like to receive the *Brown Pelican* in electronic form, either by means of a link in an email or as a PDF file attached to an email, please email us, including your name and address, at GTAudubon@aol.com

The Big Year, the Movie

Twentieth Century Fox will release *The Big Year* on Oct. 14. The film stars are Owen Wilson, Jack Black, and Steve Martin. And, as you probably know, the movie was inspired by Mark Obamskik's best-selling chronicle of three colorful and obsessive birders as they compete for the biggest "Big Year."

Audubon served as a resource for the filmmakers, contributing both expertise and Audubon branded materials for set-dressing. You'll be pleased to see Audubon make a few appearances in the movie itself. After our exclusive preview, our take is that it's a positive, engaging look at birding and birders. It even presents a fairly accurate version of Audubon's founding and its history.

Clearly, it's not every day that a major film with high profile talent injects birds and birding into the pop culture mainstream. This is a rare opportunity to engage both current members and new audiences. Watch the trailer online and read Audubon Magazine's exclusive interview with all three stars, featured in our latest issue.

*David Yarnold, President,
National Audubon Society*

Bird Sightings – August 2011

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 johnawhittle@aol.com or call (409) 722-4193. For "very rare" birds, or very much out-of-season species, 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: The beginning of fall migration is reflected in this report. Noteworthy are the good showing of migrant flycatchers, especially Olive-sided Flycatchers, and the nice selection of warblers, including a large number of Mourning Warblers.

This is the first report that uses the new "taxonomic" sequence of species as specified by the American Ornithological Union's North American Classification Committee.

WHISTLING-DUCK, Blk-bell.	(16-25) JEF 5 reps(72)	SPOONBILL, Roseate	(5-5) JEF-PI 8/5(1) JAW
BOBWHITE, Northern	(21-21) JEF 8/21(1) CSL	VULTURE, Black	(2-25) JEF 5 reps(39)
STORK, Wood	(2-17) JEF 8/2(102) JAW; JEF 8/17(250) JAW	VULTURE, Turkey	(2-31) HAI 2 reps(10); JEF 8 reps(19)
CORMORANT, Neotropic	(5-25) JEF 4 reps(21)	KITE, Swallow-tailed	(17-17) HAI-SILS 8/17(3) DMW
PELICAN, Brown	(16-16) JEF-TX87 8/16(2) JAW	KITE, Mississippi	(2-12) JEF-BMT 8/2(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/7(1) RHJ; JEF-BMT 8/12(1) RHJ
BITTERN, Least	(24-24) JEF-MCFW 8/24(1) TF	HAWK, Cooper's	(9-11) HAI-SILS 8/9(1) MG; HAI-SILS 8/11(1) MG
HERON, Great Blue	(13-16) JEF 1 rep(1); ORA 1 rep(1)	HAWK, Red-shouldered	(2-24) HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 6 reps(6)
EGRET, Great	(2-29) JEF 12 reps(89); ORA 1 rep(1)	HAWK, Broad-winged	(19-28) JEF-SW 8/19(1) JAW; JEF 8/28(1) RA
EGRET, Snowy	(2-29) JEF 10 reps(45); ORA 1 rep(25)	HAWK, Swainson's	(9-17) JEF 8/9(1) JAW; JEF 8/17(3) JAW
HERON, Little Blue	(2-29) JEF 8/2(6) JAW; JEF 8/13(6) JAW; JEF 8/17(7) JAW; JEF 8/24(1) JJW; JEF-SW 8/29(1) RHJ	HAWK, Red-tailed (Kriders)	(7-7) JEF 8/7(1) CSL
HERON, Tricolored	(5-29) JEF 4 reps(6); ORA 1 rep(2)	RAIL, Clapper	(16-16) JEF-TX87 8/16(1) JAW
EGRET, Cattle	(2-25) JEF 10 reps(3402); ORA 1 rep(50)	RAIL, King	(24-24) JEF-MCFW 8/24(2) TF
HERON, Green	(13-29) JEF 8/13(1) JAW; JEF 8/17(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/29(1) RHJ	PLOVER, Black-bellied	(23-23) JEF-TX87 8/23(1) JAW
NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-cr.	(5-5) JEF-PI 8/5(2) JAW	KILLDEER	(5-21) JEF 4 reps(63)
IBIS, White	(13-24) JEF 8/13(1) JAW; JEF 8/24(3) JJW; ORA 8/16(1) JAW	STILT, Black-necked	(2-25) JEF 7 reps(18)
IBIS, White-faced	(13-13) JEF 8/13(4) JAW	SANDPIPER, Spotted	(5-13) JEF-PI 8/5(6) JAW; JEF 8/13(1) JAW
IBIS, Plegadis	(2-13) JEF 2 reps(7)	SANDPIPER, Solitary	(13-13) JEF 8/13(1) JAW
		WILLET	(25-25) JEF-SW 8/25(4) JAW
		YELLOWLEGS, Lesser	(13-13) JEF 8/13(3) JAW
		SANDPIPER, Least	(5-21) JEF-PI 8/5(5) JAW; JEF-TX87 8/21(2) JAW

