The Brown Pelican

The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 21 No. 5 May 2015

Membership Meeting
Thursday May 21, 2015 7:00 p.m.
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont

Birding the Amazon: Among the Avian Riches of the Cristalino Jungle Lodge, Brazil
Stephan Lorenz

The Amazon Basin extends over vast swaths of South America and can rightfully be called the cradle of biodiversity. There are more kinds of plants, insects, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals growing, crawling, slithering, hopping, and walking through these jungles than any rain forest in the world. Bird diversity is also staggering. Within this vast basin several areas are especially rich in birdlife and the Cristalino Jungle Lodge in central Brazil sits squarely within one of these hyper-diversity hotspots. An incredible 586 species have been reported from the area and the majority of these species can be found in the primary rain forest of the Cristalino Private Reserve. The area is home to healthy populations of macaws, large raptors, including Harpy and Crested eagles, trumpeters, and a wide variety of antbirds, woodcreepers, and tanagers. Almost 100 species of flycatchers sally through the forest here. In addition, large mammals also thrive with several species of monkeys, tapir, and peccaries seen regularly, plus the chance encounter with a puma or jaguar. This will be a photographic journey through one of the best birding places in the world.

Stephan Lorenz has birded and travelled in every corner of North America and also birded extensively in South America. He spent three months guiding in the Amazon at the Cristalino Jungle Lodge and will share his photos and experiences. He is a regular contributor to birding magazines, including Birdwatcher's Digest, ABA's Birder's Guide, and BirdWatching, plus several newsletters. He has worked as a field biologist and educator in Alaska, California, Costa Rica, Australia, and Jamaica for example. He will lead a trip to central Brazil in July for High Lonesome BirdTours which in addition to Cristalino will visit the Pantanal, more information can be found here: http://highlonesometours.com/tour/the-fabulous-pantanal-promo/

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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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.

Saturday May 9, 2015. Jefferson County Migration Count. We have been doing these counts since 1995. The count attempts to cover as much of Jefferson County as is reasonably possible. We welcome all participants, especially if you are able to count in the early morning from dawn through about 11:00 a.m. even if you would just like to cover your own neighborhood. It is not necessary to commit to the whole day. If you have special access to any areas within the county, we would appreciate your help! Contact John Whittle (johnawhittle@aol.com or 409-722-4193) for details or offers to help. We will be out of town May 1 through 4, but will respond to emails.

Saturday May 16, 2015 (tentative) Sabine Woods Work Day. We are planning a Work Day subject to conditions (weather, insect population) being acceptable. The large amount of rain in early and mid-April has resulted in luxuriant growth of both ground cover and shrubs. Please put this date on your calendar and help us if you can. On this work day, we plan to take care of trail mowing and other trail maintenance tasks so that we do not face too daunting a task on our next work day in September. Particular needs this time are for riding mowers, but we will also need loppers to cut back the vegetation to prevent it encroaching on the trails. Sabine Woods is 4.1 miles west of Sabine Pass on Highway 87. We will start around 7:30 a.m. and work till about noon.

Thursday May 21, 2015. Membership Meeting. Birding the Amazon Stephan Lorenz. Details on page 1.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank Sherry Gibson, Sheila Hebert, Harrison Jordan, Sally and Chuck Moffet. Donna and Paul Monk, Dana Nelson, Lynn Otto, Chris and Cynthia Perkins, Sherrie Roden, Phil Rogers, Joedna Smyth, Harlan Stewart, for bringing refreshments in April. **We need volunteers to bring items for the May and all fall 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.

Saturday May 30, 2015. Field Trip to Hardin County: We will focus on the area north of Silsbee to look for the breeding birds of the area. This is typically a half-day trip. We plan to look for the nesting species of the area – Hooded, Kentucky, Pine, Prairie and Prothonotary, and Swainson's Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chat, White-eyed, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireo, Indigo and Painted Bunting, Gray Catbird, Summer Tanager, Acadian Flycatcher, Brown-headed Nuthatch and others. Swainson's Warbler is a particular target of this trip. We have often been rewarded with excellent views of this normally very secretive species on this field trip. Yellow-breasted Chats have often been seen perched high up in the open. This area also has many breeding Prairie Warblers.

