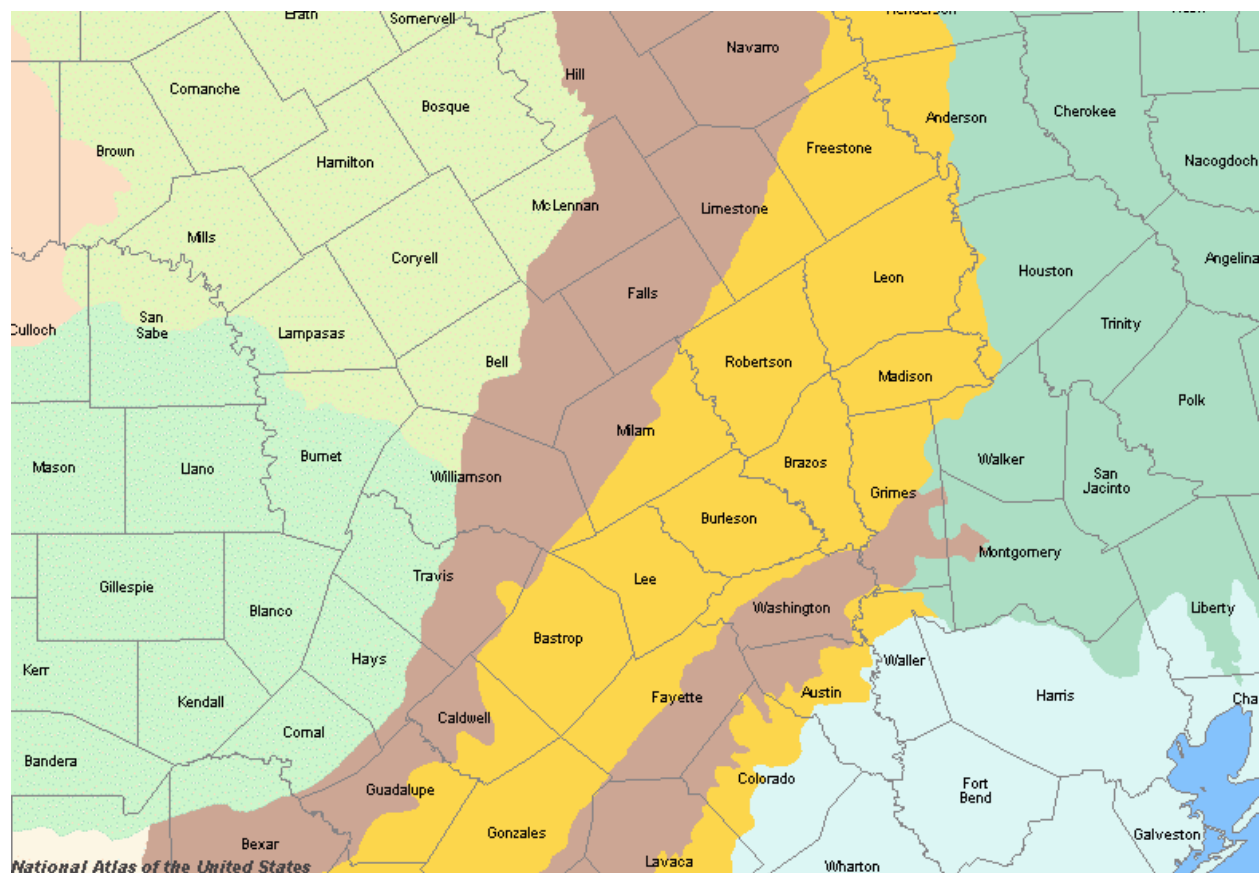


Spring 2022: Central Oaks & Prairies

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1,070,000 sightings from 1 March to 31 May 2022 in the Central Oaks and Prairies region. Sightings are included for the following counties: Austin, Bastrop, Bell, Brazos, Burleson, Falls, Fayette, Freestone, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Limestone, Madison, McLennan, Milam, Navarro, Robertson, Travis, Washington, and Williamson.



MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Greater Scaup – A first record for Limestone Co, a male Greater Scaup was photographed at Fort Parker SP 17 Mar (ph. Jay Packer, Amy Parker). Another, where it is also rare, was at Finfeather Lake, Brazos Co 2 Mar (Bill Eisele). One to three were photographed at Union Grove WMA on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co 25-26 May (ph. Daniel Kelch, ph. Doug Orama).

Bufflehead – Buffleheads rarely remain into May, so one at Longhorn Dam, Travis Co 6 May (Mike Rogan) was tardy. More surprising is a small flock that resided throughout Apr and into May at Union Grove WMA on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co, two of which remained to 12 Jun (Randy Pinkston).

Hooded Merganser – Good sightings for less frequently birded counties were two to four Hooded Mergansers 9-19 Mar (Greg Page, Eric Faria) at CR367/Warf Road in Leon Co and three females 5 Apr (Geoffrey Palmer) at FM27 near Coolidge in Limestone Co.

Red-breasted Merganser – A surprising count of six Red-breasted Mergansers (three drakes, three hens) were brought down by rain and strong winds at Brazos River Valley Trail, Washington Co 25 Apr (Darrell Vollert). Up to three Red-breasted Mergansers visited Lake Travis at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park and one tarried until 3 May (ph. Vincent O'Brien).

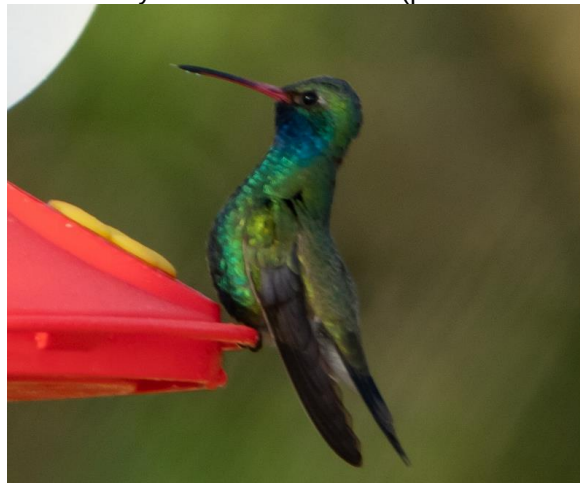
Eared Grebe – A substantial raft of up to 56 Eared Grebes spent Mar to 26 May (ph. Vincent O'Brien) at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park, Lake Travis, Travis Co.

Black-billed Cuckoo – A late rare migrant, a Black-billed Cuckoo was heard 27 May (Vincent O'Brien) at Commons Ford Ranch Metro Park, Travis Co. The late date has only been exceeded twice in the central oaks and prairies region by 28 May 1916 and 3 Jun 2012.

Chuck-will's-widow – An amazing count of 40 Chuck-will's-widows was accomplished starting at 4:44 AM in 1.75 hours and 10 miles at West Fort Hood, Bell Co 18 Apr (Charlie Plimpton).

Rufous Hummingbird – A Rufous Hummingbird feeding with Black-chinned Hummingbirds near Prairie Dell, Bell Co 13 Apr (Sylvia Culler) was late.

Broad-billed Hummingbird – A first record for Brazos Co, an immature male Broad-billed Hummingbird visited a Bryan feeder 16-19 Mar (ph. Adam Van Allen, Mycha Ashlee Van Allen).



Broad-billed Hummingbird, 17 Mar 2022, Bryan, Brazos Co © Adam Van Allen

Buff-bellied Hummingbird – A first for Grimes Co was a Buff-bellied Hummingbird 22-23 May (Dave Dolan, Clayton Bownds), photographed at Tranquility Base.

Purple Gallinule – One of few modern-day records in Bell Co, a Purple Gallinule visited Temple Lions Park 24-30 Apr (ph. Scott Snyder).

Sandhill Crane – A juvenile Sandhill Crane near Utley, Bastrop Co 29 Apr 2022 (Richard Harman) was remarkably late.

Whooping Crane – A flock of six Whooping Cranes accompanied three Sandhill Cranes as they flew over Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co at 6:15 PM 25 Mar (Randy Pinkston). Less than an hour later Pinkston noticed two Whooping Cranes had landed at the tip of Union Grove island and he found the two again the next morning.

