The Brown Pelican

The Newsletter of the Golden Triangle Audubon Society

Vol. 32 No 9 September 2026

Membership Meeting
Thursday September 24, 2026 7:00 p.m.
Garden Center, Tyrrell Park, Beaumont

Title: Herps, Odes and Birds

Troy Hibbitts

Troy has a Master's Degree in Biology and has worked as a High School Science Teacher for 31 years. Now retired, he splits his time between personal outdoor activities and guiding birders, both individually and as a consultant with Birding Texas and Beyond. His love of the outdoors began at a very young age, growing up in a household where his father had similar credentials. Troy (and his family's) initial interests were in herpetology, but birds were always part of the equation. Eventually, this passion grew to include Dragonflies, Butterflies, Cacti, and many diverse other interests.

Troy's enthusiasm for the natural world is contagious. He has birded in all 254 counties of Texas, a testament to both his dedication and his deep connection to the state's diverse habitats. He also serves as an eBird reviewer for six counties in Southwest Texas, supporting data quality and helping birders across the region contribute meaningful observations.

In addition to his birding expertise, Troy is deeply knowledgeable about reptiles, amphibians, dragonflies and damselflies, butterflies, scorpions, and regional mammals

We plan to have the doors open at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will start at 7:00 p.m.

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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, PO. Box 1292, Nederland, Texas 77627-1292
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Calendar of Events

Important Note: Field Trip notices published here are subject to last minute changes. Changes will always be posted on the web site at www.goldentriangleaudubon.org.

Future Programs and Field Trips. Always check the website goldentriangleaudubon.org for possible changes.

Thursday September 24 , 2026. Membership Meeting. Further details on page 1. Note that this membership Meeting s one week later than usual.

Directions to Tyrrell Park
From the South
Go "north" on US69/96/287 around the south side of Beaumont. Take Highway 124 west (left) towards Fannett
At the first light, turn left onto Tyrrell Park Road and go about 3/4 mile.
Turn left into the park through the arch. The Garden Center is on the left. For Cattail Marsh, continue ahead and proceed about two-thirds of the way round the main loop and into the well-marked Cattail Marsh parking area.

From IH10
Exit at Walden Road on the west side of Beaumont and turn south (right) on Walden Road. At the light at Highway 124, go straight ahead on Tyrrell Park Road and then as above.

Saturday September 26, 2026. Field Trip to Smith Point Hawkwatch.

.Note that again this month, our Field Trip will be one week later than usual so as to be nearer the date when Broad-winged Hawk migration has peaked in recent years.

To reach the Smith Point Hawk- watch site from Winnie, take Highway 124 south towards High Island. After 12 miles, turn right on FM1985 and follow it about 14 1/2 miles until it meets FM562. Follow FM562 14 miles to Smith Point. Continue straight until almost reaching the bay, and turn left, bearing left again to the parking area next to the Hawkwatch Tower on the Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area. It takes at least 90 minutes from the Golden Triangle to reach the site, more if you stop to bird

This Field Trip is much more a come and go as you wish hawk identification is always available on the tower during Hawk Watch season!

Our leaders will be there from about 8:30 a.m. on September 26. Hopefully, this will be close to a peak in this year's Broad-winged Hawk migration, but there will always be some hawks. Accipiters, especially Sharp-shinned Hawks, tend to pass over Smith Point early in the morning, often concentrated in the 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. time period, while the Broad-winged Hawks tend to come later in the morning, rarely before 10:00 a.m. Any day from mid-September through mid or late October should produce a good number of migrating hawks.

Our leaders may lead a group into the nearby woods looking for migrants, but you may stay on the tower if you wish. Mosquitoes are not normally a problem on the tower. Availability of food and fuel is essentially non-existent in Smith Point, so bring your lunch!

Golden Triangle Audubon Facebook

Join us on Facebook! There is a Golden Triangle Audubon group on Facebook, moderated by Jana Whittle and John Mariani. Our aim is to provide a space for people around the Golden Triangle to share pictures, sightings, and other information about birds, other nature, and local birding sites and habitats. All levels of pictures are welcome, especially of less common birds. If you are looking for help with identification, please include the location and date of the picture, as both are important in narrowing the possibilities. Send your contribution through a Facebook message or an email to gtaudubon@aol.com

The peak of Broad-winged Hawk migration has tended to be later than September 24 to 26 and sometimes large numbers of Broad-wings have passed through in the first few days of October.

