

## SABINE WOODS

**Ownership:** Sabine Woods (formerly known as Grim's Woods) is a bird sanctuary owned by the Texas Ornithological Society. Birders are welcome at all times.

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 69 and Texas 73 in the northern part of Port Arthur, proceed west along Texas 73 (towards Winnie) about 3 miles. Take the left exit and proceed along Texas 82 south about 1.5 miles. At the light, turn right along Texas 87 (south) towards Sabine Pass. This takes you essentially through the middle of the Clark (formerly Chevron, formerly Gulf) refinery, then across a high bridge over the intracoastal Waterway and on about 9 more miles to Sabine Pass, through some interesting marshy habitat, especially on the approach into Sabine Pass. At the stop sign at the main square in Sabine Pass, turn right (west) when Texas 87 turns right. From this point, proceed about 4.2 miles, until you see a woodlot on the right (north) side of the road, immediately past the Petroleum Helicopters base. Parking area is provided. Access to the woods is through a "gate".

**Habitat:** The main woods consist of three conjoined sections, with ponds in the two westernmost sections. Large oaks predominate, but there are also large mulberry trees in the center section, and many areas of thick undergrowth. The northern part of the sanctuary tends to be much wetter, but has some areas of low thick growth. There is a pond in the open area in the extreme northwest of the sanctuary. There is also an area of medium sized trees in the southeast corner. A large number of oak trees were planted about 1991 in some of the open areas in the southern half.

**Birds:** The sanctuary is intended to provide a protected stopping point on the coast for neotropical migrants. Warblers, Vireos, Grosbeaks, Flycatchers, Thrushes, Tanagers and Orioles are common visitors from late March through mid-May, and, in lesser numbers, from early September through late October. The grassy areas will often produce Blue Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings. The trees in the southeast corner and the low growth areas in the north should be checked for Orioles. Swallows, often including Northern Rough-winged Swallows, may be common in April. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons and Green Herons are quite common migrants. Hummingbirds make good use of the large areas of Lantana especially near the entrance. Other birds which have been seen include Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (in the pond in the northwest corner), and Harris Sparrow (with the White-throated Sparrows along the edges of the woods). White-tailed Kites, often noisily obvious, have fledged young in early September (in the oak trees at the entrance) and Groove-billed Anis have been seen in November-December (in the low growth in the northern part). Downy Woodpeckers are usually present and nest successfully most years. One Carolina Chickadee was present for some time in 1994-95, far removed from any others. A Barn Owl is often present, and Bobwhites can be heard calling in the late Spring. Although visibility is limited by the cattails, the marsh on the other side of Texas 87 – part of the Texas Point NWR – should be checked. Stilts, Egrets and Ibis usually nest along with some Mottled Ducks. Flocks of other shorebirds may be present. Rarities seen in the woods have included a Fork-tailed Flycatcher on 25 April 1993, and a Hooded Oriole on 11 April and 14 May 1995.

**Other comments:** The mosquito population can be quite high after about mid-May, especially in wet years. By summer and fall, visitors should be prepared to encounter Deer Flies in considerable numbers. They are not as troublesome inside the woods, as they are in the areas outside. In dry years, the ponds in the woods may dry up by mid to late May. Cottonmouth snakes (water moccasins) are seen quite often.

## SEA RIM STATE PARK MARSHLANDS UNIT

(including nearby areas along Highway 87)

Sea Rim State Park and surrounding areas have been divided into two for the purposes of this series. The Beach Unit and other areas in the vicinity will be dealt with separately.

**Ownership:** Sea Rim State Park is operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Camping with hookups and primitive tent sites are available in the Beach Unit upon payment of the appropriate fees.

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 69 and Texas 73 in the northern part of Port Arthur, proceed west along Texas 73 (towards Winnie) about 3 miles. Take the left exit and proceed along Texas 82 south about 1.5 miles. At the light, turn right along Texas 87 (south) towards Sabine Pass. This takes you through the middle of the Clark (formerly Chevron, formerly Gulf) refinery, then across a high bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway and on about 9 more miles to Sabine Pass, through some interesting marshy habitat. At the stop sign at the main square in Sabine Pass, turn right (west) when Texas 87 turns right. From this point, proceed about 10 miles. The headquarters and the Beach Unit are on the left (south) side of the road. The Marshlands Unit is on the right (north) side of the road, about 1/2 mile before (east) on the main entrance and headquarters. (Much of the northern part of the park is marsh, open during certain days in the season to duck hunters with permits. Access for hunters is from Texas 87, about halfway between the Intracoastal Waterway and Sabine Pass.)

**Habitat:** In Summer, airboat tours of the marshes are run from the Marshlands unit, which has a large parking lot and boathouse complex. While the noise of an airboat serves to ensure that birds are seen only from a distance, it is the swallows in the boathouses that attract the birders. The boathouses are unused - the airboats are taken away on trailers each night.

