

Upper Texas Coast Sub-regional Report, Winter 2020-21

Covering: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Jefferson, Liberty, Montgomery, Orange and Waller

Compiled by Ron Weeks
110 Indian Warrior Lake Jackson, TX 77566
(979) 299-0066

The Weather:

The total rainfall for the period at Houston's Intercontinental Airport was 8.64 inches (cm) which is 1.68 inches (cm) below normal. Average temperatures were about 1.6 degrees F (C) below normal. The weather event of the season was the "freeze" in mid-February where record lows temperatures of 16- and 13-degrees F were recorded on February 15th and 16th. The overnight lows were at or below freezing for 7 consecutive days. The extended cold took a large toll on insectivores with large numbers of dead birds found and countless more lost but just never seen again. After the freeze there were numerous comments about the lack of gnatcatchers, swallows, and flycatchers in the area. Even locally wintering phoebes appears to take a large hit. As expected, this also brought northern species "down" briefly with large numbers of Fox Sparrows suddenly reaching the coast.

Drought conditions farther west brought a western invasion reminiscent of 2012 but with a slightly different cut of species and lower total numbers. New county records included Brewer's Sparrow (*Harris* and *Waller*), Common Black Hawk (*Brazoria*), Dusky Flycatcher (*Brazoria*), Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Harris*, *Fort Bend*, and *Brazoria*), and Painted Redstart (*Harris*). The "Western" Flycatcher movement matched that farther west in the state and involved an astounding 8 birds, 6 of which were confirmed as Pacific-slope by voice.

The Birds:

Ross's Goose: Counts of 200 Ross's Goose from Highlands Reservoir, *Harris* 21 Feb (Cin-Ty Lee) and 175 along Morrison Road, *Waller* 23 Jan (Fred Collins) were notable.

White-winged Scoter: A female type White-winged Scoter at the NRG Cooling Ponds, *Chambers* 27 Dec-2 Jan (ph. David Hanson, Chuck Davis, et al.) allowed the rare viewing of all 3 scoter species at one time.

Long-tailed Duck: A female Long-tailed Duck found at the Cross Creek Wetlands in Fulshear 31 Dec-13 Feb was a first for *Fort Bend* (ph. Bill Schneider, et al.). Three were also seen along O'Quinn Estuary Corridor, *Galveston* 7 Dec-13 Jan (Duke Leibler, ph. Sandy Kroeger, ph. Bob Becker, et al.). Two were at Cattail March in Beaumont, *Jefferson* 26-28 Dec (John Haynes, ph. Harlan Stewart, Pam Smolen).

Least Grebe: A count of 28 Least Grebes at San Bernard NWR, *Brazoria* 18 Dec was an exceptional total for the U.T.C. (Susan Heath, Tad Finnell).

Western Grebe: Western Grebes were seen off Evergreen Road, *Harris* 15 Dec-11 Feb (ph. Cin-Ty Lee, et al.) and at Bolivar Flats, *Galveston* 23 Feb (ph. Ian Davies, Cullen Hanks, Ash Ferlito, Seth Strimas-Mackey, Matt Strimas-Mackey).

Lesser Nighthawk: A Lesser Nighthawk seen at Lafitte's Cove, *Galveston* 4 Dec one of few winter sightings for the U.T.C. (ph. Dean Silvers).

Common Nighthawk: A Common Nighthawk was seen and heard at George Bush Park, *Harris* on the late date of 27 Dec (Bob Sanger).

Anna's Hummingbird: Anna's Hummingbirds staged a major incursion to the U.T.C. with the peak count being 4 at Quintana NBS, *Brazoria* 20 Feb (Melissa Crookshank, et al.)

Broad-tailed Hummingbird: Broad-tailed Hummingbirds moved east in decent numbers with the peak count being 2 at Sugar Land, *Fort Bend* 17 Jan tp (ph. Ryan Shaw)

Allen's Hummingbird: The only Allen's Hummingbird was a young male first detected as an Allen's 27-28 Feb in Dickinson, *Galveston* (ph. Jane Murtishaw-Lindsey, et al.)

