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[1]Starting with Vol. 42 both issues were combined..

Cover Figure: Black-chinned x Ruby-throated Hummingbird hybrid. Photo Cin-Ty

Frontispiece. Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Photo Michael Patrikeev.

BULLETIN OF THE

TEXAS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

CASES OF HERON MORTALITY BY APPARENT ELECTROCUTION

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ABSTRACT:— Bird mortality within an urban area can result from a variety of factors, including electrocution from interaction or impact with utility lines and poles. We describe two electrocution cases, of a Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) and a Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*). Both birds exhibited burns on the legs and severe internal damage. The sites of mortality were residential areas with above ground power lines and transformers.

Electrocution of birds through impact with powerlines and electric utility poles is an ongoing problem that can affect bird populations across the globe (Bayle 1999), particularly migratory and rare species (Sharma et al. 2024). Measuring and monitoring the collision risk of power lines to birds, as well as making improvements (including adjusting the height and installing light markers on the poles), can aid in mitigating bird mortality (Pretorius et al., 2023). Monitoring and reporting cases of bird electrocution adds to our knowledge of bird mortality and may be useful for infrastructure planning and population viability assessment and management (Hays et al. 2021, Shaw et al. 2010). Herein we report apparent electrocution of a Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) and a Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*).

The Houston Museum of Natural Science's Vertebrate Zoology Department received salvaged specimens of a Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Little Blue Heron from wildlife rehabilitator Dana Simon. The Yellow-crowned Night Heron was found along County Road 605 in Angleton (Brazoria Co., Texas) on 9 April 2023. The Little Blue Heron was found along County Road 462 in Midfield (Matagorda Co., Texas) on 17 May 2024. They were prepared as study skins by Timothy McSweeny and accessioned into the collections with the catalog numbers HMNS.VO 4415 and HMNS.VO 4482, respectively.

The Yellow-Crowned Night Heron specimen weighed 625 g and was an adult (skull completely ossified) female (ovule cluster measuring 10.39 × 15.49 mm; smallest ovule = 0.89 × 0.89 mm, largest ovule = 6.45 × 6.45 mm), presenting with no traces of subcutaneous fat. During preparation the stomach was dissected, with 4.1 g of crustacean (likely *Procambarus clarkii*) material. Burns presented on the legs (Fig.1a, b), and severe internal damage and bleeding was observed during dissection and preparation of the specimen. The specimen was found in a residential area with above ground power lines and transformers.

The Little Blue Heron specimen weighted 255 g and was an adult (skull completely ossified) female (ovule cluster measuring 4.49 × 17.87 mm; smallest ovule = 0.59 × 0.59 mm, largest ovule = 2.95 × 2.95 mm), presenting no traces of subcutaneous fat. During preparation the stomach was dissected, finding 0.1 g of digested invertebrate material. Burns presented extensively on the left leg (Fig.2a, b),

