

Spring 2008: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1980 sightings of 296 species from 1 March to 31 May 2008.

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks continue being reported in East Texas, including 20 in *Franklin* 25 Mar (fide Boyd Sanders) and 9 in *Smith* on 30 Mar (Gloria Rognlie), as well as an explosion in the *Bell* population with almost daily sightings in Temple (Randy Pinkston).

A significant gathering of late departing ducks were along Witter Lane near Temple, *Bell*, to the end of May (Randy Pinkston), including **Gadwall**, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, **Canvasback**, **Redhead** (until 19 May), **Ruddy Duck**.

Four **Greater Scaup** were at Round Rock's Meadow Lake in *Williamson* on 10 Mar (Tim Fennell), one of the few consistent sites where this species occurs, if rarely, in Central Texas.

A **Red-throated Loon** and two **Pacific Loons** were at Lake O' the Pines in *Marion* on 14 Mar (Tim Fennell). The Pacific Loons were also seen 16 Mar (Peter Barnes). No recent records of Red-throated Loons exist for the Pineywoods and the 2001 regional checklist shows no March records, although the 1999 Birds of Northeast Texas indicates it is rare throughout the period, which is in accordance with Matt White's book *Birds of Northeast Texas*.

Only the second record for *Bell* and the first suggesting breeding, a courting pair of **Least Grebes** was observed 12 May (Randy Pinkston) along Witter Lane near Temple and 5 adults were observed in the same area 26 May.

A high count of 76 **Eared Grebes** on 18 Apr (Tim Fennell) with 19 at Meadow Lake and 57 at Lake Pflugerville, both in *Williamson*, is only surpassed in Central Texas with one in 1999 at Proctor Lake.

A **Brown Pelican** found 4 May (George Russell) in *San Jacinto* is rare for Lake Livingston.

Not reported annually in the Central Brazos Valley, an **American Bittern** was flushed in *Brazos* on 5 Apr (Darrell Vollert).

Two **Glossy Ibises** were in *Bell* 19 Apr (fide Eric Carpenter, Austin RBA).

A red-tagged **Turkey Vulture** banded in northwestern Venezuela in 2006 was observed 10 May (Byron Stone) in west of Austin, *Travis*.

Although Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone* is often birded, a **Common Moorhen** has not been reported since 1999, so one seen 24 Apr (Peter Barnes) is noteworthy.

Two migrating **Whooping Cranes** stopped briefly at the Waco sewage ponds in *McLennan* on 1 Apr (Joe Yelderman).

Two **Hudsonian Godwits** at Alcoa Lake 18 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) is a first county record for *Milam*.

An outstanding find for Central Texas, a female **Ruff** (Reeve) was observed at Hornsby Bend in *Travis* from 12 Apr to at least 26 Apr (m.obs.).

Identified by call, a **Short-billed Dowitcher** was seen 19 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Greg Cook) among a impressive variety of shorebirds at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, including Hudsonian Godwits, Baird's and Stilt sandpipers, American Golden Plovers, Wilson's Phalaropes and Semipalmated Plovers.

Finding a **Black-billed Cuckoo** in East Texas, away from the coast, is a rare occasion, but finding 3 together is phenomenal and probably unprecedented. The three were at Gus Engling WMA in *Anderson* on 16 May (Cliff Shackelford); this could very well be a county record for the species as well.

Only in recent years has **Eastern Phoebe** expanded its breeding territory to the Central Brazos Valley. This season a pair successfully brought off three young in mid-May and began re-nesting at the end of the month in *Brazos* (Larry & Tonna Harris-Haller).

A **Yellow-throated Vireo** on 6 Mar (Cliff Shackelford) in *Walker* was early for East Texas.

Periodic reports of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** continued through Mar and into Apr in East and Central Texas, including one still lingering in *Washington* 22 Apr (Darrell Vollert) and two in *Bastrop* the same late date (Brush Freeman).

A **Brown Creeper** in College Station, *Brazos*, on 24 Apr (Chuck Hamilton) is uncommonly late.

Blackpoll Warblers swept inland 26 Apr – 15 May with a surprising number of sightings, including reports in *Bastrop*, *Austin*, *Rusk*, *Hunt* and several in *Smith*.

A male **Wilson's Warbler** overwintered in Brenham, *Washington*, and was still present 25 Mar (Darrell Vollert).

The least common regular warbler migrants through East Texas are **Canada, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, and Blackpolls**, yet this season all were accounted for in good numbers, e.g., 5 Canada Warblers were reported in *Smith* and *Hunt* 3-7 May (m.ob.).

An **Eastern Towhee** on Gore Store Road in *Hardin* was very rare for the late date of 31 May (Steve Mayes, John Whittle, et al., Golden Triangle Audubon field trip).

Cassin's Sparrow reports included 6 singing in *Coryell* on 23 Apr (Rich Kostecke), up to 3 singing, skylarking and carrying nesting material in the Granger area of *Williamson* 26 Apr – 25 May, and 2 singing at Sore Finger WMA in *Williamson* 3-25 May (Tim Fennell).

A **Clay-colored Sparrow** in the KPC Hebert wetland on 13 Apr (Bob Honig) could be a first for *Waller*, although there probably are records for the *Harris* side of the Katy Prairie.

At least 5 **Henslow's Sparrows** were observed 6 Mar (Cliff Shackelford) in west of Huntsville in *Walker*.

Very early for **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks**, 3 were at Mineola Preserve in *Wood* on 16 Mar (Candy Troop, Lisa Evers, Peggy Harding, Barbara Cavin).

According to Peter Barnes, "**Lazuli Buntings** are rare spring migrants in north-east Texas, so three reports of this species birds were notable, with single birds in *Hunt* on 3 May (Jennifer Maxwell), Lake Tawakoni State Park on 7 May (Richard Kinney), and *Smith* on 2 May (Lyle Becknell)."

There are no recent records of **Bobolink** in *Bell*, so when up to 9 males and 2 females visited Slough Pond in Temple 10-17 May (Randy Pinkston) it was certainly a surprise.

A **Bronzed Cowbird** in *Williamson* on 3 May (Tim Fennell) is one of only the third county records.

Two **Hooded Orioles**, one of which was photographed 28 Mar (Steven McDonald) is a new county record for *Williamson* and one of about a dozen records for Central Texas.

Single **Bullock's Orioles** were in Austin, *Travis*, on 22 Apr (Mollie Kloepper) and in Temple, *Bell*, 9 May and 13 May (Randy Pinkston).

Lingering in East Texas counties of *Smith*, *Wood*, and *Rusk* the last **Purple Finch** report was 25 Mar (Donna Orr) at Lake Cherokee.

A **Pine Siskin** was still at Lake Cherokee, *Rusk*, 1 Apr (Donna Orr) and more surprisingly at Fort Hood, *Bell*, on 10 Apr (Rich Kostecke) and in *Leon* on 19 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Greg Cook).

A **Lesser Goldfinch** at McKinney Falls State Park in eastern *Travis* on 19 Apr (Joe Fischer) was at the eastern edge of its range.

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