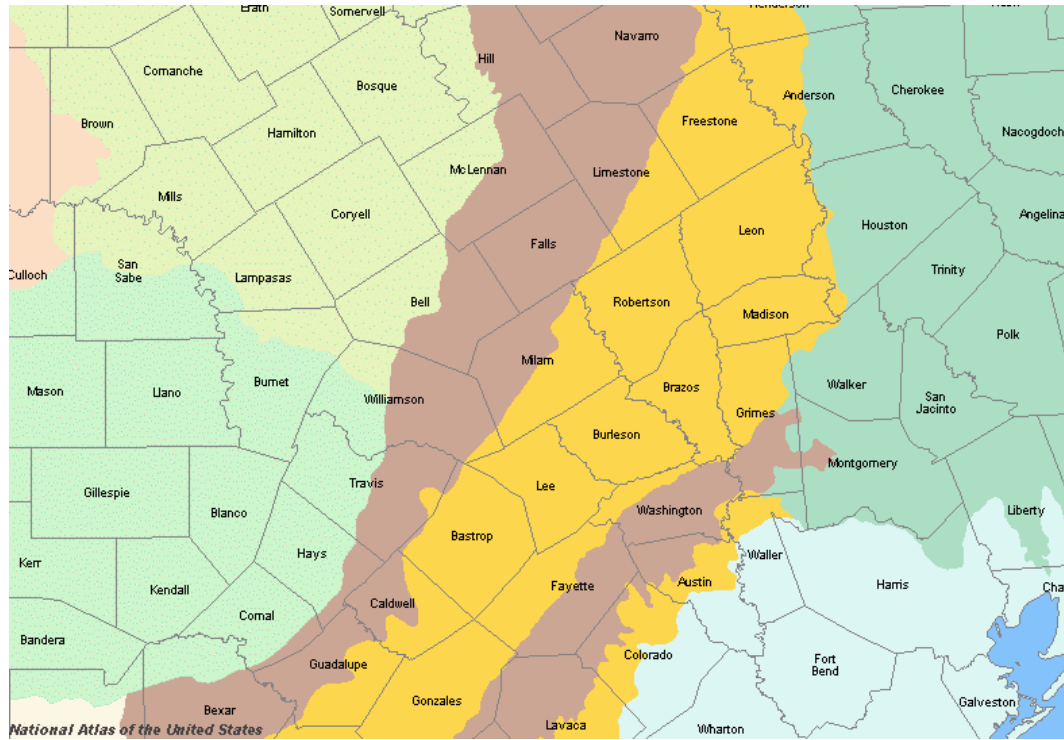


Summer 2020: Central Oaks & Prairies of Texas

By Bert Frenz

This report is from 1 June to 31 July 2020. It includes sightings from the following counties: Bastrop, Bell, Brazos, Burleson, Falls, Fayette, Freestone, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Limestone, McLennan, Madison, Milam, Navarro, Robertson, and Washington.



MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Canvasback – A male Canvasback summered 6 Jun–4 Jul (ph. Richard Hermosillo) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.



© Richard Hermosillo, 6 Jun 2020, Freestone County

Redhead – Two Redheads at Witter Lane ponds, *Bell* remained the summer season (Randy Pinkston).

Northern Bobwhite – No longer often reported, single Northern Bobwhites were heard in *Bastrop* at two locations separated by a mile near Old Antioch Road 13 Jun (Jason Leifester) and 17 Jul (Phil Rostron).

Least Grebe – A pair of Least Grebes in courtship display were at Witter Lane ponds, *Bell* 26 Jul (ph. Randy Pinkston).



© Randy Pinkston, 26 Jul 2020, Bell County

Chuck-will's-widow – A surprising count of 8 Chuck-will's-widows were heard at different locations in Fort Hood's East Range, *Bell* 11 Jun (Charlie Plimpton).

Purple Gallinule – The Purple Gallinules at Carlos Lake, *Grimes* are proliferating and this season 3 pairs, all with chicks, provided a total of 18 on 6 Jul (Rhet Raibley).

