

Spring 2017: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from over 84,000 sightings from 1 March to 31 May 2017.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, central Pineywoods, spring season. "Spring came early this year, after a very mild winter without late freezes, and the vegetation responded in kind, with many plants leafing-out and/or flowering before expected. Winter resident birds seemed to leave early, likely in response to the mild conditions, but most summer residents arrived 'on schedule' and were not especially early, with a few exceptions. Cool fronts and associated rain and stormy weather were regular right up through the end of May, but they did not drop large numbers of migrants in our area, and no really big or dramatic 'fallouts' occurred this spring. Apparently the timing of the passage of these fronts was such that the migrants were not caught over our area. In spite of this, most of our regular migrants were found at least once, albeit in lesser frequency than some years. What seemed lacking was the usual horde of easily-found colorful orioles, grosbeaks, buntings and swarms of warblers that make our so spring season so special. Stormy April 27 was perhaps the best single day. It brought a good fallout of migrants to some areas (Sabinetown on Toledo Bend; David Bell) and Caddoan Mounds State Park (Brent Burt), but dropped very few in others (Pecan Park in Nacogdoches (David Wolf) and Old Orchard Park in Diboll (Louis Debetaz)). Shorebirds are a scarce treat inland here in the Pineywoods, but local observers have learned to check the Angelina County and Nacogdoches Airports for them during wet stormy weather, and this paid off this spring when several minor fallouts were detected. Most moved on very quickly as the storms abated."

Bert Frenz, areas outside of central Pineywoods, spring season, "Contrasting to David Wolf's report a somewhat different picture emerges when looking at the East Texas area outside of the central Pineywoods David refers to. Some species appeared earlier than historical records, notably Chuck-Will's-Widow, Roseate Spoonbill, Osprey, Great Crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, and Indigo Bunting. More of difference was noted in late departures. While David comments, "most ducks disappeared by the end of February," an unusually large number of ducks were reported elsewhere late in the season: Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Redhead, Bufflehead. Other examples of late departures are Northern Harrier, Warbling Vireo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch, American Redstart, Field Sparrow."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

American Wigeon – In the central portion of the East Texas Pineywoods, most ducks disappeared by the end of February with the exception of a high count of 75 American Wigeons at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 4 Mar (Louis Debetaz).

Cinnamon Teal – Good sightings for East Texas are two reports of Cinnamon Teal, a single adult male at Sparks Lane, *Bowie* 7 Mar (Richard Parsons) and two drakes at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus* 16 Mar (†Anthony Hewetson).

Northern Shoveler – At Richland Creek W.M.A. Northern Shovelers were present all season mostly on the *Freestone* side with a peak of 500 19 Apr (Richard Kinney) and 10 still present on the late date of 30 May (Richard Kinney, Patricia Isaacson) on the *Navarro* side.

Northern Pintail – Up to 10 Northern Pintails were present at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone/Navarro* throughout the season including the late month of May with the last report 30 May (Richard Kinney, Patricia Isaacson) on the *Navarro* side.

Redhead – A late Redhead lingered to at least 25 May (Darrell Vollert) at Wichita Ranch stock pond between Brenham and Chappell Hill, *Washington*.

Bufflehead – A Bufflehead lingered near Athens, *Henderson* 13 May (Mike Leamon).

Hooded Merganser – An impressively high count of 85 Hooded Mergansers, mostly females, were present at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 16 March and 2 females were still present 22 Apr (David Wolf).

Eared Grebe – The only Eared Grebe reported in the Pineywoods this season was one at Lakeside Park, The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 19 Mar (Raymond Nojek).

White-winged Dove – David Wolf reports, “White-winged Doves are slowly colonizing Nacogdoches and this spring brought the most reports yet.” Four reports included Central Heights, Pecan Park and the SFASU campus 16 Apr–14 May (David Wolf et al.).

