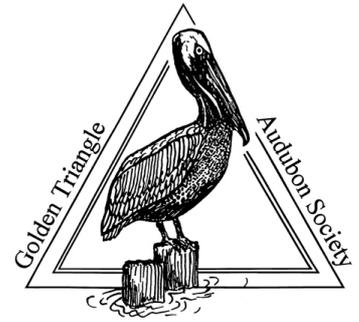


The Brown Pelican



The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 23 No. 10

October 2017

Membership Meeting
Thursday October 19, 2017 7:00 p.m.
Mid-Jefferson Extended Care Hospital
See page 3 for directions and information

Birds of Ecuador

Jana and John Whittle

Ecuador is a relatively small South American country of about 115,000 square miles, less than half the area of Texas, that sits on the west (Pacific) coast of South America south of Colombia and north of Peru. The capital, Quito, is at 9,350 feet in the volcanic Cordillera Real of the Andes, but the terrain drops down to the Pacific coast at Guayaquil in the west, and down to a series of Amazon feeder tributaries in the east. The country is named after the equator, which runs just north of Quito.

Ecuador has, despite its small area, among the most diverse avifauna anywhere. Mainland Ecuador has over 1,550 species, but only seven endemics as most species spill over into Colombia or Peru. (This does not include the Galapagos Islands, also part of Ecuador, that have an additional 30 endemics.) Notable among the bird species are a large number of hummingbirds and many tanagers. In addition there are "specialty" species such as the Cock-of-the-Rock and the Andean Condor.

The program will illustrate a selection of the birds on the eastern side of the Andes taken during a trip in February 2017 to the Tandayapa area, northwest of Quito and the higher altitude area around the Antisana volcano, southeast of Quito.

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 243

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 Society, P. O. Box 1292, 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.

Thursday October 19, 2017. Membership Meeting. See page 1 and page 3 for important information on the meeting venue.

Saturday October 21, 2017. Field Trip to Sabine Woods. 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.

October 22 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 a Western Wood-Pewee, which has been persuaded to call so its ID can be confirmed. There are always interesting birds at Sabine Woods! A Great Kiskadee has been in the area for at least a couple of months, although it is heard more often than it is seen.

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 16, 2017. Annual Meeting and Pot-luck Dinner. (But see page 3.) Bring your favorite bird photos. See page 1 for details.

Saturday November 18, 2017. 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 "expected" 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. Three years ago's trip found a Mountain Bluebird, which staying all winter and was visited by birders from all over the region.

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.



