

North American Birds
Winter 2020-2021
South Texas

The amazing incursion of western species into the region from the fall continued into winter. The infamous Polar Vortex entered South Texas birders' vocabularies this winter. Arctic storm Uri produced several days of misery with record-breaking cold, snow, ice and power outages. The impact on birds was severe especially on insectivores. Normal wintering insectivores like gnatcatchers, vireos, flycatchers, warblers, etc. were decimated. Cave Swallows disappeared. Dead Eastern Phoebes were common sights. It was horrific. Native and non-native vegetation was wiped out. Huisache, Texas Ebony, granjeno, blackbrush, all citrus, palms, etc. were killed or severely damaged. The ramifications of this late season record cold and ice will go on for several years.

Notable Observations:

Cackling Goose – Up to 28 Cackling Goose were reported from *Wharton* 6 & 8 Feb (Brent Oretgo, Dora Ann Ortego, Bob Friedrichs).

Canada Goose – Notable were two Canada Geese reported at Choke Canyon State Park Calliham Unit, *McMullen* 20 Dec (John Allendorf, Caleb Frome) and a single bird seen at Aransas NWR, Aransas 13 Jan (Quentin Thigpen).

Greater Scaup – Four Greater Scaup seen on an Edinburg municipal park, *Hidalgo* 10 Jan (Ryan Rodriguez) was noteworthy for the LRGV.

Surf Scoter – Six Surf Scoters were seen in Lavaca/Cox Bay, *Calhoun* 27 Dec (ph. Bob Friedrichs et al).

White-winged Scoter – Three White-winged Scoters seen at Falcon Dam, *Starr* 1 Jan (ph. Ciny Lee) provided for a rare LRGV record.

Black Scoter – Up to five Black Scoters excited birders at Fulton, *Aransas* 13 Dec-3 Jan (Susan Foster, m.obs.).

Long-tailed Duck – A Long-tailed Duck showed up at Osprey Overlook at Laguna Atascosa NWR, *Cameron* 9 Dec (Madeleine Sandefur). Another Long-tailed Duck entertained Spotted Rail chasers at Choke Canyon State Park – Calliham Unit, *McMullen* 20 Dec-9 Feb (m.obs.).

Common Goldeneye – A Common Goldeneye paid a rare visit to *McMullen* at Choke Canyon State Park, Calliham Unit 27 Dec-8 Jan (Kent Taylor et al). Even further south a female was photographed at a private ranch in *Maverick* 16-17 Jan (ph. Phyllis Laurence).

Hooded Merganser – Five locally rare Hooded Mergansers were seen on a *Hidalgo* pond 26 Dec (ph. Dan Jones).

Horned Grebe – Two Horned Grebes observed at Falcon State Park, *Starr* 15 Dec (ph. Dan Jones) provided for a rare LRGV record.

Ruddy Ground Dove – The male Ruddy Ground Dove continued at Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park, *Hidalgo* to 5 Feb (m. obs.). Much further north another male was found near Three Rivers, *Live Oak* 18 Dec (Willie Sekula).

Groove-billed Ani – Groove-billed Anis lingered in *Hidalgo & Cameron* into Jan with up to five birds at four different locations (m.obs.).

Eastern Whip-poor-will – An Eastern Whip-poor-will present in a San Juan yard in *Hidalgo* 4 Jan (ph. Bert Wessling) provided for a rare and unusual winter record for South Texas. Normally this species is occasionally found in winter but only along the Texas coast.

Anna's Hummingbird – The invasion of Anna's Hummingbirds into South Texas continued well into the winter. Birds were reported from practically all South Texas counties with the amazing five birds seen near Choke Canyon, *Live Oak* 6 Dec (Derek Muschalek, ph. Willie Sekula) and four birds at a Tuleta, *Bee* feeder 23 Dec+ (ph. Linda Vegh), another four birds in a Calallen, *Nueces* yard 1-9 Jan (Clay Taylor) also four birds in *Cameron* 4-28 Dec (ph. Kristy Baker).

Allen's Hummingbird – An immature male Allen's Hummingbird visited a Weslaco, *Hidalgo* yard 7-14 Feb (ph. Bill Supulski). Another bird was reported from Edinburg, *Hidalgo* 15-28 Feb (Baceliza Monroe).

