

Spring 2010: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 2533 sightings of 284 species from 1 March to 31 May 2010.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, Pineywoods Region, 15 March, "For the longest time it seemed as if this winter would hang on forever - and then suddenly spring burst forth March 8-15."

David Wolf, Pineywoods region, Spring, "A season as complex as these two months is hard to summarize...but, in general, most breeding species were somewhat late in arriving; few large pushes of migrants were observed; and May was the worst spring for warblers in recent memory. Conversely, the cool fronts in late April produced a good push of species at best uncommon in our area. May was extremely dry and I would surmise that the lack of visible migration was due to the lack of strong fronts and especially rain."

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY:

Unprecedented in a seasonal report for this region, it includes 21 first county records, the bulk from the Central Brazos Valley. Oberholser (1974) has not been consulted for this list, so a few might have been known in that earlier publication. Although we have a rich database of Central Brazos Valley records dating back nearly a century, some counties are not birded intensely and more recent attention to these has produced interesting finds.

Common Black-Hawk in *Fayette*
American Golden-Plover in *Robertson*
Upland Sandpiper in *Leon*
Hudsonian Godwit in *Robertson*
Least Sandpiper in *Robertson*
White-rumped Sandpiper in *Robertson*
Baird's Sandpiper in *Robertson*
Pectoral Sandpiper in *Robertson*
Stilt Sandpiper in *Robertson*
Ruff in *Waller*
Buff-bellied Hummingbird in *Montgomery*
Bell's Vireo in *Leon*

Philadelphia Vireo in *Robertson*
Cave Swallow in *Leon*
Swainson's Thrush in *Leon*
Chestnut-sided Warbler in *Robertson*
Hooded Warbler in *Leon*
Rose-breasted Grosbeak in *Leon*
Spotted Towhee in *Burleson*
Yellow-headed Blackbird in *Leon*
Lesser Goldfinch in *Robertson*

Other first or near first records:

Bald Eagle in *Washington* – probable first nesting record
White-tailed Hawk in *Burleson* – first since 1976
Black-necked Stilt in *Grimes* – first since 1937
Eastern Phoebe in *Robertson* – first documented nesting record
Black-and-white Warbler in *Leon* – first documented nesting record
Western Tanager in *Montgomery* – probable first record
Bronzed Cowbird in *Fayette* – first since 1978

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

A male **Green-winged Teal** 12 May (Cliff Shackelford, et al.) was late at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*.

Different female **Hooded Mergansers** with broods of tiny ducklings were at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches*, 5-7 April and 15 April (David Wolf, et al.); this species is a rare breeder in the Pineywoods.

An extraordinary total of 620 **Ruddy Ducks** were on Lake Bob Sandlin, *Franklin*, 5 Mar (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

A **Pacific Loon** was at the Holiday Marina on 9 Mar (Richard Kinney) and at the nearby *Van Zandt* boat ramp on 15 Mar, together with a **Red-throated Loon** the same day (Ron Baltzegar, Greg Cook). Another Red-throated Loon was at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, on 14 Mar (Tim Fennell).

An impressive number, 173 **Horned Grebes** were on Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, 12 Mar (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

Still another **Brown Pelican** for northeast Texas, one was on Lake Palestine in *Henderson* 25 Mar (Dale Hartsfield).

Although **American Bittern** is seen occasionally in the Central Brazos Valley, a count of 3 at Country Club Lake 12 Mar (Laura Sare) has not been reported since the 1970s.

In summer, a post-breeding **Reddish Egret** is not surprising in the central Oaks & Prairies region, but a sighting 28 May (Gil Eckrich) at Belton Lake in *Bell* is only the fifth spring record for the whole region.

A **Glossy Ibis** joined a couple dozen White-faced at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, 12 May (Cliff Shackelford, et al.).

Was it nest failure or very early post-breeding dispersal that brought **Wood Storks** into the Central Brazos Valley? Eight were at Brookshire in *Waller* 23 Apr – 10 May (Harvey Lass) and an especially large group of 45 were near the Navasota River in *Brazos* 8 May (Darrell Vollert).