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

Our October and November Meeting Location

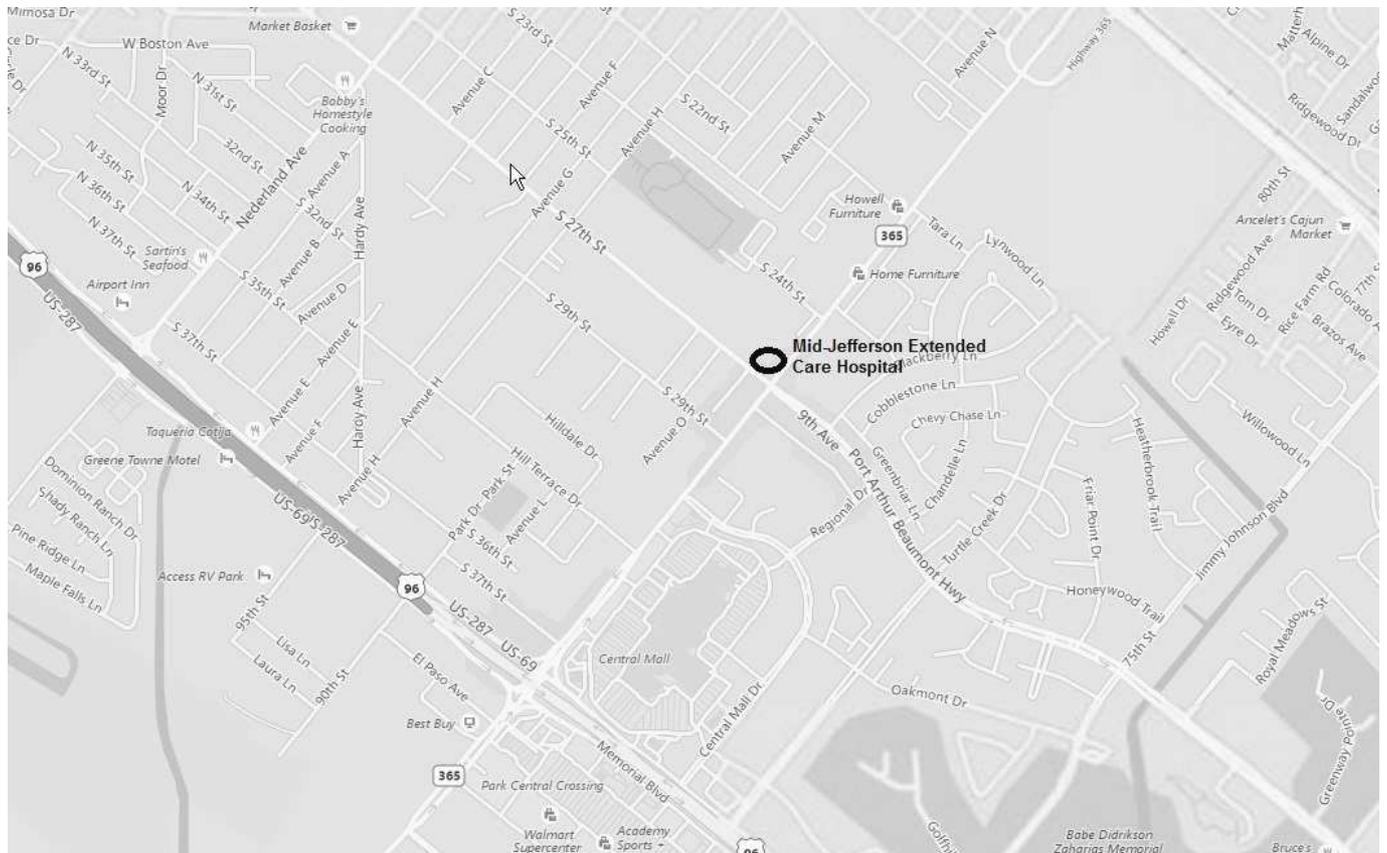
As many of you know, the Garden Center was damaged by water in Hurricane Harvey, and will not be available for our use for the October or November meetings and possibly for the first few meetings in 2018.

We are deeply grateful to Mark and Julie Pittman Rice, CEO and owners of Mid-Jefferson Extended Care Hospital for making available a meeting room in the Hospital for our October and November meetings.

We will need to make some minimal adjustment to our normal meeting format. We will be able to have refreshments, probably in a separate room across the hall, but you may have to balance your plate on your knee. There will not be a kitchen, so we will need to limit our refreshments to items that do not require a kitchen for dish clean up etc.

The Hospital is at 2600 FM365 in Nederland. It is on the corner of FM365 and 27th Street in Nederland. See map below.

The meeting room is best reached by entering through the side entrance which is on 27th Street, across from the CVS Pharmacy. The side parking lot is limited in size, so you may have to park in the main lot on FM365, which has plenty of spaces.



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 2018 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.

Electronic Delivery of the *Brown Pelican*

We currently mail most copies of the Brown Pelican to members by first class mail. While we certainly do not want to cut off any members who are unable to receive a copy electronically, we encourage you, if you are able, to receive your copy as a pdf attachment to an email. This way, you can save us both expense and volunteer time. To do this please send an email to johnawhittle@aol.com from the email address you want us to use. Be sure to include your name so we can find you in our membership records!

Fall Migration Count -- 16 September 2017

(This is an expanded version of the report in the printed version of the October Brown Pelican. The detailed spreadsheet for the 2017 count and the historical summary will be posted on the Golden Triangle Audubon as soon as possible.)

