

Spring 2019: Central Oaks & Prairies

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from sightings from 1 March to 31 May 2019. Sightings are included for the following counties: Bastrop, Bell, Brazos, Burleson, Falls, Fayette, Freestone, Grimes, Lee, Leon, Limestone, Madison, McLennan, Milam, Navarro, Robertson, and Washington.

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Fulvous Whistling-Duck – Two Fulvous Whistling-Ducks visited a pond on Wittier Lane 7-8 May (Randy Pinkston, Charlie Plimpton, ph. Steve Snyder), a fourth county record for *Bell*.



Fulvous Whistling-Duck, © Steve Snyder, 7 May 2019, Bell County

Ross's Goose – Ross's Geese have rarely been reported in recent years in the Central Brazos Valley, so four mixed on a large group of Snow Geese 10 Mar (Alberto Manterola) near Calvert, *Robertson* is noteworthy.

Surf Scoter – A fifth record for *Bell*, two adult males and a female Surf Scoter were at three locations on the shores of Belton Lake: the East Range of Fort Hood 3 Mar (Charlie Plimpton, Jeff Hall), Temple Lake Park 15 Mar (Steve Snyder) and Fort Hood 13B 16-17 Mar (ph. Randy Pinkston, ph. Kathy Cantu).



Surf Scoter, © Randy Pinkston, 16 Mar 2019, Bell County

Ruddy Duck – A late departing Ruddy Duck was near Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 12 May (Steve Glover, ph. Shirley Wilkerson).



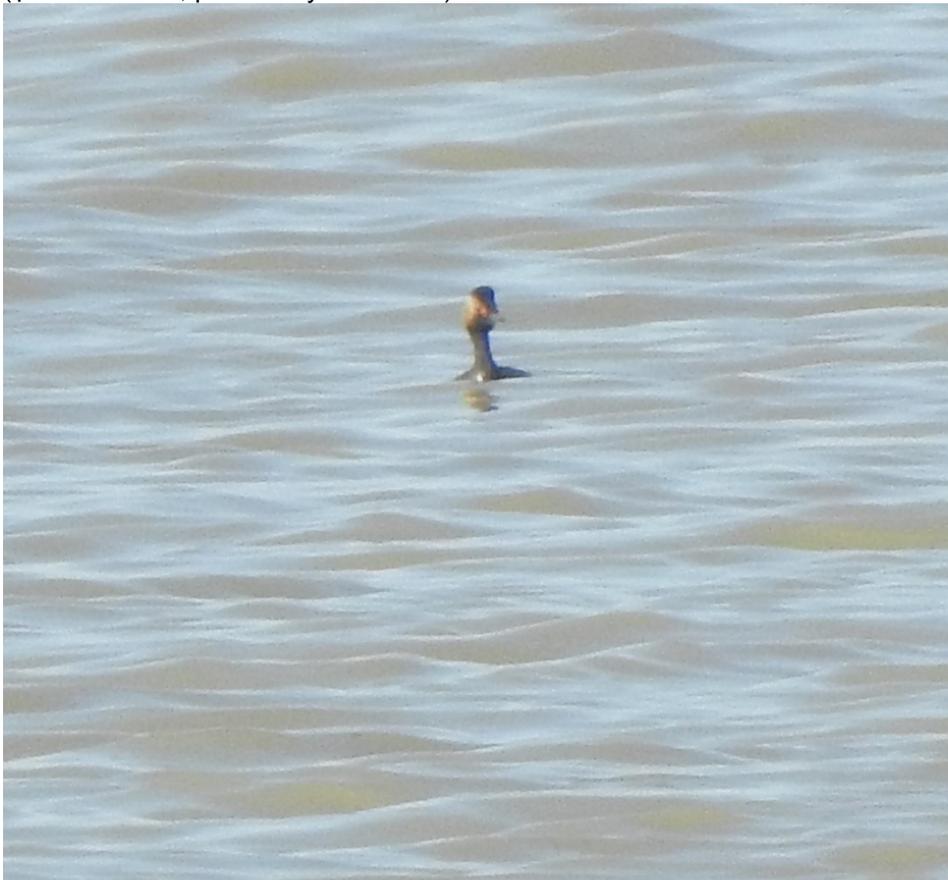
Ruddy Duck, © Shirley Wilkerson, 12 May 2019, Brazos County

Least Grebe – A single Least Grebe was photographed at Carlos Lake, Grimes 23 Apr (ph. John Pike) where they have been seen occasionally in the past.



