

# Spring 2006: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 3383 sightings of 311 species from 1 March to 31 May 2006.

## **WEATHER REPORTS:**

David Wolf, Spring season, East Texas, "This is the peak of spring migration, the most exciting time of year for birders, and it proved to be productive this year - IF you were out at the right times. Almost all of the pushes of migrants came as turbulent weather ushered cool fronts into the region, and there were several noteworthy fallouts that were almost as dynamic as "back in the good old days". A pre-dawn storm on April 29 brought a good variety of warblers and other migrants to Pecan Park in Nacogdoches April 29-30, but the numbers of birds involved were not high. May 6 was the best day, as a violent thunderstorm pushed through at dawn and shortly thereafter. As the storm drifted southward there was an immediate "fallout" of migrants, some fighting their way through the storm and others coming down. This storm dropped shorebirds into rain puddles at the Angelina County Airport and the SFASU playing fields; warblers in Pecan Park; and Eastern Kingbirds, swallows, Dickcissels, Bobolinks and orioles at Alazan Bayou WMA. The weather remained unsettled through May 10 and migrants were seen daily. The last stormy day of the month, May 14, brought a minor push of warblers and flycatchers, but a week of beautiful cool and dry weather after this pretty much ended the migration. Towards the end of the month summer arrived - hot and humid - and it looks like we may have "a long one" ahead of us."

## **MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:**

**Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** seem more numerous in East Texas with sightings in *Morris*, *Henderson*, and *Angelina* as well 3 reports in Central Texas in *Williamson* where there are few records (Tim Fennell).

A **Canada Goose** in *Cass* on 20 May (Mike Dillon) is oddly late.

A **Mottled X Mallard** was found at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell* on 15 Apr (Randy Pinkston).

More ducks than usual were late in departing. Among these are:

- 4 **Redheads** on 19 Apr (Robert Truss, Carol Wells, David Wolf) in *Nacogdoches*, locally the latest ever by a month and the first April record for the East Texas Pineywoods.
- a **Ring-necked Duck** 18 Apr (Randy Pinkston) at Lake Belton in *Bell* and another 25 Apr (Eric Haskell) at Lake Waco in *McLennan*.
- **Lesser Scaups** 5 May to 13 May in *San Augustine, Williamson, Navarro* and *Travis*.
- a **Common Goldeneye** 30 Apr (Eric Carpenter) at Hornsby Bend in *Travis*.
- 3 **Hooded Mergansers** on 1 Apr and 1 on 8 Apr (David Wolf) at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches*.

Single **Least Grebes** showed up in unusual places with one at Sheldon Lake State Park in *Harris* on 13 Apr (Stennie Meadours) and another in Temple in *Bell* on 5 May (Eva & Jim Stevenson), the latter setting a first county record.

The 2 **Brown Pelicans** found 5 Mar (Tony Gallucci) on Lake Travis is a very early record.

Single **Least Bitterns** seen 10 May (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon) in *Freestone* and 30 May (Tim Fennell) in *Williamson* are second records for each county.

Multiple early sightings of 1-4 **Tricolored Herons** were reported 30 Mar (Peter Barnes) to 11 Apr at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone*.

A spring sighting of **Reddish Egret** is rare in Central Texas; one was in Temple in *Bell* on 27 Mar (Randy Pinkston).

According to David Wolf, "7 **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** at Alazan Bayou WMA [*Nacogdoches*] 2 Apr (Robert Truss) were noteworthy, as this species seems to be declining in our area."

An estimate of 500+ **White Ibis** at Richland Creek WMA on 10 May (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon) and 12 May (Cliff Shackelford, Hayden Haucke) is an unprecedented high count for the Central Oaks & Prairies.

A **Glossy Ibis** was at a *McLennan* pond 29 Apr – 7 May (Frank Bumgardner, John Muldrow, et al.).

