

Spring 2013: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 387 sightings of 177 species from 1 March to 31 May 2013.

WEATHER REPORTS:

As in other parts of the state, birders reported exceptional numbers and diversity of migrants in the Central Brazos Valley, East Texas Pineywoods, and north-east Texas. Similar to other reports, David Wolf commented, "We've had a very interesting spring in the central Pineywoods, with almost all of the migrants possible in our region seen at least once by someone, including the scarcest."

David Wolf, central Pineywoods, Spring Season, "This was a late and cool spring that brought a remarkable series of powerful late cold fronts through our region. The northern part of our area had three nights of hard freezes March 25-27, almost 10 days later than our average last freeze date. Then, major fronts came through April 10-11 (temperatures dipped to just above freezing); April 18-19 (very cold and windy on the latter date; temperatures dipped to just above freezing); April 24; April 28 (weak, but dropping heavy rains to the south of us); May 2 (an amazingly strong late front, with temperatures down to the mid-30s); a reinforcing front a few days later; and May 10 (a weak and slow-moving front).

"The low temperatures set a lot of our vegetation back and the birds seemed to be affected by the odd weather too. Many local breeders were 1-2 weeks late in returning back to their territories and some regular passage migrants did not appear until later than we've come to expect.

"Most of April was surprisingly slow for songbird migrants, in spite of the strong fronts, and it was mostly just a few of the commoner species that were found. Clearly the migrating birds were not caught over our area by the weather, and apparently they put down to the south of us or were not moving on the days of the strongest fronts.

"Warblers and flycatchers did not appear in numbers until the remarkable front of May 2 and thereafter - but then it was very exciting in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches and Old Orchard Park in Diboll almost daily from May 2-17. A total of 32 warbler species was found in our area this spring, not bad for an inland locality!"

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – A large gathering of 100+ Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks was counted in *Henderson* 31 Mar (D. D. Currie, Dell Little), but more surprising were pairs of Whistling-Ducks in the Diboll area of *Angelina* 1 Apr and 17 May (Robert Truss) where breeding has not yet been confirmed.

Ross's Goose – The two Ross's Geese that wintered in se. College Station, *Brazos* were still present 14 Apr (Bruce Neville), having taken up with domestic geese in a cattle pasture.

Cinnamon X Blue-winged Teal – A hybrid Cinnamon X Blue-winged Teal was identified at Country Club Lake, *Brazos* 29-30 Mar (David Scott, ph. Rick Laughlin, Sarah Laughlin, Matthew Gasner).

Wild Turkey – Rarely reported in the Central Brazos Valley, two singles and a group of four Wild Turkeys were photographed on Longpoint Rd, *Washington* 30 Mar (ph. David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

Western Grebe – The Western Grebe reported in winter at Lake Cypress Springs in *Franklin* was still present 10 Mar (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton), as were the three on Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* up to 13 Mar (Mike Dillon, Billy Heldt, Joe Stuckey, Dick Waldrep).

Wood Stork – Four Wood Storks at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches* 27 May (David Wolf, Robert Truss) were early by a month or more, according to Pineywoods records.

Brown Pelican – Surprising and very rare for the Pineywoods was two Brown Pelicans over Lake Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 7 Apr (Cory Adams, fide Cliff Shackelford).

American Bittern – American Bitterns made impressive showings at two widely separated locations: up to five were present since winter, including one still resident 8 May (Matthew Gasner) at Country Club Lake, *Brazos* and at least 10 resided at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches* 14 Mar–2 May (Robert Truss, David Wolf, Ruth Heino).

White Ibis – Stunning numbers of 400-500 White Ibis were present 7 Apr (Robert Truss) to 3 May (David Wolf) at Alazan Bayou WMA, *Nacogdoches*.

White-faced Ibis – The largest flock of *Plegadis* (likely White-faced) Ibis ever seen in the Pineywoods region was 29 on 5 May (David Wolf) as they flew low over Pecan Park in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*.

Roseate Spoonbill – A very rare spring record for Roseate Spoonbill in the Pineywoods was one at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches* 11 May (Louis Debetaz, et al.)

Swallow-tailed Kite – In over a century Swallow-tailed Kite has been reported only once in *McLennan*, so the well-documented sighting of two over Waco 14 Apr (Mike Hernandez) is certainly noteworthy. Another unusual sighting was two over the Escapees Park north of Livingston 17 May (Curtis Endee); the only other record for *Polk* dates back to 1979.

