

TRANS-PECOS BIRD REPORT  
Spring (March – May), 2007  
Prepared by Jim Paton

Abundant rainfall continued to be the trend in the Trans-Pecos, this on the heels of a wet winter and fall. Through May, El Paso had received more than double its year-to-date average precipitation (3.64” vs. 1.71”). May was also one of the coolest and wettest Mays in Big Bend in the past thirty years. For example, the Chisos Basin reported 7.53” of precipitation during March-May, up 5.62” from the previous year.

Nesting Long-eared Owls in El Paso (the first local nesting since 1918!) and probable nesting there by Northern Harrier appeared to be a direct result of abundant rainfall and the resulting high rodent base. Wet conditions likely presage good nesting success for many species throughout the region. Water levels were high at Balmorhea Lake and the El Paso area reservoirs, leading to a near absence of shorebird reports. It was a good spring for Dusky-capped Flycatcher with a pair in Big Bend National Park (BBNP) and record numbers in the upper Davis Mountains. A Greater Pewee photographed in El Paso on 8May was one of the better rarities.

TBRC Review Species in **bold**; cited observers listed at the end of the report.

**Eurasian Wigeon** – A male Eurasian Wigeon found at Ft. Hancock Reservoir, *Hudspeth*, on 5May (JK et al) was likely the same one photographed nearby at Tornillo Reservoir, *El Paso*, on 7May (BZ). The male that wintered in El Paso was not seen after mid-February though all of these sightings could well be the same bird.

Horned Grebe – One at Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves*, on 12May (MS et al) was notably late.

Brown Pelican – Two adults were at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth*, on 5May (JP) with one there through 12May (MS et al). A juvenile was there 20-28May (ph. JP). Brown Pelican is an essentially an annual visitor to the El Paso area reservoirs, most often in spring and summer.

Colonial waterbirds – For the first time, colonial waterbirds failed to nest at McNary Res. By the end of the period there was no breeding activity noted among Neotropical and Double-crested cormorants or Snowy and Cattle egrets. Numbers of cormorants and egrets were much reduced by early June and many of the *Aechmophorus* grebes at McNary had displaced to nearby Ft. Hancock Res. Vegetation appeared to be the same as always at McNary, so evidently there was some negative change in water quality or prey availability there.

Tricolored Heron – The only rare heron report was of a Tricolored Heron at Rio Grande Village, BBNP, on 7May (MS et al).

Northern Harrier – A pair seen throughout May at Ft. Bliss (BZ) behaved in a way strongly suggestive of breeding, something not yet confirmed for the El Paso checklist

area. A female was seen at Balmorhea on 31May (JP). Rainfall has certainly improved conditions for the species.

Gray Hawk – Two pairs nested at BBNP – one at Rio Grande Village-Daniels Ranch and the other at Cottonwood Campground (fide MF, m.ob.). Nesting success was not yet confirmed by the end of the period.

Broad-winged Hawk – A rare but regular, and likely a bit overlooked, migrant through the region, two Broad-winged Hawks were noted, about par for the course – one in El Paso on 18April (JP) and one at Rio Grande Village on 29April (MF).

Aplomado Falcon – One photographed at BBNP along the road to Rio Grande Village on 28Mar (J & CE) was the first documented in the park. This female was part of the reintroduction effort and had been initially released 11 miles east of Marathon in July, 2004 (fide MF). Recent agricultural development in northern Chihuahua has been detrimental to the small population there. The fate of the introduced birds continues to be vital to the long-term success of the species in the northern Chihuahuan desert.

Stilt Sandpiper – One at Ft. Hancock Res. on 24Mar (JP) was notably early.

Laughing Gull – About annual at the El Paso area reservoirs, an adult was at McNary Res. on 5May (JP).

California Gull – One at McNary Res. on 5May (JP) was one of an impressive five species of gull there on that date. There have been fewer records of this species from the El Paso area reservoirs in recent years.

Least Tern – One was at Ft. Hancock Res. on 5May (JP, m.ob.), two were at McNary Res. on 28May (JP), and another was at Balmorhea Lake on the latter date (MR,SC). This fits perfectly with the expected pattern of spring-summer visits by this species in the western half of the region.

**Ruddy Ground-Dove** – One was reported on 6Mar from the La Clocha primitive campsite, BBNP (GK) and will be reviewed by the TBRC.

Long-eared Owl – On 29Apr Sproul spotted a Long-eared Owl roosting in salt-cedar at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso*. Through the period one or more birds were repeatedly observed, culminating in the detection in late May of at least two juveniles sporting some downy feathers. This is the first El Paso documented nesting record since 1918, although this species probably also nested in the area in 1934 and 1936. This lowland location is just yards from the Rio Grande. Interestingly, several more nesting records from low desert habitats came in from southern New Mexico. Doubtless more breeding occurred elsewhere in this hard-to-detect species.

*Chaetura* swift – A swift believed to be a Chimney was a good find near Boot Spring, BBNP on 11Apr (BC, MR). Chimney Swift is hypothetical for the park in spring.