Black-bellied Plover – For a rare migrant through the central oaks and prairies, this season brought many to McLennan, Travis, Brazos, and Bell Cos, including one at Renner Road Ponds in McLennan Co 3 Apr (Jeremy Ballard, Nathan Cowan) and 7 Apr (Keith Reich), one at Hornsby Bend 22 May (ph. Caleb Helsel, et al.), two at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park on Lake Travis the same day (ph. Jane Tillman), one at Sims Lane, Brazos Co 23-25 May (Brandon Woo), one to North Bosque River in McLennan 24 May (ph. Randolph King), one at Airport Park on Lake Waco 24 and 28 May (ph. Randolph King), and one to two at Union Grove WMA, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co on various dates 25 Mar to 26 May (m.ob.).

American Golden-Plover – American Golden-Plovers were in good supply in Brazos Co with 115 at the FM159 turf farms 9 Apr (Lance Caldwell, Steven Lamonde) and 150-213 at the Sims Lane turf farms 30-31 Mar (Bill Eisele).

Piping Plover – Rare Piping Plovers were one photographed at Temple Lake Park, Bell Co 25 Apr (ph. Daniel Kelch) and two photographed at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park, Travis Co on the same day (ph. Andy & Ellen Filtress).

Snowy Plover – Rare migrants through the central oaks and prairies, Snowy Plovers were found 15-26 Apr (Steve Glover, Charlie Plimpton, Randy Pinkston) at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co, 25 Apr (ph. Vincent O'Brien, ph. Jane Tillman) at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park, Travis Co, 20 May (Joseph Mitchell) at Hornsby Bend, Travis Co, and at Lake Waco, McLennan Co 22 May (ph. Randolph King).

Whimbrel – A rare spring migrant through the central oaks and prairies, single Whimbrels were photographed at Temple Lake Park, Bell Co 25 Apr (ph. Daniel Kelch), at Point Venture Park, Travis Co 26 Apr (ph. Gary Giroux), at Friendship Park on Granger Lake, Williamson Co 3 May (ph. Timothy Fennell), and a remarkable three were foraging with godwits at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co 30 Apr (ph. Doug Orama).



Whimbrel, 3 May, Granger Lake, Williamson Co © Tim Fennell

Long-billed Curlew – Both rare in McLennan Co and late, a Long-billed Curlew was at Airport Park on Lake Waco 7-16 May (ph. Randolph King).



Long-billed Curlew, 7 May, Airport Park, Lake Waco, McLennan Co © Randolph King

Hudsonian Godwit – Good numbers of Hudsonian Godwits were present in the central oaks and prairies where they are rare migrants. Remarkably, up to 29 were seen over an extended period at Union Grove WMA on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co 16 Apr—26 May, peaking 17 May (ph. Daniel Kelch). At Sims

Lane turf farms, Brazos Co 36 were counted 7 May (Donald Brightsmith) and 40 were at Lake Waco 12 May (ph. Randolph King). Nine to ten were at Lake Travis 25 Apr (ph. Andy & Ellen Filtness, ph. Vincent O'Brien).



Hudsonian Godwit, 17 May, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co, © Daniel Kelch

Marbled Godwit – Locally rare migrant Marbled Godwits were three at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co 13 Apr (ph. Daniel Kelch), two at Temple Lake Park, Bell Co 25 Apr (ph. Doug Orama), and one at Richland Creek WMA, Navarro Co 29 Apr (Ivan Castaneda).



Marbled Godwit, 25 Apr, Temple Lake Park, Belton Lake, Bell Co, © Doug Orama

Ruddy Turnstone – Ruddy Turnstone has not been reported in McLennan Co in a decade, so one to two at Airport Park, Lake Waco 10-22 May (ph. Randolph King) is noteworthy. Other sightings of this rare migrant through the central oaks and prairies were singles at Hornsby Bend, Travis Co 22-23 May (ph. Caleb Helsel, ph. Jeff Osborne, Janet Davis, Joseph Mitchell), at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park, Travis Co 22 May (Jane Tillman), and one to two at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co 1-20 May (ph. Charlie Plimpton, ph. Daniel Kelch, Kevin Ebert).