Black-billed Cuckoo – For a scarce species in East Texas, 3 reports this season is impressive: 24 Apr (†Dalton Scheuring, Morgan Berquist) near Kountze, *Hardin*, 6 May (Colette Micallef) at Micallef woods, off Hwy 321, 11 mi. n. of *Liberty*, and 7 May (Happy King) at Sabine National Forest, *Shelby*.

Chuck-Will's-Widow – An early record for Chuck-Will's-Widow occurred 26 Mar (Laura Sare) at a home near College Station, *Brazos*. The earliest previous local record was 29 Mar 1989.

Sora – Although it may be a fairly widespread (though undetected) migrant in the central Pineywoods, a Sora flushed at the Nacogdoches Airport, *Nacogdoches* 30 Apr (David Wolf, Robert Truss) was a surprise.

Purple Gallinule – Far from common in East Texas, Purple Gallinules were reported at multiple locations this season. At Martin Dies S.P., *Jasper*, 1-3 were found 21 Apr-29 May (m.ob.) with the peak count 21 Apr (Ron Weeks, Tony Frank). Two were at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 29 Apr (Louis Debetaz, Robert Truss), the only regular location in the central Pineywoods. One was at CR 3510, *Camp* 29 Apr (ph. David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) and yet another was near Old Lake, *Henderson* 13 May (Mike Leamon).

Common Gallinule – Martin Dies S.P., *Jasper/Tyler* had an impressive number of Common Gallinules 3 Mar-28 May (m.ob.) with up to 17 on the *Tyler* side 3 Mar (Ted Drozdowski), up to 20 on the *Jasper* side 14 Mar (†Jay & Amy Parker), and the same number there 21 Apr (Tony Frank, Ron Weeks).

Sandhill Crane – Typically, Sandhill Cranes avoid the East Texas Pineywoods, so two reports there this season are noteworthy: 54 reported 2 Mar (ph. Brent Spink) at Bringle (Waterworks) Lake, *Bowie*, and one heard repeatedly on Lone Star Trail, *San Jacinto* 15 Mar (Karl Poetzl).

Whooping Crane – Presumably from the Louisiana flock, an adult Whooping Crane briefly stopped at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds, *Nacogdoches* 17 Mar (Carol Wells), but was no longer present a few hours after first reported.

Black-necked Stilt – Unexpected in the East Texas Pineywoods, a single Black-necked Stilt was reported 28-30 Mar (†Mark Edmund) at Eastman Chemical Talley Bottoms, se of Longview, *Harrison* and 2 were found there 5 Apr (Mark Edmund, †David Brotherton). These are the only *Harrison* records on eBird. Also unexpected was a single stilt in a flooded field off Hwy. 105, *Hardin* 7 Apr (John Mariani) and yet another was found 22-23 May (David Wolf) in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* after heavy rain on the 22nd. The latter sighting is only the fourth *Nacogdoches* record in almost 50 years.

American Avocet – Two American Avocets were a good find 12 Mar (Steve Glover, Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes) at the Lake Trinity – Sebastopol area, *Trinity* but more unexpected were 4 at Ellison Creek Reservoir, *Morris* 11 Apr (ph. Michael Mathews), the only record for *Morris* on eBird.

Whimbrel – A Whimbrel was reported 30 Apr at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* (Evan Ward) and the same day on the *Navarro* side (Janet Cook, Laura Wilson). Perhaps more exciting was a flock of 18 flying against the wind at CR450, *Milam* 30 Apr (†Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes).

Hudsonian Godwit – Not often seen in *Brazos*, 2-5 Hudsonian Godwits were on a pond off Pitts Rd. about a mile from Hwy. 21 on 5-6 May (John Hale, m.ob.).

Marbled Godwit – A single Marbled Godwit was at Welch Park, Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 30 Apr (†Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes). Although the species is mentioned in the 1994 Kutac-Curran book as an occasional migrant at the lake, this is the first dated record we have uncovered.

