

Summer 2011: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 2140 sightings of 171 species from 1 June to 31 July 2011.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Keith Arnold, Brazos County, 7 June, "Last night's rains had raised the water levels significantly; warm and muggy walking."

Darrell Vollert, Washington County, 4 July, "This is the worst drought I have experienced in my lifetime. Ponds have dried up that haven't before. We need a tropical storm to form in the northern gulf to put a dent in this long drought."

David Wolf, Angelina County, 17 July, "Large areas of dry lake-bed on upper Rayburn grew up to grass and weeds this summer, and great numbers of singing Common Yellowthroats, Indigo Buntings and Dickcissels moved in to take advantage of this new habitat."

David Wolf, summer season, Pineywoods, "Prolonged record-setting extreme heat and severe drought sums up the weather this summer. We went into the season hotter and drier than average, and then it proceeded to just get worse...and worse...and worse, until by early August we were reaching temperatures to 106-108 deg. F. daily. Only a few areas received any significant rainfall after mid-June and rare were the days when it even clouded up enough to give us hope. By August much of the vegetation was looking very stressed and some trees were clearly dying. Huge Lake Rayburn continued to recede dramatically and by mid-August was 11 ft. below pool. This record-setting drought now covers most of the state and in many areas is the worst in 116 years of record-keeping."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Least Grebe - Two **Least Grebes** reported 13 Jun (Larry Carpenter) on Bear Branch Lake apparently had been there for 2 months, a probable first county record for *Montgomery*.

Greater Flamingo - A well-described **Greater Flamingo** was observed in flight near the Trinity River area of upper Lake Livingston, *San Jacinto*, 3 Jul (†Lisa Osborn) and again 23 Jul (†George Russell).

Least Bittern - **Least Bitterns** are rare in East Texas, so one in *Camp* 4 Jun (Janie Henderson) is a good find. Even more surprising are two at the TX 147 causeway on Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, 26 Jul (David Wolf), from within the Pineywoods.

Great Blue Heron - An **aerial survey** 7 Jul (Brent Ortego) of the Trinity River from Lake Livingston to the bay showed only 4 colonies of 1050 nesting pairs (cormorants, Anhingas, herons, egrets, ibises, spoonbills), a considerable drop from surveys 1994-2004 of the same area. Ortego comments, "When it is dry in the river bottoms, the **egrets/herons** do not nest."

Tricolored Heron - A hint that **Tricolored Herons** may be nesting on an island in Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, is a single 2 May and 2 there 6 June (David Wolf).

Osprey - Two **Osprey** nests on Lake Sam Rayburn, *Nacogdoches*, fledged young this summer (David Wolf).

Swallow-tailed Kite - A **Swallow-tailed Kite** sighting 9 Jul (Brenda Golubski) in Waco occurs at an odd date – there are only a handful of summer records for the entire central Oaks & Prairies region – and is also the first *McLennan* record since 1906, a time when the species nested in nearby Lee County. On 31 Jul (ph. Beverly & Tim Johnson) another **Swallow-tailed Kite** was photographed near Huntington in *Angelina*; there are very few records of this species this far north into the Pineywoods.

Mississippi Kite - In *Smith*, Peter Barnes reports, "Up to 4 **Mississippi Kites** were south of Tyler 1-23 Jul, raising the possibility of breeding."

Cooper's Hawk - **Cooper's Hawks** were confirmed breeding in *Nacogdoches* when 2 begging fledglings were observed 26 Jul+ (David Wolf) and the species again nested this summer (Louis Debetaz) in Lufkin, *Angelina*.

Peregrine Falcon - Summer **Peregrine Falcons** are not expected, so three widely separated reports are a surprise: 19 Jun (Peter Barnes) in *Smith*, 25 Jun (Randy Pinkston) in *Bell*, and 30 Jun (Harvey Laas) in *Waller*.

Purple Gallinule - **Purple Gallinules** were found at two ne Texas locations, both in *Wood* – 7 at Little Sandy Hunting and Fishing Club and 4 at Lake Fork – 1 Jul (Janet Cook, Peter Barnes) and 3 ads. and a juvenile were at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, 9 Jul (Louis Debetaz), the only consistent site in the Pineywoods.

