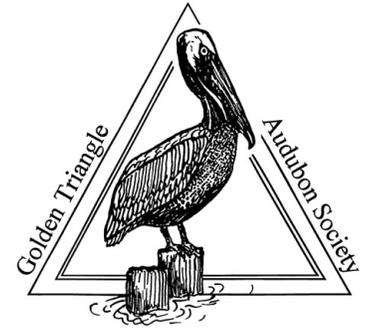


# The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 20 No. 6

June 2014

## Summer Break!

As usual, there will be no membership meetings in June or July. Our next meeting will be on **THURSDAY, AUGUST 21, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.** in the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont, Texas.

The next issue of the *Brown Pelican* will be a combined July/August issue, to be published in early August.

## Rose Ann's Water Feature

This spring there were a few things added to Sabine Woods. There were five new benches made by a wonderful GTAS volunteer, Andy Allen, and they were placed in various places. One was for Rose Ann Jordan who was a long time Golden Triangle Audubon (very active) member who passed away last year. Another was for a friend of hers and several of ours, Bob Madrulli who helped her learn to bird. One bench was placed for Sandy Komito, who tries to make it to Sabine Woods every year to bird and is still presently holds the first and second places as the most birds seen in one year in North America. The other two were placed at Rose Ann's water feature. Yes, Sabine Woods now has a total of four drips. There have been two at Howard's water feature for a good while now. But in March after getting suggestions from photographers, Gary Kelley and Howard Davis put two new drips in. This entailed a lot of planning and then carrying out all the things to accomplish this large task. Howard picked out the rocks that were just right from a business in Beaumont and then he chiseled out a place to hold the water when it drips onto the rock. It has to be just right so the birds can bathe. They both engineered how to run the water lines and used sawed off fence posts to attach the tubing. They also built about a three foot wooden wall to act as a small blind. Andy Allen built two benches for people to sit on and view the birds as they drop in to bath or drink from the two drips. Harlan Stewart, John Whittle, and Gerald Duhon contributed to selecting and clearing

the site, no small task in the middle of a McCartney Rose thicket.

Everyone seemed to be pleased with the new water feature. Yes, one side is not shaded very well, but we did want sun to light up the drip itself for better photos. I will try to list the birds that several of us saw around the drips and some birds bathing. One bird that was amazing to watch bathing was a Spotted Towhee came and bathed in both drips, one right after the other. A photographer even has pictures of it. Harlan Stewart also put out a mealworm cake which attracted birds also. Harlan has helped to try to keep an eye on the drip and see the various bird species that were seen there:

Prothonotary Warbler; Black-throated Green; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Blue Grosbeak; Summer Tanager; Scarlet Tanager; Orchard Oriole; Indigo Bunting; Hooded Warbler; Yellow Warbler; Chestnut-sided Warbler, Brown Thrasher; Bronzed Cowbird, Blue Jay.

So because we have wonderful hard working volunteers, Sabine Woods now has an extra place for the birds to have a water source and we as birders have an chance to see the birds at a different place. If you go to Sabine Woods, please go and see the new drip. It is a little hard to find, but we will eventually put a sign with arrow to show where to enter to get to it.

Jana Whittle

## *The Brown Pelican*

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Issue number 208

### Golden Triangle Audubon Society

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

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## Calendar of Events

*Important Note: Field Trip notices published here should always be regarded as needing confirmation just before the date. Changes will always be posted on the web site at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org). Confirmation of the location will also normally be available at the Membership Meeting that is usually, but not always, two days prior to each trip, or by contacting Field Trip Committee chair, Steve Mayes at 409-722-5807 or [sgmayes@hotmail.com](mailto:sgmayes@hotmail.com).*

**Saturday August 2. Field Trip to Liberty-Dayton Area.** Each year, several of us have made a pilgrimage to the Liberty-Dayton area in August. During the first half of August each year, Swallow-tailed Kites congregate in the Trinity River bottomlands between Liberty and Dayton for two or three weeks before they migrate south for the winter. Sometimes, we are lucky enough to find up to 20 or more; other times they are more spread out and we don't see quite as many.

This has become a regular field trip. We will meet on Saturday August 2 at 8:00 AM at the McDonalds at 1923 Highway 90 in Liberty. This is on the north side of the Highway at the intersection with Travis Street, one block west of Main St/Highway 227. Carpooling is highly desirable on this trip. Most of this trip does not **necessitate** extensive walking, although some of the group will probably do quite a bit of walking. The trip will probably not last beyond noon.

We will check the area along Highway 90 between Liberty and Dayton, perhaps several times, and also the Liberty Municipal Park area. We might even also drive down FM1409. In addition to the Swallow-tailed Kites, there are usually Mississippi Kites flying low in the residential areas of Liberty north of US 90. Depending on how wet the area is, there may be other birds characteristic of bottomlands.

For more information, contact Steve Mayes ([sgmayes@hotmail.com](mailto:sgmayes@hotmail.com) or 409-722-5807).

**Thursday August 21, 2014. Membership Meeting.** Tentative: Some birds of Costa Rica.

## Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank Jean Beavens, Debbie Bradford, Linda Davis, Harrison Jordan, Denise Kelley, Phil Rogers, Christine Silva, Gail Slocum and Janice Sutton for bringing refreshments in May. **We need volunteers to bring items for all fall 2014 meetings.** We do not expect one person to bring everything, but please call so we can coordinate! Even if you would like to bring drinks and cookies or something similar, please call Jana Whittle at (409) 722-4193 (or email her at [janafw@aol.com](mailto:janafw@aol.com)) **as far in advance as possible.** Please help if you can!

**Saturday August 23. Field Trip to Bolivar Flats.** Tentative. Meet leader Steve Mayes at the vehicle barrier at Bolivar Flats at 8:30 a.m. Take Highway 124 south from Winnie about 20 miles through High Island. At the shoreline, turn right along Highway 87 and proceed approximately 25 miles through Gilchrist and Crystal Beach until you come to the intersection with Loop 108. At that intersection, turn left (south -- the opposite direction from Loop 108) on Rettilon Road to the beach. If conditions permit, drive onto the sand and turn right to the vehicle barrier (about 1/2 mile). It is about a 90-minute drive, with no allowance for stops, from Beaumont or mid-County to the Flats.

