

Winter 2011-12: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 7544 sightings of 226 species from 1 December 2011 to 29 February 2012.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Eric Carpenter, 24 Dec, Lake Somerville, "Water level of lake way down."

Randy Pinkston, 21 Jan, Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir, Bell County, "The lake level is obviously lower than it was last fall, concentrating the waterfowl for easy pickens if one is willing to make the long hike out there.

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Snow Goose – After a decade of very few winter sightings of Snow Goose in northeast Texas, some are being reported, including 5 on the Panola CBC 1 Jan—the first in 10 years—and 100 in *Rusk* 29 Feb (Peggy Harding).

Ross's Goose – A single Ross's Goose was on upper Sam Rayburn Reservoir, *Nacogdoches* 24 Dec and 1 Jan (David Wolf).

Tundra Swan – Tundra Swans made a good showing in Texas this season starting with 2 at Fort Hood, *Coryell* 4-5 Dec (Richard Hoover, ph. Gil Eckrich). One viewed nearly daily at Salt Lake 13 Dec–25 Feb (Eric Carpenter, m.ob) is a first county record for *Guadalupe*. Two at Berry Creek Country Club in Georgetown 16 Dec–12 Jan (Jeff McIntyre, ph. Byron Stone, Tim Fennell, ph. Karen McBride) are first county records for *Williamson*. Three were on a pond near Clarksville City Lake, *Red River* 15 Jan (David Brotherton, ph. Luanne Brotherton), a second county record.

Cinnamon Teal – A male Cinnamon Teal 15 Jan+ (David Scott, m.ob.) was a good find for Country Club Lake, *Brazos*.

Surf Scoter – Single Surf Scoters were reported at Meadow Lake in *Williamson*, 10 Dec (Jeff McIntyre), Hornsby Bend in *Travis* 16 Dec (C.K.Hands, ph. James Hall, et al.) and Lake Tyler in *Smith* 31 Dec (James Booker, Linda Bellsnear, Zoe Ann Stinchcomb), the latter a new species for the Tyler CBC.

Common Goldeneye – Surprisingly, a Common Golden 12 Feb (Byron Stone) at Rocky Creek Park, *Washington*, is only the second record for oft-birded Lake Somerville. The first dates back to 1986.

Wild Turkey – Adding to few records of Wild Turkey in the Central Brazos Valley was 4 near Chappell Hill in *Washington* 6 Feb (June Dossat). Another 3 Dec (Tim Bister) at Caddo Lake, *Harrison* is also unusual.

Red-throated Loon – Up to 3 Red-throated Loons were watched 10 Dec–8 Jan (Greg Cook, Richard Kinney, et al.) from the *Van Zandt* side of Lake Tawakoni.

Pacific Loon – One to 2 Pacific Loons were on Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, 28 Dec–4 Jan (Tim Fennell, †Peggy Harding). Another was on Lake Tawakoni, *Van Zandt*, 30 Dec–4 Jan (Greg Cook, Richard Kinney), and yet another was on Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine* 19 Feb (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf, Travis Audubon Society). The latter may have been present all winter as a "suspicious" loon was seen there 7 Dec and 1 Jan (David Wolf).

Neotropical Cormorant – David Wolf suspects Neotropical Cormorants may be establishing a pattern of a few wintering birds at upper Sam Rayburn Lake, *Nacogdoches*, as he saw 1-2 present 2-24 Dec. A surprisingly high count of 585 at Lake Bastrop for the Bastrop CBC was recorded 1 Jan (Laurie Foss,

Shelia Hargis). Seventy at Overlook Park, *Washington* 12 Feb (Byron Stone) is a good count for Lake Somerville.

Great Blue Heron – A curiously-plumaged Great Blue Heron 10 Dec (ph. Bryan Calk) at Lake Bryan, *Brazos*, resembles the Wurdemann's morph, although it has also been suggested to be a Great Blue Heron X Great Egret hybrid.

Reddish Egret – Not reported at Lake Somerville since 1985, an immature Reddish Egret was at Welch Park in *Burleson* 24 Dec (ph. Eric Carpenter).

Black-crowned Night-Heron – An immature Black-crowned Night-Heron at Lake Murvaul, *Panola* 2 Jan (Peggy Harding, Becky Gullette) is a good find for northeast Texas, although it has been found at this lake a half dozen other winters.

