

Spring 2007: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 2931 sightings of 305 species from 1 March to 31 May 2007.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Rich Kostecke, 7 March, Belton Lake, Bell Co., "Despite a little winter rain here and there, it is still extremely dry and dusty out there. A few creeks and springs are running, but water levels are quite low. ... The water level of Belton Lake continues to drop and there is ample exposed shoreline, which could make for an interesting spring shorebird migration."

Randy Pinkston, 11 April, Temple, Bell County, "This spring continues to be an outstanding one for shorebirds. Today after work, my son Paul and I spent a short while scoping a favorite Temple hotspot. The highlight for me was more Baird's Sandpipers in one place than I can remember anywhere."

David Wolf, 20 April, Pineywoods, "Perhaps never before have I gotten such a strong impression of 'birds arriving late' as I did during this period. Many common and widespread breeding birds that should have appeared in early April were a few days to a few weeks late, and are only just now arriving. It is likely that the repeated cool fronts, including the very strong ones of April 7 (it snowed on Easter) and April 14, have 'held things up to the south of us'.

Darrell Vollert, 5 May, Washington County, "Birded two locations in the Brazos Bottoms east of Chappell Hill on the morning of the 5th. The water level of the Brazos River is really high and flowing rapidly. We observed 4 Spotted Sandpipers and one American Crow rafting down the river on large logs. The sandpipers rode the logs for about 50 yards and then flew upstream and landed on logs and rode them downstream."

Rich Kostecke, 13 May, Temple Lake Park, Bell County, "It is noteworthy that the water level has come up even further than before (only a very thin strip of land where the road has been built up currently connects the peninsula with the main portion of the park and there is very little beach at the moment with what little there is covered in debris from the flood waters)."

Cliff Shackelford, 25 May, Freestone County, "Last year is when we had such incredibly high counts of White Ibis with over 500 individuals on Richland Creek WMA. Without proper water depths, we saw 7 this year. They've had so much rain that everything is deep, deep, deep."

Susan Schaezler, Guadalupe County, "Weather was most strange--
January--record rain (SA) 1.05" rain, mean temp 45.9
Feb.--record drought (SA) .09" rain, mean temp 53.2
March--record rain (SA) 4.73 rain, mean temp 63.4
April--record low temperature and record low, high temperature (SA). We had a significant freeze and the plants were slowed down. 3.46" rain, mean temp 63.6
May--very cool month 2.21" rain, mean temp 72.8

Tim Fennell, spring season, Central Texas, "Lake Buchanan was at least 10 feet low at the beginning of the season but was full at the end of the season due to abundant rain in April and May. Granger Lake was full the entire season, leading to a personal low of only 8 migrant shorebird species recorded during the spring migration."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks continue spreading in both directions with increased sightings in East Texas and at the western front in *McLennan* a sighting 17 Apr (Fred Gehlbach) at Woodway, closer to the escapement than other Waco area sightings.

Eight **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** found 19 May (D.D. Currie, Dell Little) at Richland Creek WMA is only the second record for *Freestone*.

Unusually late, a single **Greater White-fronted Goose** without evidence of injury was at Temple in *Bell* on 13 Apr (Randy Pinkston).

A presumably wild and immature **Ross's Goose** which joined a flock of domestic geese at Country Club Lake in *Brazos* on 21 Dec 2006 (Keith Arnold) was seen weekly thereafter until it disappeared 29 May.

A **Surf Scoter** would be rare at anytime of the year, but particularly so on 13 May (Sally Breed) when a female appeared at Hornsby Bend, *Travis*.

Hooded Mergansers are rare breeders in north-east Texas and 3 young birds were at Texas Eastman in Longview, *Harrison*, on 31 May (David Brotherton, Mark Edmund).

Rare reports of **Northern Bobwhite** were single birds 20 Apr (Jane Purtle) in a yard in *Cherokee* and 11 May (Betty Vermeire, Chuck Hamilton, Mary Dabney Wilson) near a restaurant on Texas Ave in College Station, *Brazos*.

