

Fall Migration

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We are still in the midst of summer, but for some birds, it's already time for fall migration!

Here on the Upper Texas Coast, we are in a hotspot for bird migration, both in the spring and fall. This is because many species that come down from Canada and the Mid/Eastern United States funnel down through our area on their way to Mexico and South America. So we can expect to see more variety of birds in the coming months.

On the beaches, we are already starting to see some feathered travelers. Birds like Piping Plovers and Black-bellied Plovers started to arrive in July, and we will see even more of them in August. This is because the adults tend to speed back to Texas in the summer, while the juveniles take a little bit longer to get here (traveling with kids always takes longer, doesn't it?). Some of these birds will continue on down South, but many will stay on the Texas Coast through winter.

Along with shorebirds, we will also start seeing more in-land birds. For example, the peak of Purple Martin season is in July and August. We can see enormous roosts of thousands of Purple Martins in the late summer here, and there are even Purple Martin watch parties set up by Houston Audubon where visitors can watch these birds flock!

Another species that will be coming through our area in large numbers is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. We see these birds starting to migrate through Texas in July, but the real peak migration time is September. These hummingbirds are on their way South to Central America, but they often like to stay in Texas for a little while to rest up and drink nectar. So if you're one of those bird-lovers who likes to put out hummingbird feeders, you'll probably start to see more and more hummers coming in to your yard as September approaches.

Another group of birds coming through in the fall is the raptors. Many raptors coming from Canada and the Mid/Eastern U.S. naturally funnel down along the coast as they head South towards Mexico. A great example of this is Smith Point Hawk Watch on the East side of Galveston Bay. Soaring raptors naturally channel through Smith Point on their way along the coast, so during the peak of raptor migration season (early October) thousands of hawks can travel over the tower in a single day.

If you are interested in seeing some of the birds migrating through our area, you're in luck! There are many places and resources for bird lovers in our area. Check out Smith Point Hawk Watch, Brazos Bend State Park, or Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge (just to name a few!)

And if you want to help birds on their journey South, remember to turn your lights off at night during migration, keep your cats indoors, and avoid using poisons. You can also put out bird seed, sugar water in hummingbird feeders, and clean water for birds to bathe in and drink.

Photo by Joe Kennedy

Caption: Hundreds of Broad-winged Hawks soar over Smith Point Hawk Watch.