The days immediately following a cold front usually have a north wind, and more migrating hawks of all species pass through on those days.

Previous years' results are at http://hawkcount.org, so you can do your own analysis! The exact peak for hawks

probably depends more on the weather on the migration path from Pennsylvania down to east Texas, and particularly on the two or three days after the passage of a cold front. However, predicting is very difficult as there are relatively few Hawk Watches between Pennsylvania and Texas to let us know where the *en route* hawks have paused. Almost all migratory hawks over Smith Point come from areas north of Pennsylvania. Broad-wings breed over almost all of the eastern half of the United States, including the Golden Triangle and the southern tier of Canada, even as far west as British Columbia, but those from some of the western parts of the range tend to pass over the narrow strip of land between Lake Huron and Lake Erie and thus over the Detroit area. These birds continue south and join up with the eastern birds as they approach Corpus Christi.

For more information, contact our Field Trip Chair Steve Mayes (gtaudubon@aol.com).

Saturday October 3, 2026. Sabine Woods Work Day. (Tentative date). We plan to do our usual fall routine maintenance. We will be there from about 7:30 a.m. Normally, we work until about noon.

We will supply cold water and soft drinks and hope to be able to provide sandwiches for lunch.

Brush-hogging of the open areas may be accomplished before then but as usual, the sides of the trails will need attention,

We have a limited number of hand tools but if you have loppers or clippers, please bring them. We may need a chain saw, but probably only one. Bring insect repellent!

For more details, contact John Whittle at gtaudubon@aol.com

Saturday October 10, 2026. Jefferson County Fall Migration Count. Contact John Whittle at gtaudubon@aol.com for details or to volunteer to help. Since 1995, we have conducted this count on the third Saturday in September. In recent years, International Migratory Bird Day has become firmly established as the second Saturday in October, and we have decided to adopt this day for our fall count. No one day can cover more than a a portion of passerine fall migration. When we started in 1995, and for many years thereafter, eBird did not exist, and our migration count was the only published count for local locations. Now, eBird has made available counts for most weekend days in the fall. The eBird reports do tend to be concentrated on hotspots, but increasingly, birders are reporting on other locations.

Thursday October 15. 2026. Membership Meeting. Details in next month's Brown Pelican

Saturday October 17, 2026. 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, and no gasoline may not be available.

October 17 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. There are always interesting birds at Sabine Woods! Birding Sabine Woods is relatively easy walking.

Thursday November 19, 2026 Annual Meeting and Elections

The Annual Meeting of Golden Triangle Audubon Society will take place on November 19, 2026 in the Garden Center, Tyrrell Park. At this meeting, we will hold elections for all Officers and all At-Large Board positions. To nominate someone for any position contact, the chair of the Nominating Committee. Steve Mayes. Please in the first instance email him at gtaudubon@aol.com. Nominations from the floor will be in order but must be accompanied by affirmation, either orally at the meeting, or in writing, that the candidate is willing to serve.

We are also always seeking contributions to the running of the Society in the form of new volunteers, as we must have new blood. We will be happy to arrange for you to act as an understudy for a year if you want.

If you prefer to contribute in the form of habitat work at Sabine Woods, we can arrange that. Most of the work can be accomplished in the cooler months!

Membership Dues

To simplify our record keeping, all memberships now run from January through December. Membership dues are $20 per year. We are now accepting 2027 dues. You may pay at any membership meeting (checks preferred) or use the subscription/membership blank on the back page. Dues paid in September will cover through the end of 2027.

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 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 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 bring them to our attention.

We would very much encourage you receive the *Brown Pelican* electronically as this saves paper, cost (including ever increasing postal costs) and volunteer time, and means you get the *Brown Pelican* several days earlier. To start that, simply send an email to gtaudubon@aol.com from the address you want us to use.