GULL, Laughing (5-25) JEF 9 reps(188); ORA 1 rep(2)
TERN, Gull-billed (5-5) JEF-PI 8/5(9) JAW
TERN, Black (23-23) JEF-TX87 8/23(1) JAW
TERN, Forster's (2-25) JEF 4 reps(9); ORA 1 rep(1)
TERN, Royal (21-23) JEF 2 reps(4)
SKIMMER, Black (21-25) JEF-TX87 8/21(2) JAW; JEF-TX87 8/23(4) JAW; JEF-TX87 8/25(2) JAW
PIGEON, Rock (2-31) HAI 5 reps(396); JEF 7 reps(114)
COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (2-21) HAI 1 rep(2); JEF 6 reps(41); ORA 1 rep(1)
DOVE, White-winged (2-29) HAI 3 reps(3); JEF 42 reps(279)
DOVE, Mourning (2-31) HAI 5 reps(40); JEF 15 reps(179)
DOVE, Inca (1-22) JEF 6 reps(11)
CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (19-29) JEF 8 reps(13)
OWL, Barn (19-23) JEF-SW 8/19(5) JAW; JEF-SW 8/21(4) MW; JEF-SW 8/23(2) JAW
OWL, Great Horned (9-31) JEF 14 reps(25)
NIGHTHAWK, Common (19-23) JEF 3 reps(17)
WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck- (16-28) JEF-SW 8/16(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/19(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW; JEF-SW 8/24(1) TF; JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
SWIFT, Chimney (12-23) JEF 2 reps(2)
HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-thr. (1-31) HAI 13 reps(25); JEF 42 reps(124)
HUMMINGBIRD, Broad-tailed (27-27) JEF-BMT 8/27(1) RHJ
HUMMINGBIRD, Selasphorus (22-23) JEF 8/22(1) CSL; JEF 8/23(1) CSL
OODPECKER, Red-headed (22-30) JEF 6 reps(7)
WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (2-31) HAI 5 reps(13); JEF 5 reps(5)
WOODPECKER, Downy (1-29) JEF 19 reps(23)
WOODPECKER, Pileated (2-26) HAI 5 reps(6); JEF 4 reps(4)
FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (18-28) JEF-SW 8/18(2) CK; JEF-SW 8/19(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/21(4) MW; JEF-SW 8/23(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/25(2) JAW; JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (19-29) JEF 6 reps(17)
FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (19-25) JEF-SW 8/19(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/21(2) MW; JEF-SW 8/23(2) JAW; JEF-SW 8/25(2) JAW
FLYCATCHER, Acadian (25-25) JEF-SW 8/25(1) JAW
FLYCATCHER, Traill's (19-25) JEF-SW 8/19(15) JAW; JEF-SW 8/21(10) MW; JEF-SW 8/23(10) JAW; JEF-SW 8/24(1) TF; JEF-SW 8/25(10) JAW
FLYCATCHER, Least (19-25) JEF-SW 8/19(10) JAW; JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW; JEF-SW 8/24(1) TF; JEF-SW 8/25(2) JAW
EMPIDONAX species (16-28) JEF 7 reps(87)
FLYCATCHER, Gt. Crested (16-28) JEF 8 reps(76)
KINGBIRD, Trop/Couch (21-21) JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW
KINGBIRD, Eastern (2-28) JEF 10 reps(55)
FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (2-24) JEF 6 reps(25)
SHRIKE, Loggerhead (2-28) HAI 2 reps(2); JEF 12 reps(39)
VIREO, White-eyed (4-25) HAI 4 reps(8); JEF 1 rep(1)
VIREO, Red-eyed (21-25) JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW; JEF-SW 8/25(3) JAW
JAY, Blue (3-31) HAI 8 reps(54); JEF 12 reps(23)
CROW, American (4-25) HAI 3 reps(10); JEF 2 reps(10)
CROW, species (2-13) JEF 3 reps(6)
MARTIN, Purple (17-24) JEF 3 reps(225)
SWALLOW, Cliff (19-19) JEF-SW 8/19(1) JAW
SWALLOW, Barn (2-24) JEF 8 reps(102)
SWALLOW species (13-25) JEF 2 reps(13)
CHICKADEE, Carolina (4-31) HAI 7 reps(20); JEF 4 reps(8)