While there have been other falls with "unusual" weather events, this will actually be the first time we have conducted a fall count after the event. In 2005, we completed the count well before Hurricane Rita, which was, for the Gulf coast at least, unusually late in the season. In 2008, Hurricane Ike made it impossible to conduct a count at all. It was therefore interesting to find that neither the number of species nor the number of individual birds counted was grossly out of the normal. We would note that the number of individual birds was appreciably below the long term average, and we refer to that below

The weather event this year was a hurricane (Harvey) that had decayed into a tropical storm, but stalled over the upper Texas coast for an unprecedented length of time, resulting in never-before-seen rainfall totals in excess of 35 inches over a five or six day period over the entire county, with many areas receiving over 50 inches. However, the usual problems in using bird count data to gain insights into bird population changes, short or long term, are still present. These are probably best expressed as a matter of too many variables. Even before migrant populations reach our local area, their movements may have been influenced by the weather that prevailed on their breeding grounds. Not so much the weather itself, but the effect of the weather on food availability and quantity. In poor conditions, breeding fails or is not even attempted, and particularly in the fall, that can make a large difference in the numbers of that species present. Differences between species make generalizations difficult and very approximate, but it is generally assumed that in Passerine species, approximately 75 or 80 percent of the birds seen in the fall are young of the year. These young birds, being inexperienced in life skills, especially finding food and evading predators, experience a very high mortality during their first winter. Some estimates suggest only ten percent of the young of some species survive their first winter. Spring populations, therefore, are subject to less fluctuation, because a much greater fraction of them are the more experience adult birds. Much more than in spring migration, where the urge to reach the breeding areas is strong, fall migration may be delayed if food resources are plentiful or unusually favorable weather prevails, the two often related, in the areas further north.

For birds that winter in our local area, the availability of food is of critical importance, and hurricanes and less serious weather events can affect that availability in subtle ways. Seeds can be stripped off grasses, bushes and trees by wind, or washed away by water before they are ripe. Insect and rodent populations can be affected in a myriad of ways. Quite frankly, not surviving the flooding seems to be likely to have more effect on these food sources than the effects of even hurricane force winds. We remarked last fall about the apparent low numbers of some of the characteristic species of the open areas of west Jefferson County. This was necessarily anecdotal, because the number of variables is such that one can never separate out the effects of any one variable. In west Jefferson County this year, the number of Northern Mockingbirds, while low overall, seemed to have returned to near normal outside of cities, after a very low count last year. But the number of Red-winged Blackbirds (and other "blackbirds" in the broadest sense) was extremely low again. We suspect that one important factor in the case of the blackbirds may be what appears to be a relatively small acreage of rice this year in the areas we are able to survey. Blackbirds in the fall are attracted to harvested rice areas where there are plentiful amounts of rice seed that fell to the surface during harvesting. There may well be other less obvious factors in play.

We must always remember that the area of our count, Jefferson County, is relatively small. If the food resources in the county are less plentiful for some localized reason, birds do not find any difficulty in moving to neighboring areas to find more plentiful supplies. It appears to us that there are larger acreages of rice in Chambers County, and more normal numbers of blackbirds in these areas. Blackbirds are mostly residents, but the more migratory species, including most of the species that are in our area only during the non-breeding ("winter" but actually fall, winter and early spring) find no physical difficulty in traversing long distances, and likely will do so if food resources are critically low where they are. Wintering site fidelity – the phenomenon where individual birds return to the exact same location in successive winters – varies from species to species, and there are many examples of complete fidelity, but equally, there are many species that are somewhat or extensively nomadic in winter. What is never really known is whether failure to return one year results from mortality or from a "conscious" decision to winter somewhere else. But most of what we can reasonably hypothesize over applies to wintering species more than to species that merely migrate through.

We have focused on anecdotal evidence of the populations in one area of the county. A look at the county as a whole produces a slightly different picture. Although there are variations, the county-wide totals are not nearly as different from the long terms averages as are the totals in one area of the county for the few species we remarked on above. The resident species that did not find the plentiful food in west Jefferson County may well have moved elsewhere within the county. We are able to survey only a relatively small fraction of the area of the county, principally because of access issues, and we may be missing some trends as a result.

Looking at the individual birds and the numbers of them is always interesting, but we will mention only those that stand out. We have been watching the Least Grebes in Cattail Marsh in Beaumont for a good while now. There were some concerns when they were not in exactly the same places as usual after Harvey, but by count day, they were back as usual. Harvey's rains obviously filled the cells at Cattail to overflowing, and it took some time to restore normal levels. The species is interesting in that they seem to breed continuously, and we are seeing young birds every month. The ones in Cattail Marsh are becoming more tolerant of humans than most of their species, and they are among the easiest of the species to see well.

