

Summer 2008: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1080 sightings of 175 species from 1 June to 31 July 2008.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Rich Kostecke, July, Bell-Coryell-Lampasas, "July was very hot (triple digit highs characterized the latter part of the month in particular) and dry. Precipitation events were few and far between and typically quite local in nature. Much of the vegetation is brown, wilted, and generally parched in appearance. Because of the heat and lack of precipitation, water levels continued to fall in area creeks, ponds, reservoirs, and rivers. Smaller creeks were typically dry well before the end of the month. Larger creeks (e.g. Cowhouse Creek) had limited flow with water found mostly in isolated pools by month's end. However, falling water levels in ponds and reservoirs have begun to create some potentially good wader and shorebird habitat. Response by most waders and shorebirds was limited during the month though with only a few areas such as the Witter Laneponds hosting waterbird concentrations."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Two **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** mixed with a flock of Black-bellied was a nice find far from the coast in *Bastrop* on 3 Jul (Brush Freeman).

Perhaps injured, a **Greater White-fronted Goose** was in the east end of the Katy Prairie Conservancy's Mary Manor property in *Waller* from at least 5-13 Jul (Bob Honig, et al.).

Snow Geese do not summer in Texas, so a flock 16 free-flying in *Limestone* 14 Jun (Becki Snow) is suspected to be domestically raised.

An **unusually large number of ducks** remained well into summer, particularly in *Bell* and *McLennan*. These included two **Gadwall** through 31 Jul (Randy Pinkston) near Temple, singles of **American Wigeon** 5 Jun (Gil Eckrich) near Belton Lake, **Green-winged Teal** through 31 Jul (Randy Pinkston) near Temple, **Canvasback** through 31 Jul (Randy Pinkston, Gil Eckrich) near Temple, **Redhead** seen regularly throughout the period (Eric Haskell) at Waco Wetlands, **Ring-necked Duck** through 5 Jul (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich) at Fort Hood, **Ruddy Duck** through 31 Jul (Gil Eckrich) near Temple and another through 21

Jun (Daniel Hodges) at Lometa Reservoir in *Lampasas*. Additional ducks include Mallard, Blue-winged Teal and even an escaped **White-cheeked Pintail**, the latter present through 17 Jul (Randy Pinkston) at the same Witter Lane ponds near Temple. The variety and number is unprecedented for Central Texas.

The **Least Grebes** recently discovered in *Bell* continue to gather local interest. Up to 20 of two age groups – adults and juveniles – were seen regularly at Witter Lane ponds near Temple (Randy Pinkston, Gil Eckrich, Rich Kostecke) although evidence of local nesting is lacking. Additionally, a first record for Fort Hood and *Coryell* was one seen 19 Jun (Gil Eckrich, ph.), 22 Jun (Rich Kostecke) and 25 Jul (Gil Eckrich).

Surprisingly large summer concentrations of up to 20 **Pied-billed Grebes** were noted at Witter Lane ponds in *Bell* throughout the season (Randy Pinkston, Gil Eckrich, Rich Kostecke). Additional sightings were reported for *Travis*, *Lampasas* and *McLennan*.

Rarely do **Double-crested Cormorants** linger into summer in the central Oaks and Prairies and although a few have frequented *McLennan* in past years, having up to 19 juveniles summer at Lake Waco this season is unprecedented (Eric Haskell).

Rare for northeast Texas and particularly in summer, an **American Bittern** was reported at Mineola Nature Preserve in *Wood* about 26 Jul (Boyd Sanders), the first summer report of the species since 1997.

Single **White-tailed Kites** 2 Jun (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop* and 19 Jun (Rich Kostecke) in *Coryell* are uncommon, the latter being only the second record for Fort Hood.

Up until nearly the end of July, summer sightings of **Mississippi Kites** are almost always associated with breeding, although several this summer apparently are not; one kite was moving slowly north over Lake Austin in *Travis* 26 Jun (Ed Fair), 2 were over Temple in *Bell* 6 Jul (Liz Cowan), 5 were at Salado in *Bell* on 12 Jul (Rich Kostecke, Gil Eckrich) and 2-3 were seen 24-25 Jul (William Pinkston, fide Randy Pinkston) at Salado Creek. For migration, the sightings are unusually early. In northeast Texas, at least 2 and possibly 3 nesting pairs were reported (Boyd Sanders) at Tyler State Park in *Smith*, a county not previously noted for nesting. Three dozen kite reports in the Oaks and Prairies and the Pineywoods regions indicate a thriving, widespread and expanding population of nesting birds. Peter Barnes and Mike Dillon reported, "This raptor is generally considered to be a localized summer resident in forested areas along the Red and Sulphur Rivers in the far north-east corner of the state, so it was notable that up to nine birds spent July on a private ranch south of Longview in *Harrison* (Bob Griffin), the highest number of summering birds in one location in the NETFO database." Also, a pair of kites nested at the border of

Galveston, just 75 yards into *Brazoria* (Mike Austin). In all, summer sightings probably associated with breeding came from the following counties: *Bastrop*, *Bowie*, *Brazoria*, *Brazos*, *Fayette*, *Harrison*, *Liberty*, *McLennan*, *Smith*, *Waller*, *Washington*.