Facebook Page

If you are a photographer, and would like to have your bird/wildlife photos posted on Golden Triangle Audubon's Facebook page, we would love to share them. Please email photos to John Mariani at johnscottmariani@yahoo.com.

EarthShare Texas

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

Wood Storks

Dr. Simona Picardi, University of Idaho. Wildlife Ecology and Management

This unmistakable emblem of the Everglades and other Southern wetlands may be changing its migratory behavior in response to human impacts on the ecosystem.

The largest wading bird in North America and our only native stork species, the Wood Stork is an icon of the American Southeast. Wading through shallow freshwater cypress swamps, marshes, and lagoons, it is unmistakable, except when flying overhead, where it superficially resembles the American White Pelican. Like the pelican, Wood Storks are excellent fliers, soaring well and regularly observed high overhead on warm days, riding thermals. But, unlike the American White Pelican, the Wood Stork is not a migratory species in the traditional sense. Until recently, researchers defined Wood Storks as not true migrants. But our understanding of Wood Stork movements has changed. Researchers now know they are partially migratory, and like other wading birds, wander widely in response to local environmental conditions.

This response, paired with their specific habitat requirements, makes Wood Storks an ideal ecosystem indicator for the health of our southern wetlands, including the Everglades. By deploying GPS tracking tags, researchers have been able to study their movements, resulting in data that can help scientists measure the health of the systems storks inhabit, including any impacts of climate change on our wetlands. Dr. Simona Picardi is one such researcher whose quantitative skills have helped shed light on the movements of these large waders across the Southeast. What she learned is both interesting and full of implications for the survival of Wood Storks and even the Everglades.

Hailing from Italy, Picardi, who specializes in quantitative analysis methods for movement and tracking data, cut her analytical teeth studying roe deer at the University of Rome for her master's degree. When an opportunity arose at the University of Florida to analyze the movements of Wood Storks, Picardi moved to the United States in 2015. For her Ph.D., Picardi worked on an existing Wood Stork tracking dataset containing the movements of 133 storks captured across the Southeast between 2004 and 2012. What made this dataset so special is the Wood Storks were outfitted with solar-powered GPS tags, resulting in tracking not limited by battery power or location, the usual constraints of a tracking study's duration. As a result, researchers obtained a long-term dataset of stork movements across the Southeast, with one individual eventually tracked for eleven consecutive years.

This research, the first of its kind, which Picardi and colleagues published in the open-access journal Ecosphere, shows that Wood Storks are partially migratory, which researchers never formally quantified before. However, like many things in ecology, tracking data can be hard to categorize, something Picardi was quick to note.

"For the movements of Wood Storks, it turns out it's a gradient between residency and migration. There are so many more shades of the behavior between these two extremes than previously realized." She goes on adding "Not only are some storks year-round residents in South Florida while others migrate through the Southeast, but we also found that some individuals, juveniles and adults alike, change their strategy year to year. So, for Wood Storks, their strategy at a population level is both partial and facultative migration."

Picardi clarifies, suggesting different responses probably reflect different strategies that are needed due to changing conditions throughout the range, "We think that partial migration is a bet-hedging strategy that makes ecological sense in the super unpredictable environment of the Everglades or any wetland. By having individuals who do different things in an unpredictable environment, some individuals will likely be successful each year, enabling populations to persevere."

But determining that Wood Storks are partially migratory across the Southeast does not paint the entire picture for Picardi. "What I want to know is, does residency versus migration impact fitness?" She goes on to note that the landscape around Wood Storks is drastically changing and has been for the past century, to which Picardi asks, "Are Wood Storks going to respond to these changes? Will they persist?" It seems continued tracking of Wood Storks could reveal this in time.

The changes to the Everglades and the region's hydrology referenced by Picardi have driven Wood Storks to decline as breeders in the Everglades and to expand their breeding range across the Southeast as they seek out new habitats. With food sources critically tied to the hydrology of the Everglades, Wood Storks, a tactile feeder requiring specific conditions, experienced steep declines during the 1940s as a network of canals that humans implemented to make South Florida drier and thus more easily developed, disrupted the hydrology of the area. Responding directly to the altered hydrology of South Florida, Wood Storks during the 1970s expanded their breeding range northward throughout the Southeast. Thankfully, there was a slow rebound during the 1960s and 1970s, which according to Picardi, is why she wanted to look at fitness, to see if there may be a change going on in Wood Storks. "Given the drastic changes of the past century, I was interested to see if migration patterns are emerging because of environmental change."

