

## Winter 2016-17: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from reported sightings from 1 December 2016 to 28 February 2017. 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 and the Central Brazos Valley, Mild weather encouraged many species to linger longer or through the winter. These included 4 species of hummingbirds, Franklin's Gull, Tricolored Heron, Cattle Egret, White Ibis, White-faced Ibis, Vermilion Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Gray Catbird, Wilson's Warbler, Summer Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, Dickcissel, and Baltimore Oriole.

### **MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:**

**Surf Scoter**— In the middle of Lake Holbrook, *Wood*, in a flock of Lesser Scaup lurked a surprise Surf Scoter 30 Dec (ph. Steve Glover).

**Common Merganser** – Rare in East Texas, two male Common Mergansers were watched on Cherokee Lake, *Rusk* 14 Jan (†Peggy Harding).

Horned Grebe – Horned Grebes were in abundance in East Texas with 890 rafting in front of sticks on Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 27 Dec and 340 from two locations overlooking Lake Wright Patman, *Bowie* 21 Jan (both Steve Glover, Greg Cook, Baine Carnes).

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** – At feeders in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin* a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird was frequently seen in the fall season and continuing 1 Dec–22 Feb (John Mariani) when it was joined by second Ruby-throated on the last day. Another continued 31 Dec-18 Feb (ph. Shelli Ellerbe) and was joined by a second on 20 Feb near Liberty, *Liberty*.

Black-chinned Hummingbird – A female Black-chinned Hummingbird, viewed almost daily, remained until early Christmas morning (ph. Shirley Wilkerson) in Kurten, *Brazos*. Coincidentally, the next day a Black-chinned appeared at Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin*, and was viewed off and on until 22 Feb (†John Mariani).

Rufous Hummingbird – Also at the Mariani residence in Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin* was an adult male Rufous Hummingbird 4 Jan–22 Feb (ph. John Mariani).

**Buff-bellied Hummingbird** – Yet another hummingbird species, a Buff-bellied, showed up 16 Jan (ph. John Mariani) at Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin*.

Virginia Rail – Scarce in East Texas, single Virginia Rails were reported 5 Feb (F. Marianne) at Trinity River NWR, *Liberty* and 18 Feb (ph. Brent Spink) at Bringle (Waterworks) Lake, *Bowie*.

**American Woodcock** – Although American Woodcock is expected in East Texas, hearing 20+ perform their peent calls and flight twitters in a large bottomland field at FM555, *Upshur* 19 Feb (recording, Linda Price) is impressive.

Franklin's Gull – A very late Franklin's Gull was observed twice 23 Dec (ph.†David Brotherton) at the dam area of Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*.

**Pacific Loon** – At the Brushy Creek Bridge area of Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 25 Dec (ph.†Paul Sellin) a Pacific Loon was accompanied by a Common Loon and several pelicans.

**American White Pelican** – Impressive numbers of American White Pelicans were at several eastern Texas locations, with 250-435 in *Harrison*, *Sabine*, *Upshur*, and *Burlison*, but the outstanding number was 5740 counted on the CBC 29 Dec (Mike Dillon) at Lake Wright Patman, *Cass*.

**Brown Pelican** – A wayward far-inland Brown Pelican was at Fort Parker S.P., *Limestone* 18 Feb (†Dominic Norris).

American Bittern – The only American Bittern reported in East Texas this season was one at Bringle (Waterworks) Lake, Bowie 24 Jan (†Brent Spink).

Tricolored Heron – Unexpected in the coldest part of winter, a Tricolored Heron was at Martin Dies SP, *Jasper* 20 Jan (†David Sarkozi, Tony Frank).

Cattle Egret – Out of season Cattle Egrets were reported 3 Jan-24 Feb (m.ob.) in *Nacogdoches*, *Hardin*, *Brazos*, and *Jasper*, with the peak of 40-50 egrets 28 Jan-07 Feb (†Peter Barnes, et al.) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.

**White Ibis** – An unusually large number of reports of lingering or wintering White Ibis included up to 90 at Lakeside Park, The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 1 Dec-16 Feb (Gene Prejean, Raymond Nojek, Patrick McMahon), up to 105 at Old Sour Lake Rd, *Hardin* 7 Dec-10 Feb (John Mariani), 1 fly-over at College Station, *Brazos* 19 Dec (John Hale), and 20 at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 28 Jan (Peter Barnes, Amy Martin)..

**White-faced Ibis** – Again this winter, a flock of 20 White-faced Ibis were reported at Richland Creek W.M.A. *Freestone* 28 Jan (Peter Barnes, Amy Martin).

**White-tailed Kite** – Although once not unusual, but now rare in *Burlison*, a White-tailed Kite was observed 17 Dec (Cathy Liles) in the Brazos River bottoms. East Texas has few records, especially in winter, but this season a pair of White-tailed Kites hunted over grasslands along Old Sour Lake Rd, *Hardin* 7 Jan-10 Feb (ph. John Mariani). Another was reported at the *Rusk/Panola* county line at FM 1251 8 Feb (†Peggy Harding) and yet another surprised observers at the Turkey Creek Unit of the Big Thicket, *Hardin* 11 Feb (†Steve Mayes, John Haynes).

White-tailed Hawk – At the extreme limits of its range, single White-tailed Hawks were observed 28 Jan (ph.†Shirley Wilkerson, Dan Wilkerson) at Hwy 50, *Robertson* and at CR 3224 near FM 2608, *Shelby* 24 Feb (†Sue Orwig).