The meeting place will be at 7:00 a.m. (note the necessary early start if we are to find the breeding birds!) at the shopping center on the northeast corner of the intersection of FM92 and FM418 in the northern part of Silsbee. To reach this from Beaumont, take US 69 north and then US 96 north. Take Business 96 into and through downtown Silsbee. When Business 96 turns right, continue straight on FM92 for 3/4 mile to the shopping center.

Creating a Bird-Friendly Yard

Rene Ebersole

We love our lawns. In the United States more than 45 million acres—an area eight times the size of New Jersey—are carpeted with them. And we're adding 500 square miles of turfgrass every year. Maintaining all that lawn is a huge undertaking and, for many, a source of personal pride. Annually, the average U.S. homeowner spends the equivalent of at least a full workweek pushing or driving a mower.

You could say the quest for perfect lawns—richly green, closely cropped, weedless, and insect-free—is almost as American as baseball. But this national preoccupation comes at a cost. Consider how many gallons of water and pounds of pesticides it takes to keep lawns lush. Depending on the conditions, a 25-by-40-foot yard can drink 10,000 gallons of water in a summer. Lawn care accounts for 70 million pounds of pesticides applied in the United States each year, 10 times more than even what is used in farming. The toxic runoff percolates into groundwater, threatening wildlife and human health. What you get is a cookie-cutter landscape whether you're in Palo Alto, Houston, Cincinnati, New York, or Phoenix. "All around the country you can find the same few species of grasses and foundation shrubs making up a national, undifferentiated residential landscape," writes Pam Penick in her new book *Lawn Gone!*. "It's like driving cross-country on the interstate and seeing the same four fast-food restaurants at every exit."

And wherever green grass grows there was once habitat—a forest, prairie, wetland, or even a desert. Which is why many gardeners concerned about disappearing wilderness and wildlife declines are trying to grow the habitat back. With support from conservation groups like Audubon—or just for the love of it—they are digging up their yards and replacing the grass with trees, shrubs, and flowering plants that can again provide birds and other wildlife with food, clean water, shelter, and places to nest. Their spadework is unquestionably restoring varied and colorful homes where chickadees can sing and butterflies can flutter. But until recently few scientists could say for sure whether such efforts are having a meaningful impact on wildlife. Now they are finding proof that even small habitats can make a big difference.

In 2000, when Doug Tallamy bought 10 acres of former farmland near Oxford in southeastern Pennsylvania, one mile from the Maryland border, he wasn't looking for a new research laboratory. He simply wanted a pleasant place to live with his wife, Cindy, and a reasonable commute to the University of Delaware, where he has now worked for 32 years as an entomology professor. The property, once mowed for hay, was overrun with unwelcome plants. "Autumn olive and oriental bittersweet, Japanese honeysuckle, bush honeysuckle, and multiflora rose—the whole gang was there," he says. The exotic plants (nearly all from Asia) overwhelmed most of the landscape. He bought a sturdy pair of hand loppers to cut through the thorns, including autumn olive's thick, inch-long spikes. Eventually, he could take a walk without injury. Soon he noticed something else disturbing. Most of those nonnative plants had little to no leaf damage from insects, unlike the indigenous maples, oaks, cherries, willows, and black gums, which were being eaten as usual. He was concerned. Was he witnessing a troubling consequence of the exotic plants that are spreading everywhere? If insects that spent millions of years eating native plants passed up a buffet of aliens—because they either couldn't or wouldn't eat them—did that mean areas dominated by foreign plants would support fewer insects? And if the insect populations plummeted, would birds starve?

Tallamy did an exhaustive search of the scientific literature to see whether he could find answers to those questions, but there was almost nothing. So he began studying how throngs of proliferating exotic plants are affecting insect populations and, therefore, the birds that eat them.

Healthy bird communities are inextricably linked to healthy insect populations. Ninety-six percent of terrestrial North American birds raise their young on insects. And not just any insects. Mostly caterpillars. Rich in fat and protein, caterpillars are essential for a bird trying to keep up with the demands of a hungry family. Consider the Carolina chickadee. It takes 390 to 570 caterpillars a day to feed a growing clutch of four to six chickadees in the 16 days from when they hatch to when they fledge from their nest. "That can be more than 9,000 caterpillars to make one batch of chickadees," says Tallamy. "We know they're not flying five miles down the road to forage. We know that almost all of a chickadee's foraging happens within 50 meters [164 feet] of the nest. That's why you need so many [caterpillars] in your yard."