Least Grebe, © John Pike, 23 Apr 2019, Grimes County

Eared Grebe – Late for Brazos, an Eared Grebe was found at Rye School Road near Lake Bryan 12 May (†Steve Glover, ph. Shirley Wilkerson).



Eared Grebe, © Shirley Wilkerson, 12 May 2019, Brazos County

Black-billed Cuckoo – An unusually good find for *Brazos* is Black-billed Cuckoo and a surprising number were reported this spring, including singles at Hensel Park, Bryan 4 May (†Bert Foquet), at Kurten 4 May (Shirley Wilkerson), at College Station 4 May (Toby Hibbitts), and at Lick Creek Park 11 May (†Alberto Manterola).

Virginia Rail – Rarely reported in recent years in *Brazos*, one or possibly two Virginia Rails received a lot of attention in Bryan 9-25 Mar (Iliana Mock, rec. Bert Foquet, rec. Mary Richards, rec. Sandy Dillard, m.ob.).

Black-bellied Plover – Black-bellied Plovers usually migrate closer to the Gulf Coast or fly over inland sites without stopping, so inland reports are rare. Up to four were at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 7-10 May (†ph. John Hale, †Simon Kiacz) and nine were at Earhardt Rd, *Bastrop* 5-6 May (†Bernd Gravenstein, †Mike Goebel), and still two others were near Hearne, *Robertson* 13 May (†Donald Brightsmith), the latter being a first county record.

Semipalmated Plover – An occasional species to *Brazos*, up to four Semipalmated Plovers were in a flooded field at Sims Lane 7-22 Apr (†John Hale, ph. Shirley Wilkerson, et al.).



Semipalmated Plover, © Shirley Wilkerson, 12 Apr 2019, Brazos County

Piping Plover – A rare find inland, a Piping Plover was at Temple Lake Park, *Bell* 24 Apr (†Jeff Hall, ph. Randy Pinkston) and at the turf farm at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 26 Apr (†Michael McCloy, John Hale, Tyler Scott, †Erik Atwell, †Donald Brightsmith).



Piping Plover, © Randy Pinkston, 24 Apr 2019, Bell County

Whimbrel – Only the second record for *Brazos*, the first in 1997, a Whimbrel was at Sims Lane 18 Apr (†Bill Eisele, †Tyler Scott, ph. John Hale, et al.). Another was at Dana Peak Park, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, *Bell* 4 May (†ph. Charlie Plimpton) and two were at Temple Lions Park, *Bell* 14 May (†Randy Pinkston).



Whimbrel, © Charlie Plimpton, 4 May 2019, Bell County

Marbled Godwit – Up to 11 Marbled Godwits at Sims Lane 18 Apr (John Hale, ph. Tyler Scott, Shirley Wilkerson, †Bill Eisele, †Donald Brightsmith, et al.) provided a second record for *Brazos*. Four were spotted at Temple Lake Park on Belton Lake, *Bell* 14 Apr and 17 were there 24 Apr (both Randy Pinkston).

Ruddy Turnstone – Another good find for *Brazos* was a Ruddy Turnstone at Sims Lane 3-4 May (†ph. John Hale, et al.). More surprising, and a first record for *Robertson*, one was near Mumford 13 May (ph. Simon Kiacz).

Dunlin – Up to three Dunlins were at Sims Lane, *Brazos* 3-13 May (†John Hale, ph. Shirley Wilkerson). Two near Mumford 13 May (ph. Simon Kiacz, †John Hale), were a first record for *Robertson*.



