

## Winter 2015-16: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 56,559 sightings from 1 December 2015 to 29 February 2016. It surveys 42 counties: Anderson, Angelina, Bowie, Brazos, Burleson, Camp, Cass, Cherokee, Franklin, Freestone, Gregg, Grimes, Hardin, Harrison, Henderson, Houston, Jasper, Leon, Liberty, Limestone, Madison, Marion, Montgomery, Morris, Nacogdoches, Navarro (southern), Newton, Panola, Polk, Red River, Robertson, Rusk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Smith, Titus, Trinity, Tyler, Upshur, Walker, Washington.

### WEATHER REPORTS:

Bert Frenz, East Texas, "A mild winter allowed many out-of-season visitors, some staying the entire winter, including Snowy Egret, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, White-faced Ibis, American Avocet, Franklin's Gull, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Anna's Hummingbird, Common Nighthawk, Tree Swallow, Gray Catbird, Wilson's Warbler, Summer Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting.

David Wolf, Nacogoches CBC, "In general the numbers of winter residents were down. So far it has been a mild winter here (and way to the north of us) and I would guess that many birds have simply not been pushed southward into our area by bad weather. In spite of - or because of - all of the rain this year some habitats are not in good shape, especially the grassland and weedy areas that sparrows frequent."

David Wolf, Winter Season, Central Pineywoods, "The winter of 2015-16 may be summed up as "mild" weatherwise and "boring" birdwise. Temperatures were above average the entire winter, not only here but also in most of the eastern half of the continent, and undoubtedly the weather had a big effect on our winter birds - or lack there-of. Most of our expected species had already been spotted by early December, but in relatively low numbers. We then kept waiting for greater numbers to appear, but they never really did, and many species seemed to be leaving by mid to late February. Did winter really come and go this easily?"

### MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

**Tundra Swan** – A Tundra Swan was photographed 22 Dec (ph. David Brotherton) on a pond off CR 1250, *Red River*, and was seen subsequently 23-26 Dec (Luanne Brotherton, ph. David Sarkozi).



David Brotherton, 22 Dec 2016

**Wood Duck** – An amazingly large flight of 1300+ Wood Ducks left Shawnee Bottoms, *Nacogdoches* at dawn 20 Dec (Brent Burt, Cliff Shackelford).

**Eurasian X American Wigeon** – Most of the Richland Creek CBC participants showed up to view the male Eurasian X American Wigeon hybrid discovered earlier 31 Dec (Sheryll Barker, ph. Laurie Foss, †Peter Barnes, m.obs.) on FM 3273, *Henderson*. The hybrid was seen again 1 Jan (Laurie Foss).



Laurie Foss, 31 Dec 2015

**Blue-winged Teal** – Rare in winter for the central Pineywoods, a Blue-winged Teal was at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds, *Nacogdoches* 1 Jan (David Wolf). The first migrants did not appear until 14 Feb.

**Redhead** – An impressive count of 215 Redheads were at the Nacogdoches ponds, *Nacogdoches* 11 Dec (David Wolf).

**Red-breasted Merganser** – An odd location for Red-breasted Merganser, one was at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds 17 Dec (David Wolf).

**Pacific Loon** – A Pacific Loon was observed at Martin Creek Lake, *Rusk* 6 Dec (†Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes, Greg Cook). This may be a first record for *Rusk*.

**Common Loon** – A first county record for under-birded *Madison*, a Common Loon was at Lake Madison Park 14 Jan (Bruce Neville).

**Horned Grebe** – Relatively rare in *Brazos* since the mid-1970s, a Horned Grebe was at Finfeather Lake 7-9 Feb (Shelia Hargis, Betty Vermeire, Chuck Hamilton, †Mark McDermott).

**Western Grebe** – A Western Grebe was on Martin Creek Lake, *Rusk* 6 Dec (†Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes, Greg Cook). Another Western Grebe was reported at Sam Rayburn Lake, *Angelina* 18 Jan (†Larry Galvez). Both sightings may be first county records.

**Neotropic Cormorant** – Neotropic Cormorants typically vacate the central Pineywoods in winter; this season one was still present 16 Dec (David Wolf) at Marion Ferry, Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina* and 5 on 13 Feb (David Wolf) were early arrivals at the same lake, but along the TX 147 bridge, *San Augustine*.

**American Bittern** – Single winter American Bitterns showed up at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 20 Dec (David Wolf) and at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 19 Jan–13 Feb (Dan Cowell, Katy Putsch, Danny Pickens, T. Wells Shartle).

Snowy Egret – A lingering Snowy Egret was found at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 19 Jan (Dan Cowell, Katy Putsch) and again 4 Feb (T. Wells Shartle).

Tricolored Heron – Up to 3 Tricolored Herons wintered at Richland Creek W.M.A. *Freestone-Navarro* 25 Dec–14 Feb (m.ob.). Another was at Longview, *Gregg* 19-24 Dec (Peggy Harding, et al.).