Northern Harrier – Northern Harriers were reported more numerous than usual in northeast Texas with a 10-year high of 4 on the Lake O' the Pines CBC, *Marion* 26 Dec. an all-time high of 4 for the Caddo Lake Count, *Marion* 3 Dec (fide Peter Barnes), and a high count of 5 at Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, on 7 Dec (David Wolf).

White-tailed Hawk – Drifting from its normal range, an adult White-tailed Hawk sailed over the turf farms along the Brazos River in *Burleson* 17 Dec (Cathy Liles, Jackie Girouard, et al.). This is the third county record since 1976.

Ferruginous Hawk – Rare in *McLennan*, a Ferruginous Hawk was reported on the Crawford CBC 17 Dec (†Gail Cupid, Jane Derrick, Jesse Ray) at the Hog Creek WMA.

Golden Eagle – A rarity for *Brazos*, a Golden Eagle swooped down across the Texas A&M Campus 31 Dec (†Mike Manson).

Merlin – Rare in winter in the Pineywoods, a Merlin was at Kurth Lake in *Angelina* 3 Dec (Louis Debetaz).

Peregrine Falcon – Two sightings of perhaps the same bird were reported 7 Dec and 1 Jan (David Wolf, Robert Truss) at the TX 147 bridge over Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*.

Sora – Reports of single Soras were 31 Dec (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) in *Smith* and 24 Feb (Linda Price) in *Harrison*.

Common Gallinule – A rare bird for *Angelina*, an adult Common Gallinule, accompanied by a juvenile, was at Kurth Lake 18 Sep (Louis Debetaz) and was still present in 17 Dec—a first record for the CBC—to at least 16 Jan (Carol Wells, et al.).

Mountain Plover – While Mountain Plovers were difficult to find in their traditional wintering area near Granger Lake, *Williamson*, where the high count was 36 on 19 Feb (Melissa Roach, Tom Johnson, Ian Steusloff), two were photographed at the turf farms near the Brazos River 27 Dec (ph. Alton Patton), a first county record for *Burleson*. Repeated attempts to relocate the plovers went unrewarded.

Willet – New for the Caddo Lake Count, *Harrison* 3 Dec (Mark Edmund, Gene Peiter) was a Willet.

Western Sandpiper – Late were 2 Western Sandpipers 2 Dec (David Wolf) on the flats off Etoile Park on upper Sam Rayburn Lake, *Nacogdoches*.

Long-billed Dowitcher – Four Long-billed Dowitchers in *Panola* 2 Jan (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) are a first for the Tenaha CBC.

Little Gull – One of two exciting gulls this season for East Texas was the first-winter Little Gull present 7-15 Jan (†David Brotherton, ph. Luanne Brotherton, m.ob.) at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*. On 21 Jan

(Gailon Brehm, et al.), a juvenile Little Gull was viewed through a scope at Lake Tawakoni, *Van Zandt*. Both are under TBRC review.

Franklin's Gull – Out of season Franklin's Gulls include 1 at Lake Tawakoni, *Rains* 2 Dec (Chris Runk) and another at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 28 Dec–7 Jan (Tim Fennell, †Peter Barnes, †Peggy Harding, †David & Luanne Brotherton, et al.).

Thayer's Gull – A first for the area and one of few confirmed records for the Pineywoods was a first-cycle Thayer's Gull photographed 19 Feb (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf, ph. †Laurie Foss, Craig Rasmussen, Marti Wilbur, Travis Audubon Society) on an island just off the TX 147 causeway over Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*.

White-winged Dove – As White-winged Doves continue to infiltrate the East Texas Pineywoods, now we have our first-ever winter records in *Nacogdoches* 15 Dec to at least 7 Jan (David Wolf, Carol Wells). The species also continued a significant winter presence in *Smith* (fide Peter Barnes).

Common Nighthawk – Late retreating Common Nighthawks include singles in Austin, *Travis* 17 Dec (Jake McCumber) and in Bryan, *Brazos* 23 Dec (Cathy Liles).

Black-chinned Hummingbird – Wintering hummingbirds were more common than usual in the Central Brazos Valley and East Texas. An adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird continuing since Oct was still present 22 Jan (Julie Shackelford, Molly Smith) in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*.