One of Tallamy's studies examined the moth and butterfly larvae that develop on indigenous and exotic plants in the mid-Atlantic region (Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island), where you can find roughly 3,000 of the country's total of 11,500 caterpillar species. From his findings he created a ranking system of regional trees and plants by the abundance and diversity of caterpillars they can host. First place on the top 20 list went to the oaks, which supported 534 species of caterpillars. Second place went to cherries and plums, which were home to 456; willows came in third, with 455.

The study confirmed Tallamy's suspicions that gardeners could play a pivotal role in creating safe havens for wildlife. (An estimated 85 percent of invasive woody plants spreading through wild areas originally escaped from home gardens.) Thus he opens his landmark book, *Bringing Nature Home*, with a call to action: "For the first time in its history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener. Like it or not, gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation's wildlife. It is now within the power of individual gardeners to do something that we all dream of doing: to make a difference. In this case, the 'difference' will be to the future of biodiversity, to the native plants and animals of North America and the ecosystems that sustain them."

Many gardeners and botanists regard Tallamy's book as the seminal source, and sales remain strong—the paperback is in its seventh printing. Throughout it, Tallamy avoids the term *backyard habitat,* because he says "it implies that these are so terrible we have to hide them in the backyard. When in fact the front yard is fair game. We're not talking about creating ugly landscapes. A beautiful oak tree in your front yard is a highly functional plant there."

Homeowners who landscape with native trees and plants such as oaks, goldenrods, asters, cherry trees, and sunflowers are planting bird food factories that ship caterpillars in bulk, and make regular deliveries of fruits and seeds that help fuel bird migrations over thousands of miles and multiple continents. "The plants in our yards are just as effective as the bird feeder you put up in wintertime," Tallamy says, "because the plants are making the food that feeds the birds in the summertime."

For a bird searching for a nice place to raise a family, the classic suburban yard—a tidy bed of grass, one or two shade trees, and a row of leafy foundation plantings imported from China—must be like a foreclosed fixer-upper in a bad neighborhood. The accommodations are spare and all the local restaurants are dives. The nice neighborhoods, on the other hand, where native plants abound, offer all the perks of a Park Avenue suite with a stocked pantry and a view. There is abundant food, places to nest, and a brilliant stage upon which a bird can sing without competing against the din of a lawn mower. One of Tallamy's undergraduate students, Karin Burghardt, compared two such types of landscapes in southeastern Pennsylvania. One property in each of six pairs had a higher proportion of native plants, and the other was more typically suburban, with an indigenous tree canopy casting shadows on lawns fringed by alien ornamental bushes and ground covers like pachysandra.

Not surprisingly Burghardt found a greater diversity and abundance of birds and caterpillars in the yards filled with naturally occurring plants. But one finding blew the researchers away. Birds of conservation concern in the area where the study was done—wood thrushes, eastern towhees, veeries, and scarlet tanagers—were eight times more abundant and significantly more diverse on those parcels. "There was a big jump in their ability to use these properties," says Tallamy.

During the three months it took Burghardt to gather data, 125 square miles of lawn grew across the country, even in areas where you wouldn't expect to find grass growing. In Phoenix, Arizona, where temperatures can hit 120 degrees Fahrenheit, the popular garden "oasis" is a mix of turf, subtropical palm trees, and a scattering of desert-adapted plants. Susannah Lerman, a researcher from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, traveled there to examine the difference between how birds use the "oasis" compared to grounds brimming with native desert plants (a gardening style known as xeriscaping; see "Hollywood Native.").

The well-watered oasis yards were ruled by grackles, house sparrows, and European starlings—everyday birds that wouldn't normally survive in such a hot and dry place. "You're not going to see those species naturally in the desert because they can't make it without water," she says. "But as soon as you add water—boom."