Sandhill Crane – Within the Oaks and Prairies region, Sandhill Cranes are rarely seen in summer months, so the appearance of 2 at Granger Lake, *Williamson* 7 Jul (ph. Brush Freeman) is surprising.



© Brush Freeman, 7 Jul 2020, Williamson County

Killdeer – Unusually high counts of Killdeer included 153 at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 11 Jul (Bert Foquet) and an estimated 200 there 31 Jul (Bill Eisele).

Long-billed Curlew – With few records in *Burleson*, a Long-billed Curlew near Caldwell 9 Jul (Benjamin Byerly) was noteworthy.

Marbled Godwit – A first June record for *Brazos* and rare anytime of the year, a Marbled Godwit was at Sims Lane 28 Jun (ph. Michael McCloy, Corina Giron).

Stilt Sandpiper – Following a 4-year pattern since turf farms were built at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 14-15 Stilt Sandpipers were present 26-31 July (Simon Kiacz, Bill Eisele); in prior years, the sandpipers did not stop in the county.

White-rumped Sandpiper – A late spring migrant, a single White-rumped Sandpiper was at Welch Park, Lake Somerville, *Washington* 5 Jun (ph. Jane Tillman).



© Jane Tillman, 5 Jun 2020, Washington County

Pectoral Sandpiper – A stop-over flock of 35 Pectoral Sandpipers were at Sims Lane 31 Jul (Bill Eisele), a significant count for *Brazos*, especially so early in migration.

Long-billed Dowitcher – An early flock of 6 Long-billed Dowitchers was at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 26 Jul (Simon Kiacz).

Spotted Sandpiper – A count of 12 Spotted Sandpipers at The Falls in Marlin 25 Jul (Bernd Gravenstein) is a high count for infrequently birded *Falls*.

Solitary Sandpiper – An unusually large concentration of Solitary Sandpipers resided 3 Jul+ (m.ob.) at Witter Lane ponds, *Bell*, reaching a high count of 18 on 19 Jul (Randy Pinkston).

Willet – Although sightings have increased in recent years, Willet is still rare in *Brazos*. One was photographed 28 Jun (Michael McCloy) at Sims Lane.

Wilson's Phalarope – Two Wilson's Phalaropes 2 Jul (Bert Foquet) at Sims Lane, *Brazos* raise the question: late spring or early fall migrants?

Franklin's Gull – Unusual timing for Franklin's Gulls are 2 at Welch Park, Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 14 Jun (Ken Hartman), 2 at Stillhouse Park, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, *Bell* 24 Jun (ph. Gil Eckrich), and 2 more at the Birch Creek unit, Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 26 Jun (Shelia Hargis).



© Gil Eckrich, 24 Jun 2020, Bell County

Least Tern – A first record in summer for *Brazos* and one of only a handful of county records, a single Least Tern was on a pond at Easterwood Airport 17-20 Jul (ph. Michael McCloy, m.ob.).



© Michael McCloy, 19 Jul 2020, Brazos County

Black Tern – With few records for *Washington* and only the second record for July, 8 Black Terns flying over Lake Somerville 24 Jul (ph. Shirley Wilkerson) were noteworthy.

Common Loon – A very late Common Loon was at Temple Lake Park, Belton Lake, *Bell* 11 Jun (ph. Gil Eckrich).



© Gil Eckrich, 11 Jun 2020, Bell County

Wood Stork – Three Wood Storks were the first to appear in *Brazos* this season, flying over Peach Creek bottoms and then Peach Creek ponds 7 Jun (Darrell Vollert, Bert Foquet), but more unusual was an estimated 100 flying over Sulphur Springs Road 13 Jun (Bill Eisele).

Double-crested Cormorant – Rare in summer in *Bell*, a Double-crested Cormorant was at Witter Lane ponds 25 Jul (ph. Deidre Dawson).



