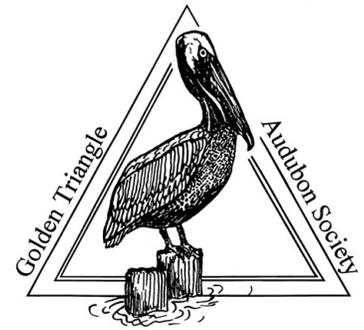


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 21 No. 1

January 2015

**Membership Meeting
Thursday January 15, 2015 7:00 p.m.
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont**

Southeastern Brazil: The Birds of Espírito Santo

Kelley Sampeck

Brazil is the largest country in South America, and the fifth largest country in the world. The eastern coast borders the Atlantic Ocean, and along this coastline is the small state of Espírito Santo. In this state is some of the last remaining Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest. Once spanning 1.2 million square kilometers, only 10 percent (less than 100,000 sq. km.) of Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest still remains today. There are around 170 regional endemic bird species found only in this habitat and nowhere else in the world.

This talk outlines the highlights of an 11 day tour organized by VENT in October 2012. Much of the birdwatching on this tour occurred in lowland Atlantic rainforest, but also included a few montane sites. One of the main target birds of the tour was the Cherry-throated Tanager, a bird long thought extinct and only recently rediscovered. It has a known population of fewer than 15 individuals, making it one of the rarest birds in the world. Seen on this tour were more than 70 regional endemics, including the critically endangered Red-billed Curassow, Ochre-marked Parakeet, Red-browed Parrot, Plumbeous Antvireo, Black-headed Berryeater, Swallow-tailed Cotinga, 22 species of hummingbird, and 20 species of tanagers. Photos taken on the tour will be presented.

We will plan on having the doors open by 6:00 p.m. and the program will start at 7:00 p.m. sharp. A light supper will be available from 6:15 p.m.

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Vol. 21, No.1 January 2015
Issue number 213

Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Web Site for more information
www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

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The Brown Pelican is

published monthly except July by
the Golden Triangle Audubon
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Nederland, Texas 77627-1292

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 need volunteers to bring items for all the spring 2015 meetings.** Pick the meeting at which you want to help. 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 December 4 through February 15. Birds in Art Exhibit.

The Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur, Texas, invites Golden Triangle Audubon Society members to visit the "Birds in Art," exhibition.

The 2014 "Birds in Art" touring exhibition features innovative perspectives throughout 60 diverse artworks by some of the world's most talented artists. A 132-page full-color, illustrated "Birds in Art" catalogue featuring every work along with artists' statements is available for purchase. For more information, see the museum's website at www.museumofthegulfcoast.org, email the Museum at bellianse@lamarpa.edu, or call 409-982-7000.

Thursday January 15, 2015. Membership Meeting. Southeastern Brazil: Birds of Espirito Santo. Kelley Sampeck. See page 1 for more details.

Saturday January 17, 2015. Field Trip to Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. On this trip, we will visit both the main unit and the Skillern Tract, looking primarily for waterfowl but also raptors and sparrows. We may also bird some of the rice field areas in Chambers County, mostly north of IH-10. On one memorable occasion (2012), this trip was spectacularly successful in finding more than 35,000 geese, seven Bald Eagles and one Golden Eagle among other species. There are lots of geese and a good number of Bald Eagles in the refuge area this winter.

We plan to meet at the Visitor Information Station just beyond the entrance at 8:30 a.m. While it is not anticipated that this field trip will necessitate extensive walking, it is a 400 yard (1/4 mile) walk from the Skillern Tract parking area to the observation platform. All roads that we will use will be easily passable in ordinary vehicles. However, car-pooling is very desirable, especially for the drive round Shoveler Pond because there are only a few pull-offs and most will only accommodate only three or four cars. There is space to leave vehicles close to the meeting place.

To reach Anahuac NWR from Winnie, take Highway 124 south to FM1985. (It is 11.0 miles from IH-10 and half a mile less from Highway 73.) Turn right (west) on FM1985 and proceed 11.0 miles to the well-marked Anahuac NWR Access Road on the left (south). The entrance to the Refuge is just over 3 miles down the access road.



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.

Thursday February 19, 2015. Membership Meeting. Tentative. Al Barr of Jesse Jones Park and Nature Reserve, Humble, Texas (a Harris County Precinct 4 Park).

