

Summer 2005: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 750 sightings of 171 species from 1 June to 31 July 2005.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Shirley Wilkerson, 15 June, Brazos Co., "We received some much needed rain here in the Brazos Valley -- a very good downpour."

Keith Arnold, 7 July, Brazos Co., ""The water level in the lake is falling rapidly and the vegetation becoming massive. While we have some fair shorebird habitat, we need rain desperately. Temps near, at or above 100F all week."

Keith Arnold, 15 July, Brazos Co., "The drought was broken yesterday; we received over 2.5" in our yard and most of Bryan College Station had similar amounts, with more expected today and tomorrow. Houston is currently in a flood mode, despite no tropical storm...as yet."

Tim Fennell, 18 July, Williamson Co., "Although the area has not received a lot of rain overall, localized storms have been enough to keep Granger Lake full with little shorebird habitat. Normally wet depressions in surrounding fields have dried up."

Randy Pinkston, summer report, Bell Co., "Shorebird migration began around here on July 1st. June and July were very dry, thereby creating lots of available shoreline habitat on scattered farm tanks. Interestingly, lake levels on Belton and Stillhouse Hollow remained fairly high despite the drought. Shorebird variety on the smaller ponds was very nice throughout July, although I found nothing rare or unexpected. Post-breeding waders were average, at best, with a few Tricolored Herons and White Ibises here and there, but no spoonbills, Reddish Egrets, or Wood Storks."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

A **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** paired with a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck continued at Country Club Lake in *Brazos*, last seen 15 July (Keith Arnold); another or the same Black-bellied had been seen with three ducklings a few weeks earlier.

A female **Wild Turkey** along *Grimes* CR190 near Gibbons Creek was observed 2 July (Darrell Vollert). The only other county record since that mentioned in Oberholser (1974) was one "heard only" in 1993. This area of Texas west of the

Trinity River is considered a “dead area” because introduced Wild Turkeys rarely survive.

Fred Collins again gives a positive report of **Northern Bobwhite** nesting this season in *Waller*, quoted here verbatim, ““Bobwhite were widely distributed and it was common to see several pairs in the 4 miles across County Roads in my daily commute if at early morning or evenings, however, with virtually no rain in the area in June, reproduction looked null. Two pair on my farm were without young as well. In late June, a pair started visiting my garden, likely the best cover and only source of water for more than 100 acres. Rain began sporadically in July and by late July I began to see pairs with young. One covey jumped on my property was about 20 birds, almost all were 1/2 size pullets, maybe 3-4 adults and almost 20 young. In late July about the 26th(?), I had a pair with downy young unable to fly (less than 8 days) on Baethe Road east of Brown about 1/2 mile. I would venture to say that the drought may have delayed nesting but certainly didn't seem to hurt it. Range conditions are good at this time and chick survival should be good. Fire ants are all but non-existent on my property again this year. It must be the protozoan controlling them because we have not treated at all.”

Nine **American White Pelicans** on Lake Livingston at the *San Jacinto* side were present 14 July (George Russell). Rare in summer in East Texas, there seems to be about one report per summer, although not at the same location.

Having become an annual event, this year's **Brown Pelican** venturing into the Central Prairie turned up at Temple Lake Park on Lake Belton in late May, was seen again on 1 June and 31 July (Grant Critchfield). But certainly not an annual event in East Texas, another was diving for fish in Lake Livingston, *San Jacinto*, on 9 July (George Russell).

A single **Double-crested Cormorant** on 15 July (Thomas Riecke, Chris Runk) at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone* is rare for the summer months.

Up to three **Anhingas** were observed several times during the summer at the Waco Wetlands (Eric Haskell). The timing suggests local nesting, although no evidence was found this year, the last proof being in 1988.

In *Bell*, summering **Osprey** were noted at Fort Hood on 4 July and at Stillhouse Hollow Lake on 24 July (Rich Kostecke). Another spent the summer at Lake Waco (Eric Haskell) and, at Granger Lake, a local fishing guide told Tim Fennell and Byron Stone of a nesting Osprey, but it was too late in the season to check it out. Osprey are not known to nest in the central Oaks and Prairies region, although it has been suspected.

Two pairs of **Mississippi Kites** were watched carefully through the summer near Utlej and finally on 17 July, Brush Freeman confirmed nesting for *Bastrop* when

he observed an adult with two very young fledglings. This represents only the second nesting location in *Bastrop* in the past century. In *Williamson*, at Round Rock two adults were seen twice in late May and again 20 July (Tim Fennell) at the same location that kites suggested breeding behavior in 2002 and 2004.

Cooper's Hawks are not known to breed in the Central Brazos Valley, but again this summer an immature was present 7-17 June (Ellen Ratoosh) in *Brazos* and another bird flew near the town of Waller on 17 June (Fred Collins).

Peter Barnes reports for *Smith*, "A **Broad-winged Hawk**, a low-density breeder in north-east Texas, was observed at the UT Health Center at Tyler on June 1."

