

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

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 780 sightings of 169 species from 1 June 2004 to 31 July 2004 .

The 67 Texas counties included in this report are: Anderson, Angelina, Austin, Bastrop, Bell, Bowie, Brazos, Brown, Burleson, Caldwell, Camp, Cass, Cherokee, Coleman, Comanche, Coryell, DeWitt, Falls, Fayette, Franklin, Freestone, Gonzales, Gregg, Grimes, Guadalupe, Hamilton, Hardin, Harrison, Henderson, Houston, Jasper, Karnes, Lampasas, Lavaca, Lee, Leon, Liberty, Limestone, Madison, Marion, McLennan, Milam, Mills, Montgomery, Morris, Nacogdoches, Newton, Panola, Polk, Red River, Robertson, Rusk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Smith, Titus, Travis (eastern), Trinity, Tyler, Upshur, Walker, Waller, Washington, Williamson, and Wilson.

## ***WEATHER REPORTS & SEASONAL SUMMARIES:***

Ellen Ratoosh, 8 July, Brazos Co., "It has been an awfully wet/productive year, and the front porch Barn Swallows are now on their third (their first two clutches fledged six and five respectively)."

Rich Kostecke, 10 July, Bell Co., "The Slough Pond is still full to the brim and a fair number of waders (particularly egrets) are roosting on a flooded brush pile and in a dead tree on the south side of the pond."

Tim Fennell, Summer 2004, Central Texas, "By June 11th, it was already the fifth wettest June on record with 7.81 inches recorded at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (record of 15.59 inches in 1981). Reservoirs were at or above capacity. Granger Lake was at 506.5 feet above sea level (full at 504.5) and Lake Buchanan was at 1019.7 (full at 1020). Rainfall was only occasional the last half of the period but all reservoirs and ponds were full at the end of the period. Temperatures were below normal for the entire period."

Darrell Vollert, Summer 2004, 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 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."

## ***MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:***

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks established themselves in *Grimes* for the first time when 1-7 appeared regularly this summer at a farm near Bedias (Bob Clements); the only prior county record is a single bird found an last season's CBC, but in a different part of the county.

Hanging out with Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks was a West Indian Whistling-Duck, presumably an escapee, at Hornsby Bend, *Travis*, on 6 July (Eric Isley).

Mute Swans, now for the sixth year in a row, seem a well-established breeding species on Town Lake in Austin (fide Jeff Mundy).

Out-of-season ducks this summer include a Northern Shoveler at Hornsby Bend 25 July (Shirley Wilkerson), a Canvasback at Meadow Lake in *Williamson* on 24 July (Kathy McCormick) and a Lesser Scaup 19 June (fide Peter Barnes) at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone*.

The breeding edge of **Least Grebe** has pushed northward yet again when a pair invaded Richland Creek WMA for a new *Freestone* record on 1 June (Chris Lansdell); they produced 5 chicks, observed 20+ July (Hayden Haucke et al.).

Two Pied-billed Grebes in June and July provided new monthly records for Fort Hood at Henson Lake on the *Coryell* side (Rich Kostecke).

Sightings of single Eared Grebes at Granger Lake on 15 June (Tim Fennell) and at Temple in *Bell* on 22 June (Randy Pinkston) are among very few Central Texas records for this late timeframe.

Out-of-place inland **Brown Pelicans** are expected each summer: this season's include one or two 30 June (Eric Haskell) at Lake Waco, *McLennan*, and one immature on Lake Belton, *Bell*, on 15 July (Randy Pinkston). But the real prize, and totally unprecedented, was a **flock of 35** on Lake Belton on 6 July (Rich Kostecke), far beyond the prior maximum of two for an inland sighting.

Summering Neotropic Cormorants are probably unprecedented for *Bell*, yet this summer includes 1-4 at five different locations between 15 June and 31 July (Randy Pinkston, Rich Kostecke).

A second summer record for *Bell* was a Double-crested Cormorant at Stillhouse Hollow Lake on 4 July (Randy Pinkston).

