

Fall 2017: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

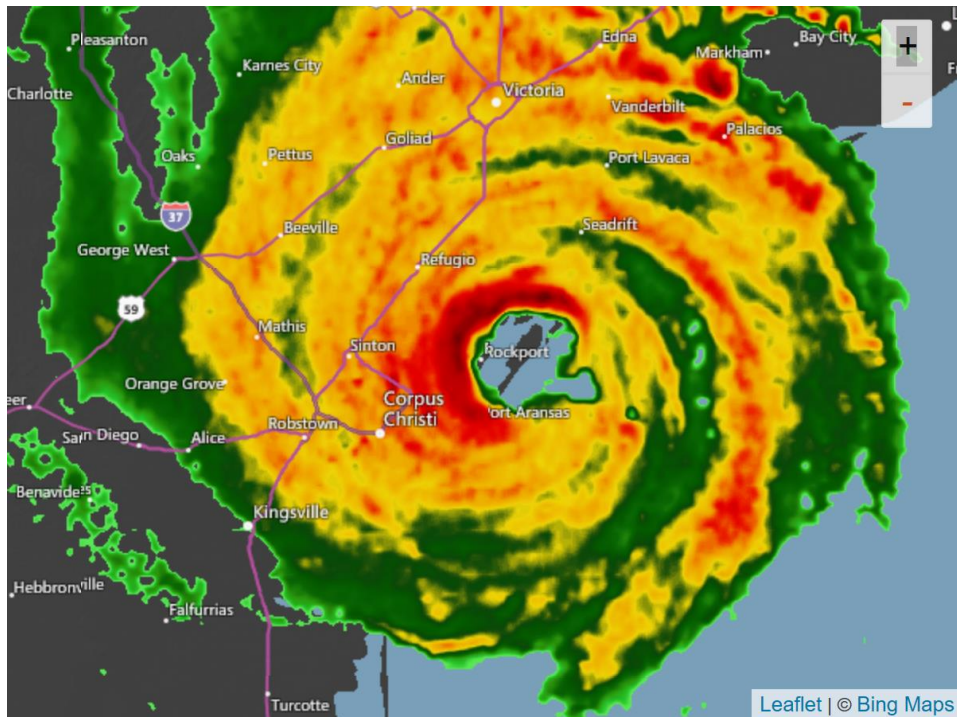
This report is prepared from 309 sightings of 76 species, plus a survey of 157,884 records submitted to eBird for the period 1 August to 30 November 2017.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, fall season, Central Pineywoods area, " Although the fall season can be one of our most exciting, this year it was relatively dull, with very few notable pushes of migrants or rarities. Apparently the weather was just too nice. Lake levels were high, so little habitat was available for shorebirds and long-legged waders. After the heavy rains of Hurricane Harvey in late August, a weak cool front on Sept 5 brought a decent rain, but then we dried out and it did not rain again until Oct 22. Modest cool fronts were regular throughout the season, keeping skies clear for days on end and temperatures consistently pleasant. The northern parts of Nacogdoches County had a freak early freeze the night of Oct 27-28 when temperatures dipped to 31-32° for a few hours, but the next freeze was not until around Nov 23, a more normal date. Beautiful weather, but it was not conducive to producing notable movements of birds!"

Arman Moreno, Austin area RBA, 30 Aug, "The following is a summary of the coastal species associated with Hurricane Harvey that have been found in Central Texas between 8/25 and 8/29/17. Notable were the incredible number of MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRDS that were pushed inland, with an estimated 58-68 birds seen within the Austin Circle alone. Also notable was an adult SOOTY TERN in Austin, providing what appears to be a 1st Travis County record. The only previous record from the Austin Circle was from Bell County in September of 1998, a bird associated with Tropical Storm Francis. Other rarities include SABINE'S GULL, ROYAL and SANDWICH TERNS.