White-rumped Sandpiper – Exceptionally early White-rumped Sandpipers were nine at Renner Road Ponds, McLennan Co 3 Apr (Jeremy Ballard, Nathan Cowan). An impressive 520 gathered at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co 24 May (Kevin Ebert).

Short-billed Dowitcher – Two rare migrant Short-billed Dowitchers were identified by call as they flew over Union Grove WMA, Bell Co 25 Apr (Greg Cook).

American Woodcock – An American Woodcock hopping between willow tree branches at College Station, Brazos Co at the late date of 16 Apr (Brandy Falise) was likely post-breeding.

Willet – An impressive 40 Willets were counted at Temple Lake Park, Bell Co 25 Apr (ph. Daniel Kelch, Randy Pinkston, ph. Doug Orama, Charlie Plimpton).

Red-necked Phalarope – Rare, single Red-necked Phalaropes were found 23 May (ph. Jeff Osborne, Janet Davis) at Bob Wentz Windy Point Park, Travis Co and 25 May (ph. Daniel Kelch) at Union Grove WMA, Bell Co.



Red-necked Phalarope, 23 May, Bob Wentz Windy Point Park, Travis Co © Janet Davis

Laughing Gull – McLennan Co has had few historical records of Laughing Gull and it is considered a vagrant on the 2015 CTAS checklist, so it is surprising to discover up to five at Airport Park, Lake Waco for the extended period 23 Apr—24 May (Clinton Trimble, Randolph King, ph. Fay Ratta).

Ring-billed Gull – A high count for Limestone Co, 800 Ring-billed Gulls were counted at Fort Parker SP 3 Mar (Garett Hodne).

Caspian Tern – A count of six to seven Caspian Terns at Airport Park, Lake Waco 9-12 May (ph. Randolph King) established a new high for McLennan Co.

Black Tern – Three Black Terns viewed from the Birch Creek Unit of Lake Somerville SP, Burleson Co 17 Apr (David Scott) were earlier than usual.

Red-throated Loon – A third record for Bell Co, a Red-throated Loon visited Stillhouse Hollow Lake 5-10 Mar (Randy Pinkston).

Common Loon – The second highest historical count of Common Loons in the oaks and prairies region was 18 at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in Bell Co 8 Mar 2022 (Noah Price). One at Lake Georgetown, Williamson Co 11-25 May (Robert Gearhart) was late departing.

Brown Booby – A first county record for Williamson Co, a Brown Booby was a one-day wonder at Granger Lake 17 Mar (Tim Fennell), viewed from the Fox Park swimming beach as it flew low over the lake to where the San Gabriel River enters. This may have been the same one seen at Lake Georgetown 4-21 May (ph. Kelly Holligan) as Fennell saw both and remarked that the birds were similar. Lake Georgetown is connected to Granger Lake by 45 km along San Gabriel River.



Brown Booby, 23 May, Lake Georgetown, Williamson Co, © Kelly Holligan

Anhinga – One to two Anhingas were seen 1-8 May (ph. Randolph King) at the marina area of Baylor University, McLennan Co, and may have been a nesting pair. In Waller Co, 11 Anhingas including five young were observed in four occupied nests at Laas Farm 25 May (ph. Harvey Laas).

Reddish Egret – A Reddish Egret first seen at Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co 21 Oct 2021 was last seen 30 Mar (Daniel Kelch), making it the longest stay in the central oaks and prairies region.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – A rookery at Gabbard Park, College Station supported 15 nesting adult and young Yellow-crowned Night-Herons 21 May (Kelley Sampeck), the highest count for Brazos Co.

Black Vulture – Black Vulture nesting details are sparse, especially for Leon Co. A nest in a deer stand near Centerville had a territorial nesting pair beginning 10 Mar, a nest with two eggs 15 Mar—14 Apr, two young on the nest 22 Apr—17 May, and on 26 May on juvenile remained on the nest while the other was dead and half eaten (Greg Page). A new high for Limestone Co, 150 Black Vultures gathered at Fort Parker SP 2 Mar (Garett Hodne) and a new high for Lee Co was 350 at Lake Somerville 5 Mar (Mark McDermott, Jeffrey Ward, Ronald Newhouse, m.obs.).