Calliope Hummingbird – Two Calliope Hummingbirds spent a good part of the winter in Victoria, *Victoria* (ph. Mark Terry, Sharon Terry). In *Cameron* a Calliope Hummingbird dropped in during the arctic blast 14-15 Feb (ph. Kristy Baker).

Broad-tailed Hummingbird – Continuing the trend from the fall at least five different Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were present in South Texas this season which is well above average.

Broad-billed Hummingbird – A Broad-billed Hummingbird was reported from a *Victoria* yard 10 Jan (Brent Ortego).

Buff-bellied Hummingbird – A Buff-bellied Hummingbird lingered in Tuleta, *Bee* yard 11-20 Dec (Linda Vegh).

Spotted Rail – The celebrity of the avian show this season has to be the Spotted Rail that mesmerized birders at 75 Acre Lake of Choke Canyon State Park – Calliham Unit. It was first identified 19 Dec (ph. Alan Clampitt). It continued to delight hundreds of birders until 23 Jan when it was flushed across the lake by marauding birders with cameras only to be never seen again!

King Rail – Four King Rails reported from Laguna Atascosa NWR, *Cameron* 3 Jan (Javi Gonzalez) were significant for the number and location.

American Golden-Plover – An American Golden-Plover well described from a *Calhoun* ranch 27 Dec (Bob Friedrichs et al) was likely a very late migrant.

Mountain Plover – A good count of 121 Mountain Plovers was made in an ag field near Mathis, *San Patricio* 3 Jan (ph. Matthew Sabatine; Jason Horn, Steve Schmit).

American Woodcock – Two American Woodcocks reported from Wesley Seale Dam in *San Patricio* 17 Dec (Skip Cantrell) and another bird present in *Bee* 13-20 Feb (Robert Benson) were noteworthy for being present in a very bad drought year.

Pomarine Jaeger – An amazing 12 Pomarine Jaegers were spotted from a fishing boat offshore from Port Aransas, *Nueces* 13 Dec (ph. Jon McIntyre).

California Gull – A 1st winter California Gull was observed at Falcon Dam, *Starr* 1 Jan (ph. Ciny Lee).

Iceland Gull – An adult Iceland Gull was again present at John F Kennedy Causeway, *Nueces* this winter 24 Dec-18 Jan (ph. Andrew Orgill, Rylee Gonzales et al).

Black Skimmer – Of note for the inland location were four Black Skimmers seen aty Santa Ana NWR, *Hidalgo* 23 Feb (Carly Frounfelker, John Bryan).

Pacific Loon – A Pacific Loon was present at Port Lavaca, *Calhoun* 12-17 Jan & 4 Feb (Petra Hockey et al).

Band-rumped Storm-Petrel – Late season Band-rumped Storm-Petrels seen offshore in *Nueces* waters included a single bird 12 Dec and three birds 13 Dec (ph. Jon McIntyre).

Great Shearwater – Three Great Shearwaters were seen offshore from Port Aransas in *Nueces* waters 25 13 Dec (ph, Jon McIntyre).

Magnificent Frigatebird – A Magnificent Frigatebird was seen sporadically at South Padre Island, *Cameron* 28 Dec-25 Jan (ph. Huck Hutchens).

Brown Booby – Twenty-six Brown Boobys tallied at Mustang Island State Park, *Nueces* 21 Jan (ph. Justin LeClaire) were pre Arctic Storm Uri which had a negative impact on this tropical species.

Hook-billed Kite – A Hook-billed Kite that shocked birders looking for the Spotted Rail at Choke Canyon State Park – Calliham Unit, *McMullen* 30 Dec (m.obs.; ph.). Only a couple of documented records exist outside the species' usual LRGV riparian habitat.

Golden Eagle – A Golden Eagle reported from Falcon State Park (*Zapata* portion) 16 Jan (ph. Jessie Williamson) provided for a rare area record.

Common Black Hawk – A Common Black Hawk again wintered in Brownsville, *Cameron* (m.obs.).

Rough-legged Hawk – An amazing Rough-legged Hawk was discovered near Riviera, *Kleberg* 2 Dec (*fide* Tom Langschied). It remained in the area to at least 10 Feb (m. obs.).

