

Spring 2011: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1677 sightings of 275 species from 1 March to 31 May 2011.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Peter Barnes, May report for northeast Texas, "With the drought and drainage of much of Richland Creek WMA for wetland construction, few large waterbirds were reported."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Seven **Blue-winged Teal**, including 4 young, were notable in *Rusk* on 26 May (Daniel Weaver), a rare case of documented breeding in northeast Texas.

A **Cinnamon Teal** first reported 28 Feb was still present 10 Mar (Judith Wright, Peggy Harding) at Lake Tyler, *Smith*.

Twenty **Northern Bobwhite** was a good count for Sabine Mining Co. property in *Harrison* 16 Apr (Peter Barnes, et al.) and one 26 May (Louis Debetaz) on the Diboll BBS, *Angelina*, was the first BBS sighting in 15 years. Other reports include singles in *Washington* 9 Apr (Darrell Vollert) and in *Brazos* 15 Apr (Jackie Girouard) and five in *Panola* 31 May (Linda Price).

One of very few records of **Least Grebe** for *Fayette* is two birds photographed 30 Mar (Chuck Sexton) at the Colorado River near La Grange.

An impressive count for *Henderson* was 19 **Anhingas** 30 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

An **American Bittern** was observed at Alazan Bayou in *Nacogdoches* 19 Mar (Robert Truss, David Wolf) and another was at Sabine Mining Co. property in *Harrison* 21 May (Mike Dillon, David Weaver).

Locally rare **White-faced Ibis** were at Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, with 7 on 2 May and 2 on 25 May (David Wolf).

Swallow-tailed Kites were nesting in a tall sweet gum in *Montgomery* 19 Apr (Andy Jordan). This is outside their usual nesting range in Texas.

Swainson's Hawks have not been seen over the Pineywoods for several years, so noteworthy are a light morph 8 Apr (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf) and dark morph 16 Apr (David Wolf, Robert Truss), both in *Nacogdoches*.

Uncommon local breeders in northeast Texas, a pair of **American Kestrels** were reported 20-27 May in *Gregg* (Linda Price) and singles were seen 21 May at Sabine Mining Co. land in *Harrison* (Peter Barnes, Daniel Weaver) and at Longview in *Gregg* (Daniel Weaver).

Rare for *Nacogdoches*, a **Purple Gallinule** was at Shirley Creek Park 4 May (Anthony Hewetson). More frequently encountered, though not annually, another Purple Gallinule was at oft-visited Country Club Lake in *Brazos* 13 May (Laura Sare).

Two **American Avocets** 8 May (Linda Price) at Sabine Mining Co. property, *Harrison*, was a good find.

Notable for the area, two **Hudsonian Godwits** were at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, on 14 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Rare for northeast Texas, a **Marbled Godwit** was present 27 Mar – 2 Apr (Linda Price, Peggy Harding, m.ob.) at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*.

A **Ruddy Turnstone** 21 May (Peter Barnes, Daniel Weaver) at Sabine Mining Co. property in *Harrison* is a good find for northeast Texas.

Impressive for Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, is a count of 130 **White-rumped Sandpipers** 26 May (Cliff Shackelford).

The turf farm in the Brazos River bottoms of *Burleson* is always a good location to find **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** in spring migration; this season's reports topped at 300+ birds 30 Apr – 1 May (David Scott, Jackie Giouard, Rich Dunn).

The wintering **Black-legged Kittiwake** was still present 14 Mar (fide Eric Carpenter) at the Lake Livingston spillway, *Polk*.

Not since 1997 has **Least Tern** been reported in *Brazos* until one 10 May (Bryan Tarbox) at a private lake near Millican.

White-winged Doves continue their expansion into East Texas, including a first county record for *Trinity* on 29 Mar (Pat Coe).

Black-billed Cuckoos in East Texas are a good find and this season's sightings include *Brazos* 3 May (Darrell Vollert), *Nacogdoches* 4 May (Anthony Hewetson), *Trinity* 7 May (Pat Coe), *Harrison* 17 May (Mike Dillon).

Only a second record for *Waller*, a **Buff-bellied Hummingbird** visited Hempstead feeders in early May (Susan McCown).

Very early was a **Great Crested Flycatcher** 18 Mar (Nancy Bird) in *Angelina*, preceding the previous Pineywoods record by 10 days.

One to two **Bell's Vireos** were found in the Pleasant Hill are of *Harrison* 21-26 May (Linda Price, Peter Barnes).

A new early record for **Warbling Vireo** in northeast Texas was 1 Apr (Mike Bloodsworth) in *Smith*.

Cave Swallows continue their rapid expansion into the Pineywoods, especially in *Nacogdoches* where evidence of nesting was observed at multiple locations (David Wolf).

A well-described **Black-crested Titmouse** was reported at Lick Creek Park 12 Apr (Jerry Huntley), yet with no history of this species in *Brazos* or adjacent counties, it may take more solid proof to convince skeptics.

A **Brown Creeper** was a late migrant through *Nacogdoches* 28 Mar (David Wolf), yet this report pales in comparison to the amazingly late creeper, well described, found 13 May (Linda Hale) in the Wellborn area of *Brazos*.

One of the harder-to-find migrants through East Texas, single **Veerys** were reported 21 Apr (Louis Debetaz) in *Angelina*, 1 May (Darrell Vollert) in *Brazos*, and 3 May (Anthony Hewetson) in *Marion*.

An impressive 800 **Cedar Waxwings** were swirling over Tyler, *Smith*, 21 Mar (Peter Barnes), though easily surpassed by a flock of 2000+ feeding on berries at Stephen F. Austin State University in *Nacogdoches* 27 Mar (Cliff Shackelford, Julie Shackelford).