While strictly part of the Beach Unit, a small strip of park property extends west from the headquarters for about 1.75 miles on both sides of Highway 87, almost to the entrance to McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge. McFaddin includes the lands to the north of this strip (and to the west of the park property all the way north to the Intracoastal Waterway). The strip of park property has a number of salt cedars (Tamarisk) and several large mulberry trees, and an area with a pond and a number of willow trees. All of these bushes and trees can be attractive to migrants in the Spring. Parking near these areas along Highway 87 is difficult. However, with care, the shoulders of the highway can be used for temporary parking. Park as near the edge of the shoulder as possible.

While McFaddin NWR is managed principally for the benefit of duck hunters, there is a gravel road which runs inland for about two miles, mostly along the edge of Clam Lake, which has extensive reeds and cattails around its edge.

**Birds:** The most sought after birds of Sea Rim are the Cave Swallows. In April 1989, two Cave Swallows were discovered nesting in one section of the three-stall boathouse, and they have returned every year since. During Spring migration, the boathouses, adjacent wires and marshes are attractive to swallows of all the eastern species. The Cave Swallows usually arrive in very late March, often joining hundreds of Tree Swallows and some Barn Swallows. By late April, it may be possible to see Cave, Cliff, Barn, Tree, Bank, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows at this site, along with Purple Martins. Cliff, Cave and Barn Swallows all nest, with Cliff usually outnumbering the Cave Swallows. Look for the pale throat of the Cave Swallow. The mini-migrant trap along Highway 87 may contain any of the migrant warblers or vireos, but is especially favored by Buntings (Painted and Indigo), Grosbeaks and Orioles. Dickcissels probably nest in the grassy area on the north side of the highway, while Bobolinks are sometimes seen on either side of the highway. McFaddin NWR may produce ducks in winter, and perhaps Marsh Wrens and Orchard Orioles in Spring.

## **SEA RIM STATE PARK- BEACH UNIT**

Sea Rim State Park and surrounding areas have been divided into two for the purposes of this series. The Marshlands Unit was dealt with in the previous section.

**Ownership:** Sea Rim State Park is operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Admission is \$2 per person per day, but free to holders of a Texas Conservation Passport. Camping with hookups and primitive tent sites are available upon payment of the appropriate fees.

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 69 and Texas 73 in the northern part of Port Arthur, proceed west along Texas 73 (towards Winnie) about 3 miles. Take the left exit 12.8 (towards Sabine Pass) off Texas 73 and onto Texas 82 south about 1.5 miles. At the light, turn right along Texas 87 (south) towards Sabine Pass. This takes you through the middle of the Clark (formerly Chevron, formerly Gulf) refinery, then across a high bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway and on about 9 miles to the intersection of Texas 87 and Texas 82. Turn right (west) when Texas 87 turns right. From this point, proceed about 10 miles. The headquarters and the D. Roy Harrington Beach Unit are on the left (south) side of the road.

**Habitat:** The Beach Unit is a stretch of Gulf of Mexico beach extending about 1.75 miles west along the beach from the headquarters, and includes a small strip north of the main highway. The beach to the west of the park boundary is known locally as McFaddin Beach. To the east, the park extends about four miles along the beach and includes the marshes between the beach and the highway. There is a boardwalk nature trail - "The Gambusia Trail" over part of the marsh. Shorebirds may be found on any exposed mud. There is a half mile stretch of beach in front of the headquarters building from which vehicles are excluded. Motorized vehicles are also prohibited from travelling more than about one-half mile east of the headquarters. Thus there is in the park about three miles of beach undisturbed but often littered with debris and garbage brought in by the tide. A small oil storage tank halfway between the highway and the beach is very close to the park boundary. Further east for about 2-1/2 miles from the eastern boundary, the land inland from the high tide line is privately owned but thereafter all the way to about 1/4 mile short of Texas Point is part of the Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge.

Other than during the summer, parts of the park away from headquarters are often quite devoid of visitors, and there are frequently concentrations of gulls, terns and shorebirds along the beach west of headquarters, usually fairly close to the western boundary. The part of McFaddin Beach just west of the park is often crowded, even "off season", but less so further west. Still further west, Highway 87 is currently unrepaired from the last time it was washed out by a tropical storm. To the east, the birder who is prepared to walk may find many sea- and shorebirds, but the larger concentrations may be two to three miles from headquarters. At present, there is a small mud flat there, and frequently some mud near the entrance road to the east beach.

**Birds:** The most obvious birds on the beach will be the gulls and terns. With any flock of gulls, check for unusual ones - Great Black-backed and other unusual species have been seen. The beach west of the entrance to McFaddin NWR has been productive for unusual gulls. Least Terns are present in summer, and there may be Common Terns among the Forsters Terns in Spring and Fall. Black Terns are also quite common from April through September. Gull-billed Terns may be unusually easily found and in the Fall, it is possible to find eight species of Tern on the beach. Piping and Snowy Plovers and other shorebirds are common except during the Summer. Red Knots may be particularly easy to find. Migrant shorebirds such as Pectoral, Stilt and Spotted Sandpipers may sometimes be seen near the trailhead for the Gambusia Trail. Other shorebirds frequent the marshes just north of the beach, especially in the areas to the east of the park. Recently, the mud flat areas on the shore have attracted Short-billed Dowitchers and even Buff-breasted Sandpipers in the Fall. Brown Pelicans have recently (1994) returned to this part of the Upper Texas Coast, and are most likely to be seen fishing offshore in the Gulf. A distant Magnificent Frigatebird may be spotted in the Summer, while in the winter, the Gulf should be checked for Gannets (flying) and for Scoters (on the water, especially further west). Although rare, there may be a Jaeger harassing the birds following a shrimp boat.

