

**TRANS – PECOS BIRD REPORT**  
**Fall (August – November) 2007**  
Prepared by Jim Paton

It was an exciting fall in the Trans-Pecos. The bird of the season, and of many a year, was the state first Fan-tailed Warbler found in Pine Canyon, Big Bend National Park, on 13 August by Carpenter and Burnett. Though typically skulky, numerous patient observers were rewarded with views over the next six weeks and the bird was wonderfully documented. Warbler seekers also discovered one, and then two, Northern Pygmy-Owls in Pine Canyon, 17 August – 29 September. There were just two accepted records prior, the last being from Boot Spring, BBNP, on 25 April 1993.

White-eared Hummingbirds continued in amazing numbers in the Davis Mountains, and a great variety of rare hummingbirds was reported including the first Berylline since 2000. Balmorhea Lake produced some good shorebird records. For the first time in five years, the western Trans-Pecos, especially El Paso, saw a nice montane irruption. Red-breasted Nuthatches appeared in good numbers starting in late August, with smaller numbers of the following species: Steller's Jay, Western Scrub-Jay, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Cassin's Finch, and Red Crossbill. Frugivores like bluebirds and Sage Thrasher were in short supply. A lone Clark's Nutcracker was reported from Guadalupe Mountains National Park in early September. The season ended with a returning Eurasian Wigeon and a flurry of rare gulls from the El Paso area.

Weather was generally seasonal with average to above average moisture throughout. Big Bend saw abundant rains continue from summer through September. All areas of the park were well above 2006 year-to-date precipitation levels and the Chisos Basin reported a notable 21.5 cm for the season.

Texas Bird Records Committee review species in **bold**; cited observers listed at the end of the report.

**EURASIAN WIGEON** – A male at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso*, 20 Nov+ (JS, ph.) was returning for its third winter.

LESSER SCAUP – A male at Ft. Hancock Reservoir, *Hudspeth*, on 2 Sept (JP) was early.

SURF SCOTER – Four at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth*, on 28 Oct (JP, ph.) were a good total and the date was right in the expected window for this rare visitor.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER – A female at Ft. Hancock Res. on 2 Sept (JP) was extremely early; unusual was a road-killed female near Rio Grande Village, BBNP, *Brewster*, on 31 Oct (HS).

HORNED GREBE – Rare in the region, two were at McNary Res., 11 Nov+ (JP).

CLARK'S GREBE – On 23Sept, many young were among the 164 counted at Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves* (ML). Many *Aechmophorus* grebes were present all period at McNary Res., and courtship displays were seen, but no young were noted (JP).

BROWN PELICAN – One to two were seen at McNary Res. off and on all period with a juvenile on 2Sept (JP) and 16Sept (BZ) and an adult on the following dates (all JP): 2Sept, 7Oct, 28Oct, and 11Nov.

LITTLE BLUE HERON – One was at Lake Amistad on 8Nov (ML) for a rare *Val Verde* report.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON – Regular in recent years, an adult was again at McNary Res., 18-25Aug (JP).

WHITE-TAILED KITE – Rio Bosque Wetlands Park is as “regular” a site as any for this enigmatic visitor with sightings sporadically there since 2001. One was again spotted there 23-24Sept (JS).

NORTHERN HARRIER – After a summer of interesting observations, a pair at Ft. Bliss with two fresh juveniles on 24Aug (BZ) provided a first documented breeding record for *El Paso*.

HARRIS'S HAWK – Though typically local in the region, Harris's Hawk does occasionally appear in areas outside of its expected range. One south of Iraan, *Pecos*, on 23Sept (RP) fit into this category.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER – It was an excellent fall for this species with one at Balmorhea Lake on 23Aug (BG, TL, CW) and a noteworthy seven there on 13Oct (ML), likely a record total for the region. Two more were noted at the Presidio sewage ponds, *Presidio* 10 Oct (DO, CO-J).

MOUNTAIN PLOVER – 186 were counted in one large field near Dell City, *Hudspeth*, on 11Nov (JP), more evidence that the species is a regular wintering bird in the agricultural fields there.

RUDDY TURNSTONE – Casual in the region, one at Balmorhea Lake on 2Sept (SC, MR) was the shorebird of the fall.

SANDERLING – Balmorhea Lake hosted singles of this rare migrant on 23Aug (BG, TL, CW) and 2Sept (SC, MR).

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER – Three reports was slightly above average for this uncommon to rare migrant – one at Balmorhea Lake on 23Aug (BG, TL, CW), three there on 2Sept (SC, MR), and one in El Paso on 5Oct (BZ).