On the properties most closely resembling the arid desert surroundings, she found Gila woodpeckers nesting in saguaro cactuses, Anna's hummingbirds sipping nectar from mesquite, and curve-billed thrashers nesting in cholla cactuses. She also discovered that the birds frequenting those xeriscaped properties were staying longer and eating until they were full. "They didn't have to keep moving around, which takes a lot of energy," she says. "They could stay in one patch and do all of their activities. If you're a bird that doesn't have to fly from yard to yard desperately trying to find food, you can go off and do other important things, like attracting a mate or feeding your young."

Lerman worries about one potential hazard of creating a bird retreat in a desert of grass and pavement. In the right set of circumstances it could become a Bates Motel. "We have to be really careful that when we do create these habitats we don't create ecological traps." (This refers to the inadvertent bait and switch that can happen when wildlife is drawn to an area that ultimately jeopardizes its safety.) "If you create a wildlife habitat, and then you have a cat outside, it's completely unproductive. You're attracting all these birds to your yard with beautiful plants, and your cat is waiting to kill them."

It doesn't have to be your cat either. It could be a neighbor's or a feral one. In fact, a recent study by scientists at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute reported that between 1.4 billion and 3.7 billion birds are killed each year by cats roaming outdoors. "This is a huge and complicated issue," Lerman says, "because you can't control other people's behavior."

While cutting-edge research is expanding scientists' understanding of how people can support birds and other wildlife—one garden, schoolyard, and urban park at a time—there is still a lot to learn. "Prior to this research, it was largely suspected that backyard habitats could be helpful in providing sanctuary to birds during nesting and migration," says Steve Kress, Audubon's vice president for bird conservation and author of *The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds*. "Their research gives us solid information that shows how important the native plants are."

But he emphasizes that selecting plants that host the insects birds eat is only part of the equation. Fruiting plants and seeds fuel birds during migration, and are thus equally essential in any habitat. "Of course, plants should also be selected for other features than food, such as shelter during extreme weather and usefulness for nesting structure. Just as some plants sustain diverse caterpillar populations, others provide good options for nesting structure and safety from predators."

Nest boxes hung on posts or standing trees are another key feature, he says, because people tend to remove downed trees and other structures with cavities that birds would use naturally. In addition, birds need sitting perches where they can keep an eye out for predators; a place to get out of the sun on a hot day or to weather a winter storm; water for drinking and bathing; and even some thorny shrubs like hawthorns that can provide a fortress against prowling animals, including cats.

At the same time scientists are taking a hard look at nonnative invasive species that provide birds with food but also harm the ecosystem. Porcelainberry is firmly on the

National Park Service's "least wanted list" for its habit of forcefully twining through woodlands and smothering native plants. But apparently the birds aren't too picky. "[They] eat porcelainberries up the wazoo," says Michelle Frankel, a conservation biologist who is leading Audubon's Bird-Friendly Communities initiative in the Atlantic Flyway. Some people think: Why make such a fuss. Just leave it. But Frankel says you have to also consider the plants that porcelainberry displaces. What's more, not all plants are created equal. A recent study revealed that the highest fat content and energy densities in fruits that migrant birds ate at two field sites in Rochester, New York, came from native shrubs—not the aliens. The birds were choosing the higher-octane fuel and eating it more voraciously.

More and more, citizen science projects continue to deepen our understanding. Two such programs were launched this spring. "These initiatives are designed to look more closely at bird and plant associations and answer some of the questions, particularly having to do with backyard habitats," says Frankel.

YardMap is a Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology project that encourages people to gather data about the habitats that they are most familiar with—their yard, their favorite birding spot, a schoolyard, even a cemetery—to provide insights about how they can aid wildlife. The program is like Google Earth, allowing users to zoom in on their place and mark the types of plants that exist there. "It's connected to eBird [a real-time online checklist program that collects and broadcasts bird data], so they can also keep track of the birds they see," says Frankel. "It's a very cool tool." She says that the program is being promoted to Audubon chapters around the country, and the schools, neighborhood groups, and municipalities receiving mini-grants to create "Urban Oases" demonstration habitats will be asked to track their sites with YardMap.

