

TRANS-PECOS BIRD REPORT
MARCH – MAY, 2006
Compiled by Jim Paton

An exceedingly dry spring followed on the heels of an exceedingly dry winter. A number of locations, including Alpine, Ft. Davis, and El Paso were each at an inch of precipitation or less in the period from November, 2005 through May, 2006. The spring was also quite windy and hot. Effects of these conditions on birds were not immediately obvious but will likely result in less breeding success for the summer season. Migration was late, with numbers of common migrants such as Wilson's Warbler still moving through in good numbers through the end of the period. Few shorebird reports were received. A number of exciting rarities were found, with Big Bend National Park leading the way.

Cited observers are listed at the end of the report. Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) review species are in **bold**.

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK: Any whistling-duck is very rare to casual in the region, so four at Imperial Reservoir, *Pecos*, on 10May were a great find (BF, CG).

LEAST GREBE: One hung around Rio Grande Village – Daniels Ranch, BBNP, from 27April- 4May (GB, m.ob), one of the only semi-reliable locations for the species in the region.

BROWN PELICAN – It took a year longer than it should have, but Brown Pelican was finally added to the documented BBNP list on the strength of an immature bird photographed at the Hot Springs in May of 2005 (PM).

LITTLE BLUE HERON: An adult in an effluent field near Marfa, *Presidio*, on 26April was certainly a surprise (ML).

Colonial Waterbirds: By the end of the period, there was very little nesting activity among colonial waterbirds at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth*. Both Double-crested and Neotropic Cormorants failed to nest, and numbers of Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, and Black-crowned Night-Heron were much reduced over two years ago. The cause of this is unclear, as large *Aechmophorus* grebe numbers suggest that poor fish populations are not the reason, and water levels are similar to years past (JP).

WHITE-TAILED KITE: Continuing the species ability to pop up about anywhere in the region, up to three White-tailed Kites was surprising in the high Davis Mountains at the Davis Mountains Preserve at 6000 feet elevation, 27March+ (JaP, m. ob). Another White-tailed Kite 9 miles north of Sierra Blanca 11March (CB) provided a first record for *Hudspeth*.

GRAY HAWK: The Gray Hawk pair at Cottonwood Campground, BBNP, again attempted nesting and birds were again present along Limpia Creek in the Davis Mountains.

HARRIS'S HAWK: One in Ft. Davis on 24March (ML) was away from known locations in the region.

SHORT-TAILED HAWK: A great find, but not too surprising given the recent surge in records in border ranges in Arizona and New Mexico, was an adult light phase Short-tailed Hawk photographed in the Davis Mountains Preserve, *Jeff Davis*, on 23April (ML) and seen subsequently there on 5May (KB). This represents the second Trans-Pecos record with the first from the Chisos Mountains, 28April2002. Are the Guadalupe next?

ZONE-TAILED HAWK: One photographed in El Paso on 13May (JP) was the first diagnostically photographed in the El Paso area, after a few reports in recent years. The species is either overlooked or is an unexpectedly rare migrant through the far western parts of the region.

FERRUGINOUS HAWK: One in creosote flats seven miles north of Presidio on 9May (ML) was notably late and in atypical habitat for the species.

PURPLE GALLINULE: One of the best finds of the season was the adult Purple Gallinule found on 6May on a pond in Musquiz Canyon between Alpine and Ft. Davis (RT). The bird was then seen and photographed by Lockwood, 11-20May. Though there are reports from BBNP, mostly Rio Grande Village, and a 6June1983 specimen record from Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, *Brewster*, documented records from the region are very few.

MARBLED GODWIT – One at Independence Creek Preserve on 7April (CL) made for a rare *Terrell* record.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER: Two-four were seen at Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves*, on 27May-5 June (SC, MR et al.). This species is rare but regular and the date fits well with the established pattern for this notoriously late migrant.

BONAPARTE'S GULL: One photographed in Santa Elena Canyon on 1March (MF) was the first documented for BBNP and one at McNary Reservoir, 29May-9June (JP) was notably late and became a very rare summer record.

LEAST TERN: Least Tern is a rare visitor during late spring and early summer with a few reported each year. One at Balmorhea Lake on 27May (SC, MR) and another at McNary Reservoir on 29May (JP) fit perfectly with the established pattern of occurrence.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE: Having first exploded in the region in 2001, the species has become a ubiquitous resident of every town in the region and is hardly "newsworthy" anymore. However, it has only recently spread into areas away from human habitation. It has consolidated its presence in BBNP, having been seen in numerous locations and is now breeding at Rio Grande Village (fide MF) and birds have also been reported from Pine Springs in GMNP (fide JW).

RUDDY GROUND-DOVE: On 31May a pair was reported from giant cane along the Rio Grande in BBNP along the Boquillas Canyon Trail (CS). If accepted, this record would be the latest for the region, though there are other documented records from early May.

