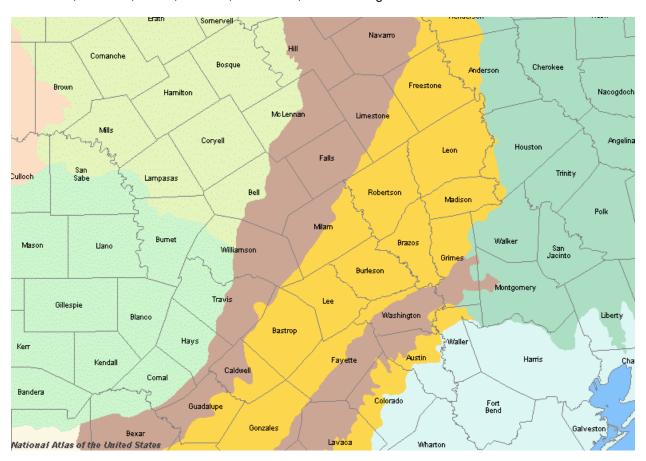
## Fall 2020: Central Oaks & Prairies of Texas

By Bert Frenz

This report is from 1 August to 30 November 2020. It includes sightings from the following counties: Austin, Bastrop, Brazos, Bell, Burleson, Falls, Fayette, Freestone, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Limestone, McLennan, Madison, Milam, Navarro, Robertson, and Washington.



## **MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:**

**Ross's Goose** – After a 7-year hiatus of Ross's Goose sightings in the Central Brazos Valley, this season brought over two dozen reports 21 Oct–28 Nov in *Brazos, Lee*, and *Robertson*.

**Greater Scaup** – Greater Scaup are a rarity in the Central Brazos Valley, with less than one sighting per year in the 10-county area. So, quite surprising is to have nine daily reports in *Brazos* 30 Oct–30 Nov

(m.ob.) at Lake Bryan and Finfeather Lake.



Greater Scaup, 29 Nov 2020, Finfeather Lake, Brazos Co. © Vaishali Katju

**Surf Scoter** – A second record for *Brazos* (the first was 9 Dec 1979), a single Surf Scoter was at Lake Bryan 4 Nov (Rhett Raibley, ph. Simon Kiacz) swimming with a raft of Ruddy Ducks. Others in the central oaks and prairies region include 1-3 at Hornsby Bend 16 Oct–9 Nov (Lisa Cole, m.ob.), 1-2 at Lake Georgetown, *Williamson* 6-20 Nov (ph. Tim Fennell, ph. Rich Kostecke), one at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park on Lake Travis, *Travis* 14 Nov (Susan Andres), and one at Granger Lake, *Williamson* 16 Nov (ph. Steven McDonald, ph. Rich Kostecke).

**Black Scoter** – The first record for *Brazos*, a single Black Scoter was at Lake Bryan 29 Oct (ph. Simon Kiacz, ph. Mark McDermott). Another first county record, this for *McLennan*, 2 were at Reynolds Creek

Park on Lake Waco 1 Nov (ph. Cheryl Wolfe).



Black Scoter, 29 Oct 2020, Lake Bryan, Brazos Co. © Simon Kiacz

Red-breasted Merganser – Although nearly annual in the Central Brazos Valley, Red-breasted Merganser has never reported as often and in such quantity as this fall. In *Brazos* at Lake Bryan, it was seen 30 Oct–29 Nov, with a peak count of 46 on 29 Nov (Simon Kiacz), and one was at Finfeather Lake 29 Nov (ph. Boris Novikov). Another was at Lake Somerville, Overlook Park, *Washington* 29 Nov (Michael

McCloy, Corina Giron, Keith Andringa).



Red-breasted Merganser, 29 Nov 2020 Finfeather Lake, Brazos Co. © Boris Novikov

**Black-billed Cuckoo** – Extremely rare in fall, a juvenile Black-billed Cuckoo was photographed in College Station, *Brazos* 25 Sep (ph Vaishali Katju).



Black-billed Cuckoo, 25 Sep 2020, College Station, Brazos Co. © Vaishali Katju

Anna's Hummingbird – A first record for *Bell*, an Anna's Hummingbird was at Salado 5-20 Sep (ph. Charlie Plimpton, ph. Noah Nei, ph. Randy Pinkston). Anna's Hummingbirds made a good showing in *Brazos* where they are rare, with singles 4-7 Oct (Mark McDermott, et al.) at a College Station residence, 25-28 Nov (ph. Kelley Sampson) at Navasota, *Grimes*, and 29 Nov (ph. Tyler Scott, Nicole Foley, ph. Simon Kiacz) at a residence in Austin's Colony Park, Bryan.



