

Upper Texas Coast Sub-regional Report, Fall 2021

Covering: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Jefferson, Montgomery, Liberty, Orange, and Waller

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The Weather:

Hurricane Nicholas, which made landfall near Sargent Beach as a Category 1 storm on 14 Sep was the only named storm of the season that made a significant impact to Texas. Although it drove many Magnificent Frigatebirds inland, no other pelagic species were detected in the sub-region. Rain for the Houston area was 17.05 inches (43.3 cm) which was 1.83 inches (4.7 cm) below normal. The average temperature was 75.4 degrees F (24.1 C) which was 0.6 degrees F (0.3 C) above normal.

The Birds:

Snow Goose: An exceptionally early Snow Goose was seen and heard flying low over West Columbia, Brazoria Co. 23 Sep (Charlie Brower).

Mottled Duck: An encouraging count of 405 Mottled Ducks were seen returning a Katy Prairie rice field roost, Harris Co. 14 Aug (Ross Silcock).

Ring-necked Duck: An impressive raft of 390 Ring-necked Ducks was present along the storm levee at Oyster Creek, Brazoria Co. 15 Nov (Ron Weeks).

Least Grebe: The new "Eastern Glades" at Memorial Park in Houston, Harris Co. hosted an impressive 17 Least Grebes representing two broods 4 Sep (ph. Miles Duboise, T Peterson). Also notable was one photographed at a private pond in Montgomery Co. 15 Nov (Gwen Lanning).

Lesser Nighthawk: Out-of-range Lesser Nighthawks were well offshore circling a fishing boat in Brazoria Co. 27 Sep (ph. Joe Fischer, ph. Ron Weeks) and flying around and eventually perched on the Quintana Jetty, Brazoria Co. 21 Nov (ph. Ron Weeks).

Broad-billed Hummingbird: A female Broad-billed Hummingbird present in Spring 30 Oct tp (ph. Clifford Salawage) was a first for Montgomery Co.

Limpkin: The Fort Bend Co. Limpkins near Brazos Bend SP continued to be seen through the period with a peak of 5 reported on 9 Nov (ph. Kevin Cochran). The Sheldon Lake SP birds in Harris Co. were also seen through the period with a peak of 7 on 23 Nov (James Rieman). The newest Texas Limpkin locations were at a private lake in New Territory, Fort Bend Co 19 Aug (ph. Cee Cee Parker) and the

Champion Lake unit of Trinity River NWR, Liberty Co. 28 Aug (ph. Karl Poldrack, ph. Lisa Holmes, Gary Holmes, ph. Colette Micallef, Paul Micallef, Carlton Collier, Shelli Ellerbe, Margaret Kirby Taylor).

Sandhill Crane: Two early Sandhill Cranes were seen flying over Pine Gully Park, Harris Co. 17 Oct (John O'Brien).

American Golden-Plover: A juvenile American Golden-Plover seen and heard at San Luis Pass, Brazoria Co. 2 Oct (ph. Cin-Ty Lee) was rare for the season.

Upland Sandpiper: The 89 Upland Sandpipers recorded in nocturnal migration over Lake Jackson, Brazoria during October and the count of 11 on the late date of 15 Oct (Ron Weeks) significantly redefined the fall migration window for the species.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: Four Buff-breasted Sandpipers at a Katy Prairie turf farm, Waller Co. 10 Nov (Fred Collins) were the latest ever for the UTC. NOTE: Matagorda County birds have been documented in Jan & Feb, but technically the "latest ever" statement above is still true as far as I can tell.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: A Semipalmated Sandpiper at Bryan Beach, Brazoria Co. 23 Oct (Cin-Ty Lee, Jonathan Taffet) was late.

Red-necked Phalarope: A worn adult Red-necked Phalarope was found at Bryan Beach, Brazoria Co. 12-31 Aug (ph. Ron Weeks, m.ob.) only to be replaced by two juveniles 4-12 Sep (ph. Ron Weeks, m.ob.).

Sabine's Gull: A juvenile Sabine's Gull offshore of Galveston, Galveston Co. 28 Sep (ph. Joe Fischer, Ron Weeks) was rare for the UTC.