## **SABINE PASS TO TEXAS POINT**

**Ownership:** The last part of the road to the Pilot Station borders the Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge. The Sabine Pass Battleground is a State Historical Park operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Entrance is free but there are fees for camping and boat launching. The entire area is within the city limits of Port Arthur.

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 69 and Texas 73 in the northern part of Port Arthur, proceed west along Texas 73 (towards Winnie) about 3 miles. Take the left exit and proceed along Texas 82 south about 1.5 miles. At the light turn right along Texas 87 (south) towards Sabine Pass. This takes you essentially through the middle of the Clark (formerly Chevron formerly Gulf) refinery then across a high bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway and on about 9 more miles to Sabine Pass through some interesting marshy habitat. At the stop sign at the main square in Sabine Pass continue straight ahead on FM 3322. The Sabine Pass Battleground is on the left between the road and the river just before FM 3322 ends at 1st Street in Sabine. Turn right (southeast) along 1st Street. The first 1.75 miles pass the Coast Guard station and then various docks operated in support of the offshore oil industry. (As an alternative the road - 8th Street - to the left (west) from FM 3322 as that road turns about 1/2 mile before its end leads past the marshes of Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge before turning left as Quinn Street and ending at 1st Street. Turn right along 1st Street.) After crossing the bridge over Texas Bayou the road deteriorates and the land on the left (west) is now part of Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge. From the bridge it is about 1.75 miles to the Pilot Station. The last mile or so of this road is very low and may be under water at high tide or when a strong southerly wind is blowing.

**Habitat:** The most interesting part of this area is the last mile and a half to the Pilot Station. The road is lined with salt cedars (Tamarisk) which are attractive to migrant landbirds in Spring and Fall. There is marsh on both sides of the road. From this road just north of where the salt cedars begin it is possible to look across the Sabine Pass Channel from the lighthouse south to the beginning of the east jetty. A telescope will be helpful. A rookery containing mainly Egrets exists in the trees near the lighthouse during the breeding season. Pelicans, gulls and cormorants may be seen on the jetty. This area, of course, is in Louisiana and is known as Louisiana Point. The Sabine Pass Battleground Park and adjacent picnic area is surrounded on the north by marsh and includes a small pond near the entrance which may attract shorebirds in migration.

**Birds:** The big attraction of this hotspot is the saltcedar-lined road through the marsh near the Pilot Station. During Spring migration there may be warblers and other passerine migrants. More warblers are seen in the salt cedars on the marsh side than on the river side perhaps because they are easier to see there. Yellow warblers are quite common but any of the migrant warblers are possible. Orioles and Buntings are also frequently found. Kingbirds and Flycatchers are quite common. This area also harbors Clapper Rails which may run across the road in front of you in April and May.

In winter there are Sharp-tailed Sparrows in the marsh although they have become more difficult to find in recent years. Elsewhere on the Gulf Coast this species is usually found in *Spartina* grass marshes which are not continuously under water. The marshes in the immediate vicinity of the road are increasingly wet and the birds may have moved to drier areas. They will usually respond to "pishing" and the best chance is from the area east of the road between the last bend and the Pilot Station.

The rookery across the channel in Louisiana has recently contained Great Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills and smaller egrets probably both Cattle Egrets and Snowy Egrets. Some Tricolored Herons have also nested. Further down on the jetty there may be White and Brown Pelicans and cormorants.

In Winter and Spring the marshes on either side of Texas 87 from Keith Lake south to the junction with FM 3322 may contain ducks and other shorebirds. Long-billed curlews, not particularly easy to find in Jefferson County, can be found on newly burnt areas. Other shorebirds which may be seen include Yellowlegs and Dowitchers. Egrets and Spoonbills are also usually present. Ducks will include mainly the common species but they may be found in these areas well into the Spring often much later than elsewhere. These marshes are burned periodically to allow the growth of new vegetation which is attractive to the birds. Different areas are burned each year so that it is not possible to indicate specific areas. As much as anything else the burning

removes the higher vegetation and allows a view of the numerous small ponds which are always present in this marsh.

## **PLEASURE ISLAND PORT ARTHUR**

**Ownership:** Pleasure Island is under the control and development of the Pleasure Island Commission, a political subdivision of the City of Port Arthur. The island consists of all the land across the Sabine Neches Canal from Port Arthur proper, and is accessed by a high bridge on Texas 82. Most of the island is composed of spoil from the dredging of the Sabine Neches Canal.