We will visit High Island on the way home, checking there for migrants.

**You will need a Galveston County Beach Parking Permit, obtainable for \$10 from most merchants on the Peninsula, to park on the beach.**



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

# Sea Rim Grand Reopening June 20, 2014

The first stage of the Sea Rim State Park redevelopment is now complete, and a Grand Reopening Ceremony will be held on Friday, June 20 from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. The ribbon cutting will be held in the newly completed parking and camping area adjacent to the boardwalk over the dunes. Expected speakers include Carter Smith, Executive Director of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Justin Rhodes, Director of Region 4, and Jefferson County Judge Jeff Branick. The ceremony is open to the public and refreshments will be served.

Sea Rim has recently been awarded two grants from the BP Oil Spill Recovery Fund. A grant of \$187, 000 will be used for dune recovery, while a grant of \$210,000 will be used to construct a Fence Lake Viewing Platform, a Willow Pond Viewing Platform and a fish cleaning station.

## Sabine Woods Work Day May 17, 2014

Sincere thanks are due to the following for working at Sabine Woods on the work day on May 17: Andy Allen, Mary Carter, Michael Cooper, Howard Davis, John Haynes, Thomas Hellweg, Gary Kelley, Sherrie Roden, Christine Sliva, We have never before had such pleasant weather for a May work day. The temperature was very pleasant, the humidity was low, and insects were relatively few and far between. The trails round the woods, the trails inside the woods and the meadow areas were all mowed and hopefully will not need too much attention for early fall birding. Most of the area round the "new" trees in the east was mowed to continue the slow process of eliminating McCartney rose from this area, and to reduce competition for water and nutrients. The trails inside the woods were extensively trimmed. A few other "odd jobs" were accomplished, including removing a couple of trees that had fallen across trails.

While most of the habitat work that we do at Sabine Woods does not need further explanation, there are some aspects that may need further elaboration. Most of our trail system has been in existence for a long time, and seeks to balance reasonable birder access with sufficient privacy for the more sensitive bird species.

Beyond that, a lot of our work involves elimination of exotics and control of undesirable invasive species, whether exotic or not. In the early days of our stewardship of Sabine Woods, Chinese tallow trees were the biggest threat. These have been eradicated as far as is possible within the Woods, but is very widespread elsewhere in the area. Tallow seeds are eaten but not digested by birds and there will always be some dispersal in the droppings of larger birds. So while we need to continue to be vigilant, all we need to do is deal with the few tallows that spring up each year. This year, there were perhaps six that appeared, all in the northwest pond area. We prefer to deal with tallows using herbicide applied as a basal bark treatment. This minimizes the collateral damage, an important consideration as tallows are not killed by the environmentally less problematic herbicides, and require the use of herbicides containing triclopyr. Cutting or girdling tallow trees results in

an aggressive bushy multi stemmed regrowth. Other tree species are less troublesome. On the advice of local NWR biologists, we are not allowing persimmon trees to grow, as they form impenetrable thickets. Most were killed by salt water from Ike, so all we needed to do was to deal with the few survivors.

McCartney rose is an introduced species that forms large thick bushes that are of very little value as bird habitat. There were extensive areas in Sabine Woods, but we are gradually gaining the upper hand. Again, herbicides are the only practical control method, although we like to mow or brushhog first, and then treat the regrowth, as that involves much smaller quantities of herbicide. We were fortunate in not having much Chinese privet, and in having successfully eradicated what was there. However, it can regrow from roots, is susceptible to bird dispersal of seeds, and is still sold and planted locally.

There are two vines we do not want despite some bird value. Japanese Honeysuckle, a non-native classified as a noxious weed in Texas, becomes invasive although used by hummingbirds briefly in the spring. Mustang grape, a native species, is of concern because a heavy load on oak trees can strangle the trees, and even though birds will eat the grapes, we need healthy oak trees more.

John A. Whittle

## Membership Dues

To simplify our record keeping, all memberships now run from January through December. Membership dues remain at \$15 per year. You may pay at any membership meeting (checks preferred), use the subscription/ membership blank on the back page of the hard copy version or simply mail to us at PO Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627.

Dues for all members will be for the period ending on December 31. The memberships of new members joining in August or later in the year will extend to the end of the following calendar year. For new members joining National Audubon using the membership blank printed on the back page of each printed issue of the *Brown Pelican*, 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 members living in the Chapter's official territory, which is defined by zip codes, but basically covers all of Jefferson, Orange and Hardin Counties and one or two zip codes adjacent to these counties. We do welcome members in other nearby counties!

Your dues cover the cost of printing and mailing the *Brown Pelican* to you, and help fund our other activities. We urge you to help us do more by receiving your *Brown Pelican* as a PDF attached to an email if you do not already. We will continue to post the Newsletter on the GTAS website at [www.goldentriangleaudubon.org](http://www.goldentriangleaudubon.org). The typical issue is currently less than 500 KB so it is not a large file, although we are now including added additional materials to the electronic version and plan to include pictures in the future, both of which may increase the fill size slightly.. Please send an email to [johnawhittle@aol.com](mailto:johnawhittle@aol.com) with your request, including the name we are currently send the printed copy to, and the email address you want us to use.

# Migration Count – 10 May 2014

*(This is the full version of a report that appeared in condensed form in the printed Brown Pelican.)*

After remarkable numbers in each of the previous two years, it was probably inevitable that this year's count was somewhat less spectacular. Nevertheless, the total number of species detected at 186 was still the third highest ever, and the number of individual birds was well within norms. Last year was unique. There was apparently a massive migration flight over the previous night, but sufficiently favorable winds that most of the birds skipped over the coast and continued well inland, resulting in very good birding in the "inland" parts of the county, but only fairly good birding near the shoreline. This year was much more normal, with a reasonably good diversity of birds near the coast in Sabine Woods, and a normal experience further inland.