Baird's Sandpiper – With a dearth of migrants this spring in the central Pineywoods, David Wolf commented, “Somewhat surprisingly, Baird's Sandpiper was one of the most frequently noted shorebirds this spring, over a prolonged period from 30 Mar-23 May.” Multiple reports of up to 6 birds came from Angelina County Airport, *Angelina*, Nacogdoches Airport, *Nacogdoches*, and Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – A rare inland spring migrant in the central Pineywoods, 15 Buff-breasted Sandpipers visited Angelina County Airport 16 Apr (Louis Debetaz) following a tremendous rainstorm that day.

Short-billed Dowitcher – Hardly ever reported in the Central Brazos Valley and not previously documented in *Brazos*, a single Short-billed Dowitcher was found 15 Apr (ph. John Hale), then described 22 Apr (†Mark McDermott, Linda Hale) at Cotrone Dix Lane, Bryan. Up to 2 were subsequently reported through 6 May (m.ob.).

Willet – Rarely reported in the Central Brazos Valley outside of Lake Somerville, one was again reported at the lake this spring 30 Apr (Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes) at Welch Park, *Burleson*.

Laughing Gull – Far from the coast, a Laughing Gull visited Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 11 May (Richard Kinney). From 2-20 Laughing Gulls were reported at various locations around Lake Livingston, *Polk-San Jacinto* 12 Mar-5 Apr (m.ob.). Two more Laughing Gulls were at Lake Trinity Sebastopol area, *Trinity* 5 Apr (Steve Glover, Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes).

Lesser Black-backed Gull – The best chance of seeing a Lesser Black-backed Gull in the East Texas Pineywoods is at Lake Livingston and again 12 Mar (Greg Cook, †Steve Glover, Blaine Carnes) and 19 Mar (†John Berner) one was near the spillway on the *San Jacinto* side.

Least Tern – Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro* was the site for an impressive count of 13 Least Terns 27 May (David Brotherton).

Gull-billed Tern – Out of place was a Gull-billed Tern strangely inland at Richland Creek W.M.A. after storms 30 Apr (ph. Evan Ward). This is a first county record for *Freestone*.



Gull-billed Tern © Evan Ward

Caspian Tern – Unexpected in the central Pineywoods were 5 Caspian Terns at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 4 May (David Wolf), the day of a cool front.

Brown Booby – Undoubtedly the most unexpected bird to show up in the Central Brazos Valley was a Brown Booby at private Stanmire Lake, *Leon*. First noticed on the lake by local resident Bob Perrenot ~22 Apr and again the weekend of 29 Apr, it was documented and photographed 5-7 May (ph. Christopher Smith) and again observed 10 May (ph. Cindie Dillard, †Sandy Dillard). Brown Booby is a Texas Review Species and would be a first record for *Leon* and a first for the Central Brazos Valley.



Brown Booby, © Christopher Smith

Brown Pelican – Inland Brown Pelicans have been reported almost every seasonal report in recent years and this time it is one at Trinity River N.W.R., *Liberty* 17 Mar (Jay & Amy Parker).

American Bittern – Scarce in East Texas in March an American Bittern was at Bringle (Waterworks) Lake, *Bowie* 2 Mar (Brent Sprink) where it had also been seen 24 Jan. Another was at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 16 Mar (David Wolf) and reportedly had been seen by W.M.A. staff for several weeks.

White Ibis – The season high count of White Ibis was 85 over Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 30 Apr (David Wolf, Robert Truss) until an impressive 275+ showed up there with the 4 May cool front (David Wolf, Susie Lower).

Glossy Ibis – One to five Glossy Ibises were in a flock of 20 *Plegadis* sp. in flooded fields along Hwy. 90, *Liberty* 17 Mar (ph. Jay & Amy Parker).

Roseate Spoonbill – Far too early by historical standards, 4 Roseate Spoonbills were in bare snags along with cormorants at Hwy. 356 Causeway, *Polk* 12 Mar (†Steve Glover, Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes). Also early was one 31 Mar (†James White) at Flagpond Lane pond near Lake Somerville, *Washington*.

Osprey – An early migrant Osprey flew over western *Nacogdoches* 3 Mar (Carol Wells).

