

# Fall 2004: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 3556 sightings of 323 species from 1 August 2004 to 30 November 2004 .

## ***WEATHER REPORTS:***

David Wolf, July-August report, East Texas, "A cool and wet summer in East Texas? Sounds impossible, but it's all relative, and this summer was indeed unusual. June was one of the coolest and wettest on record, July was more typical but still not especially hot, and August was almost the coolest ever, with notable early fronts on Aug 2 and Aug 12-13, and a weaker one on Aug 21. Still, for as strange as this summer was, it was hard to pinpoint any major effects on the birds. Few post-breeding wanderers or migrant shorebirds were found this year, as water levels remained high due to the ample rainfall. Without suitable mudflats and receding pools we simply don't find these birds in our area. Nor did all of that frontal activity produce many southbound migrants."

Darrell Vollert, 18 August, Central Brazos Valley, "We have had the mildest summer weather in the CBV since 1997. June was a very wet month. July was fairly dry (we did have 3 days with measurable rain) and August has been dry for the most part, but we are still well above average on rainfall for the year to date. We have had an unprecedented 4 frontal passages this summer. The thermometer has not topped 100 degrees this summer. I think 98 degrees has been the hottest day we have experienced. The front that passed through on Friday [13 August] was an unusually strong front for this time of the year. ... it has been in the low 60's at night. Last Saturday the thermometer did not top 90 degrees. To my surprise last weekend's front brought in fewer migrants than the one the weekend before. I guess the stronger northerly winds pushed the birds to the coast. The humidity and clouds are back today(18th) and there have been a few rain showers around. ... We have had two frontal passages in August (6th and 13th) and two in July. It has been a very unusual summer. I can remember experiencing one frontal passage during the summer months in years past, but never four in one summer season."

Darrell Vollert, 21 August, Washington Co., "Birds were very active in the Brazos River bottom after a thunderstorm passed through in the pre-dawn hours and another band of rain passed through in the early afternoon. The ag fields along FM2447 near the road's end were teeming with grosbeaks, orioles, and buntings."

Rich Kostecke, 21 August, Bell County, "In between torrential downpours, I managed to get out birding a bit ..."

Jeffrey Hanson, 3 September, Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch, "Hurricane Howard has ceased sending pacific moisture our way, and we've returned to SE winds. This translated into a closer to typical early-September day weather-wise. Thankfully, we're still on a cooler-than-normal track, so sitting out for today's 8.25 hrs was bearable."

Jeffrey Hanson, 16 September, Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch, "Phew. Once Thursday afternoon rolled around, I had to consult a calendar to remind me what the date really was... September 16th, right?!?, not August 16th? - as the heat index then was bordering on triple digits for much of that afternoon. Wednesday limped along with little in the way of what hawks here really need to migrate: heat for thermals, and conducive winds. That day briefly poked over 90 degrees, and the wind was steadily out of the south - hence the low raptor turnout."

Darrell Vollert, 6 October, Washington County, "There has been some noticable bird movement the last few days. It sure is dry here. We desperately need some rain."

Fred Gehlbach, October, McLennan County, "This past October is the rainiest in the last 40 years in the ravine, and you already know the climate is getting warmer, if you've paid attention to your heating/cooling bills."

Rich Kostecke, 19 November, Bell County, "Much of the [Union Grove] WMA is now flooded after the recent rains; making it impossible without wading to get to a good vantage point for viewing the shallow bay were the waterfowl normally hang out."

Randy Pinkston, 21 November, Bell County, "The lake level at Stillhouse Hollow is the highest ever in my 10+ years here."

Rich Kostecke, 21 November, Bell County, "Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir is way up (the highest the long-time locals I have talked to have seen it)! Most of the parks are still gated off, but I was able to access Chalk Ridge Falls and Union Grove WMA (the latter is accessible, but much of the grasslands are flooded)."

Brush Freeman, 23 November, Bastrop County, "Yes, more rain. Amid all the other down sides of all this water is the apparent loss of nearly all of the big riparian stands of giant ragweed that I have been birding so much lately. I had high hopes for these to attract winter finches as they usually do. The stands I bird on the Colorado river are under several feet of water, assuming they are even still there, and even those on lesser tributaries are either flattened or completely scoured away leaving little but bare soil. It is a shame as the seed crop on these plants was one of the best I had seen in several years and a great number of birds were using the resource. Elsewhere on higher ground, the crop seems to

have been knocked down by the heavy rains. ... A number of the back roads remain closed."