**White-faced Ibises** were early in *McLennan* on 14 Mar (Eric Haskell) and in *Angelina* on 5 Apr (Nancy Bird, Jack Windsor).

An unusual spring record for **Roseate Spoonbill** in East Texas occurred 12 May (George Russell) when one flew by Lake Livingston in *San Jacinto*.

For a second county record, a **Swallow-tailed Kite** was observed in *Fayette* on 30 Mar (fide Jeff Mundy).

A first county record for **White-tailed Kite** occurred 30 Mar (Nancy Bird, Jack Windsor) in *Angelina* and it was quickly followed 21 Apr by a second sighting, also at the Angelina County Airport.

A **Harris's Hawk** at Hornsby Bend on 20 Apr (Barry Lyon) is unusual.

On 30 Apr, Tim Fennell finally discovered the nest of a breeding pair of **Swainson's Hawks** that he has seen each spring since at least 2001 at Granger Lake in *Williamson*.

Setting a first county record for *Washington* was a **White-tailed Hawk** in the Brazos River bottoms on 28 Mar (Darrell Vollert) and only the second record for *Williamson* when one was at Granger Lake on 23 Apr (Tim Fennell).

A **Zone-tailed Hawk** in *Bell* on 7 Mar (Randy Pinkston) is the second or third county record, the first in Dec to Jan a decade ago.

A **Purple Gallinule** 23 Apr and 14 May (Tim Fennell) at Granger Lake dam in *Williamson* are first and second county records.

Unexpected were the number of reports of **Common Moorhens** in 7 locations in *Bell, Coryell, Travis, Williamson* and *Nacogdoches*

An amazingly large flock of 400+ **American Golden-Plovers** seen 28 Mar (Darrell Vollert) in *Washington* is unprecedented for the Central Oaks & Prairies region.

Single **Piping Plovers** made surprising visits to *Travis* 21 Apr (Tim Fennell) and *McLennan* 29 Apr (Frank Bumgardner, John Muldrow, Eric Haskell, Kiyomi Haskell).

A pair of **Hudsonian Godwits** provided a first county record for *Bell* on 8 May (Randy Pinkston). Another was seen 18 May (Mike Dillon) at Richland Creek WMA in *Navarro*.

A second record for *Williamson*, a **Marbled Godwit** was photographed 8 Apr (Tim Fennell) at Granger Lake. In *McLennan*, another was at Lake Waco on 18 Apr (Eric Haskell), where it is also rare.

Representing a significant proportion of the world's population of **Buff-breasted Sandpipers**, a thousand were estimated on a rice field in *Waller* on 21 Mar (Ken Hartman).

Surprisingly early, a **Franklin's Gull** was found 4 Mar (Randy Pinkston) in Temple, *Bell*.

Later than usual, a **Bonaparte's Gull** was at Granger Lake in *Williamson* on 23 Apr (Tim Fennell).

David Wolf writes, "From 1-3 **White-winged Doves** were reported in Lufkin [*Angelina*] Feb 27- March 13 (Carroll Moore, Martha Moore). Though this species is increasing dramatically across the state it is still very rare in East Texas."

With no previous records of **Monk Parakeet** in East Texas, we are left wondering if the one found 2 May (fide Peter Barnes) in *Gregg* is a recent escapee or an explorer from urban populations farther south.

**Black-billed Cuckoos** aren't often found inland, so three reports are significant: 17 Apr (Kenny Anderson) in *Travis*, 22 Apr (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop*, and 8 May (David Wolf) in *Angelina*. The *Bastrop* cuckoo was heard singing repeatedly at midnight.

The substantial number of **Burrowing Owls** in the Blackland Prairies this winter continued through March with sightings of up to 6 in *Bell* and *Williamson* (Tim Fennell, Byron Stone, Randy Pinkston).

A rare **Green Violet-ear** frequented feeders in Spicewood, *Travis*, 5-11 May (Libbey Scheible, Eric Carpenter).