Surprisingly, Picardi's study holds many titles as it was the first to look at partial migration in a wading bird in the Southeast, and the first to give such a comprehensive

picture of annual individual movements in any wading bird in the US. Moreover, she adds, "Wading birds are one of the most understudied groups of birds in this sense." A fact Piicardi finds interesting given that the size of wading birds lends themselves perfectly to tracking studies. She adds, "Wading birds are a fascinating group of species that are good models for studying partial migration due to living in unpredictable habitats such as wetlands." Picardi suspects that as other wading birds are tracked, similar results might be observed.

Picardi and colleagues also demonstrated that not all tracked individuals stayed within the United States. In a study published in the peer-review journal Caribbean Naturalist, they provided results of two Wood Storks migrating from Georgia and eastern Mississippi to Mexico. One individual, a juvenile, remained in Mexico for the subsequent four years into adulthood. This study presented evidence of potential mixing between the United States and Mexican/Central American populations of Wood Storks, which was previously not documented via tracked birds. Understanding the degree of genetic mixing has important implications for the conservation of populations.

With conservationists and decision-makers often using research results on storks to guide management, Picardi confirms that Wood Storks are essential indicators of the health of the Everglades and the wetlands of the Southeast. However, Picardi suggests that this could change with a potential shift in their movement strategy. If Wood Storks were to "shift away from being migratory towards a strategy of residency as a result of an increasing reliance on human sources of food, Wood Storks would be less reliable as indicators of natural wetlands." As a result, Picardi is extremely interested in understanding whether migrant or resident Wood Storks forage at different places within the breeding season. Early results from tracking studies indicate that resident storks feed much closer to cities than migrant storks, often using novel food sources and potentially negatively impacting the species as a whole.

In a study by Dr. Betsy Evans, conducted during her time at Florida Atlantic University, the gut contents of Wood Stork chicks were analyzed and revealed to contain human foods such as chicken nuggets and hot dogs. One hypothesis that Picardi puts forward is that some storks have become resident in recent decades because they have adapted to exploit novel food sources from humans; and if this trait is heritable, we could be seeing the beginning of a shift. In the coming decades, it is possible that Wood Storks could become entirely residential, increasing the risk of disease transmission as storks congregate together in new ways just outside and even inside city limits.

But the impacts of Wood Storks changing their strategy from being migratory birds to year-round residents also extend to the systems they inhabit, including the Everglades. Picardi warns that if Wood Storks forage outside of the Everglades system, it could have a top-down as the droppings of Wood Storks are a significant source of nutrients in wetland habitats. The lack of stork droppings could contribute to a change in nutrient cycling, whichdrives plant community composition, vegetation density, and fish and invertebrate populations. The resulting change could result in substantial, and unpredictable consequences on ecosystem function for places such as the Everglades.

For Picardi, the conservation of all species within the Everglades, including storks, hinges on a bottom-up approach, starting with getting the water right and restoring historical flows from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay. However, it is worth noting that changes to the hydrology over the years did not equally impact all wading bird species. In contrast, tactile foragers, including Wood Storks, White Ibis, and Roseate Spoonbills, have been deeply impacted by water depth and salinity changes around Florida Bay and its adjacent mangroves as caused by changing hydrology.

While her love for Wood Storks and their movements will never wane, Picardi has recently focused on another emblematic species in another iconic system. Currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at Utah State University, Picardi is looking to combine movement and population modeling approaches to inform the management and conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse populations across the West. According to Picardi, while sage-grouse do not seem to have much in common with Wood Storks at the surface, they share some similarities at a closer look.