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 69 and Texas 73 in the northern part of Port Arthur, proceed west along Texas 73 (towards Winnie) about 3 miles. Take the left exit and proceed along Texas 82 south about 1.5 miles. At the light, proceed straight on Texas 82 about one mile to the bridge. On the other side, the road makes a gentle 180 degree curve. At the T junction, a right turn (northeast) on T. B. Ellison Parkway leads back under the bridge and for about two miles past various recreation areas to the marina, restaurants and condominiums. Continuing straight past the marina for about half a mile leads to the sea wall. A left turn leads to the five mile long North Spoil Levee Road, which passes a small impoundment and then a much larger impoundment on the left (west) and on to an area at the end used for sailboarding. Sabine Lake is on the right (east) side of the Levee Road. There is access (on foot) to the woods at the end of the road.

The South Spoil Levee Road is accessed from T. B. Ellison Parkway just south of Logan Park/Music Park. The start of the road is about 1-1/4 miles northeast of the T junction at the exit from the bridge. If coming from the bridge, it is a right turn (southeast) leading past two smaller impoundments, to an area where there is a high levee on the right (west). From the top of this levee, there is a good view across the large impoundment. Further down, the impoundment becomes marshy. In fact, the area of marsh is about twice that of the water. After a total of six miles, the Levee Road meets Texas 82.

Turning right (northwest) on Texas 82 leads in five miles back to the entrance to the bridge. The water on the left (west) is known variously as (according to the maps) the Port Arthur Ship Canal, and the Sabine Neches Canal and is also the Intracoastal Waterway for part of this stretch. A right turn (southeast) along Texas 82 leads in 2-1/2 miles to the "Causeway" bridge to Louisiana.

**Habitat:** The various large impoundments on the island are bordered by extensive areas of marsh. The main part of the island is somewhat firmer ground. There are extensive mud flats at the western edge of the water in the south impoundment, but close access to them is all but impossible. The mosquitoes in the marsh are active year round. There are woods at the extreme north end of the North Spoil Levee Road, and also an isolated small woodlot east of Texas 82 just south of the south exit of the South Levee Spoil Road. However, this latter woodlot is overgrown and access is difficult. There are pilings of old piers on the Texas side of the Causeway which may attract gulls, terns and cormorants.

**Birds:** Winter is the best season to bird Pleasure Island. Common Loons are found consistently in winter, usually near either Levee Road on the Sabine Lake side. The large north impoundment is attractive to a variety of ducks. There is usually a large flock of Canvasbacks, and this is the best and most reliable place to find Bufflehead. There may also be Common Goldeneye, and almost certainly will be Red-breasted Mergansers. In the marshy areas on the southern part of this impoundment there may be many Northern Shoveler, but also other ducks such as Blue and Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, and sometimes Pintail and Wigeon. In the large south impoundment, there will usually be Ruddy Ducks. Other species may also be present, especially along the edges of the marshes. Currently, the south impoundment is bordered by extensive marshes on the north, west and especially the south. The west shoreline often forms extensive mud flats, but close approach is unfortunately not practical. White Pelicans will usually be around, often on the far bank of the north

impoundment. Neotropic Cormorants can be found easily in any season. The woods at the northern end may contain woodland species such as Chickadees not normally seen so near the Gulf. The “mainland” of the island was one of the first places to be occupied by a pair of White-tailed Kites as the species expanded eastward. The rocks on the Sabine Lake side of both Levee Roads will usually be the winter home of several Spotted Sandpipers. American Pipits are also seen along the roads. The small southern woodlot is a good Spring migrant trap.

The pilings and other structures around the Causeway between Texas and Louisiana are attractive to gulls and especially to terns. Black Terns often fish near the bridge in summer. Caspian Terns are regularly seen working along the levee roads, and Forster’s Terns are resident. A small flock of American White Pelicans is usually present in winter (on the Louisiana side), and there may be other shorebirds also.

## **THE HILLEBRANDT BAYOU WATERSHED OF JEFFERSON COUNTY**

This and the succeeding two parts in this series will cover the areas of Jefferson County north of the Intracoastal Waterway, and west of Major Drive (FM364) in the north and west of West Port Arthur Road in the South. This part will deal with the Hillebrandt Bayou watershed - roughly the area bounded on the south by FM365, on the northwest by TX124, and on the east by West Port Arthur Road. Subsequent parts will cover the Taylor Bayou watershed and The Northwest quadrant of the county.

This description will first cover the two major state maintained roads through the area, and then outline a “tour” route which covers the more productive secondary roads (as well as most of the major roads).

FM365 leaves the city limits of Port Arthur as it crosses Rodair Gully. The marshy pond on the north side can be good for shorebirds in fall and spring, and ducks in winter. American Pipits can often be found. The marshes on the south side of the road between Rodair Gully and Hillebrandt Bayou may be productive for ducks in winter. Roseate Spoonbills and Egrets are often seen. A small inlet on the north side of FM365 just after it crosses Hillebrandt Bayou on a steeply arched bridge is also worth checking. Although more houses are being built each year, the open areas from this point to Fannett are attractive to Kestrels, Shrikes and similar species. Lovell Lake, a long sinewy lake south of FM365 from about Garner Road to a mile or more beyond the western part of Burrell Loop, somehow fails to attract many birds. The wooded areas - there are few - may harbor a Bluebird or two, and any rice fields under cultivation may attract shorebirds in the appropriate season. The open grassy areas on the north side about one-half mile before TX124 is reached attract Robins in late winter, and may be used briefly by Upland Sandpipers during Spring migration.