One Wood Stork remained at the usual roost on Highway 90 just inside the Jefferson County line west of Nome. Double-crested Cormorants have generally not arrived by count time, but this year, one was observed and carefully identified in an unlikely place – a relatively small and probably not very deep pond on South China Road.

We were not able to access Sea Rim State Park this year – it was still closed after Harvey -- so numbers of the "true" shorebirds were all low. Brown Pelican numbers were low. No American White Pelicans were seen. Up until 2007, we almost always found at least one group of them, but only occasionally since then.

For the most part, heron numbers were normal. Great Egrets were particularly plentiful, possibly because they were unusually concentrated in various wet areas that were very accessible. Almost 3500 Cattle Egrets was a new high – there were large flocks everywhere in the western part of the county. They were mostly not associated with cattle but were obviously finding a plentiful diet of insects in the recently dried out fields suggesting that the water may have activated previously dormant eggs.

Eight Ospreys, which were spread over the southern half of the county, was a new high, so presumably fish were readily available. White-tailed Kites were more plentiful in the early years of this count than in the past few years, so finding four was encouraging. One Bald Eagle was reported as coming in to Cattail Marsh late in the date, so hopefully, we will have a nesting pair again this winter. The absence of any Swainson's Hawks for the first time since 2002 was both surprising and perhaps a little disturbing, as it looked as if the species was establishing (or reestablishing) in Jefferson County. A White-tailed Hawk following four last year was encouraging. The species' range seems to be expanding eastwards ever so slowly. There is country wide concern over an apparent reduction in American Kestrel numbers passing through Hawk Watch sites. Count day falls into time period where Kestrel migration is just getting under way, and minor disruptions or delays will make a difference locally. Nevertheless, in the early days of the count in the second half of the 1990s double digit numbers were routine whereas one or two in the whole county has become the norm. We recorded the first Peregrine Falcon since 2010.

Solitary Sandpipers were also recorded in larger numbers in the late 1990s, but not 2014-16, so it was nice to find two in separate areas this year. On the negative side, we missed Western Sandpiper for the first time ever, but this was likely explained by the lack of access to Sea Rim Park. The species is very much a shoreline dweller, and Least Sandpipers, more likely to be found in any mid-delta area in the county, were in good numbers. Dunlins are just arriving by count time, so six in Cattail Marsh, the first on the count since 2010 was very welcome. On the other hand, Stilt Sandpipers were nowhere to be found this year.

Despite no access to Sea Rim, Laughing Gull numbers were very healthy. All tern species that can normally be found in the county were present, including a Common Tern and a Sandwich Tern, although Black Skimmers were not for the first time since the first count in 1996.

The number of White-winged Doves at 78 was the lowest since 2006, perhaps indicating the population has peaked, or possibly some disruption as a result of the rainfall. Mourning Dove numbers at 139 were an all-time low for the count. We will need to watch over the next few months to determine if there is some longer term trend, or perhaps again an as yet undetermined effect of the recent weather event. The complete absence of Inca Doves was the first miss in the history of the count. Eurasian Collared-Doves numbers were in line with recent counts, so whatever the cause, it did not affect all dove species.

Red-headed Woodpeckers were missed for the first time in many years, perhaps reflecting a somewhat reduced observer coverage of Beaumont, partly out of respect to those struggling to clean out damaged houses. Count day is about three weeks prior to the arrival of the first migrant Northern Flickers, so finding two was interesting. There are a very few Flickers around all summer, and it is not clear where the two we found were residents or arriving migrants.

Passerine migrant numbers in fall counts are very variable, and highly dependent on weather conditions that might bring an influx from the north and/or dissuade many from leaving for the long southbound Gulf crossing. Comments on individual species are generally not indicated here, unless species is unusually early or late, or unusually numerous. Flycatchers were not particularly numerous. Vireos were few. *Catharus* thrushes are very scarce in the fall, and we did not find any. A large flock of more than 30 American Robins was observed in Beaumont, boosting that total. Among the warblers, there were good numbers of Common Yellowthroats and Yellow Warblers. This is building up to be a very good year for Wilson's Warbler, with ten at Sabine Woods, and there have been good numbers most days this fall.