Northern Harrier – Definitely unseasonal, a female Northern Harrier was near Huxley, *Shelby* 30 May (Cliff Shackelford). Other late departing harriers passed over *Nacogdoches* 20 Apr and 4 May (David Wolf).

Swainson's Hawk – Typically Swainson's Hawks migrate farther west than the one over Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 24 Apr and another over Nacogdoches Airport on the day of the cool front 4 May (both David Wolf).

Zone-tailed Hawk – Quite remarkably out-of-range Zone-tailed Hawks were reported at 2 widely separated locations. Two were at Hwy. 96, south of Center, *Shelby* 11 Mar (†Darrell Schiffman) and a single at Woodway, Lake Waco, *McLennan* 25 Mar (†Matthew York).

Crested Caracara – Crested Caracara continues its push into East Texas which this season included 2 reports in *San Jacinto* where we have not previously received a confirmed sighting. Two birds flew together off Hwy. 150 12 Mar (†Steve Glover, Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes) and one was in flight at Lone Star Trail 15 Mar (Carl Poetzl).

Great Crested Flycatcher – An early Great Crested Flycatchers was heard 14 Mar (†Jay & Amy Parker) at Big Thicket N.P, *Hardin* and 19 Mar (Ryan Shaw) at the same location.

Western Kingbird – A rare migrant at the eastern edge of its range, single Western Kingbirds were reported at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 30 Apr and Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 1 May (both David Wolf).

Eastern Kingbird – On the early edge of arrival dates, 2 Eastern Kingbirds were at Angelina County Airport 1 Apr (Louis Debetaz), while season high counts of migrants over *Nacogdoches* were 60+ 30 Apr and 65+ 4 May (both David Wolf).

White-eyed Vireo – While common in *Brazos*, 63 White-eyed Vireos at Lick Creek Park, College Station 24 May (Bruce Neville) is a surprising count.

Bell's Vireo – *Brazos* has only a small scattering of historical records for Bell's Vireo in spring, perhaps because it may be misidentified as another species, so a photographed Bell's Vireo 24 Apr (ph. Ron Newhouse) is noteworthy at Brison Park.



Bell's Vireo © Ron Newhouse

Warbling Vireo – Late migrant Warbling Vireos were reported 23 May (Keith Arnold) at Country Club Lake, Bryan, *Brazos*, 27 May (Mike Wease) at 3750, *Wood*, and 28 May (Linda Price) at Nasturium Rd., near Snapdragon, *Upshur*. Normally, last passage dates are the first half of May.

Red-breasted Nuthatch – After a good winter season for Red-breasted Nuthatches, one lingered at feeders in Douglass, *Nacogdoches* to the very late date of 16 May (Carol Wells).

American Pipit – American Pipits seemed to be everywhere 24 Mar (James White) at Welch Park, Lake Somerville, *Burleson* when the observer stopped counting at 200 and yet more flocks were flying in. Still there on 31 Mar he reached a count of 140 pipits.

Purple Finch – Purple Finch lingered in the Pineywoods until 25 Mar at Sabinetown, *Sabine*, and then a very late female, perhaps impaired, showed up there 12 Apr (David Bell).

Pine Siskins – Pine Siskins were sparse this winter and the last to leave were 9 on 24 Apr (David Bell) at Sabinetown, *Sabine*.

Lesser Goldfinch – East of their normal range, two Lesser Goldfinches at feeders in College Station 10 May (ph. Helen Baines) provide only the third county record for *Brazos*.





Lesser Goldfinch © Helen Baines

Brewster's Warbler – At Brison Park, College Station, *Brazos*, a Brewster's Warbler was carefully described 9 May (†Sandy Dillard, †Mark McDermott).

Hooded Warbler – Hooded Warblers are not known to nest in *Brazos*, so a male singing 12-24 May (John Hale, Bruce Neville) at Lick Creek Park is curious.

American Redstart – A late date for a migrant female American Redstart was 26 May (†Marion Weidemann) at Brothers Pond Park, College Station, *Brazos*.