Apart from Blue-winged Teal and Whistling-Ducks, we expect only a few stragglers of most other species such as Northern Shovelers and Lesser Scaup. This year, a few Gadwall remained. Perhaps most unusual was finding six Wood Ducks not in the wooded wetland behind Cattail Marsh where they usually are, but in the corner of a rice field!

We were heartened to find a total of 10 Northern Bobwhite giving rise to hopes that the species is holding its own locally. Most Common Loons have left our area by count day, but this was the fourth time in the last ten years that we found one lingering in Sabine Lake. However, we did not find any Pied-billed Grebes for only the second time in ten years. The numbers of many of our shorebirds and waterbirds were on the low side. Neotropical Cormorants were much reduced; two Anhinga was also low; only two Black-crowned Night-Herons is as low as we have ever seen. Great Egrets at 78 were the lowest in the last ten years; Snowy Egrets numbers were the lowest since 2007; and 23 Little Blue Herons was the lowest in the history of the count. On the other hand, it was nice to find an American Bittern again, after seeing two last year but none in the preceding eight years. Most of that species have departed for more northern nesting grounds by count day. Cattle Egrets were numerous again – the highest in ten years. White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbills were not particularly numerous, but we did again find Glossy Ibis as this species seems to be establishing itself in small numbers.

We found an Osprey, another of the many species that are often all further north by mid-May. A Swallow-tailed Kite, seen over the Neches River in north Beaumont, was perhaps to be expected given the increasing numbers being seen in the bottomlands of the various rivers in the area. The White-tailed Kite was the first we have seen since 2010, even though we suspect small numbers breed every year in the area. Mississippi Kites have seemingly established a foothold in the Beaumont area, and the four seen followed sighting every year since 2008. The pair of Bald Eagles nested across from Cattail Marsh again this year but only raise one eaglet. All three were seen. Essentially all Sharp-shinned Hawks migrate north to breed, but a few Cooper's Hawks breed locally, and we saw two of them. Nine Red-shouldered Hawks was fewer than we would normally expect. We saw two of the few breeding Broad-winged Hawks. A White-tailed Hawk seen on Wilber Road south of Highway 73 in the western part of the county,

while a new species for the count, was not unexpected as there have been frequent reports from the Big Hill area. Six Crested Caracara was a new high, further indicating that the species is now firmly established essentially throughout the county.

We knew there were a lot of Soras around this year, but seeing 50 was way above expectations. Other rail, coot, and gallinule numbers were unremarkable.

Plovers were interesting. In recent year, we have not seen many American Golden Plovers in late spring, or at all for that matter, even though we regularly found significant numbers in breeding plumage on counts in the late nineties. So it was nice to find six this year. Sixty-six Killdeer is not a low number but is many fewer than we usually find. The small beach plovers were about normal, although the Piping Plovers were the first we have seen since 2009. Three Snowy Plover was not abnormal, although we wonder where all of them are in May, because most other months of the year, one can find many more than that on the Sea Rim beach. Ten Wilson's Plovers seems to be the new norm, even though it is more than we used to find.

For a few years now, American Oystercatchers have been seen from time to time in the Sabine-Neches Ship Channel especially, so finding one on the May count this year after finding three (first time ever on the count) last year suggests that the species may be establishing a presence. American Avocets can often be seen in the impoundments on Pleasure Island even in mid-summer when they cannot be found elsewhere locally, so the 50 seen this year were not altogether unexpected. Spotted Sandpipers are among the last shorebirds to leave (and the first to return in the fall) and were found in normal numbers. Solitary Sandpiper migration patterns are similar, and were seen in Sabine Woods both before and after count day, but none were there on the day itself. Willet numbers matched the 2010 high number, although they have not appeared to be unusually numerous this spring. Lesser Yellowlegs are usually found in quite large groups, and 330 was the second highest we have recorded. We always look carefully for Upland Sandpipers in the usual places, but only in 1998 did we ever find them as late as count day. We came up empty again in 2014. On the other hand, we do expect to find Hudsonian Godwits, one of the later migrating shorebirds, but for the first year since 2001, we could not find any. They just seem to be avoiding the county this year. Whimbrels, however, pass through in much larger numbers over a longer period, and we found a rather high 121. Of the smaller sandpipers, count day is in the heart of the passage period of Semi-palmated Sandpipers, and we did find a number, but a more normal 23 after last year's 294. However, the usually much more numerous Western Sandpipers were almost nowhere to be found. Only in 1994 did we find fewer than the three we found this year. We did record four Baird's Sandpipers, but there is always the probability that some more are included in the fairly large number of "peep" species that we are always unable to study long enough or at close enough range. No such difficulty exists with White-rumped Sandpipers, which are relatively easy to identify, and usually

present, as this year, in multiple locations in quite large flocks. Stilt Sandpipers are present in our area except for a couple of months in the summer, even though numbers are quite low in mid-winter. We did find seventy, mostly in breeding plumage. Buff-breasted Sandpipers are much sought after by birders, and not always easy to find. We did find four, far below last year's 34, but then we did not find any in the preceding five years. Wilson's Phalaropes were everywhere this year, with particularly large numbers in the Beaumont Wastewater Treatment facilities and also in the southern part of the south impoundment of Pleasure Island/

Ever since the recent hurricanes, especially Ike in 2008, the beach in Jefferson County has been fairly narrow, and this has affected gulls and terns more than any other species. There just doesn't seem to have been areas of mud and moist sand that these birds favor. So numbers have been and continue to be quite low. However, all expected species were accounted for, including a nice total of 22 Sandwich Terns, missing in the two prior years. Herring Gulls in summer are usually not adult birds, but we do expect some immatures and it was gratifying to find five after missing them also in the two preceding years. Black Terns mass in numbers in late spring and again in early fall, but this year's 530 was an all-time high. We did find two Black Skimmers along the Sabine-Neches channel, amid reports of nesting on gravel areas within local chemical plants and refineries.

Doves and Pigeons were all present in good numbers, except for a significant decrease in Eurasian Collared-Doves over the last few years. Mourning Dove numbers were on the high side of normal, while White-winged Dove numbers hit a new high.