White-tailed Kite – A White-tailed Kite at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches* 13 Apr (Tyson & Kim Hart) is the first area record since 2006.

Harris's Hawk – A third or fourth record for *Brazos* since 1974 is a Harris's Hawk seen in the Peach Creek Community 17 Mar (Darrell Vollert) and very likely the same hawk 25 Mar (Gus & Marion Cothran) at the Texas World Speedway south of College Station.

Virginia Rail – Reported less than once per decade in *Brazos*, a Virginia Rail was observed 13-14 Apr (Bruce Neville, ph. Bryan Calk) at Country Club Lake.

Whooping Crane – On 12-14 Mar (fide Cliff Shackelford) a radio-tracked female Whooping Crane from the experimental (reintroduced) population in Louisiana crossed ne.Texas. It was recorded in *Liberty* as it crossed between the two ecoregions of Pineywoods and Coastal Prairies, apparently close to the Trinity River NWR. On 27-29 Apr (fide Vladimir Dinets) a pair of one-year-old cranes moved northwesterly from St. Mary Parish, Louisiana to the outskirts of Dallas and roosted 29 Apr (fide Sara Zimorski) in the west arm/branch of Lake Ray Hubbard, *Dallas*.

American Golden-Plover – American Golden-Plovers made good showings in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 14-24 Mar (David Wolf) with a peak count of 45. Larger numbers were at Angelina County Airport 14 Mar–8 Apr with a peak count of 150 on 31 Mar (Louis Debetaz, et al.). After the storm of 31 Mar (Susie Lower) at least 70 were at Nacogdoches Airport. Meanwhile in the Central Brazos Valley, approximately 200 golden-plovers were at the turf farms in *Burleson* 17 Mar (David Scott).

Piping Plover – Inland Piping Plovers are always a good find, so noteworthy sightings are two plovers 2 May (ph. Eric Carpenter, ph. Sam Fason, Arman Moreno) at Hornsby Bend, *Travis*, one the same day and next (Peter Barnes, Mike Bloodsworth, ph. Doug Ghrist) at Lake Tyler—a first record for *Smith*—and yet two more 5 May (ph. Gil Eckrich, Michael Stewart) at Union Grove Wildlife Area, *Bell*.

Black-necked Stilt – Normally Black-necked Stilts do not migrate through the central Pineywoods, but 16 Apr (Louis Debetaz, Lynn Smith) one was near Clawson, *Angelina*, and 2 May (ph. Ron Mize) another

was at Alazan Bayou WMA, *Nacogdoches*, thereby providing the fifth and sixth spring records for the ecoregion.

Willet – A rare find for the Pineywoods was a Willet on stormy 2 May (Susie Lower) at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches*. A bit more likely was one at Lake Tyler 15 May (Peter Barnes), yet even here the last *Smith* sighting was in 2000.

Whimbrel – A Whimbrel at Lake Tyler, *Smith* 16 May (Peter Barnes) contributed to a very short list of ne. Texas records, with none in the past decade.

Hudsonian Godwit – Quite a surprise for the Central Brazos Valley is up to eight Hudsonian Godwits at Carter Lake 4-6 May (John Hale, Linda Hale, ph. Bryan Calk, et al.), the fourth *Brazos* record since the first in 1974.

Baird's Sandpiper – Until the advent of Texas Century Club, Madison County was seriously underbirded. Baird's Sandpiper was added to the county list 27 Mar (Bill Wright) when one was sighted at Lake Madison Park.

Stilt Sandpiper – Bringing the underbirded Madison County list to 202 species, a Stilt Sandpiper was identified 27 Mar (Bill Wright) at Lake Madison Park.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – Very rare in the Pineywoods region, four Buff-breasted Sandpipers were at Angelina County Airport 16 Apr (Louis Debetaz).

Wilson's Snipe – A late record for north-east Texas, a Wilson's Snipe was seen 30 Apr (Peter Barnes) at Lake Tyler, *Smith*.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – A first record for the Central Brazos Valley and a remarkable inland sighting, a Lesser Black-backed Gull was photographed at Rocky Creek Park on Lake Somerville, *Washington*, and then, a bit later the same day, undoubtedly the same bird was at Nails Creek State Park on Lake Somerville, *Lee* 30 Mar (ph. David Brotherton, ph. Luanne Brotherton).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo – David Wolf reports in *Nacogdoches*, “Yellow-billed Cuckoos appeared early and in good numbers this spring, beginning with an early first at Alazan Bayou 12 Apr (John & Thelma Dalmas).”

