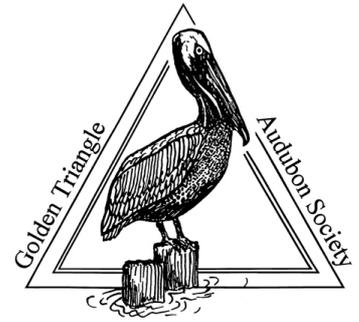


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 22 No. 10

October 2016

Membership Meeting
Thursday October 20, 2016 7:00 p.m.
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont

Moths of Trinity River Refuge – The Good, Bad, and Ugly
Stuart Marcus, Refuge Manager
Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge

His presentation will focus on many of the moths seen at the Refuge headquarters along with some interesting life histories. There will be some audience participation questions as part of the program.

Stuart Marcus is the first and current Refuge Manager of the 30,000 acre Trinity River National Wildlife located in Liberty, Texas. He graduated from the University of Florida in 1977 with a degree in Wildlife Ecology.

Stuart worked as a seasonal forester with the U. S. Forest Service in 1977 and 1978 at Pisgah National Forest in western North Carolina. He started his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1979 as a Biological Technician at the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge located in north Florida. He went on to work as an Assistant Refuge Manager at three other refuges, throughout different parts of Florida. He was promoted to Refuge Manager of the Trinity River Refuge in June, 1994. His long-time interest in birds and butterflies now includes moths. He started noticing some strange and beautiful moths at the security lights soon after he moved into a new headquarters office located on the Refuge in 2012. Hundreds of new moths have been photographed on the Refuge and now documented for Liberty County.

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.

The Brown Pelican

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Issue number 232

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.

Thursday October 20, 2016. Membership Meeting. Subject: Trinity River NWR. Details on page 1.

Saturday October 22, 2016. Field Trip to Sabine Woods. Leader Steve Mayes. Meet at Sabine Woods, which is 4.1 miles west of Sabine Pass on the north side of Highway 87 at 7:30 a.m. or join the trip in progress in the woods later. Waterproof footwear will probably be a good idea, especially if it is at all wet from previous rain or just heavy early morning dew. Bring mosquito repellent just in case. There are few services available on weekends in Sabine Pass, but gasoline is available. The deli is no longer open. Bring drinks.

The 22nd of October is towards the end of fall songbird migration, but often brings a good variety of birds. A cold front may drive down the last of the warblers and the first big push of wintering birds. Some of our winter birds may be arriving, and often the woodland species that winter in the Big Thicket overshoot a little at first. In some past years, this has included Red-breasted Nuthatch and Brown Creeper.

Recent finds at Sabine Woods have included Bell's Vireo, Groove-billed Ani and Prairie Warbler. All three have been seen more than once, and may be wintering there.

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

Thursday November 17, 2016. Annual Meeting and Pot-luck Dinner. Bring your favorite bird photos.

Saturday November 19, 2016. Field Trip to West Jefferson County. In recent years, this has been one of our most successful field trips. The area is well known for its birds of prey, which in past years have included Bald and Golden Eagles, Crested Caracaras and White-tailed Hawks in addition to the more "normal" Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and American Kestrels. In some years we have seen White-tailed Kites and Merlins.

The area is well known as the wintering ground of what has become a large (about 1,000 strong) flock of Sandhill Cranes and is also one of the best places to see sparrows in the area. In wet years, there can be lots of waterfowl including geese and many duck species as well as ibis and other waterbirds. Two years ago's trip found a Mountain Bluebird, which staying all winter and was visited by birders from all over the region, and a Couch's Kingbird.

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.

Refreshments

Each month, we rely on volunteers to provide the refreshments at our membership meeting. We thank all those who brought refreshments over the last few meetings **We need volunteers to bring items for the remaining fall meetings.** Pick the meeting at which you want to help. 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.

Membership Dues

To simplify our record keeping, all memberships now run from January through December. Membership dues remain at \$15 per year. We are now accepting 2017 dues. You may pay at any membership meeting (checks preferred) or use the subscription/membership blank on the back page.

Dues for all members will be for the period ending on December 31. The memberships of new members joining in August or later in the year will extend to the end of the following calendar year. For new members joining National Audubon on line and selecting our Chapter code (W25), 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 (NAS) 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 also welcome NAS members in other nearby counties although their membership in NAS does not automatically bring them to our attention.