Osprey – A high Osprey count of 12 for the central oaks and prairies region was set 2 Apr (Andy Balinsky) seen in a ten mile stretch of the Colorado River near Montopolis Bridge, Austin, Travis Co.

Swallow-tailed Kite – A fourth record for Limestone Co was a Swallow-tailed Kite flying over Fort Parker SP 22 Apr (Damian & Nancy Martinez).

Mississippi Kite – An early Mississippi Kite 15 Mar (Keith Reich) flew over the Baylor University campus, McLennan Co.

Crested Caracara – A count of 25 Crested Caracaras, including 24 on the ground at one spot, far exceeds the previous high count of ten for Austin Co, these seen 30 May (Ben Sandstrom) at the Centerhill Road area.

Merlin – A late migrant Merlin soared over James Wilson Park, Bell Co 4 May (Randy Pinkston).

Brown-crested Flycatcher – A territorial Brown-crested Flycatcher was at Riverbend Park, Bastrop Co 15 May (audio Justin Bosler) and one or the same was heard calling 1.3 km away in Smithville 17 May (Ron and Susan Martin), both instances suggesting breeding.

Couch's Kingbird – Couch's Kingbird continues to maintain a presence in the central oaks and prairies region with sightings this season in Austin, Bell, Brazos, McLennan, Travis, Washington, and Williamson Cos.

Western Kingbird – An early arriving Western Kingbird was photographed 22 Mar (ph. Susan Schroeder) at Cedar Creek, Bastrop Co.

Least Flycatcher – Exceptionally early was a Least Flycatcher photographed 4 Apr (ph. Jeff Osborne, Janet Davis) at Shoal Creek Greenbelt in Austin, Travis Co.

Northern Shrike – The surprise Northern Shrike that first showed up at Wilson H. Fox Park at Granger Lake, Williamson Co 17 Nov 2021 continued to be viewed almost daily and reported on eBird over 380 times to 18 Mar 2022 (Rich Kostecke).



Northern Shrike, 9 Mar, Granger Lake, Williamson Co, © Tim Fennell

Common Raven – East of its normal range, a Common Raven was at Woodway, McLennan Co 9 May (Keith Reich).

Tufted Titmouse – Almost all titmice in McLennan Co are hybrids, so two well-documented sightings of Tufted Titmouse are noteworthy. One was at Oakwood Cemetery in Waco 8 May (Randolph King) and six were at Hallsburg 14 May (ph. Kathy Blocker).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – A major push of migrant Ruby-crowned Kinglets passed through Brison Park, Brazos Co. 9 Apr (Michael McCloy, Bill Eisele, Sandy Dillard) with individual counts of 23-28 birds. One was late 26 May 2022 (Bob Bevins) near Benchley, Robertson Co.

House Wren – A tardy migrant was still near Benchley, Robertson Co 28 May (Bob Bevins).

Cassin's Sparrow – An eruption of Cassin's Sparrows moved eastward to Austin, Bastrop, Fayette, McLennan, Milam, Waller, and Williamson Cos 26 Apr—21 May. A remarkable high count of 13 was attained along the rural roads near Granger, Williamson Co 15 May (ph. Jason Leifester).



Cassin's Sparrow, 15 May, Smithville, Bastrop Co, © Byron Stone

Clay-colored Sparrow – A Clay-colored Sparrow first found at Laas Farm 3 Feb continued to 6 Apr (Harvey Laas).

Dark-eyed Junco – Quite unusual for an eastern location, up to three Oregon form Dark-eyed Juncos were seen nearly daily below seed feeders in a yard near Centerville, Leon Co 10 Jan—29 Mar (Greg Page).



Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon form), 24 Mar, Centerville, Leon Co, © Greg Page

White-throated Sparrow – A very late White-throated Sparrow was studied 23 May (Eric Lewis) at the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Brazos Co.

LeConte's Sparrow – Quite late for LeConte's Sparrow was one described at a ranch near Calvert, Robertson Co 10 May (Alberto Manterola, Jackie Girouard, Kate Cupps).

Henslow's Sparrow – In Brazos Co, rare Henslow's Sparrows continued from winter at Veterans Park in College Station until 1 Mar (Shun-Yuan Huang) and at Texas A&M University Ecology & Natural Resource area until 25 Mar (Laura Sare).