The second program, called Hummingbirds at Home "www.hummingbirdsathome.org, joins Audubon's citizen science programs, such as the Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count, by enlisting people to log observations of hummingbirds on flowers and note blooming patterns. Several recent studies indicate that the arrival of hummingbirds on their foraging grounds is out of sync with food availability and flower pollination. "The Hummingbirds at Home program aims to gain insights into what's going on, and how people can help," says Audubon chief scientist Gary Langham.

There is plenty of evidence to show that anyone can play a vital role in preserving bird habitats, says Tallamy, who even goes as far as to call it a moral imperative. "Our success is up to each one of us individually," he writes in *Bringing Nature Home*. "We can each make a measurable difference almost immediately by planting a native nearby. As gardeners and stewards of our land, we have never been so empowered—and the ecological stakes have never been so high."

Shovel Ready: Transforming Your Yard

1. Get started by signing Audubon's Healthy Yard Pledge to promote bird-friendly communities. It aims to remove invasive exotic plants; plant native species; reduce pesticide use; conserve water; protect water quality; and support birds and other wildlife. Visit audm.ag/HYPledge.

2. Begin small and have a plan. "Someone always comes up [after a talk] and says, 'I'm going to run home and rip out all my lawn, ' " says Doug Tallamy, author of the renowned gardening book *Bringing Nature Home*. "That is not my recommendation. If you take something out, be ready to replace it." He suggests an easier pace. "This can be a hobby. You don't have to do it all at once." Or, for instant results, hire someone to do the work. If you already pay to have your lawn cut and cared for, you might consider putting at least part of that budget toward managing your yard in a way that's more beneficial to birds.

3. Convert the salespeople at your nursery. If you go to one with the name of a native plant that you want to buy, they will likely take you to the closest thing in stock. "What you say to them is, 'That's not what I want. Can you get this for me?' And if they can't, you walk away," says Tallamy. "If they hear that enough they'll start carrying this stuff." (Find resources that can help you locate plants native to your region at audubonmagazine.org.)

4. Try to avoid cultivars of the native plants you're buying. When the horticultural industry tweaks a plant's features (for instance, its color or petal size and shape), the plants may become less desirable or even incompatible with the insects that evolved to eat them.

5. Shun the misconception that gardens brimming with native plants look weedy. "If you go to the fine gardens of Europe, many of the plants they display are from North America," says Tallamy. "So this notion that just because a plant grows down the street, it can't be used formally is just an urban legend." For some domestic inspiration, Tallamy points to a new 3.5-acre native plant exhibit at the New York Botanical Garden that is both beautiful and beneficial for wildlife in one of the world's most crowded cities.

6. There's power in numbers. Enlist your neighbors and wider community to help incorporate bird-friendly plantings in yards, parks, workplaces, schoolyards, and other public areas. Join a growing army of citizen scientists collecting data about how birds can coexist with us and become part of Audubon's Hummingbirds at Home program. Visit audubon.org/citizenscience, where you can also download the mobile app.

7. This winter participate in the Christmas Bird Count (birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count) and the Great Backyard Bird Count, two ongoing citizen science programs that help track long-term bird population trends.

8. Register your plot of habitat at YardMap and document its value to birds as you make improvements.

9. Hang out at home. Half the nation's lawn equals about 20 million acres—roughly the collective size of 15 national parks, including Denali, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Great Smoky Mountains, and The Badlands. "We have to get rid of the notion that nature is something you must drive to," Tallamy insists. "That's why people go to national parks, to connect with nature. You can do that right at home—every time we look out the window or go outside."

A version of this story ran in the July-August 2013 issue of Audubon magazine under the title "Food Network."

Field Trip to Sabine Woods – 18 April 2015

The March field trip of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society was drenched in a heavy rain. The forecast for the April field trip? Heavy rain. This could be a bad trend. On the other hand, rain in April can also bring down the much hoped for "fallout" of birds at coastal locations. So, despite the forecasts of rain, the April trip to Sabine Woods would go on as planned. That turned out to be a good idea.

