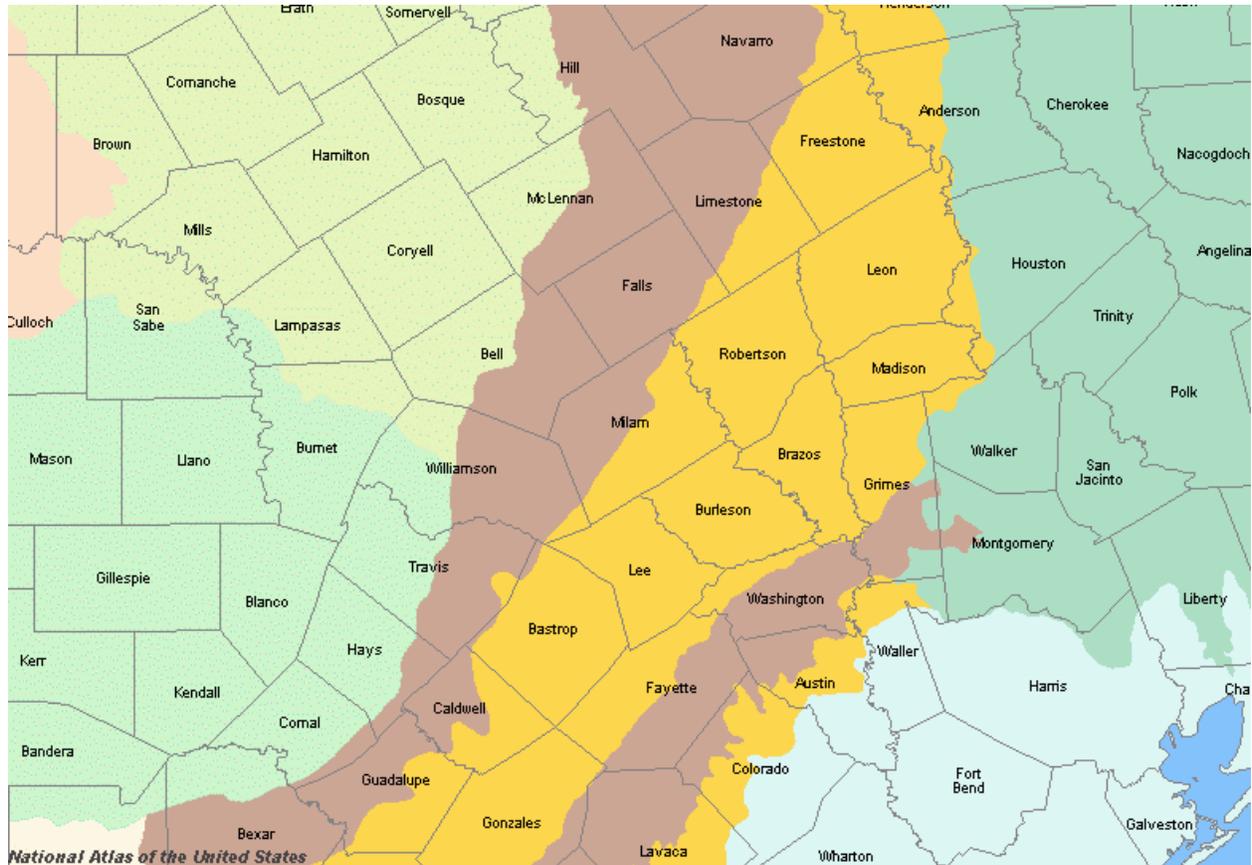


## Fall 2019: Central Oaks & Prairies of Texas

By Bert Frenz

This report is from 1 August to 30 November 2019. It includes sightings from the following counties: Austin, Bastrop, Brazos, Bell, Burleson, Falls, Fayette, Freestone, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Limestone, McLennan, Madison, Milam, Navarro, Robertson, and Washington.



### MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

**Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** – Good numbers of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were reported this season including up to 250 at Country Club Lake, *Brazos* 13 Aug–14 Dec (Warren Hardin), 250 at a stock pond near Cameron, *Milam* 21 Oct (†Barrett Riess), up to 203 at Ledbetter Park, *Milam* 29 Nov (Greg Cook).

**Ducks** – Unprecedented large numbers of ducks gathered at Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 29 Oct+ (†Michael McCloy, m.ob.). These included up to 500 Northern Shovelers, 200-300 Gadwall, 100-175 American Wigeon, up to 1300 Northern Pintail, 53-450 Redhead, 90-225 Ring-necked Ducks, 100-900 Lesser Scaup, up to 8 Common Goldeneye, 6-12 Red-breasted Mergansers, 140-350 Ruddy Ducks.

