

Trans-Pecos region of Texas – Summer 2021 (1 June 2021 – 31 July 2021)

Noteworthy Bird Sightings

Compiled by Jim Paton and Steven W. Cardiff

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

Texas Bird Records Committee (TBRC) review species in **bold**.

PART 1 of 2 - El Paso area (El Paso and Hudspeth Counties)

Sub-regional compiler: Jim Paton

The very hot and dry conditions in Jun abruptly changed in the El Paso area during the last week of the month when strong thunderstorms hit the area. Heavy monsoonal moisture remained through the period and beyond, resulting in a remarkable greening of ranges like the Franklins. El Paso reported 22.7cm of precipitation 15 Jun – 14 Aug, the second wettest on record for that time period, with some areas receiving significantly more. The beginning and end of the period were very different. Early Jun was remarkably dry and hot with some interesting records of late, heat-stressed migrants remaining in city neighborhoods, the only places with much greenery. Late Jul saw fresh vegetation everywhere, good insect populations, and notably few early migrants (in stark contrast to the dry fall of 2020), presumably no longer concentrated to urban oases. The rain likely came too late to be of much help to most breeding birds. Birding effort was pretty low with no great rarities, but a Jul visit to the Eagle Mts, in southeastern Hudspeth Co, produced some interesting finds.

SNOW GOOSE – The Snow Goose at Ascarate Park, El Paso Co that had settled in with its domestic brethren remained from spring through the period (m.ob.).

LESSER SCAUP – The male Lesser Scaup, present through the spring at Horizon City, El Paso Co continued through the period (ph. Michael Harvey, m.ob.).

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER – Rare but regular, three White-rumped Sandpipers in Horizon City, El Paso Co 3 Jun (Michael Harvey) were in the expected late spring window.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER – A Spotted Sandpiper in El Paso, El Paso Co 11 Jun (Dan Belcher) was getting late.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS – A Lesser Yellowlegs at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso Co 4 Jun (ph. Ad Konings) was late.

LEAST BITTERN – A Least Bittern was at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso Co 30 Jun–10 Jul (John Sproul); appropriate habitat for this rare local breeder is sporadic at best and few, if any, sites are reliable year to year.

TRICOLORED HERON – The Tricolored Heron from spring at Keystone Wetlands Park, El Paso Co continued through 9 Jun (m.ob) with another at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso Co 4 Jun (John Sproul).

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON – In addition to the reliable pair in extreme western El Paso Co (John Groves), a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso Co 16 Jun (John Sproul).

Migrant passerines – Most local birders do not appreciate the number of migrants typically still moving north through at least the first week of Jun in the El Paso area. Some of the most regular species involved are Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, *oriantha* White-crowned Sparrow, Western Tanager, and Black-headed Grosbeak. In dry springs this pattern is accentuated as birds concentrate in urban oases; this spring thus produced many interesting records of additional notably late migrants.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE – Three to four Western Wood-Pewees were in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (Michael Harvey). This date would be very early for migrants and they were presumably on nesting territory, something not known for the county though this area had not been checked in summer before.

CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER – A Cordilleran Flycatcher in El Paso, El Paso Co 13 Jun (Jim Paton) was getting late even for this notoriously late migrant; an *Empidonax* photoed by a trail camera in an El Paso yard 11 Jun (Barry Zimmer) was probably this species.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD – In addition to the nesting pairs present all period at Ascarate Park, El Paso Co (m.ob.), two Tropical Kingbirds were audiotaped in extreme western El Paso Co 16 Jul (ph. John Groves, John Kiseda). The species seems to be expanding its base in the county but additional nesting sites have yet to be found.

PLUMBEOUS VIREO – A Plumbeous Vireo in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17 Jul (Michael Harvey) was presumed on breeding territory, something not confirmed for the county.

WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY – A Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay was in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (ph. Michael Harvey) where the species is presumed to be resident.

COMMON RAVEN – A Common Raven was well-described and seen for comparison with Chihuahuan Ravens at the Sierra Blanca landfill, Hudspeth Co 18 Jul (Michael Harvey). There are few well-documented records for El Paso or Hudspeth Cos.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE – A titmouse seen poorly but audiotaped in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 18 Jul (Michael Harvey) was believed to be a Juniper Titmouse, which would be a first county record. Black-crested Titmouse was recorded here in the 1990s.

