

# Fall 2009: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 2529 sightings of 280 species from 1 August to 30 November 2009.

## ***WEATHER REPORTS:***

Brian Fuchs, State Climate Office of Texas Drought Monitor, 1 August, "This report characterizes the meteorological severity of the 2008-09 Texas Drought as of August 1, 2009, putting the present drought into a historical perspective. The report draws upon multiple sources of information, including data and reports from the National Weather Service (NWS) and National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), the U.S. Drought Monitor, and our own analyses. The present drought is most severe on a 1-3 month time scale. We find that, compared to historical droughts of the 20th and 21st centuries, the 2008-09 Texas Drought is probably the most severe drought on record from a precipitation standpoint alone in Bastrop, Caldwell, and Lee counties. When the impact of high temperatures is included, the drought is probably the most severe on record for an additional six counties: Victoria, Bee, San Patricio, Live Oak, Jim Wells, and Duval Counties. The drought of 1956 was of longer duration but its intensity was not as extreme, so it had a somewhat different set of impacts. In neighboring areas of central and south-central Texas, the intensity of the 2009 drought is greater than that of most but not all of the major historical droughts of the past 110 years, including 1910, 1917, 1918, 1925, 1953, 1955, 1956, and 1971."

Brush Freeman, 12 August, Bastrop County, "Received almost 0.11" of rain this afternoon. Enough to cool the roof off so I can once again open the doors and windows after being cooped in every evening at this time. Maybe more rain will come. Nah!

Keith Arnold, 18 August, Country Club Lake, Brazos Co., "Water levels continue to drop, while increased growth of the rattlebox diminished view of the northern arm of the lake."

Brush Freeman, 21 August, Travis County, "The poor trees in Webberville Park are in bad shape. Most of the huge old Hackberries in the main part of the park and up on the hill are dead now and the rest are fading quickly. The park will be a different place because of this drought. Not a green blade of grass or weed to be had for the most part."

Darrell Vollert, 22 August, Washington County, "Friday evening in Chappell Hill we were blessed with half an inch of rain and Saturday evening we picked up 1.08 inches. I hope the counties experiencing the worst drought conditions will

get rain very soon. This summer has been far worse than the hot summers of 1980 and 1998.

Keith Arnold, 15 September, Country Club Lake, Brazos County, "Recent rains have raised water levels significantly and northerly winds have cleared much of the surface on the main body of water."

Byron Stone, 20 September, Lake Somerville, Burleson County, "More resident birds were vocal today than I've heard on my last couple of trips to this area. I think the recent rain has brought relief even to the birds. There certainly is more standing water in creeks and ponds, and it is clear that the level in Lake Somerville has come up significantly."

Darrell Vollert, 26 September, Brazos County, "The [Navasota] river bottom has accumulated standing water from recent rains. The sloughs on the property are full and the creek on the property is flowing."

Don Schaezler, 31 October, Guadalupe County, "Conditions at Warbler Woods had improved considerably in the last two months with the onset of a rainy spell. Everywhere one looked the grass, wildflowers, and underbrush were green."

## **MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:**

A flock of about 70 **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** on 28 Nov (Rick Bello, Terry Thibodeaux) is a high count for *Grimes*, where the species has only been known to occur since 2003. Similarly high counts are 55 in *Franklin*—including 45 at Lake Bob Sandlin—21 Nov (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Peter Barnes), and 40 in *Camp* 27 Nov (David Brotherton).

**Ross's Geese** were reported in counties with few records in recent years: *Titus* on 11 Oct (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton), *McLennan* on 6 Nov (Matthew York, Heidi Trudell), and *Brazos* 21 Nov (Bryan Tarbox, John Berner).

A **Gadwall** on the Nacogdoches ponds, *Nacogdoches*, was observed at the odd dates 4-6 Sep (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

An early **Green-winged Teal** was at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, on 7 Aug (Mike Bloodsworth).

A high count of 4 **Red-breasted Mergansers** were found at Lake Bryan 22 Nov (Toby Hibbitts), only the seventh *Brazos* record in 25 years. A single was at Lake Somerville, *Washington*, on 21 Nov (Darrell Vollert), where it has only been reported twice before.

At Texas Eastman in Longview, *Harrison*, 200 **Ruddy Ducks** 5 Nov (Mark Edmund, David Brotherton) was an unusually high count for East Texas.

Off-birded Kurth Lake in *Angelina* added a new species: **Northern Bobwhite** on 13 Sep (Louis Debetaz).

More birders visited *Falls* recently than in many past years, resulting in additions to the county list, including **Common Loon** 27 Nov (D.D. Currie, Dell Little) at Marlin City Lake.