Long-eared Owl – A Long-eared Owl lived up to the species' secretive nature while present at Estero Llano Grande State Park, *Hidalgo* 19 Jan-8 Feb (ph. Huck Hutchens).

Elegant Trogon – The female Elegant Trogon continued from fall to delight birders throughout the season at Estero Llano Grande State Park, *Hidalgo* (m.obs.).

Red-naped Sapsucker – A Red-naped Sapsucker was present at San Juan Wetlands, *Hidalgo* 3 Dec+ (m.obs.), the bird reported from Falfurrias Cemetery, *Brooks* in Nov lingered to 23 Jan (Mary Gustafson). A nice male was seen in Crystal City, *Zavala* 1 Jan (ph. Martin REeid, Sheridan Coffey).

Rose-throated Becard – Rose-throated Becards had a banner winter with the male from the fall at the Falfurrias Cemetery, Brooks Co continuing to 30 Jan (m.ob.) and the female from the fall at Salineno, Starr Co being reported until 13 Feb (m.ob.). New birds found during the winter included a female at Sabal Palm Sanctuary, Cameron Co 15-31 Jan (Ken Retrum et al.), a male sporadically at Salineno, Starr Co 24 Jan - 13 Feb (Tiffany Kersten, ph. Wayne Stahnke), a male at Quinta Mazatlan, Hidalgo Co 26 Jan - 9 Mar (John Yochum; ph. Quentin Thigpen), and one more male at Resaca de la Palma SP, Cameron Co 26-27 Feb (Brad McKinney et al.).

Dusky-capped Flycatcher – At least 10 and likely more Dusky-capped Flycatchers were present this winter in South Texas with the most notable bird being seen at Lake Findley in Alice, *Jim Wells* 6 Dec (voice recording, Blaine Carnes).

Hammond's Flycatcher – A rare for winter Hammond's Flycatcher was present at Resaca de la Palma State Park, *Cameron* 19 Dec+ (ph. Mark Esparza; m.obs.).

Pacific-slope Flycatcher – The Pacific-slope Flycatcher detected in Nov at Quinta Mazatlan, *Hidalgo* stayed up to 13 Feb (m.obs.). A Pacific-slope Flycatcher was found on private property in *Matagorda* 18 Dec (ph. Ron Weeks, Bob Friedrichs et al) while another bird was seen at Santa Ana NWR, *Hidalgo* 4 Dec-14 Jan (Eric Carpenter et al).

Cassin's Vireo – A Cassin's Vireo was present at Choke Canyon State Park, *McMullen* 14 Jan (ph. Michael B. Cooper et al).

Plumbeous Vireo – A Plumbeous Vireo was reported from *Hidalgo* 8 Dec (Ryan Rodriguez).

Philadelphia Vireo – A late Philadelphia Vireo was reported from Bentsen State Park, *Hidalgo* 7 Dec (Tiffany Erickson). While birders were looking for the Crimson-collared Grosbeak another Philadelphia Vireo was discovered in a Portland, *San Patricio* yard 2 Jan (ph. Willie Sekula; Derek Muschalek et al). It was seen again the next day (ph. Skip Cantrell).

Common Raven – A Common Raven seen on the Halff Brothers Ranch, *Frio* 1 Jan (Martin Reid, Sheridan Coffey) was significant since the location was well away from the species' usual Balcones Escarpment haunts.

Bank Swallow – Up to five Bank Swallows spent most of the winter at Santa Ana NWR, *Hidalgo* (Zak Pohlen et al).

Violet-green Swallow – A Violet-green Swallow reported from Valley Acres Reservoir, *Hidalgo* 17 Dec (Javier de Leon) may have been a really late migrant.

Brown Creeper – A rare for the location Brown Creeper was seen at Presidio Park, *Dimmit* 27 Dec (Michelle Summers).

Mountain Bluebird – Mountain Bluebirds invaded South Texas this winter with sightings in at least 17 counties. The most notable being a flock of 120 birds (!) in a field in *Zavala* 21 Jan (ph. Tripp Davenport). Also of note was a flock of 50 birds in Quemado, *Maverick* 23 Jan (Phyllis Laurence).

