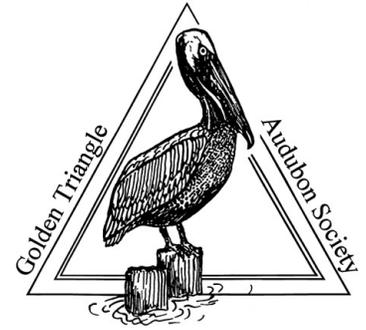


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 20 No. 11

November 2014

Annual Meeting and Pot-luck Dinner Thursday November 20, 2014 7:00 p.m. Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont

Thanks to Kay and Travis Lovelace of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge, we have a two part program. Following the main part of the program about Anahuac NWR, we will have a brief presentation of a new citizen science program focusing on Texas colonial waterbirds.

David Sarkozi, Friends of Anahuac Refuge Winter and Spring Birding at Anahuac NWR

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge is one of the premier birding locations on the Upper Texas Coast. More than 320 species have been documented on the 35,000 acres of the refuge. With a mix of small woodlands, stands of native prairie, rice field, brackish and salt marshes, the birds of Anahuac NWR are as varied as the habitat. Thirty species of waterfowl, 16 species of raptors, and 37 species of warblers have been recorded. Learn what to expect and where to look for the best birds at Anahuac NWR.

Kari Howard Audubon Texas Coastal Conservation Program Texas Estuarine Resource Network

Audubon Texas Coastal Conservation Program has launched the citizen science and stewardship program, Texas Estuarine Resource Network or T.E.R.N. This program offers free training, educational workshops, and stewardship activities to promote awareness among the general public about the importance of colonial waterbird species, issues of conservation concern, and to encourage participation in the protection of colonial waterbird species and their habitats. The primary objective is to develop a network of informed volunteers to become stewards of the Texas Coast through monitoring of waterbirds in foraging and rookery habitats, other wildlife, and their habitats. The data collected through this citizen science program can be incorporated into management and conservation plans, and to influence local, state and federal policy development.

The Brown Pelican

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Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
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. 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.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank the Port Arthur Convention and Visitors Bureau, Linda and Howard Davis, Girish Doshi, Sherrie Roden, Herb and Mary Stafford, and all others who brought refreshments in October. November will be our Annual Meeting and Pot-luck Dinner But we need volunteers to bring items for all the spring 2015 meetings Please do not wait until the last minute to volunteer! We do not expect one person to bring everything, but please call so we can coordinate! Even if you can just bring drinks and cookies or something similar, please call Jana Whittle at (409) 722-4193 (or email her at janafw@aol.com) as far in advance as possible. Please help if you can. We thank all those who brought or assisted in the purchase of refreshments over the last year or so!

Thursday November 20. Annual Meeting. Program details on page 1. We will have our annual pot luck dinner, and conduct our elections.

Saturday November 22. Field Trip to West Jefferson County. The area is well known for its birds of prey, its Sandhill Cranes and its sparrows. In wet years, there can be lots of waterfowl also.

Meet at 8 a.m. at the intersection of FM365 and Johnson Road (on the "north/west" side of Johnson Road at that intersection). From the intersection

of Interstate 10 and FM365 in Fannett, proceed along FM365 (towards Nome) for about six miles. Shortly after you emerge out of the woodlands, South China Road goes to the right (east then north) and immediately afterwards, on the left, is Johnson Road. There is a green sign for the G and A Turf Farm on Johnson Road at the intersection. Contact Steve Mayes, sgmayes@hotmail.com, or call 409-722-5807 for further information.

Thursday December 4. Reception and Birds in Art Exhibit Opening at the Museum of the Gulf Coast, Port Arthur 4 to 6 p.m. See details on page 3. The exhibit will be open through February 15, 2015.

Christmas Counts

See the list on page 4 of this issue.

Thursday January 15, 2015. Membership Meeting. Details in a future issue of the *Brown Pelican*.

Saturday January 17, 2015. Field Trip. A final decision will be made much nearer the time, but we have tentatively selected Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge for this trip. This is an opportunity to observe waterfowl, and also, especially at the Skillern Tract, various wintering warblers, sparrows and Vermilion Flycatchers.

