

Summer 2007: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1025 sightings of 175 species from 1 June to 31 July 2007.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Rich Kostecke, 19 June, Bell County, "As in many areas, the rains have continued to pound the Fort Hood area. The lakes (Belton and Stillhouse Hollow) are at the highest levels that I have seen in my nearly 5 years of birding the area. This has not been so good for species that nest in the under- or mid-stories of our riparian areas (e.g., Indigo Buntings) or in grassy flats bordering the lakes (e.g., Dickcissels at Union Grove WMA at Stillhouse Hollow). However, the rains have promoted lush habitat conditions elsewhere, and the birds have responded. There is a multitude of hatch year birds out and about right now. It seems to have been a very good reproductive year so far, and the breeding season is not over yet. I have seen evidence suggesting that many species are attempting to pull off additional broods. With that said, it has apparently also been a good year for predators. David Cimprich, Fort Hood's Black-capped Vireo biologist, remarked to me that most of the Black-cappeds that he has been monitoring have fledged young, but it has often taken up to 4 or 5 nest attempts before they were successful at doing so because of the high level of predation this year."

Rich Kostecke, June, Bell-Coryell-Lampasas counties, "June was an interesting month climatically. It was both cooler and wetter than typical. Precipitation was seemingly constant and, often, locally heavy. Habitat conditions continued to be green and lush. Green, lush habitat conditions seem to have resulted in a very good reproductive year for most of our breeding species. Fledglings and hatch-year birds were everywhere. Many species exhibited signs of attempting second broods. However, there was a dark side to all of the precipitation. Widespread flooding occurred within the Lampasas River, Leon River and Cowhouse Creek drainages. Birding efforts were hampered by the flooding of favored birding locations around Belton and Stillhouse Hollow Reservoirs. By the end of the month, water levels were within 10' of flowing over the Belton and Stillhouse Hollow spillways. The rains continued into July. It will be interesting to see what these unusual access and habitat conditions will bring in the way of birds later this summer and into the fall."

Susan Schaezler, 7 July, Warbler Woods, "All the ponds are full from the rain--we have had 1.64" [already] for July and 22.70" for the year. All the vegetation is very happy out there and my trails are needing attention, but my tractor is out of commission!"

Rich Kostecke, July, Bell-Coryell-Lampasas counties, "July 2007 was both cooler and wetter than average. Rainfall, sometimes quite heavy, continued and by the end of the month both Belton and Stillhouse Hollow lakes had water on, if not over, their spillways. Flooding continues to restrict access to traditional birding sites, many of which are still under water. The resulting lack of beach and mudflat habitat has resulted in a poor shorebird migration so far (pitiful diversity and numbers; Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, and Least Sandpiper were the only 3 species reported). Better shorebird habitat in the way of flooded fields might exist on the Blackland Prairie portion of Bell County east of I-35, but there have been no reports from that area. Wading birds have fared somewhat better, at least locally. West of I-35, assemblages of wading birds have been rather unspectacular, especially compared to the previous 2 years when drought conditions prevailed and resulted in many isolated pools and ample shallow water habitat. Concentrations of prey within these habitats in turn concentrated the wading birds. This year, the flooding seems to have dispersed many of the wading birds from the area west of I-35 (Belton, Lometa, and Stillhouse Hollow lakes in particular). In contrast, wading bird diversity and numbers are quite good along the I-35 corridor, particularly in the Belton-Temple area. The Belton-Temple area (particularly along and in the vicinity of Shallowford Road) traditionally holds a fairly diverse breeding population of wading birds. This breeding population seems to have had a very good year as many juveniles are now present. Species such as Tri-colored Heron and Roseate Spoonbill that exhibit post-breeding dispersal have also begun to show up in the Belton-Temple area, though not elsewhere as of yet. "

Keith Arnold, 31 July, Brazos County, "As the rains regress, temperatures have begun to climb. Still, we have a lot more rain in the forecast in the next 7-10 days. One of the wettest and coolest July's on record."