TITMOUSE, Tufted (4-21) HAI 4 reps(9)
WREN, Carolina (4-25) HAI 2 reps(4); JEF 4 reps(5)
GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (4-29) HAI 1 rep(1); JEF 8 reps(182)
BLUEBIRD, Eastern (13-30) JEF 9 reps(16)
ROBIN, American (7-24) JEF 5 reps(13)
CATBIRD, Gray (1-31) JEF 5 reps(5)
MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (2-25) HAI 2 reps(15); JEF 19 reps(117); ORA 1 rep(1)
THRASHER, Brown (6-31) HAI 6 reps(6); JEF 2 reps(3)
STARLING, European (2-24) HAI 1 rep(11); JEF 7 reps(76)
OVENBIRD (21-28) JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW; JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
WARBLER, Worm-eating (28-28) JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
WATERTHRUSH, Northern (21-21) JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW
WARBLER, Blue-winged (25-25) JEF-SW 8/25(2) JAW
WARBLER, Black-and-white (19-29) JEF 7 reps(15)
WARBLER, Prothonotary (23-28) JEF 3 reps(5)
WARBLER, Mourning (21-28) JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW; JEF-SW 8/24(1) TF; JEF 8/28(4) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(10) JM
YELLOWTHROAT, Common (5-5) JEF-MURW 8/5(8) JA
WARBLER, Hooded (27-28) JEF-BMT 8/27(1) RHJ; JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
REDSTART, American (23-29) JEF 5 reps(5)
PARULA, Northern (29-29) JEF-SW 8/29(1) RHJ
WARBLER, Yellow (19-29) JEF 9 reps(54)
WARBLER, Yellow-throated (19-19) HAI-SILS 8/19(1) MG
WARBLER, Prairie (21-28) JEF-SW 8/21(1) SM; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
WARBLER, Black-thr. Green (29-29) JEF-SW 8/29(1) RHJ
WARBLER, Canada (21-29) JEF 6 reps(19)
WARBLER, Wilson's (28-29) JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM; JEF-SW 8/29(1) RHJ
CHAT, Yellow-breasted (21-29) JEF-SW 8/21(1) MW; JEF 8/28(4) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(2) JM; JEF-SW 8/29(1) RHJ
TANAGER, Summer (25-25) JEF-SW 8/25(1) JAW
CARDINAL, Northern (2-31) HAI 14 reps(940); JEF 8 reps(15)
GROSBEAK, Blue (24-28) JEF-SW 8/24(1) TF; JEF-SW 8/25(2) JAW; JEF 8/28(1) RA; JEF-SW 8/28(1) JM
BUNTING, Indigo (23-25) JEF-SW 8/23(1) JAW; JEF-SW 8/25(1) JAW
BUNTING, Painted (21-29) JEF 6 reps(11)
DICKCISSEL (24-24) JEF 8/24(5) JJW
BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (2-25) JEF 6 reps(27)
MEADOWLARK, Eastern (2-13) JEF 2 reps(3)
MEADOWLARK species (2-17) JEF 3 reps(17)
GRACKLE, Common (2-25) JEF 7 reps(74)
GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (2-25) JEF 5 reps(30)
GRACKLE, Great-tailed (2-25) JEF 10 reps(168); ORA 1 rep(3)
GRACKLE, Gt./Boat tailed (13-23) JEF 2 reps(5)
COWBIRD, Brown-headed (2-13) JEF 2 reps(144)
ORIOLE, Orchard (1-28) JEF 11 reps(101)
ORIOLE, Baltimore (23-28) JEF-SW 8/23(1) JAW; JEF-
FINCH, House (1-24) HAI 5 reps(8); JEF 14 reps(25)
SPARROW, House (2-24) HAI 1 rep(100); JEF 9 reps(70)