**Surf Scoter** – A female Surf Scoter photographed at Richland Creek WMA 19 Oct (†ph. Jane Tillman, ph.Candy McNamee, Mark Lyon) is the first dated record for *Freestone*.



Surf Scoter © Candy McNamee 19 Oct 2019

**White-winged Scoter** – Only the third record for *Bell*, a White-winged Scoter was viewed at Stillhouse Hollow Lake from Stillhouse Park 3 Nov 2019 (†Gil Eckrich, ph. Daniel Kelch).



White-winged Scoter © Daniel Kelch 3 Nov 2019

Bufflehead – Up to 93 Buffleheads were at Finfeather Lake, *Brazos* 13-19 Nov (Tyler Scott, Michael McCloy).

**Least Grebe** – Up to 3 Least Grebes were at Witter Lane, *Bell* 1 Sep–27 Nov (†ph. Randy Pinkston, †Charlie Plimpton, Greg Cook). This is the 6th record for *Bell*, 3 of which were at this location.



Least Grebe © Randy Pinkston 1 Sep 2019

Pied-billed Grebe – Fifty-four Pied-billed Grebes at Lake Bryan 29 Oct (Michael McCoy) is a high count for *Brazos*, but it was surpassed by 80 at Witter Lane, *Bell* 27 Nov (Randy Pinkston).

**Western Grebe** – A first record for *Brazos* and only the 5<sup>th</sup> record for the Central Brazos Valley, a Western Grebe was at Lake Bryan 8-10 Nov (†ph. Tyler Scott, †ph. Cameron Johnson, ph. Shirley Wilkerson, †ph. John Hale, †ph. Sandy Dillard, ph. Boris Navikov, m.ob.).



Western Grebe © Shirley Wilkerson 9 Nov 2019

White-winged Dove – While White-winged Doves are abundant in cities along the I-35 corridor, they are found in considerably smaller numbers in the Central Brazos Valley. Two of the best locations to find them is at Country Club Lake, Bryan, *Brazos* where 148 were reported 10 Aug (Tyler Scott) and in Brenham, *Washington* where 80 were found 24 Aug (Darrell Vollert).

Common Nighthawk – Late for Common Nighthawk in the Central Brazos Valley, one was observed 20 Nov (Eric Atwell) hunting insects in the lights over the intramural fields at the Texas A&M University campus, *Brazos*.

Chimney Swift – Unusually high counts of Chimney Swifts coming from the north 6 Oct (Steve Glover) included 235 over Slough Pond, *Bell* in the morning and 80 feeding over Lake Waco Wetlands, *McLennan* in the afternoon.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were in abundance 27 Sep (ph. Shirley Wilkerson) in Kurten, *Brazos* when 41 were photographed in a single frame and at least 9 more were in nearby trees and bushes.



Ruby-throated Hummingbirds © Shirley Wilkerson 27 Sep 2019

**Anna's Hummingbird** – A rare Anna's Hummingbird was at Steep Hollow Rd, *Brazos* 24 Oct–22 Dec (ph. Bill Morris, †Mark McDermott, ph. Jackie Girouard, m.ob.). It is a 7<sup>th</sup> record for *Brazos*.



Anna's Hummingbird © Bill Morris 24 Oct 2019

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** – A Broad-tailed Hummingbird visited Salado, *Bell* feeders 28 Sep–3 Oct (†ph. Charlie Plimpton, ph. Chelsea Plimpton). In the past decade, Broad-tailed appears almost annually at least once in *Bell*.



Broad-tailed Hummingbird © Charlie Plimpton 28 Sep 2019

**Rufous Hummingbird** – A Rufous Hummingbird photographed near Blooming Grove 12 Aug (ph. Sharon Lane) is apparently only the third reported record for *Navarro*.



Rufous Hummingbird © Sharon Lane 12 Aug 2019

**Virginia Rail** – A Virginia Rail was present in dense cattails 2-17 Nov (Jason Leifester, Jeremy Webster, Bernd Gravenstein) at Paint Creek Road, providing only the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> record for *Bastrop*.

American Coot – An unusually large gathering of about 1900 American Coots were present at Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 29 Oct (Michael McCloy).

Sandhill Crane – Southbound Sandhill Cranes were in good numbers with peak counts of 1000-1500 19-20 Oct (Shirley Wilkerson, Warren Hardin) at Sims Lane, *Brazos* and 350-400 28 Oct (Donna Lewis) near Gause, *Milam*.