BUSHTIT – One to three Bushtits were in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (ph. Michael Harvey), their westernmost outpost in TX.

HOUSE WREN – A House Wren lingering in El Paso, El Paso Co through at least 4 Jun (Grant Paton) was several weeks late.

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER – A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 18 Jul (ph. Michael Harvey), carrying food and providing perhaps the first county breeding record. Appropriate habitat exists in the Eagles and the Sierra Diablo, but access has not been available.

GRAY CATBIRD – Two summer records of Gray Catbird in El Paso Co were a surprise: Franklin Mts State Park 12 Jun (ph. Cesar Mensez) and El Paso 7 Jul (ph. Barry Zimmer).

PINE SISKIN – A few Pine Siskins lingered into early Jun in El Paso, El Paso Co (Jim Paton, Barry Zimmer) for rare summer records, with the latest one on 12 Jun (ph. Barry Zimmer).

MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER – A MacGillivray's Warbler at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso Co 13 Jun (Liz Walsh) was several weeks past expected departure dates, though there are previous early Jun records for the county.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER – There were several late records of Yellow-rumped Warbler for El Paso Co with one in El Paso 11 Jun (Dan Belcher) and an extremely late two at Ascarate Park 16 Jun (John Kiseda).

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER – A Black-throated Gray Warbler in El Paso, El Paso Co 10 Jun (ph. Barry Zimmer) was very late.

SPOTTED TOWHEE – One to three Spotted Towhees were in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (ph. Michael Harvey) where they presumably nest.

CHIPPING SPARROW – A Chipping Sparrow in El Paso, El Paso Co 3 Jun (Liz Walsh) was late and added to the handful of local Jun records.

HEPATIC TANAGER – Two territorial male Hepatic Tanagers along with a female were a surprise in the upper Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (ph. Michael Harvey). Breeding was not known or suspected in the county, but this area had not been checked before in summer.

NORTHERN CARDINAL – In addition to the now expected one to two pairs at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, El Paso Co (John Sproul, m. ob.), a male Northern Cardinal was present all period at Keystone Heritage Park, El Paso Co (ph. John Groves, m. ob.).

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK – One to two Black-headed Grosbeaks in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (Michael Harvey) were hard to characterize. They could be breeders, but wandering individuals are uncommonly seen on similar dates in El Paso Co, where they are not known to breed.

VARIED BUNTING – Small numbers of Varied Buntings were in the Eagle Mts, Hudspeth Co 17–18 Jul (ph. Michael Harvey), further indication the species is widespread in the southeastern corner of the county.

Cited observers: Dan Belcher, John Groves, Michael Harvey, John Kiseda, Ad Konings, Cesar Mensez, Grant Paton, Jim Paton, John Sproul, Liz Walsh, Barry Zimmer

**PART 2 of 2 - Eastern Trans-Pecos (Brewster, Crane, Culberson, Jeff Davis, Loving,
Pecos, Presidio, Reeves, Terrell, Val Verde, Ward, Winkler)**

Sub-regional compiler: Steven W. Cardiff

Conditions remained very dry early in the period, with most areas stalled in the low single digits of inches of rain for the year. But, thankfully, widespread monsoon rains finally cranked up during the last week of June and first week of July and then continued off and on through the remainder of the summer, transforming landscapes across much of the region from sparse, brown, and dusty to relatively lush and green.

Notable Species observed during the period:

WOOD DUCK – A pair of Wood Ducks at Independence Creek Preserve, Terrell Co 1 Jun (ph. Rich Kostecke et al.) were either very late or attempting to breed in the area. There are only a few previous summer occurrences for the region.

GADWALL – A summering pair of Gadwalls at Musquiz Creek, Jeff Davis Co, first noted during May, remained through the period, with both individuals present to at least 4 Aug and the male present to at least 9 Aug (ph. Carolyn Ohl et al.); there were no indications of breeding activity.

AMERICAN WIGEON – Single late American Wigeons were noted at Balmorhea Lake, Reeves Co 14 Jun (Doug Willick), and at Musquiz Creek, Jeff Davis Co 15 Jun (ph. Carolyn Ohl).