Saturday February 21, 2015. Field Trip to Cattail Marsh and Tyrrell Park. Meet at the parking lot for Cattail Marsh at 8:00 a.m. The parking lot is accessed from the loop road round the main picnic areas in Tyrrell Park in Beaumont. Some birds can be seen with minimal walking, **but the group will probably make a leisurely three-or-so-mile hike round the various cells in the marsh.** Walking is on the levees; the main ones are graveled, but some of

the interior ones are mowed grass. This will be a good trip for beginning to intermediate birders, as most of the waterfowl and wading birds are relatively easy to study in the open water areas.

Directions to Cattail Marsh. From the south

Go "north" on US69/96/287 around the south side of Beaumont. Take Texas 124 (west towards Fannett -- left turn under the highway). Travel about a mile to the first light. At the first light, turn left onto Tyrrell Park Road and go about 1/2 mile. Turn left into Tyrrell Park through the nice new arch. Continue past the Garden Center on

your left, past the clubhouse for the golf course further along on your right, and proceed about two-thirds of the way round the loop road. The Cattail Marsh parking area is accessed by means of a signed shell road on your right.

From IH-10

Exit at Walden Road on the west side of Beaumont; Go south on Walden Road for about 1/2 mile to the first light. At the light go straight across Highway 124 onto Tyrrell Park Road and follow the directions above.

Thursday March 19, 2015. Membership Meeting. Details in next month's issue of the *Brown Pelican*.

Bird Sightings – October through December 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.

This month, we include October sightings which were squeezed out of last month's Newsletter, and we are also including December's birds. Because of the deadlines for the *Brown Pelican*, there may be a few sightings from late in that month that we will not know about in time. But we are making this effort in order to be more timely, now that we are publishing only noteworthy sightings. Any sightings that we learn about too late will be reported in next month's Newsletter. We continue to make decisions to omit species that have recently become significantly more common. Bald Eagles are now almost common in the area in winter, and Green Herons and Stilt Sandpipers are routinely present at least through December. A number of waterfowl were seen on November 14 this year, one day before they become common!

The format of the listing is Species – Date – County-more precise location if available – (number) – Observer(s) with comment on reason it is noteworthy, if applicable/

Seen in our core Counties (listed above)

Fulvous Whistling-Duck	Nov 23	JEF-TP (10) TH (late)
	Nov 30	JEF-TP (2) JHH, SM
Canada Goose	Oct 3	JEF-Hwy 105 (5) J&R (now rare)
	Nov 25	JEF-WJC (1) Dennis Shepler
Cackling Goose	Dec 12	JEF-WJC (7) JHH (rare)
Greater Scaup	Nov 14	JEF-TP (1) RW (rare)
Bufflehead	Nov 14	JEF-TP (1) RW (early)
	Nov 14	JEF-PI (12) RW (early)
	Nov 14	JEF-SRSP (1) RW (early)
Common Goldeneye	Nov 14	JEF-PI (1) RW (early)
Hooded Merganser	Nov 14	JEF-TP (1) RW (early)
	Nov 14	JEF-SRSP (2) RW (early)
	Nov 14	JEF-Pilot Stn Rd (5) RW (early)
Wood Stork	Oct 30	ORA-Downtown (1) Odie Asscherick
Magnificent Frigatebird	Oct 18	JEF-McFaddin Beach (David Roberts) (late)
Least Bittern	Oct 13	JEF-Big Hill Rd (2) RC (late)
	Oct 20	JEF-Big Hill Rd (2) RC (late)
Glossy Ibis	Nov 20	JEF-TP (1) JHH (rare)
	Nov 24	JEF-Big Hill Rd (1) RHRC (rare)

White-tailed Hawk	Nov 22	JEF-WJC (2) GTAS Field Trip remained thru Dec 29+
Broad-winged Hawk	Nov 15	JEF-SW (2) J&R (late)
Purple Gallinule	Oct 13	JEF-Big Hill Rd (1) RC (late)
Pectoral Sandpiper	Oct 26	JEF-TP (22) JHH (late)
	Nov 4	JEF- Murphree WMA (40) Jim Armacost
Lsr Black-backed Gull	Dec 9	JEF-McFaddin Beach (1) Gerald Duhon (rare)
	Dec 11	JEF-McFaddin Beach (1) JHH
Sandwich Tern	Dec 29	JEF-PI (1) TH (late)
Common Ground-Dove	Nov 9	JEF-Pilot Stn Rd (1) Gary Binderim (rare)
Groove-billed Ani	Oct 18	JEF-SW (1) SM, JHH, David Roberts (rare)
	Dec 25	JEF-WJC (1) HS (rare)
	Dec 26	JEF-WJC (1) J&R
Black-chinned Humm.	Oct 11	JEF-NEDR (1) HS (rare)
Ruby-thr. Hummingbird		See note below
Rufous/Allen's Humm.		See note below
Broad-tailed Humm.		See note below
Chuck-wills-Widow	Oct 25	JEF-SW (1) SM, J&R (late)

