

## Winter 2010-2011: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 3065 sightings of 234 species from 1 December 2010 to 28 February 2011.

### WEATHER REPORTS:

Keith Arnold, 11 January, Brazos County, "Water levels up significantly due to recent, heavy rains."

Peter Barnes, January, Northeast Texas, "January had some cold snaps and brought the expected loons and waterfowl, although overall numbers were low, perhaps because of the drought, which also made for reduced numbers of land birds. Winter finches were an exception, with good numbers of Purple Finches and Pine Siskins."

Keith Arnold, 1 February, Brazos County, "Cold temps and high winds had an obvious effect on this census. ..."

### MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Winter sightings of **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** are rare in northeast Texas and an impressive 100 at Callender Lake in *Henderson* is surprising for 8 Dec (Mike Kirkpatrick). In the Central Brazos Valley where wintering birds have not been seen since 1980, 13 were flying 24 Jan (Darrell Vollert) in Chappell Hills, *Washington*.

Three **Ross's Geese** were reported 18 Dec on the Nacogdoches CBC, 8 were at Gibbons Creek, *Grimes*, 29 Jan (Bruce Neville, Laura Sare, et al.), and 1 was at Rosebud City Lake in *Falls* 19 Feb (Kenneth Williams).

A **Cinnamon Teal** at Finfeather Lake 29 Dec (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) is the first *Brazos* record since 1993. One 28 Feb (Mike Bloodsworth) at Lake Tyler East is only the second record for *Smith*, the first occurring in 1999.

Peter Barnes' observation, "**Greater Scaup** were more common than usual," is echoed by high counts on East Texas CBC's and as high as 107 at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, 15 Jan (David Brotherton). Overshadowing this is 1 at Fayette Lake 8 Feb (Chuck Sexton) which is one of very few records for *Fayette*.

An impressive 142 **Hooded Mergansers** were counted 20 Dec (Tim Fennell) at Trinidad, *Henderson*.

Surprising for East Texas, 2 **Wild Turkeys** were in *Nacogdoches* 26 Dec (Carol Wells).

A **Red-throated Loon** was reported 2 Jan (Caleb Frome) at Lake Tawakoni, *Rains*.

A **Pacific Loon** was seen at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, 21 Dec-14 Jan (Tim Fennell, David Brotherton). Another was at Lake Tawankoni, *Hunt*, 19 Dec (Richard Kinney).

The first East Texas record since 2004, a **Western Grebe** was found at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, 15 Jan (David Brotherton).

Up to three **Brown Pelicans** wintered at Lake Livingston dam, *Polk-San Jacinto*, from 1 Dec to at least 20 Feb (Fred Collins, et al.).

Trinidad Lake supported 126 **Neotropic Cormorants** on 20 Dec (Tim Fennell), a good number for *Henderson*. Smaller numbers were in *Brazos*, *Freestone*, *Grimes*, *Harrison*, *Hopkins*, *Hunt*, *Jasper*, *Leon*,

*Liberty, Limestone, McLennan, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Panola, Polk, Rains, San Augustine, Washington and Van Zandt.*

Ninety-six **Great Egrets** at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, 28 Jan (Mike Bloodworth) is a good count.

Unusual in East Texas in winter, a **Snowy Egret** was in *Smith* 31 Dec (Dennis Scott).

For the first time, up to 23 **White Ibis** wintered at Richland Creek WMA (Jim Wright, et al.), occupying both *Navarro* and *Freestone*. In prior years, there have been no sightings during the coldest portions of winter. Likewise, up to 34 **White-faced Ibis** wintered there to at least 13 Feb (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, et al.)

Up to 4 **Virginia Rails** were seen and photographed 14 Jan – 11 Feb (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, ph. Jim Wright) at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*.

Six **Virginia Rails** and 5 **Soras** were found at Grand Saline Marsh in *Van Zandt* 21 Dec (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

A winter sighting 28 Jan (Mike Bloodworth) of **Common Moorhen** is unusual for Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*.

Two **Sandhill Cranes** on 31 Dec (Jim Wright) are both rare and occurring on an odd date for Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*.

A new county record for oft-birded *McLennan* is **Mountain Plover** when 9 were found on Steiner Road near Waco 1 Jan (Byron Stone, Joe Yelderman, Gail Cupit, et al.). Two were still seen 8 Jan (Eric Haskell).