Bert Frenz, Fall Report, Brazos Co. "The local weatherman called it the fifth wettest year by the end of November with only a small fraction of an inch from surpassing the fourth wettest, a sure bet with one month to go. Elsewhere, a cross region drive the third week of November showed standing water everywhere, rivers overflowing and even a small ditch called Dry Creek now broadened to a major waterway."

Tim Fennell, Fall Report, Williamson Co. "By the end of the season, it was the third wettest year in the area's history, with the possibility of it becoming the wettest year in history by year's end. Granger Lake was at times 10-15 feet above full, with the picnic shelters at Friendship Park completely submerged."

Brush Freeman, Fall Report, Central Coast to Central Texas, "What an amazing fall. Late migrations, the warmest October on record along the coast, southeast and central Texas (per NOAA data), with likewise probably the rest of the eastern 2/3 s of the state seeing the same. Rainfall was in abundance during the period with many central Texas and coastal locations receiving in excess of 25-35 inches above the norm for the year, continuing the wet trends that were such a major factor this entire year. In western Bastrop Co. Utley, (Barton Ranch) 62.15" had accumulated YTD with a full month to go! Likewise Austin with an average annual rainfall of 30.357 inches is recording almost 57". Into early and mid Nov. neo-tropical migrants stacked up on the coast and in central Texas seemingly in no hurry to depart, on the coast hummingbird numbers remained high at many feeder locations to the end of October and beyond! Atypical. While migrant passerines piled up, a large contingent of winter birds moved in to over-lap the late departures, in numerous cases 2-4 weeks earlier than usual. This provided for an interesting mix of birds. ... With ample rains (and even flooding) this year the seed crop is excellent as is the acorn, nut and berry crop (excepting yaupon). And while it is very tempting to try to read something into the early influx of wintering birds, this observer has learned to keep his mouth shut when it pertains to such speculation:-). However by the end of the period no killing frost or freezes had occurred in most of South Central Texas"

## **MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:**

Five Canada Geese arriving 2 Oct (David Wolf) in *Nacogdoches* beats the earliest ever date for that East Texas area by one day.

With very little historical data to go by, almost all **Cackling Goose** sightings set county records. So two Cackling in a mixed flock of Canada and Greater White-fronteds are noteworthy for *Hill* on 15 Nov (Brush Freeman).

Mottled Ducks, which are not uncommon in *Waller*, were nonetheless present in larger than typical numbers on 26 Sep (Fred Collins) when 100+ were near Pattison Road.

The summering lone drake Canvasback present since 8 May was still at Meadow Lake in *Williamson* on 24 Oct (Tim Fennell), about the time when other Canvasbacks started appearing.

A **Greater Scaup** at Salt Lake on 20 Nov (Brush Freeman, April Day) is apparently a new county record for *Guadalupe*.

A second county record, the first being set about the same date last year, is two **Surf Scoters** on 19 Nov (Bob Burleson) on a pond on a restored prairie in the eastern part of *Bell*. Another Surf Scoter appeared on Calaveras Lake in *Bexar* on 27 Nov (Sheridan Coffey, Martin Reid) and remained into Dec.

A **Long-tailed Duck** in central Texas is a rare show; so one at Hornsby Bend, *Travis*, first noted 22 Nov (Victor Emanuel, Barry Lyons) and continuing well into December, and a second one at the Waco sewage treatment ponds in *McLennan* 29 Nov–2 Dec (Frank Bumgardner) is a double feature.

At Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes* David Phalen found a female Red-breasted Merganser, not an annual event for the Central Brazos Valley region.

A juvenile Ruddy Duck at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone* was out of season on 15 August (Peter Barnes); otherwise, the first East Texas arrivals were four on Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, on 26 Sep (Louis Debetaz, Jack Windsor).

Within the Austin city limits were five Wild Turkeys – a male escorting four females - on 12 Oct (Byron Stone) at Northwest Hills.

Fred Collins reports that Northern Bobwhite continue to be common and widespread in central *Waller* where grass is plentiful, cover good and fire ants almost undetectable.

A first for *Hunt*, two **Red-throated Loons** were on Lake Tawakoni on 7 Nov (Matt White). Although almost annual at the lake, this is first time they have been on the *Hunt* side.