Anna's Hummingbird – An immature male Anna's Hummingbird continuing from fall stayed until 29 Dec (Darrell Vollert) at Chappell Hill, *Washington*. Another fall lingerer stayed until 10 Dec (Toby Hibbitts) in Millican, *Brazos*. Yet another from the fall is an immature Anna's in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* until 29 Dec (Tim Baggett, ph. Vicki Baggett, ph. David Wolf, ph. Sue Orwig). A search of eBird records revealed Anna's sightings this winter from 30 Texas counties, all south or west of those mentioned above. [Bandera, Bastrop, Bee, Bexar, Blanco, Brazoria, Brazos, Brewster, Calhoun, Cameron, Comal, DeWitt, El Paso, Fort Bend, Galveston, Guadalupe, Harris, Hays, Hidalgo, Jeff Davis, Kleberg, Live Oak, Matagorda, McMullen, Nacogdoches, Nueces, Real, Travis, Uvalde, and Webb.]

Calliope Hummingbird – Calliope Hummingbirds continuing from the fall include 1 at Stillhouse Hollow Lake until 23 Dec (ph. Terry Lairmore, fide Randy Pinkston) and a second record for *Bell*; and 1-2 at The Woodlands to 10 Jan (Kathy Merritt, fide Sumita Prasad), a first record for *Montgomery*. A subadult male was in Austin, *Travis* 1-29 Jan (ph. Jake McCumber, ph. Nathan McGowan).

Rufous Hummingbird – Continuing from the fall, Rufous Hummingbirds visited many Central Brazos Valley and East Texas feeders this season, including 3 locations in *Brazos* 12 Nov+ (Laura Sare, ph. Kitty Anding, Shirley Wilkerson), 1 in *Austin* 8 Jan (Florence Merrill), 2 locations in *Nacogdoches* 3 Nov–23 Jan (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf, Julie Shackelford, Cliff Shackelford), 1 in *Angelina* 26 Nov–19 Jan (Gene Hallmark), 1 throughout the season in *Hardin* (Kelly Walker), and 3 locations in *Montgomery* 2 Nov–20 Feb (Dorothy Borders, Susy Briseno, David Sarkozi, Donna Genta).

Northern Flicker – The red-shafted race of Northern Flicker was east of its normal range 22 Dec (Boyd Sanders) in *Harrison*.

Pileated Woodpecker – A new high for the Caddo Lake Count 3 Dec (fide Peter Barnes) was 115 in *Harrison*.

Black Phoebe – Out of range and a first county record for *Bell* is a Black Phoebe at Salado Creek 17-21 Dec (Randy Pinkston, m.ob.).

Say's Phoebe – A vagrant to *McLennan*, a Say's Phoebe was a surprise at Woodway Park on Lake Waco 3-8 Dec (ph. Jim Edwards). Even farther east was one near Allen Farm, *Brazos* 29 Dec (ph. Bryan Tarbox).

Hutton's Vireo – A first record for *Bell* is a Hutton's Vireo at Lake Belton 31 Jan (Randy Pinkston).

Fish Crow – The Lake O' the Pines CBC netted a good total of 163 Fish Crows 26 Dec (fide Peter Barnes).

Brown Creeper – Brown Creepers were unusually common this winter, typified by 11 coming to a tape near Elgin, *Bastrop* 3 Dec (Brush Freeman), a surprising 32 reports from *Brazos* alone, and a high count of 9 for the Palmetto State Park CBC 30 Dec (fide Dwayne Rogers).

Townsend's Solitaire – A third *Bell* record for out-of-range Townsend's Solitaire was 31 Jan (Randy Pinkston) at Lake Belton.

Wood Thrush – A very early Wood Thrush arrival—about 2 weeks ahead of schedule—for East Texas was 29 Feb (Jack Windsor) in Lufkin, *Angelina*.

American Robin – American Robins invaded Central Texas in huge numbers in Jan, evoking comments of 10's of 1000's "literally streaming across the highway, going west to east at their roost time" near Leon River in *Bell* 8 Jan (Shirley Wilkerson, Dan Wilkerson), and a count of 18,705 at Commons Ford Park, *Travis* 29 Jan (Ed Fair).

Sage Thrasher – Sage Thrashers shifted noticeably eastward into counties with very few records, including 28-29 Jan (David Brotherton, ph. Luanne Brotherton, ph. Shirley Wilkerson) in *Grimes* and 8 Jan (ph. Rick & Sarah Laughlin) in *Brazos*.