**Whooping Crane** – Two adult Whooping Cranes were photographed 27 Oct (ph. Tyler Miloy) at Sims Cutoff, *Brazos*. Another flock of 8 flew near Lexington, *Lee* 1 Nov (†ph. Timothy Freiday).



Whooping Crane © Timothy Freiday 1 Nov 2019

Black-necked Stilt – A late flock of 4 Black-necked Stilts were found 4 Oct (†John Hale) at Moore Farms (private), *Brazos*.

American Avocet – Unusually late American Avocets this fall include 9 at Lake Mexia, *Limestone* 29 Nov (Nicholas DeMalo) and one the same day (Alberto Manterola) near Calvert, *Robertson*.

Black-bellied Plover – Up to 4 Black-bellied Plovers visited Sims Lane, *Brazos* and at least one was observed for the extended period 20 Aug–22 Nov (m.ob.). Elsewhere in *Brazos*, one was at Veterans Park 5-6 Nov (Jackie Girouard) and another was at Lake Bryan 10 Nov (Laura Sare).

Killdeer – Killdeer are so common they are rarely reported here, but this season the numbers at Sims Lane, *Brazos* were truly impressive: 250-650 on numerous days 1 Sep–23 Nov (m.ob.), peaking 1 Nov (Michael McCloy).

**Sanderling** – A scarce inland Sanderling was photographed at Union Grove WMA, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, *Bell* 2 Sep (ph. Charlie Plimpton).



Sanderling © Charlie Plimpton 2 Sep 2019

**Dunlin** – A long staying single Dunlin was seen often 25 Oct–15 Nov (†Simon Kiacz, m. ob.) at Sims Lane, *Brazos*. Another was at Union Grove WMA, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, *Bell* 10 Nov (†Randy Pinkston).

Long-billed Dowitcher – Significant numbers of migrating Long-billed Dowitchers stopped at water spots, including up to 65 at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 16-25 Oct (Simon Kiacz, Michael McCloy), 22-28 at Trading House Creek Reservoir, *McLennan* 3-5 Nov (Anand Chaudhary, Fay Ratta), and 60 at Union Grove WMA, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, *Bell* 10 Nov (Randy Pinkston).

Wilson's Snipe – Good numbers of Wilson's Snipe were seen at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 20 Oct+ (m.ob.), peaking at 80 on 3 Nov (Sandy Dillard).

Lesser Yellowlegs – A very large flock estimated to be 125 Lesser Yellowlegs was at the sod farm at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 25 Oct (Simon Kiacz).

Greater Yellowlegs – Counts that on many days exceeded 100 Greater Yellowlegs were made at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 16 Oct–1 Nov (m.ob.), peaking at 275 on 25 Oct (Simon Kiacz).

**Red-necked Phalarope** – A 3<sup>rd</sup> record for *Bell*, a Red-necked Phalarope visited Witter Lane 27 Sep–2 Oct (†ph. Daniel Kelch, ph. Scott Snyder, †ph. Doug Orama, †ph. Matthew York, †ph. Jeff Corcoran, †ph. Charlie Plimpton, m.ob.).



Red-necked Phalarope © Scott Snyder 28 Sep 2019

**Laughing Gull** – Rare at inland lakes and even rarer in numbers, 9 Laughing Gulls were at Lake Bryan 29-30 Oct (†Michael McCloy, †Sandy Dillard, †Mark McDermott) was a record number for *Brazos*. Two more Laughing Gulls were at Slough Pond, *Bell* 30 Nov (†ph. Randy Pinkston).

**Franklin's Gull** – An amazing flock of about 2100 Franklin's Gulls roosted at Lake Bryan, *Brazos* in late afternoon 29 Oct (Michael McCloy). The next morning the flock, variously estimated at 2500-5000, lifted off the water and flew out of the fog and over the head of observers (Sandy Dillard, Mark McDermott).

**Caspian Tern** – A flock of 5 Caspian Terns visited Lake Limestone 6 Sep (John Berner, David Sarkozi), providing a first county record for infrequently birded *Leon*.

**Common Loon** – Although Common Loons have been reported sparsely in prior years at Lake Bryan, *Brazos*, never in the counts as high as 11-14 on 8 Nov (ph. John Hale, ph. Shirley Wilkerson, m.ob.) with a single loon remaining to at least 12 Nov (Michael McCloy).



