

Upper Texas Coast Sub-regional Report, Winter 2007-2008

Covering: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Jefferson, Orange and Waller

Compiled by Ron Weeks

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The Weather

Rainfall for the period as reported at Houston's Intercontinental Airport was 10.68 inches or 0.33 inches above normal. Temperatures averaged above normal (3 deg F) for the period, but the maximum temperature was only 82 deg F. Much of the coast made it through the winter without a "killing" frost.

Many wintering passerines were noted in very low numbers with some normally common species such as White-throated Sparrow being hard to find all winter. Irruptives were a mixed bag with a few of the large fall invasion of Red-breasted Nuthatches remaining in the pine forests and Purple Finches present in decent numbers. Others such as Golden-crowned Kinglets and Pine Siskins were present in very small numbers.

The Best Birds

Brown Booby – TBRC review species
Least Bittern – first UTC records for Jan and early Feb
Magnificent Frigatebird – first UTC record for Jan (details still being sought)
Broad-winged Hawk – rare winter record
Zone-tailed Hawk – 2nd UTC record
Prairie Falcon – rare UTC record
Franklin's Gull – rare Feb record
Thayer's Gull – two rare UTC records
Lesser Nighthawk – rare winter record
Chuck-will's-widow – two rare winter records
Whip-poor-will – rare winter record
Blue-throated Hummingbird – continuance of 5th UTC record
Red-eyed Vireo – 1st UTC winter record
Cliff Swallow – earliest ever UTC records – 24 Feb & 27 Feb
Blackburnian Warbler – 1st UTC winter record
Louisiana Waterthrush – rare Jan record

The Best of the Rest

Fulvous Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor* One spent 13 Jan+ at Herrmann Park, *Harris* (m.ob.). This species has very rarely overwintered all the way through Feb.
Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera* This species was present in above average numbers this winter (m.ob.) with the very tame Herrmann Park, *Harris* birds returning again this year.
Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* Above average numbers were seen this winter in *Galveston & Jefferson*. Sixty-two were seen 22 Jan off of Sea Rim SP, Jefferson (Orion Weldon). Twenty-eight were seen 27 Feb at Bolivar Flats, Galveston (Bernd Gravenstein). Several other observers reported seeing decent numbers off the Bolivar Peninsula. One at the Baytown NC, *Harris* on 26 Jan was a good find away from the open Gulf (Drew Dickert et al.).
White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca* White-winged are the hardest of the 3 scoters to find on the UTC, but they were reported 29 Dec on the Sea Rim CBC, Jefferson; 20 Jan on Follet's Island, *Brazoria* (ph. Greg Lavaty), two 22 Jan at Sea Rim SP, *Jefferson* (Orion Weldon), one 26 Jan (Carolyn Dill) and two 3 Feb at Bolivar Flats, *Galveston* (Cin-Ty Lee).

Black Scoter *Melanitta nigra* Sightings of multiple Black Scoters included 12 on 22 Jan Sea Rim SP, *Jefferson* (Orion Weldon), 5 on 3 Feb (Cin-Ty Lee) and 9 on 27 Feb Retillion Road, *Galveston* (Mike Austin).

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica* Two Pacific Loons were found this winter. One was seen 18 Dec and also in Jan at Texas City Dike, *Galveston* (Jim Stevenson, Dick Peake). Another was seen 17 Feb+ at Offat's Bayou, *Galveston* (John O'Brien, Dick Peake).

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus* The only Least Grebes reported were two found at Nannie Stringfellow WMA, *Brazoria* on the San Bernard CBC (Brent Ortego).

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* This species dropped off from its impressive fall numbers, but counts of 11 on the Bolivar Peninsula count and 9 on the Houston count were still above average.

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* A raft of 600 photographed 28 Feb at the Texas City Dike, *Galveston* was an impressive modern day count (Joe Kennedy).

