

Fall 2005: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 2539 sightings of 298 species from 1 August to 30 November 2005.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Darrell Vollert, 25 September, Washington Co., "Today's high temperature in Chappell Hill was 105 scorching degrees! The hottest temperature so far this year in Chappell Hill. We did not get a drop of rain from Rita on Saturday."

Susan Schaezler, 26 September, Guadalupe Co., "Today's high 104.8--sent me inside quickly this morning!"

Debra Corpora, 24 October, Robertson Co., "Temperature about 44 degrees this morning with a 10 mph north wind."

Tim Fennell, fall season, Williamson Co. "Weather for the period: dry, dry, dry!"

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

In East Texas, David Wolf made the comment, "Again this year, waterfowl were late in appearing and no numbers were seen during this period. This may reflect the very noticeable trend of more and more waterfowl wintering further north than in the past (check the CBC reports if you don't believe me). Unless or until it gets very cold "up there" we probably won't see many in our region."

Looking at all the duck reports that I received for Central and East Texas, many first reports seemed late: Snow Goose 11/12, Ross's Goose 11/13, Canada Goose 11/27, American Wigeon 10/1, Mallard 11/9, Northern Pintail 10/9, American Green-winged Teal 9/14 and then 10/9, Canvasback 11/12, Redhead 10/24, Bufflehead 11/13. Waterfowl that were a bit late included: Gadwall 10/9, Northern Shoveler 9/10. Waterfowl that were about expected included: Greater White-fronted Goose 10/4, Ring-necked Duck 10/1, Lesser Scaup 10/25, Common Goldeneye 11/19, Hooded Merganser 11/10, Red-breasted Merganser 11/9, Ruddy Duck 8/6 and then 9/10.

In the Central Oaks and Prairies, **Cinnamon Teal** are rare fall migrants, so a flock of six to seven Cinnamon Teal in Waco on 6 November (Frank Bumgardner) was a first record for the fall season in McLennan; one male remained to 12 November (Eric Haskell, et al.). Another Cinnamon Teal was at Hornsby Bend on 18 November (Eric Carpenter) where one or more appear most, but not all, fall seasons.

Found 14 November (Sally Breed) and remaining until 18 November, a female **White-winged Scoter** visited Hornsby Bend, Travis, and was joined at the ponds by a female **Black Scoter** 15 November (Paul Sunby, Dennis Palafox). The Black Scoter, a first for Travis and the Central Oaks and Prairies region, was viewed by many birders until 21 November.

A **Common Loon** on Stillhouse Hollow Lake in Bell on 1 October (Gil Eckrich) is the earliest fall arrival for that area.

Two families of **Neotropic Cormorants** were observed feeding half and three-fourths grown young at the unusual date of 19 November (Jeffrey Musser, Joan Dziezyc, et al.) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in Grimes. Cormorants are found here year round, but this is the first well-documented evidence of breeding.

Late were three immature **White Ibis** in Washington on 29 November (Darrell Vollert).

Post-breeding **Roseate Spoonbills** visited areas where they are not often seen, including Mexia (Limestone) for four weeks in August-September (Bennie Flatt), Country Club Lake in Bryan (Brazos) 21 September (Keith Arnold), various parts of Lake Livingston (San Jacinto) September to November (Pat & Jim Coe, George Russell) and Lake Sam Rayburn (Angelina) 6-16 September (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

A pre-migratory assemblage of 17 **Swallow-tailed Kites** in Liberty on 2 August (Sue Davison) is noteworthy. One migrant was found in San Jacinto on 24 September (George Russell).

August 7 (Cathy Liles) was an unusually early arrival for a **Bald Eagle** at Lake Somerville, Burleson.

Rare in August, a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** 28 August to 12 September (David Wolf) in Nacogoches town may have been a local breeder.

Swainson's Hawks usually appear in late September, so one in Nacogoches town on 4 September (Dave Wallace) and several days thereafter is very rare.

Although singles are typically seen in Waller, a pair of **White-tailed Hawks** on 2 November (Fred Collins) on Brown Road suggests breeding interest.

Zone-tailed Hawks made an unusual number of appearances in Central Texas, including one in western Travis on 9 August (Byron Stone) and 12 August (Gray Jolink), one at the Hornsby Bend Hawk Watch on 8 October (Gary Newgord) and another there 16 November (Kathy Funk, et al.). In addition, on 28 November there were sightings along the Blanco River in Hays (Herb Smith) and at Kizer Golf Course in eastern Travis (Scott Young).

A **Crested Caracara** 31 October (Dwight Hudson) in Coleman is a bit north-west of its normal range.

Virginia Rails at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in Bell on 14 October (Randy Pinkston) and the Waco wetlands in McLennan on 12 November (Rich Kostecke) were good finds.

Mountain Plovers were sparse and late arriving in Williamson and Bell; the first report was a single bird on 30 October (Randy Pinkston). By 23 November (Tim Fennell), 42 were found near Bartlett in Bell.