Calliope Hummingbird: The significant fall movement of Calliope Hummingbirds dissipated but birds were detected at Sugar Land, *Fort Bend* 14 Dec (Ryan Shaw), at Hitchcock, *Galveston* 28 Dec (Duke Leibler), and Lake Jackson, *Brazoria* 26 Feb tp (ph. Larry & Vicki Kirby)

Broad-billed Hummingbird: The overwintering male Broad-billed Hummingbird at Baytown, *Chambers* stayed until 17 Feb (ph. David Hanson, et al.).

Whooping Crane: The long staying pair along Oak Island Road, *Chambers* was seen 2 Jan tp (ph. Tim Junker, et al. and another pair was found in western *Jefferson* 2-30 Jan (Michael B. Cooper, et al.).
NOTE: Both pairs are known birds from the non-migratory LA flock and are reported now breeding.

American Golden-Plover: An apparently sick bird (tumor noted) was seen on Pleasure Island, *Jefferson* 6-11 Dec (ph. Ryan Leimbach, ph. John Whittle, ph. Greg Jackson).

Long-billed Curlew: An encouraging count of 2500 Long-billed Curlews at Executive Airport in Brookshire, Waller 22 Feb (Stephen Gast).

Purple Sandpiper: Purple Sandpipers were reported from the 17th St. Jetty in Port Bolivar, *Galveston* (Clayton Leopold) and the Surfside Jetty, *Brazoria* 14 Dec (Joe Fischer). Pending TBRC acceptance.

Pectoral Sandpiper: Early Pectoral Sandpipers were at the Texas City Dike, *Galveston* 17 Feb (ph. Brian Berry) and Horseshoe Marsh at Port Bolivar, *Galveston* 19 Feb (Ian Davies).

American Woodcock: An adult with chick was reported from the Houston Arboretum 20 Feb, *Harris* was the first documentation of U.T.C. breeding in many years (ph. Alejandro Yanes Molina). NOTE: Birds are seen displaying annually at various U.T.C. locations but actual breeding confirmation is rare.

Parasitic Jaeger: A Parasitic Jaeger was reported 7 Dec in Galveston, *Galveston* (Clayton Leopold).

California Gull: An adult or near adult California Gull was seen in Baytown, *Chambers* 2 Jan during the Houston CBC (David Hanson, Todd McGrath, John Berner).

Iceland Gull: Iceland Gulls were reported from Ash Lake, *Harris/Chambers* 17 Dec-9 Jan with a peak of 2 birds on the last date (ph. David Hanson, John Berner, Todd McGrath, Cin-ty Lee) and the Texas City Dike, *Galveston* 2-12 Jan (ph. Bayard Nicklow, et al.).

Glaucous Gull: A first cycle Glaucous Gull was at the Port Arthur landfill, *Jefferson* 25 Jan (Philip Chaon).

Great Black-backed Gull: A first cycle Great Black-backed Gull was seen at Brazoria NWR, *Brazoria* 5 Feb (Michael Austin, Judy Behrens). Pending TBRC acceptance.

Common Black Hawk: A adult Common Black Hawk found on private property near Brazoria NWR, *Brazoria* 20 Dec & 23 Jan during the Freeport CBC was just the second record for the U.T.C. (ph. Allen & Michael Hardee, et al.). The bird was seen feeding on crawfish in Big Slough on both occasions.

Harris's Hawk: Harris's Hawks were at Davis Estates Road, *Fort Bend* 1 Dec (Michael Austin), a private ranch in *Galveston* 17 Dec (ph. Kyle O'Haver, Clayton Leopold, Duke Leibler), at Texas City, *Galveston* 6 Jan (ph. David Bradford), and at Sheldon Lake SP, *Harris* 12 Dec tp (ph. Li Li, et al.).

Swainson's Hawk: An adult Swainson's Hawk was in Texas City, *Galveston* 30 Dec was rare for the winter season (Richard Goldfarb, Barbara Stern).

Zone-tailed Hawk: Zone-tailed Hawks are slowly becoming a more regular winter bird on the U.T.C., but the only one detected this winter was one at Kleb Woods, *Harris* 27 Jan (ph. Bayard Nicklow, ph. Fred Collins, Andy Jordan).

Red-naped Sapsucker: Red-naped Sapsuckers were found at Taylor Lake Village Community Park, *Harris* 23 Dec-9 Feb (ph. Dale Wolck, et al.) and a residence in Cypress, *Harris* 25 Dec (ph. Troy Hibbits).