Good numbers (7-9) of **Least Grebes**, nesting this summer for the first time in *Freestone*, were still present 12 Sep (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon) at Richland Creek WMA and one remained to the late date of 14 Nov (Peter Barnes). As reported by Peter Barnes in NETFO News, "Of interest is a Least Grebe at Red Slough in Oklahoma, just north of Bowie Co. during this period as well (David Arbour)."

Twelve American White Pelicans at Martin Creek Lake in *Panola* on 29 Aug (Mike Dillon) is about right for early arrivals, but 150 on 4 Sep (fide George Russell) at Lake Livingston in *Trinity* is an exceptionally high count this early in the season for East Texas.

The success of breeding **Brown Pelicans** along the coast is having a spillover effect further inland. One remained at Michell Lake wetlands in *Bexar* from 14 Aug-5 Sep (Martin Reid, Sheridan Coffey, m.obs.) among a flock of hundreds of white pelicans. Another Brown Pelican visited Lake Buchanan, *Burnet*, on 5 Sep (Byron Stone, Tim Fennell), but the most unusual was a **flock of ~30** at Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir in *Bell* on 25 Nov (Gil Eckrich, Sabrina Nicholson), an amazing reoccurrence of a similar number for the first time last July.

Seventeen Anhinga on 29 Aug (Jeffrey Hanson) at the Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch, *Travis*, was not only a one-day record for the watch, but also more than recorded during the entire period last year.

A very rare inland occurrence of a **Magnificent Frigatebird** was noted 24 Oct (Willie Sekula) near Saspamco in *Wilson*. Atypically, this record does not seem to be associated with the strong winds of a storm.

A Reddish Egret was reported 21 August (Martin Reid) at Mitchell Lake wetlands in *Bexar*, while another apparently showed up at Hornsby Bend early on 11 Sep, but could not be refound later the same day (fide Byron Stone).

Seven lingering White Ibises were at the *Harrison* side of Caddo Lake on the weekend of 20 Nov (Dede Crusinberry) and on the same date (David Phalen) four immature White Ibises were still at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes*, having resided there for the previous 6 weeks.

Coincidentally, a Glossy Ibis in transition from alternate to basic plumage was in the same Temple location on 13 Aug (Randy Pinkston) as one was about that date last year. This is only the third county record for *Bell*.

Migrating Turkey Vultures are interesting phenomena, but seeing 824 at the Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch on 22 Oct (Jeffrey Hanson) and a "river" of an astounding 3-4000 vultures over *Bastrop* on 24 Oct (Brush Freeman) must have been a thrilling experience. The *Bastrop* migration occurred ~4:30-5:45 pm and, curiously, ~4000 Turkey Vultures were seen migrating along Lake Tawakoni that morning 10:35-12:45 (Richard Kinney, Julius Nussbaum, Ron Baltzegar). Could they be the same string? A nne. line connects the two sites by 325 km (195 mi), yielding an average flight speed of 54 kph (32 mph).

Adding to a less than a handful of reports from *Lee* stretching back to 1887 is a 4 Aug (Cal Newnam) sighting of two Swallow-tailed Kites circling over Center Point Cemetery.

Jeffrey Hanson, conducting the Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch in *Travis* established new season highs for Black Vulture (262), Turkey Vulture (4688), Osprey (13), Sharp-shinned Hawk (92), Cooper's Hawk (151) – not including 90 unidentified Accipiters - Broad-winged Hawk (227, including two dark-morph), and Red-tailed Hawk (23).

High counts of Bald Eagles on several lakes bodes well for the species: 5 on Lake Livingston 9 Oct (George Russell), 4 on Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir 25 Nov (Gil Eckrich, Sabrina Nicholson), 5 on Gibbons Creek Reservoir 26 Nov (David Phalen).

**Common Black-Hawk** is accidental to the Austin area, with most of the few prior records insufficiently documented. A single bird first sighted ~19 Nov (Chris Thomas) was refound with a second on 24 Nov (Chris Thomas, Josh Mitchell) near the river in Wimberley, *Hays*.

On 1 Sep (Janice Thomson) an adult Harris's Hawk showed up in *Williamson*, north of its normal range.

In excess of 10,000 Swainson's Hawks flew over *Williamson* at Granger Lake on 3 Oct (Robert Bates), coinciding with a cold front and rainstorms that arrived later in the afternoon. Four days later, 3542 Swainson's were counted at the Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch and the next day, 8 Oct, 5428 Swainson's Hawk set a new daily record for the count (Jeffrey Hanson).