TX124 northwest from Fannett passes through open country, but development is pushing out even further from Beaumont, and this road is generally not very productive of birds.

To start the tour, take LaBelle Road south from TX124 (or follow Tyrrell Park Road across Hillebrandt Bayou - it becomes Frint Drive - and then intersects with LaBelle Road). LaBelle Road passes the BFI landfill, which attracts many gulls and crows. A left turn on Steinhagen Road provides an interesting drive through open fields with good visibility in all directions. Shrikes, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Kestrels use the wires, and larger raptors can often be seen. The road soon turns south, and later curves east and continues (as Humble Road) through an area - not very productive of birds - with small trees to Hillebrandt Road. A left turn (north) goes through very moist fields (which often harbor shorebirds, especially Ibis) and eventually joins West Port Arthur Road. A right turn (southeast) takes one past a number of pipeline stations and petrochemical plants. The area off Hebert Road (on the right) used to be worth checking for open country birds, but the construction of the federal prison in that area has changed the situation. At FM365, turn right (west) and proceed across Rodair Gully and Hillebrandt Bayou and to LaBelle Road. This corner used to be especially productive of flycatchers in the Spring and Summer, but new development may well affect this. A left turn (north) on LaBelle Road takes

one through open country, and another left turn (west) on Blewitt goes through fields usually under cultivation of rice. and attractive to shorebirds as a result. After many sharp curves, Blewitt eventually reaches TX124, and a right turn (northwest) will lead back to the starting point on the outskirts of Beaumont.

## **THE TAYLOR BAYOU WATERSHED OF JEFFERSON COUNTY**

This is the second part of a three part sequence covering the areas of Jefferson County north of the Intracoastal Waterway, West of Major Drive (FM364) in the north, and west of West Port Arthur Road in the south. This part deals with the Taylor Bayou watershed - roughly the area bounded on the north by FM365, on the northwest by IH-10, on the west by the Chambers County line and on the south by the Intracoastal Waterway.

The area includes three major highways: FM365 from Rodair Gully to Fannett (discussed in the first part of this sequence); TX124 from Fannett to the intersection with TX73 just east of Winnie; and TX73 from the Taylor Bayou bridge west of Port Arthur to the Chambers County line just east of Winnie. TX124 southwest from Fannett first runs through an area of woods which is not usually productive of birds, although Wood Ducks have been seen when low parts of the woods have been under water, and Red-shouldered Hawks are heard and occasionally seen. The section between Fannett and TX73 is similarly relatively unproductive, although shorebirds can sometimes be seen in the rice fields north of the road. TX73, which is currently in the process of being upgraded to four lane divided highway from Winnie to Taylor Bayou, is usually too busy for much birding. Rice fields north and especially south of the highway, particularly in the central portion between Wilber Road and Country Club Drive, can be productive of shorebirds, particularly in Spring and again in July and early August.

The following route covers most of the other roads in the area. Starting from FM365 at Rodair Gully and the Port Arthur city limits, proceed west six miles (covered in the first part) to Garner Road. Turn left (south) on Garner Road. After about two miles, the road turns right (west), and passes through a farm complex with several mature oaks. A road to the left leads to Burrell Cemetery and Taylor Bayou. Garner Road crosses LaBelle Road and becomes Burrell-Wingate Road. Eastern Bluebirds are often present near the woods near this intersection. The road then passes through rice fields and short grass fields favored by flycatchers. After passing Jap Road, the number of houses increases, and there are often Swallows, Martins and Swifts in Summer. Just before reaching Fannett, turn left (south) on Craigen Road. After about two miles, Craigen Road turns right (west), and passes through a wooded area. Just as the road crosses the North Fork of Taylor Bayou and exits the wooded area is a nice pond with Bald Cypresses. The oil field area on the left rose to fame in 1993 when one (or more?) American Swallow-tailed Kite was regularly seen over the South Fork. On one occasion the bird was observed to be carrying nesting material. However, the bird did not return in 1994 or 1995. Just before reaching TX124, turn left (south) on Wilber Road. Hawks, including Swainson's Hawks, can sometimes be seen over the open areas after the road crosses the North Fork. Turn right (west) on Hamshire Road, then left on TX124, and left (south) on Englin Road. After crossing TX73, this road goes about four miles south through relatively open country, often with flycatchers in summer, and sparrows in winter. On returning north, turn left (east) on Todd Road, which often produces many birds, especially flycatchers and shorebirds. On reaching Wilber Road, turn left (north), checking the rice fields for the usual species. After crossing TX73, turn right (east) on Old Big Hill Road. Jap Road, which runs north and across both forks of Taylor Bayou. is not usually very productive, although Prothonotary Warblers can be heard in Spring. Continue on Old Big Hill Road until it returns to TX 73, then turn left (east). After about four miles, turn left (north) on LaBelle Road. Hawks are often seen over the open fields surrounding the intersection. LaBelle Road crosses Taylor Bayou and eventually meets FM365. A right turn (east) returns you to the starting point.

