

Upper Texas Coast Sub-regional Report, Winter 2021-22

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

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The Weather:

The total rainfall for the period at Houston's Intercontinental Airport was 12.75 inches (32.3 cm) which is 1.99 inches (5.1 cm) above normal largely due to a very locally wet January near the airport. Average temperatures were about 1.9 degrees F (1.1 C) above normal larger due to a much warmer than normal December.

Western species, especially Bullock's Orioles, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Western Tanagers continue to winter in ever-increasing numbers now to numerous to list in this report. This is presumably due to the extended drought continuing further west where these species would normally winter. Western flycatchers continue to make news as the sub-region recorded its first ever Dusky-capped and Hammond's Flycatchers and Pacific-slope Flycatchers made a return appearance following last year's invasion.

The Birds:

Fulvous-Whistling-Duck: Unprecedented numbers of Fulvous Whistling-Ducks wintered at Anahuac NWR, Chambers Co. with highs counts of 47 on 21 Dec (Jeremy Ballard, Nathan Cowan), 137 on 28 Jan (Cecile & Morris Yarrow), and 340 on 1 Feb (Ian Davies). This species typically begins returning in mid-Feb.

Mexican Duck: A Mexican Duck was again at the same Horsepen Creek Park location, Harris Co. 20 Feb (ph. Hank George) where birds were confirmed last year.

White-winged Scoter: A flyby White-winged Scoter near Thompson's Bait Camp, Harris Co. 10 Dec (Cin-Ty Lee) was notable.

Long-tailed Ducks: Two Long-tailed Ducks were at Bryan Beach, Brazoria Co. 20-27 Feb (ph. Ed Thomas, Michael Hardee, et al.). Unfortunately, one appeared on Facebook after having been shot by a hunter.

Western Grebe: A Western Grebe was along Tri-City Beach Road, Harris Co. 3 Jan-27 Feb (ph. Stephen Gast, John Berner, David Hanson, et al.).

Lesser Nighthawk: A Lesser Nighthawk found on a private ranch in SW Galveston Co. 13 Dec (Bob Becker, Duke Liebler, Kyle O'Haver) was rare for the season.

Allen's Hummingbird: Up to two Allen's Hummingbirds were present on the west side of Houston, Harris Co. 15 Dec-23 Jan (ph. Kevin Smith). An adult male was in Sugar Land, Fort Bend Co. 10 Jan-21

Feb (Donald Troha, et al.), and a first-year male was in High Island, Galveston Co. 14 Jan-14 Feb (ph. Wyatt Egelhoff, ph. John Mariani, et al.).

Broad-billed Hummingbird: A female Broad-billed Hummingbird first reported from the fall season stayed in Spring, Montgomery Co. until 26 Feb (ph. Clifford Salawage).

Purple Gallinule: A wintering Purple Gallinule was at Beaumont's Tyrrell Park, Jefferson Co. 4 Dec-6 Jan (ph. Stan Koster, ph. Ethan Porter, John Whittle, et al.).

Limpkin: High counts of 7 Limpkin near Brazos Bend SP, Fort Bend Co. 15 Feb (ph. Kelly Holligan) and 8 at Sheldon Lake SP, Harris Co. 22 Dec (Tom Rollins) and 13 Feb (Justin Bosler) indicate a strong continuing presence.

Long-billed Curlew: A count of 1450 Long-billed Curlews at Brookshire, Waller Co. 16 Feb (Stephen Gast) was encouraging.

Pectoral Sandpiper: A Pectoral Sandpiper at Anahuac NWR, Chambers Co. 24 Feb (ph. Colette & Paul Micallef) was early.

Solitary Sandpiper: Solitary Sandpipers overwintered at Seabourne Creek Park, Fort Bend Co. with exceptional counts of 3 birds on 9 Jan & 2 Feb (ph. Nathan Cross, Kevin Kolk, Carol Schwartz, et al.).

Franklin's Gull: A Franklin's Gull at Bolivar Flats, Galveston Co. 25 Feb (Wyatt Egelhoff) provided a rare later winter record.

California Gull: A California Gull at Sea Rim SP, Jefferson Co. 30 Dec (ph. Sheila Hebert, Nancy Angell) was a rare county record.

Magnificent Frigatebird: A late Magnificent Frigatebird photographed at the Brazos River mouth, Brazoria Co. 1 Jan (Brandon Nidiffer) was late.

Brown Booby: The peak count of the Brown Boobies at the traditional Baytown Nature Center location, Harris Co. was 21 on 3 Dec (Clayton Leopold).

Least Bittern: Least Bitterns appear to be overwintering (or perhaps returning earlier) in ever increasing number as singles were found at San Bernard NWR, Brazoria Co. 22 Jan (ph. Dan Hayes), Anahuac NWR, Chambers Co. (Ian Davies), Brazos Bend SP, Fort Bend Co. 2-19 Feb (Sheryl Travis, ph. Donald Fullmer, et al.), High Island, Galveston Co. 6-28 Feb (Ian Davies, Corina Giron, Michael McCloy, Cameron Johnson, et al.), El Franco Lee Park, Harris Co. 6 Feb (Melissa Crookshank, Brad Lirette), and Beaumont's Tyrrell Park, Jefferson Co. 28 Jan (Bob Foehring).

Broad-winged Hawk: An adult Broad-winged Hawk photographed along Sharp Road, Harris Co. 19 Dec (Mark Land) was a rare winter find.

Zone-tailed Hawk: An adult Zone-tailed Hawk photographed flying above Beard Road, Fort Bend Co. 19 Dec (Mark Land) was notable.