A Zone-tailed Hawk hunted the vireo restoration area of Balcones Canyonlands near the *Travis-Williamson* border on 11 Nov (Paul Fushille).

In *Williamson*, a striking partial albino Red-tailed Hawk was observed 26 Sep and again on 21 Nov (Tim Fennell) near Cypress Blvd in east Round Rock.

A Ferruginous Hawk 19 Oct (Jeffrey Hanson) on the Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch presented only the second such occurrence for the watch.

Casual to north-east Texas, a **Golden Eagle** was observed briefly in *Rusk* on 19 Sep (Peggy Harding, Wanda Bosmans).

For the second year in a row, Crested Caracaras nested on a ranch in *Mills* (Robert Bates); this year they successfully raised one young. Also for the second year, two young were raised in a west *Williamson* (Robert Bates). Fourteen caracaras at a cow carcass in *Burleson* on 13 Oct (Josh Gascamp) is a county high count.

In *Williamson* where they are rare, 2-4 Prairie Falcons were sighted 3 times in Granger Lake sites within a few miles of each other: a pair on 3 Oct (Robert Bates), and singles on 29 Oct (Byron Stone) and 13 Nov (Tim Fennell).

Not often reported, a Virginia Rail was at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell* on 14 Oct (Randy Pinkston).

Rice harvest is the best time to find Sora's: on 14 Oct Fred Collins counted 38 in 30 minutes in southern *Waller* and on 10 Nov he saw 36 in west *Harris* along with 2 Virginia Rails, but no Yellow Rails on either day.

The story, complete with photos, of two **Whooping Cranes** resting near a stock pond in *Austin* made the Brenham Banner-Press. The sighting was near the *Washington* border on 1 Nov (Derek Hall, photographer), but established a new county record for *Austin*. Two days later 26 cranes were counted on the Aransas NWR aerial census and by the end of the period the census revealed 183 adults and 33 young for an all time high of 216 cranes.

Late American Golden-Plovers were 1 at Hornsby Bend on 20 Oct (Jeffrey Hanson) and 3 in the Granger area of *Williamson* on 28-30 Oct (Tim Fennell).

An early arrival date of 29 Sep (Bob Doe) marked 22 Mountain Plovers at the usual location along Dauer Ranch Road in *Comal*. At Granger in *Williamson* they were first noticed on 16 Oct, remaining through the season and peaking at 97 on 29 Oct (Tim Fennell).

Unofficially, Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch counters Jeffrey Hanson and Gray Jolink "counted gobs of Upland Sandpipers migrating their way into the Central Texas record books." Officially, they ended 21 Aug with an amazing day count of 1222, plus another 305 the next day. The day count surpasses the previous Central Texas record of 615 established from calls the evening of 4 Sep 1961 in Austin.

Semipalmated Sandpipers tarried at mud flats along Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes* and 8 were still present at the late date of 13 Nov (David Phalen).

An amazingly high count of **800-1000 Buff-breasted Sandpipers** at the turf farms in the Brazos River bottoms of *Burleson* was made on 31 Aug (Robert Tizard). Thereafter, others observed the Buff-breasteds and even on 18 Sep (Karen Russell, Jeffrey Musser) 500-1000 were still present. This flock represents a significant percent of the world's population, estimated at 15-20,000.

A first county record for *Bell*, a **Red-necked Phalarope** was carefully identified 11 Oct (Randy Pinkston) at Union Grove Wildlife Area on Stillhouse Hollow Lake. This is a late date, but not unprecedented in the Oaks & Prairies region.

At Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell*, two immature Franklin's Gulls on 21 Aug (Randy Pinkston) were very early, typically not being expected in numbers for another two months.

A dozen adult Ring-billed Gulls at the same place on the same day (Randy Pinkston) were also very early.

In *Van Zandt*, a first winter **California Gull** was carefully compared with Ring-billed and Herring gulls on pilings at Holiday Marina on 2 Nov (Matt White). According to Matt's book, there are only three prior records for California Gull in ne. Texas.

Two Least Terns were at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell* on 22 Aug (Gil Eckrich), but more remarkably one was extremely late on 23 Oct (Peggy Harding, Wanda Bosmans) at Wright Patman Lake in *Cass*.