Cedar Waxwing – Good numbers of Cedar Waxwings passed through East Texas in December, with counts of 2838 on the Nacogdoches CBC 17 Dec (fide David Wolf), and a 10-year high count of 1487 on the Lake O' the Pines CBC, *Marion* 26 Dec (fide Peter Barnes).

Lapland Longspur – Lapland Longspurs had their strongest presence in a decade at the Brazos River bottoms of *Brazos* and *Burleson* with consistent sightings 24 Dec+ (ph. Shirley Wilkerson, Dan Wilkerson, Toby Hibbitts, m.ob.). Setting a new county record for *Grimes* were 3 near Shiro 28 Dec (Eric Hough, Elaine Hough, Jennifer Backo). Three were also at Nacogdoches Airport, *Nacogdoches* 28 Jan (David Wolf, Mimi Hope Wolf, et al.).

McCown's Longspur – Not seen in *Burleson* for a decade, small flocks of McCown's Longspurs visited the Brazos River bottoms 15 Dec+ (Linda Hale, John Hale, ph. Shirley Wilkerson, ph. Alton Patton, m.ob.) The species was also reported across the river in *Brazos* 29 Dec (Bryan Tarbox, Toby Hibbitts).

Wilson's Warbler – A Wilson's Warbler 14 Feb (Darrell Vollert) in Brenham, *Washington* was either an early arrival or an otherwise undetected overwintering bird as one wintered in the same neighborhood in 2007.

Spotted Towhee – Spotted Towhees shifted eastward in good numbers, with multiple reports in *Austin*, *Brazos*, *Burleson*, *Fannin*, *Harrison*, *Henderson*, *Nacogdoches*, *Rains*, *Smith*, *Titus*, and *Washington*.

Clay-colored Sparrow – An out-of-season Clay-colored Sparrow was in south *Brazos* 10 Dec (Bryan Tarbox).

Lark Bunting – Lark Buntings drifted eastward, producing reports from boundary counties such as *McLennan*, *Lee*, *Williamson* and *Guadalupe*, but also establishing new county records farther east in *Brazos* 22 Dec (Toby Hibbitts, Bryan Tarbox), and in *Austin* 24 Nov+ (Teri Zambon, Darrell Vollert).

Fox Sparrow – Lake O' the Pines CBC, *Marion* reached a 10-year high count of 37 Fox Sparrows 26 Dec (fide Peter Barnes).

Lincoln's Sparrow – While there were a few reports of Lincoln's Sparrows the first 3 weeks of Dec, hardly anyone could find one thereafter throughout entire Texas.

Harris's Sparrow – On the other hand [compared to Lincoln's] Harris's Sparrows were amazingly common throughout the Central Brazos Valley and northeast Texas. Counties where they usually are not reported annually, but were this season, include *Austin* (only its second record), *Burleson*, *Camp*, *Cherokee*, *Falls*, *Grimes*, *Hardin*, *Harrison*, *Henderson*, *Hunt*, *Liberty*, *Montgomery*, *Morris*, *Nacogdoches*, *Rains*, *Shelby*, *Smith*, *Upshur*, *Van Zandt*, *Walker*, and *Wood*.

Dark-eyed Junco – Dark-eyed Juncos were more common and widespread than it has been for many years, highlighted by a high count of 504 on the Nacogdoches CBC 17 Dec (fide David Wolf).

Summer Tanager – A female-plumaged Summer Tanager 30 Jan–17 Feb (ph. Diana Walker), may have been the same bird seen 13 Nov in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*.

Western Tanager – A first county record for *Austin* was a Western Tanager 30 Dec–13 Jan (ph. Penny Bevill) near the Brazos River between Brookshire and Sealy. A second county record for *Montgomery*, a male Western Tanager visited feeders in New Caney 5-14 Dec (Kathleen Ybañez, ph. Jeanne Schneider).

Pyrrhuloxia – Rare and not reported in *Washington* in a decade, a Pyrrhuloxia was at Washington-on-the-Brazos 11 Feb (†Laura Sare, Bryan Calk, Bruce Neville).

Indigo Bunting – Although Indigo Buntings are an easy winter find in South Texas, not so for Central or northeast Texas. So, noteworthy is a male in breeding plumage at Tyler, *Smith* 11 Dec (Boyd Sanders), another at Chappell Hill, *Washington* 9 Jan–8 Feb (Darrell Vollert) and yet another 30 Jan–5 Feb (Ian Layton, Cindy Layton) in *Bastrop*.