Common Loons © Shirley Wilkerson 8 Nov 2019

**Brown Booby** – Undoubtedly, the “best bird” of the season is the Brown Booby that showed up at Lake Somerville, flying near the dam that straddles *Burleson* and *Washington*, on 17 Aug (†Justin Bosler, ph. Sherry Mason, ph. Shelia Hargis, m.obs.). This is the first record for each of the two counties and the second record for the Central Brazos Valley.



Brown Booby © Sherry Mason 17 Aug 2019

Anhinga – An unusually high count of 40 Anhinga were in trees above wetlands near Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes* 9 Nov (Eric Lewis).

American White Pelican – Flock after flock, numbering 50-70 each, kept arriving at Fort Parker S.P., *Limestone* 7 Oct (Catherine Winans) until a count of 500 was reached. On 12 Oct (Brandon Best) 600 were estimated at nearby Lake Mexia and on 21 Oct (Laurel Runnels) the flock of 600 were back at Fort Parker S.P. On 15 Oct (Alysa Joaquin) a massive flock of 750-1000 flocked over water at Lake Somerville S.P., *Lee*.

White-faced Ibis – Good numbers of White-faced Ibis gathered at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 16-31 Oct (m.ob.), peaking at 98 on 16 Oct (Simon Kiacz). Another high count was 66 on 6 Oct (Steve Glover) at Slough Pond, *Bell*,

Roseate Spoonbill – Although a few Roseate Spoonbills show up in *Fayette* almost yearly, a count of 17 seen 29 Sep (Steve Glover) at Mullins Prairie Sand/Gravel Lake is unprecedented in the county.

**White-tailed Kite** – Only the 3<sup>rd</sup> county record for *McLennan*, a White-tailed Kite flew over Waco near Cameron Park 27 Sep (Dave Ruch).

Mississippi Kite – Late migrating Mississippi Kites included 2 juveniles at Temple, *Bell* 3 Oct (†Randy Pinkston) and singles 5 Oct (Scott Snyder) at Temple and 7 Oct (Dave Ruch) at Hewitt, *McLennan*.

**White-tailed Hawk** – White-tailed Hawk is scarce in *Bastrop* and especially rare in fall, so one 4 Nov (†ph. Shelia Hargis) is exceptional. Another White-tailed Hawk was at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 19 Oct (†Warren Hardin).

Ringed Kingfisher – A Ringed Kingfisher was sighted multiple times 27 Aug–6 Oct (Kathy Cantu, m.ob.) at Witter Lane, *Bell*.



Ringed Kingfisher © Kathy Cantu 29 Aug 2019

**American Kestrel** – A surprising 22 American Kestrels were counted all together on telephone lines over grasshopper-laden fields southwest of Bastrop, *Bastrop* 5 Oct (Jonah Gula).

**Peregrine Falcon** – A Peregrine Falcon found 13 Aug (Tyler Scott) at Sims Lane added to very few *Brazos* records at this early fall date.

**Ash-throated Flycatcher** – A first county record for *Madison*, an Ash-throated Flycatcher was described at Lake Madison Park 23 Nov (†Mike Austin).

**Couch's Kingbird** – A 2<sup>nd</sup> record for *McLennan*, 3 Couch's Kingbirds were at Baylor University 1-27 Nov (†ph. Anand Chaudhary). The 5<sup>th</sup> record for *Brazos*, a Couch's Kingbird found 12 Oct (ph. Neil Diaz) at County Club Lake and was viewed regularly to early Nov (m.ob.) when it next appeared 13 Nov+ (ph. Ron Newhouse) at nearby Finfeather Lake. Other area Couch's Kingbirds include 2 at Oak Hill Cemetery, Flatonia, *Fayette* 9 Oct (†Damian Martinez), 1 at Brenham, *Washington* 17 Oct (†Darrell Vollert), and another at Fairview Cemetery, *Bastrop* 24 Nov (†Anna Stalcup, audio Jeffrey Jackson).



Couch's Kingbird © Ron Newhouse 31 Oct 2019

**Vermilion Flycatcher** – A male Vermilion Flycatcher was consistently at Witter Lane, *Bell* 21 Sep+ (Charlie Plimpton, m.ob.). Another was in western *Bell* at Fort Hood 28 Sep (Bruce Polikoff). Rarely seen in *Burleson*, a male was at Black Lake in the Brazos bottoms 27 Oct (m.ob.). A female was at Harman Ranch, *Bastrop* 2 Nov (Richard Harman) and two were at Kauffman Road, *Bastrop* 4 Nov (Shelia Hargis).

