

WINTER TRANS-PECOS BIRD REPORT  
December 2006 – February 2007

Prepared by Jim Paton

Most of December was dry and mild, followed by a wet and cold end of the month and early January. The Chisos and Guadalupe mountains had more snowfall than in recent memory and El Paso had several snows. Compared to the previous winter, Big Bend National Park had at least two more inches of precipitation for December-January and all areas of the park reported in excess of two inches of precipitation for January alone. It was thought that this would presage an excellent spring wildflower display but germination was tardy, perhaps due to the cold conditions. By late February, wildflowers began to appear in numbers in the park.

Birding was relative slow for the period, with Big Bend reporting no review species for the first winter since 1999 – 2000. El Paso reported a returning Eurasian Wigeon and an Iceland Gull, a first for the Trans-Pecos that split its time between Texas and New Mexico. A Greater Pewee enjoyed by many in the Davis Mountains was only the second ever in winter for the region. Cave Swallow and Turkey Vulture wintered in El Paso, but numbers were hit by the cold weather in early January. Once again, aside from a decent showing by bluebirds, montane irruptives were in very short supply with no movement of jays, nuthatches, or finches to the lowlands.

TBRC review species in **bold**; cited observers listed at the end of the report.

**ROSS'S GOOSE:** For the second time, a blue-morph Ross's Goose was found in the large mixed white goose flock at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth*, 17Dec (BZ). The bird was present through at least 7Jan (JP). Twenty-five Ross's at Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves*, on 21Jan (ML) were a good total for there. Even more unusual was a clear Snow x Ross's photographed among them.

**CAACKLING GOOSE:** One to three hung out with a small flock of Canada Geese at McNary and Ft. Hancock reservoirs, 7-28Jan, for just the second *Hudspeth* record (JP).

**TUNDRA SWAN:** Only very rare to casual in the region, three Tundra Swans were a treat in Big Bend, spotted at three locations along the Rio Grande, 6-9Jan (MS, MF, DE).

**EURASIAN WIGEON:** Presumably the same bird that was there the previous winter, a male Eurasian Wigeon graced Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso*, 29Dec – 10Feb (JS, ph., m.ob). Water deliveries to the park ceased for the spring in mid-February, hastening the departure of hundreds of ducks. Eurasian Wigeon has essentially become annual in the El Paso area in recent years.

**CINNAMON TEAL:** Cinnamon Teal continues to expand in winter in the El Paso area and is now regular, especially at Rio Bosque WP where a number wintered. In addition, a few were found at other El Paso locations.

**HORNED GREBE:** Rare in the region, four at Ascarate Lake in El Paso on 2Jan (BZ) and three at Balmorhea Lake on 21Jan (ML) were the only reported.

**SNOWY and GREAT EGRETS:** Snowy and Great egrets were in small numbers and tough to find at the El Paso area reservoirs throughout the winter, in stark contrast to recent years. Merganser and cormorant numbers were typical there, suggesting the lack of egrets was not due to a lack of food supply.

**TURKEY VULTURE:** Turkey Vulture typically is gone from the region November – February. In recent years, a few have lingered well into November in El Paso and this trend continued in a big way this winter. Up to four hung in at Rio Bosque until at least 4Jan (JS) and five or six reportedly successfully overwintered nearby (fide JS), a first for the El Paso area.

**WHITE-TAILED KITE:** Only one report was received – one west of Marfa, *Presidio*, on 31Dec (DB, BP).

**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK:** This status of this species may be changing in the region, with increasingly more fall and winter reports from the central Trans-Pecos. A juvenile was at Rio Grande Village-Daniels Ranch, BBNP on 1-2Feb (JH, J&JB), an adult was 4 mi. N of Fort Davis, *Jeff Davis*, on 5 Jan (KB), an imm. bird was at Davis Mountains State Park, *Jeff Davis*, on 9Jan (ML), and an adult was at Balmorhea Lake on 21Jan (ML). All but the 5 Jan bird were photographed.

**MOUNTAIN PLOVER:** Nine found in agricultural fields near Dell City, *Hudspeth*, in late January (LB) were further evidence that the species winters there.