GREEN-WINGED TEAL – Very rare for the season, single male Green-winged Teal were at Musquiz Creek, Jeff Davis Co 6 Jun (ph. Carolyn Ohl, Dale Ohl), and at Santa Elena Canyon, Big Bend NP, Brewster Co 8 Jul (Isaac Grosner, Greyson Poutas).

LESSER SCAUP – Another species for which there are surprisingly few regional summer occurrences, a male Lesser Scaup was at Del Rio, Val Verde Co 14 Jun (ph. Mike Miller) and 28 Jun (ph. Brigitte Brantley). Interestingly, one was in the same area a year earlier, on 12 Jun 2020 (ph. Kenneth Bader).

WHITE-TIPPED DOVE – A White-tipped Dove at Independence Creek Preserve 1 Jun (Eric Carpenter) was just the third for Terrell Co; all so far have been “heard only.”

ANNA’S HUMMINGBIRD – An adult male Anna’s Hummingbird in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis Co 30 Jul, and joined by a female there 31 Jul, were the only reports of the season (ph. Jeff Sexton, ph. Nick A. Komar Jr., Beth McBroom, Barbara Pankratz).

COSTA’S HUMMINGBIRD – An adult male Costa’s Hummingbird in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis 7 Jul+ (Maryann and Marc Eastman et al.) was only about the second well-documented occurrence for Jeff Davis Co.

CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD – A relatively early-arriving southbound migrant adult male Calliope Hummingbird was in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis Co 4 Jul (Steven W. Cardiff, ph. Donna L. Dittmann).

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD – Also relatively early was an adult male Rufous Hummingbird in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis Co 29 Jun–4 Jul, with an adult female at the same location 3 Jul, and a different adult female there 4 Jul (Steven W. Cardiff, ph. Donna L. Dittmann).

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD – An adult male Broad-billed Hummingbird that first appeared 12 Apr in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis Co was last reported 18 Jul (ph. Dell Little, D. D. Currie, Cecilia Riley). A (presumably) different adult male was a one-day-wonder at nearby Davis Mountains SP 28 Jun (ph. Steve and Sue Whitmer).

SNOWY PLOVER – Although breeding has not been confirmed at the location, the presence of two pairs of Snowy Plovers at Amistad NRA, Val Verde Co 4 Jun (ph. Troy and Marla Hibbitts) was suggestive and added to a few previous late spring-early summer occurrences for the area.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW – Nineteen Long-billed Curlews at Marfa, Presidio Co 26 Jun (ph. Scotty Lofland, Bryan Box) and a single near Alpine, Brewster Co 30 Jun (Colin Shackelford) were presumably early southbound migrants.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER – A Baird's Sandpiper at Terlingua, Brewster Co 3 Jun (ph. Jane Tillman, Mark Lyon), and five at Amistad NRA, Val Verde Co 4 Jun (ph. Troy and Marla Hibbitts) provided some of the latest-ever well-documented spring occurrences for the region.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER – Adding to the relatively few previous June occurrences for the region were two White-rumped Sandpipers at Amistad NRA, Val Verde Co 4 Jun (ph. Troy and Marla Hibbitts); 20 had been noted at the same location a few days earlier on 29 May 2021 (ph. Ty Allen, ph. Bryan Calk).

WILLET – A Willet at Independence Creek Preserve 14 Jul (ph. Nathaniel Watkins et al.) was possibly the first occurrence of a fall migrant for Terrell Co.

LAUGHING GULL – Five Laughing Gulls at Amistad NRA, Val Verde Co 4 Jun (ph. Troy and Marla Hibbitts) were conceivably some of the same individuals present in that area the preceding spring.

CASPIAN TERN – A surprisingly scarce visitor to the region, a Caspian Tern at Balmorhea Lake, Reeves Co 13 Jul (ph. Anita Meagher) was only about the second photo-documented summer occurrence.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT – Possibly the first documented to over-summer in Jeff Davis Co, a Double-crested Cormorant was at Musquiz Creek from May-early Jun (ph. Chris Pipes, m. ob.), with up to three individuals there 16 Jun+ (ph. Carolyn Ohl, m. ob.).

OSPREY – An Osprey at Independence Creek Preserve, Terrell Co 12 Jul (Ryan Smith) was noted as having been present since the preceding spring, although no other reports were submitted after 8 May. The species is a very rare summer visitor in the region.