Species seen:

WHISTLING-DUCK, Black-bellied (112); WHISTLING-DUCK, Fulvous (37); DUCK, Wood (5); DUCK, Mottled (27); TEAL, Blue-winged (232); TEAL, Green-winged (5); GREBE, Least (6); GREBE, Pied-billed (14); STORK, Wood (1); CORMORANT, Neotropic (137); CORMORANT, Double-crested (1); CORMORANT, Species (40); ANHINGA (11); PELICAN, Brown (21); BITTERN, Least (1); HERON, Great Blue (34); EGRET, Great (266); EGRET, Snowy (197); HERON, Little Blue (26); HERON, Tricolored (71); EGRET, Reddish (2); EGRET, Cattle (3461); HERON, Green (10); NIGHT-HERON, Black-crowned (33); NIGHT-HERON, Yellow-crowned (10); IBIS, White (415); IBIS, White-faced (17); IBIS, Plegadis (88); SPOONBILL, Roseate (75); VULTURE, Black (37); VULTURE, Turkey (62); OSPREY (8); KITE, White-tailed (4); KITE, Mississippi (1); EAGLE, Bald (1); HARRIER, Northern (2); HAWK, Cooper's (5); HAWK, Accipiter species (1); HAWK, Red-shouldered (10); HAWK, Broad-winged (2); HAWK, White-tailed (1); HAWK, Red-tailed (4); CARACARA, Crested (6); KESTREL, American (2); MERLIN (2); FALCON, Peregrine (1); RAIL, Clapper (44); RAIL, King (2); GALLINULE, Purple (4); GALLINULE, Common (36); COOT, American (8); PLOVER, Black-bellied (8); PLOVER, Snowy (13); PLOVER, Semipalmated (7); PLOVER, Piping (7); KILLDEER (155); STILT, Black-necked (49); AVOCET, American (4); SANDPIPER, Spotted (10); SANDPIPER, Solitary (2); YELLOWLEGS, Greater (10); WILLET (18); YELLOWLEGS, Lesser (11); YELLOWLEGS, species (2); TURNSTONE, Ruddy (6); SANDERLING (55); SANDPIPER, Semipalmated (2); SANDPIPER, Least (80); SANDPIPER, Peep species (8); SANDPIPER, Pectoral (6); DUNLIN (6); DOWITCHER, Short-billed (1); DOWITCHER, Long-billed (11); GULL, Laughing (1454); GULL, Ring-billed (2); TERN, Least (2); TERN, Gull-billed (7); TERN, Caspian (1); TERN, Black (4); TERN, Common (1); TERN, Forster's (66); TERN, Royal (8); TERN, Sandwich (1); PIGEON, Rock (134); COLLARED-DOVE, Eurasian (32); DOVE, White-winged (78); DOVE, Mourning (139); CUCKOO, Yellow-billed (1); SCREECH-OWL, Eastern (1); OWL, Great Horned (2); OWL, Barred (3); WILL'S-WIDOW, Chuck- (2); SWIFT, Chimney (2); HUMMINGBIRD, Ruby-throated (16); KINGFISHER, Belted (10); WOODPECKER, Red-bellied (10); WOODPECKER, Downy (10); FLICKER, Northern (2); WOODPECKER, Pileated (1); FLYCATCHER, Olive-sided (1); WOOD-PEWEE, Eastern (6); FLYCATCHER, Acadian (1); FLYCATCHER, Traill's (3); FLYCATCHER, *Empidonax* (3); FLYCATCHER, Great Crested (3); KISKADEE, Great (2); KINGBIRD, Eastern (30); FLYCATCHER, Scissor-tailed (32); SHRIKE, Loggerhead (57); VIREO, White-eyed (17); VIREO, Red-eyed (3); JAY, Blue (99); CROW, American (4); CROW, Fish (4); SWALLOW, Tree (21); SWALLOW, N. Rough-winged (27); SWALLOW, Cliff (1); SWALLOW, Cave (3); SWALLOW, Cliff/Cave (1); SWALLOW, Barn (20); CHICKADEE, Carolina (7); WREN, Carolina (5); GNATCATCHER, Blue-gray (51); KINGLET, Ruby-crowned (1); ROBIN, American (38); CATBIRD, Gray (1); MOCKINGBIRD, Northern (126); THRASHER, Brown (5); STARLING, European (581); WATERTHRUSH, Northern (2); WARBLER, Blue-winged (1); WARBLER, Black-and-white (5); WARBLER, Mourning (3); YELLOWTHROAT, Common (14); REDSTART, American (2); PARULA, Northern (2); WARBLER, Yellow (16); WARBLER, Chestnut-sided (1); WARBLER, Pine (1); WARBLER, Canada (1); WARBLER, Wilson's (10); CHAT, Yellow-breasted (1); SPARROW, Lark (3); SPARROW, Seaside (28); CARDINAL, Northern (33); GROSBEAK, Blue (23); BUNTING, Indigo (4); BUNTING, Painted (8); BLACKBIRD, Red-winged (74); GRACKLE, Common (214); GRACKLE, Boat-tailed (93); GRACKLE, Great-tailed (399); COWBIRD, Brown-headed (244); ORIOLE, Orchard (5); ORIOLE, Baltimore (1); SPARROW, House (40); TOTAL (10439); Number of species (151); Number of Observers (14); Number of Parties (7); Number of Party-Hours (54.6); Party hours on foot (10.75); Miles on foot (1.6); Party-hours by automobile (43.85); Miles by automobile (584.7); Party-hours stationary/feeder watching (not incld in totals) (2.07)