Thursday February 19, 2015. Membership Meeting. Details in a future issue of the *Brown Pelican*.

Saturday February 21, 2015. Field Trip. Tentatively, this will be to Cattail Marsh in Tyrrell Park, Beaumont.



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.

Invitation to Opening Reception for Birds in Art exhibit at Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur, December 4

The Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur, Texas, invites Golden Triangle Audubon Society members and their guests to the opening reception of "Birds in Art," from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday, December 4, at the Museum, 700 Procter Street in downtown Port Arthur.

The Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur, Texas, will host the "Birds in Art" touring exhibition. The 2014 "Birds in Art" exhibition features innovative perspectives throughout 60 diverse artworks by some of the world's most talented artists, and will be featured in the museum from December 5, 2014 through February 15, 2015. Birds inspire artists worldwide as these avian marvels signal seasonal and environmental change, mesmerize with their flight, dazzle with their colors, and soothe with their songs. Artists strive to be chosen for the internationally renowned "Birds in Art" exhibition, organized annually by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin. Artworks in the 2014 exhibition feature a diverse array of birds preening, resting on unexpected perches, engaging in mischief, and more. Owls abound — from French sculptor Helene Arfi's bronze pair perched on a high tree branch to Japanese pyrographer Nobuko Kumasaka's trio of dozing barn owls. Three dimensional surprises await in Kerry Miller's hand-colored collage created from a vintage book. Swedish artist Gunnar Tryggmo's moody watercolor depicts gulls on a misty morning.

A painting of American goldfinches nestled, nearly camouflaged, among resplendent sunflowers exemplifies the watercolors of Barry Van Dusen, the Woodson Art Museum's 2014 Master Artist. In announcing the 2014 Master, director Kathy Kelsey Foley said of the Princeton, Massachusetts, artist, "We are delighted to honor Barry Van Dusen and acknowledge his exceptional artwork. Barry's watercolors are remarkably luminous and sensitive, which is due in part to his preference for working in the field, a long-standing tradition among artists who look to nature for subject matter."

Each fall at the Woodson Art Museum, the "Birds in Art" exhibition presents original paintings, sculptures, and graphics created within the last three years by artists from the world over. More than 500 artists annually — 564 in 2014 — submit their work for consideration by a jury of three different professionals who winnow the field to about ninety artworks. The 2014 jurors were Nina Z. Gormley; Wendell Gilley Museum, Southwest Harbor, Maine; Robert B. Pickering, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Laurie Winters, Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend.

A 132-page full-color, illustrated "Birds in Art" catalogue featuring every work along with artists' statements is available for purchase. For more information, visit www.museumofthegulfcoast.org, email the Museum at bellianse@lamarca.edu, or call 409-982-7000.

Field Guide to the Future: Half of North America's Birds at Risk from Global Warming

Half of the bird species in the continental United States and Canada are threatened by global warming. Many of these species could go extinct without decisive action to protect their habitats and reduce the severity of global warming. That's the startling conclusion reached by Audubon scientists in a new study.

Here in Texas birds threatened by global warming include Sandhill Crane, Brown Creeper, Northern Shoveler, Common Loon.

Of 588 bird species examined in the study, 314 are at risk. Of those, 126 species are at risk of severe declines by 2050, and a further 188 species face the same fate by 2080, with numerous extinctions possible if global warming is allowed to erase the havens birds occupy today.

"The greatest threat our birds face today is global warming," said Audubon Chief Scientist Gary Langham, who led the investigation. "That's our unequivocal conclusion after seven years of painstakingly careful and thorough research. Global warming threatens the basic fabric of life on which birds - and the rest of us depend, and we have to act quickly and decisively to avoid catastrophe for them and us."

To understand the links between where birds live and the climatic conditions that support them, Langham and other Audubon ornithologists analyzed more than 40 years of historical North American climate data and millions of historical bird records from the U.S. Geological Survey's North American Breeding Bird Survey and the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Understanding those links then allows scientists to project where birds are likely to be able to survive - and not survive - in the future.

The study offers an invaluable new way for Audubon to discuss and address global warming by bringing the issue into backyards and neighborhoods across America. It also reveals areas that are likely to remain stable for birds even as climate changes, enabling Audubon to identify "stronghold" areas that birds will need to survive in the future.