In Bell, where they rarely are found, two **Black-necked Stilts** showed up on 14 September (Randy Pinkston).

American Avocets appeared in atypical locales for several days at Lake Livingston, Trinity, the third week of October (Bert Frenz, Pat & Jim Coe) and at a pond in Waller on 1 November (Fred Collins).

Joining in a chorus of **American Woodcock** sightings this season are the following: 9 September (Robert & Connie Cook) in Harrison, 10 November (Grant Critchfield) in Bell, 12 November (Darrell Vollert) in Washington, 18 November (Scott Young) in Travis, 20 November (Karen Arquette, et al.) in Williamson, 23 November (Eric Carpenter) in Travis, 24 November (Byron Stone) in Travis, 26 November (Scott Young) in Travis, 27 November (Laura Bottone, Tappa Burt) in Smith, 27 November (Karen Arquette, James Loesch) in McLennan.

Among the few reported incursions of larids into East Texas as a result of Hurricane Rita were two **Laughing Gulls** at Lake Wright Patman in Cass on 25 September (Matt White) and twenty-five at Lake Sam Rayburn in San Augustine on the same date, one of which stayed until 6 October (David Wolf).

An early **Herring Gull** on 25 September (David Wolf) at Lake Sam Rayburn, San Augustine, was probably pushed in by Hurricane Rita. There is only one other September record shown on the Pineywoods checklist.

Eighteen **Caspian Terns** the day after the storm, 25 September (David Wolf), at Lake Sam Rayburn is a high count but smaller numbers were also seen there 26 August and 6 September.

By far the best Hurricane Rita stragglers were two **Royal Terns** at Lake Sam Rayburn, San Augustine, with one to two there on 25 September (David Wolf) and two on 1 October (David Wolf, Robert Truss). Good photos were taken (David Wolf) of this first confirmed record for the Pineywoods region.

A recently deceased **Inca Dove** found on 30 October (Bert Frenz, specimen to TCWC), near Livingston in Polk, was a recently fledged dove, unexpected at this late fall date.

An exceptionally late record for **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was one heard on 29 November (Darrell Vollert) and the previous week (Mary Brandt) in Chappell Hill, Washington. This is considerably later than the previous Central Brazos Valley record of 12 November 1973.

A calling **Whip-poor-will** on 30 September (Rich Kostecke) may be a first county record for Coryell, where few records have been kept. It was the only report of Whip-poor-will this season in the Central Prairie and East Texas.

A **Buff-bellied Hummingbird** remained in northern Austin [county] through the end of the period (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard).

A **Blue-throated Hummingbird** was a one day wonder at a College Station feeder on 27 September (Laura Biddle). The bird was identified from photographs (taken by Laura Biddle, identified by Keith Arnold and Bert Frenz) and is a first record for Brazos and one of only three or four for the entire central Oaks & Prairies region.

In the Pineywoods Scissor-Tales newsletter, David Wolf writes on 20 October, "This has been an outstanding fall for **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** and many people reported unusually large numbers swarming their feeders throughout September (50+ or more at some feeding stations). Numbers fluctuated, with many leaving just before Hurricane Rita, but others replacing them the week afterwards until they peaked ca Sept 28-29. While it is tempting to link these numbers to the hurricanes, I suspect that the prolonged dry spell was more responsible - other years with great numbers at the feeders have also been very dry and there isn't much natural food for them out there (m. obs.). Most departed abruptly on the Oct 6-7 cool front, but as I write this a few feeders are still attracting single late birds."

A first county record for Rusk and only the third for East Texas, a carefully described **Anna's Hummingbird** visited a Kilgore feeder from 24 October to 4 November (Peggy Harding).

The opportunity to see all three Texas kingfisher species – **Ringed, Belted, Green** - from the same spot is probably unprecedented for Central Texas, so that spot along the San Gabriel River in Georgetown, Williamson, was oft visited after Tim Fennell's first discovery on 6 November.

Quite surprising was the discovery of a female **Ringed Kingfisher** at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in Grimes on 19 November (Darrell Vollert, Jan Horbaczewski,

Marsha Seyffert, et al.) This first Central Brazos Valley record was photographed (Marsha Seyffert) on the 19th and again on 25 November.

A Red-naped Sapsucker was observed 29-30 October (Ed Fair, Richard Kaskan, Stu Wilson) at Commons Ford Ranch in Travis.

In an unexpected area at Caddo Lake, Harrison, a **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** was located 24 October (Tom Walker, Bettye Jo Lowery, fide Dorothy Metzler). This location is only two miles northeast of Caddo Lake State Park where another unexpected sighting was made on two days in October 2003.

A **Say's Phoebe** 8 September (Roy Reinartz Jr.) is likely a first county record in underbirded Lampasas.

A **Couch's Kingbird** was identified by voice on 3 August and 5 October (Keith Arnold) at Country Club Lake in Bryan, Brazos. These are the fourth and fifth sightings at this location since 2004, and the only reports of Couch's in the Oaks and Prairies region this season.