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 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.

Golden Triangle Audubon now on Facebook

Thanks to Kelley Sampeck, Golden Triangle Audubon has its own Facebook page. The page will include bird reports from the Golden Triangle

area, meeting, field trip and other birding event announcements, and pictures. To participate, simply go to <http://www.facebook.com/GoldenTriangleAudubon/> and click the "Like" button to follow. Once you have "liked" the page, any posts to the page will show up in your newsfeed, and you will be able to post comments and pictures to the page. Kelley is no longer in the immediate area, but John Mariani has been looking after the page for us. If you do not have Facebook but would like to send in bird reports/alerts for the page, you may e-mail John at jmariani@gt.rr.com. This Facebook page has proven to be a much easier method to distribute daily bird updates during migration.

Sabine Woods Work Day – 10 September 2016

The Sabine Woods Work Day on Saturday September 10 was successful despite the most challenging conditions in recent memory. Not only was there moderate rain very early in the day, almost before we even got started, but the deer fly population was very high if somewhat localized. In the areas of heavy infestation it was possible to cause up to five deer fly fatalities with a single swipe of the hand. Nevertheless our volunteers did an excellent job in the circumstances. Much of the credit goes to Craig Geoffrey who spent Friday mowing the trails and some of the meadow areas, with the explanation that "it was going to rain Saturday." We guess the accuracy of his forecast disqualifies him from employment with either local television stations or the National Weather Service.

More seriously, we also worked on the sides of all the trails, chopped down both giant ragweed in disturbed areas near trails and rattle bean in the main pond. The giant ragweed is a powerful allergen for many people as well as verging on being invasive. Fortunately, it is an annual, and chopping it down in September effectively prevents it from seeding. Likewise, the rattle bean is short lived, and dies back to the ground or water in winter, so cutting it down prevents it from spreading. It is toxic to livestock, and although we have no

information on its toxicity to birds, we rarely see birds on it. At Sabine Woods, it is mainly a problem in the ponds.

We were able to cut the side branches off a hackberry tree that fell across the path along the west fence by the highway so that it fell all the way to the ground and can now be relatively easily stepped over. We will need a medium-large chain saw to cut the main trunk so we can move it out of the trail. Howard has kept the vegetation as the water features (a.k.a. the drips) trimmed, and they are in good shape. Our volunteers did some "gardening" on some of the hog damage to make the paths level again, but we do have a number of larger areas where the wild hogs have rooted up the grasses, fortunately in areas where we do not have any commonly used trails, but at some point, we will need to find some way to re-level the ground with mechanized equipment so we can keep these areas mowed. We are not alone in the area, or in the state for that matter, in having a "hog problem" but no real solution is in sight.

It has been a wet summer, and for the first time in several years, the main pond has stayed near full for most of the time. The small pond at Howard's Water feature did come close to drying up in August, but there have been substantial rains since then. We had the northern section of the Sanctuary mowed in later spring, but it will need doing again later this fall.

We thank those who worked on the work day and on the days before or after: Michael Cooper, Everett Culver, Howard Davis, Ashley Fuselier, Craig Geoffrey, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Steve Mayes, Jana Whittle.



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.com.

Jefferson County Fall Migration Count -- 17 September 2016

The fall migration count is set on a fixed date each year -- the third Saturday in September -- and unfortunately cannot readily be changed in the light of weather forecasts. However, as often happens, the weather prognosticators warn of possible rain showers that do not in fact come to pass, or pass by harmlessly. Such was the situation on count day this year, and weather did not interfere with the count.

However, the results were unusual in the extreme, and we do not yet understand fully why. Indeed, we probably will not until either much later in the fall season or even until we have next fall's results. In the northern tier of the county, particularly west of Beaumont, and that comprises, by area, most of the northern tier, the numbers of birds counted was very low. To those of us counting in these northwestern areas, it was clearly evident that there were not many of the various blackbird, cowbird and grackle species to be seen. In addition, there were not many of the mockingbirds that are usually to be seen in the shrubs and bushes that mark the edges of the rice fields. On the other hand, the numbers and variety of species seen in the coastal areas was exceptionally high, and we preliminarily tallied 175 species, not an all-time high but close to it and perhaps 10 species above normal. The total number of individuals was around the middle of the normal range, with larger numbers of grackles in the southern tier areas making up for their absence in the northern tier.