NORTHERN HARRIER – A Northern Harrier at the Marathon Prairie Dog Town, Brewster Co 11 Jun (Robert Gearhart, E. Mathis) was the only report of the season.

HARRIS'S HAWK – Continuing since late 2018, a pair of Harris's Hawks, accompanied by a juvenile, were at the Alpine cemetery, Brewster Co 1 Jul (Bill Sain).

CRESTED CARACARA – A Crested Caracara along Hwy. 385 south of Marathon, Brewster Co 8 Jun (ph. Wesley Hochachka), added to the growing swarm of reports from between Marathon and Big Bend NP.

PEREGRINE FALCON – Two Peregrine Falcons at Amistad NRA, Val Verde Co 16 Jul (ph. Derrick Mims, Lynn Thompson) was only about the second summer occurrence for the far southeastern corner of the region.

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER – An Olive-sided Flycatcher at the Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis Co 31 Jul (ph. Jeff Sexton, ph. Nick A. Komar Jr., Beth McBroom, Barbara Pankratz) was relatively early.

GREATER PEWEE – A Greater Pewee near Boot Spring, Chisos Mountains, Big Bend NP, Brewster Co 11 Jun (ph. Jim Collins) was apparently a first summer occurrence for Texas away from the Davis Mountains.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD – A well-documented Tropical Kingbird at Kermit, Winkler Co 24 Jun (ph./voice-recording Scotty Lofland, Bryan Box) was possibly the region's first occurrence from north of the I-10 corridor.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER – In the southern portion of the region, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers are regular breeders at least locally west to northwestern Brewster Co, but the species is rare in summer in adjacent Jeff Davis Co. During 2021, at least 1-2 individuals were repeatedly documented along Hwy. 118 in Jeff Davis Co just west of the Brewster Co line 6 Jun–11 Jul (ph. Carolyn Ohl, Dale Ohl, et al.), with an active nest monitored 28 Jun–7 Jul (Steven W. Cardiff, ph. Donna L. Dittmann, ph. Carolyn Ohl). The nest, possibly a first for Jeff Davis Co, was determined to be abandoned by 9 Jul (Carolyn Ohl).

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO – A singing Yellow-throated Vireo was unusually far west at Davis Mountains SP, Jeff Davis Co 16–21 Jun (ph. Steve and Sue Whitmer et al.).

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH – A well-documented Clay-colored Thrush in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis Co 5 Jun (ph. Lorrie Lowrie) was a county first, only about the fourth regional occurrence from west of the Del Rio area, and just the second occurrence for the summer season.

CEDAR WAXWING – Although small numbers can regularly linger into early Jun, two Cedar Waxwings at Chisos Basin, Big Bend NP, Brewster Co 26 Jun (ph. Sebastian Jones et al.), and a single near Girvin, Pecos Co 27 Jun (Scotty Lofland, Bryan Box) were very late.

PINE SISKIN – After the preceding winter-spring influx, Pine Siskins continued to turn up into the summer season south and east of normal, with as many as 17 at Independence Creek Preserve, Terrell Co 1–2 Jun (Rich Kostecke et al.), 11 at Chisos Basin, Big Bend NP, Brewster Co 1 Jun (Peter R. Engler) and 1–2

there to 18 Jun (Ryan Pierce, Mary Beth Stowe). Counts of up to 26 at a feeding station in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis 1-2 Jun (Dell Little, D. D. Currie) were also noteworthy.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH – An adult male American Goldfinch in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis 4 Jun (Dell Little, D. D. Currie) was exceptionally late.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD – At least 15 reports of Yellow-headed Blackbirds scattered over Jeff Davis, Presidio, Brewster, and Val Verde Cos 27 Jun-18 Jul (m. ob.) suggested an unusually early southward movement into the region.

AMERICAN REDSTART – A stray first year male American Redstart was in the Davis Mountains west of Fort Davis, Jeff Davis 21 Jun (ph. Barbara Pankratz, Lorrie Lowrie, Crystal Ledezma).

YELLOW-RUMPED (AUDUBON'S) WARBLER – A Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler at Marathon, Brewster Co 9-11 Jun (ph. E. Mathis, ph. Carolyn Ohl, ph. Dale Ohl) was notably late for a lowland migrant.