GREEN VIOLET-EAR: A Green Violet-Ear in the Davis Mountains Resort, 16May+ (M & ME) was only the second for the Trans-Pecos, with the previous record coming from the same yard.

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD: Two Broad-billed Hummingbirds were noted: a male in the Christmas Mountains north of Big Bend, 9May+ (CO-J, ML) and a female at the Eastman's in the Davis Mountains Resort, 25-30March.

WHITE-EARED HUMMINGBIRD: This species continues to confirm its status as a regular visitor to the Davis Mountains Resort. A male showed up on 12April for the earliest spring arrival for Texas and stayed through the period (fide ML), and a female appeared at another nearby yard on 28May+ (M & ME).

LUCIFER HUMMINGBIRD: One photographed in Sheffield, *Terrell*, on 1May (BS) was well to the east of its known locations in the state and is likely a county first.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD: Spring migrant records are more scarce than fall, when it is a regular and expected migrant in small numbers. This spring one was in Panther Junction, BBNP on 28April (R & AD) and another was in Alpine on 18May (ML).

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD: In recent years, an average of roughly one Rufous Hummingbird has appeared as a spring migrant in the El Paso area. This spring nearly every well-monitored set of feeders reported a bird, and Zimmer had no fewer than four in his yard, including an immature male which lingered into May for a first local May record. A reasonable hypothesis is that extreme drought in typical migration corridors in Arizona may have forced birds to fan out along a broader front, as something was clearly "up" with the species this spring.

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER: The bird from the winter at the Frijole Ranch, GMNP, lingered through most of May (fide JW) and another was found in the Davis Mountains near the McDonald Observatory on 16April (ML).

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER: One present 22-23March in extreme northern *Presidio* near Valentine (C & JM) was well away from areas of regular occurrence. The species generally gets no farther west than the *Presidio* area and this may represent the most westerly record for the region.

BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER: Once again, the species was found in small numbers in the Davis Mountains Preserve, 16April+ (m. ob). Surveys in early May located birds at three different locations, with a lone male and two pairs, one of which was incubating by early June.

DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER: On 13May, three pairs were located high in the Davis Mountains Preserve, in the same areas as in 2004 and 2005 (ME, ML). On 28May one was found along the Limpia Chute trail on the east flank of Mount Livermore (SC, MR). The species was less visible in BBNP this year, with the only report of two heard-only birds on 28May near Boot Canyon (CA, GC, RD, and BG).

TROPICAL KINGBIRD: In BBNP, the species is only rarely reported away from its nesting site at Cottonwood Campground, making one at Rio Grande Village on 27April (JD) noteworthy.

COUCH'S KINGBIRD: One heard calling at Cottonwood Campground, BBNP on 20May (MF) made for a rare Trans-Pecos record and a nice contrast with the Tropical Kingbirds there.

THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD: One was reported from Dugout Wells, BBNP on 27 May (HW). The details will be reviewed by the TBRC.

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO: One at Rio Grande Village, BBNP, on 13April (W & EH) was rare.

CASSIN'S VIREO: One in El Paso on 17March (JP) was the first local March record and likely a wintering bird as it was a month early of expected spring migrant dates.

HUTTON'S VIREO: One was found in west El Paso on 7March (PF) where it is a rare migrant and winter visitor. Since the species nests no closer than 30 miles to El Paso, it is clearly not as sedentary a species as once believed.

VARIED THRUSH: Hot on the heels of two birds in the Chisos this winter, a male Varied Thrush was photographed at Cottonwood Campground, BBNP, on 14Mar (ADo).

BROWN THRASHER: Rare but regular, a the Brown Thrasher that over wintered at Davis Mountains State Park linger through 21March (ML).

LONG-BILLED THRASHER: Always a good find in the region and less than annual, a Long-billed Thrasher wandered up the Pecos River from its south Texas haunts and was photographed in Sheffield on 6May (BS).

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER: One in El Paso on 24May (BZ) was notably late.

TROPICAL PARULA: One reported at Panther Junction, BBNP, on 2March (R & AD) was a good find. The species nests just to the east of the region in the Devils River area and seems to be spreading northward. There are several prior BBNP records.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER: On 19May a male was seen at Panther Junction, BBNP (MF, R & AD).

MAGNOLIA WARBLER: Big Bend had a handful of nice eastern warbler sightings in the last half on May. One of the better ones was a Magnolia Warbler at Rio Grande Village on 26May (HW).

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER: One in El Paso on 24May was notably late (BZ). This species is a pretty early migrant and any found after 10May or so is unusual.

HERMIT WARBLER: Lowland records of Hermit Warbler are unusual, so a male in El Paso photographed on 30April (JP) was a good find.

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER: Yellow-throated Warbler made two appearances this spring. A male returned for the second year to the Davis Mountains Preserve on 22April+ (ML, KB) and another was reported from Hot Springs, BBNP, on 20April (DS).