Tim Fennell, Summer Report, Williamson Co., "What a difference a little rain makes! By the end of the period, Granger Lake was as high as I've ever seen it, (20 + feet over full) as was Lake Georgetown (30+ feet above full). Lake Buchanan was only two feet below full (after having been 20 + feet low for over a year)."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, up to recently rare in *Bell*, *Coryell* and *Lampasas* were reported through the summer near Temple (m.ob.) and on 12 Jul (Daniel Hodges) at Lometa Reservoir. First evidence of breeding for the tri-county area was a pair and 7-8 ducklings at a private residence in *Bell* on 27 Jul (Randy Pinkston).

A **Gadwall**, possibly injured, was observed 7 Jun and 4 Jul (Bob Honig) in central *Waller*.

At the same *Waller* location, a **Ring-necked Duck** was present 4 Jul (Bob Honig).

Lingering until the late date of 4 Jun (fide Eric Carpenter), a **Common Loon** was near Longhorn Dam on Town Lake, *Travis*.

An infrequent summer resident, **Pied-billed Grebes** nested at Granger Lake in *Williamson*, with a juvenile present 16 Jul and one bird on an active nest on 28 Jul (Tim Fennell).

"Twenty-four **American White Pelicans**, unusual in the summer, were spotted at Lake Bob Sandlin [in *Titus*] on June 24 (Linda Ainsworth)." [fide Peter Barnes & Matt White, NETFO].

Double-crested Cormorants typically leave Central Texas during summer months, but this summer 1-6 were reported 8 Jun – 18 Jul (Rich Kostecke) at the Cowhouse Creek arm of Belton Lake in *Bell*, one on 9 Jun at Lake Waco and 14 Jun (Eric Haskell) at Waco wetlands in *McLennan*.

According to Peter Barnes and Matt White in NETFO News, "An **Osprey**, very unusual here in the summer, was at Texas Eastman in Longview [*Harrison*] on 4 occasions from June 12 through July 26 (David Brotherton, Mark Edmund). They are apparently nesting at Lake Millwood in southwestern Arkansas not too far from here (fide Mike Dillon)."

Mississippi Kites continue to flourish at existing and new nesting sites in the eastern half of Texas, with reports this summer in *Williamson*, *McLennan*, *Brazos*, *Washington*, *Waller*, *Walker*, *Trinity*, *Harrison*, *Morris*, *Denton*, *Brazoria*, and *Liberty*.

Rare in summer, single **Cooper's Hawks** were reported at Copperas Cove in *Coryell* 23 Jun (Rich Kostecke), at Fort Hood in *Coryell* 24 Jun (Rich Kostecke), and at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell* 1-4 Jul (Gil Eckrich).

According to Randy Pinkston, "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 Jun."

Single **Swainson's Hawks** were present 15-22 Jun (Rich Kostecke) in *Coryell* and all summer (Susan Schaezler, Don Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*, without evidence of nesting.

A pair of **American Kestrels** nested on the Sam Houston Building near the Capitol in downtown Austin (fide Eric Carpenter). A male kestrel was observed preening on 21 Jul (Rick Bello, Liz Bello) in *Walker*, where it is rare in summer.

Not often reported in recent years in *Waller*, but perhaps common, a **King Rail** was observed and heard repeatedly throughout July (Bob Honig, Maggie Honig) on Katy Prairie Conservancy property on Morrison Rd.

An early **Snowy Plover** was in Austin 13 Jul (Mollie Kloepper).

Two **Piping Plovers** visited Hornsby Bend, *Travis*, on 14 Jul (Kelly Quisenberry, Eric Carpenter).

Very rare as a fall migrant, three **White-rumped Sandpipers** accompanied other shorebirds at receding floodwaters at Lake Waco, *McLennan*, on 27 July (Eric Haskell).

A long-staying **Green Violet-ear** continued at feeders in *Bastrop* 1 Jun – 14 Jul (Sharon Finlay).