John A. Whittle

Field Trip to Smith Point – 23 September 2017

A fall trip to the Smith Point Hawk Watch is a fall tradition for the Golden Triangle Audubon Society but, lately, it has not necessarily been a great one. The hawk watch is always a gamble. Because field trip dates must be set well in advance it is impossible to know if the trip will be on a good day or a bad day. Hawk migration is heavily weather influenced with most hawks in the fall arriving in Smith Point a day or two after a frontal passage. If your field trip is not taking place on a day like that, you might not see very many hawks. Such has been the case for field trips to Smith Point in recent years. The weather conditions have not been favorable and consequently, the numbers of migrating hawks have been few. Luckily, the group got the day right this year!

It was obvious fairly early that it might be a good day with a sudden explosion of Mississippi Kites! Mississippi Kites are usually one of the more numerous raptors during the fall at Smith Point so it is not too surprising that we would get some but we were very gratified by the numbers. The kites were likely roosting overnight in the oak mottes at Smith Point or somewhere else nearby and appeared just as thermals started to form in the morning wheeling over the hawk tower. Mississippi Kites prey mostly on large insects like cicadas and dragonflies but these birds were not in a dining mood and were looking to head south though, like many raptors, they were reluctant to fly over the open waters of East Bay and preferred to hug the shoreline.

Accipiters were also seen on the day though not in large numbers. Cooper's Hawks were by far the most numerous of these bird-eating hawks seen as they flapped and glided their way across the point.

Other raptors were spotted from the hawk tower that day either by the group or by the professional hawk watcher employed at the site. A fish-eating Osprey put in an appearance as did a young Red-shouldered Hawk and a larger Red-tailed Hawk. Small American Kestrels were seen as well. These colorful little falcons are our smallest diurnal raptors are usually abundant in the area as migrants and wintering birds. Other falcons reported on the day included Merlin and a Peregrine Falcon. One of the highlights of the day was a bird almost hidden in the first flock of Mississippi Kites – a Swallow-tailed Kite. With careful observation, the black and white raptor with the obvious forked tail stood out like a sore thumb and the birders all got to admire this beautiful, graceful raptor.

Hawks are not the only migrants that move through Smith Point. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were the most obvious as these tiny insectivores came through in good numbers. A Baltimore Oriole or two also were kind enough to perch up for easy observation by the assembled birders. A small group of Blue Grosbeaks perched in a bush while Barn and Bank Swallows zipped overhead. Several warblers visited the drip that is visible from the tower including Black and white, Nashville, Yellow and Yellow-throated Warblers. The nearby patches of woods contributed still more birds including Barn Owl, White-eyed Vireo, American Redstart and Warbling Vireo.