**MEW GULL** – One first-winter bird was present at Keystone Heritage Park in west El Paso as well as in adjacent New Mexico, 20Nov+ (JP, ph., m.ob). There are now a number of El Paso records for this species among the large wintering Ring-billed Gull flock.

**CALIFORNIA GULL** – A first-winter bird was photographed at McNary Res. on 23Nov (JP, BZ) and it remained through the period.

**THAYER'S GULL** – Found the previous day in New Mexico (BZ), a first-winter bird turned up at Keystone Heritage Park, El Paso, on 27Nov (JP).

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** – One first-winter bird at Keystone Heritage Park, 21Nov+ (DA, m.ob, ph.) split time between the two states and was the fourth for *El Paso*.

**SABINE'S GULL** – It was a good fall for the species with one at Ft. Bliss on 28Sept (BZ) and one at Balmorhea Lake on 13Oct (ML). A pair at Tornillo Reservoir, *El Paso*, on 11Nov (JP) were about a month late of expected departure dates.

**CASPIAN TERN** – Rare to casual, one was at Ft. Hancock Res. on 18Aug (JP).

**BAND-TAILED PIGEON** – Something seemed to be up with Band-tailed Pigeons as El Paso recorded its second and third for the year – 7Oct (BZ) and 14Oct (JK). The species is seen far less than annually in El Paso.

**NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL** – Very exciting was the discovery of one, and then two, Northern Pygmy-Owls in Big Bend's Pine Canyon, 17Aug – 7Oct (DJ, DE, m.ob, ph, audio). The rapid double note calls as well as plumage details indicate that the birds were of Mountain Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma gnoma*). This is just the third record for Texas.

**LONG-EARED OWL** – Twelve or more birds returned to roost in the same dense salt-cedar thicket as last winter at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso, 13Nov+ (JS).

*Chaetura* swift – Two birds, not identified to species, were over El Paso on 20Oct (BZ). Vaux's Swift remains insufficiently documented for the state and is not on the state list.

**BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD** – The only report was of an immature bird in the Chisos Basin, BBNP, on 26Aug (BB, TR).

**WHITE-EARED HUMMINGBIRD** – Amazing numbers of White-eared Hummingbirds were again found in the Davis Mountains, *Jeff Davis*, all at feeders in the Davis Mountains Resort. Lockwood and Bryan, based on extensive photos, believed that up to fifteen birds were at the feeders of Bryan and of a neighbor. In addition, another home hosted two birds with the latest through 29Sept (M&ME).

**BERYLLINE HUMMINGBIRD** – One was photographed in the Davis Mountains Resort, 25-28Aug (KB, RW) for the first report since 2000.

**VIOLET-CROWNED HUMMINGBIRD** – Two Violet-crowned Hummingbirds were photographed in the region. One paid a long visit to the Eastman's in the Davis Mountains Resort (M&ME), 31Aug – 10Oct while more unexpected was a bird in Alpine, *Brewster*, 15-22Sept (W&BB, ML).

**MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD** – One was spotted sporadically 3-8Nov in an El Paso yard (JK) for a very rare El Paso record.

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** – Ruby-throated Hummingbird appeared in the central Trans-Pecos in above average numbers this fall (fide ML). As usual, none were noted in the far western Trans-Pecos.

**BROAD-TAILED X BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** – On 4Sept Lockwood photographed a hummingbird in his Alpine yard that looked to have the characteristics of this rare but known hybrid combination.

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD** – One at Seminole Canyon State Park on 8Nov (ML) provided a rare *Val Verde* record.

**COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD** – Rounding out a remarkable season for hummingbirds, a young male Costa's paid an extended visit to an Alpine yard 20Aug – 4Oct (ML). Photographs documented plumage changes during its stay.

**ACORN WOODPECKER** – Likely part of the larger montane invasion, a lone Acorn Woodpecker was spotted in El Paso on 16Oct (BZ).

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** – A male was found at Ft. Bliss on 5Oct (BZ). Surprisingly, given the two species relative abundance in mountains to the north, Downy Woodpecker records outnumber those of Hairy Woodpecker about ten to one in *El Paso*. In addition, Downy Woodpecker records have increased greatly in the past decade.

**LEAST FLYCATCHER** – One at Ft. Hancock on 2Sept (JP) was just a third for *Hudspeth*.

**BUFF-BREASTED FLYCATCHER** – A pair with two fledglings was in the Davis Mountains Preserve on 11Aug (ML). Though this is a known location for the species, the date makes it the latest nesting record for the state.