Common Gallinule - Five **Common Gallinules** were at Lake Fork, *Wood*, 2 Jul (Peter Barnes, et al.).

Black-necked Stilt - **Black-necked Stilts** made a good showing in the Central Oaks & Prairies region. Five were in *Robertson* 4 Jun (Bill Reiner), a second county record. Nesting stilts at Union Grove Wildlife Area at Stillhouse Hollow Lake produced 3 fledglings 26 Jun-22 Jul (ph. Randy Pinkston), a first nesting record for *Bell*.

Willet - Early **Willetts** were a single 28 Jun (ph. Randy Pinkston) at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell*, and 6+ 2 Jul (George Russell) at Lake Livingston in San Jacinto; two **Willetts**, identified as Eastern, were on the beach at Lake Tawakoni in *Van Zandt* 12 Jul (Richard Kinney).

Dunlin - Apparently a first summer record for ne Texas, 3 **Dunlins** were at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, 31 Jul (Linda Price).

Ring-billed Gull - Rare summer occurrences for the Pineywoods, a very late **Ring-billed Gull** was at the TX147 bridge on Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina/San Augustine*, 6 Jun (David Wolf) and 4 others were in *Trinity* 9 Jul (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

White-winged Dove - David Wolf reports, "Perhaps the biggest bird news of this hot summer was yet another southern "invader" moving into the Pineywoods. **White-winged Doves** were present in Lufkin, *Angelina*, in significant numbers all summer, and were confirmed breeding for the first time in our region. I first heard of them through Louis Debetaz in late May and then Cliff Shackelford tracked down further information. In mid-July they were photographed by Richard Rowlett (including 14 birds at once) and he also found a nest. On August 3 Cliff heard at least 5-6 singing from one spot near Winston Park and saw one. It is likely that White-wings will soon be a regular part of our avifauna, but for now this is an important range extension."

Peter Barnes adds, "**White-winged Doves** have been pretty scarce in the ne. Texas area until 2010. They have been reported in many counties but very rarely, with zero in 2006 and 1 each year in 2007-9. However, there were 6 reports in 2010, and we had 2 for a month this summer in Tyler [*Smith*] and 1 in Rusk County this summer. So perhaps they are finally becoming more common in NE Texas." Although still uncommon and breeding is not mentioned, **White-winged Doves** have now been reported in the following e. and ne. Texas counties:

Anderson, Angelina, Bowie, Brazos, Cass, Cherokee, Delta, Fannin, Freestone, Grimes, Hardin, Harrison, Henderson, Hopkins, Houston, Hunt, Jasper, Lamar, Liberty, Limestone, Madison, Marion, Montgomery, Morris, Nacogdoches, Polk, Rains, Robertson, Rusk, San Jacinto, Shelby, Smith, Titus, Trinity, Van Zandt, Walker, Washington, Wood.

The counties for which I could not find records are: *Camp, Franklin, Gregg, Leon, Newton, Panola, Red River, Sabine, San Augustine, Tyler, Upshur.* (Bert Frenz).

Greater Roadrunner - An impressive tally of 9 **Greater Roadrunners** were in *Van Zandt* 5 Jun (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) and in *Nacogdoches*, both adult roadrunners were observed feeding young early to mid-Jul (fide Cliff Shackelford).

Eastern Screech-Owl - Five fledgling owlets were successfully raised from a single pair of **Eastern Screech-Owls** in College Station, *Brazos*, a surprising number – 3-4 owlets is more normal – given the drought. The five with two adults were observed 9 Jun (Mary Dabney Wilson).

Black-capped Vireo - Quite unexpected so far from typical breeding territories, a **Black-capped Vireo** was singing in *Robertson* 4 Jun (Bill Reiner), a first county record. An attempt to relocate the bird the next day was unsuccessful.

Purple Martin - At a traditional **Purple Martin** post-breeding roost site in Tyler, *Smith*, up to 50,000 birds gathered the last half of Jul (Peter Barnes, Doug Ghrist) and “Martin heads and wings were found near the roosting trees, suggesting predation by raccoons, which dismember their victims in this manner.”