An American Bittern on 6 June (Julie and Andy Balinsky) at Hornsby Bend is very rare for summer.

Typically rare in summer, single immature Black-crowned Night-Herons appeared in two *Bell* locations from mid June to 18 July (Randy Pinkston).

One or two Roseate Spoonbills at Waco, *McLennan*, were early on 13 June (Annette Jones).

An Osprey at Lake Somerville, *Burleson*, on 20 July (Cathy Liles) is the first summer record there since 1974.

Single Swallow-tailed Kites in *Bastrop* 18 July (Shelia Hargis, Dawn Dickson) and in *Austin* for a second county record 26 July (David Henderson) are rare; although more common in *Newton*, on 21 July (Dennis Paulson, fide Greg Lasley) a flock of 20 is a substantial count. Perhaps part of the same flock, twelve were found the next day (Tom Bledsoe) in nearby *Beauregard Parish*, Louisiana.

Mississippi Kites again had a very good breeding season in the Central Brazos Valley as evidenced by many sightings in *Brazos* and *Washington*, with probably at least a half dozen nesting pairs in each county (m.ob.). Summer kites were again found in northern *Austin* (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard) and two adults and two juveniles were found (Walter Matuska, fide Brian Hays, fide Keith Arnold) at a nest site in Bellville, further south in the county. A 19 June (Cathy Liles) sighting at the Nails Creek Unit of Lake Somerville State Park in *Lee* is the first summer record for the lake area. A pair nested in Tahitian Village subdivision of *Bastrop* with observations throughout the period (Denise Rodgers). Late July - early August sightings are problematic: a 29 July (Tim Fennell) sighting of 1-2 in Round Rock, *Williamson*, is suspected to be a local nester, while a Belton Lake, *Bell*, sighting the same day (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich) is thought to be a wandering juvenile.

Two **Sharp-shinned Hawk** nests were found in East Texas: one in *Nacogdoches* (Howard Williamson et al.) and another in south Angelina NF in *Jasper* (Rick Schaefer). According to David Wolf, "It is only in the last decade that it has been confirmed that this species nests in the Pineywoods."

Summer sightings of Cooper's Hawks are problematic: are they breeding pairs, non-breeding lingerers, or early post-breeding wanderers? Confirmed breeders this season include a nest near Garrison, *Nacogdoches*, (J. P. Dobbs, m.ob.), which according to David Wolf is " the first active nest found in our area and only the 2nd for the Pineywoods in 30 years," and a pair of Cooper's Hawks successfully nesting and raising two fledglings 1 March to 22 June (Perry Ping) in *Collin* of n-c. Texas. In the problematic category we have sightings 5 June (Rich Kostecke, Dan Roberts) in *Bell*; 13 June (Mary Dabney Wilson) in *Brazos*; 30 June (Fred Collins) in *Waller*; 13 July (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*; and 21 July (Jeffrey Hanson) in *Travis*.

A rare summer sighting of a Broad-winged Hawk occurred 19 July (Mike Dillon) on the *Cass* side of Wright Patman Lake. In the same time frame (Ted Eubanks Jr., Jeffrey Hanson) a nesting pair and a juvenile were reported in Austin near Shoal Creek.

Although no nesting evidence was found, some of the following single Swainson's Hawks likely represent local breeders: 1 June and 22 July (Tim Fennell) in Pflugerville, *Travis*; 15 June (Tim Fennell) near Jonah, *Williamson*; 20 June (Darrell Vollert) near Chappell Hill, *Washington*; 26 June (Randy Pinkston) in western *Bell*; 3 July (Rich Kostেকে) near Temple, *Bell*; 12 July (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*; 25 July (Tim Fennell) near Granger, *Williamson*; and 28 July (Fred Collins) in Waller; *Waller*. Twenty on the ground near Bruceville, *Williamson*, on 31 July (Dan Wilkerson) are early migrants.

An American Kestrel 14 July (Cliff Shackelford) in Austin is out of season. Another was in *Bowie* on 11 June (Charles Mills).