Three very late **Nashville Warblers** were singing in *Panola* 28 May (Linda Price, Peggy Harding), the latest previous northeast Texas spring record being from 14 May.

Old Sabine Bottom WMA, *Smith*, was “dry as a bone” 26 Mar (Peter Barnes) when 80+ Northern Parulas were estimated.

For a rare migrant with only a handful of northeast and Pineywoods records, **Black-throated Blue Warbler** made an outstanding showing with one staying 1-3 Apr (Brian Sanders, Boyd Sanders) at Tyler State Park, *Smith*, and another 10 May (Louis Debetaz) on the Azalea Trail, a first record for *Angelina*.

A **Blackburnian Warbler** 5 Apr (Boyd Sanders) at Tyler State Park, *Smith*, was early.

The **Yellow-throated Warbler** that wintered in *Brazos* was still present 5 Mar (John Hale).

Palm Warblers are rarely reported in northeast Texas and the Pineywoods, so it is surprising that this season brought 3 reports of singles: 3 May (Anthony Hewetson) in *Cass*, 3 May (Peter Barnes) in *Smith*, and 4 May (Anthony Hewetson) in *Angelina*.

Rarely recorded in *Angelina*, a male **Blackpoll Warbler** was at the Azalea Trail 21 May (Louis Debetaz).

Another good migrant to find away from the coast is **Cerulean Warbler** and this spring singles were seen 17 Apr (Boyd Sanders) at Tyler State Park in *Smith* and 12 May (John Hale, Linda Hale) in *Brazos*.

A survey of Sabine Mining Company property in *Harrison* yielded a remarkable count of about 60 **Yellow-breasted Chats** 21 May (Peter Barnes, Mike Dillon, Mike Bloodsworth, David Weaver, Daniel Weaver).

The bird of the season for East Texas was **Cassin's Sparrow**, usually confined to the Hill Country and westward. Perhaps it was the fires and weather conditions in their traditional territory that induced them to push far eastward. In *Waller*, where there were no prior county records, the first appearance was 22 Apr (Harvey Laas) and they continued to be seen daily at many *Waller* locations through the end of the season, including a high count of 37 counted in the Katy Prairie 15 May (Bob Honig). Likewise, without prior northeast Texas records, Cassin's Sparrows were first reported 7 May (Linda Price) in *Harrison*, 11 May (Linda Price) in *Gregg*, 11 May (Peter Barnes) in *Smith*, 11 May (Bernd Gravenstein) in *Washington*, 22 May (Linda Price, Peggy Harding) in *Henderson*, and 26 May (Linda Price, Peggy Harding) in *Rusk*. All of these are first county records. Subsequent reports included additional locations within these counties.

A singing **Bachman's Sparrow** at Sugar Hill Road 14 Mar (Linda Price) is perhaps only the second *Panola* record.

Clay-colored Sparrow made a better than usual showing in Central Brazos Valley with multiple sightings in *Brazos*, *Freestone*, *Grimes*, *Waller*, and *Washington* 2 Apr – 24 May (m.ob). Several were in *Rains* 16-28 Apr (Ted Drozdowski) and one was reported in *Gregg* 5 May (Linda Price) where they are scarce.

Grasshopper Sparrows were plentiful at Pleasant Hill in *Harrison* 7-8 May (Linda Price) where at least 30 were counted.

Great finds for northeast Texas were single **Scarlet Tanagers** 15 Apr (Mark Edmund) at *Harrison*, 29 Apr at *Red River*, and 3 May at *Marion* (both Anthony Hewetson).

An East Texas rarity, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, was present in a Marshall yard in *Harrison* 1 Mar – 15 Apr (Peggy Hall).

Out of range **Lazuli Buntings** include singles 12-13 Apr (Jerry Huntley, Bryan Tarbox) at Lick Creek Park, *Brazos*, and 4-5 May (Justine Henley) at Lake Livingston State Park, the latter being a probable first county record for *Polk*.

Although typically scarce in East Texas, **Bobolinks** made a good showing, with sightings of 2 in *Van Zandt* 3 May (Richard Kinney), 1 in *Nacogdoches* 4 May (Anthony Hewetson), 25 at Grand Saline Marsh in *Van Zandt* 5 May (Richard Kinney), and 10 at Upper Sam Rayburn in *Angelina* 15 May (Louis Debetaz).

Out of range in East Texas, 2-3 **Western Meadowlarks** were singing in *Rusk* 6-9 Apr and 2 others were in *Gregg* 27 May (all Linda Price).

East of normal migration routes, **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** were reported 30 Apr (David Scott, Jackie Giouard) in *Burleson*, 2 May (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) in *Morris*, 5-8 May (Richard Kinney) in *Van Zandt*, 9 May (Linda Price, Peggy Harding) in *Rusk*, 14 May (Bruce Neville, et al.) in *Brazos*, and 28 May (Boyd Sanders) in *Wood*.

Because of ongoing concern, **Rusty Blackbird** sightings are noteworthy. East Texas reports this season include up to 15 on 5-6 Mar (Peter Barnes, Doug Ghrist, Judith Wright) in *Smith*, 6 on 11 Mar (Louis Debetaz, Susie Lower) in *Angelina*, 1-70 on 5-14 Mar (Linda Price) in *Gregg*.

Remarkably out of range **Lesser Goldfinches** is one sporadically visiting Kilgore feeders in *Rusk* 24 Jan – 5 Mar (Peggy Harding) and one 7 May (ph. Shirley Wilkerson) in Kurten, only the second record for *Brazos*, the first seen in 1976.

CONTRIBUTORS:

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