The timing of the count is such that we usually see at least the first of the winter residents that make the area so attractive for winter birding. The weather in the days prior to count day was unusually warm, both in our area and the areas somewhat further north. This could well explain why we saw so few of species such as American Kestrels, Northern Harriers and Red-tailed Hawks. These species most likely move south as the availability of prey begins to decrease, and that is almost always temperature dependent. Indeed, as this is written in very early October, the number of Kestrels seems to have increased to normal.

There is one species that is always very scarce in September, and that is the Eastern Meadowlark. Meadowlarks can be found in the county in almost every other month of the year. We know from the experience in the panhandle of Texas and areas

somewhat further south that meadowlarks are significantly migratory, with typically more present in the winter. Western Meadowlarks are found in Texas (mostly in the Panhandle), basically only in winter. We believe that, in Jefferson County, the meadowlarks we see in summer, migrate south for the winter, and are replaced by birds moving in from the north. But the summer residents seem to leave before the winter ones arrive. To the best of my knowledge, there is as yet no definitive evidence that this is the case, but as tracking individual birds becomes easier and cheaper, we should be able to confirm this. We are inclined to hypothesize that a similar phenomenon exists in other species, but, in most years at least, the departure of summer residents does not significantly precede the arrival of the winter ones. If later in the fall, we see normal numbers of these other species, that will be evidence that their arrival was merely late, as it is difficult to believe that we just failed to see them on count day, as access to most areas in the northwest part of the county from public roads is very good. We do not discount the possibility that only some of the birds of these species are migratory, as the numbers of, for example, Northern Mockingbirds and Northern Cardinals in the cities and towns seemed to be at least nearer normal, suggesting perhaps the urban dwelling individuals do not migrate. This is possibly most easily seen in the case of American Robins. Robins now routinely breed in the cities in the Golden Triangle, and are present in similar numbers year round. But in winter, large flocks of Robins typically descend on the areas of the Big Thicket just to our north (and sometimes briefly invade the cities, but not usually until late January or February).

We do understand that the numbers of fall passerine migrants that we find on the count is variable, as weather and particularly wind conditions in the days prior can cause feast or famine conditions in the woodlots that make birding in the area so attractive. This year was a "feast" year and overall we recorded a remarkable 25 species of warblers on count day, most, but not all, in the coastal woodlots. There were large numbers of Northern Waterthrushes in the natural wetland areas of Cattail Marsh. A Prairie Warbler in Sabine Woods seems in no hurry to move on, and could

well winter there. Canada Warbler is expected to be the most numerous warbler in Sabine Woods in late August and early September, and this year, they were still present even in mid-September. It was nice to have Wilson's Warblers around this year, after two very slim years for that species.

Although it was a relatively wet summer overall, the late summer was relatively dry and the showers in the days leading up to the count did not result in particularly wet conditions. Accessible shorebird habitat is not particularly plentiful in Jefferson County and the number of species and numbers and of shorebirds seen were not particularly high. However, there was enough water that herons were seen in relatively normal numbers.

A significant number of Least Grebes have been resident in Cattail Marsh for some time, with at least two families with recently hatched juveniles. We found two birds, adding that species to the overall count list.

Other noteworthy species included a Yellow-headed Blackbird that was also a first for the count. Not seen on count day, but seen within the count week at Sabine Woods was a Bell's Vireo, a rare species on the Upper Texas Coast, but most likely to be found in September.