In Leander, Williamson, a male **Calliope Hummingbird** came to feeders 25-27 Jul (Carol Ferguson).

An early fall arrival for a **Rufous Hummingbird**, a female visited Copperas Cove feeders in *Coryell* 16-18 Jul (Rich Kostecke).

A lingering **Eastern Wood-Pewee** was still present 1 Jun (Bob Honig), presumably a first summer record for *Waller*. Another in *Bell* on 30 Jun (Rich Kostecke) was rare.

Two **Brown-crested Flycatchers** stayed 9 Jun – 12 Jul (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*.

For a second county record, a **Great Kiskadee** appeared one day only 7 Jul (ph. Eric Haskell, ph. Frank Bumgardner) at Lake Waco, *McLennan*.

At Fort Hood, *Bell-Coryell*, **Black-capped Vireos** "fledged young, but it has often taken up to 4 or 5 nest attempts before they were successful at doing so because of the high level of predation this year," according to Rich Kostecke and David Cimprich. At the farthest east nesting site at Lake Georgetown in *Williamson*, the nest and adult were photographed 19 May (Tim Fennell), but on 16 Jul the nest was under water, as the lake was over 30 ft. above full.

Rock Wrens frequented the spillway at Lake Georgetown, *Williamson*, and fledglings were seen 20 Jun and 1 Aug (Tim Fennell).

Although excellently photographed and widely discussed on Texbirds, a lingering thrush in *Guadalupe* 6 Jun (ph. Susan Schaezler) could not be identified beyond **Gray-cheeked or Swainson's**. Either would be late by Austin area standards.

Not expected as a breeder in *Bell*, a territorial **Wood Thrush** was present 21 May – Jun 3 (Randy Pinkston, Patty Pinkston). In *Morris* were they do breed, 10 singing Wood Thrushes were heard in Daingerfield State Park on 2 Jul (David Brotherton, Sarah Brotherton).

A **Gray Catbird** lingered to 8 Jun (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*. Another was at Lake Livingston, *Trinity*, 20 Jun (Pat Coe) were they are not common in summer.

Lingering to the late date of 2 Jun (Susan Schaezler) in *Guadalupe* was an **Orange-crowned Warbler**.

Although no direct evidence of breeding was found, the window of observation strongly suggests local breeding of multiple **Yellow-throated Warblers** in the Central Brazos Valley, with sightings this summer 7 Jun and 16 Jun (Debra Corpora) at two different *Robertson* locations, 6 Jul (Darrell Vollert) in *Washington*, as well as the spring sightings 20 May in *Robertson* and 20 May in *Brazos*. The only previous evidence is territorial adults and a juvenile observed in May 2006 in *Robertson*.

Four **Prairie Warblers** were found at 3 different *Anderson* locations on 16 Jun (D.D. Currie, Dell Little). They are listed as rare on the Gus Engeling WMA for that county.

A **Swainson's Warbler** was in *Anderson* on 16 Jun (D.D. Currie, Dell Little) and another was still singing in *Smith* on 30 Jun (Peter Barnes).

A singing territorial male **Kentucky Warbler** was observed 24 Jun (Rich Kostecke), a second record for Fort Hood and possibly a first county record for Coryell.

On 2 Jun (Susan Schaezler) a late **MacGillivray's Warbler** showed up at Warbler Woods, *Guadalupe*. Within the Austin region, the late migrant date is only surpassed by one on 4 Jun 2003 at the same location.

Cassin's Sparrows were scarce in Central Texas this summer with the only report being one singing at Fort Hood, *Bell*, on 26 Jun (Rich Kostecke).

Very late for a **White-crowned Sparrow**, one was photographed in Austin on 9 Jun (fide Eric Carpenter, Austin RBA). For the Austin area, there is only one later departure, 19 Jun 2002.

Near the southern limit of its breeding range, an adult and 3 fledgling **Indigo Buntings** were observed 21 Jul (Susan Schaezler, Don Schaezler) in *Guadalupe*.

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