Suspected local and rare breeders, **Common Moorhens** were found in *Travis* and *Bell*: two among lily pads and cattails in Austin 20 July (Tim Fennell) and two, plus one calling, at Lake Rogers 29+ Jul (Tim Fennell). Before the April report of the birds at Rogers, the last *Bell* record was in 1996. At Country Club Lake in Bryan, one was on a nest in March (Keith Arnold), but no young were found this season in weekly surveys, perhaps the first failure in a decade at that site.

A **Willet** 1 June (Grant Critchfield, Randy Pinkston) at Belton Lake was unexpected. Since the last of spring migrants are gone by mid May and the first of fall migrants don't appear until mid June, one can only guess which direction this one was headed.

The same might be said for a **Long-billed Curlew** flying over Kizer Golf Course in Austin on 9 June (Scott Young), but this one was heading south. The Austin area checklist shows fall migration starting the last week of the month.

A **Hudsonian Godwit** on 1 June (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich) at the *Coryell* side of Fort Hood is the first Central Texas occurrence of that species in June.

Adding to a very short list of summer records for East Texas, a juvenile **Herring Gull** on 28 July (Tim Fennell) was at Lake O' the Pines in *Marion*.

Two **Least Terns** were also at Lakeside Park that day (Tim Fennell) and one was present the next day as well.

White-winged Doves continue to expand into East Texas, this season being spotted in Tyler, *Smith*, on 23 June (Richard Kinney).

An odd occurrence for June, a **Black-billed Cuckoo** was heard at Wilbarger Creek in *Bastrop* on 3 June (Brush Freeman).

From 2-4 June (Robert Norris, Lynn Barber, et al.) a **Green Violet-ear** appeared at a private residence not far from the Guadalupe River near New Braunfels in *Comal*.

Marking an early arrival, a male **Rufous Hummingbird** was at a rest area south of Goldthwaite in *Mills* on 8 July (Anthony and Aveline Hewetson).

The Lake Conroe **Green Kingfisher** was seen again 3 June (Kevin Broussard, John Cocanower). Twelve along Cibolo Creek in *Karnes* on 15 June (C. Bludau, S. Carter, J. Holcomb) was a good number. One at Salado Creek in *Bell* on 17 July (Randy Pinkston) was the sixth county record.

Eastern Phoebes continue to expand breeding territory in the Central Brazos Valley, but with mixed success. Absent this season from the College Station site where they bred the past four years, and lower numbers on the BBS route (Darrell Vollert) through *Grimes* and *Madison*, a pair began renesting 15 July (Shirley Wilkerson) after producing its first set of fledglings in Kurten, *Brazos*.

A **Couch's Kingbird** present at Temple Lake Park since 5 May was still there 1 June (Grant Critchfield).

The first July record since 1997 for the Central Brazos Valley, a **Yellow-throated Vireo** was singing on the *Brazos* side of the Navasota River on 2 July (Darrell Vollert). The previous record was on the same river.

Tree Swallows successfully nested for the third year in a row at Willis Creek Park in *Williamson*. Up to 6+ adults and 19+ juveniles were observed 31 July (Tim Fennell).

Pairs of **White-breasted Nuthatches** were reported at McKinney Falls State Park on 12 June (Dan Smith), in *Grimes* on 14 June (Darrell Vollert), in Kurten of *Brazos* throughout the summer (Shirley Wilkerson) and in the Granger area of *Williamson* on 31 July (Tim Fennell, Byron Stone), thus providing one of the most numerous of summer reports in recent years.

The **Tropical Parula** at Hamilton Pool in western *Travis* was still being reported the first week in June (Charles Alberty).

A singing **Magnolia Warbler** observed 1 June (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe* puts a new mark on the Austin area checklist, there being no previous June records.

Out of range were two first fall female **Golden-cheeked Warblers** south of Early in *Brown* on 8 July (Anthony & Aveline Hewetson).

A **Swainson's Warbler** singing near the Navasota River on 2 July (Darrell Vollert) is only the second *Grimes* record.

Louisiana Waterthrushes were reported 15 June and 9 July (Rich Kostecke) at Fort Hood in *Bell*, but more surprisingly is a migrant 15 July (Shirley Wilkerson) in *Brazos*. A migrant again appeared in Chappell Hill, *Washington*, on 17 July (Darrell Vollert) and the same day a first arrival was reported in *DeWitt* (Derek Muschalek).

"Nesting **Lark Sparrows**, a low-density breeder in north-east Texas, were reported from Cherokee Co. throughout the month (Jane Purtle)," according to Peter Barnes in June.

Although not unexpected, a singing **Indigo Bunting** 30 May – 25 June (Ellen Ratoosh) in the Bee Creek floodplain of College Station is the first report of a potential nester in *Brazos*. The only other summer record for the county was 20 June 1998.

CONTRIBUTORS REFERENCED ABOVE:

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