Unprecedented for Central Texas is a healthy **Sandhill Crane** visiting a very small marshy pond near Round Top in *Fayette* throughout July (Gar Seifullin). According to Brush Freeman, "Injured or otherwise impaired birds are sometimes found on the coastal plain especially. There was one in a Calhoun Co. pasture for several weeks in May and June but I haven't seen it lately though I have not been in the area. It appeared to be crippled slightly."

Unusual for *Burleson*, a Black-necked Stilt in the Brazos River bottoms on 31 July (Sue Ruotsala) is probably a post-breeding wanderer.

Establishing new summer records for Fort Hood, a 22 June (Sheila Jackson) sighting of a Long-billed Curlew was on the *Coryell* side of the base, while a 5 July (James Restivo) report of three was on the *Bell* side.

A Marbled Godwit 14 July (Grant Critchfield) on Lake Belton is one of very few *Bell* records.

Summer Franklin's Gulls were a surprise, with two at Granger Lake in *Williamson* 15 June (Tim Fennell) and one 21-24 July (Richard Kaskan, Laurie Foss) at Hornsby Bend in *Travis*.

A Caspian Tern on Lake Livingston in *Polk* on 15 June (Cliff Shackelford) is early; only one June record is shown on the Pineywoods checklist. Two to eight Caspian Terns were on Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes*, 11-31 July (David Phalen) where they are rare.

A Common Tern at Gibbons Creek Reservoir 31 July (David Phalen) is only the second *Grimes* record for the species.

Forster's Terns observed from the *Burleson* side of Lake Somerville 19 June (Cathy Liles) is the first June record for the large lake, although the observer states that she has seen them there before in the summer. She reported six at the same spot on 20 July, but found none during the intervening period.

Two inland Least Terns appeared at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone* 19 June (fide Peter Barnes) and a single one was at Lake Waco in *McLennan* on 24 June (Eric Haskell). Although the latter location was documented as a breeding site in 1932-33, there is no subsequent evidence of nesting there.

Photographic evidence of two Monk Parakeet nests in Brenham 12 June (Darrell Vollert, Marsha Seyffert) follows a two-year history of the invader's presence in *Washington*. One of the nests was removed by Bluebonnet Electric, but the birds built a new nest nearby. Four parakeets were seen on 10 July.

So many reports came out of the Central Brazos Valley this summer that 2004 has been called "The Year of the Roadrunner." An unprecedented 14 sightings from 29 May to 24 July derived from *Austin, Brazos, Burleson, Lee, Grimes, Waller, and Washington*.

A rarely reported adult and two nestling Barn Owls were observed 1 June (Randy Pinkston) on a farm near Moody in *Bell*.

Red-bellied is the expected woodpecker in the Austin area, although Golden-fronted is resident at Commons Ford Ranch west of the city. Hence, a Golden-fronted seen 19 June (Sue Whitmer) in north Austin, 10 miles w. of I-35, is unusual.

Pileated Woodpeckers are rarely reported for *Waller*, but this summer one was observed east of Hempstead on 17 July (Darrell Vollert) and another in north-east *Waller* on 24 July (Fred Collins). These are the first reports since 1998.

Although a common migrant through *Bell*, an Eastern Wood-Pewee along the Lampasas River on 11 July (Randy Pinkston) is very rare in mid-summer.

Eastern Phoebes are rare breeders in the Central Brazos Valley, so finding four singles in *Madison* and two each at two stops on the western edge of *Walker* on the Oak Grove BBS 20 June (Darrell Vollert) is a much higher count than expected.

Unexpected for July, a male Vermilion Flycatcher was observed the 18<sup>th</sup> (Kathy McCormick) on the *Williamson/Travis* county line.

As has occurred in past years, post-breeding Purple Martins gathered in mid-July by the thousands at a few traditional spots: south Tyler in *Smith*, Highland Mall in Austin, and Sanger Dr in Waco in *McLennan*.

For the second summer, juvenile Tree Swallows were present at Willis Creek Park in *Williamson* (Tim Fennell). Likely breeders were also noted at Belton Lake in *Bell* on 16 June (Rich Kostecke).