Finding owls is always a challenge since we do not spend much time seeking them in the very early morning or late evening. A pair of Great Horned Owls did nest again at Sabine Woods and fledged one offspring, and we usually see or hear them in Beaumont. None of these birds were found on count day, although we did detect one during the count week. At least two parties found flocks of about eight Common Nighthawks, as apparently there was a good migration flight on count day, but there were still fewer than in the previous two years.

Chimney Swifts gave rise to some concern. Seventeen is the fewest we have seen since 1994, the first year of the count, and observation generally suggests low numbers across the area this year. Usually, only a few Belted Kingfishers are still around by count time, so one is only slightly below normal. Ordinarily, we would not add a species to the overall count list based on a "count week" (seen in three days prior or three days after the count) record, but a Buff-bellied Hummingbird seen by Harrison Jordan in Beaumont on May 13 and for a couple of days after that deserves mention.

This year, both Golden-fronted Woodpeckers at Sabine Woods were around. The increase following the hurricanes in the Red-headed Woodpecker population dissipated somewhat, although numbers were still high by historical standards. Downy Woodpecker numbers were down somewhat, while Pileated Woodpecker numbers remained above historical averages.

The flycatchers disappointed somewhat. Eastern Wood-Pewees, after two years with exceptional numbers were lower, but still good relative to long term averages. *Empidonax*

flycatchers need very good views to enable species identification, but most of those seen this year were identified as Acadian Flycatchers. Some were probably already on territory, but most were likely still migrating. Great Crested Flycatcher numbers at five were disappointingly low. The first Western Kingbird since 2008 was a welcome sighting, all the more so since it was well inland rather than at a more usual location near the shore. Eastern Kingbirds and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers are closely related and have the same habitat preferences. Historically, the Eastern Kingbirds greatly outnumbered the Scissor-tailed Flycatchers locally, but in recent years, the ratio has changed in favor of the Scissor-tails.

There is concern across the nation over Loggerhead Shrike numbers, but we continue to see numbers that are close to long term averages. Among the Vireos, a single Yellow-throated Vireo was a low number, White-eyed Vireos were about normal, and Red-eyed Vireos were significantly low. This latter may reflect a late migration for the species this year, based on the large numbers seen subsequently in Sabine Woods. Warbling and Philadelphia Vireos are much less numerous than Red-eyed and White-eyed. Warbling Vireos tend to migrate earlier than Philadelphia Vireos, but this was the third consecutive year than one was seen. Warbling Vireos may be increasing, while Philadelphia Vireos may be decreasing in number.

There has been much discussion over the effect of West Nile Virus on Corvid numbers, but our results over the years do not indicate any precipitous decreases in either crows or Blue Jays. This year's numbers were very much in line with long-term averages.

Trends in local swallow populations seem to have continued much as in recent years. Purple Martin numbers were normal. Tree Swallows were somewhat high and Northern Rough-winged Swallows low. Cliff Swallows numbers continued to increase and the species can now be found nesting under most bridges over wet and moist areas.

Carolina Chickadee numbers were low again while Carolina Wrens were normal. Sedge Wrens mostly have left by count time, but two were found this year. We do find Marsh Wrens most years, as some apparently remain to breed along the immediate coast, and 13 was the second highest in the history of the count. Eastern Bluebirds were fairly widely scattered throughout the county in somewhat elevated numbers, although they do stay north of the coastal marshes. The true thrushes are all only migrants through our area, and therefore numbers found on our spring counts are dependent on weather conditions. However, numbers were a little lower than in most years, with only one Veery, no Gray-cheeked or Wood Thrushes and only a modest number of Swainson's Thrush. American Robins, although much more numerous in winter, do nest in the area, in larger numbers than most immediately surrounding areas, and we found a good number this year. Gray Catbird numbers were a little low this year. Over the years, Northern Mockingbird numbers increased only to be reduced in the aftermath of the 2005 and 2008 hurricanes, when they apparently fled north and did not immediately return. They have now more than recovered, and this year's 452 was a new high for the count.

Just as with the thrushes, the number and diversity of warblers on count day depends heavily on the weather. We probably could not expect to repeat the variety or number of

warblers seen on either of the prior two years, but we found 17 species nonetheless. Some of these are almost certainly nesting: Prothonotary Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Pine Warbler and Yellow-throated Warbler while most of the others were migrants. Parula numbers were low for the second consecutive year, while Pine and Yellow-throated Warbler numbers were low. Special mention must be made of a new species for the count, Swainson's Warbler, located in the Neches River bottomlands at the Edgewater Picnic Area in extreme north Beaumont. Given the date; this was probably also a nesting species, and this marks the first probably breeding record for the county. We normally find Ovenbird, but not this year, and missing Hooded Warbler was unusual, perhaps reflecting a gradual elimination in the county of the thick underbrush preferred by this species. We don't normally find any Palm Warblers, more a wintering species in the area, so one in Sabine Woods was noteworthy. If anything, the number of migrant American Redstarts, Magnolia Warblers and Yellow Warblers were on the low side, while Blackburnian numbers returned to normal after two bumper years. It was disappointing not to find any Canada Warblers, a late migrant often seen in May in our area, even though we have often missed the species.

Scarlet Tanagers are fairly late migrants and four is about normal. The Summer Tanagers we find are mostly on territory; however, three is a low number. One of the most unexpected birds found on the count were two Western Tanagers, a male and a female, seen in Sabine Woods. This was the first time since 2006 that the species had been seen. They did not stay around, so we assume they realized they were too far east and headed back west. Blue Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings both breed in the area and we usually find quite a few of each. Only three Indigo Buntings was a low number. There were about the usual number of Painted Buntings, Eastern Meadowlarks and the various grackle species. For the third year in a row, we found Bronzed Cowbird, suggesting the species is establishing itself in the area.

Participants: Jessica Barry (via eBird), B.J. Boatwright, Michael Cooper (via eBird), Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Harrison Jordan, Denise and Gary Kelley, Randy Lewis (via eBird).