Black-chinned Hummingbird – Unexpected and only about the fifth or sixth record for *Brazos* since 1970, a male Black-chinned Hummingbird was at a Wellborn feeder from 11 Apr+ (ph. Helen Baines, John Baines, m.ob.) making it by far the longest staying Black-chinned.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird – The immature Broad-tailed Hummingbird that wintered at a Wellborn yard of College Station was still present 2 Apr (John Hale), having gained an almost complete gorget in the interim. Given their rarity in *Brazos*, it is amazing that another, first showing in Bryan 7 Oct, was still present 14 Mar (Sandy Dillard).

Rufous Hummingbird – Wintering Rufous Hummingbirds lingered in Kilgore, *Rusk* until 21 Mar (Peggy Harding), two *Montgomery* locations until 26 Mar (Dorothy Borders) and 30 Mar (Andy Jordan), and two College Station locations, *Brazos* until 29 Mar (Kitty Anding, Jim Anding) and 8 Apr (Helen Baines).

Crested Caracara – A Crested Caracara east of Crockett, *Houston* 28 Mar (Tyson Hart) was just inside the Pineywoods where there are very few records, although they are regular just to the west along the Trinity River.

American Kestrel – A late pair of American Kestrels present at Carter Lake through the end of the period (John Hale) is being closely watched as the species has not been documented as nesting in *Brazos* since the before 1940.

Couch's Kingbird – A third record for *Washington*, a calling Couch's Kingbird was observed in Brenham 28 Mar–12 Apr (Darrell Vollert). Possibly this is the same Couch's found in January at a location about 10 miles distant.

Western Kingbird – Rare for *Smith*, a Western Kingbird was at Camp Tyler 16 May (Peter Barnes).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – For north-east Texas, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was early 9 Mar (Mike Dillon) at Lake Murvaul, *Panola*.

Red-breasted Nuthatch – The overwhelming influx this winter of Red-breasted Nuthatches left stragglers to 12 Apr (Darrell Vollert) in Chappell Hill, *Washington* and to 10 May (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf) in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*.

Gray-cheeked Thrush – The north-east Texas region has few records for Gray-cheeked Thrush, so it is noteworthy that six singles were reported this season at Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 8 Apr (James Tolliver), at Tyler State Park, *Smith* 26 Apr (Peter Barnes, Ross Rickett), at Tatum, *Rusk* 6 May (Boyd Sanders), at Pleasure Acres Lake, *Smith* 7 May (Linda Price), near Athens, *Henderson* 11 May (D. D. Currie, Dell Little), and at Sabine Bottom WMA, *Smith* 13 May (Mike Bloodsworth).

Louisiana Warbler – A very late migrant Louisiana Warbler passed through Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 2 May (David Wolf).

Golden-winged Warbler – David Wolf reported six sightings of at least nine individuals of Golden-winged Warbler in the Pineywoods region 27 Apr–12 May and remarked, "It was an excellent spring for Golden-winged Warblers, a declining species that is never a common migrant in our region."

Swainson's Warbler – Although Swainson's Warblers are known to nest at Lick Creek Park, a count of six there 11 May (Bruce Neville) was impressive for *Brazos*.

Nashville Warbler – A Nashville Warbler 23 May (David Wolf) at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* exceeds the latest spring record for the Pineywoods by a week.

Bay-breasted Warbler – David Wolf reports, "Far more Bay-breasted Warblers were found this spring than normal" and goes on to list nearly daily sightings 2-17 May in Nacogdoches, with day counts as high as eight.

Bronzed Cowbird – About once every five years a Bronzed Cowbird shows up in *Brazos*; this year one or perhaps two were seen at Carter Lake 25 May (John Hale).

Pine Siskin – Large numbers of Pine Siskins were present in the Central Brazos Valley through March with good numbers still present at several locations to mid-April (fide Darrell Vollert) and as late as 27 Apr (Bruce Neville) at Lick Creek Park, *Brazos*. Siskins remained longer in the East Texas Pineywoods with peak numbers of 250-305 25-27 Apr (David Wolf). Latest departures were 11 at Pleasure Acres Lake, *Smith* 2 May (Peter Barnes) and one at Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 18 May (John & Thelma Dalmas).

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