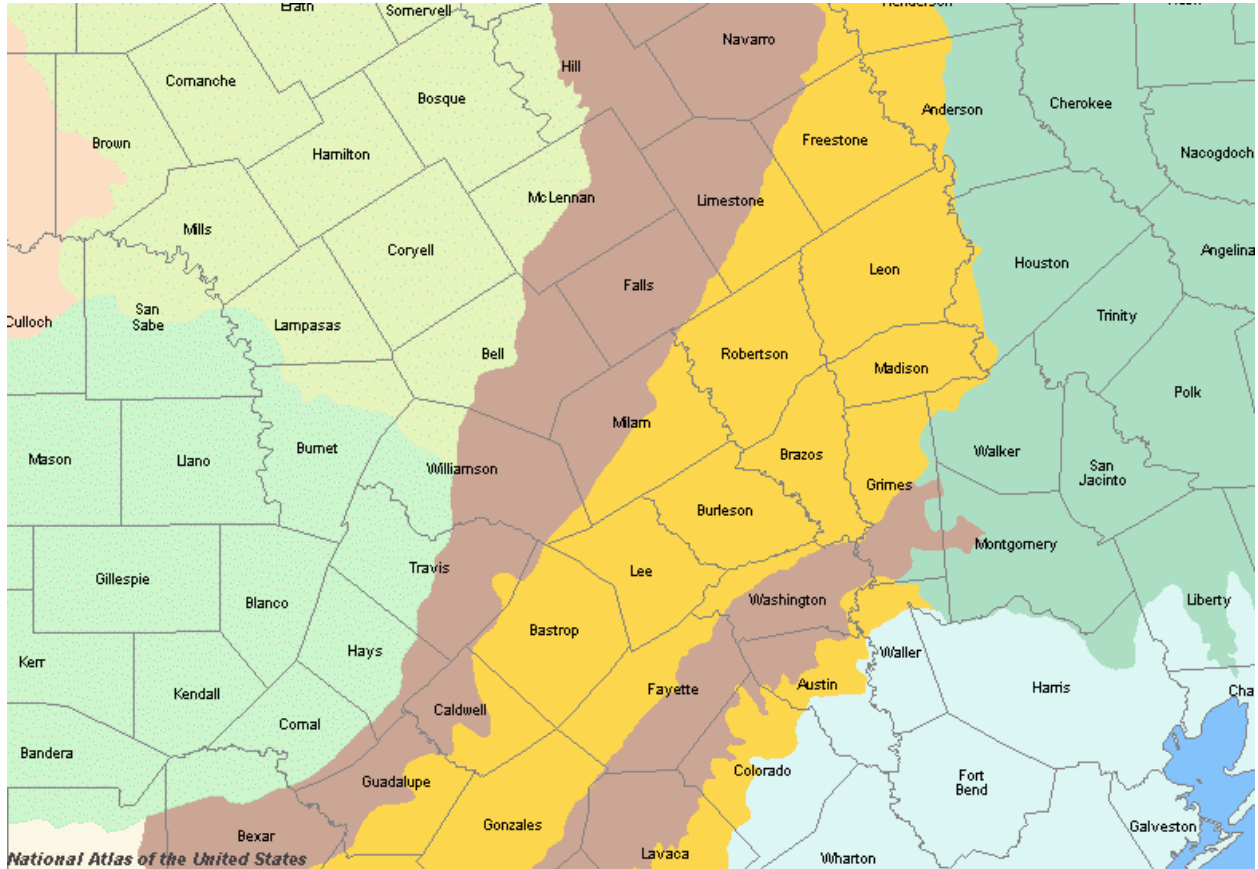


Fall 2021: Central Oaks & Prairies of Texas

By Bert Frenz

This report is from 1 August to 30 November 2021. 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:

Northern Shoveler – A count of 170 Northern Shovelers at Marlin WTP 23 Nov (Christian Walker) is the highest yet reported for Falls Co.

Northern Pintail – Two Northern Pintails at Richland Creek WMA, Freestone Co, 1 Aug (Todd Fitzgerald) were either very early or were undetected summer lingerers.

Greater Scaup – A rarity in Brazos Co, a male Greater Scaup accompanied a raft of Lesser Scaups at Lake Bryan, 25-30 Nov (Bill Eisele, Michael McCloy, Mark McDermott).

Ruddy Duck – A male Ruddy Duck at Marlin City Lakes, Falls Co 16 Sep 2013 (Gary Yoder) was early.