Possibly the first record of nesting **Bald Eagles** in *Washington* was documented 3 Apr (Darrell Vollert) northeast of Chappell Hill.

Quite surprising was a well-described **Sharp-shinned Hawk** in *Robertson* at the late date of 15 May (Rich Kostecke); the species is not known to nest in the Central Brazos Valley.

Observation of a pair of copulating **Cooper's Hawks** 29 Mar (Louis Debetaz) and discovery of their nest 4 April provided the first breeding documentation for this species in Angelina. While there is no concrete evidence of nesting in the Central Brazos Valley, a territorial pair in College Hills subdivision in College Station, Brazos, 26 May is noteworthy. Another was reported 30 May (John Hale) in the Wellborn area of *Brazos*.

Perhaps the biggest surprise this season for the Central Oaks and Prairies region is a **Common Black-Hawk** 30 Mar – 13 Apr (Stan VanSandt, m.ob.) at Lake Fayette. Not only very rare for the region and a first county record for *Fayette*, it is also the farthest east in the region.

Repeated sightings of **Broad-winged Hawks** at Camp Allen on the *Grimes-Waller* border 11 Apr – 23 May (Darrell Vollert, et al.) are suggestive of local nesting, although there is no prior evidence for the Central Brazos Valley. Another late sighting was one at Brenham in *Washington* 28 May (Darrell Vollert).

Quite remarkable was a **White-tailed Hawk** photographed 6 Mar (David Scott) at the turf farm in the Brazos River bottoms; the only other record for *Burleson* was over 34 years ago. Just across the river in *Brazos*, the only record dates back to 1937.

A **King Rail** 6 Mar (Peter Barnes, Tyler Audubon field trip) at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, was a surprise for northeast Texas.

American Golden-Plovers made an impressive showing in East Texas with many reports 20-28 Mar in *Angelina*, *Franklin*, *Titus*, and most notably 297 in *Red River* 26 Mar (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton). Three in *Robertson* 15 May (Rich Kostecke) is a first county record.

Unexpected was a **Black-necked Stilt** 6 Apr (Laura Sare) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir, the first *Grimes* record since 1937.

Sixty-four **American Avocets** at Lake Waco 18 Apr (Eric Haskell) is a good count for *McLennan*.

A flyover **Upland Sandpiper** was the first noted county record for *Leon*, reported 27 Apr (Keith Arnold) at Fort Boggy State Park.

A first county record for *Robertson* is a **Hudsonian Godwit** 15 May (Rich Kostecke) in the Brazos River floodplain. Sheet water covering dirt fields in the floodplain have either not been explored previously or are rarely present, as that same day, Kostecke established first county records for **Least Sandpiper**, **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Baird's Sandpiper**, **Pectoral Sandpiper**, and **Stilt Sandpiper**.

A first county record for *Waller* is a **Ruff (Reeve)** photographed near Pattison 14-25 Apr (Mary Gustafson, Adam Wood).

David Wolf reports for *Nacogdoches*, "Single **White-winged Doves** in Loco Valley 22 Apr (Ruth Heino) and Central Heights 25 Apr (Cliff Shackelford) coincided with the peak of spring migration for this species, which has not yet established itself as a breeding bird in the Pineywoods."

With only one other reported incidence of **Buff-bellied Hummingbird** in the East Texas Pineywoods, it is surprising to have reports of one photographed at Stagecoach 19-27 Mar (Kenneth Anderson) and another observed 16 May (Carol Bookout) in Conroe, both in *Montgomery*.

At three *Nacogdoches* locations, wintering **Rufous Hummingbirds** remained into spring, the last seen 21 Mar (fide David Wolf).

Not previously reported and for the third year in a row, a pair of **Eastern Phoebes** nested in *Robertson* under the eave of a house (fide Debra Corpora). Although seasonally reported rarely in the Central Brazos Valley the only prior documented nesting has been in *Brazos*.