**EASTERN KINGBIRD** – Always a good find in the region, an Eastern Kingbird was in El Paso on 12Sept (BZ).

**HUTTON'S VIREO** – Continuing the trend of recent fall-winter records away from breeding areas, a Hutton's Vireo was in El Paso on 12Nov (BZ). The closest breeders are

some forty miles to the north. Hutton's Vireo seems to wander a bit more in winter than is generally acknowledged.

**STELLER'S JAY** – Very small numbers of Steller's Jays irrupted into the El Paso area this fall, with high counts of just two or three birds in November. The last invasion, and a much greater one, was in the fall of 2002.

**CLARK'S NUTCRACKER** – One bird was described from the upper elevations of Guadalupe Mountains National Park, *Culberson*, on 2Sept (EB). The species did show some movement early in the fall into montane areas of south-central NM where not normally present.

**MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE** – For the first time since the huge influx in 2000, a few Mountain Chickadees could be found in El Paso.

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** – Good numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches could be found all fall in El Paso, with the greatest numbers in September. More unusual was an early bird in Sierra Blanca, 25Aug (JP) for a 4<sup>th</sup> *Hudspeth* record and one in Balmorhea, *Reeves*, on 23Oct (ML).

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** – Much less likely to irrupt than their smaller Red-breasted kin, a few White-breasted Nuthatches were spotted in El Paso for the first time in several years.

**Bluebirds** – It was a very poor fall for bluebirds as well as for Sage Thrasher.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** – A bird of the "Russet-backed" race was spotted in Pine Canyon, BBNP, on 20Sept (ML) but it eluded photographic efforts. There are several El Paso records including photos, but the race remains poorly documented for the state.

**GRAY CATBIRD** – Late fall (October – early November) is the best time to locate this rare but regular migrant. Right on schedule, singles were in El Paso, 5 and 13Nov (BZ) and at Rio Grande Village – Daniel's Ranch, BBNP on 8Nov (MF).

**BROWN THRASHER** – The only report of this rare migrant and winter visitor was from El Paso on 4Nov (JK).

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** – Although one of the most regular migrant wood warblers on the Edwards Plateau and to the west in Arizona, Nashville Warbler is, believe it or not, a difficult bird to find in the El Paso area. The species could easily be missed in a year of birding. One was in El Paso on 23Sept (JP).

**COLIMA WARBLER** – North of its regular Chisos Mountains range, one was spotted on 26Aug in the Davis Mountains Resort (KB, ML).

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** – One at Ft. Bliss on 5Oct (BZ) was a rare El Paso record.

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH – One was reported from Boot Spring, BBNP, on 26Aug (BB, TR). Louisiana Waterthrush is casual in the region.

RED-FACED WARBLER – August in the Trans-Pecos generally means that a Red-faced Warbler will turn up somewhere and this August was no exception. Two birds were found, each in BBNP: 21Aug at Boot Spring (BG, TL, CW) and 24Aug in Pine Canyon (LP, RW).

**FAN-TAILED WARBLER** – The birding event was clearly the first state record of Fan-tailed Warbler found by Carpenter and Burnett in BBNP's Pine Canyon on 13Aug. The bird was last reported on 24Sept. Many birders made the bumpy drive and long hike to see this fabulous bird which was generally cooperative, though it could be elusive as is characteristic of the species. The bird was extensively documented with photographs and audiotape.

WESTERN X FLAME-COLORED TANAGER – On 24Sept a tanager in the Davis Mountains Resort (RP) showed many characteristics of this known hybrid combination.

FOX SPARROW – Always a good find in the region, one was in El Paso on 28Oct (JK).

COMMON GRACKLE – A male was at Panther Junction, BBNP, on 20Nov (MF). Rare.

HOODED ORIOLE – One which hung around an El Paso yard until 19Oct (BZ) lingered about seven weeks after expected departure dates.

CASSIN'S FINCH – Very small numbers were found in El Paso in October, for the first reports in several years. The species was first noted on 6Oct (BZ).

RED CROSSBILL – Small numbers were in El Paso with daily highs of fewer than ten birds.

Undocumented Rarities:

White-eared Hummingbird – Boot Canyon, Big Bend N.P. on 8Aug.

**Cited Observers:** Dan Allen, Eric Bents, Wallace and Bobby Brown, Kelly Bryan, Buck Buchanon, Maggie Burnett, Eric Carpenter, Sheridan Coffey, Marc and Maryann Eastman, David Elkowitz, Mark Flippo, Brian Gibbons, Dan Jones, John Kiseda, Tony Leukering, Mark Lockwood, Dale Ohl, Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, Laura Packer, Jim Paton, Randy Pinkston, Martin Reid, Thomas Riecke, Howard Smith, John Sproul, Ron Weeks, Cole Wild, and Barry Zimmer.