Number of Species 128
Number of Individuals 18242

County Abbreviations

HAI — Hardin; JEF — Jefferson; ORA — Orange

Location Codes

BC — Bridge City; BMT — Beaumont; GROV — Groves; MCFW — McFaddin NWR; MURW — J. D. Murphree WMA; NEDR — Nederland; PI — Pleasure Island, Port Arthur; SILS — Silsbee; SW — Sabine Woods; TX87 — Texas 87 Pt. Arthur-Sabine Pass-Sea Rim SP

Observer Abbreviations

CK — Cody Conway and Kelley Sampeck; CSL — Christine Sliva; DMW — Debby McWhorter; JA — Jim Armacost; JAW — John Whittle; JJW — John and Jana Whittle; JM — John Mariani; MG — Melanie Goetsell; MW — Steve Mayes and John Whittle; RA — Richard Atkins; RHJ — Rose Ann and Harrison Jordan; SM — Steve Mayes; TF — Terry Ferguson.

Trip to Smith Point Hawk Watch – 24 September 2011

It is well known among seasoned birders that the hawk watch at Smith Point is a hit or miss proposition even at peak time. Get a nice front coming through a day or two before your trip and you may see thousands of hawks and falcons funneling through. If the weather is wrong though, you might get very few birds of any kind. Birders from the Golden Triangle Audubon Society have experienced both of these extremes on past trips to the hawk watch on the September field trip. On this trip, the group was to learn that you can experience both extremes in one day!

The day started off quiet at Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area and the tower built for the hawk watch not only provided a great view of the area to scan for hawks but also relief from any mosquitoes present. Twenty two birders from the Golden Triangle Audubon Society (and friends) arrived at the tower and a few hawks were present right from the start. Accipiters are the early risers in the world of migrating hawks. Sharp-shinned Hawks zipped by with their flap-flap-glide cadence, cruising low over the oaks and occasionally diving into them after some small bird. Larger Cooper's Hawks also flew by though less frequently. A few Brown Pelicans patrolled the bay while Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were easily located in the trees. Crested Caracara was observed by the group but large numbers of hawks were not to be found.

The birders were not discouraged. The majority of the hawks passing through the Smith Point area are Broad-winged Hawks and they pretty much require thermals to migrate. Thermals are rising columns of warm air that hawks use as a "free ride" to gain altitude for soaring. They form because of uneven heating on the land and normally do not start until the sun is well up (sometimes after 10 a.m.). So not seeing many of these soaring birds early on is not too surprising. A few Mississippi Kites were seen early and that was encouraging. One early Broad-wing also put in an appearance. A couple of Magnificent Frigatebirds were a great sight. When a Swallow-tailed Kite soared by things were really looking up ... but the big numbers of hawks that had been hoped for did not materialize.

After a trip to the nearby woods, the birders returned to the tower for lunch hoping that things would pick up in the afternoon. And pick up they did! Although it is not the usual pattern at Smith Point, the afternoon provided a steady parade of kettling hawks to enjoy. A kettle refers to a group of hawks (or other soaring birds) swirling around in a thermal, slowly rising like bubbles in a boiling pot. The kettles started out fairly small but seemed to get larger as the afternoon went on, going from a few dozen birds to more than a thousand. Most of the birds were Broad-winged Hawks but there were a few Mississippi Kites, Accipiters and even a Turkey Vulture or two thrown in. Add in some American Kestrels and Northern Harriers and you add it up to a pretty good day! The group even got to see an Accipiter take a dive at a perched Olive-sided Flycatcher (he missed)!