The result is a roadmap for bird conservation in coming decades in a warming climate. The study provides a key entry point for Audubon's greater engagement on the urgent issue of global warming. Responding to the magnitude of the threat to our birds, Audubon is greatly expanding its climate initiative, aiming to engage a larger and more diverse set of voices in support of protecting birds.

Solutions will include personal choices to conserve energy and create backyard bird habitat, local action to create community climate action plans, state-based work to increase rooftop solar and energy efficiency, and our work in Important Bird-Areas and other efforts to protect and expand bird habitats.

For more information, visit the National Audubon website at Audubon.org/climate.

2014-15 Christmas Bird Count Dates

As we go to press, relatively few Christmas Bird Count dates have been finally set. The following are **tentative** dates for the local counts, and we expect most of them will be firmed up in the next week or two. We will post a list of confirmed dates on the website at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org as soon as possible. Also, Houston Audubon Society maintains a list of all Texas CBCs on its website at www.houstonaudubon.org.

Saturday December 20: Turkey Creek. Centered in the Turkey Creek unit of the Big Thicket NP north of Kountze. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193)

Thursday December 18: Bolivar Peninsula. High Island and Anahuac NWR areas. This count was compiled by Bill Graber for fifty years, and has always been among the top counts in the nation. The count circle includes High Island, Rollover Pass and all of Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Contact Steve Mayes (sgmayes@hotmail.com or 409-722-5807)

To be determined: Johnson Bayou, LA. Centered on Johnson Bayou in Cameron Parish. This area of Cameroon Parish is recovering from two devastating hurricanes. This count has access to oilfield and Gray estate properties that are not accessible any other time. Contact Ken Sztraky (berrysheepfarm@att.net or 409-385-2835)

Saturday December 27: Beech Creek. Centered in the Steinhagen Lake area of Tyler and Jasper counties. In addition to Steinhagen Lake, this count includes all of Martin Dies State park, and the Corps of Engineers picnic areas and campgrounds around the lake. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193)

Thursday January 1, 2015: Orange County. This count includes much of Orange County between Orange and the Neches River, including Bessie Heights and the Old River Unit. Contact Ken Sztraky (berrysheepfarm@att.net or 409-385-2835)

Saturday January 3, 2015: Sea Rim SP. Sabine Pass/Texas Point/Sea Rim area. This count is sponsored by the Golden Triangle Audubon Society. The count circle includes the southern part of Murphree WMA, all of Texas Point NWR and Sea Rim State Park, the eastern part of McFaddin NWR as well as Sabine Woods, the Sabine Pass area and a small section of extreme western Cameron Parish. Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193)

Christmas Bird Counts are all day events in which participants identify and count all the birds they can find in a 15-mile diameter circle, most groups birding from dawn to dusk. Christmas Bird Counts are free and most are open to anyone. However, in the case of some of the counts with many participants (Bolivar Peninsula and Sea Rim SP are in this category), it is often difficult to accommodate participants who show up without advance notice in a way that is

satisfactory to all and provides the best possible experience for the participant. Such counts are organized into groups in advance and many of the groups go straight to their assigned areas. In most cases in such counts, it is easier to adjust if someone (area leaders excepted!) who has indicated their probable participation in advance is forced to withdraw than to add someone to a group on the morning of the count.

While all are welcome, we would suggest to new birders that they participate in a local field trip to learn the common local birds before participating in a Christmas Count. Our November field trip to west Jefferson County would be one good opportunity to do that!

Membership Dues

All memberships run from January through December. Membership dues will remain at \$15 per year. You may pay at any GTAS meeting (checks preferred) or use the subscription/membership blank on the back page. 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. The typical issue will be less than 500 KB and so it is not a large file. Please send an email to johnawhittle@aol.com with your request, including the name we currently send the printed copy to, and the email address you want us to use.

Nominating Committee Report

At the November meeting, Golden Triangle Audubon will elect its officers and directors for 2015. The Nominating Committee slate is as follows:

Vice-President: Sherrie Roden; Treasurer: Christine Sliva; Secretary: John Whittle; Directors-at-Large: Jessica Barry, Edra Bogucki, Howard Davis, Gerald Duhon, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Randy Lewis, John Mariani, Steve Mayes, Harlan Stewart and Jana Whittle. The term of President Gary Kelley extends through December 2015.

