

Spring 2015: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from sightings from 1 March to 31 May 2015.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, central Pineywoods, spring season. "Weather always plays in major role in just what birds we find during our exciting spring migration period – and this year we had plenty of weather! March was dominated by wet and chilly conditions. April was warmer, but after the 10th a remarkable pattern of regular and severe thunderstorms began dumping rain on our region. This pattern continued (with short breaks) through the first three weeks of May, causing much damage and smashing rainfall records for the month in the eastern parts of Texas and Oklahoma. How did this weather affect the birds? Well, many of our local breeding birds seemed to be late in arriving, while the migrants were somewhat disappointing given the stormy conditions. Apparently the numbers of songbirds got put down elsewhere, though we did have some great fallouts of stronger migrants like shorebirds. On the other hand, many species that are rare locally were found and observers that got out often managed to see a great array of species."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Northern Pintail – Many lingering ducks were at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 7 May (Peter Barnes, Ross Rickett), including 2 Northern Pintails.

Redhead – Lingering Redheads including 6 at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 7 May (Peter Barnes, Ross Rickett), 1 at Hwy 21 at the *Brazos* county line 17 May (Sarah & Rick Laughlin), and 1 near Flatonina, *Fayette* 18 May (Brush Freeman). The *Brazos* sighting is the latest historical record.

Greater Scaup – A Greater Scaup at Lakeside Park in The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 13 Apr (Larry Carpenter) was noteworthy. More surprising was a female Greater Scaup seen well at the TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine* 13 May (David Wolf) that was the latest ever for the entire Pineywoods region by well over a month.

Red-breasted Merganser – A Red-breasted Merganser at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* and even more unexpected is to find 17 on 24 Apr (Peter Barnes).

Wild Turkey – An increase in reports of Wild Turkeys has been coming from the Central Brazos Valley and this season includes 3 turkeys east of Hwy 36 in *Burleson* 3 Apr (Laura Sare) and 1 near Rockdale, *Milam* 18 Apr (Byron Stone).

Red-throated Loon – A Red-throated Loon was among 85 Common Loons at Cedar Creek Reservoir, *Henderson* 7 Mar (Blaine Carnes).

Western Grebe – A first for Lake Somerville and only the fifth for the Central Brazos Valley, a Western Grebe was viewed from Yegua Creek Park, *Washington* 13 Mar (Laura Sare).

Brown Pelican – a single Brown Pelican was viewed from Welch Park on Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 2 Apr (ph. James White), a sighting that would have been remarkable a decade ago but now is almost an annual occurrence.

Glossy Ibis – Two Glossy Ibis 7 May (†ph. Peter Barnes, Ross Rickett) were again reported at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.



Roseate Spoonbill – Two Roseate Spoonbills were at Richland Creek W.M.A., Freestone 24-25 Apr (ph. T. Wells Shartle, D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Swallow-tailed Kite – A vagrant Swallow-tailed Kite passed over the Angelina County Airport 31 Mar (Louis Debetaz). In the Central Brazos Valley one was over Brison Park, College Station, *Brazos* 9 May (ph. Sarah & Rick Laughlin, et al.) and another was at Sandtown Road, *Washington* 20 May (ph. Colton Robbins).

Sharp-shinned Hawk – A Sharp-shinned Hawk on the Mount Selman BBS route, *Cherokee* 23 May (Peter Barnes) was a surprise as it is uncertain whether it was a late migrant or evidence that the small breeding population near the Louisiana border may be expanding.

Swainson's Hawk – Early and scarce for the Pineywoods, a Swainson's Hawk 31 Mar (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) was flying over the interstate in *Hopkins*. In *Burleson* 13 Apr (Sandy Dillard), a kettle of 360 Swainson's was very large for the Central Brazos Valley.

White-tailed Hawk – A first county record for Leon was a White-tailed Hawk 15 Mar (†Ron Newhouse) viewed from Interstate 45. Another was in Bryan, *Brazos* 22 Mar (Megan Smith) where it is very rare.

Ferruginous Hawk – Ferruginous Hawks seen this winter continued in *Robertson* near Hearne to at least 23 Mar (Alberto Manterola). One was also reported in *Milam* near Yarrelton 11 Mar (†Jimma Byrd, Ann Collins).

Purple Gallinule – Adding to only a very few records in *McLennan*, although some dating back to 1893, a Purple Gallinule was near the convention center in Waco 14 May (†Greg Lewallen).

Whooping Crane – Once again some of Louisiana's experimental Whooping Cranes crossed the border into Texas and were seen near Beaumont, *Jefferson* and Tyler, *Smith* the first week of May (fide Clifford Shackelford).

Black-necked Stilt – Two Black-necked Stilts were at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 6 Mar (Danny Pickens).

American Avocet – Eighteen American Avocets was a good find 23 Apr (Peter Barnes) for Pleasure Acres Lake, *Smith*.

Willet – Four Willets at Lake Gibbons 2 May (John Hale) may be a first record for under-birded *Lamar*. Thirteen Willets were at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 25 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) and 4 others were in *Fannin* the same day (Gary Ferandes).