Burrowing Owl: A Burrowing Owl found along Pennick Road, Waller Co. 1 Jan (ph. Stephen Gast, Peter Gottschling) was one of few recent county records.

Green Kingfisher: A pair of Green Kingfishers found at the historic Hanson Riverside Park, Brazoria Co. 11-18 Dec (ph. Susan Heath, Ron Weeks, Martin Hagne, ph. Lynn Hay, Brad Lirette, Melissa Crookshank, et al.) fueled speculation that these birds may now be breeding along the San Bernard River.

Red-naped Sapsucker: A male Red-naped Sapsucker overwintered at Glenwood Cemetery, Harris Co. 21 Dec+ (ph. Cin-Ty Lee et al.). Another male was photographed at Armand Bayou NC, Harris Co. 12 Feb (Phillip Robinson, Beth Fitch).

Greater Pewee: A Greater Pewee “re-found” during the fall season at Houston’s Bear Creek Park, Harris Co. after being absent for 3 winters was reported until 30 Jan (m.ob.).

Hammond’s Flycatcher: The UTC’s first Hammond’s Flycatcher was found at Brazos River County Park, Brazoria Co. 30 Dec-2 Feb (ph. & audio Ron Weeks, m.ob.).

Dusky-capped Flycatcher: The UTC’s first Dusky-capped Flycatcher was first conclusively identified at Smith Oaks at High Island, Galveston Co. 17 Jan (audio Wyatt Egelhoff). Earlier sightings of an Ash-throated Flycatcher were likely this same bird which stayed through the winter season allowing for many excellent photographs and & recordings suggesting the bird was of the *olivascens* subspecies (m.ob.).

Western Kingbird: Winter Western Kingbirds were at the Baytown NC, Harris Co. 7 Dec (ph. Richard Rulander), the Old Sabine Cemetery, Jefferson Co. 30 Dec (John Haynes), and on Follett’s Island, Brazoria Co. 14 Jan (ph. Ross Foreman, John Whittle).

Bell’s Vireo: A Bell’s Vireo near Clute, Brazoria Co. 19 Dec was one of few winter records for the UTC (Mike Austin).

Swainson’s Thrush: Nocturnal flight calls continue to reveal rarely detected migrants as evidenced by Swainson’s Thrushes with 2 recorded in Lake Jackson, Brazoria Co. 2 Dec (Ron Weeks), and another recorded in Friendswood, Harris Co. 7 Dec (Chris Bick).

Bullock’s Oriole: Bullock’s Orioles continue to become more common in winter as evidenced by sightings from 11 different UTC locations highlighted by 2 birds each in Cypress, Harris Co. 3 Feb (ph. Chloe Tamez) and Pearland, Brazoria Co. 13-18 Jan (ph. Angie Westmoreland).

Rusty Blackbird: The only Rusty Blackbird reports this winter were 4 from SE of Sealy, Austin Co. (ph. Debbie McMullen, Erik Wolf) and another at the historic Bear Creek Park location in Harris Co. 30 Jan (Howard Smith).

Blue-winged Warbler: An amazing 3 Blue-winged Warblers were reported on the UTC with singles at a private ranch in Galveston Co. 27 Dec (Kyle O’Haver, Sibley O’Haver, Bob Becker, Duke Liebler), Sam Houston Park, Harris Co. 2-8 Dec (ph. Adam Johnson), and Texas Avenue Park, Harris Co. 11 Dec (ph. Andrew Hamlett, M Hood).

Tennessee Warbler: A female Tennessee Warbler at Bear Creek Park, Harris Co. 2 Dec (Timothy Freiday) was late.

American Redstart: A female American Redstart at the Quintana NBS, Brazoria Co. 19 Dec (ph. Gayle Green, Roy Freese) was a notable winter sighting.

Cape May Warbler: The female Cape May Warbler first reported during the fall season in a Richwood, Brazoria Co. yard lingered until 27 Jan (ph. Ron Weeks, ph. Susan Heath, Michael Allen, et al.).

Northern Parula: An impressive two Northern Parulas were in a Seabrook yard 7 Jan (Hilary Gibbs).

Tropical Parula: Two Tropical Parulas were noted in a west Houston yard, Harris Co. 12 Dec-9 Jan (ph. ph. Kevin Smith, Jim Hinson, Cin-Ty Lee, Letha Slagle) with just one after the initial sighting. Other Tropical Parulas were found in Pasadena, Harris Co. 28 Dec-7 Jan (Andrew Hamlett) and in Hermann Park, Harris Co. 30 Dec+ (Don Verser, ph. Jonathan Taffet, m.ob.).

Magnolia Warbler: Magnolia Warblers were noted at Sabine Woods, Jefferson Co. 4 Dec (Steve Mayes) and near Brazos Bend SP, Fort Bend 30 Jan (ph. Rich & Sally Jespersion).

Black-throated Blue Warbler: The overwintering male Black-throated Blue Warbler originally found at Richwood, Brazoria Co. residence during the fall was present until 7 Feb (Adam Wegwerth, m.ob.).

Black-throated Gray Warbler: The only UTC Black-throated Gray Warbler was one on Old Greenhouse Road, Harris Co. 29 Dec (Letha Slagle).

Scarlet Tanager: A basic male Scarlet Tanager present at High Island, Galveston Co. 11-17 Jan (Duke Liebler, Ryan McGinty, Wyatt Egelhoff) was one of few winter sightings for the UTC.

Dickcissel: The only Dickcissel was found on the Nash Prairie, Brazoria Co. 1 Jan (Liz Garney, Scott Buckel).