Despite the forecast, a respectable number of birders turned up early on the morning of the trip to brave the weather and look for birds and they were well rewarded. So with the appropriate rain gear on, the group headed into the woods. White-eyed Vireos were evident right away. They called from high and low and some even showed themselves for all to see. White-eyed Vireos proved to be one of the more common species on the day but other vireos including Yellow-throated, Blue-headed, Warbling, Philadelphia and Red-eyed were seen on the day. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were also numerous in the woods buzzing around the lantana thickets and patches of honeysuckle.

Flycatchers are among the more numerous neotropical migrants and they were evident on the day. Eastern Wood-Pewees were probably the most conspicuous, sitting on open perches and giving their familiar calls. An Eastern Kingbird was perched outside of the woods while Great Crested Flycatcher gave their "weep" calls from inside the woods. Some of the difficult Empidonax species were present and a few were actually identified to species. Most of these were Acadian Flycatcher (our familiar breeding Empid) but a Least Flycatcher was also sighted on the day. Swallows zoomed around the woods with Northern Rough-winged Swallows flying low and Tree Swallows flying high. Purple Martins and Barn Swallows were also seen in the mix. A couple of Common Nighthawks fluttered around above the woods while our resident Golden-fronted Woodpecker was seen with his newest mate, a female Red-bellied Woodpecker.

Rusty colored Orchard Orioles sang from the tree tops while brilliant orange and black Baltimore Orioles worked the mulberry trees for ripe fruit. Red Summer Tanagers staked out the large bee hive in the woods (bees are a favorite food) while a couple of neon male Scarlet Tanagers were also located. But not all migrant birds are brilliantly colored. Swainson's Thrush was very common in the woods as were spotted Wood Thrushes. A Gray-cheeked Thrush was located by some and an American Robin (an unusual species for Sabine Woods in spring) was located by many. Gray Catbirds were everywhere as often happens in the spring, mewing from low (especially) and high (occasionally) while Brown Thrashers worked the forest floor. But back to the colorful species, Indigo Buntings were common in electric blue while darker Blue Grosbeaks and black and pink Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were seen but less common.

Warblers are the main focus of spring birding on the Texas coast, so the group sought out this group and they came through. Northern Waterthrushes worked the pond edges with a single Louisiana Waterthrush. Worm-eating Warblers probed clusters of dead leaves while Black and White Warblers probed crevices in the bark. A yellow Prothonotary Warbler was found by the group along with a couple of brilliant Yellow Warblers. Elusive Kentucky Warblers proved common on the day and almost as easy to see as the bold Hooded Warblers. Gray and green Tennessee Warblers worked the tree tops while Blue-winged Warblers worked the middle areas of the trees and Ovenbirds foraged on the ground. Multi-colored Chestnut-sided Warblers and Black-throated Green Warblers were seen by the group as were a couple of beautiful Northern Parulas.

All warblers are great but some are more prized by birders than others. Luckily, a number of these species were seen by the group on this trip. At least two Canada Warblers (uncommon in the spring) were located displaying their dark necklaces. A single Blackpoll Warbler was seen which has not been easy to do in recent years along with sky blue Cerulean Warblers. Several brilliant orange Blackburnian Warblers were spotted by the birders as were black and orange American Redstarts. A brilliant male Golden-winged Warbler, always a treat, was seen by most of the group and pretty much everyone was able to get a look at a Swainson's Warbler. Swainson's are highly prized by birders because they can be so difficult to see. Luckily, this spring has been the best in recent memory for viewing of these sough after birds and several were located on this trip.

The only thing missing from this field trip? Rain! The predicted heavy rain did not materialize during the day and everyone got to enjoy a full day of birdwatching in the heart of spring migration. With more than twenty species of warbler seen along with vireos, tanagers, orioles and more, it is no wonder that many birders consider Sabine Woods to be the best migrant trap on the upper Texas coast. I think the birders who "braved" the weather for the Golden Triangle Audubon's April field trip would heartily agree with this statement!