© Shirley Wilkerson, 28 Jan 2017

**Crested Caracara** – Continuing their expansion into East Texas, 2 Crested Caracaras were probably first-county records for *Rusk*, observed 2 Dec (ph. Linda Price, ph. Peggy Harding) on CR 146 and again 14-18 Jan on CR 118. Known, but still scarce in *Hardin*, 1-2 Crested Caracaras were seen repeatedly along Old Sour Lake Rd. 7 Dec+ (ph. John Mariani).

**Black Phoebe** – Undoubtedly the most exciting find this winter in the Central Brazos Valley was a photo-documented Black Phoebe 18-23 Feb (Sandy Dillard, ph. Nancy Thaden, m.ob.) at the Brazos Center, Bryan, *Brazos*. Previously, the region had an undated pre-1973 record in *Brazos* and a 1999 record in *Lee*, neither photographed.



© Nancy Thaden, 18 Feb 2017

**Vermilion Flycatcher** – Typically scarce, an unusually number of Vermilion Flycatchers were reported in eastern Texas, including 1-2 seen regularly 9 Dec-19 Feb (John Mariani) at Atlantic Rd and at Old Sour Lake Rd, *Hardin*. The Vermilion Flycatcher reported last winter at Fowlers Place, *Morris* was again present this winter (Catherine Winans, Luanne Brotherton, David Brotherton). Two male Vermillion Flycatchers were at Gates Rd, *Liberty* 15 Jan (Shelli Ellerbe), a single was at the boat ramp at Willow Creek Recreation Area, *Sabine* 12-18 Feb (Steve Glover, Greg Cook, David Bell), and yet another was at Lake Somerville S.P., *Lee* 29 Jan-3 Feb (Brian Hughes, Jeremy Webster).

**Couch's Kingbird** – A Couch's Kingbird was observed in downtown Brenham, *Washington* 13 Jan (Darrell Vollert).

**Western Kingbird** – Without prior Jan-Feb records in the Central Brazos Valley, a Western Kingbird 9 Feb (ph.† Ron Newhouse) at Washington-on-the-Brazos S.H.P., *Washington* was a surprise.





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**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** – Unexpected winter sightings of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers included singles 17 Dec-12 Jan (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Catherine Winans, †Mark Edmund) at Texas Eastman at Longview, *Harrison* and 2 Jan (John Hale) at College Station, *Brazos*.

**Fish Crow** – A Fish Crow was reported off U.S. Hwy 69, *Angelina* 19 Feb (Martin Reid, Sheridan Coffey) where the species is unexpected. [David Wolf was not aware of any *Angelina* records, yet the species is not filtered in eBird. I have written to Martin and Sheridan to get details].

**Purple Martin** – Three out-of-season Purple Martins were watched in flight 11 Dec (†Kurt Nguyen) at Huntsville S.P., *Walker*.

**Tree Swallow** – Flocks of 3-20 Tree Swallows were reported 15-20 Jan (†Shelli Ellerbe, Paul Randall) at three water bodies in *Liberty*.

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** – Out of season was a Northern Rough-winged Swallow skimming low over open water at Lake Gilmer, *Upshur* 8 Jan (†Mark Edmund).

**Cave Swallow** – Up to 25 winter Cave Swallows were reported at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 6 Dec (Louis Debetaz), 4 were at Nacogdoches airport, *Nacogdoches* 11 Dec (David Wolf, Robert Truss), 10 were at Lake Woodlands, *Montgomery* 7 Jan (†Ryan Shaw) and 6 were at *Panola* (ph.Linda Price).

**Gray Catbird** – Rarely found in winter, single Gray Catbirds were reported 31 Dec (John Hale) in College Station, *Brazos*, 26 Jan (Fred Collins) at FM1094, *Austin*, 3 Feb (Mike Sanders), at Paul Boorman Trail, *Gregg*, 10 Feb (Blair Dudeck) at Hewitt, *McLennan*, and 12 Feb (Kurt Nguyen) at Lick Creek Park, College Station.

**Wilson's Warbler** – Strangely, a Wilson's Warbler was in the Nelsonville area, *Austin* 12 Jan (Darrell Vollert).

Henslow's Sparrow – A scarce, rarely reported species of the Central Brazos Valley, a Henslow's Sparrow was found near Shiro, *Grimes* 28 Dec (ph. Jennifer Backo) at a location where the observer states that she had seen it there twice before.

Summer Tanager - An out-of-season female Summer Tanager was at Chez Mitsi, *Smith* 22 Dec (†Jay Huner) and another was at Warren, *Tyler* 5 Jan (ph. Patrick Nowlin).

**Pyrrhuloxia** – Rarely reported in *Brazos*, a female Pyrrhuloxia was at Veteran's Park, College Station 9 Dec-6 Feb (†Simon Kiacz, ph. Kurt Nguyen, m.ob.).



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**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** – Certainly not expected in the dead of winter in the Central Brazos Valley, a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was in College Station, *Brazos* 20 Jan (†Eileen Slider).

Indigo Bunting – Perhaps a late migrant, a female Indigo Bunting was at Lone Star College, Kingwood, *Montgomery* 21 Dec (†Kevin Bennett).

**Painting Bunting** – A late departing female Painted Bunting was described near Hearne, *Robertson* 5 Dec (†Alberto Manterola, Bryan Calk), but why was one male still at Walnut Creek Forest, *Montgomery* in the dead of winter 28 Jan (ph. Ellen Baker Tarbox, William Tarbox)?

**Dickcissel** – Yet another out-of-season species, a Dickcissel was in Bryan, *Brazos* 16 Jan (ph. Cindie Dillard, Sandy Dillard).





© Cindi Dillard, 16 Jan 2017

Baltimore Oriole – A female Baltimore Oriole was at Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin* 12 Jan (†John Mariani).

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