Birds seen: WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (73); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (72); DUCK, Wood (6); GADWALL (4); DUCK, Mottled (37); TEAL, Blue-winged (245); SHOVELER, Northern (3); SCAUP, Lesser (3); BOBWHITE, Northern (10); LOON, Common (1); CORMORANT, Neotropic (71); CORMORANT, Double-crested (8); CORMORANT species (1); ANHINGA (2); PELICAN, American White (25); PELICAN, Brown (39); BITTERN, American (1); BITTERN, Least (11); HERON, Great Blue (11); EGRET, Great (83); EGRET, Snowy (84); HERON, Little Blue (76); HERON, Tricolored (50); EGRET, Cattle (1055); HERON, Green (33); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (2); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (39); IBIS, White (91); IBIS, Glossy (2); IBIS, White-faced (89); IBIS, Plegadis species (112); SPOONBILL, Roseate (18); VULTURE, Black (55); VULTURE, Turkey (60); OSPREY (1); KITE, Swallow-tailed (1); KITE, White-tailed (1); KITE, Mississippi (4); EAGLE, Bald (3); HAWK, Cooper's (2); HAWK, Red-shouldered (9); HAWK, Broad-winged (2); HAWK, Swainson's (6); HAWK, White-tailed (1); HAWK, Red-tailed (2); CARACARA, Crested

(7); HAWK species (2); RAIL, Clapper (25); RAIL, King (5); RAIL, Virginia (2); SORA (50); GALLINULE, Purple (32); GALLINULE, Common (36); COOT, American (63); PLOVER, Black-bellied (69); PLOVER, American Golden (6); PLOVER, Snowy (3); PLOVER, Wilson's (10); PLOVER, Semipalmated (14); PLOVER, Piping (2); KILLDEER (67); OYSTERCATCHER, American (1); STILT, Black-necked (82); AVOCET, American (52); SANDPIPER, Spotted (23); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (22); WILLET (69); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (330); WHIMBREL (121); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (76); SANDERLING (136); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (23); SANDPIPER, Western (3); SANDPIPER, Least (45); SANDPIPER, White-rumped (448); SANDPIPER, Baird's (4); SANDPIPER, Peep (100); SANDPIPER, Pectoral (38); DUNLIN (170); SANDPIPER, Stilt (70); SANDPIPER, Buff-breasted (4); DOWITCHER, Short-billed (58); DOWITCHER, Long-billed (8); DOWITCHER species (17); PHALAROPE, Wilson's (473); GULL, Laughing (108); GULL, Ring-billed (12); GULL, Herring (5); TERN, Least (33); TERN, Gull-billed (2); TERN, Caspian (11); TERN, Black (530); TERN, Common (6); TERN, Forster's (39); TERN, Royal (87); TERN, Sandwich (22); SKIMMER, Black (2); PIGEON, Rock (103); DOVE, Eurasian Collared- (15); DOVE, White-winged (136); DOVE, Mourning (348); DOVE, Inca (8); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (12); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (1); OWL, Great Horned (cw); OWL, Barred (2); NIGHTHAWK, Common (33); SWIFT, Chimney (17); HUMMINGBIRD, Buff-bellied (cw); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (16); HUMMINGBIRD, Species (1); KINGFISHER, Belted (1); WOODPECKER, Golden-fronted (2); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (10); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (32); WOODPECKER, Downy (10); WOODPECKER, Pileated (12); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (1); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (15); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (4); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (1); FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (6); KINGBIRD, Western (1); KINGBIRD, Eastern (74); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (63); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (69); VIREO, White-eyed (20); VIREO, Yellow-throated (1); VIREO, Warbling (1); VIREO, Philadelphia (1); VIREO, Red-eyed (7); JAY, Blue (76); CROW, American (33); CROW, Fish (32); CROW, Species (1); MARTIN, Purple (188); SWALLOW, Tree (181); SWALLOW, N. Rough-winged (4); SWALLOW, Bank (71); SWALLOW, Cliff (611); SWALLOW, Barn (280); CHICKADEE, Carolina (32); TITMOUSE, Tufted (13); WREN, Carolina (25); WREN, Sedge (2); WREN, Marsh (13); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (20); VEERY (1); THRUSH, Swainson's (8); ROBIN, American (32); CATBIRD, Gray (19); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (452); THRASHER, Brown (15); STARLING, European (209); WAXWING, Cedar (138); OVENBIRD (3); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (2); WARBLER, Black-and-white (2); WARBLER, Prothonotary (12); WARBLER, Swainson's (1); WARBLER, Tennessee (2); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (13); REDSTART, American (8); PARULA, Northern (9); WARBLER, Magnolia (6); WARBLER, Bay-breasted (1); WARBLER, Blackburnian (3); WARBLER, Yellow (5); WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (2); WARBLER, Palm (1); WARBLER, Pine (4); WARBLER, Yellow-throated (1); WARBLER, Black-throated Green (5); SPARROW, Savannah (34); SPARROW, Nelson's (4); SPARROW, Seaside (16); TANAGER, Summer (4); TANAGER, Scarlet (4); TANAGER, Western (2); CARDINAL, Northern (109); GROSBEEK, Rose-breasted (5); GROSBEEK, Blue (4); BUNTING, Indigo (3); BUNTING, Painted (8); DICKCISSEL (108); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (489); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (87); MEADOWLARK species (1); GRACKLE, Common (143); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (100); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (209); COWBIRD, Bronzed (1); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (123); ORIOLE, Orchard (42); ORIOLE, Baltimore (2); FINCH, House (9); SPARROW, House (152); TOTAL INDIVIDUALS (11345); TOTAL SPECIES (186)

Number of Observers (17); Number of Parties (9); Number of Party-Hours - Foot (23.73); Car (48.67); Stationary (4); Total Party-hours (76.40); Number of Party-Miles - Foot (13.8); Car (573.2); Total Party-Miles (587.00).