More detailed results by area within the county, and more historical information are in the reports posted on the Golden Triangle Audubon web-site at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org

2016 Totals:

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (43); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (6); DUCK, Mottled (28); TEAL, Blue-winged (875); SHOVELER, Northern (1); GREBE, Least (2); GREBE, Pied-billed (34); STORK, Wood (3); CORMORANT, Neotropic (151); ANHINGA (7); PELICAN, American White (11); PELICAN, Brown (60); BITTERN, American (2); BITTERN, Least (2); HERON, Great Blue (34); EGRET, Great (186); EGRET, Snowy (216); HERON, Little Blue (31); HERON, Tricolored (40); EGRET, Cattle (1881); HERON, Green (19); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (8); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (14); IBIS, White (167); IBIS, White-faced (36); IBIS, *Plegadis* (72); SPOONBILL, Roseate (50); VULTURE, Black (69); VULTURE, Turkey (110); OSPREY (4); KITE, White-tailed (2); EAGLE, Bald (2); HARRIER, Northern (1); HAWK, Sharp-shinned (1); HAWK, Cooper's (4); HAWK, Accipiter species (1); HAWK, Red-shouldered (9); HAWK, Broad-winged (6); HAWK, Swainson's (2); HAWK, White-tailed (4); HAWK, Red-tailed (6); CARACARA, Crested (12); KESTREL, American (3); MERLIN (1); RAIL, Clapper (52); GALLINULE, Purple (7); GALLINULE, Common (55); COOT, American (15); PLOVER, Black-bellied (8); PLOVER, Snowy (3); PLOVER, Wilson's (2); PLOVER, Semipalmated (7); PLOVER, Piping (1); KILLDEER (91); STILT, Black-necked (44); AVOCET, American (5);

SANDPIPER, Spotted (4); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (1); WILLET (18); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (4); SANDPIPER, Upland (3); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (3); SANDERLING (78); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (3); SANDPIPER, Western (7); SANDPIPER, Least (9); SANDPIPER, Peep species (18); SANDPIPER, Pectoral (1); SANDPIPER, Stilt (11); SANDPIPER, Buff-breasted (15); DOWITCHER, Long-billed (8); GULL, Laughing (907); GULL, Ring-billed (3); TERN, Least (11); TERN, Caspian (8); TERN, Black (4); TERN, Common (3); TERN, Forster's (303); TERN, Royal (122); SKIMMER, Black (95); PIGEON, Rock (211); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (17); DOVE, White-winged (162); DOVE, Mourning (448); DOVE, Inca (4); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (2); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (1); OWL, Great Horned (2); OWL, Barred (2); NIGHTHAWK, Common (5); SWIFT, Chimney (10); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (48); HUMMINGBIRD species (1); KINGFISHER, Belted (15); WOODPECKER, Red-headed (8); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (21); WOODPECKER, Downy (15); WOODPECKER, Pileated (4); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (2); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (42); FLYCATCHER, Yellow-bellied (1); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (4); FLYCATCHER, Traill's (2); FLYCATCHER, Least (4); FLYCATCHER, Empidonax (11); FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (3); KISKADEE, Great (2); KINGBIRD, Eastern (11); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (26); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (74); VIREO, White-eyed (38); VIREO, Bell's (cw); VIREO, Yellow-throated (2); VIREO, Blue-headed (cw); VIREO, Warbling (5); VIREO, Red-eyed (35); JAY, Blue (131); CROW, American (19); CROW, Fish (4); CROW, Species (6); MARTIN, Purple (1); SWALLOW, Tree (35); SWALLOW, N. Rough-winged (1); SWALLOW, Bank (7); SWALLOW, Cliff (2); SWALLOW, Barn (39); SWALLOW species (2); CHICKADEE, Carolina (24); TITMOUSE, Tufted (2); WREN, Carolina (15); WREN, House (2); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (65); BLUEBIRD, Eastern (27); THRUSH, Swainson's (1); ROBIN, American (8); CATBIRD, Gray (3); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (161); THRASHER, Brown (9); STARLING, European (661); OVENBIRD (3); WARBLER, Worm-eating (3); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (15); WARBLER, Golden-winged (2); WARBLER, Blue-winged (2); WARBLER, Black-and-white (21); WARBLER, Prothonotary (6); WARBLER, Tennessee (4); WARBLER, Mourning (1); WARBLER, Kentucky (4); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (10); WARBLER, Hooded (15); REDSTART, American (17); PARULA, Northern (4); WARBLER, Magnolia (1); WARBLER, Blackburnian (3); WARBLER, Yellow (6); WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (3); WARBLER, Pine (1); WARBLER, Yellow-throated (3); WARBLER, Prairie (1); WARBLER, Black-throated Green (4); WARBLER, Canada (15); WARBLER, Wilson's (1); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (1); SPARROW, Lark (1); SPARROW, Seaside (48); TANAGER, Summer (6); TANAGER, Scarlet (1); CARDINAL, Northern (79); GROSBEAK, GROSBEAK, Blue (41); BUNTING, Indigo (9); BUNTING, Painted (3); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (471); BLACKBIRD, Yellow-headed (1); GRACKLE, Common (1400); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (205); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (586); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (242); ORIOLE, Baltimore (9); SPARROW, House (41) TOTAL (11897); Number of species (175); Number of Observers (15); Number of Parties (9); Number of Party-Hours (194.69);