GRACE'S WARBLER: Grace's Warbler is only rarely seen as a migrant, especially in lowland areas. One was in El Paso on 13May (JP) and another was found in BBNP, where it does not breed, along the Colima Trail on 7May (AM).

AMERICAN REDSTART: One of the more regular "eastern" warblers in the region, lone American Redstarts were found on 10May in the Christmas Mountains north of BBNP (ML) and on 29May in El Paso (JP).

WORM-EATING WARBLER: Rare in the region, one was reported from the Chisos Basin, BBNP, 20-23April (DS).

OVENBIRD: Another nice warbler was the Ovenbird found around Boot Spring, BBNP on 15May (KL).

HOODED WARBLER: One was found at Boot Spring, BBNP on 28May (CA, GC, RD, and BG).

WILSON'S WARBLER: It is not unusual to find a straggling Wilson's Warbler or two migrating through even at the very end of May. However, this spring good numbers were still on the move at this time, with double digit counts from El Paso on dates as late as May 29 (JP). This late migration was perhaps a reflection of the dry conditions, with birds lingering in favored areas.

CANADA WARBLER: Canada Warbler is one of the rarest eastern warblers through the interior west, with none reported most springs. This season two stunning males were seen, one in El Paso on 23May (DA) for a third *El Paso* record and the other at Cattail Falls in BBNP on 30May (BG).

RED-FACED WARBLER: A Red-faced Warbler was reported from BBNP along the Laguna Meadows Trail on 30April (JV).

PAINTED REDSTART: In recent years, Painted Redstart has become much more regular as a migrant in the El Paso area. Spring migrant records fall neatly into the last week of

March and the first week of April and these year was no exception with lone birds at Hueco Tanks SHS on 31March (KT) and in El Paso on 2April (fide BJ). In BBNP, birds were again much in evidence in the higher drainages of the Chisos, especially in Boot Canyon.

SLATE-THROATED REDSTART: The season's best find was likely the Slate-throated Redstart nicely photographed in Boot Canyon, BBNP on 2May (J & LW). Attempts to relocate the bird were unsuccessful. This is the sixth documented record for the Trans-Pecos.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT: First found on 20May, Yellow-breasted Chats found Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso, to their liking (JS), a good indication that habitat restoration efforts there are recreating the desired appropriate floodplain conditions.

HEPATIC TANAGER: Only rarely seen as lowland migrant, a male was in El Paso on 17May (JS) at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park and a female was seen in El Paso on 20May (JP). Flippo reported birds at lower than usual elevations in BBNP, thought perhaps to be a reflection of dry conditions.

LARK BUNTING: One near the west entrance of BBNP on 27May was especially late (BG).

SAVANNAH SPARROW: Lone birds in northern *Brewster* on 30May (BS) and near Comstock, *Val Verde*, also on 30May (MG), were a good three weeks late of normal late departure dates.

BAIRD'S SPARROW: As has happened in past years, migrant Baird's Sparrows were attracted to the moist conditions around Rio Grande Village, BBNP, where birds can occasionally be well-seen and photographed. On 1May a bird was reported from Daniels Ranch (JS) and one was nicely photographed there on 4May (KH, JL).

LINCOLN'S SPARROW: One at Boot Spring, BBNP, on 28May was late (BG).

COMMON GRACKLE: Lone birds at Cottonwood Campground, BBNP, on 29March and 28April (both MF) were rare.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE: Very rare in the region, two were reported from BBNP: one at Cottonwood Campground, 2-7May (KH, JL) and another at Rio Grande Village on 2May (KH, JL).

RED CROSSBILL: After a winter with very few reported, 13 Red Crossbills in the Davis Mountains Preserve on 22April (KB, ML) were the only ones reported.

PINE SISKIN: Small numbers of Pine Siskins lingered through the end of the period in El Paso, Ft. Davis, and Alpine.

undocumented rarities:

RED-FACED WARBLER: Panther Junction on 16May.

Cited observers: Dan Allen, Charley Amos, Gavin Bieber, Charles Britt, Kelly Bryan, Sheridan Coffey, Greg Cook, Rob and Angie Dean, Alec Dobson, Rachel Dugas, Jon Dunn, Marc and Maryann Eastman, Bert Filemyr, Mark Flippo, Paul Fushille, Brian Gibbons, Connie Goldman, Mary Gustafson, W and E Harrington, Kelly Holligan, Bob Johnson, Kit Larsen, Jason Leifester, Mark Lockwood, Carl Lundblad, Peter MacGregor, Al Mercer, Clay and Jody Miller, Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, Jay Packer, Jim Paton, Martin Reid, Bob Sargent, Charles Seniawski, Joe Shoemaker, Dennis Spriggs, John Sproul, Byron Stone, Keith Taggart, Rick Taylor, John Vanderpoel, Jim and Lynne Weber, Harley Winfrey, Jan Wobbenhorst, and Barry Zimmer