Eventually, more than 5,000 Broad-winged Hawks would be counted by the "official" counter present on this day. Counting hawks might seem like a straight forward proposition and at most hawk watch sites it is. But this is not the case at Smith Point. Many hawk watch sites are situated in

mountainous areas or along coast lines were raptors funnel through in (more or less) one direction. This makes counting easy. But Smith Point is on a small peninsula on Galveston Bay and creates a geographic problem for the migrating birds. Hawks, in general, do not like to fly over open water so they hug the coast line for as long as possible. But in doing so they end up at Smith Point with nowhere left to go. The birds then have a decision to make – turn around and go back the way they came or fly over the water to the other side of the bay. The hawks often mill around for a while before making a decision and this creates a great chance to observe the birds at close range. Normally, the kettles of hawks fly very close to the hawk tower and give great looks. On this day, they mostly stayed further away but distant looks are better than no looks! As good as this is for seeing hawks it creates a nightmare for counting! How do you know if a hawk that is coming by is doing so for the first time or is circling around for another pass? Hawk counting at Smith Point has to be an art and a science!

What started out as a slow morning turned into a busy afternoon of hawk watching. Boom or bust is the rule at Smith Point and the birders on this trip got a good taste of both. But with a morning that included watching Swallow-tailed Kite and Magnificent Frigatebirds and an afternoon watching thousands of kettling hawks how much more can you really ask for? Whatever you are looking for, if you are a birder on the upper Texas coast, Smith Point is the place to be in late September and the Golden Triangle Audubon Society will be back next year to do it all over again!

The following species were recorded by the trip leaders in and around Smith Point:

Black-bellied Whistling Duck (79), Fulvous Whistling Duck (15), Northern Bobwhite (6), Brown Pelican (70), Anhinga (2), Neotropical Cormorant (204), Magnificent Frigatebird (4), Great Blue Heron (2), Great Egret (7), Snowy Egret (3), Tricolored Heron (1), Cattle Egret (178), White Ibis (131), Plegadis sp. (345), Black Vulture (9), Turkey Vulture (46), Osprey (1), Swallow-tailed Kite (1), Mississippi Kite (116), Northern Harrier (10), Sharp-shinned Hawk (321), Cooper's Hawk (32), Accipiter sp. (12), Red-shouldered Hawk (1), Broad-winged Hawk (5592), Swainson's Hawk (2), White-tailed Hawk (1), Red-tailed Hawk (10), Crested Caracara (5), American Kestrel (91), Merlin (1), Black-bellied Plover (4), Killdeer (6), Black-necked Stilt (10), American Oystercatcher (3), Long-billed Curlew (1), Greater Yellowlegs (10), Willet (3), Ruddy Turnstone (75), Sanderling (9), Least Sandpiper (3), Laughing Gull (62), Herring Gull (4), Gull-billed Tern (14), Royal Tern (15), Rock Pigeon (2), Eurasian Collared-Dove (19), White-winged Dove (23), Mourning Dove (212), Chuck-will's-widow (1), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (15), Belted Kingfisher (1), Red-bellied Woodpecker (1), Downy Woodpecker (2), Olive-sided Flycatcher (1), "Trail's" Flycatcher (1), Least Flycatcher (1), Empidonax sp. (1), Great Crested Flycatcher (1), Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (13), Loggerhead Shrike (28), White-eyed Vireo (1), Blue-headed Vireo (1), Warbling Vireo (1), Blue Jay (6), American Crow (8), Tree Swallow (5), Bank Swallow (5), Cliff Swallow (2), Barn Swallow (50), Carolina Chickadee (1), Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (9), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1), Eastern Bluebird (3), Northern Mockingbird (13), Brown Thrasher (1), European Starling (50), Yellow Warbler (1), Black and White Warbler (4), American Redstart (1), Wilson's Warbler (2), Blue Grosbeak (1), Indigo Bunting (2), Dickcissel (1), Eastern Meadowlark (1), Great-tailed Grackle (34)