Participants: Mary Carter, Michael Cooper, Howard Davis, Linda Davis, Craig Geoffrey, Sherry Gibson, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Thomas Hellweg, Harrison Jordan, Denise Kelley, Gary Kelley, Michael Lester, Randy Lewis, Steve Mayes, John Whittle. *John A. Whittle*

Field Trip to Smith Point – 24 September 2016

Hawk watching is a different kind of birding. Instead of roaming around some forest or beach seeking out birds hidden in little tangles or scurrying over a mud flat, the birder just sits in one place and waits for the birds to come to them. It is not for everyone but, on the right day, it can be very rewarding and there is no better way to learn to identify raptors in flight than at a hawk watch. With this in mind, the Golden Triangle Audubon Society traveled to Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area for the annual Smith Point Hawk Watch.

Hawk watches are situated at strategic places that have particular geographic or topographic features that funnel migrating hawks through the area. This may be mountain passes that force hawks to fly through them to avoid having to fly over mountain peaks like Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania or coastal areas like Smith Point. Smith Point is a peninsula on the eastern part of Galveston Bay. Most raptors avoid flying over large bodies of open water so they fly along the coastline as long as possible. Along Galveston Bay, the birds follow the coast along the bay onto Smith Point where they suddenly find themselves out of land. At this point, the birds can either fly across the bay or turn around and head back the way they came. Until they make this decision, the raptors tend to mill around Smith Point allowing lots of opportunities for viewing!

Hawk watches can be boom or bust affairs depending on weather patterns but they generally start with Accipiters. Accipiters (Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks in our area), are bird hunting hawks that do not soar as much as our familiar Buteos. Because of this, they do not need to wait for the day to heat up and thermals to start forming, they can start moving first thing in the morning. This was certainly the case on this day as Sharp-shinned Hawks were evident right from the start and remained the most prominent hawk of the day. Larger Cooper's Hawks were much fewer in number on this date but a few were seen. A couple of Northern Harriers were also seen very early on. Harriers are known for flying low over marshes and can cause a great deal of confusion when they are soaring high overhead. In these atypical conditions, harriers can often be mistaken for Peregrine Falcons or other raptors. Luckily, these two were acting in a more "normal" harrier way and were easy to recognize.

Buteos, our typical soaring hawks, are usually the focus of the hawk watch. A small Buteo, the Broad-winged Hawk, is by far the most numerous migrant raptor at Smith Point and can move through by the thousands on the right day. Along with other Buteos like Red-tailed Hawks and Swainson's Hawks, Broad-wings generally do not start appearing until the sun is well up. As the sun heats the earth, thermals (rising columns of heated air) form that provide lift for soaring birds. Raptors take advantage of these thermals to gain altitude with little effort and thereby save a lot of energy during migration. These thermals usually do not start forming well until around 10:00 AM on a sunny day and on a cloudy, rainy day ... well, they do not really form at all creating a problem for the raptors that rely on them. Unfortunately for the Golden Triangle birders, the field trip day was one of those cloudy, rainy days

and soaring birds were hard to come by. A few Broad-wings were seen on the day but that was all.

Kites are another group of migrant raptors often seen at Smith Point. In fact, Mississippi Kites are one of the most common migrant raptors at Smith Point and several were seen on the field trip day. These were all young birds and, like the adults, will travel a long migration route that will take them all the way down to southern South America. Two other kite species were also located on the day Joseph Kennedy discovered a Swallow-tailed Kite just down the road from the hawk watch area and the Golden Triangle group quickly traveled to see it. These black and white fork-tailed raptors were, until recently, a very rare sight in southeast Texas but now seem to be making a comeback and are seen in small numbers as migrant and nesting birds in the area. On the hunt for that bird, the group discovered another kite – the White-tailed Kite. This species has a fairly limited range in the United States but is fairly common in this area. Both of these kite species perched in bare trees and cooperated well for the birders providing viewing and photographic opportunities.

