

Trans-Pecos region of Texas – Winter 2019-2020 (1 December 2019 – 29
February 2020)
Noteworthy Bird Sightings

Compiled by Eric Carpenter and Jim Paton

Counties Covered: Brewster, Crane, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Loving, Pecos, Presidio, Reeves, Terrell, Val Verde, Ward, Winkler

Seasonal Summary:

Western Trans-Pecos: It was a mild winter with abundant rainfall. By the end of the period, year-to-date rainfall was at a level not reached on average until July 1st. Birding was generally uneventful. Aside from decent numbers of Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays in some choice El Paso neighborhoods, there were few montane irruptives. Very small numbers of Steller's Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Mountain Chickadee were found. A Eurasian Wigeon and a first winter record for Summer Tanager were the most notable rarities.

Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) Review List species in **bold**. Cited observers listed alphabetically at the end of the report.

Notable Species observed during the period:

CAACKLING GOOSE – Rare in the Trans-Pecos, a lone Cackling Goose was at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth* 16 Dec – 2 Feb (Barry Zimmer)

EURASIAN WIGEON - A drake Eurasian Wigeon visited Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves* 9-18 Dec (Randy Pinkston, Steve Cardiff, ph. Donna Dittman); another male at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso* 2 Feb (ph. Tom Johnson, John Sproul, Judy Yellon) looked like it could have had some American Wigeon/hybrid influence.

CINNAMON TEAL – A male Cinnamon Teal was in west El Paso, *El Paso* 1 Jan (Mary Anderson, ph. Jim Paton). More expected were small numbers at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in Dec and early Jan (m.ob). Cinnamon Teal is a very early migrant with birds trickling in starting in mid-Jan, but Dec and early Jan records remain rare.

GREATER SCAUP – As in recent years, up to 3 Greater Scaup were present through the period at Ascarate Park, *El Paso* (m.ob); more unexpected were 3 at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth* 16 Dec (Barry Zimmer).

SURF SCOTER – Less than annual in the El Paso area and most regular late Oct – mid-Nov, two Surf Scoters were at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth* 16 Dec (ph. Barry Zimmer) with one remaining through 5 Jan (ph. Jim Paton).

WESTERN GREBE - A Western Grebe was on the eastern end of Lake Amistad, *Val Verde* 18 Jan - 8 Feb (ph. Willie Sekula).

AMERICAN AVOCET – A count of 21 American Avocets on the McNary C.B.C., *Hudspeth* 16 Dec (ph. Barry Zimmer) was an excellent winter total.

WESTERN SANDPIPER – Rare in the Trans-Pecos in winter, a Western Sandpiper was near Ft. Hancock, *Hudspeth* 16 Dec (ph. Jim Paton).

LESSER YELLOWLEGS – Casual in winter, a Lesser Yellowlegs was at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso* 27 Dec (Randy Hesford).

LAUGHING GULL - A Laughing Gull was an unusual late fall visitor to Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves* 1 Dec (Mark Lockwood).

ICELAND GULL - An Iceland Gull with many Thayer's characteristics was at Lake Amistad, *Val Verde* 18-19 Feb (ph. Willie Sekula).

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL - Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls were detected at Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves* 15 Dec (Steve Cardiff, ph. Donna Dittman) while as many as 5 individuals spent the winter on Lake Amistad, *Val Verde* 20 Dec - 6 Mar (Troy Hibbitts, ph. Willie Sekula, Martin Reid).

GLAUCOUS GULL - A first-cycle Glaucous Gull was a nice find on Lake Amistad, *Val Verde* 1-23 Feb (ph. Tripp Davenport).

RED-THROATED LOON - As many as 3 Red-throated Loons were present on Lake Amistad, *Val Verde* 19-22 Jan (ph. Willie Sekula, ph. Sheridan Coffey).

PACIFIC LOON – A Pacific Loon was at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth* 16 Dec (ph. Barry Zimmer); there are fewer than ten county records.

TURKEY VULTURE – A few Turkey Vultures again wintered in and around Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso* (John Sproul, m.ob) at their only regular wintering site in the western Trans-Pecos. More unusual were up to 2 in west El Paso, *El Paso* 7-15 Feb (John Groves, John Kiseda, Jim Paton). Turkey Vulture does not appear in numbers as a spring migrant until the second week of March.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK - Irregular and rare through much of the Trans-Pecos, a Red-shouldered Hawk at Musquiz Canyon, *Jeff Davis* 21 Jan+ (Mark Lockwood) was unexpected.

LONG-EARED OWL – A Long-eared Owl at Hueco Tanks State Historic Site 8 Feb (ph. Samantha Dominguez., Kevin Floyd) likely overwintered.

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER - A Lewis's Woodpecker was a surprise in Kermit, *Winkler* 16 Feb (ph. Sheridan Coffey, Martin Reid).

HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER - A Hammond's Flycatcher at Rio Grande Village, Big Bend N.P., *Brewster* 4 Jan (Mark Lockwood) was a nice find. Another Hammond's Flycatcher was at Hueco Tanks State Historic Site, *El Paso* 8 Feb (Samantha Dominguez, ph. Kevin Floyd); any winter *Empidonax* in the El Paso area is notable with perhaps one located per winter, but Hammond's is the most common.

WHITE-EYED VIREO – The White-eyed Vireo in El Paso, *El Paso* from fall lingered through 8 Dec (ph. Barry Zimmer) for a first local winter record.

HUTTON'S VIREO – Rare but regular, this winter's Hutton's Vireo was at Hueco Tanks State Historic Site, *El Paso* 8 Feb (Samantha Dominguez, Kevin Floyd).

PLUMBEOUS VIREO – A Plumbeous Vireo seen occasionally in El Paso, *El Paso* 8 Dec – 1 Feb (Jim Paton) undoubtedly overwintered.

STELLER'S JAY – A very small number of Steller's Jays, counts from one to 5, overwintered in a west El Paso, *El Paso* neighborhood but there was no broader irruption (m.ob.).

WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY – Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay had a modest irruption into a few El Paso, *El Paso* neighborhoods (m. ob).

Swallows – The mild winter allowed small numbers of Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, and Cave Swallow to overwinter, with most reports from in and around Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, *El Paso* (m. ob). A count of 20 Tree Swallows at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth* 5 Jan (Jim Paton) was a good mid-winter total.

WINTER WREN – Two Winter Wrens and a Winter/Pacific Wren were at McNary Reservoir, *Hudspeth* 16 Dec (ph. Barry Zimmer), the only regular wintering location in the El Paso area, with one remaining through 6 Mar (Barry Zimmer).

Frugivores – Frugivores other than American Robin were notably absent from the El Paso area aside from a few reports of Mountain Bluebird and Townsend's Solitaire from Hueco Tanks State Historic Site, *El Paso* (m.ob.).

BROWN THRASHER – A Brown Thrasher was at Hueco Tanks State Historic Site, *El Paso* 18 Jan (ph. Kevin Floyd) while another spent much of the winter nw. of Fort Davis, *Jeff Davis* 16 Dec+ (ph. Donna Dittman, m.ob.).

FOX SPARROW - A Fox Sparrow was west to the Davis Mountains Preserve, *Jeff Davis* 8 Dec (Randy Pinkston, Mark Lockwood).

HARRIS'S SPARROW - A Harris's Sparrow was also out of place to the west of its core range west of Fort Davis, *Jeff Davis* 24 Jan - 16 Mar (ph. Lorrie Lowrie, m.ob.).

BAIRD'S SPARROW - Mist-net and banding of Baird's Sparrows around Marfa, *Presidio* again illustrated how regular this species must be in the grasslands; a high count of 10 were handled 29 Jan (Sofia Gladwish et al.).

RUSTY BLACKBIRD – Two reports of Rusty Blackbird were above average – one in west El Paso, *El Paso* 1 Jan (John Groves, ph. John Kiseda, Joe Youtz) and two near Dell City, *Hudspeth* 16 Feb (ph. Jim Paton).

COMMON GRACKLE – Two Common Grackles in El Paso, *El Paso* 27 Jan (Barry Zimmer) were the only report.

SCOTT'S ORIOLE – A male Scott's Oriole successfully overwintered for the fourth time in an El Paso, *El Paso* yard (ph. Barry Zimmer) while another may have overwintered in the Chisos Basin, Big Bend N.P., *Brewster* 22 Jan - 13 Feb (Dale Plumley, Karen Plumley, Cullen Hanks).

PALM WARBLER - A Palm Warbler seen 20 miles ne. of Terlingua, *Brewster* in mid-November showed up again 2 Jan (Jim Hines, Barbara Hines).

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER – A Black-throated Gray Warbler in El Paso, *El Paso* 1 Jan (Marcy Scott) added to just a handful of local winter records.

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER – A Townsend's Warbler at the El Paso Zoo, *El Paso* 1 Jan (ph. Kevin Floyd, Vicki Milne) added to just a handful of local winter records.

SUMMER TANAGER – A Summer Tanager in an El Paso neighborhood 1 Jan (ph. Ad Konings) was a winter first for *El Paso*.

Cited observers:

Mary Anderson, Steve Cardiff, Sheridan Coffey, Tripp Davenport, Donna Dittman, Samantha Dominguez, Kevin Floyd, Sofia Gladwish, John Groves, Cullen Hanks, Randy Hesford, Troy Hibbitts, Barbara Hines, Jim Hines, Tom Johnson, John Kiseda, Ad Konings, Mark Lockwood, Lorrie Lowrie, Vicki Milne, Jim Paton, Randy Pinkston, Dale Plumley, Karen Plumley, Martin Reid, Willie Sekula, John Sproul, Judy Yellon, Joe Youtz, Barry Zimmer