Dusky Flycatcher: The U.T.C.'s first Dusky Flycatcher was photographed and recorded at San Bernard NWR, *Brazoria* 24 Dec (ph. Nick Komar, Jr., audio Ron Weeks). This bird was seen until 9 Jan along with another *empidonax* making individual sighting determinations difficult.

Pacific-slope Flycatcher: The invasion of Pacific-slope Flycatchers spread all the way east to the U.T.C. with the first winter season bird being documented in the Pine Shadows neighborhood in Houston, *Harris* 8-21 Dec (ph. Diana Strassman, ph. Cin-Ty Lee, et al., John Berner, Drew Dickert, Chris Hammond, Nicholas DeMaio, et al.). The species was also found at Brazos Bend SP, *Fort Bend* in the Equestrian Area along Sawmill Road 19 Dec (ph. Ryan Shaw, ph. & audio Mark Scheurman, ph. Janey Woodley, Bob Romero, ph. Sergey Buben). A second "Western" Flycatcher was found in Brazos Bend at 40-Acre Lake 9 Dec (ph. Marianne F). In *Brazoria*, an impressive 3 Pacific-slopes were documented at the Eagle Nest Lake unit of Brazoria NWR. The first two birds were discovered there during the Brazoria-Columbia Bottomlands CBC 2 Jan (ph. Robyn Savage, John Faragher). But their specific identity was not confirmed until 5 Feb (ph. & audio Ron Weeks, Susan Heath) and the 3rd bird not confirmed until 13 Feb (ph. Ron Weeks, et al.). On the same 2 Jan count another Pacific-slope was seen & heard just north of West Columbia, *Brazoria* (Charlie & Olivia Brower, et al.) and another "Western" was photographed at Harris Reservoir, *Brazoria* (ph. Ron Weeks). In all, an amazing 6 birds were identified as Pacific-slope (pending TBRC acceptance) with two other "Westerns" photographed for the season.

Western Kingbird: Lingering Western Kingbirds were at Thompson Road, *Jefferson* 6 Dec-24 Jan (John Whittle, Sheila Hebert), Moody Gardens, *Galveston* 10-15 Dec (ph. Greg Whittaker, et al.), Levington

Park, *Orange* 26 Dec (ph. Marilyn Guidry), and Bayside Regional Park, *Galveston* 13 Jan (ph. Kris Cannon, Jackie Farrell, Jane Murtishaw-Lindsey, Jodi Henricks).

Fork-tailed Flycatcher: A Fork-tailed Flycatcher was found along Skyline Drive in Texas City, *Galveston* 29 Dec (ph. Nina Garcia). This bird was seen by many until 19 Jan.

Bell's Vireo: Extremely rare for the winter season a Bell's Vireo seen at Galveston Island SP, *Galveston* 1 Dec (Kyle O'Haver, Dennis Cooke).

Mountain Bluebird: Two Mountain Bluebirds were at John Paul Landing Park, *Harris* 1-4 Dec with one bird linger until 27 Dec (Howard Smith, Jim Hinson, et al., many ph.). Another two birds were reported from Skyline Drive in Texas City, *Galveston* 16 Jan (Chris & Angela Bailey).

Purple Finch: Purple Finches staged their most significant irruption to the area in recent times with 875 eBird reports for the sub-region with a peak of 25 birds from Sam Houston National Forest, *Montgomery* 6 Feb (Jeremy Ballard, et al.).

Red Crossbill: Red Crossbills reached *Montgomery* with 2 first reported on Kelly's Pond Road 31 Jan (Tim Freiday, Iliana Mock). They were reported through the period with 4 Feb recordings reportedly confirmed by Tim Spahr as both Type 2 & Type 4 birds (Drew Dickert, Kendra Kocab).

Lesser Goldfinch: Extralimital Lesser Goldfinches included birds in Pasadena, *Harris* 4 Jan (ph. Cathy Hay), West Columbia, *Brazoria* 21 Feb-6 Mar(Charles & Olivia Brower, et al.), and one in Atascocita, *Harris* 24 Feb (ph. Li Li).

