

Spring 2007 ABA Report – Panhandle and South Plains.

By Anthony Hewetson

This has been a strange year for both the Panhandle and the South Plains. Despite incredible amounts of rain, surprisingly evenly distributed across the regions, the spring shorebird season was horrible. Several observers commented that there was too much water – and that only the long-legged shorebirds seemed to be present in good numbers! Waders seem to be doing well with some early arrivals in the Panhandle – well worth noting as some of these species are now established as breeders in the Southern High Plains and may well be continuing their push northwards.

Songbirds continued to bedazzle or befuddle with continued early arrivals by some breeding species, particularly swallows, rather late arrival dates for some breeders, particularly flycatchers and orioles, and an unusually protracted migration on the part of flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, and buntings.

Waterfowl through Vultures

Greater White-fronted Goose – One very late bird near Cofferville, *Lamb* 11 Mar (AnH) – only the seventh March record for the South Plains.

Common Merganser – 2 at Rita Blanca Lake, *Hartley* 14 April (LS) – very late for the Panhandle.

Western Grebe – 2 at Rita Blanca Lake, *Hartley* 26 May (LS) – very late for the Panhandle and a first county record.

Great Egret – One at Mackenzie Park, *Lubbock* through 10 Mar (BB) – the third winter in a row that individuals of this species have successfully overwintered on the South Plains.

Snowy Egret – One at White River Lake, *Crosby* 24 Mar (AnH) – the earliest arrival date for the South Plains. One in *Gray* 23 Apr (MDL) – a very rare spring record for the Panhandle.

Black Vulture – One south of Floydada, *Floyd* 27 May (AnH, AvH) – accidental but increasing on the South Plains; the first record for the county and the tenth record for the region; most in the last decade.

Raptors through Terns

White-tailed Kite – A pair nested in northern *Kent* but lost their nest during heavy storms 20 May (JC, AnH) – the first documented breeding record for the South Plains.

American Avocet – One in *Gray* 5 Mar (MDL) – extraordinarily early for the Panhandle.

White-rumped Sandpiper – 4 just north of Lubbock, *Lubbock* 22 Apr (AnH) and 3 near Floydada, *Floyd* 26 May (AnH, AvH) – rarely documented on the South Plains in recent years; any record is noteworthy.

Wilson's Phalarope – 2 at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 25 Mar (BB) – a very early arrival for the South Plains.

Franklin's Gull – One in *Dallam* 14 Apr (LS) represented the first county record for this species. 60+ at Bull Lake, *Lamb* 21 Apr (AnH, AvH) represented an extraordinarily high number for the region.

Bonaparte's Gull – One at White River Lake, *Crosby* 24 Mar (AnH) – either very late or very early; the first March record for the South Plains.

California Gull – 3 second cycle birds at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 5 May (BB) – accidental; the fifth record for the South Plains and the third record of multiple birds – all within the last five years.

Pigeons through Woodpeckers

Long-eared Owl – One at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 15 Apr (BB) – the second year in a row of very late records for the South Plains.

Northern Saw-whet Owl – One in Lubbock, *Lubbock* 9 Feb-14 Mar (KHa, BB, AnH, photos) – a state review species and emphatically accidental for our region; only the third record for the South Plains.

Chuck-will's-widow – A pair at nest with two eggs along Mitchell Creek, *Donley* 26-28 May (BP, photos) – the first confirmed breeding record for the Panhandle; very exciting.

Rufous Hummingbird – One male at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 21 Apr (AnH, AvH) – very rare as a spring migrant on the South Plains.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – One in *Donley* 5 May (BP) – a very late record, only the fourth May record for the Panhandle.

Flycatchers through Swallows

Gray Flycatcher – One at Buffalo Lake NWR, *Randall* 22 Apr (BP) – accidental for the region; only the fourth record for the Panhandle.

Eastern Kingbird – One in *Gray* 30 Mar (MDL) represented a very early arrival date for the Panhandle. One in *Castro* 14 May (AnH, AvH) and one at Boy's Ranch, *Oldham* 15 May (LS) were both far west of their usual haunts in the Panhandle.

Tree Swallow – Two pairs on nests at Greenbelt Lake, *Donley* 19-26 May (JRu, BP) – vagrant as breeders in the Panhandle, may be becoming annual.