Chuck-wills-Widow	Nov 1	JEF-SW (2) JHH, SM
	Nov 7	JEF-SRSP (1) RW
Peregrine Falcon	Oct 6	JEF-Big Hill Rd (1) RC
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Oct 15	JEF-SW (1) JHH (late)
Traill's Flycatcher	Oct 14	HAI-Lumberton (1) J. Armacost
	Oct 19	JEF-SW (1) JHH (late)
Vermilion Flycatcher	Oct 13	JEF-Big Hill Rd (1) RC (early)
Couch's Kingbird	Nov 22	JEF-WJC (1) GTAS Field Trip (seen thru Nov 25, and two on Nov 28)
Bell's Vireo	Oct 5	JEF-Tex. Pt NWR (1) SM (rare)
Cave Swallow	Nov 23	JEF-WJC (1) Gary Binderim
Mountain Bluebird	Nov 22	JEF-WJC (1) GTAS Field Trip (remained thru Dec 26)
Hermit Thrush	Oct 19	JEF-SW (1) JHH (early)
Worm-eating Warbler	Oct 10	JEF-SW (1) JHH (late)
Blue-winged Warbler	Oct 20	JEF-SW (1) JHH (late)
	Oct 21	JEF-SW (1) Chris Runk (late)
	Oct 22	JEF-Tex. Pt NWR (1) JHH (late)
Golden-winged Warbler	Oct 10	JEF-SW (1) JHH (rare in fall)
Tennessee Warbler	Nov 2	JEF-SW (2) J&R (late)
	Nov 8	JEF-Tex. Pt NWR (1) Gary Binderim (late)
	Nov 8	JEF-SW (2) J&R, JHH, JAW
	Nov 9	JEF-SW (1) JHH, SM
Hooded Warbler	Oct 23	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW (late)
American Redstart	Oct 23	JED-SW (1) JHH, JAW (late)
	Oct 25	JEF-SW (1) JHH (late)
Cape May Warbler	Oct 4	JEF-SW (1) MC, JHH (rare)
	Oct 11	JEF-SW (1) J&R, JHH, SM
Northern Parula	Oct 23	JEF-SW (2) JHH, JAW (late)
	Oct 25	JEF-SW (2) J&R, SM (late)
	Nov 8	JEF-SW (1) J&R, JHH, JAW
	Nov 9	JEF-SW (1) SM, TH (late)
	Nov 14	JEF-SW (1) RW (late)
Black-thr. Blue Warbler	Oct 4	JEF-SW (1) Multiple obs.(rare)
	Oct 11	JEF-SW (1) J&R, JH, SM (rare)
Yellow-thr. Warbler	Oct 15	JEF-SW (1) JHH (late)
	Oct 18	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW (late)
Canada Warbler	Oct 19	JEF-SW (1) TH (late)
American Tree Sparrow	Nov 7	JEF-Pilot Stn Rd (1) RW, JHH, SM, Kendra Kocab, Brad Lirette (v rare)
Clay-colored Sparrow	Nov 8	JEF-Sabine Pass (1) John Bernier, Drew Dickert (rare)
Dark-eyed Junco	Nov 25	JEF-NEDR (2) JAW, JHH (early)
Western Meadowlark	Nov 8	JEF-Big Hill Rd (1) Mike Austin, Tony Frank (rare)
Yellow-head. Blackbird	Oct 18	JEF-SRSP (1) Greg Page (rare)

Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

Ferruginous Hawk	Dec 26	GAL-TX87 High Is to Rollover Pass (1) Andy Davis (v rare)
Broad-winged Hawk	Nov 1	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Mac Myers, Dave Patton et al. (v late)
Golden Eagle	Oct 10	CHA-SPHW (1) Hawk Watch
	Oct 24	CHA-SPHW (1) Hawk Watch
Black Rail	Dec 17	GAL-High Is-Mundy Marsh(1) Chris Butler (banding project) (rare)
	Dec 18	GAL-High Is-Mundy Marsh(2) Chris Butler (banding project) (rare)
Purple Gallinule	Dec 6	CHA- NWR (1) Greg Page
	Dec 9	GAL-High Is (Smith Oaks) (1) Stephanie Bilodeau (late)
Sandhill Crane	Oct 18	CHA-TX124 Laurie Foss, Sheila Hargis, Florence Rice, Byron Stone
Mountain Plover	Dec 13	GAL-Bolivar Flats (1) Donna Kelly, Mark Bartosik et al (v rare) remained thru Dec 30+
Upland Sandpiper	Oct 4	CHA-Smith Pt (1) Brad Lirette
	Oct 5	CHA-Smith Pt (1) Bill and Mavis Townesley (late)
Anna's Hummingbird	Dec 18	GAL-High Is-(2) Bolivar Pen CBC (v rare) remained thru Dec 30 +
Yellow-green Vireo	Oct 11	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Jay Huner (v rare)

Hooded Warbler	Nov 15	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Mac Myers, Dave Patton et al (very late)
American Redstart	Nov 15	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Mac Myers, Dave Patton et al (very late)
Cape May Warbler	Nov 15	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Mac Myers, Dave Patton et al (very late)
Yellow-breasted Chat	Dec 18	GAL-High Is (1) Bolivar Pen. CBC
Baltimore Oriole	Dec 26	JAS-Buna (1) Lana Gau
Orchard Oriole	Dec 18	GAL-High Is (1) Bolivar Pen. CBC (very late)

Hummingbirds: While it is relatively easy to record the Anna's Hummingbird in High Island, and a Black-chinned in Nederland as shown above, it is not nearly as easy to chronicle the other wintering hummingbirds in Jefferson County. When hummingbirds are coming to feeders or to flowers, given very good views or, often better, clear photographs, small plumage differences can be used to identify individual birds. But keeping track of individual birds over time is complicated by the fact that most of them are in the process of molt. As of the end of December, there are still lots of flowers that provide alternatives to the feeders, so individual birds may be coming to feeders only occasionally. Here is the best account that we can compile at this point.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: (All birds seen prior to the end of October are assumed to be migrating.) Harlan Stewart had one from Nov 25 to Dec 6. Steve Mayes has had one since Dec 19.

Rufous Hummingbird: Harlan Stewart has a female that has been positive identified as a Rufous, and appears to be a bird that was present last winter. It was first seen Oct 21 and was present through the end of December.

Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird. This is the most difficult group. Harlan Stewart has had one (in addition to the known Rufous) since Nov 2. Steve Mayes had on visit on Dec 19. John and Jana Whittle began seeing one of this group on Oct 31. Since that time, there have been several present, and based on plumage, it seems likely that, as of the end of December, there are at least four different individuals involved.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird: A male of this species arrived at John and Jana Whittle's feeders on Sep 24, and was regular through Nov 13. During that period, numerous photographs eventually provided the complete number on the band on this bird, and proved that it was one banded last winter in that location. This bird was not seen again until Nov 29 and Dec 1. It disappeared again, but, presumably the same bird, appeared again on Dec 30 and 31 (and beyond)

Abbreviations used: ANWR – Anahuac NWR; CHA – Chambers County; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAS – Jasper County; 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; PI – Pleasure Island; RC – Rita Czek; RHRC – Rene Hebert and Rita Czek; RW – Ron Weeks; SM – Steve Mayes; SPHW – Smith Point Hawk Watch; SRSP – Sea Rim SP; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; TP – Tyrrell Park incld Cattail Marsh; WJC – West Jefferson County.

Commentary: As we further refine this section, it has become clear that there are interesting sightings, often multiple sightings, which do not meet the rarity criterion we use for the table, but which are likely to be of interest to local birders.

As noted above, there are lots of Bald Eagles around this year. Raptor numbers are also fairly good in west Jefferson County. Crested Caracaras are increasing in number and spreading east into Louisiana. The Lacassine-Sweet Lake CBC apparently found at least 40.

This fall was marked by a good number of late-migrating warblers. The numerous interesting sightings on the November Field Trip to West Jefferson County mostly continued for some time. The large number of Sandhill Cranes are somewhat peripatetic, but some can usually be seen. Following recent rains, the area has become attractive to geese and large flocks have been in the area. There has also been a large flock of Northern Pintails on Lawhon Road, but the area is hunted and the birds may have moved on by now.