Anna's Hummingbird, 29 Nov 2020, Bryan, Brazos Co. © Tyler Scott

**Calliope Hummingbird** – A first record for *Milam*, an amazing count of up to 3 Calliope Hummingbirds visited a feeder near Gause 25 Nov+ (Donna Lewis). A fourth record for *Bell*, a female Calliope was at Belton 1 Nov (ph, Gil Eckrich).



Calliope Hummingbird 1 Nov 2020, Belton, Bell Co. © Gil Eckrich

Rufous Hummingbird – An enormous influx of Rufous Hummingbirds descended in the Central Brazos Valley at more than 14 locations in *Brazos*, *Grimes*, and *Lee* 10 Aug+ (m.ob.).



Rufous Hummingbird 21 Oct 2020, Steep Hollow, Brazos Co. © Bill Morris

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** – A first county record for *Fayette*, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird was at feeders near Rutersville 2-3 Nov (†Ron Braun, †Marcia Braun). Locally rare Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were seen at three locations in *Brazos*: a juvenile 3 Oct 2020 (Laura Sare) in College Station, a female 7 Nov (ph. Bill Morris) at Steep Hollow, and an immature male 22 Nov (Michael McCloy) at Bryan.



Broad-tailed Hummingbird 21 Oct 2020, Steep Hollow, Brazos Co. © Bill Morris

**King Rail** – A first *Brazos* record since 1973, a King Rail was heard repeatedly 26-28 Oct (Michael McCloy, Tyler Scott, Laura Sare) at the marsh behind Home Depot in College Station.

Virginia Rail – At the same *Brazos* marsh where the King Rail was heard, one to two Virginia Rails were heard and occasionally seen 5 Oct+ (Tyler Scott, m.ob.). Another was heard at Veterans Park 11-27 Oct (Simon Kiacz) and yet another was at F&B Road, College Station 13 Oct (Simon Kiacz).

American Coot – Rafts of up to 1200 American Coots were at Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 16-17 Oct (Michael McCloy).

Purple Gallinule – Purple Gallinules again nested at Carlos Lake, *Grimes* and counts up to 7 adults and juveniles were reported 8 Aug–6 Oct (Greg Page, T. Jay Adams, ph. Garett Hodne).

**Yellow Rail** – The last time a Yellow Rail was seen in *Brazos* was 1972 and it was at the same Moore Farms location as one flushed 16 Oct 2020 (John Hale).

Sandhill Crane – Near Caldwell, *Burleson* a high count of 647 Sandhill Cranes 10 Nov (Andrea Fox) was the sum of ten flocks with individual counts up to 135 per flock.

**Whooping Crane** – A mixed flock at Lake Bastrop 24 Oct (ph. Jason Leifester) included 6 Sandhill Cranes and 6 noticeably larger and whiter Whooping Cranes. It was the fifth record for *Bastrop*.



Whooping Crane 24 Oct 2020, Lake Bastrop, Bastrop Co. © Jason Leifester

American Avocet – Although American Avocets are not unexpected in *Brazos*, a count of 209, the tally of four separate groups at Lake Bryan 16 Oct (Michael McCloy), is the highest number ever recorded in the county.

Killdeer – Flocks of Killdeer, attracted to the turf farms at Sims Lane and FM159 in *Brazos*, repeatedly provided counts exceeding one hundred, topped by 425 8 Nov (Simon Kiaz).

**Snowy Plover** – Snowy Plover has not been seen in *Brazos* since 1980, so multiple sightings of 2 at Sims Lane turf farms 5-8 Sep (Michael McCloy) and one at nearby Fazzino Road 4 Oct (Michael McCloy) are surprising. Up to 10 Snowy Plovers were at Union Grove WMA, *Bell* 31 Aug–2 Sep (ph. Daniel Kelch)

Stilt Sandpiper – A high count of 45 Stilt Sandpipers is the highest ever for Lake Somerville; these were seen 22 Oct (Richard Kaskan) at the Birch Creek Unit of the state park, *Burleson*.