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* An immature Brown Booby was seen 11 Dec off of the North Jetty at Port Bolivar, *Galveston* (Stephan Lorenz, Orion Weldon). If accepted this will be just the 4th UTC record.

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* Astounding was the discovery of Least Bitterns at two locations on the unheard of date of 20 Jan. Two birds were photographed on that date at Quintana, *Brazoria* (Greg Lavaty) and another at *Brazoria* NWR, *Brazoria* (Bill Duke). Birds were seen at *Brazoria* consistently from late Jan through Feb with calling birds heard in mid-February (Mark Bartosik). Another was seen 13 Feb at Anahuac NWR, Chambers (Joe Kennedy). Prior to this winter the earliest UTC record was 28 Feb.

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* Three found 18 Feb on the Katy Prairie, *Waller* were noteworthy due to the inland location (Harvey Laas).

Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* One seen in late Jan from the new tower at High Island, *Galveston* while the observer was scanning for Northern Gannets. This would be the first ever Jan record for the UTC and possibly TX. Details on the bird, the observer's full name and the date are fuzzy and still being gathered.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platyterus* An adult was reported 3 Dec from the Smith Point Hawk Watch, *Chambers* (Joe Kennedy). Another reported 18 Dec during the Galveston CBC may have been the same immature reported through at least 13 Feb near Bolivar Flats, *Galveston* (m.ob.).

Zone-tailed Hawk *Buteo albonotatus* One was seen 1 Feb with Turkey Vultures on the Nash Prairie in NW *Brazoria* (Dick Benoit, Diane Humes). Although only one of the observers had binoculars, a banded tail and Turkey Vulture-like shape were noted. This is just the 2nd UTC and the first for *Brazoria*.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* There was a bumper crop by UTC standards this winter with birds noted 22 Dec on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC, 31 Dec in *Jefferson* (John Whittle), 1 Jan on Cypress Creek CBC and possibly the same bird 26 Jan near Fulshear, *Fort Bend* (Alisa Kline).

Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* A total of 23 on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC on 22 Dec shows that this species is continuing its slow but steady progress eastward.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* The Galveston CBC reported an impressive 10 birds on 18 Dec.

Prairie Falcon *Falco mexicanus* One seen sporadically on the Katy Prairie was documented 1 Jan on the Cypress Creek CBC.

American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica* The first Golden-Plover of the season was noted on 29 Feb in *Waller* (Fred Collins).

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* Three were seen 14 Dec on the Freeport CBC, *Brazoria* and was another was found 29 Dec on the Buffalo Bayou CBC in *Harris*.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* The Sea Rim CBC once again checked in with 4 Whimbrels.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* This species was found 1 Jan on the Orange CBC, Orange and 24 Feb at a Houston construction site where many gulls were roosting (ph. Cin-Ty Lee).

California Gull *Larus californicus* The only report was of one seen 17 Feb at Galveston's East Beach (John O'Brien).

Thayer's Gull *Larus thayeri* A construction site on the north side of Houston hosted a first-winter bird on 13 Feb (Martin Reid) and a second-year bird on 16 Feb (ph. Cin-Ty Lee).

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* The high numbers of this species on the UTC continue with the highest count being 20 on 24 Feb at a construction site in *Harris* (Cin-Ty Lee). Smaller numbers were along the immediate coast (m.ob.).

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* A 1st winter bird was seen 11-12 Dec at Bolivar Flats, *Galveston* (Stephan Lorenz). One was also seen 17 Dec during the Galveston CBC.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* A tally of 9 reported 29 Dec on the Armand Bayou count, *Harris* was interesting due to its inland location. One was also found 1 Jan during the Orange CBC, *Orange*.

Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus* This species continues to be reported with increasing frequency in the Tomball area, *Harris* (Fred Collins et al.).

Groove-billed Ani *Crotophaga sulcirostris* The only reports were of five seen 17 Dec on the Galveston CBC. Two were overwintered on west Galveston Island (Jim Stevenson).

Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia* The only Burrowing Owl was one found 22 Dec on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC.

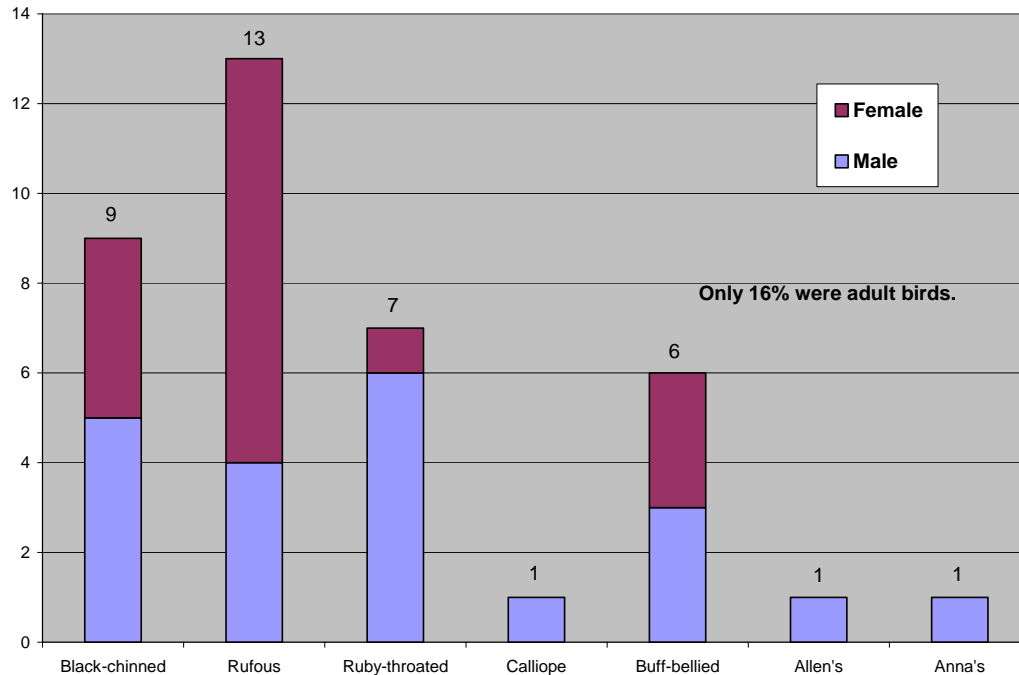
Lesser Nighthawk *Chordeiles acutipennis* The only report was from 21 Jan at the same location as last year flying over High Island's Claybottom Pond, *Galveston* (Winnie Burkett).

Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor* One was seen and heard 31 Dec in Missouri City, *Fort Bend* (Bruce Bodson).

Chuck-will's-widow *Caprimulgus carolinensis* One of two birds seen 16 Dec during the Freeport CBC, *Brazoria* was in a location where this species (same bird) has been found at least three other times (Mike Austin et al.).

Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus* One found on the Freeport CBC, *Brazoria* was most unexpected and was voted the best bird of the count (Ron Weeks, Michael Lindsey).

Hummingbirds Banded by Charles Brower in Fort Bend, Harris & Brazoria Counties - Winter 2007-2008



Buff-bellied Hummingbird *Amazilia yucatanensis* It was a good year for Buff-bellieds all over the UTC. Most impressive was a count record 10 seen on 16 Dec during the Freeport CBC.

Blue-throated Hummingbird *Lampornis clemenciae* The female first located during the fall in Lake Jackson, *Brazoria* made only sporadic appearances at feeders there through at least 27 Feb (Robert & Kay Lookingbill, Vernon Kirby et al.). The author made seven chase trips before finally adding the bird to his county list!

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris* A total of 7 birds were banded by Brower in *Brazoria* indicating this species continues to winter in good numbers.