Turkey Creek Christmas Bird Count – 20 December 2014

The Turkey Creek Christmas Bird count, sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve, was conducted in pleasant weather conditions, but with some difficulties in the aftermath of heavy rains the day before. The 65 species recorded on the count is exactly the average over the last ten years and the 4150 individual birds seen was little above the 3700 average over the same period. In many ways, the count was "routine" – nothing truly unusual was seen, and while, as always, there were some expected species that we did not see, there is nothing in the results that indicated that any group of birds had suffered a group-wide decline in numbers.

Waterbirds were somewhat lacking, perhaps because the water condition of Lake Hyatt, one of only two significant bodies of water in the count circle, did not appear to be very good.

We normally expect to find more than one Red-tailed Hawk, but finding an Osprey, something we do less than half the time, was nice. Although we did find one Sharp-shinned Hawk, it is a little surprising that we do not find more of them wintering in the area.

The disappearance of Killdeer from the area over the last two or three years is a little puzzling. The northern nesting birds of this species do retreat southwards, but there are many resident birds in our area also. In the earlier part of the last ten years, we averaged 40 on the count. None in 2011, only two last year and then only one this year suggests something is afoot. We cannot think of any habitat change that might have caused this. The counts on the coast that have reported so far suggest that there are well above average numbers of Killdeer there.

Woodpecker numbers were healthy, with 14 Red-headed Woodpeckers a very good number for a species we only find on about 70 percent of counts, and seven Hairy Woodpeckers was a high number. Perhaps increased numbers of Woodpeckers are to be expected in the years following hurricanes, as dead and dying trees can provide woodpeckers with both soft wood to excavate nesting cavities, and lot of food in the form of insects and grubs in the dying trees

Mention must be made of the 41 Brown-headed Nuthatches recorded. This is a new all-time high for the count, eclipsing the 39 in 1991. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were also present in good, although not record numbers, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were seen by two parties.

Eastern Bluebird numbers were relatively modest. The count circle always has a good number of wintering American Robins, which dominate the birding in many areas. The actual numbers vary from year to year, but this year's numbers were higher than most. Cedar Waxwings are very nomadic in winter, and seeing good numbers on this count probably depends on the berry crop further north. The yaupon berry crop in the Big Thicket is very good, but perhaps it is further north also, and many of the flocks may not have felt the need to

come south yet. Typically, they are very late leaving the area, often well into May, and there may be more around later in the winter

Orange-crowned, Pine and Yellow-rumped Warblers are the staple wintering warblers of this count circle, and they were there in normal number.

Sparrows are found in winter in the Big Thicket in good numbers and usually good variety in winter. Flocks of Chipping Sparrows are always present, and typically seen on roadsides. White-throated Sparrows like the leaf litter of the floor of the wooded areas. After two years of good numbers, it was surprising not to find any White-crowned Sparrows.

Blackbirds – including Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles are strangely difficult to find in the area, and we found none this year. On the other hand, we found the highest number of American Goldfinches in the history of the count, 386.

DUCK, Wood (25); GREBE, Pied-billed (7); CORMORANT, Double-crested (1); HERON, Great Blue (1); EGRET, Great (3); VULTURE, Black (56); VULTURE, Turkey (63); OSPREY (1); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Red-shouldered (10); HAWK, Red-tailed (1); KESTREL, American (14); KILLDEER (1); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (3); DOVE, Mourning (91); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (1); KINGFISHER, Belted (2); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (14); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (50); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (27); WOODPECKER, Downy (17); WOODPECKER, Hairy (7); FLICKER, Northern (5); FLICKER, Northern (Yellow shafted) (10); WOODPECKER, Pileated (20); PHOEBE, Eastern (29); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (2); VIREO, White-eyed (6); VIREO, Blue-headed (1); JAY, Blue (50); CROW, American (208); CHICKADEE, Carolina (97); TITMOUSE, Tufted (40); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (41); CREEPER, Brown (1); WREN, Carolina (35); WREN, House (16); WREN, Winter (2); WREN, Sedge (4); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (2); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (5); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (71); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (85); THRUSH, Hermit (11); ROBIN, American (1588); CATBIRD, Gray (4); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (28); THRASHER, Brown (5); STARLING, European (16); WAXWING, Cedar (23); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (23); WARBLER, Pine (83); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (116); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) (160); TOWHEE, Eastern (6); SPARROW, Chipping (279); SPARROW, Field (2); SPARROW, Vesper (7); SPARROW, Savannah (75); SPARROW, LeConte's (2); SPARROW, Song (4); SPARROW, Swamp (27); SPARROW, White-throated (84); JUNCO, Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) (2); CARDINAL, Northern (81); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (15); GOLDFINCH, American (386); SPECIES, total (65); INDIVIDUALS, total (4153); Number of observers (13); Number of parties (5); Party-hours on foot (17.5); Party-miles on foot (11.5); Party-hours by car (26.3); Party-miles by car (131.7); Party-hours stationary; Party-hours owling (0.5); Total Party hours (44.3); Total Party miles (143.2).