Savannah Sparrow – A late Savannah Sparrow 26 May (Willem Meintjes) was found at Lake Travis Mansfield Dam, Travis Co.

Song Sparrow – Exceptionally late, a Song Sparrow was described 10 May (Alberto Manterola, Jackie Girouard, Kate Cupps) at a ranch near Calvert, Robertson Co.

Spotted Towhee – A late-departing Spotted Towhee was at Commons Ford Ranch Metro Park, Travis Co 16 May (Mark Clegg).

Bobolink – Rare migrants through the central oaks and prairies with few sightings in McLennan Co, Bobolinks put on quite a show at farmlands near Leroy 5-10 May (ph. Matthew York), peaking at 24 birds on 6 May (Randolph King).



Bobolink, 6 May, McLennan Co, © Randolph King

Bullock's x Baltimore Oriole – At the junction of the ranges of Bullock's and Baltimore Orioles, hybrids have been rare, so one photographed at James Wilson Park, Bell Co 4 May (Randy Pinkston) is noteworthy.

Worm-eating Warbler – A rare migrant through the central oaks and prairies, this season brought single Worm-eating Warblers to Brison Park, Brazos Co 5 Apr (Laura Sare, audio Bill Eisele), Sun City, Travis Co 23 Apr (ph. Kelly Holligan), Barton Creek Wilderness Park, Travis Co 6 May (ph. Caleb Helsel), and Chalk Ridge Falls, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Bell Co 8 May (ph. Kevin Ebert). Quite unusual was a warbler that was seen repeatedly at Nicholas Dawson Park, Travis Co 11 Apr—13 May (Joyce Bird, ph. Jason Garcia, audio Vincent O'Brien).



Worm-eating Warbler, 11 Apr, Nicholas Dawson Park, Travis Co, © Jason Garcia

Brewster's Warbler – A Brewster's Warbler, hybrid of Golden-winged and Blue-winged, was described at College Station, Brazos Co 1 May (Tyler Scott). It is the ninth record for the central oaks and prairies region since the first report in 1967.

MacGillivray's Warbler – Only the fourth record for Bastrop Co, a male MacGillivray's Warbler was photographed at a ranch near Elgin 8 May (ph. Charles Alberty). Another of these rare migrants in eastern parts of Texas was seen at Fort Hood East Range, Bell Co 11 May (Chris Waas).

Hooded Warbler – Although Simmons (1925) and Strecker (1929) reported the presence of migrant Hooded Warblers in McLennan Co, the only dated record in almost a century was in 2002. Hence it is amazing that this spring, single Hooded Warblers were found at five disparate locations, two at Waco addresses 14 Apr (Mike Hernandez) and 10 May (Nathan Cowan, Jeremy Ballard), and others at Mammoth National Monument 26 Apr (ph. Rob Bradfield, David Christian, audio Rob Bradfield), Flat Rock Access 1 May (Keith Reich), and Lake Waco Wetlands (ph. Randolph King).



Hooded Warbler, 4 May, Lake Waco Wetlands, McLennan Co, © Randolph King

Chestnut-sided Warbler – A tardy migrant Chestnut-sided Warbler was at Texas A&M University Research Park, Brazos Co 31 May (Laura Sare).

Black-throated Gray Warbler – A rare, almost casual, visitor to the central oaks and prairies, a male Black-throated Gray Warbler was described at McKinney Falls SP 19 Mar (Sean Mecredy). It was only the twelfth individual reported in the region in the past three decades.

Canada Warbler - A late record for Canada Warbler was one photographed 29 May (ph. Kelly Holligan) at Round Rock, Williamson Co.

Western Tanager – Western Tanagers west of their normal range were at western Austin, Travis Co 27 Apr (ph. Steven McDonald), Gotier Trace Road in Bastrop Co early Mar to 21 Mar (ph. Woody & Patricia Raine), and near Hockley in northeast Waller Co 17 Mar (ph. Sydney Lee Kobs).



Western Tanager, 20 Mar, Gotier Trace Road, Bastrop Co, © Woody Raine

Black-headed Grosbeak – Far west of its normal range, a pair of Black-headed Grosbeaks visited a Sealy feeder nearly daily 4 Jan—29 Mar 2022 (Charlene Koehler), the same location where a single grosbeak came 19 Jan—29 Mar 2021.