A first for north-east Texas and the farthest north **Least Grebe** has been recorded in Texas, one was at Texas Eastman in Longview, *Harrison*, 12-17 Sep (ph. Linda Price, Mark Edmund). In the past, the species has also been seen at Red Slough, Oklahoma.

A high count of 100 **Pied-billed Grebes** was reported at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, 10 Oct (Louis Debetaz).

**Swallow-tailed Kites** reported in Central Texas include singles at Fort Hood, *Coryell*, 4 Aug (Eric Runfeldt) and Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, 7 Aug (ph. Mike Bloodsworth), and up to 3 in *Bastrop* 12-18 Aug (Brush Freeman).

For East Texas, Peter Barnes reports, "**Mississippi Kites** were unusually abundant this year, with 9 birds near Tyler [*Smith*] from Aug 9-21 (Peter Barnes), 9 in *Rusk* from Aug 6-18 (Peggy Harding), and 1 in *Gregg* on Aug 5 and 9 (Peggy Harding). Mississippi Kites are also uncommon breeders, and up to 5 birds at one time were seen in the Canton [*Van Zandt*] area almost daily from mid-July to Aug 20 (Dale Ohl), perhaps including migrants and breeding birds." An extremely late Mississippi Kite was in Canton, *Van Zandt*, 1 Nov (Dale Ohl), far surpassing the previous late date of 2 Oct.

One of the highest counts for migrating **Broad-wing Hawks** in the Pineywoods was 2280 over Daingerfield State Park, *Morris*, 25 Sep (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Mike Dillon). A **Washington** high count of 700, including a couple of dark morphs, streamed over Chappell Hill on 27 Sep (Darrell Vollert).

Scarce for the Pineywoods, a **Swainson's Hawk** flew over Daingerfield State Park, *Morris*, 28 Sep (Luanne Brotherton, Mike Dillon). A juvenile 21 Nov (Bryan Tarbox, John Berner) in southern *Brazos* was very late for the Central Brazos Valley.

A new county record for *Houston* was a **Crested Caracara** documented 25 Nov (Laura Sare).

Quite late was a **Sora** at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, 1 Nov (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

Rare for the area, 3 **Common Moorhens** were apparently migrants at Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, on 5 Sep (David Wolf).

**American Coots** at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, jumped from 78 on 27 Sep to 2000+ on 10 Oct (Louis Debetaz).

Two **Whooping Cranes** were reported at Waco Wetlands, *McLennan*, on 19 Nov (Fred & Nora Gehlbach).

A first for *Bell* as a fall migrant, an alternately-plumaged **Ruddy Turnstone** was observed 13 Aug (Randy Pinkston) at Union Grove Wildlife Area on Stillhouse Reservoir.

Only the second record for the Lost Pines region, two **Sanderlings** were found 13 Aug (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop*.

Very rarely found in *Bell*, a **Short-billed Dowitcher** was at Rogers sewage ponds 2 Sep (Randy Pinkston).

A first county record for *Brazos*, a well-described **Laughing Gull** was at Lake Bryan 22 Nov (Toby Hibbits).

Early for *McLennan* was a **Ring-billed Gull** 13 Aug (Eric Haskell) at Lake Waco; also early for East Texas, another was at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, on 13 Sep (Louis Debetaz).

For a very rare East Texas migrant, getting two reports of **Black-billed Cuckoo** in one season is probably unprecedented; one was on Azalea Trail in Lufkin, *Angelina*, on 27 Aug (Louis Debetaz) and another was at Caddo Lake NWR in *Harrison* on 11 Oct (Eddie Ray).

Rare for the Central Brazos Valley and the first record for *Burleson* since 1974, a **Long-eared Owl** was observed at the early date of 8 Nov (David & Manuelita Gwin) while kayaking the Brazos River in an area hardly ever explored by birders.

Rare migrants for East Texas, single **Whip-poor-wills** were heard in *San Augustine* 8 Sep (Marcus Arreguin) and in *Wood* 18 Sep (Janet Cook).

A strikingly beautiful leucistic hummingbird, all white but for dark eyes, bill and legs, was photographed 22 Sep (Leigh & Linda Weld, Darrell Vollert) near Chappell Hill in *Washington*. Accompanied by Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, the identity of the leucistic bird is unknown.

A female **Black-chinned Hummingbird**, the third sighting for north-east Texas, visited feeders in *Rusk* 9 Sep (Peggy Harding).

One of few records for East Texas, a **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** has repeatedly been seen at feeders in Magnolia, *Montgomery*, 9 Sep to at least 15 Nov (Kelly Hill) and was also seen there regularly in winter 2008.

Early **Rufous Hummingbirds** appeared 1 Aug (Howard Williams) in *Hays* and the same day (Kelly Hill) in *Montgomery*. Presumably the same male Rufous Hummingbird that wintered last year, it returned to a Nacogdoches yard in November (Jack Rohrer).