Participants: Jessica Barry, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Randy Lewis, Sherrie Roden, Kelley Sampeck, Wanda and Charles Smith, Harlan Stewart, Ken Sztraky, Jana and John Whittle.

John A. Whittle

Beech Creek Christmas Bird Count – 27 December 2014

The Beech Creek Christmas Bird count, sponsored by the Big Thicket National Preserve, was conducted on December 27, 2014 in somewhat adverse weather conditions. Fog and low cloud in the morning, making it impossible to see much of Steinhagen Lake, gave way briefly to gloomy overcast conditions, and then rain showers, a few of them briefly heavy.

Overall, we confirmed 83 species, a little lower than the recent average, but in line with longer term averages. The number of individuals counted, not very significant because of the varying numbers of American Coots and American Robins, was higher than in the last two years, but somewhat below the numbers of the years immediately before that.

Geese are not always found on this count, but one flock was seen this year. The area typically has many ducks in winter, including diving ducks in the lake away from shore, and dabbling ducks in the shallow areas near shore. However, intensive hunting on the lake makes them very wary. The visibility issues also probably reduced the number we were able to find. Canvasback and Ring-necked Ducks were found in reasonable numbers, but numbers of others were quite low.

Numbers of heron and related species were unremarkable. Finding only one White Ibis suggested the rest of the usual flock was hiding in a distant part of the lake.

Raptors in general tend not to fly much in low cloud and foggy conditions. Nevertheless, vulture numbers were only a little below normal. Only one American Kestrel was the lowest in more than 10 years, and the absence of both Osprey and Northern Harrier was a little disappointing. Five Bald Eagles has come to be normal, a sharp contrast to the 1980s when eagles first returned to the area.

Woodpeckers are the quintessential bird of the Big Thicket and Pineywoods and it was nice to see normal or slightly above normal numbers of all normal species, including Red-headed Woodpeckers, missed last year.

While Carolina Chickadee numbers were normal, Tufted Titmice were again low, continuing a slow decline over the last five or so years. Eight Brown-headed Nuthatches was the highest since 2004. We missed Winter Wren, although perhaps this relatively hardy migrant had still not reached so far south this year. We did find Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Golden-crowned Kinglets, but Ruby-crowned Kinglets, certainly readily detected, continue a slow decline from the elevated number of the beginning of this century.

American Robin numbers in the count circle vary greatly from year to year, without there being any indication of overall fluctuations in the population. This year was one of good numbers, the third highest in the last ten years. Relatively few Cedar Waxwings were seen, perhaps a combination of poor weather conditions on count day and the absence of any prolonged cold snaps in the areas a few hundred miles further north to drive the nomadic flocks down to our area.

While many sparrow species tend to feed on the ground in open areas, they like to have trees and bushes nearby to provide cover when needed. There is always a good variety

of sparrows to be found, from the large flocks of Chipping Sparrows on the sides of road to the occasional Dark-eyed Junco. The numbers detected were perhaps a little low for many species, but again the weather may have been a factor. American Goldfinch numbers were good and a Pine Siskin was detected in one flock. Two of our groups encountered finches with red on their heads, but in both cases, the birds were a good distance away and in poor light. The immediate thought is Purple Finch, a species that is now seen only very occasionally in the area. One does not expect House Finches in the habitat of the area, but they do occur in some numbers in the urban and suburban areas further south. So these finches must go as unidentified as to species.