Bert Frenz, Central Brazos Valley and East Texas. "The big event that had a profound effect on the bird distribution this season was Hurricane Harvey. On 25 Aug the eye of the hurricane passed over Rockport and Port Aransas and headed in the direction of the Central Brazos Valley. Mightily, the hurricane pushed inland to College Station where a daily rainfall record was broken and the rains continued for days. Total rainfall has been reported variably from 21-27 in. College Station is in Brazos County, named after the river flowing on its border. Much of the College Station rain drained into the Brazos River and flowed toward Houston, one of the reasons the reservoirs reached maximum depth and the water had to be released, causing more flooding in Houston. Rainfall total near the reservoir in Sugarland was reported at 36 in. Damage by winds was been pretty much restricted to Port Aransas and Rockport where the eye of the hurricane first hit land. Everywhere else, the problem was the rain and flooding. Reports list the maximum rainfall at 51.88 in. and a total deluge of 27 trillion gallons, with 6800 homes destroyed. Birdwise, the hurricane winds pushed species inland into counties that rarely see them. Here is a list of likely hurricane pushed birds this fall in the Central Brazos Valley and East Texas: Least Grebe (2 Sep), Magnificent Frigatebird (25-30 Aug), Brown Booby (29 Aug), Brown Pelican (5 Sep), Swallow-tailed Kite (31 Aug), Purple Gallinule (1 Sep), Black-bellied Plover (31 Aug), Ruddy Turnstone (26 Aug), Sanderling (26-31 Aug), Willet (29 Aug-21 Sep), Laughing Gull (26 Aug), Herring Gull (26 Aug), Least Tern (26 Aug), Royal Tern (28 Aug), and Bank Swallow (29 Aug)."



Hurricane Harvey 10:23 PM August 25

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are still rare in the Central Pineywoods including *Sabine* with only 3 prior records, so another sighting 19 Aug (David Bell) near Sabinetown on Toledo Bend is noteworthy.

Ross's Goose – Rare in *Angelina*, a single Ross's Goose was amidst a flock of Snow Geese over Boggy Slough west of Lufkin 31 Oct (Cliff Shackelford).

American Wigeon – Preceding the earliest arrival date for American Wigeon in the Central Prairie by 9 days was a dozen 10 Sep (ph. Simon Kiacz) at FM50 near Caldwell, *Burleson*.

Green-winged Teal – An impressive count of 1750 Green-winged Teal was made 25 Oct (Richard Kinney, Pat Issacson) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro*.

Redhead – The Redhead that summered at Wichita Ranch stock pond along US 290 east of Brenham, *Washington*, continued to 24 Aug (Darrell Vollert).

Surf Scoter – In addition to the Surf Scoter that showed up at Hornsby Bend, *Travis* 4-9 Nov (m.ob.), a first year male appeared at Lakeside Park, The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 23-24 Nov (†Krien VerBerkmoes III, †Gene Prejean, ph. Clair Moore, Todd McGrath, ph. †Raymond Nojek).

Red-breasted Merganser – A noteworthy Red-breasted Merganser was at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 20 Nov (Louis Debetaz).

Least Grebe – A second record for much-birded *Brazos* is two Least Grebes 2-9 Sep (ph. John Hale, m.ob.) in a flooded depression on Varisco Lane in the far western part of the county, near the Brazos River.



© Cindie Dillard, Brazos County, 2 September

Magnificent Frigatebird – Hurricane Harvey first hit the coast at Port Aransas and Rockport on 25 Aug, bringing with it many species rarely seen inland. Five Magnificent Frigatebirds (3 ad., 2 imm.) reached Lake Somerville at Welch Park, *Burleson* 26 Aug (ph. Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes, Steve Glover). Five frigatebirds also reached Lake Conroe, *Montgomery* 28 Aug (†J.S. Kobes). The next day, 29 Aug (ph. Simon Kiacs, Corina Giron), a single Magnificent Frigatebird was at Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes*. On 30 Aug (†Michael B. Cooper) one flew over the home in Oakhurst, *Montgomery*.