Participants: Jessica Barry (eBird), Michael Cooper (eBird), Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Harrison Jordan, Denise and Gary Kelley, Randy Lewis (eBird), Steve Mayes, Sherrie Roden, Kelley Sampeck, B.J. Shoemaker, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, Ken Sztraky, Jana and John Whittle.

## Field Trip to Hardin County – 31 May 2014

*(This is an expanded version of the report that appeared in the print version of the Brown Pelican.)*

For the last few years, Golden Triangle Audubon has run a field trip to the area of Hardin County just north and slightly west of Silsbee. This year, nineteen members and guests, one-third of whom were on their first field trip with us, assembled in the northern part of Silsbee on a pleasant morning following some rains over the preceding few days. There was the promise of showers in the afternoon, but our birding area remained dry until 12:01 p.m.! (There were showers elsewhere in the area, but not where we birded.)

The attraction of the area is the relatively easy access to the breeding songbirds of the area. Since the area was popularized for birding in the 1980s, Gore Store Road and Firetower Road (originally Smart School Fire Tower Road) have been the favored birding roads, and, indeed, are almost the only county maintained (and thus almost the only public) roads in the Beech Creek and Village Creek bottomlands in Hardin County that are the heart of the Big Thicket. The observation tower that was still there in the 1980s is now long gone, but the northern part of the road where the tower was located has changed little.

The avifauna of the area has changed somewhat over time. It is no longer possible to find either Red-cockaded Woodpeckers or Bachman's Sparrow in the area; these are now reliably found no closer than Angelina County. However, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Swainson's and Prairie Warblers have become easier to find. Outside of the protected areas of the Big Thicket National Preserve, the habitat is constantly changing, and the bird distribution with it. Many relatively small areas have been clearcut over the last decade or so, and replanted, resulting in monocultures of same age pine trees. In the early stages, these areas are favored by species such as Buntings (Indigo and Painted) and Blue Grosbeaks. As they grow up and thick underbrush develops, Yellow-breasted Chats, Hooded Warblers and other species, and as the pines become taller, Prairie Warblers find the areas attractive. As the pines mature and the underbrush diminishes, Pine Warblers and Brown-headed Nuthatches become more numerous, and the other species move on. The other warbler species not mentioned are more likely to prefer mixed species, mixed age areas.

We had two choices as to where to start. In the past couple of years, we had started at the Beech Creek crossing on Gore Store Road and worked our way east then south. This year, we elected to go back to our previous strategy of starting at the south end of Firetower Road and working north then west. The meeting area and the drive along FM418 allowed us to check off the urban birds such as European Starling, Rock Pigeon and Great-tailed Grackle, as well as a somewhat surprising Fish Crow. The southernmost stretch of Firetower Road provided suburban birds, including Blue Jay, Purple Martin, Carolina Wren and Northern Mockingbird.

The first stop we made was at the bridge over Dry Creek. The detritus of modern society that used to mar this small creek has been removed, and it is a whole lot better looking, even though there are a lot of small tallow trees along the

banks. The area on the south side of the creek, just east of the road was clearcut a couple of years back, but the now early stage of succession seems to be attractive to birds again. One of the first birds to greet us there was a nice male Yellow-throated Warbler, which stayed in the area all the time we did. A Yellow-billed Cuckoo announced its presence with its characteristic call, gave us a glimpse as it flew across the road, but then kept on going away from us. Next, we heard the chatter of Brown-headed Nuthatches, and probably three of them flitted between the taller pines, staying fairly high. This species used to be much less easy to find in the Big Thicket, but now, they are seen in small groups all over, often noisily indicating their presence. A Pine Warbler also checked us out from high in a pine. Much to our surprise, an Eastern Screech-Owl answered a taped call, but remained stubbornly hidden. We heard White-eyed Vireo, and some of the group actually saw it, Carolina Chickadee and the omnipresent Northern Cardinal. In this area, Northern Cardinals are particularly numerous in the areas of thicker underbrush, so much so that one soon ignores their incessant calls. Pine Warblers are numerous where there are taller pines, and their calls are equally obvious. It is impossible to travel up this road and not notice the explosive White-eyed Vireo calls emanating from the roadside bushes. Woodpeckers were uncharacteristically shy but obviously included two Red-bellied Woodpeckers. More surprising was a flyover Northern Flicker, a relatively uncommon breeder in southeast Texas.

Just a little further up the road, near the last cluster of dwellings on the road, were two American Crows, a House Finch and a Mourning Dove. Also perched on a wire in an open section was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, not really expected in this basically wooded section. As we proceeded further, a stop in a somewhat open area, fairly recently clearcut, produced the first few typical birds of the area. A Blue Grosbeak was perched at the top of a small pine, while an Indigo Bunting was nearby. A male Prairie Warbler moved from perch to perch around us, calling vigorously in response to a tape. This species prefers to nest in areas where the pine trees are about ten feet tall, although they will continue to use an area for two or three years as the pines get somewhat taller. A pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers appeared to have a nest hole in a dead tree that had been left during the clearcutting process, while a Downy Woodpecker worked the small trees alongside the road. A Yellow-breasted Chat was barely glimpsed as was a Gray Catbird. Pine Warbler, Carolina Chickadee and Common Yellowthroat were also recorded at this stop.

We stopped again at the point where Matigwa Road goes northwest from Firetower Road. There we had a Wood Thrush, moving relatively high in the trees, another Prairie Warbler, and a Yellow-breasted Chat that remained for a long time on a power line. Chats are generally reluctant to show, but males do often perch in the open in April and May. Hooded Warblers are characteristic of this area, although in sharp contrast to the confiding behavior of the species on

migration, they are very reluctant to allow a view on the nesting grounds, but often quite vocal. This individual, however, was more visible than most encountered on this trip. A Brown Thrasher and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher rounded out the species at this stop.