A first record for *Freestone* as well as the Central Brazos Valley, a **Pacific Loon** accompanied two Common Loons on Richland-Chambers Reservoir on 17 Apr (Truman Powell).

A **Horned Grebe** and two **Eared Grebes** were unexpected for the Pineywoods on 17 Mar (Louis Debetaz), seen at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*.

Over 2000 **American White Pelicans** flew over Warbler Woods, *Guadalupe*, late on 12 Apr (Brent Ortego) and the next evening (Jeff Hanson) 900+ were observed over Austin, *Travis*.

A **Reddish Egret** flying high over College Station 10 May (Ellen Ratoosh) is an odd addition to a residential yard list; it also represents a first county record for *Brazos* and only the fourth spring record for the Oaks & Prairies region of Central Texas.

A pair of adult *Plegadis* ibis turned out to be a **Glossy Ibis** and a White-faced wading together in a flooded field in Temple, *Bell*, on 25 Apr (Randy Pinkston).

An odd date to find a **Swallow-tailed Kite** away from breeding grounds, one was seen 25 May (Hayden Haucke, Cliff Shackelford) near Gus Engling WMA, providing a first county record for *Anderson*.

A very early date for **Mississippi Kites**, especially for the Central Brazos Valley, three were soaring above College Station, *Brazos*, on 31 Mar (Darrell Vollert). In *Trinity*, a Mississippi Kite was seen 29 Apr (Pat Coe) and regularly thereafter at a location where it was recently learned a pair nested last summer near Lake Livingston.

Harris's Hawks now seem to be making regular appearances in *Travis* with sightings of a pair on 18 Mar (Randy Pinkston) in Pflugerville and a single adult on 16 Apr (Tim Fennell) at the same exit 245 of I-35.

Randy Pinkston reports, "An adult **Broad-winged Hawk** in Temple [*Bell*] on 14 May was possibly a local breeder in a wooded neighborhood which has produced mid-summer records in previous years. Another adult was observed there on 16 June 2007."

An early **Swainson's Hawk** was at Lake Wright Patman, *Bowie*, on 10 March (Mike Dillon). A Swainson's Hawk was found near a nest site at Belmont subdivision near the *Bexar-Guadalupe* border on 19 May (Maren Phillips, Susan Schaezler).

At least one **Virginia Rail**, first reported in October 2006, was seen up until 21 Apr (fide Eric Carpenter) at Hornsby Bend, *Travis*.

For an inland record, a conservative estimate of 800+ **American Golden-Plovers** at Sore Finger WMA on Granger Lake, *Williamson*, on 25 Mar (Tim Fennell) is an amazing count.

Snowy Plovers made a good showing with three sightings 17-25 Apr (Randy Pinkston) in Temple, *Bell*, and singles 25 Apr (fide Eric Carpenter) at Pflugerville and 16 May (Mollie Kloepper) at Mueller Airport, both in *Travis*.

A color-banded **Piping Plover** observed in Temple, *Bell*, on 13 Apr (Randy Pinkston) was banded two years ago on the Gavins Point Reach of the Missouri river, near Yankton, SD.

A count of 19 **Whimbrels** at Fort Hood, *Bell*, on 30 Apr (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich) is impressive.

A **Long-billed Curlew** was present near Utley in *Bastrop* at the late dates of 8-16 May (Brush Freeman).

Baird's Sandpipers migrated through *Bell* 4-30 Apr (Randy Pinkston) with a high count of 200+ on 11 Apr, a number higher than the previous 12 yr. combined for this observer.

Wilson's Phalaropes migrating through Central Texas 24 Mar to 14 May included impressive numbers of 90 at Hornsby Bend on 25 Apr (Eric Carpenter), 183-216 on 30 and 24 Apr (Randy Pinkston) at Temple.