"They are both unmistakable icons of their respective ecosystem, and their conservation means so much more than conserving just a single species. While Wood Storks are indicators of ecosystem functioning in the Everglades, the Greater Sage-Grouse is considered an umbrella species to protect the entire sagebrush steppe ecosystem. "

For a closer look at Wood Stork data analyzed by Picardi and her colleagues, including Dr. Peter Frederick, Dr. Rena Borkhataria, Dr. Mathieu Basille, and Larry Bryan, please see the Wood Stork map on the Bird Migration Explorer at www.BirdMigrationExplorer.org

Wood Storks in Southeast Texas

This interesting report on studies of Wood Stork movement does explain some recent changes in the occurrence of Wood Storks locally. Until roughly 10 to 20 years ago, if you wanted to see Wood Storks, you had to go and look at a relatively small woodlot south of Highway 90 in extreme western Jefferson County just east of the Liberty County line in July or August. This was apparently a night time roost that sometimes held over 100 birds. After about 8 am and before evening, there might be only a very few storks present. The birds were readily visible from Highway 90 until recent years, when the view of the woodlot the birds preferred began to be obscured by pine trees growing just outside the right of way. The birds can still be seen as they arrive or depart the woodlot. Over the same period, it has become more common to see a Wood Stork in other areas of the county, even in months other than the late summer

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Field Trip to Bolivar Flats-

In the midst of one of the hottest, dryest stretches that southeast Texas has seen in some time, the Golden Triangle Audubon Society held its annual August field trip to Bolivar Flats. The destination was no accident as not only is Bolivar Flats one of the best birding destinations anywhere, it is also one of the coolest places to be in the area in late August! The coast always stays a few degrees cooler than inland areas, there is always a breeze and there are no mosquitos or biting flies! That being said, the conditions were still likely to be challenging so it was no surprise that the field trip had fewer participants than usual. But the birders who were present were to head out onto the flats to see what they could find!

Obvious right away were a couple of Long-billed Curlews probing the wet sand for invertebrates. These are the largest members of the sandpiper family in North America and the group took the time to scope them out and note the differences between this species and the smaller but similar Whimbrel. Whimbrels are more of a migrant species in our area while it is not unusual to find Long-billed Curlews at any time of year. Sanderlings are also present all year and there was no problem finding them on Bolivar Flats as groups fed along the water's edge or loafed on the beach. A Ruddy Turnstone was also quickly spotted. Among the most colorful of our shorebirds, this species was not abundant on the flats on this trip but a few were enjoyed by the group. A few Marbled Godwits were seen near a sandbar, searching for food. Bolivar Flats is the best place in the area to find this species as they are decidedly uncommon in Jefferson County. The long, slightly up curved, two-toned bill is distinctive when it is not buried in the mud searching for prey. This is the only godwit species likely to be seen in the fall in our area. Hudsonian Godwits pass through in the spring but take a different route in the fall and prefer inland wetlands to beaches anyway. A few Common Nighthawks roosting on the beach were nice to see.

Laughing Gulls are always present on the flats and were easily visible on this trip but other gulls were scarce. A couple of Ring-billed Gulls were seen on the drive down the beach toward the parking area but were not located on the flats proper. None of the usual large Herring Gulls were spotted on this trip, they obviously had business elsewhere on the day! A beautiful adult Lesser Black-backed Gull was spotted from a distance and eventually allowed for a slightly closer approach. Never common here, they can still often be spotted at this location – but only in ones and twos. Royal Terns were easy to spot on the flats while larger Caspian Terns took a little longer to find. A couple of Common Terns were spotted but the normally more common Forster's Tern proved more elusive. No Gull-billed Terns or Sandwich Terns could be found on this trip. A couple of Black Terns were located looking nothing like the all-black birds they would have been earlier in the year. Tiny Least Terns took some time to locate but were eventually enjoyed by the whole group.

The American Avocets that are so prominent at Bolivar Flats in the winter are not present in August but there were plenty of loafing Black Skimmers in the distance. Huge Brown Pelicans were common but the even larger American White Pelicans had not yet arrived to winter on the flats. Tiny Least Sandpipers were the easiest of the "peeps" to find while only a single American Oystercatcher was located. Plovers are always a feature at Bolivar Flats and they did not disappoint. Endangered Piping Plovers were the most common but Wilson's Plovers also were easy to spot. Snowy Plovers and Semipalmated Plovers took some searching to find while large Black-bellied Plovers were obvious with some living up to their name in fine breeding plumage. Reddish Egrets are probably easier to find on Bolivar Flats in August then on our spring trips. Both dark and white-morph individuals were seen, mostly from a distance. A few demonstrated the crazed, dancing feeding style for which they are well known. A Magnificent Frigatebird gave a great look as it soared overhead.