After a little misunderstanding by some participants over the intended route, we proceeded up the northern (unpaved) section of Firetower Road. Although it had recently rained quite significantly, the sandy unpaved roads characteristic of this area are well drained, and, for the most part, were not problematic. The first dirt section produced very much more of the same, with calls of many Pine Warblers, White-eyed Vireos, Prairie Warblers and Hooded Warblers punctuating our progress. At one stop, an Eastern Towhee could be heard in the medium distance but did not allow us to see him. We have learned over the past three or four years that this species does apparently nest in very small numbers in this area, although the field guides show the southwestern edge of the breeding range to be several hundred miles northeast! By this time – it was after 10:00 a.m. – the first Turkey Vultures were tilting overhead.

A little further up the road, those in the lead car were treated to a quick sighting of two Greater Roadrunners. Although the species is typically associated with dry and even arid habitats, our field trips to this area have consistently encountered this species, albeit usually only those in the first car are fortunate enough to get a good view. Unlike many of the Roadrunners of the open near desert areas, the ones in the Big Thicket tend to be very shy, and always quickly disappear into the abundant thick cover that is impenetrable to us humans. Much more associated with the area was a Pileated Woodpecker, which eventually made several flights over an open area within our sight. Then, one of the target birds of this trip, a Swainson's Warbler was heard and seen briefly by some trip participants. We can virtually always hear Swainson's Warblers, but the species is perhaps the most skulking of the eastern warblers, and getting a good view is never easy. In migration, we can find this bird foraging in the leaf litter on the ground in fairly thick underbrush, but such habitat, although present in the Big Thicket, is too extensive and too thick to allow us to find and see one. A hawk overhead turned out to be a Broad-winged Hawk. We also heard our first Tufted Titmouse of the day.

Camp Waluta Road used to be a good road for birding, but the pines have become tall, and, as the morning was already quite advanced, we elected to skip it this year, and turned west along Gore Store Road. The first section of the road typically has considerable traffic, so we proceeded without any stops, hearing White-eyed Vireos and not much else, although we know that this area has Prairie Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats in the areas of pines that were planted a few years ago. However, they will soon be too tall for most species. Immediately after passing Little Bighorn Drive, we stopped, and here were able to get the best view of the day of a Swainson's Warbler. Also at this stop, we had another Broad-winged Hawk overhead and heard another Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

At the Beech Creek crossing, we spent quite a lot of time being entertained by a male Prothonotary Warbler which

repeatedly flew from one side of the road to the other, either just above the road or under the bridge. It was easy to follow the movements of this bright yellow bird. The Acadian Flycatcher that also was somewhat cooperative had an unusual bill that was fairly bright yellow on the basal half of both mandibles, and was dark on the distal half. We did hear a Red-eyed Vireo, saw a Barn Swallow, but this stop was a little disappointing when compared to past years. Woodpeckers were strangely absent. Perhaps it was the advancing hour, or perhaps all the other species we have sometimes seen there in the past were just being secretive. Earlier scouting trips had suggested that the birds were there this year. We did have a "mini-kettle" of three Broad-winged Hawks overhead. We have seen more hawks of this species over all parts our area this late spring than we ever recall before. Conversely, we do not recall hearing any Red-shouldered Hawks, the quintessential hawk of the Big Thicket.

The field trip was successful in finding a good number of the target species, although no one trip in this type of habitat is likely to find all the species that are present. We did not find any Painted Buntings, nor Yellow-throated Vireos, nor any of the other warblers that are there such as Kentucky Warbler and Northern Parula. The failure of any Summer Tanagers to appear was also somewhat surprising. Perhaps many birds were sitting on eggs, during which time even the non-incubating bird of the pair tends to be secretive and quiet to avoid indicating the location of the nest. Once there are young to feed, the birds necessarily become more active in seeking food, and it may be that we should schedule this field trip either a little earlier when the birds are still establishing territories or a little later when they are feeding young. Nevertheless, the field trip did demonstrate a nice variety of the birds of the area to the participants, and perhaps many will be inspired to investigate the area further on their own. A smaller group will always obtain better views of the birds, which are deterred from showing by large groups!

The following species were recorded: Cattle Egret (2); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (3); Black Vulture (2); Turkey Vulture (6); Broad-winged Hawk (5); Rock Pigeon (9); Mourning Dove (8); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (1); Eastern Screech-Owl (1); Red-headed Woodpecker (2); Red-bellied Woodpecker (3); Downy Woodpecker (1); Northern Flicker (1); Pileated Woodpecker (2); Acadian Flycatcher (1); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (1); White-eyed Vireo (2); Red-eyed Vireo (1); Blue Jay (3); American Crow (4); Fish Crow (1); Purple Martin (5); Barn Swallow (1); Carolina Chickadee (4); Tufted Titmouse (3); Brown-headed Nuthatch (3); Carolina Wren (6); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (2); Eastern Bluebird (3); Wood Thrush (1); Gray Catbird (1); Northern Mockingbird (6); Brown Thrasher (1); European Starling (5); Prothonotary Warbler (2); Swainson's Warbler (2); Common Yellowthroat (2); Hooded Warbler (6); Pine Warbler (8); Yellow-throated Warbler (1); Prairie Warbler (5); Yellow-breasted Chat (7); Eastern Towhee (1); Northern Cardinal (7); Blue Grosbeak (3); Indigo Bunting (2); Common Grackle (3); Great-tailed Grackle (1); Brown-headed Cowbird (2); House Finch (1); House Sparrow (5); 51 species.

*John A. Whittle*

## Bird Sightings – April 2014

This year, we have changed the method of compilation and the format of this section, a change that was made necessary by the increasing number of reports that are becoming available, especially on eBird. We encourage all of our regular contributors to enter their sightings into eBird going forward. If you do not enter your sightings into eBird, please continue to send those of rare birds to us ([johnawhittle@aol.com](mailto:johnawhittle@aol.com)) by the 15th of the month following.

In this section of the Newsletter, we now generally limit the report to birds justifiably shown as rare or very rare on the local checklists for the week of the sighting, but we also try to mention any particularly high numbers as well as any sightings that may be of special interest for reasons other than those mentioned.