Hudsonian Godwit – A good sighting for *McLennan* was 3 Hudsonian Godwits on a small pond on Shiloh Church Road 19 May (Frank Bumgardner, John Muldrow). The last report in this county was in 2011. Thirteen Hudsonian Godwits were at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 25 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Dunlin – After 4 in. of rain fell in Lufkin 21 May, the biggest shorebird fallout in the central Pineywoods dumped 85 Dunlin at Angelina County Airport (Louis Debetaz) and another 18 Dunlin at Nacogdoches Airport, *Nacogdoches* (David Wolf); Dunlin are rare in spring in the central Pineywoods.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – A Buff-breasted Sandpiper at Nacogdoches Airport, *Nacogdoches* 21 May (David Wolf) was the latest ever for the Pineywoods by a week.

Laughing Gull – Two breeding-plumaged adult Laughing Gulls over the TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine* 15 Mar (Robert Truss, David Wolf) were a surprise.

Black Tern – A high count of 130+ Black Terns were seen from the TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine* 13 May (David Wolf).

Common Ground-Dove – Rare for the Pineywoods, a Common Ground-Dove was reported in *Franklin* 8 Mar (Mark Olinger). Somewhat more regular for *Brazos*, yet a good find, two ground-doves were near Allen Farm 23 Mar (Rick Laughlin).

White-winged Dove – White-winged Doves are slowly colonizing Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* and Lufkin, *Angelina* as noted by sightings this season in Loco Valley 16 Mar – 22 May (Ruth Heino), in Nacogdoches mid-April – 21 May (Rick Schaefer), and at Central Heights 1 May (David Wolf).

Black-billed Cuckoo – Quite the surprise for the Rio Brazos Audubon Big Sit, a Black-billed Cuckoo was checked off on 10 May (†Sarah Laughlin, m.ob.) at Brison Park, College Station. Although known as a transitory migrant in *Brazos* since 1936, there are only about 20 records and this is only the 5th record in the past decade.

Common Nighthawk – An early Common Nighthawk passed over a Douglass home 15 Apr (†Carol Wells) in *Nacogdoches*. The best spring count in years was a gathering of 75 over Nacogdoches 29 May (Cliff Shackelford, Jim Neal).

Red-cockaded Woodpecker – Last reported in *Nacogdoches* in 2009, a Red-cockaded Woodpecker sighting near Appleby 13 May (Brent Burt) is rare. David Wolf commented, "Apparently a few of them wander away from their colonies."

Prairie Falcon – One of the wintering Prairie Falcons continued to be seen until 3 Mar (Byron Stone, Alberto Manterola) near Calvert, *Robertson*.

Olive-sided Flycatcher – Early was an Olive-sided Flycatcher seen 19 Apr (†Larry Carpenter) at Lakeside Park, The Woodlands, *Montgomery*.

Acadian Flycatcher – An Acadian Flycatcher was an early arrival 24 Mar (†Andy Davis) at W. G. Jones State Forest, *Montgomery*.

Vermilion Flycatcher – Vermilion Flycatcher is a prized bird for county listers in *Brazos*. Although it has been recorded there since the 1930s, the last sighting was in 2006. A female Vermilion was at Bonham Park in Bryan 17 Mar (†Jason Hunt). Another, a male, was seen near Calvert, *Robertson* 26 Mar (†Alberto Manterola).

Ash-throated Flycatcher – An Ash-throated Flycatcher 9 May (†Sandy Dillard) is a good find for *Brazos*.

Great Crested Flycatcher – In Bryan, *Brazos* 17 Mar (†Jason Hunt) a Great Crested Flycatcher was early.

Couch's Kingbird – A Couch's Kingbird 3-10 Apr (Darrell Vollert) may be the same bird that has appeared in Brenham, Washington the previous two springs.

Western Kingbird - Single Western Kingbirds reached the Pineywoods in *Nacogdoches* at Alazan Bayou, 24 Apr 24 and in Central Heights 25 Apr (both David Wolf).

Cliff Swallow – Five Cliff Swallows were early in *Henderson* 13 Mar (Karen McBride, Sue Tichy).

Cave Swallow – New to the Mount Selman BBS route in *Cherokee* 23 May (Peter Barnes) were 8 Cave Swallows. The farthest east Cave Swallows this season were in *Morris* 29 Mar (Bruce Neville).

Tufted Titmouse – A high count of 33 Tufted Titmice was reported on eBird for Tyler State Park, *Smith* 23 Mar (Barbara Tompkins).

Marsh Wren – A Marsh Wren at Pleasure Acres Lake, *Smith* was seen as late as 11 May (†Peter Barnes).

Sprague's Pipit – A very late Sprague's Pipit was at the Turf Farms in the Brazos River bottoms, *Burleson* 2 May (ph.†Roger Shaw).