Cerulean Warbler – A declining species and now rarely reported in the East Texas Pineywoods, Cerulean Warblers were found in better than normal numbers, including sightings of singles at Pecan Park, Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 22 Apr and 12 May (David Wolf), at a Nacogdoches birdbath 8 May (Cliff Shackelford, Julie Shackelford), and at Rose Hill Acres, *Hardin* 5 May (John Mariani).

Blackpoll Warbler – Although the rarest of regular spring warblers in the East Texas Pineywoods, single Blackpoll Warblers were reported 4 times this season: in Sabinetown, *Sabine* 27 Apr (David Bell), at Lake Wright Patman, *Cass* 6 May (ph. Luanne Brotherton, David Brotherton), at Paul G. Boorman Trail, Longview, *Gregg* 6 May (Greg Cook, Blaine Carnes, Ted Drozdowski, Steve Glover), and at Pecan Park, Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 14 May (Tyson Hart).

Palm Warbler – Last reported in *Brazos* 12 years ago, a Palm Warbler was a good find for the Rio Brazos Audubon Big Sit 29 Apr (ph. John Hale, †Mark McDermott et al.) at Brison Park, College Station; it was still present the next day (m.ob.). Another was at Bryan, *Brazos* 30 Apr (Sandy Dillard).

Clay-colored Sparrow – The Clay-colored Sparrow found at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 24 Apr (David Wolf) is a scarce migrant this easterly.

Field Sparrow – Late departing Field Sparrows were 7 at Mining Company & Pleasant Hill Church, *Sabine* 24 May and one at Armadillo Rd., *Upshur* 27 May (both Linda Price).

Summer Tanager – Summer Tanagers usually do not arrive in *Nacogdoches* until April, so the one reported 9 Mar (Julie Shackelford) at the Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches may have wintered, though

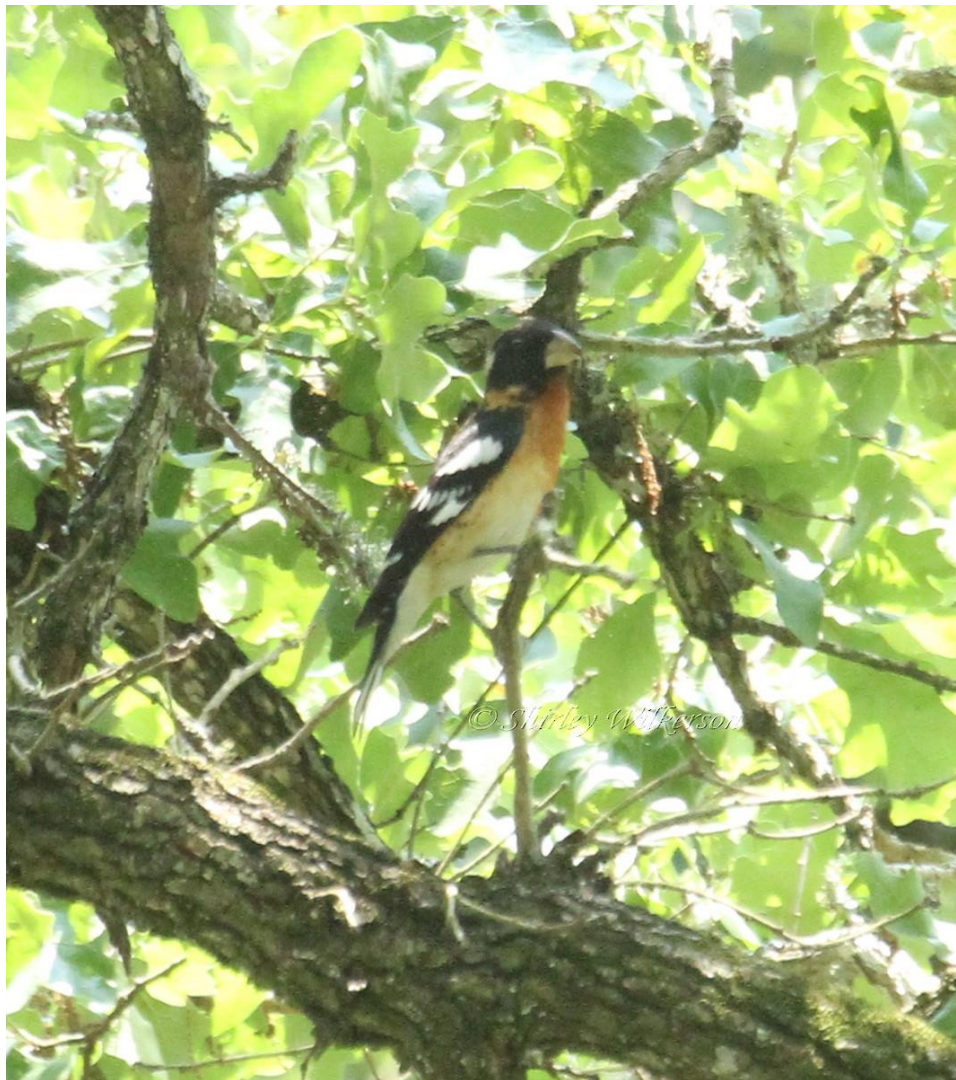
others were also early, including one at Dorr Creek Rd. 29 Mar (Cliff Shackelford, Julie Shackelford), and another in Carrizo Creek 30 Mar (Susie Lower). Elsewhere in the Pineywoods, 2 were found at Lake O' Pines, *Marion* 16 Mar (†Mike Dillon) and at Neches River N.W.R., *Cherokee* 23 Mar (Mike Dillon).