© Simon Kiacz, Gibbons Creek Reservoir, 26 August

Brown Booby – Another likely Hurricane Harvey event was a Brown Booby at John D. Parker East Texas Fish Hatchery, *Jasper* 29 Aug–12 Sep (ph. Amy Kocurek).



© Amy Kocurek, Jasper County, 11 September

Brown Pelican – Although Brown Pelicans at Lake Livingston seem to be a regular event in recent years, the pelicans are now showing up elsewhere in East Texas. This season's sightings include: Lake Palestine, *Henderson* 5 Sep (Teri Dickinson), Lake Livingston, *Polk-San Jacinto* 30 Sep (ph. Ryan Shaw) and 29 Oct (Steve Glover, Greg Cook), Lake O'the Pines, *Marion* 13 Oct (ph. Kristi Thomas), and Lake Conroe, *Walker* 6 Nov (ph. Chuck Berthoud).

American Bittern – An early American Bittern was at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 11-12 Sep (Carol Wells, Cliff Shackelford) and was seen again 1 Oct (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

Glossy Ibis – Up to 3 Glossy Ibises were described 9 Aug (†Richard Kinney, Pat Issacson) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro*.

White-faced Ibis – Unusually common this fall for *Brazos*, White-faced Ibises congregated at ponds near the Texas A&M University Riverside campus in the western part of the county 14 Aug-2 Oct (m.ob.) with high counts of 40 28-29 Aug (John Hale, Simon Kiacz) and 49 on 29 Sep (Mark McDermott).

Roseate Spoonbill – A Roseate Spoonbill flew low over Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 16 Sep (David Wolf), the only report for the Central Pineywoods and #218 on Wolf's property list.

Osprey – Perhaps aided by Hurricane Harvey, about a week earlier than typical, an Osprey reached Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes* 26 Aug (†Simon Kiacs, Corina Giron) and another arrived at Lake Somerville, *Burleson* and *Washington* the same day (†Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes, †Steve Glover).

Swallow-tailed Kite – Very rare as far north as *Angelina*, a Swallow-tailed Kite was over Lufkin 31 Aug (Asa Vermeulen).

Mississippi Kite – David Wolf reported, "After sporadic sightings of Mississippi Kites in Carrizo Creek (east of Nacogdoches) all summer, on Aug 13 a juvenile about to fledge was in and out of a nest in a tall pine while the adults brought food (Susie Lower). This is one of very few confirmed breeding records for the area. 1-4 were also seen regularly over various parts of Nacogdoches town from June to early August and it is likely that they nested here too (m. obs.). Certainly this species is increasing in the Nacogdoches area in the summer. They were also present in the Diboll, Huntington and Crown Colony areas in Angelina County, and by mid-August they were appearing more widely, as wandering birds moved around and migrants appeared."

Cooper's Hawk – An early Cooper's Hawk flew over Brenham, *Washington* 14 Aug (Darrell Vollert).

Bald Eagle – A high count for early in the season, at least 15 Bald Eagles were spotted around the TX 147 causeway of Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine* 11 Oct (David Wolf).

White-tailed Hawk – Only the second record for *Washington*, a second-year White-tailed Hawk flew and then perched in the Brazos River bottoms east of Chappell Hill 10 Sep (Darrell Vollert).

Broad-winged Hawk – A tardy Broad-winged Hawk passed over Conroe, *Montgomery* 24 Oct (†John Pike).

Swainson's Hawk – Unusually late was a Swainson's Hawk passing over *Liberty*, north of Dayton 30 Nov (†Collett Micallef, Paul Micallef).

Purple Gallinule – The first fall record for *Grimes* (and only 2 spring records for the county) was a Purple Gallinule at Gibbons Creek Reservoir 1 Sep (Sandy Dillard, Cindie Dillard).