**Dunlin** – An unusually high number of sightings of Dunlin in the Central Brazos Valley include 2 at Lake Somerville SP Birch Creek Unit, *Burleson* 28 Aug (Laura Sare), 2 at the Brazos River bottoms of *Burleson* 26 Oct (Laura Sare), 6 at the Lake Somerville SP Nails Creek Unit, *Lee* 7 Nov (Jason Leifester), and 3+ at The Falls in Marlin, *Falls* 20 Nov (Richard Kaskan).

Red-necked Phalarope – A first for *Brazos*, a Red-necked Phalarope was at Sims Lane turf farms 23 Sep (ph. Rhett Raibley, Meredith Anderson, Corina Giron, ph. Michael McCloy, Mark McDermott, ph.





Red-necked Phalarope 23 Sep 2020, Sims Lane, Brazos Co. © Michael McCloy

**Sabine's Gull** – A first record for *Brazos*, a Sabine's Gull was at Lake Bryan 24-25 Sep (Corina Giron, m.ob.). A second record for *Williamson*, a Sabine's Gull was over Granger Lake 8-24 Sep (Brush Freeman, ph. Rich Kostecke, m.ob.). Another was at Hornsby Bend 10 Sep (ph. Jason Garcia).



Sabine's Gull 25 Sep 2020 Lake Bryan, Brazos Co. © Sid Ehlert

Least Tern – Up to 7 Least Terns visited Lake Bryan, Brazos 1 Aug-12 Sep (Corina Giron, ph. John Hale,

m.ob.)



Least Tern 26 Aug 2020, Lake Bryan, Brazos Co. © Shirley Wilkerson

**Royal Tern** – Only the second record for *Brazos*, a Royal Tern visited Lake Bryan 30 Aug–3 Sep (ph. Rhett Raibley, m.ob.)



Royal Tern 30 Aug 2020, Lake Bryan, Brazos Co. © Rhett Raibley

**Black Skimmer** – The first record for *Brazos* since 1977, a juvenile Black Skimmer was at Sims Lane turf farms 1-4 Aug (ph. Rhett Raibley, †Bruce Neville, m.ob.). Its occurrence may have been related to storms following Hurricane Hanna which made landfall in South Texas 25 Jul.



Black Skimmer 2 Aug 2020 Sims Lane, Brazos Co. © Michael McCloy

**Magnificent Frigatebird** – The second county record for *McLennan*, a Magnificent Frigatebird was photographed at Lake Waco 6-7 Nov (ph. Black Harrell). Another was circling above the peninsula at Lakeshore Park, Austin, *Travis* 21 Nov (Ryan Levine), and yet another circled over the dam at Granger Lake, *Williamson* 24 Nov (ph. Rich Kostecke).



Magnificent Frigatebird 24 Nov 2020, Granger Lake, Williamson Co. © Rich Kostecke

American White Pelican – Several large flocks of American White Pelicans, totally about 1000 birds, flew over Caldwell, *Burleson* 28 Sep 2020 (Andrea Fox).

Brown Pelican – A good inland find for *McLennan*, a juvenile Brown Pelican tarried at Trading House Creek Reservoir 31 Oct+ (John Muldrow, ph. Matthew York). Another juvenile was at Granger Lake, *Williamson* 1 Aug–11 Sep (Rich Kostecke, ph. Richard Kaskan, m.ob.)

Reddish Egret – An immature Reddish Egret was dancing at Welch Park, Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 21 Nov (Laura Sare).

Glossy Ibis – A second record for *Brazos*, a Glossy Ibis was at Sims Lane turf farms 5-7 Sep (John Hale, m.ob.)



Glossy Ibis 5 Sep 2020, Sims Lane turf farms, Brazos Co. © Simon Kiacz

White-faced Ibis – A high count for *Brazos*, 275 White-faced Ibis were estimated in large flocks congregating for roost 8 Sep (Simon Kiacz). Large numbers were present 1 Aug–28 Sep.

Roseate Spoonbill – A new high count for *Brazos* was 16 Roseate Spoonbills at Moore Farms 1 Aug (ph. John Hale).