Black Terns are uncommon in East Texas; nonetheless, 91 at Wright Patman Lake in *Cass* on 20 Aug (Mike Dillon) is an impressive number.

A **Black-billed Cuckoo** at Wright Patman Lake in *Cass* on 11 Sep (Mike Dillon) was a rare find for north-east Texas.

A late Yellow-billed Cuckoo was at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* on 20 Oct (David Wolf).

In a mowed hayfield in the Brazos River bottoms of *Washington* on 6 Nov (Darrell Vollert, Marsha Seyffert), a **Burrowing Owl** was the first county record in many decades; the owl did not stay in the vicinity however. The residential Oak Hill area of south-west Austin was an odd place for another Burrowing Owl, found there 8 Nov (Noreen Baker).

Considerably out of range, an adult female **Magnificent Hummingbird** was identified in south-central Texas in *Wilson* on 23-24 October (Martin Reid, Georgina Schwartz, Libby Huffman, Sheridan Coffey, Ron and Teresa Hillstromb, Andy Garcia, Helen Rejzek). An uncommon and local summer resident in West Texas, this species is known in the east by only a couple of records.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds tarried until 27 Oct (Peggy Harding) in *Rusk*, 29 Oct (Ellen Ratoosh) in *Brazos* and 5 Nov (Gail Cole) in *Washington*. Late Ruby-throateds are almost always immature/female-type birds. An adult male present until 3 Nov (Barb & Ken Emery, Ellen Ratoosh) in College Station, *Brazos*, is unusually late.

The status of wintering **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** in East Texas has not been well documented, but sightings seem to be increasing. In *Washington*, an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird stayed throughout Nov (Gail Cole) in



Brenham and, concurrently, two Black-chinneds stayed in Chappell Hill (Floi Ewing). Further east and adding to less than a handful of sightings for the Pineywoods, in *Nacogdoches* female-plumaged Black-chinned Hummingbirds were present 16-24 Nov (Nelda Mitchell, confirmed by Jesse Fagan) in *Nacogdoches* and 18 Nov+ (Ruth Heino, confirmed by Jesse Fagan and David Wolf) in Loco Valley.

An adult male Broad-tailed Hummingbird visited feeders 28+ Aug (Noreen Baker) in Austin.

Ringed Kingfishers were found along the Colorado River at two Austin locations: Roy C. Guerrero Colorado River Metropolitan Park throughout the season (Homer Rushing, et al.) and Hornsby Bend on 30 Oct (Richard Kaskan, Eric Carpenter).

Green Kingfishers were widespread at their northern limit, including sightings in *Travis*, *Bell*, *Gonzales*, and two *Williamson* locations. The most unusual was one at Belton Lake spillway 25 Sep - 12 Nov (m.obs.), adding to only a few records for *Bell*.

Finding seven woodpecker species at a single Oaks & Prairies site is a challenge, but David Phalen found that many while canoeing Gibbons Creek Reservoir in Nov. Best for the *Grimes* location was 14 Red-headed Woodpeckers found on 26 Nov.

Late Eastern Wood-Pewees were at *Nacogdoches* on 21 Oct (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, David Wolf) and eastern *Travis* on 6 Nov (Brush Freeman).

Singing at *Nacogdoches* ponds, an Alder Flycatcher confirmed its identity on 5 Sep (Jesse Fagan).

In the Pineywoods Scissor-Tales, David Wolf writes, "Without a doubt, the bird of the season was a **Gray Flycatcher** on the edge of Rayburn Lake at the base of the TX 147 bridge on Sep 6 (Jesse Fagan, Robert Truss, David Wolf). Jesse obtained detailed digi-scoped images of the bird and video clips of its distinctive tail wag to confirm the sighting, while Dave and Robert made extensive notes. This is a phenomenal record, one of less than 10 for the entire eastern North American region, and a species that no one would have predicted would ever occur in our area." The sighting was in San Augustine County.

A "Western" Flycatcher stayed three days 28-30 Nov (Brush Freeman) at Colorado Chapel Cemetery in *Bastrop*. This species is recorded less than annually in Central Texas and most of the reports come from Brush.

Say's Phoebes spread eastward this season with reports of two birds west of Austin on 7 Nov (Edward Fair), and singles at Lake Belton in *Bell* on 12 Nov

(Randy Pinkston) and two different *Bastrop* locations on 18 and 28 Nov (Brush Freeman).