The group reached the end of the dry portion of the flats with the tide retreating and the birds scattering farther out. The walk back to the vehicles proved hot but did provide a few more nice sightings. Horned Larks are one of the best features of Bolivar Flats. A common bird in west Texas, Horned Larks are hard to come by on the upper Texas coast but can usually be located at Bolivar Flats. A few Pygmy-Blue Butterflies (I can never remember if it is the eastern or western variety) were seen on the beach vegetation. They are remarkably tiny but worth a look if you can ever spot one sitting still! A couple of White-tailed Kites were spotted on the walk back which was certainly appreciated.

By the time the birders reached the vehicle barrier, it was approaching noon and the temperature, even at Bolivar Flats was getting quite uncomfortable. This trip usually includes stops at nearby birding hotspots like Yacht Basin Road and the High Island Sanctuaries but the assembled birders decided it was just too hot! The field trip was declared a success even if it was a bit shorter than usual. Driving out of Bolivar Flats along Rettilon Road, the planned development adjacent to the flats was easy to see. All birders can be grateful to the Houston Audubon Society (and many donors) for purchasing that property and protecting one of the best birding locations in Texas – Bolivar Flats!

The following species were recorded by the trip leaders:
Common Nighthawk (3); Clapper Rail (1); Black-bellied Plover (20); Semipalmated Plover (10); Piping Plover (40); Wilson's Plover (18); Snowy Plover (6); Long-billed Curlew (15); Marbled Godwit (10); Willet (15); Greater/Lesser Yellowlegs (1); Ruddy Turnstone (4); Sanderling (45); Least Sandpiper (15); Laughing Gull (50); Ring-billed Gull (2); Lesser Black-backed Gull (1); Black Skimmer (5); Least Tern (3); Caspian Tern (2); Black Tern (2); Common Tern (2); Royal Tern (30); Magnificent Frigatebird (1); Neotropic Cormorant (1); White Ibis (1); Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (4); Tricolored Heron (1); Reddish Egret (15); Snowy Egret (3); Western Cattle Egret (1); Great Egret (1); Great Blue Heron (2); Brown Pelican (35); Osprey (1); White-tailed Kite (2); Eastern Kingbird (1); Loggerhead Shrike (1); Horned Lark (2); Barn Swallow (6); Great-tailed Grackle (11)

Steve Mayes

Swallows at Cattail Marsh

For the last ten years, swallows in the summer have been observed to mass on the utility lines that run along Willow Marsh Bayou on the south end of Cattail Marsh. The swallows tend to perch in the late afternoon in large numbers, typically in the hundreds. This appears to be a staging behavior since they typically leave as sundown approaches. Particularly attention-getting is the fact that this is reliably a daily occurrence throughout the summer. In earlier years the daily number often exceeded one thousand. Curiously, numbers fall precipitously in early September. In 2015, the disappearance coincided with the appearance of three American Kestrels on the lines.

In the past, conventional wisdom held that Jefferson County typically hosted four species of summertime swallows: Purple Martin, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, and Cave Swallow. The large numbers on the utility lines have allowed a finely granular assessment of that presumption. In fact, Northern Rough-winged Swallows proved to be abundant in the summer on the lines, while Tree and Bank Swallows appeared in small numbers. Bank Swallows actually begin to appear in July, but in small numbers. One would have to observe hundreds of swallows in order to find one Bank Swallow, a feat very hard to come by for most locations, except for Cattail Marsh.