Roseate Spoonbill 1 Aug 2020 Moore Farms, Brazos © John Hale

**Swallow-tailed Kite** – A good season for post-breeding Swallow-tailed Kites in the central oaks and prairies included one at Anderson-Tucker Ranch, *Robertson* 22-31 Aug (Alberto Manterola), one at Hwy 6 in *Grimes* 22 Aug (ph. John Hale), one at Bastrop S.P., *Bastrop* 31 Aug (Linda Ramirez), and another at Brenham, *Washington* 1 Sep (Darrell Vollert), one at Little Webberville Park, *Travis* 7 Sep (ph. Laurie



Swallow-tailed Kite 22 Aug 2020, Hwy 6, Grimes Co. © John Hale

Harris's Hawk – A fifth record for *McLennan* since 1963, a Harris's Hawk was at Trading House Creek Reservoir 19 Sep–4 Oct (Fay Ratta, ph. Matthew York). Only the second record for *Bell*, a Harris's Hawk was at Belton Lake 9 Oct (ph. Brad Burden).



Harris's Hawk 9 Oct 2020, Belton Lake, Bell Co. © Brad Burden

White-tailed Hawk – Once rarely seen in the Central Brazos Valley, sightings increased starting in 2013 and this fall season brought multiple sightings, including 1-2 at Brazos River Valley Trail, *Washington* 6-13 Aug (ph. Richard Kaskan, ph.† Gary Yoder), one at Fazinno Road, *Brazos* 13 Aug (ph. Simon Kiacz), 2 at Sims Lane 17-18 Oct (ph. Simon Kiacz, ph. Michael McCloy, ph. Shirley Wilkerson), one in *Grimes* 19 Oct (ph. Pix Hitchcock), and another at Sandy Point Road, *Brazos* 29 Nov (ph. Simon Kiacz).



White-tailed Hawk 17 Oct 2020, Sims Lane, Brazos Co. © Shirley Wilkerson

American Kestrel – A second nesting this year of a pair of American Kestrels near Carter Lake, *Brazos* produced 4 fledglings that were observed regularly 7 Aug–2 Sep until they dispersed and only the adults were seen 10-11 Sep (Linda Hale).

**Prairie Falcon** – A fourth record for *Navarro* (the first was in 1879), a Prairie Falcon was eating a songbird in an open field near Dawson 5 Nov (ph. Auliya Gurzenda).



Prairie Falcon 5 Nov 2020, Dawson, Navarro Co. © Auliya Gurzenda

Ash-throated Flycatcher – Irregularly seen in the Central Brazos Valley, single Ash-throated Flycatchers 16-21 Nov (ph. Simon Kiacz, Bill Eisele) at Sims Lane and 16-17 Nov (Simon Kiacz, et al.) at Leonard

Road, Brazos were good finds.



Ash-throated Flycatcher 21 Nov 2020, Sims Lane, Brazos Co. © Michael McCloy

Couch's Kingbird – The single Couch's Kingbird that has been reported in Brenham, *Washington* since 2013 continued 7 Aug+ (Darrell Vollert). More unusual were 2 at Anderson-Tucker Ranch, *Burleson* 17 Oct (Alberto Manterola), one at Austin's Colony, *Brazos* the same day (ph. Warren Hardin, et al.), another at Veterans Park, College Station 20 Oct (ph. Meredith Anderson), and yet another at Lake Somerville S.P. Birch Creek Unit, *Burleson* 22 Oct–1 Nov (ph. Richard Kaskan, Laura Sare). Two Couch's Kingbirds returned 24 Sep–30 Oct (Anand Chaudhary) to Moody Library on the Baylor University campus, *McLennan*, where they had resided the previous winter.

**Black Phoebe** – Two Black Phoebes at Reynolds Creek Park, Lake Waco 10-11 Nov (ph. Jeremy Ballard, Nathan Cowan) is only the second record for *McLennan*, the first way back in 1975.



Black Phoebe 10 Nov 2020, Lake Waco, McLennan Co. © Jeremy Ballard

Say's Phoebe – Locally rare Say's Phoebes were widespread in the Central Brazos Valley with sightings 11-27 Nov (ph. Simon Kiacz) at Moore Farms, *Brazos*, 22 Nov (ph. Matthew York) at Frances Road, *McLennan*, 22-29 Nov (Alberto Manterola) at Anderson-Tucker Ranch, *Robertson*, and 27 Nov (Shelia Hargis) at CR 418, *Milam* 



Say's Phoebe 27 Nov 2020, Milam Co. © Shelia Hargis

Bell's Vireo – Bell's Vireo is always a good find for *Brazos* and this season brought one 29 Sep–2 Oct (Vaishali Katju, ph. Cameron Johnson, †Michael McCloy) at a sewer line cut in Emerald Forest and

another heard 10 Oct (John Hale) at Moore Farms.