Black-necked Stilt – Typically rare in summer and fall in *Brazos*, a large concentration of up to 22 Black-necked Stilts continued from 4 Jul through 16 Sep (Mark McDermott, m.ob.) in ponds in the western part of the county.

American Avocet – A late departure for American Avocet in *Brazos*, one was still present 28 Nov (†John Hale) at Pitts Road pond where up to 7 had been present since 14 Jul.

Black-bellied Plover – The ninth record for *Burleson*, but the first photo-documented Black-bellied Plover was 31 Aug (ph.†Ronald Newhouse) at the turf farms in the Brazos River bottoms.



© Ronald Newhouse, Burleson County, 31 August

American Golden-Plover – Rare in fall in the Central Brazos Valley (8 prior records since 1972), the only sighting this season was 2-3 at Fazzino Rd, *Brazos* 9-10 Sep (John Hale, m.ob.).

Semipalmated Plover – Infrequently reported in fall in the Central Brazos Valley (7 reports since the first in 1980), this season 1-5 were seen at 6 locations in *Brazos*, *Burleson*, and *Washington* 7 Aug-9 Sep (ph. John Hale, Darrell Vollert, Ron Newhouse, Simon Kiacz, Mark McDermott).

Ruddy Turnstone – One day after Hurricane Harvey made landfall, a locally rare Ruddy Turnstone appeared at Gibbons Creek Reservoir 26 Aug (ph. Simon Kiacs, Corina Giron); it is a first record for *Grimes*.



© Simon Kiacs, Gibbons Creek Reservoir, 26 August

Sanderling – Three sightings of locally-rare Sanderlings could be hurricane related: Welch Park, Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 26 Aug (ph. Greg Cook, Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes), Pitts Road pond, *Brazos* 31 Aug (ph. Ronald Newhouse), and 2 at the turf farms, Brazos River bottoms, *Burleson* 31 Aug (Ronald Newhouse). Another 8 Sanderlings and only the second *Montgomery* record in eBird was at Lake Woodlands 15 Sep (Raymond Nojek).

Dunlin – The only ne Texas report this season, 8 Dunlin were at Eastman Chemical Talley Bottoms, *Harrison* 6 Nov (†Mark Edmund, †David Brotherton).

Semipalmated Sandpiper – This season brought an unusually large number of reports of Semipalmated Sandpipers at 8 locations within the Central Brazos Valley 20 Aug-27 Sep (m.ob.), the most notable being a single at Lake Limestone dam area 11 Sep (Steve Glover, Michelle Summers), a first fall record for *Robertson*.

Willet – The first *Brazos* record since 1999, with prior records in 1977 and 1983, 1-2 Willets were at Sims Lane and Pitts Road pond 29 Aug-21 Sep (ph.†Simon Kiacz, †Sandy Dillard, Cindie Dillard).



© Simon Kiacz, Brazos County, 29 August

Wilson's Phalarope – A bit early and a high count, 40 Wilson's Phalaropes were at Pitts Road pond, Brazos 16 Aug (ph. Ronald Newhouse). Phalaropes remained in the area through 29 Sep.



© Ronald Newhouse, Brazos County, 16 August

Laughing Gull – A Laughing Gull was inland at Lake Somerville, *Burleson/Washington* 26 Aug (†Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes, Steve Glover). A minimum high count of 120 Laughing Gulls were reported at Lake Livingston, *San Jacinto/Polk* 30 Sep (Ryan Shaw) and some remained until 29 Oct.

Herring Gull – Remarkably earlier than prior records, 2 Herring Gulls were at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 26 Aug (†David Brotherton) and is likely another hurricane displaced bird.

Least Tern – A first county record for *Grimes*, 3 ad. and 3 juv. Least Terns were likely hurricane-pushed to Gibbons Creek Reservoir 26 Aug (ph. Simon Kiacs, Corina Giron). Likewise, a first county record for *Washington* were 2 Least Terns 26 Aug (†Greg Cook, Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes) at Lake Somerville and these were also seen on the *Burleson* side.