Steve Mayes

Jefferson County Migration Count – 17 September 2011

Ordinarily, we would be looking at the results of this count, three years after Hurricane Ike, to see what we could glean about the recovery of the habitat in the area from that event. However, the drought conditions would lead us to assume that the dry state of the habitat would overwhelm any other effects, even though most parts of the county had some rain in late August and early September. So it was most unexpected to reach an all time high in the number of species seen! Upon further analysis, we must conclude that the drought and recovery from the hurricane are only two of several factors involved. From very late in August through about September 23, the winds were consistently light and often with a northerly component, and it seems that neotropical passerine migrants flowed in a steady stream through the area, with the birds that proceeded southward being replaced each night with new arrivals from the north. On count day, the diversity of migrant species was very high, and conditions were good for observing them. On the other hand, the habitat in the county was extremely dry as a result of the minimal rainfall. Somewhat surprisingly, normal numbers of species were found in the areas in the northwest quadrant of the county, although the areas in the west that are south of Highway 73, and even south of Interstate 10, continued to lack the numbers of birds that were normal before Ike. As might be expected with the dry conditions, shorebird habitat was very much reduced, and numbers of most individual shorebirds were quite low. Gulls and terns were particularly scarce in the accessible parts of the beach on count day. Overall, the combination of these factors led to a high number of species but a very modest number of individual birds. One factor that is readily observed in the field, but requires some scrutiny to detect in the count results, is the low number of blackbirds (grackles, cowbirds and Red-winged Blackbirds) that are present in the-rice field areas. This has prevailed each year since Hurricane Rita in 2005.

In mid-September, Blue-winged Teal are the only migratory ducks that can be expected in numbers, and we found a reasonable number of them, a good result for the dry conditions. A few early Northern Shoveler, and as often happens, a single Green-winged Teal were also seen. On the other hand, we failed to find any Wood Ducks, and one flyby Fulvous Whistling Duck was the only one seen.

Brown Pelican numbers continue to be very healthy, but no White Pelicans had arrived by count day. Paradoxically, there was a good showing of one of the other larger migrants, Double-crested Cormorants. The large number of Anhinga included some migrating kettles seen over the northern part of the county.

Least Bitterns breed in the area, while American Bitterns winter. Often we see a few lingering Least Bitterns and occasionally an early wintering bird. But this year, we saw neither. Likely also influenced by the dry conditions was the small number of herons and Snowy Egrets. Cattle Egrets on the other hand seem oblivious to the dry conditions, and somehow find insects. We have found Reddish Egrets in most recent years, probably mostly post-breeding dispersal, although a few have wintered in recent years.

It was to be expected that ibis numbers would be low, and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons are presumably with the ibis, probably in wetter areas in the Trinity River bottoms. Wood Storks are regularly found in significant numbers in August just on the Jefferson County side of the Jefferson/Liberty County line. Usually, we find either none remaining or a good number, but this year there was one lone bird there, and two elsewhere in the county.

Raptor numbers were generally unremarkable, except for a very late Swallow-tailed Kite – a new species for the count – and relatively high numbers of American Kestrels, Merlins and Northern Harriers, possibly portending good wintering populations of these species.

Although we did not find any in the last two years, Purple Gallinules have become established breeders, particularly at Cattail Marsh, so finding seven this year was not surprising. Common Gallinules (reverting to that name after 25 years as Common Moorhens) were in normal numbers, but no American Coots were located for the second year in a row. Coots are still abundant in winter; they just seem to be arriving a little later.

We managed to find all the expected small plovers on the beach, including a Wilson's Plover for the first time in several years. We did fairly well with the "waders" – non-beach shorebirds – finding Solitary Sandpiper and Upland Sandpiper, each for the first time in several years. A large flock of Buff-breasted Sandpipers, at least 75 strong, on a turf farm near Nome was something we have not encountered before on this count. We recorded most of the usual "peeps" including Semi-palmated Sandpiper but did not find a Baird's Sandpiper this year. A few Pectoral Sandpipers were seen after an absence of two years.

As noted above, most gulls and terns were away from the accessible beach on count day, but we were able to find most species, some in areas around Sabine Lake, but we again failed to find Herring Gull. Sandwich Terns thin out very rapidly in September and none were seen, but one Least Tern was. Black Skimmers have been particularly numerous all this year.

White-winged Dove and Eurasian Collared-Dove populations may have leveled off, and Inca Dove populations may be rebounding.