## **JEFFERSON COUNTY NORTH AND WEST OF INTERSTATE 10**

This is the third part of a sequence, and covers the area north and west of IH-10, drained by the North Fork of Taylor Bayou, and its major tributaries, Ground Bridge Gully and Green Pond Gully, both of which have been extensively widened, straightened and deepened. LNVA canals carry irrigation water to the rice fields in the northern part of the area. The rest of the area is dominated by the Gilbert Ranch and its Oil Field, which are north of Fannett, north and a little south of FM365. In addition to IH-10, the area includes US 90, and FM365 from Fannett to Nome, where it continues north as Texas 326. FM1406 runs south from FM365 to Winnie. Except as noted below, these major roads themselves are not productive.

The Gilbert Ranch contains the most extensive wooded areas in Jefferson County, in the old flood plain of the North Fork and its tributaries. Unfortunately, there is little access to these woods, except along the sides of FM365 just north of Fannett. These areas, which were extensively harvested for timber in 1995/96, are leased to various hunting clubs. Nevertheless, the areas still have populations of most woodland species, such as chickadees, titmice and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Nesting species include White-eyed Vireo, Summer Tanagers and Hooded Warblers.

Most of the rest of the area is open and virtually treeless, and used intermittently to grow rice. Johnson Road is well worth checking for ducks in winter and shorebirds during migration. The fields either side of FM1406 between Willis Road and the Chambers County line have been temporary home to Sandhill Crane flocks twice in the recent past. Thompson Road, especially the northern parts where there are trees, is productive, and often has a pair of Painted Buntings. Other roads worth exploring are McDermand, South China and League. In general, the roads nearer Beaumont are less productive. Dickcissels are always obvious in Spring along the edge of any rice field which has a weedy border (as many do). Open areas may produce Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Eastern Kingbirds. Increasingly, Swainson's Hawks are to be seen over the drier areas. Large flocks of White and/or White-faced Ibis may be encountered, and Wood Storks have been seen in the crawfish ponds on Interstate 10 just west of the bridge over the North Fork. Mottled and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks are present year round, supplemented in winter by the usual wintering ducks.

## **TYRRELL PARK AND CATTAIL MARSH**

**Ownership:** Tyrrell Park and Cattail Marsh are owned by the City of Beaumont. Tyrrell Park is operated by the Parks and Recreation Department, while Cattail Marsh is operated by the Water Utilities Department as the final polishing phase of the wastewater treatment system.

**Directions:** From Interstate 10 just west of Beaumont proper, turn south on Walden Road. Proceed to the first light (Texas 124). (This intersection can also be accessed by taking Texas 124 south from US 69.) Cross over Texas 124 to (or turn left onto) Tyrrell Park Road, and after about a mile, turn left into Tyrrell Park. For Cattail Marsh, proceed ahead about a mile to the one way loop. About two-thirds of the way round the loop, you will come to a well-marked side road which leads to the parking lot and pedestrian entrance.

**Habitat:** Most of Tyrrell Park proper is given over to a golf course, but the picnic area in the center of the loop road has many very tall trees, and the area south of the loop constitutes a narrow swath of mature woodland with lots of understory and some trails to provide access.

The main part of Cattail Marsh is artificially constructed 900 acre wetland, separated into compartments by graveled levees, bounded on the south by Willow Marsh Bayou and on the east by Hillebrandt Bayou - both of which have been channelized to improve drainage. A smaller 250-acre natural wetland south of Willow Marsh Bayou with a 2.7 mile loop trail can be reached by means of a bridge from. Unfortunately, the gate which previously allowed birders access to drive along the western edge and along to the pump house at the bridge has been locked since January 1996. Currently, the only way to access the wetland is on foot (or on bicycle) through the gate at the parking lot at the entrance. The pump station is about two miles from this entry gate. A complete



circuit round the boundary levees of the artificial wetland is about five miles. Using cross levees, shorter circuits of 2.8, 3.2 or 4.7 miles are possible. The vegetation in the wetland may not have reached equilibrium yet - the wetland was only completed in 1993 - but comprises extensive growths of cordgrass and cattails. Some compartments are still largely open water.

**Birds:** Tyrrell Park has long been a favored birding site in Beaumont. The tall trees attract many of the common woodland species including chickadees, titmice, Pine Warblers, Pileated, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers. The areas with underbrush are home to Carolina Wrens, supplemented in winter by Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers. The Garden Center - the Beaumont Botanical Gardens as it has recently become - attracts hummingbirds, including a Buff-bellied one mild winter. The area of the Gardens, in addition to nesting Parula Warbler in the tall trees most years, is a good area to look for transient migrants Barred Owls are often heard (and occasionally seen), and Great Horned Owls are resident in the area.