© Simon Kiacs, Gibbons Creek Reservoir, 26 August

Caspian Tern – Although very few prior August records in the Central Brazos Valley for Caspian Terns, Hurricane Harvey brought singles to Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes* 26 Aug (ph. †Simon Kiacs, Corina Giron) and the same day (†Greg Cook, Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes) to Lake Somerville, both *Burleson* and *Washington*.

Black Tern – Black Terns passed through earlier than usual at Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 3 Aug (†Ronald Newhouse) and at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* the same day (Cheryl Niemeier, Joyce Niemeier, Debbi Haile). On the late side, a Black Tern was at Cox Cemetery, *Brazos* 28 Oct (†Bruce Neville).

Common Tern – Rare in the Central Brazos Valley, a Common Tern was photographed at Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 3 Aug (ph. Ronald Newhouse) and 3 more were at Overlook Park, Lake Somerville, *Washington* 27 Sep (†James White).



© Ronald Newhouse, Lake Bryan, 3 August

Royal Tern – It takes a tropical storm to push Royal Terns into the Central Brazos Valley, so again this fall Hurricane Harvey brought 2 Royal Terns to Sims Lane, *Brazos* 28 Aug (ph. John Hale), thus establishing a first county record. In East Texas, a Royal Tern was at Trinity River N.W.R., *Liberty* 7 Oct (Shelli Ellerbe).



© John Hale, Brazos County, 28 August

Burrowing Owl – Rare throughout most of the Central Brazos Valley, there are a few records of Burrowing Owl in *Robertson*, yet the 21 Nov (ph. Alberto Manterola) sighting near Calvert is still noteworthy.

Short-eared Owl – The first area sighting in 20 years applies to a Short-eared Owl found in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 9 Nov (Charles Dean Fisher).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – Very late for the central Pineywoods, a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird lingered in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* to 7 Nov (David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf).

Green Kingfisher – A female Green Kingfisher has been at Evans Gully, at Lone Star College, *Montgomery* since at least 1 Jan 2006 and was last reported 8 Aug (Michael B. Cooper).

Golden-fronted Woodpecker – An out-of-range and probable first county record for *Houston*, a Golden-fronted Woodpecker was carefully described 24 Nov (†Barrett Riess) at CR 2210 north of Wheeler Springs.

Crested Caracara – Crested Caracaras are still a rarity in much of East Texas and a sighting 11 Nov (†Bob White) near Alto may be a first record for *Cherokee*. The few other caracara reports this season were in *Rusk*, *Henderson*, and *Bowie* where they have been seen previously.

American Kestrel – Local breeding has yet to be confirmed for a pair of American Kestrels present each summer at a metal utility pole near Carter Lake, *Brazos* since 2013 and last reported 14 Aug (Linda Hale).

Willow Flycatcher – A late Willow Flycatcher was at Millican Reserve, *Brazos* 23 Sep (†Bruce Neville, et al.).

Black Phoebe – Likely the same Black Phoebe that visited the Brazos Center, *Brazos* 18-23 Feb returned to the same park 23 Oct (Herb Thron) and has stayed through the period (many photos, m.ob.)



© Mary Richards, Brazos Center Park, 31 October

Vermilion Flycatcher – Two locally-rare Vermilion Flycatchers that visited last winter at Old Sour Lake, *Hardin* have turned up again since 30 Sep+ (ph. Ryan Shaw). Also rare in the central Pineywoods, a male was near Huntington, *Angelina* 7 Oct (ph. James Childress) and an immature male was at the TX 147 Causeway, Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine* 11 Oct (David Wolf).

Couch's Kingbird – Widely disbursed out-of-range sightings of calling Couch's Kingbirds include 3 at Katy Prairie, *Waller* 15 Oct (†Bob Honig), 2 at the Stephen F. Austin State University campus, *Nacogdoches* 4 Nov (†David Wolf), and 5 at Brenham, *Washington* (†Darrell Vollert).