Creating quite a stir in birding news, a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** made an amazingly long stay at Hornsby Bend from 23 September (Ingrid Huskey, Homer Rushing) to 30 October, marking the longest stay in the U.S. and providing an opportunity for hundreds of birders to see this U.S. rarity.

In virtually the same spot it was seen last year, a **Cassin's Vireo** was on Arbuckle Road in Bastrop on 24 November (Brush Freeman).

One to two **Common Ravens** were again seen in Guadalupe on 1 August and 25 September (fide Susan Schaezler) and also within the Austin city limits on the northwest side on 28 October (Byron Stone).

Two **Purple Martins** 13 November (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon) at Richland Creek WMA, Freestone, were late.

On the eastern edge of their range, a flock of 5+ **Bushtits** at Bluff Park on Stillhouse Hollow Lake were unexpected and quite rare for Bell, on 27 August (Grant Critchfield, Randy Pinkston).

Two **Brown Creepers** on 5 November (Sue Bernard) were not unexpected, yet first county records for infrequently birded Austin [county].

Rock Wrens made a significant incursion into eastern Texas this season, with sightings at Lake Tawakoni in Rains 10-29 November (Brian Gibbons, Matt White, David Arbour), and one 25 November (Matt White) for a first county record for Lamar. Rock Wrens turned up in unexpectedly in McLennan where they are less than a handful of records since the first in 1964, and none previously in fall.

One was at Cameron Park 11 and 16 September (Eric & Kiyomi Haskell) and another was photographed at Koehne Park on 2 November and again mid November (John Muldrow) and 29 November (Eric Haskell). Photo by Eric Haskell at http://www.bafrenz.com/birds/RoWr_EricHaskell.htm In Travis, a probable first record for Hornsby Bend occurred 19 November (Eric Carpenter, Richard Kaskan).

Golden-crowned Kinglets invaded eastern Texas starting the last week in October and were numerous and widespread through the end of the season.

An amazingly early **Swainson's Thrush** was photographed 31 August (Susan Schazeler) in Guadalupe and was seen several times until 6 November.

An out of place **Wood Thrush** was observed at a bird bath in north-west Travis on 22 October (Aletha Snowden). Migrant Wood Thrushes don't often visit East Texas in fall either, so two in Lufkin on 11 October (Jack Windsor) is noteworthy.

A **Gray Catbird** was unusually early at Guadalupe on 4 August (Susan Schaezler, Don Schaezler).

Scarce as a fall migrant in East Texas, single **Blackburnian Warblers** were seen 16 and 28 September (Kay Burnell) near Appleby in Nacogdoches.

At Platt Lane near Hornsby Bend on 13 August (Richard Kaskan) a **Prairie Warbler** was unexpected.

Palm Warblers, of the dull western race, showed up in East Texas on 1 October (David Wolf, Robert Truss) at Lake Sam Rayburn, San Augustine, and 9 October (David Wolf, Ruth Heino, et al.) at Alazan Bayou WMA, Nacogdoches.

Very rare in fall, a female **Cerulean Warbler** was identified 26 August (Matt White) in Lamar.

A late fall migrant, an **Ovenbird** was observed 10 November (Jason Leifester, Kelly Holligan) at Pecan Grove WMA in Williamson.

A high count of 12+ **Northern Waterthrushes** visited upper Lake Sam Rayburn on 16 September (David Wolf).

There are few precedents for the late sighting on 24 October (Debra Corpora) of a **Summer Tanager** in Robertson; the latest usually disappear by the end of September.

For the third consecutive fall season a **Western Tanager**

A **Green-tailed Towhee** at Hornsby Bend on 24 September (Richard Kaskan) was east of its normal range.

Typically a winter visitor, an **Eastern Towhee** at Old Sabine Bottom WMA on 26 August (Brooke Nicotra) was unexpected for East Texas and has few precedents.

Four **Lark Buntings** at Granger Lake dam in Williamson were well east of their normal range on 10 November (Jason Leifester, Kelly Holligan), although they have appeared here a few times in previous years. The next day a single Lark Bunting was in northeast Travis (Richard Kaskan).

For the Pineywoods the earliest ever by almost a week, an adult **White-crowned Sparrow** arrived in Nacogdoches on 8 October (David Wolf).

Nearly unprecedented for the Pineywoods of East Texas, a male **Lesser Goldfinch** accompanied American Goldfinches at a feeder at the TPWD station southwest of Tyler in Smith on 30 November (Irene Hamel, David Sierra, Gloria Rognlie). Lesser Goldfinch is not listed in either the Pineywoods or the Northeast Texas bird checklists. The only other historical record is a bird that summered in 1953 near Willis in Montgomery (Audubon Field Notes, Vol. 7 (1953), South Texas Region, Luther C. Goldman and Frank G. Watson, p.320).

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