GOOSE, Snow (28); GOOSE, Snow (Blue) (5); DUCK, Wood (10); GADWALL (1); PINTAIL, Northern (2); CANVASBACK (83); DUCK, Ring-necked (66); SCAUP, Lesser (1); MERGANSER, Hooded (5); DUCK, Ruddy (1); GREBE, Pied-billed (34); CORMORANT, Double-crested (250); ANHINGA (6); PELICAN, American White (12); HERON, Great Blue (8); EGRET, Great (15); EGRET, Snowy (1); HERON, Tricolored (4); IBIS, White (1); VULTURE, Black (30); VULTURE, Turkey (27); EAGLE, Bald (5); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Cooper's (1); HAWK, Red-shouldered (9); HAWK, Red-tailed (4); KESTREL, American (1); MERLIN (1); GALLINULE, Common (5); COOT, American (1354); KILLDEER (18); TERN, Forster's (12); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (4); DOVE, Mourning (66); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (1); OWL, Barred (4); KINGFISHER, Belted (5); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (4); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (45); SAPSUCKER, Yellow-bellied (9); WOODPECKER, Downy (14); WOODPECKER, Hairy (2); FLICKER, Northern (11); WOODPECKER, Pileated (25); PHOEBE, Eastern (22); VIREO, White-eyed (1); VIREO, Blue-headed (1); JAY, Blue (38); CROW, American (125); SWALLOW, Tree (8); CHICKADEE, Carolina (65); TITMOUSE, Tufted (27); NUTHATCH, Brown-headed (8); CREEPER, Brown (2); WREN, Carolina (22); WREN, House (3); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (2); KINGLET, Golden-crowned (10); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (36); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (25); ROBIN, American (1558); CATBIRD, Gray (3); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (26); THRASHER, Brown (1); STARLING, European (13); WAXWING, Cedar (147); WARBLER, Orange-crowned (10); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (1); WARBLER, Pine (64); WARBLER, Yellow-rumped (116); WARBLER, Yellow-r. (Myrtle) (51); SPARROW, Chipping (257); SPARROW, Field (1); SPARROW, Song (2); SPARROW, Swamp (2); SPARROW, White-throated (93); JUNCO, Dark-eyed (1); CARDINAL, Northern (123); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (697); MEADOWLARK, Eastern (25); GRACKLE, Common (80); FINCH, Purple/House (2); SISKIN, Pine (4); GOLDFINCH, American (229); SPARROW, House (12) SPECIES, total (83); Number of Individuals (6104); Number of observers (10); Parties (5); Party-hours on foot (9.75); Party-miles on foot (3.00); Party-hours by car (27.00); Party-miles by car (130.00); Party-hours by boat (4.00); Party-miles by boat (3.00); Party-hours total (35.25); Party-miles total (156.00) Participants: Anonymous boater, Sherry Gibson, Sheila Hebert, Phillip Hight, Christine Sliva, Ken Sztraky, Wanda and Charles Smith, Jana and John Whittle

John A. Whittle

Other Christmas Counts

As results become available and time permit, fuller accounts of and data from these counts will be posted on the Golden Triangle Audubon web site at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org (in the reports tab).

Johnson Bayou, LA – 16 December 2014

This count, compiled by Ken Sztarky, has once a year access to a number of large tracts of private property in Johnson Bayou, including areas of the Gray Estate, Crain Brothers and Dore Energy properties.

The preliminary species total was 123, about average for this count. As always, waterfowl were plentiful but, the true shorebirds disappointed, possibly because all the areas of accessible beach are frequently disturbed by four-wheeler traffic, forcing the birds out. Wader habitat is also not extensive. The oak cheniers south of LA 82 are very much degraded as a result of the two recent devastating hurricanes.

The count produced a good selection of ducks in good numbers. The highlight of the raptors was a very late adult light phase Swainson's Hawk, circling over the marsh late in the day. Both Horned and Eared Grebes were seen. Twelve Hooded Mergansers were found, only the second time in the past decade for that species. An American Bittern was the first this century. Virginia Rail and Sora, neither seen very often on this count, were found. Sparrows were plentiful as usual, and included a Grasshopper Sparrow.