Lapland Longspur: The freeze week brought a Lapland Longspur to Cross Creek Wetlands, *Fort Bend* 18 Feb (ph. Albert Ribes, ph. Jason Bonilla, ph. John Berner, ph. Suzanne Mottin, ph. Gary Yoder).

Clay-colored Sparrow: Clay-colored Sparrows were more numerous than usual with reports of 3 at San Bernard NWR, *Brazoria* 1 Jan (Wendy McCrady) and 4 at a private ranch in *Waller* (Bill Wright, Drew Dickert).

Brewer's Sparrow: The U.T.C.'s first Brewer's Sparrow since 1980 and third overall was found at John Paul Landing, *Harris* 12 Dec (ph. Brandon Nidiffer, Drew Dickert). This bird remained at a side pile along one of the trails until 31 Jan. Another was found 17 Dec at a private residence in *Waller* (Harvey Laas, John Berner, Drew Dickert). Both records represent county firsts.

Lark Bunting: Lark Bunting sightings were 6 on 1 Jan at a private farm in *Waller* (ph. Drew Dickert, Harvey Laas, John Berner, Fermin Torrez) and 1 on 20 Feb on the Warren Ranch, *Harris* (John Berner, Steve Gast, Timothy White).

Fox Sparrow: Freeze week pushed large numbers of Fox Sparrows all the way to the coast with 15 estimated at Sabine Woods, *Jefferson* 18 Feb (John Haynes). Numbers remained for two more days but none were found there in the 21st. NOTE: Cliff Shackelford told me one person in East TX counted 88 at his feeders during this push!

Green-tailed Towhee: Green-tailed Towhees were one at Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson, *Brazoria* 20 Dec (ph. Cindy Goodrum, Michael Goodrum, Tom Morris), one at Morrison Road, *Waller* 20 Dec-22 Feb

(ph. Marianne F, et al.), two at Davis Estates Road, *Fort Bend* 19 Dec (ph. Henry Jerng, ph. Albert Ribes, Jason Bonilla, ph. Justin Bower, Candy McNamee, Rohit Agarwal), and one at Damon, *Brazoria* 23 Jan-23 Feb (ph. Susan Heath, et al.).

Spotted Towhee: Spotted Towhees included one 12 Dec Chappell Hill, *Austin* (Darrell Vollert), one at Cullinan Park in Sugar Land, *Fort Bend* 17 Dec-28 Jan (Mark Scheuerman, Albert Ribes, Ryan Shaw et al.), 2 at Boy Scout Woods at High Island, *Galveston* 23 Dec (Todd McGrath), one at the Houston Arboretum, *Harris* 27 Dec (ph. Christine Mansfield, Kelsey Low), one at Jesse H. Jones Park, *Harris* 2 Jan-6 Feb (ph. Bernie Jacoby, Matthew Abernathy, et al.), and 1-2 at a private farm in *Waller* 5 Dec-1 Jan (ph. Harvey Laas, John Berner, et al.).

Orchard Oriole: A male Orchard Oriole was photographed in Lake Jackson, *Brazoria* 8 Feb (ph. Denis James).

Hooded Oriole: Hooded Orioles included a female 2 Jan tp at Seabrook, *Harris* (Hilary Gibbs, ph. John Berner, ph. James Rieman, et al.) and a young male in San Leon, *Galveston* 11 Jan (ph. Stennie Meadours).

Bullock's Oriole: Bullock's Orioles were too widespread to mention them all in the best year for them in recent memory.

MacGillivray's Warbler: A MacGillivray's Warbler overwintered at Quintana, *Brazoria* 20 Dec-31 Jan (Brad Lirette, Melissa Crookshank, et al.).

Hooded Warbler: A male Hooded Warbler seen in Sugar Land, *Fort Bend* 4-6 Feb was rare for the season (Robert Opperman).

Tropical Parula: A Tropical Parula was seen sporadically in Dickinson, *Galveston* 3-6 Jan (Jane Murtishaw-Lindsey, ph. Jodi Henricks, Jackie Farrell).

Magnolia Warbler: Lingering Magnolia Warblers were at Brazos River County Park, *Brazoria* 15 Dec (Joe Fischer) and *Brazoria* NWR, *Brazoria* 5-8 Jan (Joe Fischer, ph. Steve Metchis).