But that was not all! The falcon family was represented on the day as there were Peregrine Falcons, a Merlin and American Kestrel present. Non-raptors are also enjoyed at Smith Point as migrants of all kinds pass through the area. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were seen along with several swallows. Magnificent Frigatebirds are always a birder favorite at Smith Point and several were seen on the day. The feeders on the tower buzzed with pugnacious Ruby-throated Hummingbirds all fighting for control of the nectar. Nearby Robbins Park provided looks at Semipalmated Plovers, American Oystercatcher and Willets. Throw in plenty of Brown Pelicans, Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns and you have a pretty complete day.

It was not a big day in terms of numbers of raptors seen and the group was eventually chased home by rain showers but it was still a successful trip for the Golden Triangle Audubon Society. Participating in tracking migrant raptors is important for conservation efforts and is also a great learning opportunity for birders. So next fall count on the group to be heading back to Smith Point for another chance at a great hawk watching experience!

The following species were recorded by the trip leaders:

Magnificent Frigatebird (5); Brown Pelican (20); Great Egret (2); Snowy Egret (1); White Ibis (50); Swallow-tailed Kite (1); White-tailed Kite (1); Mississippi Kite (14); Northern Harrier (2); Sharp-shinned Hawk (40); Cooper's Hawk (3); Broad-winged Hawk (10); American Oystercatcher (1); Semipalmated Plover (20); Killdeer (15); Willet (12); Laughing Gull (20); Forster's Tern (2); Royal Tern (9); Mourning Dove (2); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (25); Belted Kingfisher (1); American Kestrel (2); Merlin (1); Peregrine Falcon (2); Loggerhead Shrike (1); Blue Jay (4); Northern Rough-winged Swallow (1); Tree Swallow (10); Barn Swallow (15); Cliff/Cave Swallow (1); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (5); Northern Mockingbird (1); Northern Cardinal (2) Steve Mayes

Bird Sightings – September 2016

For this column, we review, looking for rare and very rare species, all credible eBird and other records for the Texas counties we have always covered – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine and Tyler. We also review, looking for very rare or vagrant species only, records for Chambers, Galveston (High Island and Bolivar only) and Liberty Counties in Texas, and Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes (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 sometimes a comment on the reason it is noteworthy other than being a rare species for the area.

Commentary: A very normal September. Once the migration got into stride, there were many "good" birding days, especially in the coastal woodlots. One Townsend's Warbler showed up, but unfortunately was seen for only one day. It is a few years now since a Prairie Warbler wintered in Jefferson County, but the one at Sabine Woods this month may stay. In the fall, migrants can remain for several days awaiting more favorable weather conditions for the Gulf crossing, but this bird has passed up a number of opportunities to set out for the Yucatan. There are a good number of passerine migrant species that migrate much further east in the fall than they do

in the spring, and are in the rare category when we see them here in the fall.

The hawk migration season, while not spectacular, has had several good days. As often happens, it seems that the vast majority of the Broad-winged Hawks bypassed Smith Point this year. Those birds from the western populations cannot be expected to funnel over Smith Point, as they are geographically positioned to pass further north and west. The numbers passing over Hazel Bazemore, near Corpus Christi have been good, so there is no concern about the overall population numbers. It appears that many of the winter resident raptors that we look forward to each year are late in arriving this year. Normally by the middle of September, there are numerous American Kestrels on wires along all the roads in Jefferson and Chambers Counties. This year, it was very close to the end of the month before any significant number were reported on eBird.

The fall migration count, documented elsewhere in this issue has raised some interesting questions about birds of the open country this year. We await reports over the next two months or so to determine if it was merely a quirk in the weather patterns or something more disturbing is occurring. West Jefferson County is heavily birded each late fall and early winter and we look forward to answers to our questions.