California Gull: An adult California Gull at Galveston's Apfel Park, Galveston Co. 9 Nov tp (ph. James Rieman, m.ob.) was the only one for the UTC this fall.

Iceland Gull: A first cycle Iceland (Thayer's) Gull photographed on Follett's Island, Brazoria Co. 2-9 Nov was the 2nd earliest for the UTC (ph. Ron Weeks, m.ob.).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Lesser Black-backed Gulls continue their rapid increase as a winter resident as evidenced by a count of 102 on Follett's Island, Brazoria Co. 30 Sep (Ron Weeks).

Black Skimmer: A Black Skimmer at Davis Estates Lake, Fort Bend Co. 14 Sep (Tony Frank) was a rare inland sighting undoubtedly blown inland by Hurricane Nicholas.

Magnificent Frigatebird: Hurricane Nicholas moved Magnificent Frigatebirds inland on 14 Sep with 32 at Sugar Land, Fort Bend Co. (Ryan Shaw), 25 in The Woodlands, Montgomery Co. (Carl Poldrack, Dean Gregory), and 11 north of Brookshire, Waller Co. (Harvey Laas) being the most impressive inland counts.

Brown Booby: Brown Booby numbers appear strong despite the losses during the spring freeze with counts at the Baytown Nature Center, Harris Co. peaking at 20 on 24 Nov (ph. Steve Metchis, Fred & Kay Zagst) and a group of 9 offshore in Brazoria Co. 25 Oct (ph. Bob Friedrichs, Joe Fischer, Ron Weeks). The most unexpected individual was an immature bird flying over Cullinan Park, Fort Bend Co. 18 Sep (ph. Henry Jerng, Albert Ribes).

American Bittern: An American Bittern at Anahuac NWR, Chambers Co. 7 Aug may well have been an over summering bird (ph. Dwayne Litteer).

Reddish Egret: An adult Reddish Egret seen inland at Davis Estates Road, Fort Bend Co. 14 Sep was likely pushed inland by Hurricane Nicholas (ph. Albert Ribes, Mark Scheuerman).

Common Black Hawk: An immature Common Black Hawk at Smith Point, Chambers Co. 17 Oct was just the 2nd for the Smith Point Hawk Watch and the 3rd for the UTC (ph. Joe Kennedy, Bob Baez, et. al.).

Ferruginous Hawk: The only Ferruginous Hawk was spotted at the Smith Point Hawk Watch, Chambers Co. 4 Nov (Bob Baez, et.al.).

Harris's Hawk: Harris's Hawks staged a minor movement eastward as evidenced by birds at Smith Point, Chambers Co. 7-8 Nov (Bob Baez), Anahuac NWR, Chambers Co 8 Nov tp (ph. Gary Yoder, m.ob.) and Cullinan Park in Sugar Land, Fort Bend Co. 20 Nov (ph. Robert Opperman, ph. Henry Jerng, ph. Albert Ribes, Dean Lawless).

Broad-winged Hawk: A Broad-winged Hawk seen at the Smith Point Hawk Watch, Chambers Co. 30 Nov (Susan Heath) was late.

Smith Point Hawk Watch Totals (15 Aug - 30 Nov Count Period)

Totals courtesy of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory - Official Counter Bob Baez

Species	2021 Total	Comment
Black Vulture	224	
Turkey Vulture	10064	
Osprey	45	
Bald Eagle	79	Record high count (previous 46)
Northern Harrier	647	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2541	
Cooper's Hawk	1303	
Common Black-Hawk	1	Only 2 nd record for count - 17 Oct
Red-shouldered Hawk	20	
Broad-winged Hawk	55599	
Red-tailed Hawk	376	
Swainson's Hawk	424	
White-tailed Hawk	11	
Ferruginous Hawk	1	4 Nov
Harris's Hawk	2	7-8 Nov
American Kestrel	564	
Merlin	110	
Peregrine Falcon	100	
Crested Caracara	3	
Mississippi Kite	6560	
Swallow-tailed Kite	149	
White-tailed Kite	12	
Total	78841	Includes unidentified raptors

Red-naped Sapsucker: A Red-naped Sapsucker at Armand Bayou Nature Center, Harris Co. 9 Oct was rare for the subregion (ph. Chris Bick, John Berner, Bill Wright, Dale Wolck).