Black-throated Blue Warbler: A male Black-throated Blue Warbler was photographed in Missouri City, *Fort Bend* 24 Jan was one of few winter records for the U.T.C. (ph. John Donaho).

Black-throated Gray Warbler: Black-throated Gray Warblers included singles near Bear Creek Park, *Harris* 12 Dec (Frank & Margaret Farese), Clear Lake, *Harris* 19 Dec (Andrew Hamlett, ph. Gemini Twins, Jodi Henricks), and Peckham Park in Katy, *Harris* (David Bradford, et al., many ph.).

Painted Redstart: A Painted Redstart in Houston 1 Dec-21 Feb was a first for *Harris* (ph. Barbara Stern, Ed Robinson, John Berner, et al.).

Pyrrhuloxia: Interestingly, the western invasion included just one Pyrrhuloxia at the Artist Boat Coastal Heritage Preserve on Galveston Island, *Galveston* 9 Dec-21 Feb (ph. Greg Hall, Clayton Leopold, Duke Leibler, et al.).

Black-headed Grosbeak: There multiple Black-headed Grosbeak sightings with reports of 2 birds at Sealy, Austin 16-26 Feb (Charlene Koehler) and Baytown, *Chambers* 9-17 Jan (ph. David Hanson, et al.).

Dickcissel: Wintering Dickcissels were found on the Katy Prairie, *Waller* 3 Dec (Bob Honig), George Bush Park, Harris 27 Dec (ph. Bob Sanger), San Jacinto Battleground, *Harris* 30 Dec (Garett Hodne), and at the Bar-X Ranch, *Brazoria* 11 Feb (Cindy Goodrum).

Observers

Matthew Abernathy
Rohit Agarwal
Michael Austin
Angela Bailey
Chris Bailey
Bob Becker
Judy Behrens
John Berner
Brian Berry
Jason Bonilla
Justin Bower
David Bradford
Charles Brower
Olivia Brower
Sergey Buben
Kris Cannon
Philip Chaon
Fred Collins
Dennis Cooke
Michael B. Cooper
Melissa Crookshank
Ian Davies
Chuck Davis
Nicholas DeMaio
Drew Dickert
John Donaho
Marianne F
John Faragher
Frank Farese
Margaret Farese
Jackie Farrell
Ash Ferlito
Tad Finnell
Joe Fischer
Tim Freiday
Nina Garcia
Stephen Gast
Hilary Gibbs
Richard Goldfarb
Cindy Goodrum

Michael Goodrum
Marilyn Guidry
Greg Hall
Andrew Hamlett
Chris Hammond
Cullen Hanks
David Hanson
Allen Hardee
Michael Hardee
Cathy Hay
John Haynes
Susan Heath
Sheila Hebert
Jodi Henricks
Troy Hibbits
Jim Hinson
Garett Hodne
Bob Honig
Greg Jackson
Bernie Jacoby
Denis James
Henry Jerng
Andy Jordan
Tim Junker
Larry Kirby
Vicki Kirby
Kendra Kocab
Charlene Koehler
Nick Komar, Jr
Sandy Kroeger
Harvey Laas
Cin-Ty Lee
Ryan Leimbach
Li Li
Brad Lirette
Duke Leibler
Clayton Leopold
Kelsey Low
Christine Mansfield
Wendy McCrady
Todd McGrath
Candy McNamee
Stennie Meadours
Steve Metchis
Iliana Mock
Alejandro Yanes Molina
Tom Morris
Suzanne Mottin

Jane Murtishaw-Lindsey
Bayard Nicklow
Brandon Nidiffer
Kyle O'Haver
Robert Opperman
Albert Ribes
James Rieman
Ed Robinson
Bob Romero
Bob Sanger
Robyn Savage
Mark Scheuerman
Bill Schneider
Ryan Shaw
Dean Silvers
Howard Smith
Pam Smoleng
Barbara Stern
Harlan Stewart
Diana Strassman
Seth Strimas-Mackey
Matt Strimas-Mackey
Fermin Torrez
Darrell Vollert
Ron Weeks
Greg Whittaker
Timothy White
John Whittle
Dale Wolck
Janey Woodley
Bill Wright
Gary Yoder