Cattle Egret – An out-of-season Cattle Egret was at Lake Cypress Springs, *Franklin* 3 Feb (Dale Bottrell).

**White Ibis** – For the third successive winter, White Ibis stayed at Richland Creek W.M.A. *Freestone* 30 Dec–14 Feb (m.ob.), reaching a peak count of 50.

**White-faced Ibis** – Again this winter, White-faced Ibis tarried at Richland Creek W.M.A. *Freestone* 31 Dec–14 Feb (m.ob.), reaching a peak count of 60 on 26 Jan (Carol Wells).

Common Gallinule – A Common Gallinule was at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 20 Dec (ph. Janet & Ron Cook).



Janet & Ron Cook, 20 Dec 2015

American Avocet – An American Avocet was an odd inland winter occurrence at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 30 Jan (Chuck Sexton).

**Laughing Gull** – The first winter record of Laughing Gull in *Brazos* was photographed at Carter Lake 26 Dec (ph. John Hale).



John Hale, 26 Dec 2015

Franklin's Gull – Out of season Franklin's Gulls were reported at Lake Palestine, *Cherokee* 24 Dec (Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes, Greg Cook), at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 25 Dec–4 Feb (Brian Fant, T. Wells Shartle), and at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 20-22 Dec (Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes, Greg Cook, Christopher Lindsey).

Gull-billed Tern – At the outer edge of wandering Gull-billed Tern range, two were flying over woods near the Trinity River, *Liberty* 18 Jan (†Bruce Neville, Betty Vermeire).

Forster's Tern – A high count of 796+ Forster's Terns was tallied over the TX 147 causeway of Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine* 16 Dec (David Wolf).

Royal Tern – An inland Royal Tern was out of place 18 Jan (†Bruce Neville, Laura Sare, Betty Vermeire) at the Trinity River Bridge and SR 105, *Liberty*.

**Common Nighthawk** – Truly unusual was a Common Nighthawk at CR 2210, *Houston* 6 Jan (†Barrett Riess).

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** – A rare winter record for *Brazos*, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was in the Wellborn area 4-5 Dec (John Hale). At a residence in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin*, a female Ruby-throated wintered from early Dec+ (ph. John Mariani).



John Mariani, 4 Dec 2015

**Black-chinned Hummingbird** – A Black-chinned Hummingbird spent December to 13 Feb (ph. John Mariani, banded Sumi Prasad) at feeders in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin*.



John Mariani, 5 Dec 2015



**Anna's Hummingbird** – With less than a handful of winter records for Anna's Hummingbird in north-east Texas the immature female that wintered 4 Dec–16 Feb (ph. John Mariani) near feeders in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin* is noteworthy.



John Mariani, 13 Feb 2016

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** – An immature Broad-tailed Hummingbird 12-14 Feb (banded Sumi Prasad, ph. John Mariani, et al.) was identified after banding in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin*.



John Mariani, 12 Feb 2016

Rufous Hummingbird – Yet another hummingbird species at the Mariani feeders in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin* was a Rufous Hummingbird 16 Jan+ (banded Sumi Prasad, ph. John Mariani, et al.). A Rufous Hummingbird also wintered in College Station, *Brazos* 25 Dec–10 Feb (Helen Baines)



John Mariani, 12 Feb 2016

Green Kingfisher – A pair of Green Kingfishers made a brief appearance 1-3 Jan (John Jasek, ph. Gary Binderim, Noreen Baker, Michael Cooper) at Lone Star College, *Montgomery*.



Gary Binderim, 1 Jan 2016

Merlin – Rare in winter in the central Pineywoods, single Merlins were reported at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 20 Dec (David Wolf) and Toledo Bend at Sabinetown, *Sabine* 28 Dec (David Bell).

**Say's Phoebe** – A first record for Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro* 31 Dec–4 Jan (Doug Ghrist, D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Linda Belssner) was a Say's Phoebe.

**Vermilion Flycatcher** – The first-county-record Vermilion Flycatcher from the fall remained through the winter in *Morris* (Buddy Fowler, David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton). Another which may also be a first-county record was a male near the Big Thicket National Preserve, *Gregg* 19 Dec (Randy Lewis). Vermilion Flycatchers were also reported in *Jasper* 25 Dec (ph.† T. Robertson) and three locations in *Hardin* 19 Dec (Randy Lewis, Michael Cooper) and 14 Jan (†Rich Kostecke).

**Couch's Kingbird** – A vagrant Couch's Kingbird was heard and photographed near Lake Gilmer, *Upshur* 24 Jan (ph. Linda Price). It is the second county record, the first being in 2012.



Linda Price, 24 Jan 2016

Fish Crow – A first for the Tyler CBC, 22 Fish Crows were counted in *Smith* 2 Jan (fide David Brotherton).

**Tree Swallow** – Out-of-season Tree Swallows were found in *Liberty* at two locations–6 at Travis Park and 2 at Liberty Municipal Park–18 Jan (†Bruce Neville, Laura Sare, Betty Vermeire).