Bell's Vireo 2 Oct 2020, Emerald Forest, Brazos Co. © Vaishali Katju

Cassin's Vireo – Although Cassin's Vireo has been reported several times in the Central Brazos Valley, it has never been sufficiently documented to accept the species, until now. One was seen by many observers at Bryan City Cemetery, *Brazos* 30 Oct–2 Nov (Simon Kiacz, †Michael McCloy, audio Mark McDermott) and video-audio recorded 1 Nov (Meredith Anderson). A third record for *Williamson*, a

Cassin's Vireo was at Berry Springs Park 16 Oct (ph. Sebastian Casarez).



Cassin's Vireo 1 Nov 2020, Bryan City Cemetery, Brazos Co. © Michael McCloy

Red-breasted Nuthatch – It was a good fall season for Red-breasted Nuthatches in the central oaks and prairies region, with multiple reports 19 Sep+ in *Austin, Bastrop Bell, Brazos, Fayette, Grimes, Lee, McLennan, Navarro, Travis, Waller*, and *Williamson*.

Eastern Bluebird – Hardly rare, yet never is such high numbers, 85 Eastern Bluebirds were counted 29 Nov (Simon Kiacz) at Sandy Point Road, a count that surpasses all previous records for *Brazos*.

**Western Bluebird** – The last time a Western Bluebird was reported in *Brazos* was in 1949, so it is amazing to have multiple reports of up to 5 this fall 26 Nov+ (Simon Kiacz, m.ob.) at Bryan City Cemetery. The bluebirds were part of an eastern incursion this season that also included multiple sightings in *Travis* and *Williamson*.



Western Bluebird 28 Nov 2020, Bryan City Cemetery, Brazos Co. © Brandy Falise

**Mountain Bluebird** – Mountain Bluebirds were last seen in *Brazos* in 1963, and now 28 Nov+ (ph. John Hale, m.ob.) one was observed near the Brazos River at Kemp Road. Up to 20 Mountain Bluebirds were in *McLennan* 8 Nov+ (ph. John Muldrow, m.ob.), found mostly at Old Crawford Road and Trading House Creek Reservoir.



Mountain Bluebird 30 Nov 2020, Kemp Road, Brazos Co. © Mary Richards

American Pipit – Massive numbers totally 600-1900 American Pipits covered the turf farm at FM159 in *Brazos* 8-12 Nov (Simon Kiacz). The previous high count for the county was 400.

Purple Finch – A major eruption of Purple Finches invaded the Central Brazos Valley 30 Oct+ (Michael McCloy, m.ob.) with multiple sightings daily in *Austin, Brazos, Falls, Grimes, Lee, Milam, Waller*, and *Washington*. A high count of 10 were at Democrat Road, *Brazos* 21 Nov (Simon Kiacz).

Pine Siskin – Erratic Pine Siskins came in full force to the central oaks and prairies, with hundreds of reports 20 Sep+ in *Austin, Bastrop, Bell, Brazos, Burleson, Falls, Fayette, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Madison, McLennan, Milam, Navarro, Robertson, Travis, Waller, Washington,* and *Williamson.* A high count of 200 was summed from multiple flocks of 20-30 birds at Long Trussel Road, *Brazos* 14 Nov (Simon Kiacz).

Lesser Goldfinch – Becoming an annual occurrence in *Brazos* since 2017, a Lesser Goldfinch was photographed 6 Nov (ph. Vaishali Katju) in College Station. Two others were at Newman Bottom, Lake

Somerville S.P., Lee on the same day (Jeremy Webster).



Lesser Goldfinch 6 Nov 2020, College Station, Brazos Co. © Vaishali Katju

Lark Bunting – Lark Buntings have not been found in *Brazos* in a decade, so it was noteworthy to find several this fall at multiple sites, including Moore Farms 16 Oct (ph. John Hale), Leonard Road 16-17 Nov (Simon Kiacz), Sims Lane 16 Nov (Bill Eisele), White Switch Road 17 Nov (Cameron Johnson), Kuder Road 22-27 Nov (ph. Meredith Anderson), and Kemp Road 28 Nov (Sandy Dillard), as well as Brazos River Valley Trail, *Washington* 14 Nov (Darrell Vollert) and China Spring, *McLennan* 13 Nov (ph. Fay Ratta).