Scarlet Tanager – Not easily found in the central Pineywoods, away from the coast, this season brought 3 sightings: a male in Pecan Park 22 Apr (David Wolf), a pair there 23 Apr (David Wolf, Robert Truss), and a male over SFA Experimental Forest 24 Apr (David Wolf), all in *Nacogdoches*.

Western Tanager – An out-of-range male Western Tanager was at Lake Windcrest Golf Course, *Montgomery* 5 May (†Raymond Nojek).

Pyrrhuloxia – At the eastern edge of their range, a Pyrrhuloxia was reported at Marlin City Lakes, *Falls* 5 Mar (ph. Cindie Dillard, Sandy Dillard) and also at Old Marlin Lake Rd., *Falls* 2 Apr (ph. Alisha Flanary, Tom Flanary Jr.).

Black-headed X Rose-breasted Grosbeak – A Black-headed X Rose-breasted Grosbeak hybrid shows characteristics of both species. It was photographed at Kurten Cemetery Rd., *Brazos* 28 Apr (ph. Shirley Wilkerson).



Black-headed x Rose-breasted Grosbeak © Shirley Wilkerson

Indigo Bunting – Very early was an Indigo Bunting at feeders in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 29 Mar (Thelma & John Dalmas).

Bobolink – This season brought a plethora of Bobolink reports in the Pineywoods 27 Apr-12 May in *Cherokee, Freestone, Harrison, Henderson, Jasper, Panola, Rusk, and Titus*, with a high count of about 100 at County Line Rd., *Panola* 12 May (Linda Price, ph. Linda Gillespie). In the Central Brazos Valley where there is only one earlier record for *Robertson*, 4 Bobolinks were found at Wilcox Farm, se of Calvert, and another close by 23 May (Alberto Manterola).

Yellow-headed Blackbird – A male Yellow-headed Blackbird in a stand of regenerating longleaf pine was both in unusual habitat and very rare in *Sabine* near Fox Hunter's Hill 2 May (Cliff Shackelford). More typical, but still scarce, were 25 at a pond near Hwy. 21, western *Brazos* 6 May (John Hale).

Rusty Blackbird – A flock of ~70 Rusty Blackbirds so late in the season 9 Apr (Carol Wells) at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* is noteworthy.

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