For a first spring record and a second county record, a female **Red-necked Phalarope** in alternate plumage was observed 19 May (Randy Pinkston) in Temple, *Bell*.

An early **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, on 24 Mar (Peter Barnes).

On 28 Apr (Mark Klym) a **Green Violet-ear** was observed at a residence in *Bastrop* and was still present through the period (Sharon Finlay). The arrival date of this vagrant is 6 days earlier than prior Central Texas sightings.

A **Buff-bellied Hummingbird** overwintered in *Austin* [County] and a second appeared at feeders on 30 Mar (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard) and remained throughout the period. A one-day occurrence of a Buff-bellied at a Bryan feeder on 13 May (Judy Winn) added to only a few *Brazos* records.

A very late female **Black-chinned Hummingbird** accompanied a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird at feeders near Lake Livingston, *Trinity*, on 25-26 Apr (Pat Coe).

Rufous Hummingbirds wintered in Central and East Texas in good numbers, some residing well into March, including one last seen 16 Apr (Peggy Harding) in *Rusk*.

For the third spring, a **Green Kingfisher** was observed 10 Mar (David Scott) at Stubblefield Recreation Area in *Walker*.

Providing the first documented proof of nesting **Ladder-backed Woodpeckers** in *Waller*, an adult was photographed 21 Apr (Joseph Kennedy) carrying food to a nest hole. Although known as a scarce winter resident, the limited prior evidence was a 1989 sighting on 4 Jul.

A single **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was photographed 19 May (Darrell Vollert, ph. Prabha Acharya) in the Navasota bottoms of *Brazos*, where one was also seen last summer. While both sightings occurred during the breeding season, there is no evidence of breeding activity.

A vocalizing **Couch's Kingbird** was observed 4 Apr (Eric Carpenter) and heard 25 Apr at Hornsby Bend, a new location for the species. Known to winter sparingly in *Waller*, single **Couch's Kingbirds** were observed 20-29 Apr near the intersection of Hebert and Penick and 6 May (Bob Honig, Maggie Honig) in Waller [town] about 10 mi. distant. As nest building can commence about the time of the latter sighting, the sighting is suggestive, however, no breeding evidence was observed and the bird(s) not seen later in the season.

Western Kingbirds are scarce in the East Texas Pineywoods, so three sightings this season could each be county first records: 15 Apr (Rick Bello) in *Trinity*, 5 May (Rick Bello, Liz Bello) in *San Jacinto* and 29 May (Rick Bello) in *Walker*. A pair was observed nest-building in Waller, *Waller* on 19 May (Bob Honig, Maggie Honig).

At a site where a singing male was observed last spring, two adult **Black-capped Vireos** were at a nest with three 2-3 day-old nestlings at Cedar Hollow, Lake Georgetown, *Williamson*, on 16 May (Tim Fennell). The nest was empty on 27 May. Apparently this is the easternmost nesting site for the species, the well-known Balcones Canyonlands NWR being 15+ miles to the west.

In May (Tim Fennell) 3 **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** were observed at Lake Georgetown Dam, *Williamson*; one appeared to be examining a nest site in round holes in the concrete wall of the spillway and two birds were seen flying in and out of this hole.

Cliff Swallows took advantage of the die-off of wintering **Cave Swallows** at a colony under a bridge in College Station, *Brazos*. The colony, once mostly Cliffs, became dominated by Caves in recent years but throughout April (Ellen Ratoosh)

the ratio was pretty much evenly divided. A first county record for *Smith*, one **Cave Swallow** was noted 31 Mar (Peter Barnes).

A first nesting record for *McLennan*, two **White-breasted Nuthatches** were feeding young near the pecan grove at Lake Waco on 17 Apr (Frank Bumgardner, John Muldrow). Previously, the nuthatch was only known as a vagrant wintering bird.