Hairy Woodpecker: Hairy Woodpeckers are rare on the northern edge of the UTC, so birds heard at Kleb Woods, Harris Co. 12 Sep (Timothy Freiday, Iliana Mock) and seen at Humble, Harris Co. 21 Oct (Bernie Jacoby) were notable.

Olive-sided Flycatcher: An Olive-sided Flycatcher seen New Ulm, Austin Co. 6 Nov was late (Stuart Nelson).

Greater Pewee: A Greater Pewee was again seen at the historic location in Houston's Bear Creek Park, Harris Co. 20 Oct (Jim Hinson, m.ob. ph.) after being "absent" for a few years. The bird stayed through the period. Pending TBRC acceptance.

"Western" Flycatcher: The only UTC report after last winter's major invasion was a worn adult at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 18 Sep (ph. Thomas Hellweg, ph. Greg Jackson, ph. and audio Matt O'Sullivan, ph. John Whittle, John Haynes, ph. Steve Mayes).

Say's Phoebe: A Say's Phoebe found near Damon, Brazoria Co. 31 Oct (ph. Ron Weeks, Charlie Brower) was one of very few county records.

Great Kiskadee: A count of 9 Great Kiskadees along Sharp Road, Harris Co. 4 Nov (Jim Hinson) suggests the species is continuing to breed in the area.

Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher: A Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher was discovered at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 7 Oct (ph. Steve Mayes, John Haynes, m.ob.). This bird stayed until 18 Oct allowing many to add it to their state list.

Tropical Kingbird: Tropical Kingbird detections continue to increase on the UTC with singles at Quintana, Brazoria Co. 6 Oct (ph. Melissa Crookshank, Lynn Hay, et al.) and 28 Oct (Joe Fischer, ph. Ed Thomas) and as many as 4 birds at Sabine Pass, Jefferson Co. 13-29 Aug (Timothy Freiday, et. al).

Cassin's Kingbird: A Cassin's Kingbird found along FM-562 near Smith Point, Chambers Co. 4 Oct (ph. John Mariani) was one of few recent UTC records.

Eastern Kingbird: A very late Eastern Kingbird was at the John Hargrove Environmental Complex/Delores Fenwick Nature Center in Pearland, Brazoria Co. 15 Nov (Dennis Wiesenborn).

Cassin's Vireo: A Cassin's Vireo found at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 18 Sep was one of few recent UTC records (ph. Steve Mayes, John Haynes).

Bank Swallow: A Bank Swallow seen at Beaumont's Cattail Marsh, Jefferson Co. 6 Nov (Eric Ripma, Tyler Ficker, Loren Albin) was late.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Red-breasted Nuthatches were detected at both Kleb Woods, Harris Co. (Bayard Nicklow, G. Fred Collins, Andy Jordan) and Friendswood, Harris Co. (audio Chris Bick) on the early date of 22 Sep.

Sage Thrasher: A Sage Thrasher seen near Katy, Waller Co. 28 Oct was unexpected (ph. Chris Bailey, ph. David Goff Michelle Rometry, Bayard Nicklow, Kate Baumbach, ph. Megan Ahlgren, Janey Woodley, ph. John Berner).

Veery: Veery is known as a rare fall migrant in Texas so the UTC total of 16 individuals was unexpected. This was largely due to 11 recorded in nocturnal migration by stations at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. (audio Cin-Ty Lee) and Lake Jackson, Brazoria Co. (audio Ron Weeks) between 7 Sep and 27 Oct.

Gray-cheeked Thrush: Gray-cheeked Thrushes recorded in nocturnal flight over Lake Jackson, Brazoria 24 & 26 Oct (Ron Weeks) were two of very few physically documented fall records for the UTC.