© Deidre Dawson, 25 Jul 2020, Bell County

Great Egret – An unusual large gathering of 84 Great Egrets was at a rural farm lake on Dilly Shaw Tap Road in *Brazos* 29 Jul (ph. Shirley Wilkerson).

White Ibis – The highest historical count for *Brazos* of White Ibis was 119-150 at Sulphur Springs Road 13-15 Jul (Tyler Scott, Bill Eisele).

Roseate Spoonbill – At Sulphur Springs Road, *Brazos* 18 Jun (ph. Ron Newhouse, Tyler Scott) a Roseate Spoonbill was the first June record for the county.

Osprey – The first June record for Lake Somerville, an Osprey was photographed from Welch Park, *Burleson* 5 Jun (ph. Jane Tillman). Another Osprey was in the Burton area, *Washington* 6 Jul (Susan Heath).

Cooper's Hawk – Three nearly grown Cooper's Hawks were in a nest in College Station, *Brazos* 1 Jun (ph. David Scott).

Mississippi Kites – Only nesting in *Bell* in the last decade or so, a count of 14 Mississippi Kites 7 Jun (Randy Pinkston) is impressive. Since 2009, the number of nesting pairs in *Bell* has increased each year so that they are now regularly found in the Salado-Belton-Temple area from May onward, with many juveniles evident starting in July. Active nesting continues in *McLennan* as well, this season with a report of 2 adults and 3 fledglings 20 Jun (Fay Ratta) in the Tonkawa Falls area, not previously reported as a nesting site.

Swainson's Hawk – A sighting of 3 adult Swainson's Hawks in rural *Lee*, near Lexington, 4 Jul (Shelia Hargis) is a rare summer record.

Eastern Screech-Owl – Hearing 18 Eastern Screech-Owls is impressive: starting at 3:45 AM, driving 10 miles through Fort Hood East Range, *Bell*, stopping 8 times and listening for owls, Charlie Plimpton heard a total of 18 in about two hours on 11 Jun.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker – A single Ladder-backed Woodpecker continues in Brenham, *Washington* through the season (Darrell Vollert), where it is rare.

Pileated Woodpecker – Rare in *McLennan*, though reported earlier this year, a Pileated Woodpecker was again seen at Lake Waco Wetlands 12 Jul (ph. Matt York). Although more expected in *Brazos*, a sighting of family group of 6 flying together at Sulphur Springs Road 19 Jul (Bill Eisele) is unprecedented.

Crested Caracara – Although not rare in *Bastrop*, seeing 78 Crested Caracara hunting grasshoppers on Sayersville Road 6 Jun (Brush Freeman) is amazing.

American Kestrel – In *Brazos*, near Carter Lake, the pair of American Kestrels reported this spring for producing 4 fledglings were at it again when copulation was observed 4 Jun (Tyler Scott).

Monk Parakeet – Only the fourth report of Monk Parakeet in *Bastrop*, a pair was observed in the Elgin area 26 Jul (Erika Dihmes).

Great Kiskadee – About the sixth record for *Bell*, a Great Kiskadee was observed on Asa Road northwest of Temple 4 Jun (fide Randy Pinkston).

Olive-sided Flycatcher – The second latest spring report for the central oaks and prairies region of an Olive-sided Flycatcher was at Belton, *Bell* 4 Jun (Steve Snyder).

Eastern Phoebe – A pair of Eastern Phoebes nested again and produced a clutch of 6 eggs near Gause, *Milam* 4 Jun (Donna Lewis).

Yellow-throated Vireo – Although listed on the *McLennan* checklist as a rare breeding species, there are only about a dozen records of Yellow-throated Vireo for the county since 1959 and none of those include breeding evidence, so a report of two males counter-singing across Childress Creek, west of the Brazos River, and one issuing a scolding alarm call on 26 Jun (Colton Robbins) is noteworthy.