Local observers remarked that **American Coots** were present this season in larger than typical numbers in *Bell* and *McLennan*. In June, 6 coots were at Witter Lane ponds and smaller numbers at two other *Bell* locations (fide Rich Kostecke), while up to 14 coots were at the Waco wetlands throughout Jul (Eric Haskell).

Two **Long-billed Curlews** at Fort Hood, *Coryell*, were observed at the highly unusual date of 20 Jun (Gil Eckrich, Rich Kostecke).

An immature **Laughing Gull** at the Cowhouse Creek arm of Belton Lake, *Bell*, on 28 Jul (Gil Eckrich) could have been the result of Hurricane Dolly.

Barn Owls are hardly ever reported in East Texas, so it is sad that the one found 8 Jun (Carol Wells) in *Nacogdoches* was a road kill.

Only the fourth record for the East Texas Pineywoods, a **Green Violetear** was photographed at feeders in Magnolia, *Montgomery*, on 29-30 Jul (Don DuBois).

A **Buff-bellied Hummingbird** at the feeder of the park hosts campsite in Lockhart State Park, reported 12 Jul (Byron Stone), could be a new record for *Caldwell*, as few reports come from that county.

Although not a new county record for *Bastrop*, the **Calliope Hummingbird** frequenting feeders 9-15 Jul (Brush Freeman) at Utley is certainly remarkable.

Single singing **Willow Flycatchers** were late 2 Jun (Brush Freeman) at Webberville County Park in *Travis* and very late 12 Jun (Keith Arnold) at Bryan in *Brazos*.

Only in the past few years have **Eastern Phoebes** been noted to nest in *Brazos* and this season a pair successfully hatched three young in mid-May and then re-nested and brought off another 3 young in the nest 23 Jun (Larry Harris-Haller).

Suspected to be an unusually early migrant, a calling **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was observed 9 Jul (Darrell Vollert, John Groves) along the Navasota River in *Brazos*. However, in the prior two years at the same location an Ash-throated was sighted 19 May and 7 Jun as well.

A good find for *Bastrop*, a **Brown-crested Flycatcher** was observed 6 Jun (Brush Freeman) in Utley.

Out of typical range, **Warbling Vireos** have again nested at Webberville County Park in *Travis*, raising at least 3 young, with observations 4-17 Jul (Brush Freeman), including 3 adults and 3 young on 11 Jul.

A first summer record for the Central Brazos Valley, an adult **Tree Swallow** was near the boat ramp of Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes*, on 21 Jun (Darrell Vollert, Dennis & Jayne Grimes). Two immature Tree Swallows at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, on 25 Jul (D. D. Currie, Dell Little)] suggests the possibility of nesting there.

A first summer record for *Grimes*, a **Brown-headed Nuthatch** was observed near Roans Prairie 17 Jun (Darrell Vollert). This location is at the dividing line between Post Oak Savannah and Pineywoods regions.

Adding support for the hypothesis that **Sedge Wrens** might nest in the East Texas, a singing and calling bird was heard 19 Jun and again heard and seen 5 Jul (Bob Honig) in *Waller* on Penick Road between Hebert Road and Live Oak Creek.

Only the second summer record for the Central Brazos Valley since 1987, a **Wood Thrush** was singing near Chappell Hill in *Washington* on 1 Jun (Darrell Vollert, David McDonald).

Tempting, but without evidence of breeding, a singing male **Yellow Warbler** was studied 6-19 Jul (Brush Freeman) at Webberville County Park in *Travis*.

One of very few summer records of **Prairie Warbler** in Central Texas, one was seen 5 Jun (Wayne Strebe) at West Fort Hood in *Bell*.

A remarkable find for the East Texas Pineywoods, a **Cerulean Warbler** was well described on 15 Jul (Tom Walker) at Caddo Lake in *Marion*. Historically a summer resident of northeast Texas, there are no recent summer records, although the species may still nest in se Oklahoma and is a breeding bird of much of Arkansas.

A singing male **American Goldfinch** in full alternate plumage astonished Byron Stone when he found it at Niederwald in *Caldwell* on the strange date of 9 Jul. Less surprising, yet still unusual, an American Goldfinch was heard at Lake O' the Pines, *Upshur*, on 21 Jul (Mike Dillon).

CONTRIBUTORS QUOTED ABOVE:

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Randy Pinkston, William Pinkston, Boyd Sanders, Becki Snow, Byron Stone,
Wayne Strebe, Darrell Vollert, Tom Walker, Carol Wells.