A **Brown-headed Nuthatch** was a surprise 11 Mar (John O'Neill) on FM 1774 near Anderson in *Grimes* since the property is devoid of pines. Prior records have been on CBC territories in the eastern part of the county where pines are common.

Two pairs of **Rock Wrens** examined nest sites and carried nest materials 15 Mar (Tim Fennell) at Lake Georgetown and one was seen at the *Williamson* site in May.

A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was observed regularly from early May to the late date of 20 May (Susan Schaezler, et al.) at Warbler Woods, *Guadalupe*.

For a species that is a rare migrant in *Bell*, an appearance 28 Apr near Salado followed by a singing **Wood Thrush** 21-31+ May (Randy Pinkston) in Temple is surprising. Another was singing 20 May (Byron Stone) in northwest *Travis*. Neither county has nesting records for Wood Thrush.

A **Golden-winged Warbler** 2 May (David Brotherton, Mark Edmund) in *Harrison* is a good find for the East Texas Pineywoods.

A very late **Orange-crowned Warbler** remained throughout May (Susan Schaezler, et al.) at Warbler Woods, *Guadalupe*.

Yellow-throated Warblers have been present since 24 Mar (Debra Corpora) at a *Robertson* ranch where they nested last season. Another Yellow-throated was a one-day wonder at Temple on 5 May (Randy Pinkston) for the second *Bell* record. A single was in *Brazos* on 20 May (David Scott), a half-mile west of the Navasota River. Coincidentally, another was seen the same day at a different *Robertson* location (Debra Corpora). The May records are problematic in that it is uncertain if these are very late spring migrants, birding birds or non-breeding wanderers.

Outside of the Pineywoods of East Texas, Pine Warblers are only known to nest in the lost pines of *Bastrop* and a small pocket of pines in the *Washington-Austin-Fayette-Colorado* area. So it is with great surprise to hear of nesting **Pine Warblers** at the comparatively remote site in *Robertson* in the Central Brazos Valley. An adult and fledgling were in pines on 21 Apr (Rachael Smith). The pines, now 60-100 ft. tall, were planted by the observer's great-grandfather 36

years ago beside some other pines and 400 bald cypress trees her great-grandmother (other side of family) planted 10 years earlier. She had ordered the pines and cypress from the Louisiana Forestry Service. Unsure about whether they would thrive, she consulted neighbors on her western border who told her they had planted pines many years before on their 300-acre property and those were doing quite well. Her great-grandmother also transplanted pines from seedlings from her neighbors. Pine Warblers remained in the *Robertson* location through the end of the period.

Single **Palm Warblers** in Central Texas this season included multiple sightings 5-7 Mar (Kenny Anderson, Mike Rogan, et al.) at Kreig Field in Austin, *Travis*, and 1-4 May (Steve Snyder) at Temple Lion's Park, *Bell*.

Considered one of the most threatened songbirds in the U.S., **Cerulean Warbler** is barely reported annually as a spring migrant through Central Texas, so it is quite surprising to hear of 8 reports during the period 25 Apr to 1 May. These include one bird on 25 Apr (fide Eric Carpenter) in *Bastrop*, 2 birds 27-28 Apr (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*, 2 on 28 Apr (Randy Pinkston) in *Bell*, 1-2 on 28-29 Apr (Ed Fair) in *Travis*, and 1 on 1 May (Darrell Vollert) in *Washington* and 1 on 1 May (Randy Pinkston) in *Bell*.

Termed a vagrant on the *McLennan* checklist, a male **Prothonotary Warbler** appeared on the back of a patio chair in China Spring on 27 May (Frank & Jeanette Baumgardner).

A well described *Oporornis* warbler fitting the field marks and behavior of a **Connecticut Warbler** was observed over a 5-10 min. period on 13 May (Ted Eubanks) in Austin, *Travis*. Although there are reports almost annually of Connecticuts in Texas, very few are well described and only 8, mostly in the fall, have been accepted by TBRC. The closest accepted record was in *Hays* 3-14 May 1986.

