

Winter 2012-13: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 343 sightings of 112 species from 1 December to 28 February 2013.

WEATHER REPORTS:

December, lakes of north-east, Texas, David Brotherton, "The low water level on Lake O' the Pines may have affected the unusual low numbers for the Lake O' the Pines C.B.C.. ... Probably due to the many sandbars available American White Pelicans were reported in record numbers."

December, marshes of ne. Texas, David Wolf, "Waterfowl were widespread and in good numbers, and it was a pleasant surprise to have some marsh birds recorded again: American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren and Common Yellowthroat. These were all completely lacking during the drought years, as were marshes."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Ross's Goose – Ross's Goose rarely lingers in the Central Brazos Valley, so a dozen sightings in se. College Station, *Brazos* are noteworthy. The first was a single at Carter L. 12 Dec (John Hale, Rachel Smith, ph. Bryan Calk), followed by one goose at another College Station site 1.2 mi. distant 28-30 Dec (Cheryl Lewis, Jim Anding, ph. Kitty Anding et al.), and then 1-2 geese 7.5 mi. away in the Wellborn area 19 Jan+ (Rick & Sarah Laughlin et al.). Surprisingly high counts of about 100 Ross's Geese each flock were reported 20 Jan (Linda Belssner) in *Navarro* and 16 Feb (Laurie Sheppard) in *Hunt*.

Cackling Goose – County records of Cackling Goose are not well documented, so it is noteworthy to report 7 at L. Gibbons in *Lamar* 18 Dec (Jake McCumber) and 3 *Henderson* sightings of 17-50 2-10 Feb (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Peter Barnes).

Common Merganser – The best duck of the ne. Texas C.B.C.s was a female Common Merganser photographed on the Tyler C.B.C. at L. Tyler, *Smith* 5 Jan (ph. Mike Bloodsworth, Doug Ghrist, Danny Pickens).

Ruddy Duck – the Tenaha C.B.C. recorded an impressive 1657 Ruddy Ducks 1 Jan (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) at L. Murvaul, *Panola*. It even surpasses the record of 1414 set at that lake 23 Dec 2010.

Pacific Loon – A Pacific Loon was on L. O' the Pines, *Marion* 15 Dec (Dana Green, Jan Maitland).

Horned Grebe – Rafting in the evening of 15 Dec (m.ob.) at Alley Creek of L. O' the Pines in *Marion* were 639 Horned Grebes.

Western Grebe – Up to 3 Western Grebes were observed and photographed at Tejas Village and later at Lakeside Marina on L. O' the Pines, *Marion* 15 Dec–2 Feb (ph. David Brotherton et al.). Starting 2 Feb+ (ph. David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) up to 3 Western Grebes were near the dam of L. Cypress Springs in *Franklin*.

Neotropical Cormorant – Neotropical Cormorants made a significant influx into ne. Texas this winter with multiple sightings in 18 counties 8 Dec-23 Feb: *Bowie, Harrison, Henderson, Hunt, Jasper, Liberty, Marion, Montgomery, Morris, Polk, Rains, Sabine, San Jacinto, Smith, Upshur, Van Zandt, Walker, and Wood*. The peak count was 175 at L. Tawakoni, *Van Zandt* 23 Feb (Richard Kinney).

American White Pelican – The low water level and the many available sandbars probably accounted for the large numbers of American White Pelicans residing on ne. Texas lakes, including 961 on L. O' the Pines, *Marion* 15 Dec (m.ob.) and 1000 on L. Wright Patman, *Bowie* 19 Jan (Ted Drozdowski).

American Bittern – After several drought years, wet marshes this winter brought the return of an American Bittern to the Nacogdoches C.B.C. 16 Dec (*fide* David Wolf).

Tricolored Heron – The best bird of the Caddo “warm-up” count 1 Dec (Diane Jones, Dorothy Metzler) was a Tricolored Heron at Crip's Camp in *Harrison*.

White Ibis – An unexpected find on the Caddo count 1 Dec (m.ob.) was at least eight White Ibises in *Harrison*.

White-tailed Kite – Not reported in winter in *Brazos* in nearly a decade, a White-tailed Kite was observed over College Station 27 Jan (Laura Sare).

Bald Eagle – While the recovery of Bald Eagles in c. and e. Texas is well known, what was surprising this winter was the very large numbers found in certain sites: up to 10 at the turf farms in the Brazos R. bottoms of *Brazos* and *Burleson* 7 Dec–20 Jan (m.ob.); 5 on the Nacogdoches C.B.C. 16 Dec; an all-time high of 7 on the Longview C.B.C. 22 Dec and another all-time high of 13 on the L. Tawakoni C.B.C. 29 Dec; up to 8 at Sabine R., *Newton* 14 Jan–24 Feb (Jeremy Webster); and 8 at L. Fork in *Wood* 13 Jan (Janet Cook).