We detected all four common owl species after missing both Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl on count day for the last three years. No Common Nighthawk was seen or heard, although multiple Chuck-will's Widows were in the coastal woodlots.

Chimney Swift numbers were modest this year, as were Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. As far as the latter are concerned, this probably reflects on reduced coverage of feeder equipped backyards more than any real decline.

Woodpecker numbers were all very much in line with the last two years, so any effect caused by dead and fallen trees seemingly continues.

Flycatchers have been very numerous throughout the fall, and this is reflected in the count results. Because of the large number, many were only able to be identified as *Empidonax*

species. Of those that could be studied, a good number turned out to be of the "Traill's complex (Willow and Alder). A record number of Great Crested Flycatchers were counted. An early Vermilion Flycatcher was found in the extreme western part of the county, but we were surprised to see on reviewing past counts that this happens about one year out of three. Eastern Kingbird numbers were high with Scissor-tailed Flycatchers more modest.

We are pleased to note that Loggerhead Shrike numbers have returned to normal numbers after being severely reduced in the wake of the two hurricanes. We hope that this reflects recovery of the habitat and the return of more birds of this species.

The number of vireos recorded was rather modest, as elsewhere throughout the fall so far, enlivened on count day by the presence of a new species to the count, Bell's Vireo.

One of the principal reasons for the high species count was the presence of no fewer than 25 warbler species, 21 of them in Sabine Woods. We did have the benefit of multiple observers present in the woods over most of the day, but nevertheless, this represents an excellent day. The only ones that could well have shown up but didn't were two that have been conspicuously absent (so far) this fall, Chestnut-sided and Tennessee Warblers.

Scarlet Tanagers are regarded by most as rare here in the fall, but they are present, and possibly overlooked as they are far less conspicuous than in the spring. So it was nice to find one, and even nicer to record a male Western Tanager that was present in Sabine Woods, apparently for at least three days.

The count is conducted too early to expect many sparrows other than the resident Seaside Sparrows. However, this year was a bumper year for Blue Grosbeaks, which, along with Dickcissels, were everywhere in the roadsides in the western part of the county. A few Indigo Buntings were already migrating, although the peak for them is in October. As usual, a few of the young Painted Buntings were still enjoying the numerous seeds in Sabine Woods.

Below is a provisional listing of the species seen. If corrections are needed, the listing on the GFAS website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.com will be updated.

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (42); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (1); DUCK, Mottled (23); TEAL, Blue-winged (247); SHOVELER, Northern (22); TEAL, Green-winged (1); BOBWHITE, Northern (cw); GREBE, Pied-billed (17); STORK, Wood (3); CORMORANT, Neotropic (206); CORMORANT, Double-crested (21); ANHINGA (173); PELICAN, Brown (215); HERON, Great Blue (16); EGRET, Great (86); EGRET, Snowy (90); HERON, Little Blue (15); HERON, Tricolored (29); EGRET, Reddish (3); EGRET, Cattle (1777); HERON, Green (12); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (2); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (1); IBIS, White (194); IBIS, White-faced (11); IBIS, Plegadis (141); SPOONBILL, Roseate (45); VULTURE, Black (37); VULTURE, Turkey (52); OSPREY (2); KITE, Swallow-tailed (1); KITE, White-tailed (3); KITE, Mississippi (9); HARRIER, Northern (7); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Cooper's (2); HAWK, Red-shouldered (11); HAWK, Broad-winged (14); HAWK, Swainson's (4); HAWK, Red-tailed (2); CARACARA, Crested (3); KESTREL, American (12); MERLIN (5); RAIL, Clapper (20); RAIL, King (1); GALLINULE, Purple (7); GALLINULE, Common (55); PLOVER, Black-bellied (18); PLOVER, Snowy (9); PLOVER, Wilson's (1); PLOVER, Semipalmated (4); PLOVER, Piping (10); KILLDEER (41); STILT, Black-necked (30); AVOCET, American (102);