Ring-necked Pheasant – Rare in McLennan Co and hardly ever reported, a Ring-necked Pheasant was inside the Baylor Track and Field complex in Waco 15 Sep (Timothy Campbell).

Common Nighthawk – Not often reported in significant numbers in recent years, 20 Common Nighthawks flew over the Texas A&M University campus in Brazos Co 24 Aug (Brenda Schultze). A single nighthawk there 21 Oct (Michael McCloy) was a bit late.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – In the early morning of 22 Sep (video Shirley Wilkerson, Dan Wilkerson) a carefully estimated count of over 100 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds crowded ten feeders and surrounding trees at Kurten, Brazos Co.

Anna's Hummingbird – An Anna's Hummingbird was photographed feeding on salvia at a residence near Stillhouse Hollow Lake 6 Nov (ph. Gil Eckrich), a third record for Bell Co.



Anna's Hummingbird 6 Nov 2021, Bell County © Gil Eckrich

Broad-tailed Hummingbird – A fourth record of McLennan Co, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird was photographed at Carleen Bright Arboretum 9-16 Sep 2021 (ph. Matthew York). In Bell Co, where one is reported most years, an adult male was at Salado 4-5 Sep (audio Steve Mayes).



Broad-tailed Hummingbird 9 Sep 2021 Carleen Bright Arboretum, McLennan County © Matthew York

Buff-bellied Hummingbird – Only the second record for Waller Co, a Buff-bellied Hummingbird was seen and photographed at Laas Farm 21-24 Sep (ph. Harvey Laas).



Buff-bellied Hummingbird 21 Sep 2021 Laas Farm, Waller County © Harvey Laas

Whooping Crane – A pair of Whooping Cranes flew high above Salado, Bell Co 12 Nov (ph. Charlie & Chelsea Plimpton). A few hours later at Stillhouse Hollow Lake, two adults and a juvenile were spotted on an island (ph. Doug Orama). That same afternoon (Phil Rostron) two were seen flying over Bastrop Co with a group of Sandhill Cranes and pelicans. On 16 Nov (Bernd Gravenstein) a single crane flew southeast, with rather fast wingbeats, over Sayers Road, Bastrop Co. In Travis Co three flew south, with slow steady wingbeats, over the toll road near Del Valle 18 Nov (Carlos Ross).



Whooping Crane 12 Nov 2021 Salado, Bell County © Charlie & Chelsea Plimpton



Whooping Crane 12 Nov 2021 Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell County © Doug Orama

Black-bellied Plover – With few records in McLennan Co, a Black-bellied Plover at Trading House Creek Reservoir 2 Oct (Greg Cook) is a good find.

American Golden-Plover – A late American Golden-Plover was at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co 25 Nov (ph. Shelia Hargis).



American Golden-Plover 25 Nov 2021 Union Grove WMA, Bell County © Shelia Hargis

Killdeer – Substantial flocks of Killdeer were again attracted to the turf farms at Sims Lane in Brazos Co 7 Aug—4 Sep, topped by a count of 550 15 Aug (Simon Kiaz).

Whimbrel – Whimbrels are casual fall migrants in the central oaks and prairies and this season one was found 12 Aug (Laura Sare) at Sulphur Springs Road in Brazos Co.

Long-billed Curlew – Sightings in the central oaks and prairies compounded starting in 2000, particularly at turf farms. One to two were present at the Sims Lane turf farm in Brazos Co 29 Oct—19 Nov 2021 (Brandon Woo) and three flew over Moore Farms 28 Aug 2021 (ph. John Hale).



Long-billed Curlew 14 Nov 2021 Sims Lane, Brazos Co © Bill Eisele

Ruddy Turnstone – An inland oddity, a Ruddy Turnstone was at Welch Park on the Burleson Co side of Lake Somerville 12 Sep (Laura Sare).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – Large flocks of Buff-breasted Sandpipers stopped in Brazos Co at Sims Lane turf farms 7 Aug—3 Oct, topped by 600 on 1 Sep (Bill Eisele).

Red Phalarope – Pending review by TBRC, a first record for Freestone Co was a Red Phalarope photographed 5 Nov (ph. Glenda Keilstrup, ph. Charley Amos) at Richland Creek WMA.