White-tailed Hawk – Quite a surprise for *Burleson* was a brilliant adult White-tailed Hawk at the turf farms in the Brazos R. bottoms 6 Jan (David Scott). There are now only 6 records for White-tailed Hawk in the Central Brazos Valley since 1937 and 4 of the 6 are near this location.

Virginia Rail – Improvement in marsh habitats may account for the multiple reports of Virginia Rails in ne. Texas. One was reported on the Nacogdoches C.B.C. 16 Dec, 2 were tallied at Grand Saline Marsh in *Van Zandt* 29 Dec–18 Jan (Richard Kinney), and 1 each was at Bellwood L. and Pleasure Acres L. in *Smith* 5 Jan (m.ob.).

American Coot – The Nacogdoches C.B.C. tallied an all-time high of 11,006 American Coots 16 Dec.

American Avocet – A first-ever record for the L. O' the Pines C.B.C. 15 Dec was an American Avocet found at the Hwy. 155 bridge in *Upshur*. Just as unexpected a find is one at L. Halbert Park in *Navarro* 30 Dec (Donna Rizos).

Long-billed Dowitcher – Very low water in the irrigation ponds at the turf farm in the Brazos R. bottoms of *Burleson* could account for the unexpected showing of 50 Long-billed Dowitchers on the College Station C.B.C. 15 Dec (John Hale).

Franklin Gull – Out of season were single Franklin's Gulls at L. Tawakoni, *Hunt* 2 Dec (Richard Kinney) and at L. Tyler, *Smith* 26 Dec (Peter Barnes).

Ring-billed Gull – Ring-billed Gulls are hardly ever recorded on the College Station C.B.C., so it is quite amazing to have 450 counted 15 Dec (John Hale) with 30-100 remaining 7 Dec – 20 Jan (m.ob.), another oddity attributed to the very low water in the irrigation ponds at the turf farm in the Brazos R. bottoms of *Burleson*. Other unusually high counts were 600 at L. Tyler, *Smith* 27 Jan (Peter Barnes) and 1200 at L. Bob Sandlin, *Titus* 26 Dec (David Brotherton).

Herring Gull – Herring Gulls gathered at L. O' the Pines with a peak of 34 in *Marion* 2 Feb (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton). It is only the second time in 24 years that a Herring Gull was counted on the Longview C.B.C., this one found at Texas Eastman at Longview, *Harrison* 22 Dec (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

Great Horned Owl – An all-time high of 11 Great Horned Owls were tallied on the Tyler C.B.C., *Smith* 5 Jan.

Short-eared Owl – Perhaps it is because *Red River* is under birded or else the lack of suitable habitat, yet nonetheless, the Short-eared Owl observed at dusk on CR1200 just north of Bogota 2 Feb (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) appears to be a first county record.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – Following the spectacle of over 100 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at or near feeders in Kennard, *Houston* 10-27 Sep, one lone male remained until 6 Feb (Becky Baker), including 15 Jan when it was photographed resting on ice.

Black-chinned Hummingbird – An out-of-season adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird in Chappell Hill, *Washington* 15 Dec (Darrell Vollert) battled for feeder access against an adult male Rufous Hummingbird and a female *Selasphorus* sp.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird – A young male Broad-tailed Hummingbird drew lots of local attention at the Wellborn area of College Station 26 Jan+ (John Hale, ph. Bryan Calk, m.ob.). It is the first photo-documented record for *Brazos* and only the second reported.

Rufous Hummingbird – Rufous Hummingbirds often winter from the U.T.C. south to the Mexico border, but considerably less so in the colder Central Brazos Valley and the E. Pineywoods. Most notably, Rufous Hummingbirds spent the whole winter season near feeders at 2 locations in *Brazos* (Helen Baines, Jim & Kitty Anding), 2 locations in *Montgomery* (Dorothy Borders, Andy Jordan), and one location in *Rusk* (Peggy Harding). Sporadically, Rufous also visited feeders in *Austin*, *Polk*, *Walker*, *Washington*, and *Wood*.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird – One of the Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, a first county record this fall for *Liberty*, wintered at feeders near Cleveland until 24 Feb (ph. Charlene & Richard Nix).

Red-headed Woodpecker – Woodpeckers were having a heyday during the Tyler C.B.C., *Smith* 5 Jan when all-time numbers were counted for 4 species: Red-headed (31), Red-bellied (165), Downy (90), and Pileated (35).

Merlin – A rarity on the Nacogdoches C.B.C., a Merlin was present 16 Dec (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, Dean Fischer, Catherine Winans) in s. *Nacogdoches*.

Empidonax sp. – Very unexpected was an *Empidonax* flycatcher 16 Dec (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, Dean Fischer, Catherine Winans) in s. *Nacogdoches*.

Say's Phoebe – The county's first Say's Phoebe, reported 27 Oct, remained at L. O' the Pines, *Upshur* until at least 14 Feb (m.ob.).

Couch's Kingbird – A second record for *Washington*, a Couch's Kingbird was voice-recorded and photographed near Hughes L. 2-26 Jan (ph. Ken Hartman, ph. Kathie Holder, recorded Darrell Vollert).

