

Spring 2009: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 2414 sightings of 280 species from 1 March to 31 May 2009.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Brush Freeman, Bastrop Co., 12 March, "I returned to Uteley for a few days and between yesterday and today so far have received 1.17" of rain, the biggest rain event since August 2008 here. It will take a lot more but am pleased with what fell."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Higher counts and more reports of **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** continue from East Texas, including 40 at Lake Palestine in *Smith* 12 Mar (Joe Marsey), a nesting pair at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Camp*, in April (Jack Ainsworth) and other sightings in *Grimes*, *Wood* and *Henderson* (fide Peter Barnes).

A **Least Grebe** found in Round Rock 2 Mar (Tim Fennell) is a first for *Williamson*; another (the same?) was reported in Round Rock 23 Apr (fide Eric Carpenter).

Now a rarity for East Texas, a **Northern Bobwhite** heard in *Gregg* 16 Apr (Peter Barnes) is noteworthy.

Remarkably, 23 **Brown Pelicans** still resided at Lake Livingston spillway, *Polk-San Jacinto*, 16 Mar (David Wolf, Robert Truss), two were at Lake Somerville, *Washington*, on 21 Apr (Darrell Fischer), presumably holdouts from last year's hurricanes, and an immature was at Granger Lake, *Williamson*, 2 May (Tim Fennell, Byron Stone) and yet another pelican was at Lake Waco, *McLennan*, 3 May (Eric Haskell).

A **Glossy Ibis** 8-10 May (Tim Fennell) at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, is rare.

Purple Gallinules made a good showing this spring at inland sites, including single sightings at Gus Engling WMA in *Anderson* 27 Apr (Tal Roberts), Country Club Lake in *Brazos* 28 Apr (Keith Arnold, et al.) and Austin, *Travis*, 18-20 May (Desha Melton, et al.)

A **Common Moorhen** at Waco Wetlands in *McLennan* 3-17 May (Eric Haskell) is a rare find. Somewhat more frequent, although not annual, are three at Country Club Lake, *Brazos*, 19-26 May (Keith Arnold) and one at Hornsby Bend, *Travis*, 21 May (Rob Fergus).

A “fallout” of **American Golden-Plovers** occurred in mid March at inland sites. On 11 Mar (David Wolf), 95 were counted at Angelina County Airport and 65 at Lake Sam Rayburn TX 147 bridge, *San Augustine*. The next day, 19 were at Nacogdoches Airport, *Nacogdoches*, and still one was there on the 13 Mar. Hundreds of golden-plovers were at the turf farms in *Burleson* on 15 Mar (David Scott).

A sizable flock of 36 **Willetts** were apparently driven by a storm to Airport Beach Park on Lake Waco, *McLennan*, 3 May (Eric Haskell) and 14 were still there 16 May.

Not reported annually, 2 **Ruddy Turnstones** were at Lake Waco, *McLennan*, on 16 May (Eric Haskell), and curiously this Airport Beach Park location is the same where they were reported last in 2004.

Dunlins were reported at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, on 8 May (Tim Fennell) and at Lake Waco, *McLennan*, on 16 May (Eric Haskell).

A count of 258 **Wilson’s Phalaropes** at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, 8 May (Tim Fennell) is impressive.

Up to 5 **Short-eared Owls** wintered in *McLennan* and were last reported 3 Mar (Karen Arquette, Eric Haskel, et al.).

Rare for the Central Brazos Valley, a **Black-chinned Hummingbird** visited feeders in *Brazos* on 14 Apr (Sandy Dillard).

A wintering **Rufous Hummingbird** remained in *Nacogdoches*, until 1 Mar (Jack Rohrer).

A brief look at a possible **Tropical/Couch’s Kingbird**, identified by the absence of white outer tail feathers, was reported at Lake Tyler, *Smith*, 23 Apr (Elizabeth Farley, Jamie Cantrell, Jessica Coleman). There are no records for Western Kingbird in *Smith*, and this sighting would be a first record for Tropical/Couch’s.