Northern Rough-winged Swallow – Lingering Northern Rough-winged Swallows were seen in Liberty, *Liberty* (29 Dec (†Andy & Rhoda Davis) and in Calvert, *Robertson* 2 Jan (Dean Gregory).

White-breasted Nuthatch – At a count of 41 White-breasted Nuthatches the all-time record for the Tyler CBC, *Smith* was tied on 2 Jan.

Red-breasted Nuthatch – Red-breasted Nuthatches avoided East Texas this winter; 1 or 2 each were found in *Freestone*, *Harrison*, *Montgomery*, *Sabine*, and *Smith*.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – A rare-in-winter Blue-gray Gnatcatcher amidst a mixed-flock was found 12 Dec (Les Stewart, David Wolf, et al.) at Lake Alazan, *Nacogdoches*.

**Gray Catbird** – In the Central Brazos Valley, Gray Catbird is rare in the coldest part of winter, so one 6 Feb+ (ph. Ira Greenbaum) in Bryan, *Brazos* is exceptional. Other unusual sightings in East Texas include singles 23 Dec (David Wolf) at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* and another on the 20 Dec Nacogdoches CBC. A Gray Catbird was a first record for the Tyler CBC, *Smith* 2 Jan (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).



Ira Greenbaum, 28 Feb 2016

**Wilson's Warbler** – A wintering male Wilson's Warbler 10 Dec–9 Feb (†John Mariani) was at Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin*. Singles were reported 28 Dec (Andy & Rhoda Davis) at W. G. Jones State Forest and 27 Jan (Kenneth Rieger) at The Woodlands, both in *Montgomery*.

**Henslow's Sparrow** – Reports of Henslow's Sparrows from East Texas include the west side of Lake Sam Rayburn near Caney Creek Park, *Angelina* 3-5 Jan (Paul Sunby, ph. John Hale), near Big Thicket National Preserve, *Hardin* 18 Jan (Bob Dellinger), at Sabine National Forest & Toledo Bend Res., *Sabine* 19 Jan (Jack Kelly), and at Tom Walker's Farm, *Marion* 18-23 Jan (ph. Mike Weber).



John Hale, 5 Jan 2016



Mike Weber, 18 Jan 2016



**Summer Tanager** – Wintering Summer Tanagers include single females at Kurten, *Brazos* 9 Jan–13 Feb (ph. Shirley Wilkerson, Dan Wilkerson) and at Walnut Creek Forest, *Montgomery* 17 Dec+ (William Tarbox, †Bryan Tarbox, ph. Ellen Baker Tarbox).



Shirley Wilkerson, 9 Jan 2016



Ellen Baker Tarbox, 23 Jan 2016

**Pyrrhuloxia** – With only 4 prior records for heavily birded *Brazos*, it is noteworthy that a *Pyrrhuloxia* was photographed 19 Dec (ph. Rick Laughlin, Sarah Laughlin) near Easterwood Airport in College Station and another was at Cox Cemetery 15-19 Jan (ph. † Dan Cowell, m.ob.).



Rick Laughlin, 19 Dec 2015

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** – Out-of-season molting male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were photographed in *Montgomery* at Lone Star College Kingwood 16 Dec (ph. Gary Binderim) and at a residence near Stagecoach 5 Feb (ph. Kelly Hill).



Gary Binderim, 16 Dec 2015



Kelly Hill, 5 Feb 2016

**Black-headed Grosbeak** – In *Montgomery* at a feeder off Hooper Ranch Rd, an out-of-range Black-headed Grosbeak was photographed 5 Dec (ph. Patti Edens).



Pattie Evens, 5 Dec 2015

**Indigo Bunting** – A drab molting male Indigo Bunting arrived early at feeders near Conroe, *Montgomery* 15 Feb+ (ph. † David Henderson) and quickly gained color. A day earlier 14 Feb (†Charlotte McCown) one showed up near Kenefick, *Liberty*.



David Henderson, 25 Feb 2016



**Painted Bunting** – A winter surprise was a male Painted Bunting 6-8 Jan (ph. Joel Degenstein) in The Woodlands, *Montgomery*. An early Painted Bunting arrived 9 Feb+ (ph. Ellen Baker Tarbox, William Tarbox) at Walnut Creek Forest, *Montgomery*.



Joel Degenstein, 8 Jan 2016



Ellen Baker Tarbox, 9 Feb 2016

**Rusty Blackbird** – Two Rusty Blackbirds were at Lake Fairfield State Park, *Freestone* 31 Jan (ph. † Chuck Sexton), a site where they have not been recorded previously.



Chuck Sexton, 31 Jan 2016



Purple Finch – In general, Purple Finch were scarce in East Texas although at *Brazos* in the Central Brazos Valley they were reported numerous times at 8 locations 19 Dec–12 Feb (m.ob.).

**Common Redpoll** – Certainly the best find in the East Texas Pineywoods this winter was a Common Redpoll at Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 10 Jan–1 Feb (John & Thelma Dalmas, ph. Sue Orwig, m.ob.)



Sue Orwig, 20 Jan 2016

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