Of course, summertime is a very undesirable time to engage in a three-mile round trip to observe swallows. Heat indices regularly exceed 100, too often above 110, with dew points regularly north of 75. This summer Dania Sanchez and I coordinated with John Beaver, Kenyan Guidry, and Jason Torres to hold two (air conditioned) van tours to see the swallows, with great success. Both times the swallow numbers exceeded 300 and all seven possible species were observed. This summer Cave Swallows have been the dominant species. In past years Northern Rough-winged Swallows have been dominant. I guesstimated swallow numbers for the first tour but obtained consecutive non-overlapping photos for the second, allowing for a more objective count: A third tour on August 27 was more or less thwarted by the only thunderstorm around at the time scheduled for the tour.

A Least Grebe seen in a pond in cell 6 across from the mid-point of the utility lines was a special non-swallow sighting.

Many thanks to the people at the CVB Education Center: John Beaver, Kenyan Guidry and Jason Torres.

	Photo Count August 7	**Guesstimate July 30**
Bank Swallow	3	4
Tree Swallow	1	1
Purple Martin	11	3
N Rough-winged Swallow	47	40
Barn Swallow	54	40
Cliff Swallow	64	20
Cave Swallow	132	100
Cliff/Cave Swallow	126	100
Total	438	

Non-swallow species recorded August 7

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (14); Fulvous Whistling-Duck (3); King Rail (2); Common Gallinule (10); Purple Gallinule (15); Laughing Gull (20); Least Grebe (1); Neotropic Cormorant (30); White Ibis (1); White-faced Ibis (1); Least Bittern (3); Tricolored Heron (3); Snowy Egret (5); Western Cattle-Egret (50); Great Egret (1); Red-shouldered Hawk (1); Red-tailed Hawk (1); Red-bellied Woodpecker (1); Carolina Wren (1); Red-winged Blackbird (10); Boat-tailed Grackle (3); Common Yellowthroat (1); Northern Cardinal (2)

Harlan Stewart

Bird Sightings –August 2026

For this column, we review, looking for rare and very rare species, all credible eBird and other records reported to us from nearby Texas counties – Angelina, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine and Tyler. We also review records for Chambers, Galveston, Harris and Liberty Counties in Texas, and Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes in Louisiana.

The format of the listing is Species – Date – County-and brief location information if available – (number) – Observer(s). If more precise location information is needed, it can often be obtained by using the bird species map feature to find the sighting in eBird, opening the checklist, and using the map function to display the location as precisely as the observer reported it.

Commentary: This month's column includes the fewest reports and the fewest species we ever remember presenting in this section. And it includes some species that are likely to be either semi-domesticated or impaired and unable to fly long distances.(The three geese species listed) Also, the Gray Kingbird returned for a second summer to the same golf course location.

The paucity of reports this summer was likely connected to the long hot, dry period in August, possibly because these weather conditions dissuaded observers from leaving the comfort of air conditioning as much as anything. The birds can certainly find water in Southeast Texas, but that water may not be in local areas easily accessed by birders.

The Scaly-breasted Munias (aka Nutmeg Mannikin and also Spice Finch) are escaped cage birds doing very well in Southeast Texas).

The reports of both Eastern and Western Warbling Vireos led the observers to question whether the split into two species was justified. However, the split was discussed for a long time. It is reported that there are very substantial differences in both the mitochondrial and nuclear DNA leading to conclusion that the species diverged millions of years ago. From a birder perspective, it will be very difficult to definitively separate these species in the field. The descriptions in the eBird submissions are exceptionally detailed, and discuss the very slight differences in both morphological and sound (call and song) differences. Thus, they are almost certainly what are described as cryptic species -- distinct, genetically isolated bird populations that look nearly identical to the human eye but are actually separate species. There are some very limited regions, such as Central Alberta where both species coexist in breeding season, without any reported inter-breeding. eBird is likely to do what eBird always does, default sightings away from the areas of known coexistence to the species that predominates in the nearest area where one species is significantly more common. In this case, the ranges overlap very little, but it nevertheless is not a very scientific approach when the option of not attempting to decide which of a cryptic pair a particular bird is, but instead recording a name covering both is available.