Heartening for a diminishing species, a count of 12+ **Red-headed Woodpeckers** 26 Sep (Darrell Vollert) in the Navasota River bottoms of *Brazos* is a county high and regionally only surpassed by prior CBC counts of 15 and 16 in *Grimes* at Gibbons Creek Reservoir.

Not often seen in East Texas, single migrating **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were reported at Tyler State Park in *Smith* 9 Sep (Boyd Sanders) and at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* 11 Sep (Robert Truss).

A late migrant **Acadian Flycatcher** was at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* 2 Oct (David Wolf).

A sixth county record but the first in 17 years, a **Say's Phoebe** was photographed in southern *Brazos* on 21 Nov (Bryan Tarbox, John Berner).

Two rather late **Great Crested Flycatchers** were at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* 26 Sep (David Wolf, Robert Truss). Much later was one 25-26 Nov (Dale Ohl) in Canton, *Van Zandt*, two months beyond the previous late fall record.

A first fall record for *Angelina* was a **Western Kingbird** at Kurth Lake 16 Oct (Louis Debetaz).

A **Blue-headed Vireo** arrived in *Nacogdoches* at the early date of 27 Sep (Susie Lower).

Continuing a trend of southward and westward expansion in East Texas, **Fish Crows** were reported in *Gregg* 17 Aug (Linda Price) and *Harrison* 27 Aug (David Weaver) and 12 Sep (Mark Edmund) and *Titus* 1 Nov (Peter Barnes). The crows are not usually seen south of Lake O' the Pines in *Marion*.

The 10 Oct (David Wolf) cool front brought a high count of 90+ **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** to upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*.

A first county record for *San Augustine*, a single **Cave Swallow** was distinguished among three other swallow species around upper Lake Sam Rayburn 10 Oct (David Wolf).

A banded **Winter Wren** 24 Oct (Darrell Vollert) in Chappell Hill, *Washington*, is likely the same banded in the yard last winter.

The first East Texas **Golden-crowned Kinglet** of the season was in *Henderson* 18 Oct (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

A very early **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was observed 5 Sep (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*.

Imagine seeing 250+ **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**! It happened 5 Sep (David Wolf) at the Lake Sam Rayburn TX 147 bridge in *San Augustine*. Also impressive was 120+ there on 19 Sep (Robert Truss).

The first report of **Cedar Waxwings** was 2 at Longview, *Gregg*, on 17 Sep (Candy Troop).

Rare and early was a **Blue-winged Warbler** on Azalea Trail, *Angelina*, on 29 Aug (Louis Debetaz).

A **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, rare in fall, was in *Gregg* 7 Oct (Linda Price).

Appearing at a very early date, a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* on 2 Oct (David Wolf).

Although not often reported in East Texas, **Palm Warbler** is almost annual at Alazan Bayou WMA, *Nacogdoches*, and again was seen this season 17 Oct (David Wolf).

Quite late was a **Common Yellowthroat** 28 Nov (Peter Barnes, David Brotherton) at Lake Cypress Springs, *Camp*.

An extraordinary find at an exceptionally early date was a **Green-tailed Towhee** 17 Sep (Frank Bumgardner, Lois & John Muldrow) in Waco. It is the first report for *McLennan* since 1980 and the earliest record for the Oaks & Prairies region.

Remarkably early were single **Le Conte's Sparrows** 2 Oct (Isaac Sanchez) at Common Ford Park in *Travis* and 3 Oct (Bob Honig) at Katy Prairie Conservancy Manor Property in *Waller*.

Although usually found on the Gibbons Creek CBC, **Harris's Sparrows** are not reported at other times and reliable *Grimes* locations are not often identified. Six provided excellent looks along CR 219 on 29 Nov (Rick Bello, Terry Thibodeaux).

An excellent find was 2 **Henslow's Sparrows** in *Upshur* 28 Nov (Mark Edmund).

David Wolf reports for *Nacogdoches*, "**Great-tailed Grackles** continue to prosper in the Wal Mart/Lowe's area in Nacogdoches, with sightings of 5 (1 female, 4 juveniles) on 1 Sep (Robert Truss); 4 (2 males) on 5 Oct (David Wolf); and 3 (1 male) on 8 Oct. They have nested here the last two summers, but so far have not been found during the winter."

Five **Purple Finch** were amazingly early arrivals at Canton, *Van Zandt*, on 15 Sep (Dale Ohi) and some remained in the area to at least 11 Nov. The only other Purple Finch reported elsewhere in East Texas was 2 on 29 Nov (Peter Barnes) in *Franklin*.

A popular and inexpensive cage bird, an **Orange Bishop** was seen 10 Nov (Keith Arnold) at Country Club Lake in *Brazos*. Elsewhere in Texas, escapees have established breeding populations.

## **CONTRIBUTORS:**

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