**WILSON'S PHALAROPE:** One at McNary Reservoir lingered from the fall until 17Dec (BZ); accidental in winter.

**ICELAND GULL:** An Iceland Gull present in New Mexico from 5Dec – 26Feb was seen from time to time in west El Paso at Keystone Marsh, 25Dec – 10Feb (JP, BZ) where it was extensively photographed. This first-winter bird was seen by many observers at the New Mexico location (Sunland Park racetrack) just yards west of the state line and, if accepted by the appropriate state committees, would be a first for New Mexico, a first Trans-Pecos record, and just the third for Texas.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** – A first-winter bird was spotted at two El Paso locations, 26Dec and 31Dec (both BZ) for just the third *El Paso* record.

**LONG-EARED OWL:** Abundant rainfall in the fall apparently created a large prey base for Long-eared Owls in the El Paso area. Five roosts were found in *El Paso* and *Hudspeth*, totaling thirty or so birds. In addition, a large roost (25-30 birds) was found just yards west of the state line in west El Paso.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER:** A female was in west El Paso, 2-4Jan (JP, BZ – ph.) for a very rare record. Downy Woodpecker is a very rare to casual visitor to El Paso, with about ten records.

**GREATER PEWEE:** A Greater Pewee in the Davis Mountains at Limpia Crossing, about ten miles west of Ft. Davis, 19Dec – 23Jan (T&CH, m.ob. ph.) was enjoyed by many. This is only the second winter record for the region (5-14Dec1995 in El Paso).

**HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER:** Any winter empid in El Paso is notable. A Hammond's Flycatcher was nicely photographed at Hueco Tanks State Historic Site on 16Jan (SL). There are fewer than five local winter records.

**DUSKY FLYCATCHER:** An empid found in west El Paso on 2Jan (JP, ph.) was tentatively identified as a Dusky. This identification was confirmed by its response to taped calls on 4Jan (BZ); only the second *El Paso* winter record.

**SWALLOWS:** Winter records of swallows continue to increase in the El Paso area. 25 **TREE SWALLOWS** were at McNary Reservoir on 7Jan (JP). **CAVE SWALLOW** once again overwintered at Rio Bosque WP. Up to 200 were seen on 29Dec (JS) with numbers much reduced after cold, wet weather in early January. In addition, one was at McNary Reservoir on 7Jan (JP) and another at Cottonwood Canyon, BBNP on 8Dec (JM). More unusual were the one to two **BARN SWALLOWS** at Rio Bosque – 26Dec (JP), 8Jan (BZ), and 18Jan (JS).

**WINTER WREN:** Rare in the region, single Winter Wrens appeared at scattered sites: 17Dec near Ft. Hancock, *Hudspeth* (MS, JZ), Ft. Bliss, *El Paso*, 28Dec (DB, BP) – 7Feb (BZ), and 30Dec in BBNP on the River Road east.

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** – Though not reported in most of the region, 3-5 Golden-crowned Kinglets were found at several BBNP sites in late December and two were at The Post near Marathon on 1Jan (DB, BP).

**GRAY CATBIRD:** Providing a nice bonus for those searching for the Greater Pewee, a Gray Catbird was west of Ft. Davis at Limpia Crossing, 16-29Dec (fide ML) for a rare winter record.

**BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER:** One at Arroyo Park in El Paso on 27Dec (DB, BP) was only the second for El Paso in winter. A bit more expected but still rare was one at Rio Grande Village, BBNP, on 30Dec (MF).

**WILSON'S WARBLER:** One in BBNP on the Chisos CBC, 30Dec (fide MF) was thought to perhaps be the first winter record for the park.

**HARRIS'S SPARROW:** A Harris's Sparrow at Rio Bosque WP, 13Feb – 4Mar (JS, JP-ph.) was a first for the park and the first in El Paso in a number of years.

COMMON GRACKLE: Rare in the El Paso area, fourteen at Rio Bosque WP on 2Feb (JS) were the only ones reported.

**Cited observers:** Lynn Barber, J&J Biddick, David Bradford, Kelly Bryan, David Elkowitz, Mark Flippo, Jim Hines, Tom and Carol Hobby, Mark Lockwood, Stephan Lorenz, John Muldrow, Jim Paton, Brandon Percival, Melford Smith, John Sproul, Barry Zimmer