Two **Cave Swallows** in *Anderson* 7 Mar (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon) is a first county record.

A **Sprague’s Pipit** was observed at the late date of 3 May (Randy Pinkston) in Temple, *Bell*.

A new record for *Freestone* is a **Palm Warbler** at Richland Creek WMA 19 Apr (Peter Barnes, Dale Ohl, Lynette & Jim Jackson).

Adding to only a few *McLennan* records, a **Prothonotary Warbler** was observed 17 May (Eric Haskell) at Flat Rock Park on Lake Waco.

A first county record for *Austin*, a **Swainson's Warbler** nested in wooded back yard. The nest, 4 ft. off the ground, was discovered 3 May (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard) when brush was cleared for some plantings, unfortunately removing some of the cover hiding the nest with 5 eggs, including one cowbird egg. By 5 May the bird had removed the cowbird egg. On 13 May the bird and all eggs were gone.

East of its normal range, a singing male **Spotted Towhee** was in Nacogdoches 17 March (Robert Truss).

An unusually large number of reports of migrating **Clay-colored Sparrows** came from counties where they are not often reported, including *Brazos*, *Freestone*, *Gregg*, *McLennan*, and *Smith*.

A first county record for *Austin* and one of only a few spring records for the surrounding area, a female **Black-headed Grosbeak** was photographed 17 April (Sue Ruotsala, Billie Bernard).

Lazuli Buntings passed through Central Texas, including 5 at one residence in western *Bastrop* (fide Eric Carpenter). More surprisingly, out-of-range single Lazuli Buntings appeared in *Robertson* 11 Apr (Patricia Stovall), a first county record, as well as *Smith* on 29 Apr (Mike Bloodsworth) and *Van Zandt* on 29 Apr (Dale Ohl).

A surprising number of inland sightings of **Bobolinks** occurred in mid May, including 8 males on 3 May (Roy Smallwood, Eric Haskell) near Waco Airport in *McLennan*, 1 male 4 May (Dennis Shepler) in *Waller*, a first county record, up to 60 in southern *Brazos* 4-10 May (ph. Toby Hibbits, m.ob.), and 2 males 6 May (ph. Rich Kostecke) at Cowhouse Creek arm of Belton Lake in *Bell*.

A rare migrant for East Texas, a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at Camp Tyler in *Smith* on 30 Apr (Peter Barnes).

Seventy **Rusty Blackbirds** were at Tyler in *Smith* 12 Mar (Peter Barnes) while 10 were extremely late at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone* on 19 Apr (Peter Barnes, Dale Ohl, Lynette & Jim Jackson).

Purple Finches were almost lacking this past winter and the only spring report was 2 in *Angelina* 12 Mar (Jimmie Putnam).

Abundant numbers of wintering **Pine Siskins** tarried into spring in Central and East Texas (e.g., *Coryell, McLennan, Brazos, Washington, Smith*) with the last report being one flyover in *Bastrop* 12 May (Brush Freeman).

CONTRIBUTORS QUOTED ABOVE:

Jack Ainsworth, Keith Arnold, Karen Arquette, Peter Barnes, Billie Bernard, Mike Bloodsworth, Jamie Cantrell, Jessica Coleman, D. D. Currie, Sandy Dillard, Mike Dillon, Elizabeth Farley, Tim Fennell, Rob Fergus, Darrell Fischer, Brush Freeman, Bert Frenz, 221 Rainbow Dr. #12190, Livingston, TX 77399-2021, bert2@bafrenz.com, Chuck Hamilton, Eric Haskell, Toby Hibbitts, Lynette & Jim Jackson, Rich Kostecke, Dell Little, Joe Marsey, Dale Ohl, Randy Pinkston, Jimmie Putnam, Tal Roberts, Jack Rohrer, Sue Ruotsala, David Scott, Dennis Shepler, Roy Smallwood, Byron Stone, Robert Truss, Darrell Vollert, David Wolf.