Tree Swallow – Tree Swallows are rare in summer at Lake Somerville, having only been reported once before (in 2014), so several records 5 Jun–1 Jul at three parks is new information. At Welch Park, *Burleson*, 2 adult pairs used utility poles as nesting sites and 3 nestlings were observed 5 Jun (Jane Tillman). At the Birch Creek Unit, *Burleson* 18 Jun (Ken Hartman) 6 swallows were observed. At the Nails Creek Unit, *Lee*, juveniles were photographed 26 Jun (ph. Gary Yoder) and 1 Jul (ph. Richard Kaskan).



© Gary Yoder, 26 Jun 2020, Lee County

Northern Rough-winged Swallow – Bolstered by large numbers of recent fledglings, 100+ Northern Rough-winged Swallows were lined up on utility wires at Witter Lane 17-19 Jul (Randy Pinkston, Jeff Hall), a record count for *Bell*.

Tufted Titmouse – A recent evaluation of titmice records in *McLennan* resulted in the cleansing of hundreds of eBird reports for lack of details. Veteran observers have known that the common form is the hybrid, Tufted x Black-crested Titmouse, that Tufted is uncommon and Black-crested is rare. An accurately described Tufted Titmouse was at Oakwood Cemetery, Waco 6 Jun (Anand Chaudhary).

Lesser Goldfinch – A small group of Lesser Goldfinches, feeding on thistle, at McKinney Roughts Park 14 Jun (Dina Perry) added to few summer records for *Bastrop*.

Grasshopper Sparrow – While Grasshopper Sparrow is a known nester in the Central Brazos Valley, previously it has not been seen in summer after early July, so 5 in the Brazos River bottoms of *Burleson* 18 Jul (Ashley Tessnow) and one at Wilcox Lane, *Brazos* 26 Jul (Simon Kiacz) are noteworthy.

Lark Sparrow – Lark Sparrows are common in the Central Brazos Valley; however, an estimate of at least 25 in the Brazos River bottoms, *Burleson* 18 Jul (Ashley Tessnow) is a high count for summer.

Baltimore Oriole – Although known to breed in *McLennan*, details are scarce, but this season at Moody 2 adult Baltimore Orioles were photographed feeding at least 3 nestlings 1 Jun and fledged birds were photographed 2 Jun (ph. Gil Eckrich).



© Gil Eckrich, 1 Jun 2020, McLennan County



© Gil Eckrich, 2 Jun 2020, McLennan County

Red-winged Blackbird – High counts of Red-winged Blackbirds for summer in *Brazos* were an estimated 200 28 Jun–2 Jul (Michael McCloy, Bert Foquet) at Sims Lane.

Bronzed Cowbird – The lone male Bronzed Cowbird previously reported at Smithville Elementary School, *Bastrop* continued to at least 14 Jul (Ron & Susan Martin).

Brown-headed Cowbird – Unprecedentedly high summer counts of Brown-headed Cowbirds resided at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 18-31 Jul, peaked by 220 on 28 Jul (Simon Kiacz).

Louisiana Waterthrush – Rarely reported in summer in *Brazos*, a Louisiana Waterthrush was photographed at the Little Brazos River 16 Jul (ph. Warren Hardin).



© Warren Hardin, 16 Jul 2020, Brazos County

Swainson's Warbler – An expected species, though uncommon, in portions of the Central Brazos Valley, Swainson's Warbler is rarely photographed and videoed singing, as was the case 5 Jun (audio ph. Jane Tillman) at the Birch Creek Unit of Lake Somerville S.P., *Burleson*. The audio/video act was repeated 13 Jun (ph. T. Jay Adams) at the same location. Two were again heard singing there 26 Jun (Shelia Hargis). Elsewhere in the Central Brazos Valley, Swainson's Warblers were heard singing 5 Jun (Bill Eisele) at Leonard Road, *Brazos*, 7 Jun (Bert Foquet) at Lick Creek Park, *Brazos*, and 14-16 Jun (Rachel Smith) at Bucksnot, *Robertson*.



© Jane Tillman 5 Jun 2020, Burleson County

Yellow Warbler – A first record in June for *Bell*, a Yellow Warbler was at Fort Hood East Range 7 Jun (†Randy Pinkston).

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