Dunlin, © Shirley Wilkerson, 4 May 2019, Brazos County



Dunlin, © Simon Kiacz, 13 May 2019, Robertson County

Short-billed Dowitcher – Only the second documented record for *Brazos*, a Short-billed Dowitcher was found at Sims Lane 25 Apr (†Michael McCloy) accompanying two Long-billed Dowitchers. Another or the same was photographed there 11 May (ph. Shirley Wilkerson). Three were near Shallow Ford Road, *Bell* 10 May (†Randy Pinkston).



Short-billed Dowitcher, © Shirley Wilkerson, 11 May 2019, Brazos County

Willet – A Willet was at Sims Lane in *Brazos* 18-25 Apr (ph. John Hale, †Bill Eisele, †Michael McCloy, m.ob.). One was at Temple Lake Park, Bell 13 Mar and an amazing 65 were individually counted there 24 Apr (both †Randy Pinkston). Seventeen were still there 2 May (Charlie Plimpton).

Lesser Black-backed Gull – A distant digiscoped Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lake Halbert 2 Mar (ph. Greg Cook) was a first county record for *Navarro*.



Lesser Black-backed Gull, © Greg Cook, 2 Mar 2019, Navarro County

American Bittern – Finding an American Bittern in *Bastrop* is not an annual event, yet one was at the Harman Ranch near Utley 21 Apr (†Richard Harman) and another was on Old Potato Road 4 May (Jason Leifester). The latter is the latest spring record for *Bastrop*.

Least Bittern – *Brazos* had a surprising number of sightings of Least Bittern this spring. A single Least Bittern was at Country Club Lake, Bryan 19 Apr (Sandy Dillard, Cindie Dillard). Two male Least Bitterns were at Gabbard Park, College Station 20 Apr (†Amanda Beckman). Another or one of the same was about two miles away in Southwood Valley, College Station 20 May (Heather Dennis).

White-tailed Kite – Surprisingly only the second record for *McLennan*, a White-tailed Kite was at Tradinghouse Creek Reservoir 26 Mar (ph. John Muldrow).



White-tailed Kite, © John Muldrow, 26 Mar 2019, McLennan County

Swallow-tailed Kite – Swallow-tailed Kites made a good showing in diverse locations, with reports of singles 28 Mar (†Darrell Vollert) near downtown Chappell Hill, *Washington*, 9 Apr (†Clayton Bownds) near Tranquility Base, *Grimes*, 10 Apr (†Neil Diaz) at College Station, *Brazos*, and 10 Apr (†Debbie Feagin) near Webberville, *Bastrop*.

Ferruginous Hawk – The first spring record for *Bastrop* and the latest spring record for the central Oaks and Prairies region was a Ferruginous Hawk 19 Apr (†Mike & Jan Goebel) hovering over a field east of Earhardt Road.

Great Kiskadee – A calling Great Kiskadee was seen 2 Apr (†Debbie Feagin) near Webberville, *Bastrop* and one was calling from a pine tree 7 Apr (ph. Jason Leifester) at Paint Creek Road, *Bastrop*.

Couch's Kingbird – One to two Couch's Kingbirds were again in Brenham, *Washington* 1Mar–12 Apr (†Darrell Vollert).

Bell's Vireo – A good find for *Brazos*, a Bell's Vireo was heard and seen in College Station 4 May (†James Hughes).

Philadelphia Vireo – With few records for *McLennan*, the last in 2006, a Philadelphia Vireo at Whitehall Park, Woodway 4 May (†Matthew York) was notable. Surprisingly, another was described 13 May (†Matthew York) at Carleen Bright Arboretum.

Red Crossbill – A female Red Crossbill was photographed a feeder near Gravel Crossing W.M.A., Stillhouse Hollow Lake 4-9 Apr (ph. Harper Price) and is about the fifth record for *Bell*.