Anna's Hummingbird *Calypte anna* One was photographed 30 Jan in Houston, *Harris* (Kelly Hill) and an immature male was banded in *Brazoria* (Charlie Brower).

Calliope Hummingbird *Stellula calliope* An immature/female was reported 9-12 Dec at residence in Houston, *Harris*. An adult male was seen 27 Jan-3 Feb at the same location (Keith Kingdon). Another was banded by Brower in *Brazoria*.

Allen's Hummingbird *Selasphorus sasin* This species once again overwintered at the home of Stephen & Ann Williams in Houston. Another was banded by Brower also in *Harris*.

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus* One found 23 Dec near Armand Bayou, *Galveston* was a rare sight so close to the coast (Richard Houck).

Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus* This species is now expected on the coastal CBCs. A record high 3 were found on the San Bernard CBC. One was documented as overwintering at the HAS Dos Vacas Muertas on West Galveston Island, *Galveston* (Mike Austin et al.).

Couch's Kingbird *Tyrannus couchii* An impressive 6 were found together 15 Dec in Damon, *Brazoria* during the Brazos Bend CBC (Charles & Olivia Brower).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus* Lingering Scissor-taileds included singles 1 Dec at Anahuac NWR, *Chambers* (David Sarkozi), 1 Dec at Warren Lake Ranch, *Harris* (John Berner), and 12 Dec Spring, *Harris* (Steve Gross).

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* One found 18 Dec on the Galveston CBC constitutes the 1st winter record for the UTC.

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus* Amazing was a 10 Jan count of 86 birds not far from Houston's Intercontinental airport in Houston, *Harris* (Martin Reid). Another 8 were seen 21 Feb near Lake Houston, *Harris* 21 Feb (Dave Allen). Although there have been other *Harris* records in recent years, this indicates the species truly made the move westward to the "big city" after many years.

Purple Martin *Progne subis* The first returnees were 4 seen 20 Jan at High Island, *Galveston* (Don Verser).

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* Three were reported 22 Dec on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC. Nine seen 23 Feb at San Bernard NWR, *Brazoria* were likely early returnees (Susan Heath).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* The total of 42 reported 22 Dec on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC were mind boggling as this species is normally found in one and twos in December. The earliest returnees were 3 found 17 Feb at Brazos Bend SP, *Fort Bend* (David Whipple).

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonata* Four seen 24 Feb in nw Houston, *Harris* (Drew Dickert) and another seen 27 Feb at Cullinan Park, *Fort Bend* (Bernd Gravenstein) were the first Feb records for the UTC. These birds were carefully observed and documented.

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis* The impressive fall invasion birds dwindled to a few remaining in the pines areas. The highest count was of 6 seen 4 Dec at Houston's Bear Creek Park (Jim Hinson). One seen 17 Dec on the Galveston CBC was the most unexpected as most of the fall birds had since retreated inland.

Brown-headed Nuthatch *Sitta pusilla* This species continues to be seen regularly in *Harris* (Fred Collins et al.).

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa* This species was virtually absent from the UTC this winter.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* A count of 22 Feb 5000 Smith Point, *Chambers* was particularly interesting since this area is a south-facing point (Marcy Brown)

Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina* One was seen 14 Dec during the San Bernard CBC.

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis* This species seems to be more and more common as a wintering species. An impressive 90 were found 14 Dec on the San Bernard CBC.

Nashville Warbler *Vermivora ruficapilla* Two Nashvilles were reported on both the 16 Dec Freeport CBC and the 17 Dec Galveston count.

Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler *Dendroica coronata* One was seen 20 Jan at Brazos Bend SP, Fort Bend (Jan & Will Risser).

Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens* The only report was of one seen 29 Dec during Armand Bayou CBC.

Yellow-throated Warbler *Dendroica dominica* 2 on 2 Feb Pearland, *Brazoria* (David Whipple). One apparently winter at the Williams' home in Houston, *Harris* with sightings including 2 Dec and 29 Jan (Jim Hinson).

Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca* One found 5 Dec at Kleb Woods, *Harris* represents a new UTC late record (Fred Collins).

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* One was found 15 Dec (Stephan Lorenz) and 20 Jan (Will Risser) at Brazos Bend SP, *Fort Bend*. Another was seen 4 Jan and again 25 Jan San Bernard NWR (Susan Heath, Geoff Butcher).

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla* One was banded 14 Dec during the San Bernard CBC and 3 were found 16 on the Freeport CBC both in *Brazoria*.

Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis* There were a few reports again this winter (m.ob.). This species is somewhat expected at locations like San Bernard NWR.

Louisiana Waterthrush *Seiurus motacilla* One was videotaped on the early date of 26 Jan at Houston's Bear Creek Park, *Harris*. One has to wonder whether this may have been an early migrant as this area was birded heavily all winter.

Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens* Singles were found 10 Feb at San Bernard NWR, *Brazoria* (Cin-Ty Lee) and 30 Dec near the town of Anahuac, *Chambers* (Linda Scott).

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* Singles were found 30 Dec in Galveston (Ted Eubanks) and 8 Feb at Kleb Woods, *Harris* (Drew Dickert).

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus* A female was found 20 Jan on the Katy Prairie, *Waller* (Ken Hartman).

Seaside Sparrow *Ammodramus maritimus* Two reported 1 Jan during the Orange CBC were well inland. Perhaps these were found on the north end of Sabine Lake.

Henslow's Sparrow *Ammodramus henslowii* Singles were found 14 Dec on the San Bernard CBC and 1 Jan on the Cypress Creek CBC.

Pyrrhuloxia *Cardinalis sinuatus* This species was found in good numbers east of its breeding zone with two birds found on the UTC. One found 12 Dec on the Katy Prairie, *Harris* and seen through at least 13 Feb (m.ob.). Another was photographed 26 Jan at Quintana, *Brazoria* (Greg Lavaty) and was seen through the period.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* One was reported 6 Dec in Houston, *Harris* (Geoff Newton) and another 28 February at Dos Vacas Muertas on west Galveston Island (Jim Kessler, Ann Amsbury).

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* One was found 16 Dec on the Freeport CBC and two were found 22 Dec on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC.

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* One was seen 1 Jan during the Orange CBC.

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus* One was found 22 Dec on the Bolivar Peninsula CBC.

Bronzed Cowbird *Molothrus aeneus* A count of 75 in Houston, *Harris* on 14 Jan was an impressive and discouraging total (Jan & Will Risser).

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula* Two were seen 16 Dec on Freeport CBC (Ron Weeks, Mike Austin). One was also seen 31 Jan at Cullinan Park, *Fort Bend* (Bernd Gravenstein).

Purple Finch *Carpodacus purpureus* Above average numbers were found this winter (m.ob.).

Observers

David Allen
Ann Amsbury
Mike Austin
Mark Bartosik
Dick Benoit
John Berner
Bruce Bodson
Charlie Brower
Olivia Brower
Marcy Brown
Winnie Burkett
Geoff Butcher
Fred Collins
Drew Dickert
Carolyn Dill
Bill Duke

Ted Eubanks
Bernd Gravenstein
Steve Gross
Ken Hartman
Susan Heath
Kelly Hill
Jim Hinson
Richard Houck
Diane Humes
Joe Kennedy
Jim Kessler
Keith Kingdon
Vernon Kirby
Alisa Kline
Harvey Laas
Greg Lavaty
Cin-Ty Lee
Michael Lindsey
Kay Lookingbill
Robert Lookingbill
Stephan Lorenz
Geoff Newton
John O'Brien
Brent Ortego
Dick Peake
Martin Reid
Jan & Will Risser
David Sarkozy
Linda Scott
Jim Stevenson
Don Verser
David Whipple
John Whittle
Ron Weeks
Orion Weldon