The artificial wetland is still relatively new. However, a picture of the resident avifauna is developing. The most obvious winter ducks are generally Ruddy Ducks and Northern Shovelers, although Gadwall and both Blue- and Green-winged Teal are also numerous. Ring-necked Duck may be present and Scaup are occasionally seen. Common Goldeneye and Bufflehead will usually be in the northernmost compartment if they are present at all. Canvasback and Redhead, increasing in the area, may be present in the deeper, more open area. Wood Ducks have been seen near Willow Marsh Bayou. Coots and Moorhens are present year round supplemented with an occasional Purple Gallinule in summer.

The habitat seems nearly ideal for Grebes and many Pied-billed Grebes can be found year-round. In late October 1995, a Least Grebe was discovered, and careful observation in subsequent months absolutely confirmed the presence of three (and very probably there were six). Mostly they were seen quite near to the walk-in gate. They were not seen between May and October 1996, when they were found again in the northernmost compartment. During Spring 1996, both Horned and Eared Grebes were noted in the northernmost compartment on a day when there were two Least Grebes, several Pied-billed Grebes, Goldeneye and Bufflehead, well worth the one-mile walk. There is at least a reasonable possibility that the habitat might suit Masked Ducks which are not well established at Brazos Bend State Park west of Houston, are reported occasionally from Anahuac NWR, and were seen one winter in some numbers in a remote part of McFaddin NWR. In Winter 1996-97, two Oldsquaws were present for several months.

A recent development has been the winter presence of a large (200+) flock of White Pelicans - quite possibly most of the flock that used to winter on Pleasure Island. Both local species of Cormorant also use the wetlands.

At all seasons, swallows are likely to be seen feeding of the wetland. In winter, these will be Tree Swallows, with perhaps a few Northern Rough-winged. In Spring, almost any eastern swallow species may be found. In summer, Purple Martins and Barn Swallows may be seen. In the Fall and often on into early winter, migrating Cliff, Northern Rough-winged, Bank and Barn Swallows may be seen.

The weedy areas round the edge of the wetland may hold several sparrows, including White-crowned, not easy to see elsewhere in the immediate vicinity in winter, along with Orange-crowned Warblers, an occasional Palm Warbler and a few Wilson's Warblers. Also in winter, the power lines which cross the wetland provide perches for Hawks, mostly Red-tailed, and both Kestrels and Merlins. A Sharp-shinned Hawk may be seen near the woods. In Spring and Summer, large numbers of Fish Crows may be seen flying over, together with Ring-billed and a few Laughing Gulls which congregate on and near an adjacent landfill.

## **BRIDGE CITY (ORANGE COUNTY) AND ADJACENT AREAS OF JEFFERSON COUNTY**

**Ownership:** The Neches River forms the boundary between Jefferson County on the west and Orange County on the east. The area immediately to the east of the Neches River, south of Texas Highway 73/87, is part of the Old River Unit of the Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area. The area north of the highway is owned by the Gulf State Utilities Division of Entergy as part of the Neches Power Plant. Areas to the west of the Neches River are privately owned.

**Directions:** The area described is to the north and south of Texas Highway 73/87 immediately east, and to a lesser extent west, of the Neches River. The area is between Port Arthur/Groves and Bridge City. Although the bridge itself, in a quirk of geography, runs almost north-south, and the highway at this point runs northeast-southwest, the prevailing and sign posted direction of the highway is east-west, and the areas are described here as if ran true east-west. To access the area “south and east” - known as Bailey’s Fish Camp - turn south off Texas 73/87 at Lake Street, the western-most traffic light in Bridge City, and proceed about a mile to the point where the paved road ends and a shell road continues. You can drive along the shell road about two miles before it ends at the bait camp buildings. Initially there are ponds and marsh on both sides, and a newly constructed viewing stand. Further on, the road follows the bank of an inlet parallel to the river as it widens into Sabine Lake to the south. The area nearer the highway can be visually accessed by leaving the eastbound lanes at the first exit after the bridge and proceeding along the track parallel to and south of the highway. This track is well worn by fishermen and others, but is only recommended if it has not rained much in the preceding few days.

The northern-most companion bridges of Texas 73/87 - the Rainbow Bridge and the Veterans Memorial Bridge - surrounded by marsh areas, is home of many wildlife species including ducks, geese, cranes, and alligators.

The Rainbow Bridge, completed in 1938, is the tallest on the Gulf Coast, rising to a height of a 20-story building and clearing the river by 177 feet. The new companion bridge to the east has only 133 feet navigational clearance, but it’s claim to fame is that it was the first cable-stayed bridge built on a Texas highway.

Access to the eastern-most areas is less extensive. The “north and west” area can be approached by proceeding to the marina and restaurants. To the “south and east”, there are two options. Ferry Road, accessed from the eastbound highway just before the bridge, takes one towards the river, but the marsh vegetation restricts viewing. A little bit further east along the highway on the south side is a historical marker with a nice paved pull off which overlooks a pond A telescope is highly desirable. If Ferry Road is used, the right turn at the end is Old Yacht Club Road, which meanders for more than a mile to the end of a narrow spit of land along the shore of Sabine Lake.