One of very few spring records for the Pineywoods, a male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was photographed and observed 23-26 Mar (Sarah Stovall, et al.) in *Nacogdoches*.

Western Kingbirds east of normal range include two at Central Heights in *Nacogdoches* 25 Apr (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, David Wolf).

A first county record for *Leon*, a **Bell's Vireo** was observed 4 May (Keith Arnold) at Fort Boggy State Park. This species is reported less than annually in the Central Brazos Valley.

In *Robertson*, a **Philadelphia Vireo** 15 May (Rich Kostecke) was a first county record.

A pair of **Brown Thrashers** were nest building in downtown Hemphill, *Sabine*, 24 Apr (Steve Skunk).

Yet another first county record for *Robertson* is a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** 15 May (Rich Kostecke), perhaps more an indication of limited coverage by birders than the species rarity in the Central Brazos Valley.

Although reports of migrating warblers through the Pineywoods were few this season, a male “**western**” **Palm Warbler** at Pecan Park in *Nacogdoches* 27 Apr (David Wolf) and a **Blackpoll Warbler** 11 May at the same location are noteworthy.

A recently fledged chick with an adult **Black-and-white Warbler** at Fort Boggy State Park, *Leon*, 4 May (Keith Arnold), adds to the very scant direct evidence of this species nesting in the Central Brazos Valley.

A **Spotted Towhee** heard at Lake Somerville 7 Mar (Bruce Neville) is a first record for the lake and for *Burleson*, an area a bit east of their normal range.

Lingering **Savannah Sparrows** were closely monitored in *Waller*, with the latest report in Brookshire 14 May (Harvey Laas), nearly reaching the latest historical record of 18 May. Two also lingered until 12 May (Cliff Shackelford) at Richland Creek WMA in *Navarro*.

Late departing **Harris's Sparrows** include one at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, 17 Apr (Mimi Hoppe Wolf) and up to three 22 Apr – 4 May (Harvey Laas) in Brookshire, *Waller*.

Six **White-crowned Sparrows** were still at Lake Waco in *McLennan* 1 May (Eric Haskell) and a few tarried in *Waller* until the last one was seen 4 May (Harvey Laas).

West of its normal range, a **Western Tanager** was photographed in *Montgomery* 17 Mar (Dave Dolan).

More often than usual, migrating **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were reported at central counties, including *Brazos*, *Leon*, *McLennan*, *Navarro*, and *Waller* 28 Mar – 5 May (m.ob.). The highest count was close to 100 at a seed and grain facility in McGregor 29 Apr (John Sneed). The Pineywoods also had unusually frequent migrants at Alazan Bayou WMA and Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* (David Wolf).

David Wolf reports, “**Great-tailed Grackles** seem to have finally conquered the heart of the Pineywoods. The first report this year was a male in the Wal-Mart area in Nacogdoches on 20 Mar (Susie Lower); the high count there was 3 males and 3 females 21 Apr and a few days earlier (Cliff Shackelford). A male was seen in San Augustine town 20 Apr (Rick Schaefer) and then 2 were in Henderson town on 16 May (Rick Schaefer).”

A **Bronzed Cowbird** was captured in *Fayette* 20 Apr (Fred Wernette). The species has not been reported in the county since 1978.

A wintering **Baltimore Oriole** in *Brazos* remained until 13 Mar (Terri Sandvik).

Almost entirely absent this winter, **Purple Finches** suddenly showed up in small number at many Pineywoods locations. The last were 2 late males in *Angelina* 2 Apr (Jimmie Putnam).

Like Purple Finches, **Pine Siskins** were noticeably absent in the Pineywoods in winter. The very few spring reports came from *Nacogdoches* with the last seen 20 Apr (Ruth Heino) in Loco Valley.

East of its normal range a single female-like **Lesser Goldfinch** was observed in *Robertson* 15 May (Rich Kostecke), a first county record and the first Central Brazos Valley record since 1982.

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