Red Phalarope 5 Nov 2021 Richland Creek WMA, Freestone County © Glenda Keilstrup

Sabine's Gull – McLennan Co has a history of harboring Sabine's Gulls at Lake Waco but this time one showed up at Trading House Creek Reservoir 25-26 Sep (ph. Matthew York, ph. John Muldrow), a fifth record for the county.



Sabine's Gull 25 Sep 2021 Trading House Creek Reservoir, McLennan County © John Muldrow

Least Tern – Least Terns consistently show up at Airport Park on Lake Waco, McLennan Co, although not nearly annually, so three there 1 Aug (ph. Brian Berry) is noteworthy.



Least Tern 1 Aug 2021 Lake Waco, McLennan County © Brian Berry

Wood Stork – A flock of at least 120 Wood Storks slowly circling and heading east over the Brazos River bottoms 29 Sep (photo and video Andrea Fox) is the largest documented flock for Burleson Co. A late flock of 28 Wood Storks soared over Bryan, Brazos Co 29 Oct (Russell Moses).

Brown Booby – A first record for Brazos Co, an adult female Brown Booby wandered to Lake Bryan 11-17 Sep (ph. Shirley Wilkerson, Dan Wilkerson). Likely, the same bird then visited another power plant lake, viz. Sandy Creek Power plant in Riesel 19 Oct (ph. Sylvia Ware), a first record for McLennan Co.



Brown Booby 16 Sep 2021 Lake Bryan, Brazos County © Brent Cox



Brown Booby 19 Oct 2021 Sandy Creek Power Plant, McLennan County © Sylvia Ware

Least Bittern – A first record for Robertson Co were two Least Bitterns at a ranch near Calvert 16 Aug 2021 (Alberto Manterola).

Reddish Egret – A long-staying Reddish Egret has been at Union Grove WMA in Bell Co 21 Oct+ (ph. Daniel Kelch); it was the eleventh record for Bell Co. Another Reddish Egret flew low over the Texas A&M University Ecology and Natural Resource 18 Sep (Meredith Anderson), a ninth record since 1975 for Brazos Co.

Cattle Egret – Multiple flocks of 50-80 Cattle Egrets comprised a total of 800 at Sims Lane 3 Sep (Laura Sare), a high count not reached in Brazos Co since 2013.

Turkey Vulture – A high count for Navarro Co, an estimated 500 Turkey Vultures gathered at the Corsicana landfill 11 Nov (Christian Walker).

Swallow-tailed Kite – This fall season had many reports of post-breeding Swallow-tailed Kites along Sayers Road in Bastrop Co 29 Aug—12 Sep (ph. Shelia Hargis) with counts of five or six on most days. Brush Freeman suspects these are local residents.



Swallow-tailed Kite 29 Aug 2021 Sayers Road, Bastrop County © Shelia Hargis

Golden Eagle – In the past 20 years, Golden Eagles have been reported 13 times in the 21-county central oaks and prairies region, so it is quite surprising to have two sightings this fall. One was at the Brazos River bottoms of Burleson Co 11 Nov 2021 (Andrea Fox) and another was at Fort Hood East Range of Bell Co 30 Nov 2021 (Chris Waas, Kevin Ebert, Matthew Christiansen). The Burleson eagle was the seventh for the county and the first since 2001. The Bell eagle was the fifth record and the first since 1993.

Cooper's Hawk – Three sightings of young Cooper's Hawks are indicative of local breeding, including one at Sayers Road and another at Upper Elgin River Road, both in Bastrop Co 1 Aug (ph. Jason Leifester), and one begging for food from a nearby adult at Brothers Pond Park in Brazos Co 19 Aug (Chris Butler).



Cooper's Hawk 1 Aug 2021 Elgin River Road, Bastrop County © Jason Leifester

Mississippi Kite – A peak migration day for Mississippi Kites was 7 Sep when flocks streamed and kettled south across Bastrop, Lee, and Williamson Cos, and especially Travis Co. High counts that day were 540 lifting off from Lake Georgetown 8:15 AM (Rich Kostecke), 325 passing over Austin from 9:45-10:30 AM (Scott Young), and 791 from 11:09-11:30 AM (Scott Young) at the same Austin location. A dozen other flocks of 6-97 hawks were reported elsewhere in the central oaks and prairies.



Mississippi Kite 7 Sep 2021 Lake Georgetown, Williamson County © Rich Kostecke

Harris's Hawk – A fifth record for Fayette Co, a Harris's Hawk was atop a ridge outside of La Grange 23 Nov (Catherine Worley).