The most numerous raptor passing through Smith Point is the Broad-winged Hawk. This is a small hawk that is related to the more familiar and much larger Red-tailed Hawk. They eat small rodents and birds and do nest in our area as well though they are still perhaps not as familiar as the local Red-tails and Red-shouldered Hawks. The bulk of the Broad-wings we see however are in migration when many thousands of hawks may pass through our area. Broad-wings often migrate in flocks that may number in the hundreds or even thousands as they wait for fall fronts to provide favorable winds for the trip south. The Broad-wings will eventually end up in South America but before they do the bulk of the population passes through Texas. On this day there did not seem to be a particular reason for large numbers of Broad-wings to be passing through (no frontal passage) but no one seemed to tell the hawks! Kettles of Broad-wings started to appear in the mid-morning and there were birds visible most of the day. Some of the flocks consisted of more than a hundred birds and allowed good study of the flight characteristics and field marks of these raptors. That is one of the most valuable things about a place like Smith Point – the ability to study multiple hawks for minutes at a time and get really familiar with them.

The hundreds of migrating Broad-wings was certainly a welcome change from trips in recent years where hawks were hard to come by. But those are the chances you must take when planning a field trip to the hawk watch. The good news is that birders in our area do not have to wait for a field trip to visit Smith Point again. Just wait for a frontal passage in late September or early October and head for the hawk tower! You might just get a great show like the Golden Triangle birders did on our trip!

The following list includes total from field trip leaders and the official hawk watch counter:

Neotropic Cormorant (6); Anhinga (2); Brown Pelican (20); Great Blue Heron (1); Great Egret (2); Snowy Egret (2); Cattle Egret (10); White Ibis (15); Black Vulture (10); Turkey Vulture (10); Osprey (1); Swallow-tailed Kite (1); Mississippi Kite (303); Sharp-shinned Hawk (12); Cooper's Hawk (30); Northern Harrier (2); Red-shouldered Hawk (1); Broad-winged Hawk (2012); Red-tailed Hawk (3); Swainson's Hawk (3); Spotted Sandpiper (1); Laughing Gull (20); Forster's Tern (15); White-winged Dove (2); Barn Owl (1); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (25); Red-bellied Woodpecker (1); Downy Woodpecker (1); American Kestrel (5); Peregrine Falcon (1); Merlin (4); Eastern Wood-Pewee (2); Acadian Flycatcher (1); "Traill's" Flycatcher (1); Least Flycatcher (1); Empidonax sp. (1); Great Crested Flycatcher (1); White-eyed Vireo (2); Warbling Vireo (1); Blue Jay (5); Northern Rough-winged Swallow (5); Tree Swallow (10); Bank Swallow (5); Barn Swallow (20); Carolina Chickadee (2); Carolina Wren (1); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (20); Brown Thrasher (1); Northern Mockingbird (3); Black and White Warbler (3); Nashville Warbler (1); American Redstart (2); Yellow Warbler (2); Yellow-throated Warbler (1); Canada Warbler (1); Northern Cardinal (2); Blue Grosbeak (3); Baltimore Oriole (2)

Steve Mays

Bird Sightings – September 2017

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 Peninsula 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)

Commentary: The weather associated with Hurricane Harvey essentially prevented birding during the last few days of August, and the recovery and access difficulties in its aftermath kept most birders preoccupied with other things until well into September. Locally, a rare fall Blackpoll Warbler at Sabine Woods provided excitement on September 12, and a Western Wood-Pewee, identity confirmed by its call, was the star attraction towards the end of the month. A Black-throated Gray Warbler put in a very brief appearance on September 7.

Seen in our Core Counties (listed above)

Least Grebe	Sep 16-21	JEF-TP (up to 6) HS, JHH, Kent Warner
White-tailed Hawk	Sep 15	JEF-WJC (1) JAW
	Sep 16	JEF-WJC (1) SH, JAW
Black-chinned Humm.	Sep 30	SAB—Pleasure Bend Dr (1) Darrell Lee
Buff-bellied Humm'bird	Sep 19	ORA-Orangefield (2) Denise and Gary Kelley
Western Wood-Pewee	Sep 24-28	JEF-SW (1) Steve Mayes et al.
Say's Phoebe	Sep 23-24	JEF-McFaddin NWR entrance (1) Tony Frank, multiple obs
Vermilion Flycatcher	Sep 30	HAI-Old Sour Lake Rd (1) Ryan Shaw
Great Kiskadee	Sep 8-24	JEF-SW (1) multiple observers
Eastern Kingbird	Sep 30	JEF-Sabine Pass (1) SM
Blue-headed Vireo	Sep 10	JEF-SW (1) SM
	Sep 13	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Sep 15	JEF-SW (1) MC, JHH
	Sep 16	JEF-SW (1) Byron Stone, Randy Pinkston
Magnolia Warbler	Sep 8	JEF-SW (2) JHH et al; sl. early
	Sep 9	JEF-SW (1) Michelle Rometry, SM, MC, TH
Blackpoll Warbler	Sep 12	JEF-SW (1) JHH, JAW, Sandy Dillard, Bill Eisele, J & L Bryan
Palm Warbler	Sep 30	JEF-Pilot Stn Rd (1) Carl Poldrack
Black-thr. Gray Warbler	Sep 7	JEF_SW (1) MC, JH, Ashley Fuselier
Chipping Sparrow	Sep 8	JEF-SW (1) JHH
	Sep 10	JEF-SW (1) SM
White-throated Sparrow	Sep 22	SAB-Hemphill (1) David Bell