**White-eyed Vireo** – An unusually high count of 50-51 White-eyed Vireos were vocalizing along 6.5 mi. of the El Camino Real Paddling Trail near Fisherman's Park, *Bastrop* 2 Sep (Shelia Hargis, et al.).

Barn Swallow – Two very large flocks of Barn Swallows, totaling 1000-1500 birds, were over Sims Lane, *Brazos* 25 Oct (Erik Atwell, Michael McCloy).

**Canyon Wren** – Canyon Wrens are sometimes reported in western *McLennan*, but one observed 1 Sep (Dave Ruch) farther east in Waco is surprising.

Sedge Wren – Unusual is a high count of 9 Sedge Wrens, including 6 at one time, at Moore Farms, *Brazos* 29 Nov (John Hale).

**Mountain Bluebird** – A 6<sup>th</sup> record for *Bell*, a Mountain Bluebird was at Stillhouse Park, Stillhouse Hollow Lake 29-31 Oct (ph. Gil Eckrich, m.ob.).



Mountain Bluebird © Doug Orama 30 Oct 2019

Cedar Waxwing – An unusually early Cedar Waxwing flew over Salado, *Bell* 1 Oct (Charlie Plimpton).

American Pipit – A high count of 375 American Pipits were spread across the turf farm at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 23 Nov (Simon Kiacz).

**Bullock's Oriole** – About the 5<sup>th</sup> record for *Bastrop*, a Bullock's Oriole was at Little Piney, Lake Bastrop 3 Oct (†Tammy Brown).

**Ovenbird** – Not often reported in fall migration, an Ovenbird was identified 13 Oct (†Cameron Johnson) on the Texas A&M University campus, *Brazos*.

Nashville Warbler – A late Nashville Warbler was near Country Club Lake, *Brazos* 29 Nov (†Laura Sare).

**Chestnut-sided Warbler** – Contributing to a small number of fall season reports in the Central Prairie, a late Chestnut-sided Warbler was in western *Lee* 24 Oct (†Timothy Freiday).

**Palm Warbler** – A 6<sup>th</sup> record for *Bell*, a Palm Warbler 11 Oct (†Randy Pinkston) was at Witter Lane.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** – Quite late for a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, one male resided at Finfeather Lake, *Brazos* 3-6 Nov (Michael McCloy, Tyler Scott, Erik Atwell).



Rose-breasted Grosbeak © Michael McCloy 3 Nov 2019

Blue Grosbeak – Two late sightings of Blue Grosbeak in *Brazos* are 28 Oct (†Toby Hibbits) at Sims Lane and 3 Nov (†Michael McCloy) at Finfeather Lake.

Indigo Bunting – A late Indigo Bunting was at Wellborn, *Brazos* 29 Nov (ph. John Hale).



Indigo Bunting © John Hale 29 Nov 2019

Dickcissel – A late female Dickcissel was southeast of Bastrop, *Bastrop* 16 Nov (Jonah Gula).

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Erik Atwell, Mike Austin, John Berner, Brandon Best, Justin Bosler, Tammy Brown, Kathy Cantu, Anand Chaudhary, Greg Cook, Jeff Corcoran, Nicholas DeMalo, Neil Diaz, Sandy Dillard, Gil Eckrich, Timothy Freiday, Bert Frenz, 221 Rainbow Dr. #12190, Livingston, TX 77399-2021, bert2@bafrenz.com, . Jackie Girouard, Steve Glover, Berndt Gravenstein, Jonah Gula, John Hale, Warren Hardin, Shelia Hargis, Richard Harman, Toby Hibbits, Jeffrey Jackson, Alysa Joaquin, Cameron Johnson, Daniel Kelch, Simon Kiacz, Sharon Lane, Jason Leifester, Donna Lewis, Eric Lewis, Mark Lyon, Alberto Manterola, Damian Martinez, Sherry Mason, Michael McCloy, Mark McDermott, Candy McNamee, Tyler Miloy, Bill Morris, Boris Navikov, Ron Newhouse, Doug Orama, John Pike, Randy Pinkston, Charlie Plimpton, Chelsea Plimpton, Bruce Polikoff, Fay Ratta, Barrett Riess, Dave Ruch, Laurel Runnels, Laura Sare, David Sarkozi, Tyler Scott, Scott Snyder, Anna Stalcup, Jane Tillman, Darrell Vollert, Jeremy Webster, Shirley Wilkerson, Catherine Winans, Matthew York.