We have reviewed eBird and other submitted records for April for the Texas counties we have always covered – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine,

San Augustine and Tyler. We use all checklists in eBird that are reasonable in the light of other checklists and reports (if any) for the date and place, and/or where the rarities are supported by documentation or photographs. We also reviewed, looking for very rare or vagrant species only, records for nearby counties or parts of counties that are easily accessible to and often birded by birders in our core Golden Triangle Audubon area. These are Chambers, Galveston (High Island and Bolivar Peninsula only) and Liberty counties in Texas, and Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes (both west of the Calcasieu River only) in Louisiana.

The format of the listing is Species – Date – County-more precise location if available – (number) – Observer(s)

**Commentary:** April reports on bird sightings are dominated by reports at coastal migrant stopover points, especially Sabine Woods, but with some reports from hotspots north of the immediate Golden Triangle.

Cinnamon Teal	Apr17 Reedman	JEF-Cattail Marsh(1) Peggy	House Wren	Apr15-21 Apr 17	JEF-SW(1) multiple obs JEF-Nederland(1) Sam
Redhead	Apr 17	JEF(4) Tony Frank		Arisco	
Northern Gannet	Apr 20	JEF-McFaddin(2) Muriel	Gray-cheeked Thrush	Apr 7-21	JEF-SW(up to 7) mult. obs (not rare after Apr 21)
Glossy Ibis	Apr 17-19	JEF-Cattail Marsh(up to 4) Multiple obs.	Louisiana Waterthrush	Apr 20	ORA (6) Miranda Lawrence
	Apr 22	JEF-Cattail Marsh Elizabeth Eddins	Orange-crown. Warbler	Apr 22	JEF-SW(1) JHH
Swallow-tailed Kite	Apr 20	HAI (1) Cathy Loewen, Brok Miller	MacGillivray's Warbler	Apr 25	JEF-SW(1) Imre Karafiath
	Apr 24	HAI-Kountze(1) David Kidwell	Cape May Warbler	Apr 29	CAM-Peveto (1) Will Lewis
Bald Eagle	Shown as rare on checklist, but number of reports from JEF, JAS and ANG counties suggests otherwise			Apr 30	JEF-SW (1) GD
Virginia Rail	Apr 28	JEF-McFaddin NWR(1) Peggy Harding and "L.G. Pr"		Apr 25	JEF-TX87 E of Sea Rim (1) JFW, GD, JAW
Purple Gallinule	Apr 7	JEF-Big Hill Rd(3) RHRC	Cerulean Warbler	Apr 5-13	JEF-SW(1-2) multiple obs (not rare after Apr 13)
Ruff	Apr 19-29	CHA-Anahuac NWR (1) multiple obs	Yellow Warbler	Apr 6	JEF-SW(1) JHH
Franklin's Gull	Apr 6	JEF-SW(2) JHH		Apr 11	JEF-SW(1) JHH, MCO
Lesser Nighthawk	Apr 15	CAM-Peveto(1) mult.obs		Apr 12	JEF-SW(3) multiple obs
	Apr 19	JEF-SW(1) Jon Dunn and multiple obs.	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Apr 13	JEF-SW(1) J&R (not rare after Apr 13)
	Apr 22	CAM-Peveto(1) mult. obs.		Apr 6	JEF-SW(1) J&R
	Apr 23	JEF-SW(1) Jon Dunn and multiple obs		Apr 7	JEF-SW(1) JHH (not rare after Apr 13)
Black-ch. Hummingbird	Apr 18	JEF-SW(1) Brittany Hoch and Jenny Vogt	Black-thr. Blue Warbler	Apr 14	JEF-TX87 east of Sea Rim(1) Truls Andersen, multiple obs
	Apr 21	JEF-SW(1) David Roberts		Apr 30	JEF-TX87 east of Sea Rim (1) Sid Gauthreaux, multiple obs)
Rufous Hummingbird	Apr 12	JEF-SW(1) Carl Jackson	Palm Warbler	Apr 15-23	JEF-SW (up to 3) multiple obs
Red-cockad. Woodpecker	Apr 6	TYL-Colmesneil(1) Charles Smith	Prairie Warbler	Apr 16	JEF-SW(1) JHH
	Apr 4-25	Numerous reports from the colonies in JAS and ANG counties.	Canada Warbler	Apr 14	JEF-SW(2) JHH, SM
Peregrine Falcon	Apr 27	JEF-SW(1) Greg Page		Apr 15	JEF-SW(2) JHH, SM, J&R
	Apr 29	JEF-SW(1) JHH		Apr 16	JEF-SW(1) JHH
"Traill's" Flycatcher	Apr 19	JEF-SW(1) SM, JAW		Apr 21	JEF-SW(1) SM (not rare after Apr 21)
	Apr 22	JEF-SW(1) Jack Chiles	Spotted Towhee	Apr 9-19	JEF-SW(1) multiple obs
Least Flycatcher	Apr 17	JEF-SW(1) JHH, JAW	Bachman's Sparrow	Apr 20	JAS-Boykin Spr(2) Blaine Carnes
	Apr 21	JEF-SW(1) JHH, SM			
Western Kingbird	Apr 13	TX87-nr Sabine Pass(1) MCO, JAW	Bachman's Sparrow	Apr 21	JAS-Boykin Spr(1) Julie Mobley, Susan Tiholz
Philadelphia Vireo	Apr 6	JEF-TexPt NWR(1) SM	Chipping Sparrow	Apr 29	JEF-Pilot Stn Rd(1) Sid Gauthreaux
	Apr 16	JEF-SW Brooke Nicotra			
	Apr 18	JEF-SW(1) Blaine Carnes			
	Apr 21	JEF-SW(2) SM			
Black-whiskered Vireo	Apr 30	JEF-TX87 W of Sea Rim(1) Steve Dillinger, multiple obs.			

### Abbreviations used

ANG – Angelina County; CAM – Cameron Parish, LA; CHA – Chambers County; HAI – Hardin County; HJ – Harrison Jordan; HS – Harlan Stewart; J&R – Jessica Barry and Randy Lucas; JAS – Jasper County; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; MCO – Michael Cooper; RHRC – Rene Hebert and Rita Czek; SM – Steve Mayes; SW – Sabine Woods; TYL – Tyler County.