Lark Bunting 17 Nov 2020, Leonard Road, Brazos Co. © Simon Kiacz

Nelson's Sparrow – One of the most remarkable finds of the season is a Nelson's Sparrow 16-17 Oct (m.ob.) first found by Simon Kiacz, though identified by Rhett Raibley, at Veteran's Park, College Station. Given its rarity inland, one might suspect it was a first county record for *Brazos*, but another was found at Moore Farms 21 Oct 1972. Remarkably, it was not the only one found this fall in the central oaks and prairies region. One was photographed 2-3 Nov (ph. Rich Kostecke, ph. Steven McDonald) at Friendship Park, Granger Lake, *Williamson*, and 2 more were at Lake Somerville S.P. Nails Creek Unit, *Lee* 7 Nov

(ph. Jason Leifester).



Nelson's Sparrow 17 Oct 2020, Veterans Park, College Station, Brazos Co. © Shirley Wilkerson

Savannah Sparrow – An estimate of 600 Savannah Sparrows were at Moore Farms, *Brazos*, after flushing out flocks of 60-100 from dense short roadside vegetation at six locations 30 Oct (John Hale). The count exceeds all historic counts for the Central Brazos Valley and the Central Prairie.

Green-tailed Towhee – A sixth record for *Bastrop*, a Green-tailed Towhee was at the Loop Road around Shipp/Stagners Lake 30 Oct–1 Nov (†Ken Hartman, †Bernd Gravenstein).

Yellow-breasted Chat – A very late Yellow-breasted Chat was photographed at Atlas Pear Trails, Bryan,

Brazos 19 Oct (ph. Cameron Johnson).



Yellow-breasted Chat 19 Oct 2020, Bryan, Brazos Co. © Cameron Johnson

Blue-winged Warbler - Rare in fall, especially in the past decade, a Blue-winged Warbler was photographed at Kurten, Brazos at the very early date of 20 Aug (ph. Shirley Wilkerson).



Blue-winged Warbler 20 Aug 2020, Kurten, Brazos Co. © Shirley Wilkerson

Prothonotary Warbler – An adult pair and 2 fledglings were at Sulphur Springs Road, Brazos 4-26 Aug

(Bill Eisele, ph. Shirley Wilkerson).



Prothonotary Warbler 15 Aug 2020, Sulphur Springs Road, Brazos Co. © Shirley Wilkerson

Swainson's Warbler – A Swainson's Warbler was still singing at the late date of 30 Aug (Michael McCloy) at Peach Creek Bottoms, *Brazos*, where the species is known to breed.

Cape May Warbler – A fourth record for *Bastrop* and the second fall record, a Cape May Warbler was

photographed at a birdbath in the Colovista area 6 Nov (ph. Kathryn McAleese).



Cape May Warbler 6 Nov 2020, Colovista area, Bastrop Co. © Kathryn McAleese

**Bay-breasted Warbler** – A very rare fall migrant, a Bay-breasted Warbler was described 24 Oct (†Fred Collins) at Navasota, *Grimes*. A late Bay-breasted Warbler was at Repka Road, *Waller* 27 Nov (ph. Fred Collins).

Blackburnian Warbler – Rare in fall, but right in the center of expectation dates, a male Blackburnian Warbler was at Bryan, *Brazos* 24 Sep (Simon Kiacz).

Pine Warbler – A high count for fall in the Central Prairie, 17+ Pine Warblers were in the Navasota area, *Grimes* 8 Nov (Fred Collins).

**Grace's Warbler** – A Grace's Warbler was photographed at a private residence in *Bastrop* 4 Nov (Brian Burgoyne). It is the second Austin-area record, the first being 28 Oct 1979 in Austin.



Grace's Warbler 4 Nov 2020, Bastrop Co. © Brian Burgoyne

**Townsend's Warbler** – A Townsend's Warbler 12 Oct (ph. Daniel Kelch) at Gravel Crossing W.M.A., Stillhouse Hollow Lake is a second record for *Bell*.



Townsend's Warbler 12 Oct 2020, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co. © Daniel Kelch

Black-headed Grosbeak – Not an annual visitor to the Central Prairie, a Black-headed Grosbeak was at Spring Creek Greenbelt, College Station, *Brazos* 21-28 Nov (ph. Brent Cox, m.ob.). Another was at a

feeder in rural McLennan, west of Waco, 29 Nov (ph. Linda Taylor).



Black-headed Grosbeak 21 Nov 2020, Spring Creek Greenbelt, Brazos Co. © Brent Cox

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