Swainson's Thrush – A late lingering Swainson's Thrush was found at Santa Ana NWR, *Hidalgo* 20 Dec (ph. David J. Ringer).

Clay-colored Thrush – Notable outside of the species' regular LRGV haunts were single Clay-colored Thrushes seen near Three Rivers, *Live Oak* 18 & 20 Dec (ph. Cinda Crosley), Aransas NWR, *Aransas* 25 Dec (ph. Jason Loghry, Ben Horstmann), Choke Canyon State Park, *McMullen*, 29 Dec (John Groves et al), near McFaddin, *Victoria* 17 Dec (Daniel Walker et al) and Fulton, *Aransas* 13-14 Feb (ph. Sean Cowden; Susan Foster).

Sage Thrasher – Sage Thrashers wintered in near unprecedented numbers across South Texas this season.

Purple Finch – Single Purple Finches observed at Tivoli, *Refugio* 17 Dec (ph. Ron Huebner) and Choke Canyon State Park – South Shore, *Live Oak* 23 Dec (Blaine Carnes) were significant finds for the southerly locations.

Chestnut-collared Longspur – Two Chestnut-collared Longspurs seen at Choke Canyon State Park – Calliham Unit 20 Dec (Tripp Davenport) provided a rare *McMullen* record.

Thick-billed Longspur – A Thick-billed Longspur was detected calling overhead at Choke Canyon State Park – Calliham Unit, *McMullen* 24 Dec.

Fox Sparrow – A Fox Sparrow present at Suter Wildlife Refuge, *Nueces* 6-14 Dec & 15 Jan (ph. Ana Novak; m.obs.) and another bird at Goose Island State Park, *Aransas* 15-27 Feb (ph. Ben Horstmann et al) provided for rare Coastal Bend records.

Eastern Towhee – A female Eastern Towhee present at Choke Canyon State Park – Calliham Unit 11 Dec-7 Jan (ph. Yvette Haughney) provided for a rare *McMullen* record.

Baltimore Oriole – A Baltimore Oriole again spent the winter in a San Benito, *Cameron* yard (Michael Marsden).

Scott's Oriole – A Scott's Oriole seen at Rancho Lomitas, *Starr* 3 Jan (ph. Johnny Wilson, Lesley Starke) provided a rare winter record for the state.

Rusty Blackbird – A handsome Rusty Blackbird visited Rockport, *Aransas* 4 Dec (ph. David Browning).

Tennessee Warbler – A Tennessee Warbler seen at South Padre Island, *Cameron* 7 Dec (Bill Beaty) along with one reported from Estero Llano Grande State Park, *Hidalgo* 5 Dec (Michael McCloy, Ethan Kistler) were on the late side. A really late bird was observed at Santa Ana NWR, *Hidalgo* 24 Dec (ph. Simon Kiacz; Tiffany Kersten).

American Redstart – Lingering American Redstarts included a female at Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, *Cameron* 4-11 Dec (ph. Michelle Cano; Javi Gonzalez) and another female at Quinta Mazatlan, *Hidalgo* 2-30 Dec (Marcia OBara et al).

Tropical Parula – A male Tropical Parula was seen at Lake Findley, *Jim Wells* 21-22 Dec (ph. Philip Chaon).

Cape May Warbler – A Cape May Warbler found in late Nov in a Harlingen, *Cameron* yard stayed to at least 15 Feb (ph. Donna McCown).

Black-throated Gray Warbler – Black-throated Gray Warbler normally is only found in deep South Texas in winter, so this season several birds were located in *Bee*, *Nueces*, *Live Oak* and *McMullen* (m.obs.).

Townsend's Warbler – A nice male Townsend's Warbler visited Bentsen State Park, *Hidalgo* 3 & 8 Dec (ph. Peggy Rudman; m. obs.).

Hermit Warbler – The Hermit Warbler from fall stayed at the McAllen Nature Center, *Hidalgo* to at least 3 Feb (m.obs.). Another bird visited Quinta Mazatlan 29 Jan-9 Feb (Jim Zervos, Tracy Zervos et al).

Painted Redstart – A Painted Redstart was present in a McAllen, *Hidalgo* yard 5-12 Feb (Ernest Herrera et al).