A Bushtit in western *Bell* on 18 June (James Restivo) was at the eastern edge of its range.

Perhaps resident for years, but not previously recognized, White-breasted Nuthatches were reported 28 June (Barbara May & Jean Cope, fide Floi Ewing, fide Darrell Vollert) at Hilltop Lake in *Leon*.

At the eastern edge of the Hill Country, a Canyon Wren was reported 20 July (Mike Creese) at Landa Park, New Braunfels, in *Comal*.

Not since 1973 has there been a record of a summer Wood Thrush in the Central Brazos Valley, but on 12 June David Phalen heard one when he paddled his kayak on Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes*.

Peter Barnes calls it a rare and localized summer resident for East Texas; the bird - a Gray Catbird - visited *Morris* on 11 July (David Brotherton).

An adult female and two fledglings observed 25 July (Tim Fennell) at Willis Creek Park may be only the second breeding record for Northern Parula in *Williamson*.

A Black-throated Green Warbler was rare for *Anderson* on 4 June (Cliff Shackelford).

With less than a handful of summer records in the region, a Yellow-throated Warbler 12 June (Darrell Vollert) near Brenham in *Washington* was a surprise.

While Prothonotary Warbler has long been suspected as a Central Brazos Valley breeder, finding evidence is another matter. On 2 June (Darrell Vollert) observed two adults feeding at least two fledglings near Chappell Hill, *Washington*. Also, the species is suspected as breeding this summer in *Robertson* at Camp Creek Lake (fide Keith Arnold).

A Louisiana Waterthrush took up residency in *Washington* for a week starting 18 July (Darrell Vollert). Curiously, one also wintered at the same location.

Grasshopper Sparrows must have kept a low profile this season, as the only report was one in *Rusk* on 25 July (Peggy Harding, Wanda Bosmans).

Producing a first July record for the Austin area and the Oaks & Prairies region, a male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** showed up at Austin feeders on the 6<sup>th</sup> (Mary Beth Martin).

Fort Hood has developed a reputation for Lazuli X Indigo Buntings and again this season, a male was observed 16 June and 1 July (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich) in *Coryell*.

Painted Buntings did well this breeding season prompting Rich Kostecke to describe it as a "ridiculous number" when he found 4-5 hour counts produced 70-96 buntings on three different trips 14-16 June in *Bell* and *Coryell*.

A female **Red Crossbill** 1 June (fide Greg Lisciandro) in *Guadalupe* was taken to wildlife rescue because its molting condition prevented it from getting airborne.

### **CONTRIBUTORS QUOTED ABOVE:**

Keith Arnold, Julie & Andy Balinsky, Peter Barnes, Billie Bernard, Tom Bledsoe, Wanda Bosmans, David Brotherton, Bob Clements, Fred Collins, Jean Cope, Mike Creese, Grant Critchfield, Dawn Dickson, Mike Dillon, J. P. Dobbs, Gil Eckrich, Ted Eubanks Jr., Jesse Fagan, Tim Fennell, Laurie Foss, Brush Freeman, Bert Frenz, Jeffrey Hanson, Peggy Harding, Hayden Haucke, Jeffrey Hanson, Shelia Hargis, Eric Haskell, Eric Isley, Sheila Jackson, Annette Jones, Richard Kaskan, Rich Kostecke, Chris Lansdell, Greg Lasley, Greg Lisciandro, Cathy Liles, Mary Beth Martin, Walter Matuska, Barbara May, Kathy McCormick, Charles Mills, Jeff Mundy, Dennis Paulson, Perry Ping, Randy Pinkston, David Phalen, Ellen Ratoosh, James Restivo, Dan Roberts, Denise Rodgers, Sue Ruotsala, Rick Schaefer, Susan Schaezler, Gar Seifullin, Marsha Seyffert, Cliff Shackelford, Darrell Vollert, Sue Whitmer, Dan Wilkerson, Shirley Wilkerson, Howard Williamson, Mary Dabney Wilson, and David Wolf