White-tailed Hawk – Once rare in the Central Brazos Valley, White-tailed Hawks can now be considered occasional. One adult was at Sims Lane at 1:19 PM 26 Sep (ph. Bill Eisele) and probably the same bird was at Sandy Point Road at 3:45 PM (Laura Sare), about two miles away in Brazos Co. Three days later, on 29 Sep (ph. John Pike) and about four miles from the previous sighting, an adult was photographed at Mumford Benchley Road in Robertson Co at 11:03 AM, and the same day at almost the exact same time and eight miles away one was observed overhead in Brazos Co near the Rellis Campus of Texas A&M University (Caleb Evans).



White-tailed Hawk 26 Oct 2021 Sims Lane, Brazos County © Bill Eisele

Burrowing Owl – A fourth record for Robertson Co and at the same farms Burrowing Owl has been reported previously, two were flushed near Calvert 13 Nov (Alberto Manterola).

Golden-fronted Woodpecker – East of its normal range, a Golden-fronted Woodpecker 7 Aug (Chris Holmes) at Reynolds Creek Park was a first record for McLennan Co and likely the same woodpecker 8 Aug (Nathan Cowan) was on the opposite side of the Lake Waco 4.7 miles away.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker heard calling several times in Bryan 10 Sep (Keith Arnold) was an early arrival in Brazos Co.

Hairy Woodpecker – Two sightings of Hairy Woodpeckers in counties with few records were 7 Nov (ph. Dean Silvers) about 10 miles west of Mexia in Limestone Co and 23 Nov 2021 (Greg Page) near Centerville in Leon Co.

Northern Flicker – A first record of Red-shafted Flicker for Madison Co occurred 23 Oct (Michael McCloy) at Lake Madison Park. In Navarro Co, Red-shafted had only been reported once since Ogilby's 1879 report, and now a hybrid Yellow-shafted x Red-shafted Flicker was photographed at Navarro Mills Lake 17 Nov (ph. Janey Woodley).



Yellow-shafted x Red-shafted Flicker 17 Nov 2021 Navarro Mills Lake, Navarro County © Janey Woodley

American Kestrel – A second nesting this year of a pair of American Kestrels near Carter Lake, Brazos produced two fledglings that were observed regularly 26 Aug–2 Sep until they dispersed and only the adults were seen 3-12 Sep (Linda Hale).

Prairie Falcon – After a hiatus of 33 years, a Prairie Falcon was again seen in Brazos Co 8 Oct (†Laura Sare), this time at Sims Lane. Not surprisingly, one was at Sayers Road in Bastrop Co for the twenty-first year in a row, reported 17 Sep (Mike Goebel).

Olive-sided Flycatcher – A first for Leon Co was an Olive-sided Flycatcher responding to a recording 28 Sep (ph. audio Greg Page) near Centerville.

Say's Phoebe – A Say's Phoebe 13 Sep (Sean Mecredy) at McKinney Falls SP in Travis Co is the second earliest fall sighting for the central oaks and prairies region, preceding by only one day a sighting in 2015.

Bell's Vireo – A late departing Bell's Vireo was photographed 11 Oct 2021 (ph. Daniel Kelch) at Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co.



Bell's Vireo 11 Oct 2021 Stillhouse Hollow Lake – Gravel Crossing WMA, Bell County © Daniel Kelch

Philadelphia Vireo – Philadelphia Vireos are rare fall migrants in the central oaks and prairies, and one described at Waco 6 Sep (†Nathan Cowan) is only the fourth fall record for McLennan Co since 1984.

Red-breasted Nuthatch – An early arriving Red-breasted Nuthatch was 23 Sep 2021 (audio Brandy Falise) at Texas A&M University Ecology and Natural Resource, Brazos Co. The same day (Erik Sauder) one was at Bastrop SP, Bastrop Co. Five nuthatches were found at Paint Creek Road, Bastrop Co 16 Oct (ph. Jason Leifester).



Red-breasted Nuthatch 16 Oct 2021 Paint Creek Road, Bastrop County © Jason Leifester

Gray Catbird – An early post-breeding Gray Catbird was heard in a thicket in College Station, Brazos Co 19 Aug (Vaishali Katju).

Brown Thrasher – A high count of 25 Brown Thrashers at Lick Creek Park, Brazos Co 3 Oct (Jacob Perry, Cameron Johnson) is substantial and only once exceeded in the oaks and prairies region.