Nearby Counties (very rare species only)

Black Skimmer	Sep 1	CAL-Southeast Sulphur (1) Tad Guidry
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Harris Hawk	Sep 5, 30	CHA-Smith Pt Hawk Watch (1) Bob Baez et al.
White-tailed Hawk	Sep 29	CHA-FM1941 near TX124 (1) JAW (adult)
Snowy Plover	Sep 29-30	CHA-Smith Pt Robbins Park (1) D. Sarkozi
White-rumped Sandpiper	Sep 30	CAM-Hackberry Ridge (1) Van Remsen, Paul Conover
Yellow Rail	Sep 24	CHA-ANWR (1) Carl Poldrack
Franklin's Gull	Sep 16	CAM-Holly Beach (1) Paul Conover, Van Remsen
Groove-billed Ani	Aug 31	GAL-Gav. Is. SP/13-mile Rd (1) Kyle O'Haver, Duke Liebler
Eastern Phoebe	Sep 30	CAM-Peveto Wds (1) E. Johnson
Western Kingbird	Sep 7	CAM-Peveto Wds (1) Tom Pollock
Bell's Vireo	Sep 4	CAM-Peveto Wds (1) Paul Conover
	Sep 20	CAM-Peveto Woods (1) Jpdy Shugart
American Crow	Sep 23	CHA-FM562 (2) SM, JJW
Cerulean Warbler	Sep 29	CHA-Smith Pt Hawk Watch (1) Teresa Connell, Gary Olson
Townsend's Warbler	Sep 16	CAM-Peveto Wds (1) David Booth, Carroe Chrisco

Abbreviations used: ANWR – Anahuac NWR; BF – Bolivar Flats; BTNP – Big Thicket National Preserve; CAL – Calcasieu Parish; 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; LIB – Liberty County; MC – Michael Cooper; NEDR – Nederland; ORA – Orange County; PI – Pleasure Is, Port Arthur; RL – Randy Lewis; SAB – Sabine County; SH – Sheila Hebert; SM – Steve Mayes, SRSP – Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TH – Thomas Hellweg; TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; TXPT – Texas Point NWR; TYL – Tyler County; WJC – West Jefferson County

Sabine Woods Work Day – 30 September 2017

We held a very successful Work Day at Sabine Woods on Saturday September 30. All needed maintenance was accomplished by the 20 volunteers participating and several others who worked in advance of the Work Day itself. The meadow areas are now all mowed, the large tree that came down across a trail in Harvey was cut up and removed. Routine trail maintenance was accomplished and a myriad of smaller tasks completed. Our contractor has completed brush hogging the northern areas of the sanctuary, so we are in good shape, and our next Work Day will not be until early spring.

There were a reasonable number of migrants around – we heard there were probably 10 or 11 warbler species. A male Vermilion Flycatcher, not particularly rare in the area, but

unusual in the Woods themselves, was seen by a lucky few. A Chuck-will's-widow was found perching on a low branch with an unobstructed line of sight for the photographers, something that does not happen often.

Volunteers this time were: Andy Allen, Laurie Baker, Michael Cooper, Howard Davis, Ashley Fuselier, Craig Geoffroy, Cathy Hay, John Haynes, Sheila Hebert, Denise and Gary Kelley, Steve Mayes, Sally and Chuck Moffet, Dana Nelson, Michelle Rometry, Christine Sliva, Harlan Stewart, Carolyn and Bill Worsham. We sincerely thank each and every one of them.

*John A. Whittle
Manager, Sabine Woods*

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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>.