Additional nominations may be made at the meeting, but require the in-person or written agreement by the prospective nominee to serve if elected.

John A. Whittle, Secretary

Field Trip to Sabine Woods – 18 October 2014

Fall birding at Sabine Woods is not always easy. Many people avoid it entirely, choosing to skip directly from the highs of spring migration to the joys of the Christmas Count season. But there is so much in between! Sure, the fall can be hot. There may be a lot of bugs. It may be uncomfortable but there are great discoveries to be made! With that in mind, birders from the Golden Triangle Audubon Society met at the Texas Ornithological Society's Sabine Woods sanctuary for the October field trip.

This fall, Sabine Woods and nearby hot spots have already produced a number of notable sightings. These have included one or more birders getting looks (and in some cases photographs) of unusual fall birds like Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Bell's Vireo, Fork-tailed Flycatcher and a constant parade of Black-throated Blue Warblers! Fall can produce quite a different mix of birds than spring migration with birds like Nashville Warbler and Canada Warbler being much more common in the fall while birds like Blackpoll Warbler and Cerulean Warbler are much rarer. Although this field trip was on the late side for the peak of fall land bird migrants, the birders set off to see what was to be found.

Looking out over the marsh across the road from Sabine Woods, a number of Northern Harriers streamed by, flying low in their characteristic style. A number of other raptors were also seen on the day. A White-tailed Kite, surely one of our most attractive raptors, gave good looks to the group from the eastern section of the refuge while an Osprey flew over the main part of the woods as some members of the the group snuck looks in the gaps between trees. Broad-winged Hawks are abundant migrants in the fall and several were seen at Sabine Woods on this field trip. Some members of the group were treated to quick flyovers by both a Merlin and a Peregrine Falcon. Throw in a Sharp-shinned Hawk, both Black and Turkey Vultures and one of our resident Great Horned Owls and the results were a very nice collection of raptors for the birders to enjoy.

More than a few Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were still passing through, while the resident male Golden-fronted Woodpecker and several Downy Woodpeckers were relatively easy to find.

Song bird migrants were well represented on the day as well. Indigo Buntings called from the brushy areas and also from tree tops. A couple of Eastern Wood-Pewees, by this time near the end of their migration window, gave their plaintive calls from high perches in the woods while stunning Scissor-tailed Flycatchers preferred the dead trees on the perimeter or the sanctuary. A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was cooperative and the numerous Brown Thrashers could not be missed while the Gray Catbirds were slightly more difficult. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets were numerous. House Wrens called from thickets inside the woods while Sedge Wrens called from the marshes across the street. An Eastern Meadowlark was a slightly unusual sighting for the location while the Northern Rough-winged Swallows streaming overhead were more expected. A few Summer

Tanagers lingered for the birders while the Lincoln's Sparrows and Swamp Sparrow were new arrivals.

Warblers, of course, are the focus of migration in the fall almost as much as in the spring and there were plenty on display. Nashville Warblers were probably the most numerous though Black-throated Green Warblers gave them a run for their money. Tennessee Warblers worked the tree tops while a similar looking Orange-crowned Warbler foraged a bit lower. Northern Parulas also moved through the canopy while the Black and White Warblers probed the tree trunks and branches. American Redstarts flitted about the trees in constant motion and Common Yellowthroats worked the pond edges. Wilson's Warblers were found in the understory by most of the group as was a single Yellow-breasted Chat glimpsed by a few birders. A single Yellow-throated Warbler was sighted looking just as dapper as in the spring while the Magnolia and Chestnut-sided Warblers the group saw appeared much duller in their fall plumages.

All in all, it was an excellent day with lots of good birds and good company. And the weather was not too hot and the bugs were not too bad. So birding during fall migration is not so scary! And if birders need more incentive to get out in the fall, there is always the chance of more rare birds. In this case, after the official end of the field trip at lunch time, a couple of remaining birders turned up a cooperative Groove-billed Ani! So don't be afraid of fall birding, get out there because there's no telling what you might find!