Tennessee Warbler – David Wolf reported for the central Pineywoods, “Overall it was a rather disappointing spring for warblers, in spite of the many turbulent storms. They must have gotten “put down” elsewhere! The best push came through Pecan Park April 23-28.” The high count for Tennessee Warblers was 120+ in Pecan Park, *Nacogdoches* 24 Apr (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

Cerulean Warbler – A scarce migrant through the East Texas Pineywoods, single Cerulean Warblers, all females, were in Pecan Park, *Nacogdoches* 23-24 and 29 Apr (David Wolf) and at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 23 Apr (Mimi Hoppe Wolf).

Blackpoll Warbler – Good sightings for the Pineywoods were a male Blackpoll Warbler 24 Apr (David Wolf, Robert Truss) at Pecan Park, *Nacogdoches* and a female there 28 Apr (Mimi Hoppe Wolf). Also in East Texas, a Blackpoll Warbler was found at Lake Murvaul, *Panola* 29 Apr (Steve Calver).

Palm Warbler – A surprising three sightings of Palm Warbler in East Texas were at Tyler State Park, *Smith* 25 Apr (Linda Belssner, Boyd Sanders, Brian Sanders), Lake Tawakoni State Park, *Rains* 30 Apr (Ross Rasmussen), and Fairfield Lake State Park, *Freestone* (Anthony Hewetson).

Yellow-throated Warbler – Near Burton, *Washington* 8 Mar (ph. Sally Isenberg) a Yellow-throated Warbler was an early migrant.

Canada Warbler – A good find at an early date is a female Canada Warbler 15 Apr (†Carol Wells) at the Experimental Forest, *Nacogdoches*.

Wilson's Warbler – An out-of-season Wilson's Warbler was on the TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine* 15 Mar (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

Grasshopper Sparrow – A surprisingly high count of 15 Grasshopper Sparrows were tallied in *Fannin* 22 Apr (Andy Newman).

Lincoln Sparrow – A Lincoln's Sparrow 19 May (†Danny Pickens) was at Tyler, *Smith*. Another was present the same day (Mark McDermott) at Brothers Pond Park, College Station, *Brazos*.

Swamp Sparrow – A Swamp Sparrow 23 Apr (†Tyson Hart) was late for the Pineywoods at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches*.

Black-headed Grosbeak – A fourth record for the central Pineywoods is a Black-headed Grosbeak 18-25 Apr (ph. Les Stewart) in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*. Another was at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 9 May (†Peter Barnes, Kristi Thomas, Nancy Sanders).

Lazuli Bunting – A backyard feeder in *Bowie* hosted a pair of Lazuli Buntings 1 May (ph. Connie Flanigan); a single bird is only the second county record and it is even more amazing to find a pair.

Bobolink – Up to 3 Bobolinks caused quite a stir in *Brazos*, arousing many local birders to find the rural location on Hudspeth Road. They were seen 15-19 May (Katharine Cupps, ph. John Berner, ph. Shirley Wilkerson, ph. Ginger Wentrcek, m.ob.). In the Pineywoods, 2 male Bobolinks were at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches* 24 Apr (Robert Truss) and 26 Apr (David Wolf, Milton Moorer).

Yellow-headed Blackbird – A male Yellow-headed Blackbird was at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 24 Apr (Peter Barnes). More surprising is the number of sightings of Yellow-headed in the central Pineywoods where the species is not found annually. Single males were at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches* 19 Apr (Cliff Shackelford, Roger Masse, et al); at the Nacogdoches High School playing fields 20 Apr (Jack Rohrer); and at the Angelina County Airport 27-28 Apr (Claude Riddle), while 4 (3 males) were in Diboll, *Angelina* 28 Apr (Robert Truss) and a female flew over Alazan Bayou 9 May (David Wolf).

Great-tailed Grackle – David Wolf reports that in *Nacogdoches*, "The first Great-tailed Grackle was back in Nacogdoches March 12 after their winter absence and by March 16 they were present at all 4 known breeding localities in Nacogdoches (David Wolf, m. obs.) The first fledgling was seen May 17 (David Wolf). This species now seems to be well-established, unfortunately."

Bronzed Cowbird – A Bronzed Cowbird took up residence at The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 27Mar+ (†Raymond Nojek).

Bullock's Oriole – Out of range was a female Bullock's Oriole at Brothers Pond Park, College Station, Brazos 9 May (†ph.Bryan Calk). It was the 6th county record since 1949 and the first since 1976.

Purple Finch – Purple Finch were sparse in east Texas this spring, with a peak of 11 at Pleasure Acres Lake, *Smith* 21 Mar (Mike Bloodsworth).

Pine Siskins – In March in east Texas, Pine Siskins peaked at 90 at Tyler State Park, *Smith* 10 Mar (Boyd Sanders). Several were still present off Old Nelsonville Road, *Austin* 9 Apr (Darrell Vollert), while in the central Pineywoods the last report was 27 Apr (David Wolf) in *Nacogdoches*, *Nacogdoches*.

American Goldfinch – An impressive estimate of 500 American Goldfinches were tallied at Daingerfield State Park, *Morris* 15 Mar (Dell Little).

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