

Summer 2006: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1034 sightings of 176 species from 1 June to 31 July 2006.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Susan Schaezler, 12 June, Guadalupe Co., "The heat continues to be oppressive--it is 8:19 p.m. and it is still 90 out there & with only 6" of rain this year & very little the previous 5 months of 2005, things are getting crispy out there. One advantage is that the invasive Johnson Grass is doing poorly w/o water and the 2nd field has been taken over by wildflowers and native vegetation, so that is one plus! "

Rich Kostecke, 14 June, Bell Co., "Despite the heat, it has been pretty birdy though, but pretty much just lots of the usual suspects Water levels are dropping fast, too. Many creeks are now dry and the number of ponds with water is fewer now. The dropping water level of Belton Lake should provide some interesting habitat for wandering waders and south-bound shorebirds come July."

Fred Collins, 5 July, Waller Co., "Welcome rains improved poor grass conditions in both West Harris and Waller County beginning in late May and continuing through June and into the first week of July. Rain totals ended near normal for May, normal for June and are already at normal levels for July."

Peter Barnes & Matt White, 15 July, NETFO Newsletter, East Texas, "The hot and dry summer has lowered lake levels significantly, resulting in more reports of shorebirds than usual, particularly from Lake Tawakoni."

David Wolf, 23 July, Nacogdoches Co., "It is very hard to determine when southbound passerine migration really begins in this region, and to determine whether any given bird is one just "wandering" from its natal territory or really a migrant, but the rare mid-summer "cool front" on July 23 gave us some clues. After overnight and dawn rain showers, and a slight wind shift to the north and much cooler temperatures, the following appeared at our place in Central Heights (Nacogdoches County) and I have to believe that they were migrants, since none stayed around after this one day: singles of Least Flycatcher; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; Northern Parula; Prothonotary Warbler; Louisiana Waterthrush; and Yellow-breasted Chat. About 20 miles away, near Melrose (Nacogdoches County), Robert Truss had the following arrivals at his place: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (10); Northern Parula (2); Yellow-throated Warbler (one); and Hooded Warbler (2). Again, none of these birds had been around. I have to

believe that this was a small wave of early migrants put down by the unsettled weather."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks continue to do well this summer in *Bell* and *Williamson*, where there are few records heretofore (Rich Kostecke, Randy Pinkston, Tim Fennell). They are also being reported more in East Texas, including *Smith*, *Hunt* and *Camp* this summer (fide Peter Barnes and Matt White).

Two **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** were in *Gonzales* on 3 Jun (Brush Freeman).

An immature **Lesser Scaup** was present at Airfield Lake in *Bell* from 23-31 Jul (Gil Eckrich).

Apparently unable to fly, a female **Hooded Merganser** lingered at Belton Lake in *Bell* from spring to at least 1 Jul (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich), providing a first area record for summer.

Unusual for *Cass*, a **Wild Turkey** was there 28 Jun (Mike Dillon).

Although chicks were not reported, **Northern Bobwhite** were common in central *Waller* where weather and the almost total absence of fire ants were good for breeding success.

Becoming nearly a repetitious seasonal event somewhere in Central Texas, a **Brown Pelican** was in eastern *Travis* on 11 Jul (Jason Leifester).

A high count for summer in *Bell* and an impressive number elsewhere in the Oaks & Prairies region, 17 **Neotropic Cormorants**, including many immatures were on Stillhouse Hollow Lake 17 Jul (Randy Pinkston).

Rare inland from the coast and almost never reported from two locations in the same season, **Least Bitterns** were in central *Waller* 4-11 Jun (Johnny Fife) and southern *Bastrop* early May to 2 Aug (Evan Quenon, Valerie Staats, fide Eric Carpenter).

Osprey are not known to breed in *McLennan*, yet a single bird was present the summer of 2005 and now in 2006 (Eric Haskell) 1-2 were at Lake Waco during the entire period, raising speculation of nesting.

Although nesting in a few East Texas locations, 11 **Swallow-tailed Kites** (10 in one flock) over Martin Dies State Park, *Jasper*, on 11 Jul (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf) is a notable count for this location.

Mississippi Kites continue to flourish and increase in the Central Oaks & Prairies region, with reports of new nesting sites at Bonham Park (Paul & Marguerite Van Dyke) in Bryan and in College Hills subdivision (Jim Hughes) in College Station in *Brazos*, a long sought-after nest found in Round Rock (Tim Fennell) in *Williamson*, a fourth nest in Woodway (Fred Gehlbach) in *McLennan*, several more nests in *Bastrop* (m.ob.), plus other breeding season sightings that suggest additional sites. In East Texas, summer populations suggest new breeding sites in *Bowie* (Al Nelson), Paris and Pinhood in *Lamar* (Matt White) and Addielou in *Red River* (Matt White).

Suspected of nesting at Willis Creek WMA in *Williamson* since 2001, the **Swainson's Hawk** nest site was finally found 18 Jun (Tim Fennell) and a downy nestling was observed 2 July and fledged just after 1 Aug.

David Wolf writes, "**Common Moorhen** is extremely rare and irregular in the central Pineywoods area and this year brought the first records here in 20 years! Carol Wells had a migrant at the Nacogdoches ponds on Apr 30, and then on May 31 I saw a bright adult on buttonbush flats at the base of the TX 147 bridge on Lake Rayburn (*San Augustine*). There were 2 here (at different spots) on Jul 1 (David Wolf). Steinhagen Lake has been lowered this year (to control water plants) and evidently became a huge marsh as the upper end dried up. On Jul 11 we found 4+ Common Moorhens (3 ad., 1 juv.) and 5+ **Purple Gallinules** here, at the US 190 crossing (*Tyler* and *Jasper*), and it is likely that both species nested here, perhaps in some numbers (I saw a juv. Purple on Jul 17).