With only one previous occurrence of a springtime **Black-chinned Hummingbird** in the Central Brazos Valley, the male found feeding near Chappell Hill in *Washington* during BirdFest 2006 on 30 Apr (fide Jerry Walls) is significant.

Following a first county record for *Bell* in January, a pair of **Ringed Kingfishers** continued at the Lampasas River location and on 2 May (Grant Critchfield) they were observed entering and exiting a nest cavity. Heavy rains forced them to abandon the nest around 4-6 May. A second county record individual was on the Leon River at Belton Lake in *Bell* on 22 Apr (Rich Kostecke).

A male **Green Kingfisher** was observed 26 Mar (David Scott) while canoeing at Stubblefield Recreation Area in the Sam Houston National Forest of *Walker*. Another was seen 15 May (Tim Fennell) at Rivery Park, Georgetown, in *Williamson* where a pair nested in 2002.

**Eastern Phoebes** have not been known to nest in *Bastrop*, so one investigating a culvert in *Bastrop* on 1 May (Brush Freeman) is remarkable.

Rare in East Texas, a male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was seen 8 Mar (Derry & Jo Ann Gartig) in *Nacogdoches*.

A **Great Kiskadee** in *Guadalupe* on 2 Apr (Susan Schaezler) and another 29 May (Scott Summers) in *Coryell* are unusual, but even more so is the first *McLennan* county record in Waco 20-22 Apr (Karen Arquette) and the first *Shelby* county record on 8 May (David & Teresa Pritchard), the latter being only the second for the entire Pineywoods region.

**Couch's Kingbirds** continue to be reported in Central Texas with sightings this spring 24 Apr to 7 May in *Bastrop*, *Guadalupe* and *Bell*.

According to David Wolf, "Though **Western Kingbird** is found at least once almost every spring, this year brought 6 reports, far more than usual. Singles were in Central Heights April 22 (Mimi Hoppe Wolf), Alazan Bayou WMA April 30 (Robert Truss), Broadus May 5 (David Wolf), Central Heights May 9 (David Wolf), a different bird in Central Heights May 11 (Mimi Hoppe Wolf) and Alazan Bayou WMA May 14 (Robert Truss)." [Nacogdoches and San Augustine counties].

A vigorously singing **Black-capped Vireo** was present 15 Apr – 21 May (Tim Fennell, Byron Stone) at Lake Georgetown in *Williamson*, 15 mi. e. of well-known populations at Balcones Canyonlands NWR.

A third county record for *Williamson*, a **Veery** was at San Gabriel WMA on 7 May (Tim Fennell). A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** there the same day was only the fourth county record.

The **Rufous-backed Robin** in *Bastrop* this winter was last seen 7 Apr (Brush Freeman), staying exactly 3 mo.

Eric Carpenter commented, "Well-represented in central Texas this spring were **Golden-winged Warblers** with 14 individuals based on 11 different sightings between 24 Apr and 16 May (m.ob.)."

Early **Tennessee Warblers** were singles 3-4 Apr (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe* and 5 Apr (Jack Windsor, Charles Kent) in *Angelina*.

Hardly ever seen in Central Texas, a **Cape May Warbler** was in Bastrop on 29 Apr (fide Brush Freeman).

A **Palm Warbler** at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* on 18 Apr (Robert Truss) is an unusual sighting for East Texas.

The first spring record and only the second county record for *Austin* was a **Prothonotary Warbler** on 13 Apr (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard

Very rare for *Bell*, a **MacGillivray's Warbler** was in Temple on 14 May (Randy Pinkston) and may be only the second county record. [Earlier records have not been located, but the species is listed on Oct 2000 Bell County checklist].