Typically, **Mourning Warblers** migrate through the UTC late Apr to mid May and slightly later through the East Texas Pineywoods, with the earliest records in mid Apr. Were it not for the very detailed report including habitat, behavior, chip note and field marks of a male seen at the Montgomery County Preserve and Nature Trail on Spring Creek it would have been difficult to accept the early record of 21 Mar (Gary Clark), more than a month earlier than expected. With less detail, yet still fitting a female Mourning Warbler better than other possibilities, another bird was reported in *Rusk* on the similarly early date of 26 Mar (Peggy Harding). Yet another early male Mourning Warbler was in Central Texas at McKinney Falls State Park in *Travis* on 1 Apr (Dan Smith).

Although **Common Yellowthroats** sing as if on territory at various locations in the Central Oaks & Prairies, virtually all of these disappear by mid May without giving us any evidence of nesting, so it is valuable to learn that on 20 May (Brush

Freeman, Phil Schappert) in an area of Crystal Lake, *Bastrop*, where males were singing, a female was observed carrying a large insect that it did not consume, but instead was wary of the observers and became quite agitated over their presence, presumably near its nest site.

Finding a migrating **Scarlet Tanager** in Central Texas is always a good sighting, but seeing 2 males and a female at the same time is quite unusual. The occurrence was 7 May (Bernadette Noll, Kenny Anderson) in Austin.

Ten **Le Conte's Sparrows** with 20+ *Ammodramus* sp. is a large concentration, found this 15 Apr (Tim Fennell) at Granger Lake dam in *Williamson*. Still 3 Le Conte's there on 5 May (Tim Fennell) is late for this sparrow.

A few **Black-headed Grosbeaks** are reported annually in migration through Central Texas, but none have been known to have a stay at one location as long as the one seen daily from 6 Jan to 21 Apr (Susan Schaezler) at Warbler Woods, *Guadalupe*.

An early arrival for the East Texas Pineywoods, a **Blue Grosbeak** was seen in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, on 30 Mar (Mimi Hoppe Wolf).

Lazuli Buntings wandered eastward to various *Bell* locations 4 Mar – 4 May (m.obs.), *Williamson* 27 Apr, and *Bastrop* 2 May, but the most unusual were the two young males observed 14-19 Apr (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard) in *Austin* [county] and the male found 7 Apr (ph. Joe Lee Miller) at Lake Tyler in *Smith*.

Peter Barnes & Matt White report for NETFO, "Two **Western Meadowlarks** were observed in *Hopkins* on 3 Mar, a singing bird was in *Titus* on 24 Mar (both David Brotherton), and an impressive concentration of 100 birds were in *Delta* on 9 Mar (Matt White)."

While a male **Great-tailed Grackle** in *Angelina* on 20 Apr (Robert Truss) is very rare for the area and the species is without breeding records (fide David Wolf), in *Gregg* "increasing numbers of the grackles have been noted in Longview and several fledglings and at least 10 nests were located there on May 24 (Dorothy Metzler, Bob Metzler). This is only the second location where breeding has been documented in Gregg Co., the other being the airport." (fide Peter Barnes & Matt White in their NETFO report).

A report of two **Orchard Orioles** at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* on 1 Apr (Robert Truss) ties with the earliest record for the East Texas Pineywoods.

An unusually large number of reports of **Bullock's Oriole** emanated 26 Apr to 14 May (m.obs.) in the eastern part of the state, including *Coryell*, *Bell*, *Travis*, and *Guadalupe*, but undoubtedly the most unusual was a well-described first-year male on 16 May (Maggie Honig) on Hebert Road, a first county record for *Waller*.

Pine Siskins lingered in Central Texas at *Bastrop* until 5 Mar (Brush Freeman) and in East Texas at *Morris* until 27 May (David Brotherton, Luaane Brotherton).

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