**Habitat and Birds:** The Bailey’s area (south and east) is shallow marsh and ponds, and is best in winter and early Spring for waterfowl. If the ponds, which are influenced by wind and tide, are low, shorebirds may be present, especially in the areas near the highway, which fluctuate in level more than the areas on the road to Bailey’s. In winter, ducks usually include Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon and Teal, although other species are also seen, including Bufflehead and Goldeneye. (This area is not far as the duck flies from the northern-most impoundment on Pleasure Island.) Roseate Spoonbills, Great and Snowy Egrets and Tricolored Herons are usually present. Dowitchers, Yellowlegs and Stilts are the commonest larger shorebirds, with Western and Least Sandpipers the most common “peeps”. One or more Ospreys frequent the area, using the power pylons as perches. In future years, platforms may be erected for their consideration as nesting sites. Marsh Wrens can often be heard burbling enthusiastically along the road to Bailey’s. Gulls and Terns may be seen near or over the mouth of the river. Commonly seen are Black, Forster’s and Least Terns along with the ubiquitous Laughing Gull. In the eighties and before, Sydney Island, the eastern-most of two islands in Sabine Lake a mile or so south of Bailey’s, held a teaming rookery with egrets, herons and especially Roseate Spoonbills. However, as they are want to do with heavily used rookery sites, the birds abandoned the island a few years ago. (This is usually ascribed to the problems caused by the accumulation of alkaline droppings.)

The area “north and east” may well contain the same ducks as the area “south and east”, but, in addition, often has Hooded Mergansers in winter in significant numbers. This is probably the most reliable site for this species in the area. Near the bridge, Roseate Spoonbills can usually be found. In winter, the area is frequently used by one of the flocks of Tree Swallows which roam the marshes of Jefferson and Orange Counties. Summer swallows are likely to be Cliff Swallows from the colony “north and east” described below. A few White Pelicans used to visit, presumably from the flock on Pleasure Island, but this flock has decreased in number (and may well have moved to Tyrrell Park in Beaumont). Neotropic Cormorants almost always perch on the power pylons, even in winter.

The area “south and west” as viewed from the historical marker is favored by Black-necked Stilts, and may produced other shorebirds in migration.

The area “north and west” has not been of note until very recently. In 1996, a flock of Cliff Swallows was discovered nesting on the new concrete beams on the north side base of the Rainbow Bridge. In 1996, approximately 100 of the jug shaped nests were noted This colony can be viewed best from the vicinity of the boat ramp next to Esther’s restaurant. Early morning or late evening are best except when the adults are actively feeding unfledged young.

## **CLAIBORNE WEST PARK ORANGE COUNTY**

**Ownership:** Claiborne West Park is owned and operated by the Orange County Parks Board.

**Directions:** Claiborne West Park is on the north side of Interstate 10, 5.6 miles east of the intersection of Texas 105 in Vidor and about 12 miles west of the city of Orange. However, there are not very many exits from the main lanes of Interstate 10 in the vicinity of the park, and it is necessary to transition to the service road well before the park is reached. Eastbound from Beaumont, the main lanes must be left at Exit 864, signed for FM1132 and FM1135. The service road is then followed for about 2.5 miles, past FM1132 and FM1135 until Cow Bayou is reached There is an underpass to the westbound service road at this point. The park entrance road is about three tenths of a mile west of Cow Bayou. (If the exit is missed, the next exit, marked 869, leads to FM1442, which can be used to cross over the Interstate to the westbound service road This is about 2.1 miles east of the Park). If approaching from the west, the appropriate exit is Exit 869 (signed for FM1442). The service road leads to the park entrance road in 2.1 miles, just west of Cow Bayou.

**Habitat:** Cow Bayou divides Claiborne West Park into two parts connected by a footbridge. The section to the west of the Bayou, which has been straightened and widened over the years for drainage purposes, is maintained for recreational purposes, and includes numerous picnic areas, softball fields, tennis courts and the like. Except for the softball fields, the taller trees, mostly pines, have been retained. There is a lake with numerous dead trees. To the northwest of the lake and the north of the softball fields, the woods have some underbrush. Across the footbridge to the east, the habitat is native mixed woodland, with one wide cleared right of way running from the bridge northeast and then curving back to a northwesterly direction. There are trails through the woods. The trail along Cow Bayou is likely to be particularly productive.

**Birds:** Claiborne West Park offers an opportunity to observe the typical woodland species of the Big Thicket without having to travel very far. The dead trees in the lake are particularly attractive to woodpeckers, often including Red-Headed. The lake also attracts ducks, usually including some relatively tame Wood Ducks. Chickadees, titmice and wrens are numerous year round. Pine Warblers are likely to be present year round also, with nesting migrant warblers such as Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers present during the summer. Acadian Flycatchers and Summer Tanagers certainly breed; Great Crested Flycatchers probably do. In winter, Orange-crowned and Myrtle Warblers are likely to be present; Brown-headed Nuthatches can be seen, and a

variety of wintering sparrows is found. In migration season, the park may harbor an unusually wide variety of warblers, probably because of the good mix of hardwoods among the pines.