A major influx of singing **Cassin's Sparrows** was a surprise for Central Texas. Multiple reports 23 Apr – 31 May (Tim Fennell, Byron Stone) in *Williamson*, plus sightings in *Hill* on 29 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little), in *Guadalupe* on 28 Apr (fide Susan Schaezler), and in *Bell* on 28 May (Randy Pinkston) overwhelm previous years often absent of a single record. Even more surprising is 1-2 at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches*, on 18 Apr (David Wolf) since the Pineywoods checklist shows only 3 prior records for East Texas.

David Wolf reports, "It was a good spring for **Clay-colored Sparrow**, normally a rare and inconspicuous migrant, and 2-3 birds were present at Alazan Bayou WMA [*Nacogdoches*] on 9 dates from April 18-May 11 (David Wolf, Robert Truss, et al.) and another 2 were in Central Heights May 6 (David Wolf)."

David Wolf reports, "'18 **Lark Sparrows** in one flock in Central Heights (Nacogdoches Co) on March 1, 2006 was a very high number for any season; 4-6 had been seen occasionally all winter; (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, David Wolf)."

Providing the only county record for *Freestone*, Bennie Flatt and the Mexia birding group saw a **Lapland Longspur** at Fairfield Lake State Park on 7 March.

Eric Carpenter commented, "**Lazuli Buntings** put on a good showing in central Texas, with 11 sightings 21 Apr - 13 May (m.ob.)." *Williamson's* first county record was an adult male found dead in Round Rock on 29 Apr (Tim Fennell, specimen deposited at TCWC).

An early record for the Central Brazos Valley, a male **Indigo Bunting** was at a College Station, *Brazos*, birdbath on 16 Mar (Ellen Ratoosh).

David Wolf wrote, "It was a good spring for **Bobolinks**. The first were single males near Nacogdoches on April 30 (SL) and at Alazan Bayou WMA [*Nacogdoches*] on May 3 (David Wolf). 10 males were at Alazan Bayou on May 5 (David Wolf), while a season peak of 40 (39 males) was tallied May 6 as violent thunderstorms moved across the area (David Wolf, Robert Truss). The last sighting was 7 males over Central Heights on May 7 (David Wolf)." Peter Barnes also writes, "A male Bobolink was a good find at Richland Creek WMA, Navarro Co., on May 10 (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon) and 18 (Mike Dillon)."

David Wolf reported, "A pair of **Great-tailed Grackles** in Lufkin on April 10 may be a portent of things to come (Nancy Bird); this species is still very rare in our area and this is the first Angelina Co. record in 3 years." And in another

newsletter, David added, "A male Great-tailed Grackle in Nacogdoches on May 17 was only the 2nd county record (Carol Wells)."

A male **Bronzed Cowbird** visiting feeders in The Woodlands 9 Apr – 11 May (Larry Carpenter, fide Eric Carpenter) is a first county record for *Montgomery* and probably only the third record for the entire Pineywoods region.

### **CONTRIBUTORS QUOTED ABOVE:**

Kenny Anderson, Karen Arquette, Peter Barnes, Billie Bernard, Nancy Bird, Frank Bumgardner, Eric Carpenter, Larry Carpenter, Grant Critchfield, D. D. Currie, Mike Dillon, Bennie Flatt, Tim Fennell, Bert Frenz, Tony Gallucci, Derry & Jo Ann Gartig, Eric Haskell, Kiyomi Haskell, Ken Hartman, Hayden Haucke, Charles Kent, Rich Kostecke, Dell Little, Barry Lyon, Stennie Meadours, Carroll Moore, Martha Moore, John Muldrow, Jeff Mundy, Randy Pinkston, David & Teresa Pritchard, Ellen Ratoosh, Sue Ruotsala, George Russell, Susan Schaezler, Libbey Scheible, David Scott, Cliff Shackelford, Eva & Jim Stevenson, Byron Stone, Scott Summers, Robert Truss, Darrell Vollert, Jerry Walls, Carol Wells, Jack Windsor, David Wolf, and Mimi Hoppe Wolf.