Fish Crow – A high count of 18 Fish Crows were calling in the Kroger parking in Oakhurst, Montgomery 30 Aug (Michael B. Cooper).

Common Raven – A Common Raven east of its normal range was identified in Marlin, *Falls* 6 Aug (†Angie Westmoreland).

Bank Swallow – An unusually high count of 75 Bank Swallows 29 Aug (Simon Kiacz) at Sims Lane, *Brazos* may be storm related.

Ovenbird – Only the second record for *Grimes* and the first in fall, an Ovenbird was at Camp Allen 30 Sep (John O'Brien). Likely a first county record for *Anderson*, another Ovenbird was at Iveys NA near Elkhart 4 Oct (†Robert Snow). Yet another was at The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 16 Oct (Gene Prejean).

Prothonotary Warbler – A late-departing Prothonotary Warbler was at Lake Wright Patman, *Bowie* 11 Sep (†Susan Heath).

Hooded Warbler – Nesting Hooded Warblers were present at the Orwig farm at Antioch, *Sheby* until the last adult male was captured on Birdcam 15 Oct (ph. Susan Orwig).

Palm Warbler – Providing the second fall record for *Grimes*, a Palm Warbler was present near Shiro 8 Nov (ph.†Christian Walker).

Black-throated Green Warbler – A late migrant Black-throated Green Warbler passed through Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 8 Nov (Charles Dean Fisher), surpassing the previous record by 2 days.

Wilson's Warbler – Late Wilson's Warblers include a male at Nelsonville, *Austin* 8 Nov (Darrell Vollert) and another Wilson's at Lone Star College, Kingwood, *Montgomery* 20 Nov (Michael B. Cooper).

Clay-colored Sparrow – An early Clay-colored Sparrow was at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 8 Sep (David Wolf). The only other Clay-colored reported passing through East Texas was a late one 4 Nov (Andrew Lydeard) at Mineola Nature Preserve, *Wood*.

Fox Sparrow – Although a Fox Sparrow arriving 12 Nov (Linda Price) in *Harrison* was on schedule, 3 in the Davilla area 18 Nov (†Nancy Webber, †T. Jay Adams, †Byron Stone) were early for *Milam*.

White-throated Sparrow – Early for the central Pineywoods was a White-throated Sparrow 22 Sep (David Bell) at Sabinetown, *Sabine*.

Vesper Sparrow – Tied for the earliest arrival date in the Central Prairie, a Vesper Sparrow was at a ranch near Calvert, *Robertson* 22 Oct (†Sandy Dillard, Alberto Manterola, Mark McDermott).

Summer Tanager – Late Summer Tanagers were reported near The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 11 Nov (†Krien VerBerkmoes III) and Loco Valley, *Nacogdoches* 13 Nov (Ruth Heino).

Scarlet Tanager – Since Scarlet Tanagers are rare fall migrants through the Pineywoods, it is surprising to have 3 reports this season: singles at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 8 Sep (David Wolf), Caddo Lake S.P., *Harrison* 11 Sep (†Susan Heath), and Lufkin, *Angelina* 2 Oct (†Theresa Mathis, Daniel Allen).

Painted Bunting – A Painted Bunting lingered in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* until 9 Oct (David Wolf).

Baltimore Oriole – A very late imm. male Baltimore Oriole was still at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 1 Nov (David Wolf).

Purple Finch – A very early Purple Finch was seen 31 Oct (Cliff Shackelford) in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*.

Red Crossbill – An exciting find at Lake Palestine, *Anderson* was a Red Crossbill 15 Nov (†Aaron Boone). Prior to this date, there are only about 10 records for Red Crossbill since 1996 in East Texas.

American Goldfinch – Early American Goldfinches were single males 21 Aug (ph. Don Shipp) in Nash, *Bowie* and 26 Aug (Eric Spink) in Texarkana, *Bowie*.

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