The following species were recorded by the trip leaders:
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (2); Neotropic Cormorant (2); Tricolored Heron (1); Cattle Egret (14); Green Heron (1); Turkey Vulture (3); Clapper Rail (1); White-winged Dove (5); Mourning Dove (4); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (2); Common Nighthawk (3); Chimney Swift (3); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (25); Golden-fronted Woodpecker (1); Red-bellied Woodpecker (1); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (2); Downy Woodpecker (2); Eastern Wood-Pewee (2); Acadian Flycatcher (4); Least Flycatcher (1); Empidonax species (2); Great Crested Flycatcher (2); Eastern Kingbird (4); Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (1); Loggerhead Shrike (2); White-eyed Vireo (35); Yellow-throated Vireo (3); Blue-headed Vireo(1); Warbling Vireo (6); Philadelphia Vireo (2); Red-eyed Vireo (5); Blue Jay (6); Purple Martin (2); Tree Swallow (20); Northern Rough-winged Swallow (30); Barn Swallow (2); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (2); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (3); Gray-cheeked Thrush (3); Swainson's Thrush (15); Wood Thrush (20); American Robin (2); Gray Catbird (50); Northern Mockingbird (2); Brown Thrasher (6); Ovenbird (4); Worm-eating Warbler (10); Louisiana Waterthrush (1); Northern Waterthrush (6); Golden-winged Warbler (1); Blue-winged Warbler (10); Black-and-white Warbler (6); Prothonotary Warbler (1); Swainson's Warbler (6); Tennessee Warbler (6); Kentucky Warbler (10); Common Yellowthroat (3); Hooded Warbler (25); American Redstart (1); Cerulean Warbler (4); Northern Parula (2); Blackburnian Warbler (4); Yellow Warbler (2); Chestnut-sided Warbler (2); Blackpoll Warbler (2); Black-throated Green Warbler (6); Canada Warbler (2); Swamp Sparrow (2); White-throated Sparrow (2); Summer Tanager (9); Scarlet Tanager (2); Northern Cardinal (4); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (6); Blue Grosbeak (2); Indigo Bunting (10); Painted Bunting (1); Red-winged Blackbird (15); Common Grackle (3); Great-tailed Grackle (10); Brown-headed Cowbird (4); Orchard Oriole (20); Baltimore Oriole (12)

Steve Mayes

Bird Sightings – April 2015

In this section of the Newsletter, we now generally limit the report to birds justifiably shown as rare or very rare on the published Upper Texas Coast checklist 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 all credible 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.

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.

This month, we are unable to review sightings after about April 25. And there may be records for the days immediately prior that were not available at the time this month's report was prepared. Because of the volume of reports from Sabine Woods, we have grouped and abbreviated reports of some birds that are rare because they are "early" in reference to the Upper Texas Coast checklist. Detail for these species will be included in our annual migration summary in an upcoming issue of the Brown Pelican. Also, for these species, we are unable to list all observers whose reports were reviewed.

Seen in our core Counties (listed above)