Lazuli Buntings – Lazuli Buntings moved eastward into the central oaks and prairies, with sightings of two males and a female were at Lake Waco Wetlands 3 May 2022 (Randolph King) and a single bird that later was identified as a hybrid continued through May. The numerous other reports canvassed Bastrop, Bell, Burleson, McLennan, Travis, and Williamson Cos 28 Mar—22 May. Specifically, the other sightings were singles at Salado in Bell Co 28 May (ph. Daniel Kelch), at Austin in Travis Co 4 Apr (ph. David Ng), at Belton Lake in Bell Co 22 Apr (Noah Price), at Shoal Creek Greenbelt in Travis Co 23 Apr (River Ahlquist), at Sayers Road in Bastrop Co 28 Apr (ph. Richard Kaskan), at the Brazos River bottoms in Burleson 28 Apr—3 May (ph. Andrea Fox), at Baylor Camp Road in McLennan Co 29 Apr (ph. Matthew York), at Harman Ranch in Bastrop Co 1 May (Richard Harman), at Austin in Williamson Co 2 May (ph. Steven McDonald), at Dottie Jordan Park in Travis Co 5 May (Brooke Rich), and at Pace Bend Park in Travis Co 22 May (ph. Bill Reiner Jr.).

Lazuli x Indigo Bunting (hybrid) – One hybrid Lazuli x Indigo Bunting was repeatedly seen at Lake Waco Wetlands, McLennan Co 3 May—26 Jun (ph. Randolph King, ph. Caleb Crain)



Lazuli x Indigo Bunting, 8 May, Lake Waco Wetlands, McLennan Co, © Randolph King

Dickcissel – Huge flocks of Dickcissels swarmed the fields and trees near Granger Lake with estimates of 500 on 1 May (Kelly Holligan, Craig Browning), 2000 on 2 May (Jack Cochran), and 700 on 3 May (ph. Tim Fennell).

CONTRIBUTORS:

River Ahlquist, Charles Alberty, Andy Balinsky, Jeremy Ballard, Bob Bevins, Joyce Bird, Kathy Blocker, Justin Bosler, Clayton Bownds, Rob Bradfield, Donald Brightsmith, Craig Browning, Lance Caldwell, Ivan Castaneda, David Christian, Mark Clegg, Jack Cochran, Greg Cook, Gus Cothran, Nathan Cowan, Caleb Crain, Syliva Culler, Kate Cupps, Janet Davis, Sandy Dillard, Dave Dolan, Kevin Ebert, Bill Eisele, Brandy Falise, Eric Faria, Timothy Fennell, Andy & Ellen Filtness, Andrea Fox, Bert Frenz, bert2@bafrenz.com, Jason Garcia, Robert Gearhart, Jackie Girouard, Gary Giroux, Steve Glover, Richard Harman, Mike Hernandez, Caleb Helsel, Garrett Hodne, Kelly Holligan, Shun-Yuan Huang, Richard Kaskan, Daniel Kelch, Randolph King, Sydney Lee Kobs, Charlene Koehler, Rich Kostecke, Harvey Laas, Jason Leifester, Steven Lamonde, Eric Lewis, Ron & Susan Martin, Damian & Nancy Martinez, Michael McCloy, Mark McDermott, Steven McDonald, Sean Mecredy, Alberto Manterola, Willem Meintjes, Joseph Mitchell, David Ng, Vincent O'Brien, Doug Orama, Jeff Osborne, Greg Page, Amy Parker, Jay Parker, Geoffrey Palmer, Charlie Plimpton, Randy Pinkston, Noah Price, Woody & Patricia Raine, Fay Ratta, Keith Reich, Bill Reiner Jr., Brooke Rich, Ronald Newhouse, Mike Rogan, Kelley Sampeck, Ben Sandstrom, Laura Sare, Susan Schroeder, David Scott, Tyler Scott, Scott Snyder, Jane Tillman, Clinton Trimble, Adam Van Allen, Mycha Ashlee Van Allen, Darrell Vollert, Jeffrey Ward, Chris Waas, Brandon Woo, Matthew York.