Ruddy Duck (605); Snow Goose (160); Ross's Goose (1); American Wigeon (37); Gadwall (1188); Green-winged Teal (27); Canvasback (284); Redhead (48); Mallard (2); Mottled Duck (29); Northern Pintail (121); Blue-winged Teal (89); Northern Shoveler (81); Ring-necked Duck (39); Greater Scaup (1); Lesser Scaup (288); Bufflehead (15); Red-breasted Merganser (2); Hooded Merganser (12); Horned Grebe (9); Eared Grebe (2); Pied-billed Grebe (56); Neotropic Cormorant (29); Double-crested Cormorant (71); Anhinga (1); American White Pelican (932); Brown Pelican (24); Tricolored Heron (11); Little Blue Heron (6); Snowy Egret (27); Great Blue Heron (15); Great Egret (65); Cattle Egret (2); Green Heron (1); Black-crowned Night-Heron (4); American Bittern (1); White Ibis (347); White-faced Ibis (12); Plegadis Ibis (132); Roseate Spoonbill (32); Black Vulture (86); Turkey Vulture (64); Osprey (4); White-tailed Kite (10); Northern Harrier (42); Sharp-shinned Hawk (1); Cooper's Hawk (4); Red-shouldered Hawk (1); Swainson's Hawk (1); Red-tailed Hawk (37); American Kestrel (28); Peregrine Falcon (1); Clapper Rail (6); King Rail (2); Virginia Rail (2); Sora (3); Common Gallinule (58); American Coot (6442); Wilson's Snipe (7); Greater Yellowlegs (3); Lesser Yellowlegs (5); Willet (3); Sandpiper species (8); Black-necked Stilt (112); Killdeer (385); Ring-billed Gull (75); Herring Gull (5); Laughing Gull (17); Caspian Tern (12); Royal Tern (13); Forster's Tern (2); Rock Pigeon (45); Mourning Dove (21); White-winged Dove (16); Inca Dove (2); Barn Owl (1); Great Horned Owl (3); Belted Kingfisher (13); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (6); Downy Woodpecker (12); Northern (Yellow shafted) Flicker (7); Eastern Phoebe (37); Vermilion Flycatcher (1); Blue Jay (4); Blue-headed Vireo (6); Loggerhead Shrike (46); Hermit Thrush (1); American Robin (3); Gray Catbird (1); Northern Mockingbird (42); European Starling (207); Sedge Wren (4); Marsh Wren (2); House Wren (26); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (35); Tree Swallow (39); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (47); Golden-crowned Kinglet (2); American Pipit (1); Orange-crowned Warbler (17); Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) (42); Pine Warbler (1); Palm Warbler (1); Common Yellowthroat (14); Song Sparrow (27); Lincoln's Sparrow (7); Swamp Sparrow (93); White-crowned Sparrow (160); White-throated Sparrow (21); Savannah Sparrow (78); Grasshopper Sparrow (1); LeConte's Sparrow (4); Chipping Sparrow (6); Field Sparrow (3); Vesper Sparrow (5); Northern Cardinal (2); Red-winged Blackbird (2068); Eastern Meadowlark (69); Great-tailed Grackle (47); Boat-tailed Grackle (96); Common Grackle (73); Brown-headed Cowbird (20); American Goldfinch (20); House Sparrow (1); Total individuals (15,741); Total species (123).

Bolivar Peninsula – 18 December 2014

The weather was not ideal, but the heavy rain was fairly isolated. However, the number of species sighted, preliminarily 181, was excellent.

The High Island area produced most of the rarities, including a pair of Anna's Hummingbirds across from Boy Scout Woods, an Orchard Oriole in the same location, Black-throated Gray Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat elsewhere in High Island. Other rarities included a Couch's Kingbird, a possible Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Black Rail and Yellow Rails were caught and banded in an ongoing study at Mundy Marsh.

Orange County – 1 January 2015

Low ceilings and poor light were a feature of this count also. However, the day got off to an auspicious start when the first bird seen in the New Year by many of the participants was a Bald Eagle which flew over the meeting place at 7:00 a.m.

The provisional total number of species for the count is 123. Apart from the eagle, one of the interesting finds was one Cave Swallow in among a large flock of Trees Swallows feeding low of the water and marsh on Bailey's Fish Camp Road. A flock of 24 Canada Geese in a residential area of Orangefield with a large pond in the back presents an issue as to whether they are truly wild or not. Presumably they are. A Sprague's Pipit seen well in an area that could be accessed for the first time was a new species for the count. Other interesting finds include a probable Franklin's Gull and a probably Virginia Rail.

Sea Rim State Park – 3 January 2015

This count, which Golden Triangle Audubon sponsors, was held in really unfriendly weather, with rain, often heavy, during the middle of the day, and low overcast and light rain most of the rest of the day. Despite the conditions, which prevented coverage of Texas Point and McFaddin by airboat, the preliminary total species stands at 150, the same as last year.

Sabine Woods was the star producer of nice finds, as it often is, with a male Western Tanager, and a Northern Parula, as well as a more expected Black-and-white Warbler. A Least Flycatcher was near the small cemetery. One or two species stand out by virtue of the number seen, most notably American Bittern of which we found six without the airboat access which is where we usually find the only one or two!

A frustrating feature is going to be the number of "count week" species – species seen in any of the three days before or the three days after count day but not seen on count day itself. So far we have Caspian Tern, Barn Owl, and Lincoln's Sparrow, and Black Skimmer and Horned Grebe which were very near the edge of the circle but probably outside it.

A full account will be published next month.

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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..>