Western Meadowlark – Western Meadowlarks swept east with noteworthy northeast Texas sightings 31 Dec–25 Feb (m.ob.) in *Hunt*, *Nacogdoches*, *Red River*, *Smith*, and *Titus*.

Rusty Blackbird – Always of concern, Rusty Blackbirds were reported in northeast Texas in numbers of 2-30 at *Fannin*, *Harrison*, *Henderson*, *Marion*, *Nacogdoches*, *Rusk*, *Shelby*, *Upshur*, and *Wood*. Exceptional counts were 60 in *Cass* 4 Dec (Linda Price), 700 in *Gregg* 6 Dec (Linda Price), 200 in *Smith* 25 Dec (Jay Huner), 60 in *Smith* 31 Dec (Peggy Harding), 84 in *Smith* 31 Dec (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton), 270 in *Smith* 14 Jan (Peter Barnes), and 125 in *Smith* 11 Feb (Mike Bloodsworth).

Baltimore Oriole – An out-of-season Baltimore Oriole was in Bryan, *Brazos* 31 Dec–9 Jan (ph. Michael Jackson).

Purple Finch – Purple Finch reports for the Central Brazos Valley and the Pineywoods were sparse this season, although Keith Arnold had his first yard bird in 20+ years 19 Jan at Bryan, *Brazos*.

Common Redpoll – The rarest find for the Pineywoods this season—and a rarity for Texas as well—is a Common Redpoll at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 30 Jan–25 Feb (ph. David Wolf, Julie Farrell, ph. Les Stewart, m.ob.). It is the first record for the Pineywoods and, when approved by the TBRC, it will be the 10th record for Texas.

Pine Siskin – There were a few scattered reports of Pine Siskins in northeast Texas, with a high count of 50 in *Smith* 2 Jan (Ann Bush).

Lesser Goldfinch – Up to 5 Lesser Goldfinches were on the eastern edge of their range at Lake Waco 6-23 Jan (ph. Bill Ravenscroft). Although rare in *McLennan*, 2 also turned up south of Waco 26 Feb (Dolaras Compton).

CONTRIBUTORS:

Kitty Anding, Keith Arnold, Jennifer Backo, Tim Baggett, Vicki Baggett, Peter Barnes, Linda Bellsnear, Penny Bevill, Tim Bister, Mike Bloodsworth, James Booker, Dorothy Borders, Gailon Brehm, Susy Briseno, David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Ann Bush, Bryan Calk, Eric Carpenter, Dolaras Compton, Greg Cook, D. D. Currie, Louis Debetaz, June Dossat, Gil Eckrich, Mark Edmund, Jim Edwards, Ed Fair, Julie Farrell, Tim Fennell, Laurie Foss, Brush Freeman, Bert Frenz, 221 Rainbow Dr. #12190, Livingston, TX 77399-2021, bert2@bafrenz.com, Donna Genta, Jackie Girouard, Becky Gullette, John Hale, Linda Hale, James Hall, C. K. Hands, Peggy Harding, Shelia Hargis, Toby Hibbitts, Richard Hoover, Elaine Hough, Eric Hough, Jay Huner, Michael Jackson, Tom Johnson, Richard Kinney, Terry Lairmore, Cathy Liles, Dell Little, Susie Lower, Mike Manson, Karen McBride, Jake McCumber, Nathan McGowan, Jeff McIntyre, Florence Merrill, Kathy Merritt, Alton Patton, Gene Peiter, Randy Pinkston, Sumita Prasad, Linda Price, Craig Rasmussen, Bill Ravenscroft, Melissa Roach, Dwayne Rogers, Chris Runk, Boyd Sanders, Laura Sare, David Sarkozi, Jeanne Schneider, David Scott, Cliff Shackelford, Julie Shackelford, Molly Smith, Ian Steusloff, Les Stewart, Zoe Ann Stinchcomb, Byron Stone, Bryan Tarbox, William Tarbox, Robert Truss, Darrell Vollert, Diana Walker, Carol Wells, Marti Wilbur, Dan Wilkerson, Shirley Wilkerson, Jack Windsor, David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf, Kathleen Ybañez, Teri Zambon.