Greater Scaup	Apr 22	JEF-Taylor Bayou(1) Chris Charlesworth (late)
Swallow-tailed Kite	Apr 7	ORA-Vidor (1) Jim Armacosdt, Kimberly Williams
	Apr 12	JEF-SW (1) Laura Kososki. D. Muschalek, Robt Thacker, Lewis Ulrey
	Apr 16	JEF-SW (2) JHH and others
Black Tern	Apr 12	JEF-Pilot Stn Rd (1) JB, RL
Black-billed Cuckoo	Apr 16-21	JEF-SW multiple obs. (early)
Eastern Whip-poor-Will	Apr 17	JEF-SW (1) Dennis Shepler
Lesser Nighthawk	Apr 25	JEF-McFaddin NWR (1) JHH, JAW
Broad-tailed Humm.	thru Apr 14	JEF-Nederland(1) JJW (wintering bird last seen Apr 14)
Red-cockaded W'pecker	Apr 14	HAI-Big Thicket NP (1) Jim Armacost, Syeda Kazmi
Traill's Flycatcher	Apr 17	JEF-SW (1) JHH (early)
	Apr 18	JEF-SW (1) Duane Huval
	Apr 25	JEF-TX87 W of SRSP (1) JAW
Least Flycatcher	Apr 11	JEF-SW (1) Shannon Fitch
	Apr 12	JEF-SW (1) TH (early)
	Apr 13	JEF-SW (1) JHH (early)
Eastern Phoebe	Apr 12	JEF-SW (1) David Sarkozi (late)
	Apr 19-25	JEF-SW reports not accompanied by any detail or photos.
Great Kiskadee	Apr 22	JEF-SW (1) JAW
Western Kingbird	Apr 9	JEF-SW (1) Brad Macurda
Blue-headed Vireo	Apr 15-19	JEF-SW (1-2) multiple obs
	Apr 16	JEF-Taylor Bayou (1) Chris Charlesworth (late)
	Apr 20	JAS-Martin Dies SP (1) Damon Williford (late)
	Apr 22	JEF-Taylor Bayou (1) Chris Charlesworth (late)
	Apr 25	JAS (1) David Sarkozi (late)
Warbling Vireo	Apr 9-14	JEF-SW (1) JHH, MC and others
Philadelphia Vireo	Apr 14	JEF-TX87 W of SRSP (1) JHH
	Apr 18-21	JEF-SW (1-4) JHH, TH, SM, JB, RL and others (early)
White-breasted Nuthatch	Apr 1	JAS-Zavalla (1) Glen Davis
	Apr 15	ANG-SFAustin Experimental Forest (1) Larry King
	Apr 17	JAS-Sam Rayburn (south) (1) Phillip Hight
Veery	Apr 11	JEF-SW (1) J. Berner, JHH, MC
	Apr 12	JEF-SW (2) JHH, SM, TH and many others
	Apr 12	JEF-Tyrrell Park (1) Tyler Miloy
Gray-cheeked Thrush	Apr 12-21	JEF SW (up to 9) multiple obs.
Swainson's Thrush	Apr 4	JEF-SW (1) MC, TH (v. early)
	Apr 11-14	JEF-SW (up to 3) multiple obs
Golden-winged Warbler	Apr 16-26+	JEF-SW multiple obs (early and rare)
Hooded Warbler	Apr 1-7	JEF-SW multiple obs (early)
Cerulean Warbler	Apr 12-14	JEF-SW multiple obs (early)
	Apr 14	JEF-Texas Point NWR (1) SM
Brewster's Warbler (hyb)	Apr 17	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW, SM
	Apr 24	JEF-SW (1) JHH
Blackpoll Warbler	Apr 11-14	JEF-SW (1) multiple obs (early)
Canada Warbler	Apr 18-20	JEF-SW (1) multiple obs (early)
Bachman's Sparrow	Apr 21	HAI-Sundew Trail (1) Damon Williford
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Apr 25	JEF-McFaddin NWR (2) JB, Gerald Duhon, JHH, JAW, RL, SM
	Apr 25	JEF-SRSP (1) Gerald Duhon
Pine Siskin	Apr 1	JAS-San Rayburn (south end) (5) Glen Davis (late)
	Apr 3	JAS-Ebenzer Park (1) Drew Dickert (late)
	Apr 4	SAA-US96 at FM103 (8) James Moony (late)
	Apr 7	JAS-Boykin Springs (5) Eric and Maggie Carpenter (late)
	Apr 13	JAS-Boykin Springs (8) Skye Haas, Gary Palmer (v late)

Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

Horned Grebe	Apr 19	GAL-Bolivar Flats (1) Jesse Huth
Glaucous Gull	Apr 15	GAL-Rollover Pass (1) Steve Clark
Little Gull	Apr 5	GAL-Rollover Pass (1) Cameron Cox, Bret Newton
Sulphur-bellied Flycatch.	Apr 8-9	GAL-Boy Scout Woods (1) multiple obs
Bell's Vireo	Apr 9, 17,23	GAL-Smith Oaks reports not accompanied by any detail or photos
Bell's Vireo	Apr 18	GAL-Boy Scout Woods report not accompanied by any detail or photos
Black-whiskered Vireo	Apr 11-19+	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) multiple obs.
Lawrence's Warbler (hyb)	Apr 11	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) multiple obs.

Abbreviations used: ANG – Angelina County, ANWR – Anahuac NWR; CAM – Cameron Parish, LA; CHA – Chambers County; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County; JAS – Jasper County; JAW – John Whittle; JB – Jessica Barry; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – Jana and John Whittle; JM – John Mariani; MC – Michael Cooper; ORA – Orange county; RL – Randy Lewis; SAA – San Augustine County; SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; TYL – Tyler County; WJC – West Jefferson County.

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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.

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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..**