Cave Swallow – The first winter record of Cave Swallow for *Smith* was 24 Feb (Peter Barnes) when 11 were found near the intersection of Hwy. 69 and FM 346, 5 mi. s. of Tyler.

Red-breasted Nuthatch – Continuing the overwhelming number of fall reports of Red-breasted Nuthatch throughout Texas, large numbers of nuthatches remained through the season in the Central Brazos Valley and E. Pineywoods.

White-breasted Nuthatch – An all-time high of 41 White-breasted Nuthatches were tallied on the Tyler C.B.C. in *Smith* 5 Jan.

Marsh Wren – Marsh Wrens returned in good numbers to the wet marshes of ne. Texas, including an all-time high of 6 on the Tyler C.B.C., *Smith* 5 Jan.

Carolina Wren – A Carolina Wren incubating 4 eggs in Brenham, *Washington* 26 Feb (Darrell Vollert) beats the previous Central Brazos Valley early nesting date by 6 days.

Bewick's Wren – Eastern Bewick's Wrens continue to hold on to a few areas of the Central Brazos Valley and ne. Texas with sightings this winter at Washington-on-the-Brazos S.H.P., *Washington* 16 Feb (Bruce Neville et al.), Trinidad L., *Henderson* 2-3 Feb (D. D. Currie, Dell Little), and *Smith* 5 Jan (Peter Barnes, Dave Holdermann, Clayton Rickett).

Cedar Waxwing – A very high count of 3898 Cedar Waxwings apparently reflected a major southward push on count day 16 Dec for the Nacogdoches C.B.C.

Black-and-white Warbler – For the third year, a Black-and-white Warbler wintered in a *Montgomery* yard in The Woodlands (ph. Florence King).

Palm Warbler – An inland Palm Warbler was in *Henderson* 24 Jan (Jim Booker).

Yellow-rumped "Audubon's" Warbler – Far from its usual haunts, an Audubon's Warbler was in Kilgore, *Rusk* 13 Feb (Peggy Harding).

Wilson's Warbler – Out-of-season for the Central Brazos Valley, a Wilson's Warbler was found 2 Jan (ph. Ken Hartman) at Washington-on-the-Brazos S.H.S., *Washington*.

Spotted Towhee – Spotted Towhees continue to push to the eastern edge of their range, with multiple sightings this season at *Brazos, Camp, Franklin, Harrison, Henderson, Hunt, Rains, Smith, Tyler, Washington,* and *Van Zandt* 14 Dec+ (m.ob.).

Henslow's Sparrow – Henslow's Sparrows made a good showing in the E. Pineywoods with sightings of one at the Hwy. 155 Marina of L. O' the Pines in *Upshur* 15-17 Dec (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, ph. Bob Metzler), 3 on Oney Rd. in *Harrison* 15 Dec–1 Jan (ph. David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Peter Barnes, Doug Ghrist, Clayton Rickett), one on private property in *Harrison* 10 Jan (Michael Dupree); 2 on the Nacogdoches C.B.C. in *Nacogdoches* 16 Dec (Catherine Winans), 2 at different Camp Maxey locations in *Lamar* 19-20 Dec (Jake McCumber). In *Harris*, 2 were at Addicks Reservoir 9 Dec and 6 Jan (Ken Hartman, David Rymal, Tony Frank), and Lake Houston Wilderness Park 26 Jan (Stephan Lorenz). David Wolf attributes the good numbers of sparrows on the Nacogdoches count as "likely due to our habitats being in much better shape than during the drought years (and perhaps because of the lack of food in drought-stricken areas elsewhere)."

Black-headed Grosbeak – A good find for the Rio Brazos Audubon Society field trip was a male Black-headed Grosbeak at Washington-on-the-Brazos S.H.S., *Washington* 16 Feb (Bruce Neville, ph. Boris Navikov, Laura Sare et al.).

Indigo Bunting – An early arriving ad. male Indigo Bunting remained 21Feb+ at Chappell Hill, *Washington* (Darrell Vollert).

Painted Bunting – A 28 Feb (Jim Anding, Kitty Anding) occurrence of Painted Bunting in College Station, *Brazos* is either an early arrival or a winter wanderer.

Western Meadowlark – A surprising number of Western Meadowlarks were in ne. Texas this winter 24 Dec-2 Feb, with groups of 1-8 at various locations in *Henderson, Red River, Smith,* and *Wood*.

Rusty Blackbird – Rusty Blackbirds were sparsely reported at 5 ne. Texas locations in *Camp, Lamar, Nacogdoches,* and *Smith*, with a high count of 120 at L. Tyler, 6 Jan (Peter Barnes).

Purple Finch – There were few reports of Purple Finch in ne. Texas, with a maximum of 6 at any location.

Pine Siskin – Pine Siskins were plentiful in the Central Brazos Valley throughout winter, but considerably less so in the e. Texas Pineywoods.

CONTRIBUTORS:

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