This fall brought an increase in Couch's Kingbird sightings at their extreme northern limit, including reports of a possible two at Hornsby Bend 9 Sep (Stan Van Sandt), one at Webberville County Park in east *Travis* on 5 Oct (Mollie Kloepper), two near Shiner in *Lavaca* on 21 Oct (Brush Freeman) and one at the farthest north location at Bryan in *Brazos* on 27 Oct (Keith Arnold), the same location one set a county first record in spring.

A Western Kingbird still present in *Travis* on 12 Sep (Byron Stone) was late.

New for the *Bastrop* county list, a **Cassin's Vireo** was carefully identified on 23 Nov (Brush Freeman).

Adding to only a handful of area records, a Hutton's Vireo was heard in extreme s. Austin on 10 Aug (Jeffrey Hanson).

An out-of-range Common Raven was reported in *Bastrop* on 27 Oct (Josh Mitchell).

In Nov, a flock of ~100 Cliff Swallows had been feeding over Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes*, but remarkably some were still present on 26 Nov (David Phalen), departing only when a cold front came thereafter.

For the second year, **Cave Swallows** have remained in *Brazos*, but this time in larger numbers. A flock of ~50 roosted nightly under a bridge in College Station throughout the season, completing a one-year presence at this site (Ellen Ratoosh). The lines between breeding season, fall migration and winter residency are not well drawn for Cave Swallows and now we know that some at least are permanent residents. Typically, one might expect Cave Swallows to have departed by or in Oct, but this season provided multiple Oct records in *Brazos*, *Milam*, *Travis*, *Washington* and *Williamson*. In Nov there were reports from *Bell*, *Brazos*, *Travis* and *Washington*, and the most unusual were hundreds of Cave Swallows in *Bastrop* on 23 Nov (Brush Freeman).

Compared to other irruptive species, Red-breasted Nuthatches made a minor showing this season, widespread but in small numbers in the Pineywoods beginning 22 Oct (Charles Dean Fisher) in *Nacogdoches* and in notable numbers in *Bastrop* 8 Nov + (Brush Freeman).

A Rock Wren was way out of habitat – and range - in the middle of a pasture north of Granger Lake, *Williamson*, on 30 Oct (Tim Fennell).

An incredibly early **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** appeared at Woodway Ravine in *McLennan* on 19 Aug (Fred Gehlbach), besting all known records for the Oaks & Prairies region.

A front in early Nov brought to the Oaks & Prairies region the first trickle of American Robins and by the end of the first week larger flocks (30-90) were being seen. On 14 Nov (Peter Barnes) and impressive flight of 1600 were observed over Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone*. By the third week of Nov, reported flocks were in the thousands in *Gonzales* and the tens of thousands in *Bastrop* (Brush Freeman).

Very rare at the northern edge of its range, a Long-billed Thrasher visited *Gonzales* on 20 Nov (Brush Freeman); a Curve-billed Thrasher was present there the same day.

Cedar Waxwings reached Central Texas by 6 Nov (Rich Kostecke) and two weeks later were present by the hundreds.

**Many warblers lingered longer than usual this fall** in Central and East Texas: Nashville Warblers until 22 Nov (Les Harrison) in *Brazos* and 25 Nov (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop*; Northern Parula until 5 Oct (Peggy Harding) in *Rusk*; multiple Black-throated Green Warblers in *Bastrop* as late as 25 Nov (Brush Freeman); American Redstart until 30 Oct (Darrell Vollert, Marsh Seyffert) in *Washington*, 6 Nov and 25 Nov (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop*; **Prothonotary Warbler** until 11 Nov (Noreen Baker) in *Travis*; Swainson's Warbler until 27 Sep (Jack Burnell) in *Nacogdoches*; Ovenbird until 19 Nov (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop*; Mourning Warbler until 10 Oct (Jesse Fagan) in *Nacogdoches*; Hooded Warbler until 30 Oct (Mike Austin) in *Montgomery*.

Yellow-throated Warblers are not typical fall migrants through Central Texas, so singles in Austin 30 Oct (Bert Frenz) and *Gonzales* 20 Nov (Brush Freeman, April Day) are unusual.

A Blackburnian Warbler in *Guadalupe* 7 Sep (Susan Schaezler) is a very rare fall migrant for Central Texas.

Yellow-rumped Warblers were unusually abundant this season.