The following species were recorded by the field trip leaders during the trip:

Neotropic Cormorant (1); Brown Pelican (2); Snowy Egret (4); Cattle Egret (14); White Ibis (95); Black Vulture (1); Turkey Vulture (4); Osprey (1); White-tailed Kite (1); Northern Harrier (7); Sharp-shinned Hawk (1); Broad-winged Hawk (3); White-winged Dove (2); Mourning Dove (7); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (1); Groove-billed Ani (1); Great Horned Owl (1); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (14); Golden-fronted Woodpecker (1); Downy Woodpecker (3); Crested Caracara (1); Merlin (1); Eastern Wood-Pewee (2); Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (1); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (6); Loggerhead Shrike (2); Warbling Vireo (1); Blue Jay (5); Northern Rough-winged Swallow (25); Barn Swallow (12); House Wren (3); Sedge Wren (6); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (22); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (15); Gray Catbird (4); Brown Thrasher (20); Northern Mockingbird (2); European Starling (4); Black-and-white Warbler (6); Tennessee Warbler (5); Orange-crowned Warbler (1); Nashville Warbler (27); Common Yellowthroat (3); American Redstart (4); Northern Parula (5); Magnolia Warbler (2); Chestnut-sided Warbler (1); Palm Warbler (1); Yellow-throated Warbler (1); Black-throated Green Warbler (14); Wilson's Warbler (2); Yellow-breasted Chat (1); Lincoln's Sparrow (2); Swamp Sparrow (1); Summer Tanager (3); Northern Cardinal (2); Indigo Bunting (11); Red-winged Blackbird (20); Eastern Meadowlark (1); Common Grackle (6).

Steve Mayes

Changes in Local Bird Scene over the Last Thirty Years

Part Two

In the previous part of this article, published in the September issue of the Brown Pelican, we reviewed the changes affecting species through the doves. Here we conclude this article by covering the other families of birds.

There seems to be little doubt that more hummingbirds are now wintering locally. Historically, there were a few Rufous Hummingbirds and once in a while, a Buff-bellied Hummingbird. In recent years, a much greater variety of species is being recognized, with probably significantly larger numbers overall. Perhaps the most surprising is the finding during banding of Allen's Hummingbirds. While still outnumbered by the very similar Rufous Hummingbird, and possibly misidentified as Rufous in times past, the possibility of Allen's must now be seriously considered for all hummingbirds of the Rufous/Allen's complex. In addition, wintering Broad-tailed, Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are being found with increasing frequency, and Calliope and Anna's have also been discovered.

On a strictly local basis, the presence of a very small number of Golden-fronted Woodpeckers in Sabine Woods and vicinity was cause for excitement, but it does not appear as if this population is expanding.

Among the flycatchers, it may be that Say's Phoebes and Vermilion Flycatchers have become a little more common as wintering species. The relative populations of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Eastern Kingbirds, more closely related to each other than their names suggest, as they are both members of the genus *Tyrannus*, seem to oscillate locally; some years Eastern Kingbirds are more numerous, in other years Scissor-tailed Flycatchers seem more common. Both species occupy much the same habitat niche, hunting in open country, often from relatively low perches. We are fairly close to the eastern edge of the Scissor-tailed range, and not too far from the western edge of the Eastern Kingbird's range.

Among the vireos, the most obvious change has been a relatively steady increase in migrating Warbling Vireos, probably reflective of a range-wide increase in populations. Over the last decade or so, more Black-whiskered Vireos have been recorded, but this may reflect increased awareness of the need to check each vireo of the "Red-eyed" complex.

Fish Crows used to be much more common than they are today, nesting as they once did at Sabine Woods, and being easy to find at Tyrrell Park in Beaumont. In recent years, there seems to have been some reduction in populations locally. We lie on the extreme western edge of the species' range, even though there are increasing, although still very rare, reports from further west up to the eastern edge of Houston.