Seen in our Core Counties (listed above)

Green-winged Teal	Sep 28	JEF-TP (2) Cathy Sheeter (early)
Least Grebe	Sep 30	JEF-TP (1) HS (early)
	Sep 1-29+	JEF-TP (11) J&L Bryan, HS, JHH, JJW, JM, MC, SH
Wood Stork	Sep 17, 18	JEF-S China Rd (1) JAW, SH
Magnificent Frigatebird	Sep 4	JEF-SRSP (4) MC, TH (rare)
American Bittern	Sep 17	JEF-Aggie Dr (1) RL (early)
	Sep 17	JEF-S of TX73 (1) Gary Kelley
Reddish Egret	Sep 4	JEF-SRSP (2) MC, TH
Northern Harrier	Sep 11	JEF-SW (1) Nancy Price, Jane Wiewora
Bald Eagle	Sep 17	JEF-TP (1) JHH
	Sep 17	JEF-Salt Water Barrier (1) JAW, SH
Stilt Sandpiper	Sep 14	JEF-SRSP (3) Shellie Ellerbie
	Sep 17	JEF-TP (11) JHH
Groove-billed Ani	Sep 9-30	JEF-SW (1) Dennis Shepler, JHH, JM, JAW, MC
Bell's Vireo	Sep 13, 18	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW, MC, TH
Vermilion Flycatcher	Sep 25	JEF-SW (1) SM, TH, JAW
Great Kiskadee	Sep 17	JEF-TP (2) JHH
Wood Thrush	Sep 24	JEF-SW (1) Gene Prejean
	Sep 29	JEF-SW (1) JHH
Louisiana Waterthrush	Sep 12	JEF-SW (1) Dennis Shepler (late)
Golden-winged Warbler	Sep 17	JEF-TP (1) JHH
Swainson's Warbler	Sep 13	JEF-SW (1) JHH MC, SM, TH
Orange-cr. Warbler	Sep 30	JEF-SW (1) JHJ (early)
Mourning Warbler	Sep 17-28	JEF-SW (up to 3) Gary Binderim, Kris Cannon, Jeff Corcoran, JHH, MC, SM, TH
Black-thr. Blue Warbler	Sep 25	JEF-SW (1) Gary Binderim
	Sep 27	JEF-SW (1) JHH, Kris Cannon
	Sep 28	JEF-SW (1) Dennis Shepler, Cathy Sheeter, JHH, JM, MC

Prairie Warbler	Sep 30	JEF-SW (1) JHH
	Sep 17-25	JEF-SW (1) Michael Lester, Mary Ann Beauchemin, JW, JAW, TH
Townsend's Warbler	Sep 13	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW, MC, SM, TH
Scarlet Tanager	Sep 16	JEF-SW (1) JHH (rare in fall)
	Sep 17	JEF-Old Sabine Cemetery (1) SM (rare in fall)
	Sep 21	JEF-SW (1) JHH
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Sep 17	JEF-Old Port Arthur Yacht Basin (1) Linda and Howard Davis

Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

Swallow-tailed Kite	Sep 17	CHA-SPHW (1) David Hanson (late)
	Sep 24	CHA-Smith Point (1) Jason Bonilla, JHH, SM, JAW
Bald Eagle	Sep 25	CHA-FM1985 nr, Pear Orchard Rd (1) Donna Kelly
American Bittern	Sep 8	CHA-ANWR (1) Thomas Haase (early)
	Sep 16	CHA-ANWR (2) JAW (early)
Lsr. Black-backed Gull	Sep 10	Holly Beach (2) Paul Conover
Black-billed Cuckoo	Sep 16	GAL-Smith Oaks (1) Michael Lester
Bell's Vireo	Sep 4	CAM-LA82 (1) Paul Conover, Mark Meunier. David Muth

Abbreviations used: ANWR – Anahuac NWR; BF – Bolivar Flats; BTNP – Big Thicket National Preserve; CAM – Cameron Parish; CHA – Chambers County; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County; HS – Harlan Stewart; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; JHH – John Haynes; JJW – Jana and John Whittle; JM – John Mariani; MC – Michael Cooper; RL – Randy Lewis; SH – Sheila Hebert; SM – Steve Mayes, SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; TYL – Tyler County; WJC – West Jefferson Cou

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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>.