Purple Finch: A male Purple Finch in Carbide Park in Galveston, Galveston Co. 18 Nov (Duke Liebler) was notable given that the lack of an irruption of this species.

American Goldfinch: An American Goldfinch recorded at dawn at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. 29 Sep (Cin-Ty Lee) was early.

Smith's Longspur: A Smith's Longspur that made a dawn flyover at Rice University in downtown Houston, Harris Co. 22 Nov was the first UTC record since the drought winter of 2011-2012 (audio Cin-Ty Lee).

Cassin's Sparrow: A Cassin's Sparrow beautifully photographed at Brazoria NWR, Brazoria Co. 16 Aug (Brooke Stickleback) was rare and early (ph. Brooke Stickleback). Another was seen at the Dos Vacas Muertes Sanctuary, Galveston Co. 30 Oct (Ben Sandstrom).

Nelson's Sparrow: A Nelson's Sparrow recorded in nocturnal migration at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. 8 Sep (Cin-Ty Lee) was early.

Grasshopper Sparrow: The count of 10 Grasshopper Sparrows recorded in nocturnal migration at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. 27 Oct (Cin-Ty Lee) was impressive given how hard the species is to find elsewhere on the UTC.

Henslow's Sparrow: A nocturnal recording station detected an early Henslow's Sparrow going over Lake Jackson, Brazoria Co. 15 Nov (Ron Weeks).

Spotted Towhee: Spotted Towhees were at Quintana, Brazoria Co. 20-21 Oct (ph. Joe Fischer, m.ob.) and along Sharp Road, Harris Co. 17-21 Nov (Jim Hinson, m.ob.).

Bobolink: Bobolinks are rarely detected in fall so birds recorded in nocturnal flight 3 Oct at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. (audio Cin-Ty Lee) and 9 Oct in Lake Jackson, Brazoria Co. (audio Ron Weeks) were notable.

Bullock's Oriole: The only UTC Bullock's Oriole report was of a female at Houston's Bear Creek Park, Harris Co. 7 Nov (Jim Hinson).

Worm-eating Warbler: A Worm-eating Warbler at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 19 Aug (John Haynes) was early.

Cape May Warbler: Cape May Warblers were more common than usual this fall with one recorded in nocturnal migration at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. 11 Sep (Cin-Ty Lee), one seen at Quintana, Brazoria Co. 19 Sep (Tony & Phyllis Frank), another at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 24 Sep (Steve Mayes, John Haynes, et al.), and two seen 14 Oct (John Haynes) also at Sabine Woods. One discovered in a residential yard adjacent to Bobby Ford Park in Richwood, Brazoria Co. 26 Nov (Billy Weber) was still being seen during the CBC period.

Black-throated Blue Warbler: A male Black-throated Blue Warbler arrived at a home adjacent to Bobby Ford Park in Richwood, Brazoria Co. in late October and was discovered by birders on 2 Nov tp (ph. Lynn Hay, m.ob.). It was still being seen at CBC time. Another male was on west Galveston Island, Galveston Co. 25 Oct (ph. Jim Stevenson).

Yellow-rumped Warbler: A very early Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler was in Sugar Land, Fort Bend Co. 18 Sep (Ryan Shaw).

Black-throated Gray Warbler: The only Black-throated Gray Warblers were a female on west Galveston Island, Galveston Co. 5 Sep (ph. Jim Stevenson) and another at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 23 Sep (John Haynes).

Townsend's Warbler: The only Townsend's Warbler was one at Lafitte's Cove on Galveston Island, Galveston Co. 15 Sep (Bob Becker).

Canada Warbler: A Canada Warbler detected by nocturnal flight call at Rice University in Houston, Harris Co. Oct 22 was late (Cin-Ty Lee).

Wilson's Warbler: Two Wilson's Warblers seen on Homrighaus Road on west Galveston Island, Galveston Co. 16 Aug (Keith Alderman) were early.

Hepatic Tanager: A female Hepatic Tanager recorded at Houston's Bear Creek Park, Harris Co. 27 Nov tp (audio Brad Lirette, Melissa Crookshank, m.ob. ph.) was just the 2nd UTC record and a county first.