Among the swallows, early fall roosts of Purple Martins were prominent locally for a few recent years, but no large roosts have been found in the last two years. Cliff Swallows have continued to expand eastwards over the last two decades, and can now be found under many overpasses in the Golden Triangle. Identifying Cave Swallows among the numerous Cliff Swallows is never easy, but there is some evidence of an eastward expansion into Louisiana, and that the numbers locally are similarly increasing. Northern Rough-winged

Swallows have increased markedly in number as a migrating species, and there may well be more wintering birds as well.

Apart from wintering Hermit Thrushes, most other thrushes are seen as migrants in the spring, although one does not have to go too far north before a few Wood Thrushes can be found nesting. Anecdotally, the number of Gray-cheeked Thrushes passing through in the spring continues to increase, although it could be that in days past, many were passed off as Swainson's Thrushes. American Robins over the past 30 years have firmly established themselves as nesting species in the suburban areas all the way south almost to the coast. It is, however, quite possible that the robins we see in the winter in the suburban areas are not the birds that nest there in the summer. There have always been large and somewhat variable numbers of robins in the Big Thicket area in winter.

Changes in warblers locally have been largely confined to slight changes in the migration window, although Cerulean Warblers may have become more common in migration, and Blackpoll Warblers may have become less common. Either our ability to detect Swainson's Warblers has improved or more have been migrating through, quite likely the former!

The Towhee situation has been complex, even apart from the one year that Green-tailed Towhees spread into south east Texas in large numbers. Eastern Towhees have become considerably more difficult to find in the areas of the Big Thicket just north of the Golden Triangle. They were previously lumped with the Spotted Towhees as the Rufous-sided Towhees, but essentially all in that area were Eastern Towhees. On the other hand, a towhee near the shore was likely to have been a Spotted, but was very rare. They appear to have increased over the last decade or so.

Among the sparrows, there may be a slight eastward expansion in the wintering range of Harris's Sparrows, and certainly an increase in White-crowned Sparrow populations. Increasing reports of Grasshopper Sparrows may well reflect an increase in populations of that species. Fox Sparrows are now decidedly rare in winter, while song Sparrow populations seem to have increase.

Bronzed Cowbirds have clearly expanded eastward over the period, and are now reasonably common, albeit in small numbers. Rusty Blackbirds, never easy to find, seem to have become even rarer, and overall populations may be in decline. Brewer's Blackbirds, however, are now much more common, and may well be increasing locally in winter.

House Finches spread into the center of the United States from both coasts, and met somewhere to our north at least 20 years ago, and have become quite common, but unevenly distributed locally. Purple Fiches were quite common, especially in the Big Thicket and northwards 30 years ago, but are now very rare winter visitors.

John A. Whittle

Bird Sightings – September 2014

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 the Texas counties we have always covered – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine and Tyler. 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. Because we apply different criteria for birds in nearby counties outside our traditional area, we have separated the list into two sections.

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

Seen in our core Counties (listed above)

Gadwall	Sep 20	JEF-TP (1) JHH (early)
Glossy Ibis	Sep 20	JEF-TP (1) JHH (rare)
Osprey	Sep 6	JEF-SRSP(1) MC, TH (early)
Merlin	Sep 13 on	JEF-SW (1) multiple observers
		on multiple days (early)
Bald Eagle (adult)	Sep 20	JEF- McDermard Rd (1) JAW
Whimbrel	Sep 5	JEF-SRSP(1) Ruben Stoll
Black-billed Cuckoo	Sep 6	JEF-SW (1) MC, TH (rare fall)
	Sep 14	JEF-SW (1) MC, JHH, TH (rare
		in fall)
Rufous Hummingbird	Sep 9	JEF-NEDR(1) JJW (rare in Sep)
Selasphorus Humm'bird	Sep 6	JEF-SRSP (1) Neil and Joni
		Cotham (rare in Sep)
Broad-tailed Humm'bird	Sep 23 on	JEF-NEDR (1) JJW (v rare)
Eastern Phoebe	Sep 27	JEF-SW (1) Clayton Leopold
		(early)
Ash-throated Flycatcher	Sep 22	JEF-SW (1) JHH (v rare in Sep)
Fork-tailed Flycatcher	Sep 22	JEF-SW (1) JHH (vagrant)
Warbling Vireo	Sep 5	JEF-SW(3)JHH (early)
	Sep 6	JEF-SW (5) J&R, MC, TH, SM
	Sep 7	JEF-SW (2) SM (early)
Ovenbird	Sep 5	JEF-SW (1) JHH (early)