Cliff Swallow – 3 in *Gray* 24 Mar (LS) – represented a very rare March record for the Panhandle.

Cave Swallow – One near Begg's Ranch, *Kent* 15 Mar (AnH) represented the earliest arrival date for the South Plains. 2 pairs/nests near Needmore, *Terry* 14 Apr (AnH) and 7 pairs/nests just east of Post, *Garza* 6 May (AnH) solidified the expansion of the species into the South Plains.

Barn Swallow – One at Lake Tanglewood, *Randall* 25 Mar (TJ) – represented a very rare March record for the Panhandle.

Titmice through Warblers

Veery – One at the Lubbock Cemetery, *Lubbock* 19 May (AnH) – accidental for the region; only the fourth record for the South Plains.

Virginia's Warbler – One at Lake Six, *Lubbock* 19 May (AnH) – a very rare migrant through the South Plains.

Northern Parula – One at Lake Six, *Lubbock* 19 May (AnH) – a rare migrant through the South Plains.

Pine Warbler – One in a Lubbock yard, *Lubbock* 15 Mar (JH) – probably a lingering winter bird as this is a very rare wintering species on the South Plains but is even more rare as a spring migrant.

Palm Warbler – One at Clapp Park, *Lubbock* 28 Apr (AnH) – accidental during spring migration; the first spring record for the South Plains since 2002.

Prothonotary Warbler – One at Clapp Park, *Lubbock* 5 May (AnH, LM) – represented a rather late date; only the seventh May record for the South Plains. One at Buffalo Lake NWR, *Randall* 5 May (LS) – accidental for the Panhandle with less than ten records for the subregion.

Ovenbird – One at the Buffalo Springs Lake, *Lubbock* 19 May (AnH, AvH) represented a rare spring record for the South Plains. One near Canyon, *Randall* 6-12 May (RM, MS) represented an even more rare spring record for the Panhandle.

Tanagers through Finches

Cassin's Sparrow – 24 at the Crossbar Ranch, *Potter* 17 Mar (RM, mob) – an unusually early record for the Panhandle as well as an unusually high number.

Grasshopper Sparrow – While the species is doing well throughout the region this year, 77 along the Floydada BBS route, *Floyd* 26 May (AnH, AvH) represented an astonishingly large number for any local within the region.

White-throated Sparrow – One at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 5 May (BB) represented a very late report for the South Plains and a bird far west of its usual haunts in the region.

Black-headed Grosbeak – One female at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 21 Apr (AnH, AvH) – formerly considered accidental this early in the season; now annual in April for the South Plains.

Indigo Bunting – One near Kress, *Swisher* 18-19 Apr (JRe) represented a first county record.

Dickcissel – 74 along the Floydada BBS route, *Floyd* 26 May (AnH, AvH) illustrative of an incredible year for the species throughout the region.

Bronzed Cowbird – One male at Muleshoe NWR, *Bailey* 21 Apr (AnH, AvH), 2 males at Lake Six, *Lubbock* 28 Apr (AnH), 2 males at the Lubbock Cemetery, *Lubbock* 28 Apr (AnH), 6 females and 2 males on the James Wallace Ranch, *Kent* 6 May (AnH), one female and 3 males at the Lubbock Cemetery, *Lubbock* 19 May (AnH), one male at Lake Six, *Lubbock* 19 May (AnH), 2 females and one male at Camp Post, *Garza* 20 May (AnH, AvH), 2 males near Dougherty, *Floyd* 27 May (AnH), 2 males at White River Lake, *Crosby* 28 May (KHi), and one male just north of Crosbyton, *Crosby* 29 May (KHi) – a fantastic year for this steadily expanding species in our region; a total recovery from last year's dismal showing.

Observers

BB – Brandon Best

JC – Joe Carter

JH – Jill Haukos

KHa – Karen Hayden

AnH – Anthony Hewetson

AvH – Aveline Hewetson

KHi – Kelly Himmel

TJ – Tom Johnson

MDL – Manuel De Leon

LM – Lori Madry

RM – Ray Matlack
BP – Barrett Pierce
JRe – Joel Reese
JRu – Joe Rusk
LS – Laura Sare
MS – Monty Schoenhals