One somewhat similar case locally involves the White-faced and Glossy Ibis. Outside of the breeding season, these species cannot be easily and reliably separated on morphological (face plumage and skin color, and leg skin color) differences. Before about 1995, observers separated the two species essentially based on range alone. On the rare occasions when a winter bird was being discussed in *American Birds* it was reported/assumed it was of the species common in the area. It was nearly impossible to know when a bird of the uncommon species– Glossy Ibis in the local case – showed up in breeding plumage and thus identifiable to species -- whether that bird had been there all winter. Most observers just assumed it had wandered - the breeding range of that species was not so far away as to make "wandering" unlikely. But gradually it became clear that that some Glossy Ibis had probably been here over most of the winter and it was accepted that there was more overlap in range than had previously been believed. Over time, not only were there more Glossy Ibis, locally, but birds were showing up with characteristics from both species, strongly suggesting hybridization was also occurring. Genomic analyses confirm that when the dispersive Glossy Ibis colonized eastern North America in the 19th century and met the native White-faced Ibis, some interbreeding occurred. The Glossy Ibis was originally an old-world species, and the White-faced Ibis a new-world species.

Local Counties August 2026

Common Loon	Aug 3	NEW-Toledo Bend Dam, Grace Yaros, WE
Crested Caracara	Aug 21	HAI-Sandyland (1) Art MacKinnon

Nearby Counties August 2026

Snow Goose	Aug 9-13	GAL-Bliss Meadows Park Pasadena (1) continuing
Ross's Goose	Aug 26-29	HAS-Copper Lakes Park (1) Drew Dickert, Joerg Jacoby
Egyptian Goose	Aug 7-24	LIB-Cleveland CR3247 (2) Kaela and Kevin Jackson
Brown Booby	Aug 5	CAM-125 miles SE of Galveston (1) Peter Kappes
Great Black-backed Gull	Aug 12	GAL-Galveston Is SP Beach (1) Deb Valdez
Peregrine Falcon	Aug 21	GAL-Ft Travis (1) Judith Rowen
Couch's Kingbird	Aug 18	GAL-9 mile Road (1) Jamie Shubert
Gray Kingbird	Aug 1	HAS-East River 9 Golf (1) continuing
Gray Catbird	Aug 25	CAM-South Lake Charles (1) Matt Conn
Bell's Vireo	Aug 28	GAL-Shaman Rd (1) Howard Kanelakos, Jim Stevenson
Eastern Warbling Vireo	Aug 28	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Linda Gilbert, Cin-Ty Lee
Western Warbling Vireo	Aug 28	HAS-Rice Univ (1) Linda Gilbert, Cin-Ty Lee
Yellow-green Vireo	Aug 2	GAL-High Island High School Rd (1) and nearby mult obs
Scaly-breasted Munia	Aug 24	LIB- Cleveland CR3247 (2) Kaela and Kevin Jackson
Nashville Warbler	Aug 29	GAL-HI Boy Scout Woods (1) WE
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	Aug 22	HAS Rice-Univ (1) Cin-Ty Lee
	Aug 26-28	GAL-HI Boy Scout Woods (1) WE
	Aug 31	CHA-Smith Pt Hawk Watch (1) WE

Abbreviations used: ANG – Angelina County;; CAL – Calcasieu Parish, LA; CAM – Cameron Parish, LA; CHA – Chambers County; GAL – Galveston County; HAI – Hardin County; HAS – Harris County; HI – High Island; JAS – Jasper County; JAW – John Whittle; JEF – Jefferson County; LIB – Liberty County; NEW – Newton County; ORA – Orange County; PI – Pleasure Island, Port Arthur; SAA – San Augustine County. SAB – Sabine County; SM – Steve Mayes, SRSP - Sea Rim State Park; SW – Sabine Woods; TP – Tyrrell Park including Cattail Marsh; TYL – Tyler County; WE – Wyatt Egelhoff; 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 forms of 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.

Many rare bird sightings in Texas are posted on Facebook Texbirds or on the TEXBIRDS listserv. Archives of the listserv are at **www.freelists.org/archive/texbirds.** It is not necessary to subscribe to view the archives, which include all recent postings.

Detailed information/maps on birding sites in Texas is available on the Web at **http://www.texasbirds.org/birdingLocations.php**. This leads you to the maps of the various eBird hotspots. You can also subscribe (free) on eBird for email alerts for all rare birds reported in a specific county.