American Robin – Although breeding American Robins are fairly common in the central oaks and prairies they usually are found only in low numbers. Thus, flocks including juveniles of 18 at College Station, Brazos Co 3 Aug (Vaishali Katju) and 35 at Waco, McLennan Co 6 Sep (Jeremy Ballard, Nathan Cowan) are unusual.

Purple Finch – The only Purple Finches reported this fall in the central oaks and prairies region were 9-29 Nov (Nathan Cowan) at Waco, McLennan Co and at College Station, Brazos Co 22-26 Nov (Vaishali Katju).

Pine Siskins – Dozens of reports of Pine Siskins in the central oaks and prairies region began 6 Nov (Janet Davis) at Webberville Park, Travis Co, with a high count of 30 at Painted Bunting Ranchito in Bastrop 21 Nov (Richard Harman), and other sightings in Bell, Brazos, Falls, McLennan, Milam, Navarro, and Williamson Cos.

American Goldfinch – A calling American Goldfinch 21 Aug (Bill Eisele) was early at College Station, Brazos Co.

Henslow's Sparrow – To the great delight of local birders, a Henslow's Sparrow was repeatedly located and photographed 14 Nov+ (ph. Brent Cox) at Texas A&M University Ecology and Natural Resource, Brazos Co. Rarely found this far west, the last Brazos Co report was a dozen years ago.



Henslow's Sparrow 14 Nov 2021 Texas A&M University Ecology and Natural Resource, Brazos County © Brent Cox

Yellow-breasted Chat – An early migrating Yellow-breasted Chat was at College Station, Brazos Co 14 Aug (Simon Burton).

Bullock's Oriole – A first record for Robertson Co, a first-year male Bullock's Oriole was described near Mumfordsport 22 Oct (Bob Bevins).

Ovenbird – Rare as fall migrants in the central oaks and prairies, an Ovenbird was seen at West Bouldin Creek Greenbelt, Travis Co 8 Sep (Callen Inman) and another was photographed at College Station, Brazos Co 11 Sep (ph. Vaishali Katju).

Blue-winged Warbler – A rare fall migrant in Brazos Co, a Blue-winged Warbler was in College Station 19 Oct (Gus Cothran).

Swainson's Warbler – Likely a post-breeding migrant perhaps from a suspected nesting area seven miles away at Fort Boggy in Leon Co, a Swainson's Warbler was singing at a home northwest of Centerville 6 Sep (audio Greg Page).

Tennessee Warbler – Single Tennessee Warblers at Waco, McLennan Co 16 Sep (Nathan Cowan) and at Texas A&M University campus, Brazos Co 25 Sep (Laura Sare) are rare fall migrants.

Tropical Parula – Although a Tropical Parula was a rare visitor to Travis Co at Commons Ford Ranch Metro Park 30 Aug (Sean Mecredy), more amazing is a second record for Brazos Co photographed at Sulphur Springs Road 24 Sep (ph. Bill Eisele).



Tropical Parula 24 Sep 2021 Sulphur Springs Road, Brazos County © Bill Eisele

Chestnut-sided Warbler – Rare in fall, a Chestnut-sided Warbler was among a mixed flock of warblers at Salado, Bell Co 6 Sep (Charlie Plimpton).

Palm Warbler – A western Palm Warbler was described and photographed at College Station, Brazos Co 17 Nov (ph. Bill Eisele) where both forms are seen about equally, though rarely.



Palm Warbler 17 Nov 2021 Sulphur Springs Road, Brazos County © Bill Eisele

Western Tanager – Not reported in Milam Co since 2003, a Western Tanager visited 24 Sep (Nancy Webber) near Milam's intersection with Bell and Williamson Cos.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak – A much-photographed grosbeak, that first appeared to be a hybrid, turned out to be an immature male Rose-breasted Grosbeak transitioning to adult plumage 26-30 Oct 2021 (ph. Shirley Wilkerson).



Rose-breasted Grosbeak 26 Oct 2021 Kurten, Brazos County © Shirley Wilkerson

Black-headed Grosbeak – The seventh record for Bell Co, a Black-headed Grosbeak was photographed at Belton 27 Sep (ph. Mandy Edwards) as it fed at a feeder.

Indigo Bunting – Late in the season for an Indigo Bunting in Brazos Co, an immature male was at Texas A&M University Ecology and Natural Resource 20 Nov (Vaishali Katju).

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