Golden-crowned Warbler – A Golden-crowned Warbler delighted birders at the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, *Cameron* 9 Jan+ (fide Javi Gonzalez; m.obs.). Another Golden-crowned Warbler made a brief stop at Resaca de la Palma, *Cameron* 25-28 Feb (ph. Mark Esparza; m.obs.).

Scarlet Tanager – A female/immature Scarlet Tanager was reported from South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, *Cameron* 24 Jan (ph. David Bailey, Mitchell Bailey).

Crimson-collared Grosbeak - Up to 13 Crimson-collared Grosbeaks visited or wintered at ten different South Texas locations with the most notable being a female that visited a yard in Portland, *San Patricio* 27 Dec-2 Jan (Dell Little et al), another female in Corpus Christi, *Nueces* mulberry tree and up to three birds that spent most of the winter at Quinta Mazatlan, *Hidalgo* (m.obs.).

Black-headed Grosbeak – Up to four Black-headed Grosbeaks were reported from Americana RV Resort in *Hidalgo* in Feb (ph. Nancy Leonard).

Indigo Bunting – Four Indigo Buntings tallied on the Hubbard Ranch, *Calhoun* 17 Dec (ph. Bob Friedrichs) were of note for the location.

Blue Bunting – It was a good season for Blue Bunting in South Texas. In *Hidalgo* a handsome male was present at Estero Llano Grande State Park 2 Dec (Susan Keefer et al), a female visited Bentsen State Park 3 Dec+ (Tiffany Kersten et al), another stunning male was present at Quinta Mazatlan 9 Dec-9 Jan (ph. Peggy Rudman; m.obs.) and finally another sharp male was reported from Frontera Audubon 27 Feb (Cynthia McKee). In *Cameron* another male was present at Resaca de la Palma State Park 22 Feb+ (ph. Ryan Rodriguez; m.obs.). Much further north a bright male was discovered in *Victoria* 21 Jan (ph. Bob Friedrichs).

Lazuli Bunting – A male Lazuli Bunting was present at a resaca in Brownsville, *Cameron* 9 Jan (ph. Ron Weeks).

Dickcissel – Single Dickcissels reported from *Hidalgo* include a bird from Ebony Hills 12 Feb (Tim Brush) and *Hidalgo* 4 Jan (Mary Gustafson). One was in a Harlingen yard in *Cameron* 16 Feb (Mark Conway).

Cited Observers

John Allendorf
David Bailey
Mitchell Bailey
Kristy Baker
Bill Beaty
Robert Benson
David Browning
Tim Brush
John Bryan
Michelle Cano
Skip Cantrell
Blaine Carnes
Alan Clampitt
Sheridan Coffey
Mark Conway

Michael B. Cooper
Sean Cowden
Cinda Crossley
Tripp Davenport
Tiffany Erickson
Mark Esparza
Susan Foster
Bob Friedrichs
Carly Frounfelker
Caleb Frome
Rylee Gonzales
Javi Gonzalez
Mary Gustafson
Ernest Herrera
Petra Hockey
Jason Horn
Ben Horstmann
Ron Huebner
Huck Hutchens
Dan Jones
Susan Keefer
Tiffany Kersten
Simon Kiacz
Ethan Kistler
Tom Langschied
Phyllis Laurence
Javier de Leon
Nancy Leonard
Cin-Ty Lee
Dell Little
Jason Loghry
Michael Marsden
Donna McCown
Michael McCloy
Brad McKinney
Cynthia McKee
Jon McIntyre
Derek Muschalek
Ana Novak
Marcia OBara
Andrew Orgill
Brent Ortego
Dora Ann Ortego
Martin Reid
Ken Retrum
David J. Ringer

Ryan Rodriguez
Peggy Rudman
Matthew Sabatine
Madeleine Sandefur
Steve Schmit
Lesley Starke
Michelle Summers
Kent Taylor
Mark Terry
Sharon Terry
Quentin Thigpen
Linda Vegh
Daniel Walker
Ron Weeks
Bert Wessling
Jessie Williamson
Johnny Wilson
Yvette Haughney
John Yochum
Jim Zervos
Tracy Zervos