Short-billed Dowitchers migrated through *Bell* where singles were observed on Belton Lake 24-25 Jul, 31 Jul and at Airfield Lake 31 Jul (Gil Eckrich)

Rare in summer, a single **Franklin's Gull** was at Hornsby Bend on 17 Jun (fide Austin RBA) and 17 were at Granger Lake, *Williamson*, the next day (Tim Fennell), a record summer count for that county.

Pending TBRC approval, a **Green Violet-ear** was west of Austin 3-4 Jul (Amber Ahrns) and another probable one was in Elgin, *Bastrop*, 14 Jul (fide Brush Freeman).

An adult male **Black-chinned Hummingbird** visited a College Station feeder for three weeks beginning 15 Jul (James Phelps), a first summer record for *Brazos* and only the second summer record for the Central Brazos Valley. The normal range of this species starts about 90 mi. west of College Station.

Although not unusual prior to 1990, subsequently **Red-headed Woodpeckers** are hardly ever reported in summer in the Central Brazos Valley, so single adults spotted 7 Jun (Darrell Vollert, Alan Murphy) near the Navasota River in *Brazos* and 7 Jul (Darrell Vollert) near the Brazos River in *Washington* are significant.

A first county record, a **Ladder-backed Woodpecker** was in *Milam* on 15 Jul (D. D. Currie, Del Little) and another in *Waller* on 2 Jul (Kassie Collins) is a rare summer record for that county.

Seen regularly on the Oak Grove BBS (*Madison/Grimes/Walker*) prior to 1986, **Hairy Woodpecker** was re-found 12 Jun (Darrell Vollert) after a 20-year absence from the list.

A **Least Flycatcher** mist-netted in *Coryell* on 7 Jul (Rich Kostecke) is unusually early.

Darrell Vollert remarks, “**Eastern Phoebes** are steadily moving into the area to breed,” and as evidence he found 3 in *Walker*, 1 in *Grimes* and 1 in *Madison* on his Oak Grove BBS on 12 Jun. Other Central Brazos Valley sightings this summer are singles in *Robertson* on 11 Jun (Rachel Smith), in *Brazos* on 8 Jul (Darrell Vollert), and in *McLennan* 11 Jun and 4 Jul (Eric Haskell).

Only the second summer record for the Central Brazos Valley, an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was photographed 7 Jun (Darrell Vollert, Alan Murphy, ph.) in the Navasota River bottoms of *Brazos*.

Adult and HY **Couch’s Kingbirds** were observed 15 Jun – 19 Jul (Brush Freeman) in far western *Bastrop*. Two Couch’s were also reported 3 Jun (Laurie Foss) at Commons Ford Park in *Travis*.

A **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** was a one day wonder in College Station, *Brazos*, on 28 Jul (Miguel Saggese), a first county record.

Confirming that these birds have been breeding, or trying to breed at Webberville County Park in *Travis* for at least 3 years, Freeman finally determined that one of the two **Warbling Vireos** he observed 5 Jul was HY. He concludes, “As far as I know this remains the southernmost confirmed breeding location in the state.”

At the new Southeast Metro Park in eastern *Travis*, a HY **Golden-cheeked Warbler** on 19 Jul (Brush Freeman) is probably a post-breeding stray, as the park is 15-17+ miles east of the closest known breeding habitat.

A pair of **Yellow-throated Warblers** nested at a ranch between Franklin and Wheelock, raised a juvenile in May and one was last seen 11 Jun (Rachel Smith), providing the first evidence of a breeding range extension into *Robertson*.

Long suspected of being a breeding species of *Brazos*, but lacking evidence, this season a singing male **Prothonotary Warbler** 10 Jun – 8 Jul, with a female 23 Jul and nestlings 29 Jul (Darrell Vollert, Alan Murphy) was discovered in the Navasota River bottoms.

Providing the first July record for *Brazos*, a **Common Yellowthroat** was singing 15 Jul (Ellen Ratoosh) in the floodplain running through Emerald Forest subdivision; in spite of many late spring sightings, there is no concrete evidence of yellowthroats nesting in the county.

Continuing the unusual influx of **Cassin's Sparrows** into Central Texas this spring, numerous summer reports included *Brown, Burnet, Coleman, Lampasas, Williamson* (m.ob.) and juveniles observed in *Travis* on 11 Jun (Byron Stone).

Expansion of **Great-tailed Grackles** in north-east Texas includes two nests at the *Gregg* airport 2-17 Jun (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf), one in *Henderson* 3 Jul (Mike Dillon) and several dozen birds now regular in downtown Tyler in *Smith* (Peter Barnes).

What a sight it must have been to see 155+ (careful count) post-breeding **Orchard Orioles** concentrated in a blueberry field in *Nacogdoches* on 7 Jul (fide David Wolf), 60+ of which were there already on 2 Jul.

A second-year **Bullock's Oriole** 7 Jul (Brush Freeman) is a rare find for Hornsby Bend in *Travis*.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Peter Barnes, Kassie Collins, Mike Dillon, Gil Eckrich, Tim Fennell, Laurie Foss, Brush Freeman, Bert Frenz, Fred Gehlbach, Eric Haskell, Rich Kostecke, Alan Murphy, Al Nelson, James Phelps, Randy Pinkston, Evan Quenon, Ellen Ratoosh, Miguel Saggese, Rachel Smith, Valerie Staats, Byron Stone, Paul & Marguerite Van Dyke, Darrell Vollert, Matt White, David Wolf, and Mimi Hoppe Wolf