Nashville Warbler	Sep 14	JEF-SW (2) MC, TH (early)
Magnolia Warbler	Sep 14	JEF-SW (3) MC, JHH, TH (early)
Black-thr. Blue Warbler	Sep 20-22	JEF-SW (2) MC, TH et al. (rare)
	Sep 27-28	JEF-SW (1) MC, TH et al (rare)
Prairie Warbler	Sep 25	JEF-SW (1) JHH (rare)
Black-thr Gray Warbler	Sep 11-12	JEF-SW (1) JHH et al (v rare)
Townsend's Warbler	Sep 23	JEF-SW (1) JHH, Steve
		Dillinger, JAW (v rare)

Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

Zone-tailed Hawk	Sep 13	CHA-SPHW (1) Jason Bojczyk
		et al (vagrant)
Savannah Sparrow	Sep 29	CHA-J J Mayes Trace (1) Paul
		Fagale (v rare in Sep)

Abbreviations used: ANWR – Anahuac NWR; CHA – Chambers County; HAI – Hardin County; HJ – Harrison Jordan; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – John and Jana Whittle, J&R – Jessica Barry and Randy Lewis; MC - Michael Cooper; NEDR – Nederland; ; RHRC – Rene Hebert and Rita Czek; SM – Steve Mayes; SPHW – Smith Point Hawk Watch; SRSP – Sea Rim SP; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; TP – Tyrrell Park incld Cattail Marsh.

October Highlights So Far

Noteworthy birds locally in October so far have included a Bell's Vireo at the Texas Point NWR parking lot on October 5, Cape May Warblers at Sabine Woods on October 4-5 and on October 10. Yet another Black-throated Blue Warbler was seen at Sabine Woods on October 4. A Yellow-headed Blackbird at Sea Rim SP on October 18 was late enough to constitute a very rare sighting. The banded male Broad-tailed Hummingbird that has been attending feeders in Nederland since September 23 has been determined from multiple photographs to be one banded in the same location last winter.

Further afield, Golden Eagles at the Smith Point Hawk Watch on October 10 and October 24 were certainly exceptional sightings.

One of the most interesting, and in many ways most puzzling series of sightings in October has been of Broad-winged Hawks at the Smith Point Hawk Watch. Prior to 2013, Broad-winged Hawk migration through Smith Point had almost always peaked in late September, with September 25 being the average peak day. Last year, there the peak occurred on October 19 trailing off in the following five days. At the time, there was speculation that an early snowstorm in South Dakota and surrounding states may have caused some of the

Broad-wings from the westernmost breeding range in Alberta to fly east before heading south producing a flight well east of the normal track. This speculation was further fueled by the exceptional number of rare dark morph birds in this late flight. The Alberta population is believed to contain a much higher percentage of dark morphs than more easterly populations.

This year's results will cause a rethink! At Smith Point, in September, there was no discernible peak, and indeed very few Broad-wings at all. But there was a very marked peak October 15 through 20, with over 10,000 each day, peaking on October 18 with 26,000. As of October 24, 101,772 of the 103,447 Broad-wings recorded at Smith Point this fall migration were in October, and only 1567 of those were before October 15.

Adding to the intrigue was the number of dark morph birds in this late flight. While short of the over 100 recorded in the 2013 late flight, the number was probably half that, far more than the one or two in each of the years prior to 2013. A very quick look at the numbers recorded at Hazel Bazemore in Corpus Christi does not seem to show a similar shift, although there are more "late" birds in the past two years. A thorough analysis will be interesting!

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RARE BIRD ALERTS

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

The Texas-wide Rare Bird Alert, maintained by Houston Audubon Society, is available on their web-site at <http://www.houstonaudubon.org/> Email alerts are also available for a fee. Most rare bird sightings in Texas are posted on the TEXBIRDS listserv. Archives of the listserv are at www.freelists.org/archive/texbirds. It is not necessary to subscribe to the listserv to view the archives, which include all recent postings. Postings for the last two weeks are also available at <http://birding.aba.org/maillist/TX>.

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..>