Red Crossbill, © Harper Price, 4 Apr 2019, Bell County

Golden-crowned Sparrow – At a location near the Travis-Bastrop county line west of Cedar Creek, an immature Golden-crowned Sparrow was photographed 27 Mar (ph. Colton Robbins) and it is a first county record for *Bastrop*. The observer reported, “This bird was feeding at a ground feeder with a juvenile White-crowned Sparrow and a couple Northern Cardinals. When it turned its head just right and the sun hit it, the yellow/gold in the forehead stood out pretty well.”



Golden-crowned Sparrow, © Colton Robbins, 27 Mar 2019, Bastrop County

Lesser Goldfinch – A new county record for *Fayette*, a Lesser Goldfinch visited a backyard near La Grange 17May (†Marcia & Ron Braun), a location far east of its normal range.

Yellow-headed Blackbird – Especially numerous this season in *Brazos*, Yellow-headed Blackbirds were reported more than a dozen times 7Apr–12 May, topped by an estimated count of 150 on 20 Apr (Virginia

Johnson) in large flocks mixed with Red-winged Blackbirds and feeding in trees near a feed lot at Cotrone Dix Lane.

Bronzed Cowbird – One to two Bronzed Cowbirds were at Country Club Lake, *Brazos* 16Apr–27 May (†Tyler Scott, m.ob.). Three others were at a backyard feeder in College Station 23 Apr (†Ron Newhouse). Although the species is not annual in Brazos, curiously two were at Country Club Lake the previous year, 8-14 May 2018. Elsewhere, a male Bronzed Cowbird was in the Wallis area, *Austin* 2 Apr (†John Berner) and another was at Bob Bryant Park, *Bastrop* 25 May (†Bernd Gravenstein).



Bronzed Cowbird, © Ron Newhouse, 21 Apr 2019, Brazos County

Cerulean Warbler – Scarce in recent years, a singing male Cerulean Warbler was at Lick Creek Park, *Brazos* 30 Apr (†Michael McCloy, †Laura Sare) and another at Brison Park, *Brazos* 12 May (†Simon Kiacz). The same day (†Randy Pinkston) in *Bell*, one was at Temple Lions Park.

Blackpoll Warbler – The ninth and tenth *Brazos* records for Blackpoll Warbler since the first in 1964 were 4 May (†Rodney Allen, Trevis Allen) at Bryan and 10 May (†Shirley Wilkerson) at Kurten.

Palm Warbler – A western Palm Warbler at Iron Bridge Park, Belton Lake 20 Apr (†Randy Pinkston) was the fifth county record for *Bell*.

Prairie Warbler – A very rare migrant to *Bastrop*, a Prairie Warbler was heard near Alum Creek, *Bastrop* S.P. 11 Apr (Brush Freeman).

Golden-cheeked Warbler – Highly unusual and a first for *Falls*, a Golden-cheeked Warbler was out-of-range at Rosebud City Park 4 Apr (†Kenneth Williams).

Painted Bunting – A female Painted Bunting that overwintered at Chappell Hill, Washington was still present at backyard feeders 11 Apr (†Darrell Vollert).

CONTRIBUTORS:

Rodney Allen, Trevis Allen, Amanda Beckman, John Berner, Clayton Bownds, Marcia & Ron Braun, Donald Brightsmith, Kathy Cantu, Greg Cook, Heather Dennis, Neil Diaz, Cindie Dillard, Sandy Dillard, Bill Eisele, Debbie Feagin, Bert Foquet, Brush Freeman, Bert Frenz, 221 Rainbow Dr. #12190, Livingston, TX 77399-2021, bert2@bafrenz.com, Jackie Girouard, Steve Glover, Jan Goebel, Mike Goebel, Bernd Gravenstein, John Hale, Jeff Hall, Richard Harman, Toby Hibbitts, James Hughes, Virginia Johnson, Simon Kiacz, Jason Leifester, Alberto Manterola, Michael McCloy, John Muldrow, Ron Newhouse, Kurt Nguyen, John Pike, Randy Pinkston, Charlie Plimpton, Harper Price, Mary Richards, Colton Robbins, Laura Sare, Tyler Scott, Steve Snyder, Darrell Vollert, Shirley Wilkerson, Kenneth Williams, Matthew York.