SANDPIPER, Spotted (6); SANDPIPER, Solitary (1); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (7); WILLET (34); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (18); SANDPIPER, Upland (1); CURLEW, Long-billed (3); GODWIT, Marbled (2); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (12); SANDERLING (55); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (11); SANDPIPER, Western (9); SANDPIPER, Least (237); SANDPIPER, Pectoral (5); SANDPIPER, Stilt (45); SANDPIPER, Buff-breasted (80); DOWITCHER, Species (90); GULL, Laughing (267); GULL, Ring-billed (2); TERN, Least (1); TERN, Caspian (84); TERN, Black (49); TERN, Common (1); TERN, Forster's (81); TERN, Royal (243); SKIMMER, Black (159); PIGEON, Rock (219); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (36); DOVE, White-winged (84); DOVE, Mourning (307); DOVE, Inca (14); GROUND-DOVE, Common (1); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (4); OWL, Barn (1); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (1); OWL, Great Horned (1); OWL, Barred (1); NIGHTHAWK, Common (cw); WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck- (3); SWIFT, Chimney (79); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (121); HUMMINGBIRD species (5); KINGFISHER, Belted (4); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (4); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (34); WOODPECKER, Downy (24); WOODPECKER, Pileated (13); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (1); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (8); FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (4); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (2); FLYCATCHER, Traill's (10); FLYCATCHER, Least (9); KINGBIRD, Western (cw); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (51); FLYCATCHER, Vermilion (1); FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (42); KINGBIRD, Eastern (52); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (44); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (116); VIREO, White-eyed (35); VIREO, Bell's (1); VIREO, Yellow-throated (1); VIREO, Warbling (1); VIREO, Red-eyed (8); JAY, Blue (115); CROW, American (14); CROW, Fish (20); CROW, Species (11); MARTIN, Purple (3161); SWALLOW, N. Rough-winged (36); SWALLOW, Bank (7); SWALLOW, Cliff (95); SWALLOW, Barn (310); CHICKADEE, Carolina (55); TITMOUSE, Tufted (22); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (2); WREN, Carolina (32); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (48); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (1); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (27); ROBIN, American (2); CATBIRD, Gray (5); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (235); THRASHER, Brown (4); STARLING, European (247); OVENBIRD (2); WARBLER, Worm-eating (1); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (9); WARBLER, Blue-winged (2); WARBLER, Black-and-white (8); WARBLER, Prothonotary (1); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (1); WARBLER, Nashville (3); WARBLER, Mourning (4); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (12); WARBLER, Hooded (2); REDSTART, American (11); PARULA, Northern (4); WARBLER, Magnolia (3); WARBLER, Bay-breasted (2); WARBLER, Blackburnian (1); WARBLER, Yellow (40); WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (cw); WARBLER, Palm (1); WARBLER, Pine (4); WARBLER, Yellow-throated (1); WARBLER, Prairie (1); WARBLER, Black-throated Green (2); WARBLER, Canada (6); WARBLER, Wilson's (14); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (6); SPARROW, Lark (cw); SPARROW, Seaside (58); SPARROW, Lincoln's (1); TANAGER, Summer (2); TANAGER, Scarlet (1); TANAGER, Western (1); CARDINAL, Northern (123); GROSBEAK, Blue (85); BUNTING, Indigo (29); BUNTING, Painted (3); DICKCISSEL (267); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (172); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (4); GRACKLE, Common (190); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (97); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (166); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (214); ORIOLE, Orchard (4); ORIOLE, Baltimore (33); FINCH, House (6); SPARROW, House (190); Total Individuals (12937); Number of species (179); Number of Observers (23); Participants 2011; Richard Atkins; Althea Bythewood; Dean Calcote; Linda Davis; Howard Davis; Drew Dickert; Terry Ferguson; John Haynes; Rose Ann Jordan; Harrison Jordan; Gary Kelley; Greg Lavaty; Carol Lynn Loker, Andy Loker, Steve Kuritz, Steve Mayes, Sally Moffet, Chuck Moffet. Janet Rathjen, Ken Sztraky, Bill Tarbox, John Whittle, Adam Wood.

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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/> Email alerts are also available for a fee. Most rare bird sightings in Texas are posted on the TEXBIRDS listserv. Archives of the listserv are at <http://lists.texbirds.org/texbirds.html> It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives, which include postings up to the most recent.

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>.

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