Certainly the most remarkable of warbler sightings this fall is a **Painted Restart** found in *Sabine* on 25 Nov (Robert Truss). Well described, the bird was observed twice, but could not be relocated the next day. According to David Wolf, "This is a new species for the Pineywoods, though it remains hypothetical as a one-observer sighting. Interestingly, the date fits into a small pattern of late fall/early winter sightings from Louisiana and Texas coast."

Single Scarlet Tanagers were surprising finds: a male in *Nacogdoches* on 2 Sep (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf) was a first fall record for the area and one of the few for the entire Pineywoods region; another male in *Fayette* on 5 Sep (Mike Mathews) is perhaps a first county record and certainly the first fall record.

An out-of-range Western Tanager was in *Washington* on 15 Oct and presumably the same individual was at the same Brenham location on 12 Nov (Darrell Vollert). Curiously, a Western was also at this location in March.

Except for perhaps Lincoln Sparrow which arrived a bit late – first two reports 13 Oct and 23 Oct – wintering sparrows arrived on schedule in the Oaks & Prairies region and, by the end of the period, numbers were better than average. Following his estimate of 175 White-crowned Sparrows on 18 Nov in *Bastrop*, Brush Freeman commented, "After several years it looks like there is a bumper crop of White-crowned Sparrows again this season in the region."

"Highly unusual in Travis County, much less the city limits," reported Byron Stone while conducting his Sparrow Class field trip, when they found a Cassin's Sparrow at Blunn Creek Preserve in Austin on 16 Oct.

For an uncommon species, Fox Sparrows seemed to be widespread – 10 reports 6-30 Nov in the Oaks & Prairies region – and in good numbers, especially on 18 Nov (Brush Freeman) when 25+ were estimated at various stops in north-east *Bastrop*.

A single McCown's Longspur on 30 Oct (Tim Fennell) on the Granger prairies in *Williamson* was early; numbers of longspurs increased to 100+ by 20 Nov (Tim Fennell, Byron Stone). Strangely, 6 McCown's were feeding in cattle pens with Least Sandpipers on Sayer's Road, *Bastrop*, on 24 Nov (Brush Freeman).

An influx of Pyrrhuloxias pushed north and/or east this season, with 9 reports in *Bastrop*, *Bell*, *Gonzales* and *Travis* from 20-28 Nov (Brush Freeman, m.obs.). The most outstanding is 11 Pyrrhuloxias in *Gonzales* on 20 Nov (Brush Freeman).

A Rose-breasted Grosbeak observed in *Nacogdoches* on 5 Nov (Mimi Hoppe Wolf). According to David Wolf this is the latest fall date – and only Nov record – for the species in the Pineywoods, although the 2001 Pineywoods checklist (which he edited) includes a single sighting for early Nov.

On the late side of their migration, two Dickcissels were at Alazan Bayou WMA, *Nacogdoches*, on 20 Oct (David Wolf).

Foraging in a freshly-plowed field in the Brazos River bottoms were two male and 5+ female **Brewer's Blackbirds** on 20 Nov (Darrell Vollert, Ornithology Group of the Houston Outdoor Nature Club). This is a long overdue first country record for

*Washington*. While common in adjoining *Waller*, the species has become quite rare further upriver in *Burleson* and *Brazos*.

After many years of meager **Purple Finch** sightings, this fall brought widespread sightings in the eastern half of Texas. The first report was up to 6 in *Rusk* on 14 Nov (Peggy Harding). Brush Freeman stated, "Purple Finches were ... reported for the state this season in Wise Co. on Nov. 16th by Claire Currie followed soon after by Richard Kinney in Northeast Texas on the 18th and soon after that sightings popped up in many places elsewhere including south Central Texas to Uvalde! ... Definitely an invasion year AND for sure the biggest since the winters of '80-81 & '81-82 in Central Texas without doubt."

Single Pine Siskins were noted early – 25 Sep (D. D. Currie, et al.) in *Hunt*, 9 Oct (Eric Carpenter) in *Bastrop* – and then appeared widely throughout Central and East Texas, prompting many to call this an invasion year.

At least one feeder watcher, in particular Robert Bates in w. *Williamson*, had the joy of seeing five species of finch at one time: Purple Finch, House Finch, Pine Siskin, Lesser Goldfinch and American Goldfinch, a feat not possible in Texas for decades.

### **CONTRIBUTORS QUOTED ABOVE:**

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