**Long-billed Dowitchers** are rare in central-east Texas in winter, so it is surprising to find up to 87 at Trinidad Lake in *Henderson* 20 Dec-14 Feb (Tim Fennell, et al.), 3 at Country Club Lake in *Brazos* 22 Dec (Bruce Neville, Laura Sare, Mary Dabney Wilson) and 43 at Richland Creek WMA in *Navarro* 13 Feb and up to 9 on the *Freestone* side 13-25 Feb (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

For a surprisingly long stay, viewed by dozens of observers, an immature **Black-legged Kittiwake** visited the Lake Livingston spillway, *San Jacinto-Polk*, 28 Dec-14 Mar (David Wolf, Robert Truss, m.ob.).

One to two **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were noted 12 Dec – 20 Feb (Liston Rice, m.ob.) at the Lake Livingston spillway, *San Jacinto-Polk*.

Single **White-winged Doves** continue to turn up in East Texas, with sightings 22 Dec – 11 Jan (m.ob.) in *Harrison, Morris, Rusk, Smith* and *Van Zandt*.

A **Common Ground-Dove**, first appearing 9 Nov in *Henderson*, was still present 31 Jan (Jim Booker).

A new location in *McLennan* for a wintering **Burrowing Owl** was reported in Lorena (Tish Tucker).

A **nighthawk**, not identified to species, was quite out-of-season on 14 Dec (Ellen Ratoosh) at College Station, *Brazos*.

Feeding on salvias in Chappell Hill, *Washington*, was a **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** 23-24 Dec (Darrell Vollert), a first county record and only the second for the Central Brazos Valley.

An all-time high count of 19 **Red-headed Woodpeckers** on the Tyler CBC, *Smith*, was a most welcome report.

Not reported in northeast Texas since 2003, a **Say's Phoebe** was near Cooper Lake, *Delta*, 2 Dec (Matt White).

A second county record, the first in 2001, of **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was 22 Jan (Darrell Vollert) near Chappell Hill, *Washington*.

The first **Purple Martin** report for East Texas was at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, 15 Jan (Louis Debetaz), but it was clearly preceded by two observed 26 Dec (Deloris & Paul Sellin) in Austin, *Travis*.

A **Tree Swallow** lingered 14-28 Jan (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Mike Bloodsworth) at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*. Another was found 29 Jan (Laura Sare, et al.) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes*.

Unusual were two **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** in Lufkin, *Angelina*, 3 Feb (Louis Debetaz).

A TexBirds discussion about wintering **Cave Swallows** produced a good list of sightings. Well-represented were *Bastrop*, *Bell*, *Bexar*, *Brazos*, *Hays*, *Travis*, *Williamson* and counties farther south. More surprising are 4 on 9 Dec (Ted Drozdowski) in *Robertson*, 12 on 14 Jan (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, et al.) in *Freestone*, 3-6 on 14 Jan-26Feb in *Hunt* (Richard Kinney, et al.), 1+ 15 Jan (Susan Foster) in *Van Zandt*, 1-6 15 Jan- 20 Feb (Richard Kinney, et al.) in *Rains*, 7 on 21 Jan (Joe Grzybowski) in *Falls* and one 10 Feb (Thomas Riecke) in *San Jacinto* where it is only the second winter record for Pineywoods.

While **Red-breasted Nuthatches** put on a lack-luster showing in East Texas, they invaded Central Texas counties such as *Bastrop*, *Bexar*, *Burnet*, *Comal*, *Guadalupe* and *Travis*.

A first county record for *Fayette* is **White-breasted Nuthatch** near Round Top on 28 Dec (Betsy Harwood). Surprisingly, this was followed 19 Jan (fide Brush Freeman) with one in *Bastrop* and on 26 Jan (Darrell Vollert) in Brenham for a *Washington* first record.

**Brown Creeper** made an impressive showing throughout winter across East Texas and the Central Oaks and Prairies regions, including a noteworthy 39 counted on the Nacogdoches CBC.

Likewise, **Golden-crowned Kinglets** seemed to be everywhere in East and Central Texas, with high counts of 18 in *Morris* 4 Dec (Linda Price), 70 on the Nacogdoches CBC and 75 on the Bell County CBC, and smaller numbers continuing throughout the season.

**Gray Catbird** usually does not hang around the colder north in winter, yet this year sightings throughout the period occurred in *Angelina*, *Bell*, *Brazos*, *Coryell*, *Gonzales*, *Guadalupe*, *Hardin*, *Jasper*, *Liberty*, *McLennan*, *San Augustine*, *Travis* and *Williamson*.