White-breasted Nuthatch - While sightings of **White-breasted Nuthatches** in W. G. Jones State Forest in *Montgomery*, such as three 2 Jun (Nina Rach) are not unusual, heretofore they have not been known to extend southward into *Waller*. On 12 Jun (Ron Weeks) found individuals at two locations in northeast *Waller*, and 20 Jul (Darrell Vollert) another was in Brenham, providing the first summer record for *Washington*.

Swainson's Thrush - Late **Swainson's Thrushes** include singles 2 Jun (Susan Schaezler) at Warbler Woods, *Guadalupe*, and the same date (Brush Freeman) in *Bastrop*. More surprising is a singing **Swainson's Thrush** 11 Jun (Cliff Shackelford) in *Nacogdoches*, *Nacogdoches*, the latest spring migrant for the Pineywoods.

Prothonotary Warbler - Listed as a vagrant to *McLennan*, a male **Prothonotary Warbler** appeared in China Spring 12 Jun (Frank & Jeanette Bumgardner).

Swainson's Warbler - In April-June, **Swainson's Warblers** were reported as usual at nesting territories in *Brazos*, *Grimes* and *Robertson*. Although they normally continue singing into late July, as noted by Darrell Vollert the warblers ceased singing after 2 July, perhaps a signal of failed nesting because of the extreme drought. On 4 Jul, for the first time in his impressive history of finding Swainson's Warblers, he was unsuccessful in locating any.

Golden-cheeked Warbler - A Black-throated Green Warbler appeared regularly at a backyard water source in Waco until 20 May (Ann Gordon) and a similar bird that appeared three times at the drip puddle 26 Jun was first thought to be the same bird. Although not photographed or described in detail, the look-alike was much more likely a **Golden-cheeked Warbler**, as there are no regional records for Black-throated Green at this late date. Extreme weather conditions could have pushed Golden-cheeked Warblers from traditional nesting areas in this timeframe, thus providing a first summer record for *McLennan*. Other reports of Golden-cheeked Warblers outside the breeding range include: 16 Jul (Rich Kostecke) in willows in *Bell* and 12 Jul at Fossil Rim in *Somervell* (fide Rich Kostecke).

Black-throated Green Warbler - Exceeding the latest Central Brazos Valley record for **Black-throated Green Warbler** by 9 days, one was photographed 6 Jun (ph. John Hale) in the Wellborn area of *Brazos*.

Cassin's Sparrow - Continuing the saga of **Cassin's Sparrows** shifting eastward into new territories, new county records were established for *Anderson*, *Grimes*, *Milam*, *Robertson*, and *Van Zandt* and continuing birds were recorded at *Waller* and *Washington* up to 17 Jul, though none reported breeding. The highest count was 29 on 11 Jun (Harvey Laas) in *Waller*. Specific records include: 2 Jun - 2 Jul (Darrell Vollert) in *Washington*, 3 Jun - 17 Jul (Greg Page, Harvey Laas) in *Waller*, 4 Jun (Laurie Foss) in *Anderson*, 4-12 Jun (Darrell Vollert, Bruce Neville, Laura Sare) in *Grimes*, 4 Jun (Bill Reiner) in *Robertson*, 4 Jun (Bill Reiner) in *Milam*, 5 Jun - 6 Jul (Dell Little, Richard Kinney) in *Van Zandt*.

Great-tailed Grackle - **Great-tailed Grackles** were confirmed breeding in *Nacogdoches* for the second year in a row, with first juveniles seen 27 Jun (David Wolf).

Bronzed Cowbird - A probable first record for *Montgomery*, up to 10 **Bronzed Cowbirds** were observed throughout Jun (John Pike, Ellen Baker, Bill Tarbox, David Dolan) to at least 1 Jul in The Woodlands area.

Lesser Goldfinch - A first summer record for oft-birded *McLennan*, a **Lesser Goldfinch** was photographed in Waco 13 Jul by Ann Gordon. Using a backyard water drip and a photo blind, Gordon photographed dozens of infrequently reported birds that were attracted to the water during the unusual drought.

CONTRIBUTORS:

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