Broad-billed Hummingbird – Continuing the spate of recent records, two Broad-billed Hummingbirds were at the Eastman's in the Davis Mountains Resort – a male 19Mar+ and a female 20Apr-30May (M & ME).

**White-eared Hummingbird** – No longer unexpected, a male was in the Davis Mountains Resort, 11May+ (*fide* ML). This species has been annual in small numbers in the Davis Mountains in recent years.

**Violet-crowned Hummingbird** – On a different level all together was the Violet-crowned Hummingbird in the Davis Mountains Resort on 23Apr (M & ME). This is the first *Jeff Davis* record and the eighth for the state.

Anna's Hummingbird – Anna's Hummingbird made news early and late in the period. On 5Mar a nest was found in west El Paso (MS, JZ). Two young had fledged by 24Mar (JK) for the state's third documented nesting record. Previous breeding records were from *Jeff Davis* (1976) and *El Paso* (2000). Late and unusual for the season was one in the Davis Mountains Resort from 2May through at least 12June (M & ME).

Northern Flicker – A family group at the city park in Sierra Blanca on 5May (JP) made for a rare *Hudspeth* breeding record. In the El Paso area this species is a rare and local nester, almost entirely in wooded residential areas along the Rio Grande in west El Paso.

**Greater Pewee** – A Greater Pewee photographed at Ft. Bliss on 8May (BZ) was only the second for *El Paso* and represented a very unusual lowland migrant record for the species.

**Buff-breasted Flycatcher** – At least one pair and another territorial male were found in the Davis Mountains Preserve in mid-April (ML).

**Dusky-capped Flycatcher** – A pair was located at Boot Spring, BBNP on 24Apr (MK). Lockwood relocated and photographed the birds on 16May and one was reported there on 18May (PB, RG). Nesting was not confirmed by the end of the period. Record numbers were found in the Davis Mountains Preserve 19May (ML) with up to six birds and four, perhaps five, territories.

Couch's Kingbird – A calling bird in Balmorhea on 26May (RH) was a first for *Reeves*. A pair looked to be nesting at Cottonwood Campground, BBNP (*fide* MF). This would be the first documented nesting for the park.

Eastern Kingbird – A very rare migrant anywhere in the region, one was at Rio Grande Village, BBNP on 29Apr (MF).

Brown Thrasher – Two reports were received of this rare migrant – one on 25Apr in the Davis Mountains Resort (M & ME) and another in northern *Hudspeth* on 2May (JO), just the fourth county record.

Golden-winged Warbler – A male Golden-winged Warbler was a great find at Rio Grande Village on 13May (JF).

Chestnut-sided Warbler – One was spotted in west El Paso on 9May (SH).

Black-throated Green Warbler – Two males were spotted along the Laguna Meadow trail, BBNP on 3May (MC).

Yellow-throated Warbler – Though it nests just east of the region, Yellow-throated Warbler is a rare find anywhere in the region. A male was noted at Rio Grande Village on 26Apr (JD).

Northern Parula – One was singing north of Ft. Davis, *Jeff Davis*, on 26May (RH).

Grace's Warbler – Rarely seen as a lowland migrant, one visited an El Paso yard on 8April (JP). More notable and just a second county record was one at a desert tank in northern *Hudspeth* on 2May (JO).

Prothonotary Warbler – One was at Rio Grande Village on 13May (S & MP).

Worm-eating Warbler – Always a great find in the region, one was at Boot Spring on 24April (RB).

**Slate-throated Redstart** – One was reported from Boot Canyon on 25Apr (JB). Efforts to relocate were not successful. This is the same location and a week earlier than a 2006 record there.

Spotted Towhee – One at Ft. Bliss on 24May (BZ) was several weeks late of expected departure dates.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow** – An adult in Sierra Blanca on 5May (JP) was only the third for *Hudspeth* and one of the latest of the 30 or so state records.

Common Grackle – The only report of this rare visitor was of a lone bird in Alpine, *Brewster* on 8Apr (ML).

Red Crossbill – This species apparently nested in the Davis Mountains. From late April on flocks of twenty or more, including juveniles, were seen at the Davis Mountains Preserve (ML). Breeding has occurred there before, but this is a bit unusual in that it did not follow any sort of fall/winter lowland irruption.

**Cited observers:** Joe Barnes, Peter Barnes, Robert Bond, Barbara Carlson, Sheridan Coffey, Mel Cooksey, Jon Dunn, Marc and Maryann Eastman, John and Char Ester, Josh Ferry, Mark Flippo, Ron Gutberlet, Rhandy Helton, Sally Homan, Gordie King, John Kiseda, Mark Korducki, Mark Lockwood, John O'Neill, Steve and Megan Parrish, Jim

Paton, Martin Reid, MaryAnn Ruthruff, Marcy Scott, John Sproul, Mark Stevenson,  
Jimmy Zabriskie, Barry Zimmer.