A **Yellow-throated Warbler** lingered in *Bastrop* 19 Dec (Brush Freeman), but much more remarkable was one in *Brazos* 20 Jan into Mar (John Hale, Linda Hale). A wintering Yellow-throated is unprecedented in *Brazos*, although there are scattered winter dates, but none in the past 35 years.

Single **Spotted Towhees** in East Texas were reported in *Smith* 4 Dec (Mike Bloodsworth), *Harrison* 4 Dec (Mike Dillon, David Weaver), *Nacogdoches* 4 Jan (David Wolf), and 2 were in *Cass* 15 Jan (David Brotherton).

A very rare bird for East Texas, an **American Tree Sparrow** was observed 6 Feb (Jim Booker) in *Henderson*.

A well-described **Clay-colored Sparrow** was reported at a sunflower seed feeder in Kilgore, *Rusk*, on the late date of 26 Dec (Peggy Harding).

With over a thousand sparrows in Chapel Hill, *Smith*, 13 Jan (Mike Bloodsworth) a remarkable 208 were counted as **Swamp Sparrow**.

Some winters it is hard to find one **Dark-eyed Junco**, but this year they were plentiful and widespread throughout the season, including reports from 41 of the 48 East Texas counties.

Eight **McCown's Longspurs** were found near Allen Farm, *Brazos*, 23 Jan (Laura Sare) at a site historically known to hold the species, but not reported there since 1976.

Surprisingly, **Lapland Longspurs** were found in the Pineywoods at the dried-up flats off the TX 147 causeway of Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, 5 Dec (David Wolf, Robert Truss), and 2-5 at Nacogdoches Airport 17 Dec – 10 Feb (David Wolf). Larger numbers were 75 north of Pat Mayse Lake in *Lamar* 11 Dec (Tyler Audubon field trip), 1000 in *Red River* 12 Dec (Peggy Harding, Linda Price) and 100 southwest of Honey Grove in *Fannin* 13 Feb (Peter Barnes, Peggy Harding).

**Smith's Longspurs** reported in East Texas this season include singles in Bogata, *Red River*, 31 Dec and near Bogata, *Morris*, 23 Jan (both David Brotherton).

A winter surprise, an adult male **Summer Tanager** was photographed at a suet feeder in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*, 13-14 Jan (Jack Rohrer), though not seen thereafter.

A late **Indigo Bunting** 26 Dec (Peter Barnes) in ne *Houston* was within a mixed flock of birds in brush.

Peter Barnes reports on 26 Dec, "An all-time high of 11,258 **Red-winged Blackbirds** and 67,037 **Common Grackles** were tallied on the Caddo Lake count (m. ob. in Texas and Louisiana)."

Northeast Texas counties with reports of **Rusty Blackbirds** this season include *Bowie, Camp, Cass, Fannin, Gregg, Hardin, Hunt, Lamar, Marion, Morris, Nacogdoches, Newton, Panola, Rains, Red River, Rusk, San Augustine, Shelby, Smith, Upshur, Walker* and *Wood*. David Wolf reports, "The northern Pineywoods, including the Tyler and Longview areas north of us, had the best flight of Rusty Blackbirds in years." Peter Barnes states, "Rusty Blackbirds were more plentiful than usual." The highest count was 340 in Whitehouse, *Smith*, 24 Dec (Peter Barnes). A report of 2 at Lake Fayette, *Fayette*, 14 Dec (Bernd Gravenstein) is a surprise.

For the East Texas Pineywoods, David Wolf reports, "We finally got our first winter records of the dreaded **Great-tailed Grackle**, when 4 were at the Lufkin Wal-Mart on 31 Dec and 2 were seen again on 5 Jan (Louis Debetaz)." Lufkin is in *Angelina*.

On the odd date of 2 Jan (Bill & Charlotte Neill) a male **Baltimore Oriole** appeared at a Birch Creek State Park campsite on Lake Somerville, *Burleson*.

East Texas birders enjoyed a good season for **Purple Finch** and the species penetrated farther south into the Oaks and Prairies counties, with sightings in *Bastrop, Bell, Brazos, Freestone, Limestone, Travis* and *Washington*.

A **Lesser Goldfinch** in Kilgore 25 Jan (Peggy Harding) was photographed for the first *Rusk* record and only the third ne Texas record. The bird was still present 5 Mar.

One of the highest counts ever for the Nacogdoches CBC, 1384 **American Goldfinch** were counted 18 Dec (fide David Wolf).

## **CONTRIBUTORS:**

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