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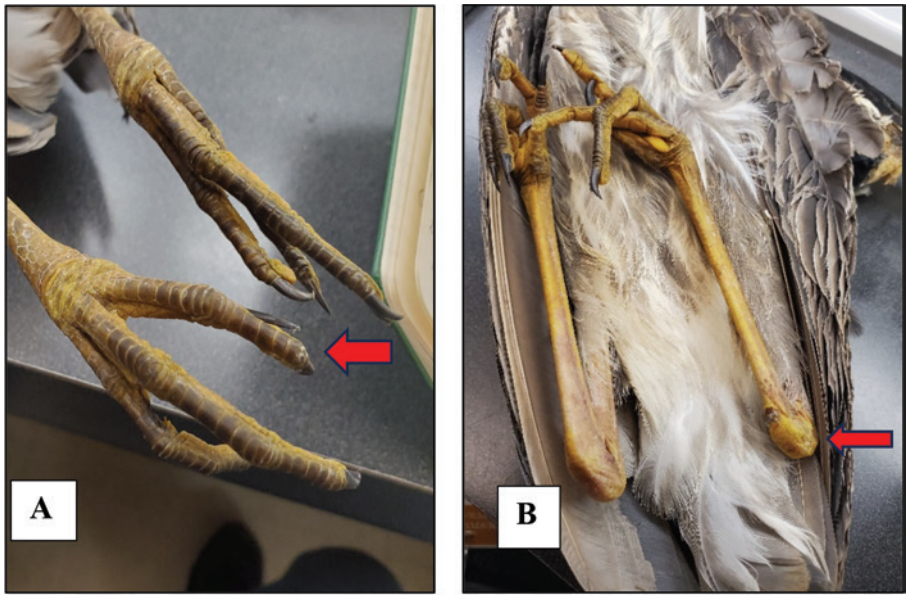
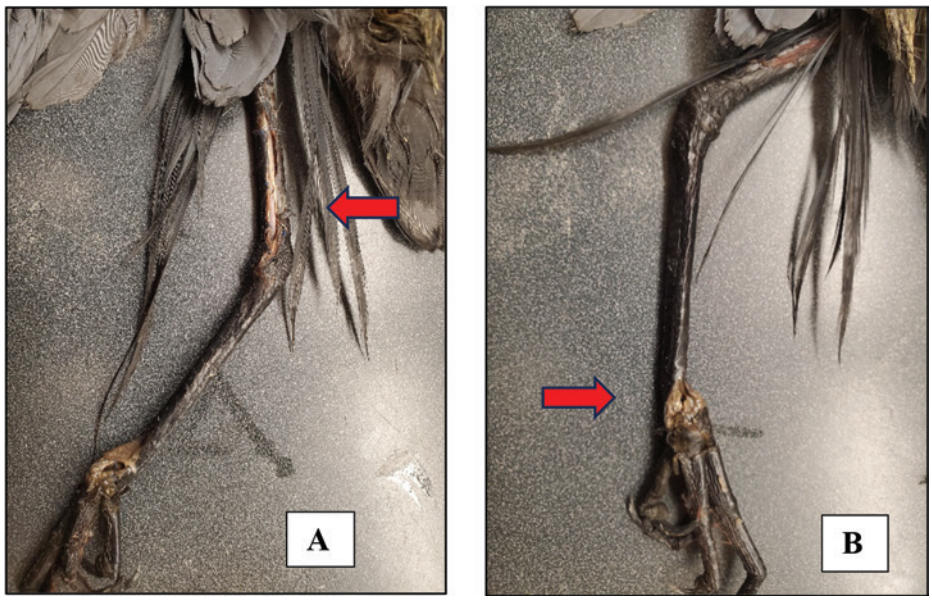


Figures 1a and 1b. Images of the burn marks on the legs of the Yellow-Crowned Night Heron.



Figures 2a and 2b. Burn marks and symptoms of necrotic damage to the left leg of the Little Blue Heron.

with the leg showing signs of being necrotic in the form of disintegrating skin and muscle. Severe internal damage was observed during dissection of the carcass, and the left foot was removed during preparation due to the severity of damage to the skin. The heron was found near a residential building adjacent to agricultural land with above ground power lines and transformers.

The injuries identified during specimen preparation are similar to those reported in other electrocution cases (e.g., Brown and Brooks 2010), corroborating that this was the cause of death.

Bird mortality due to electrocution and collision with powerlines can be significant in developed areas (Biasotto et al. 2021) and poses a risk to herons if the powerlines are located near nesting colonies and wetlands (Smallie and Virani 2010, O'Neil, 1988).

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NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL (*AEGOLIUS ACADICUS*) OCCURRENCES ON THE SOUTHERN HIGH PLAINS, USA

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ABSTRACT.— The Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) is widespread and common throughout its northern breeding range in montane and boreal forests. Although several studies have been published on their breeding and fall movements, little research has occurred during the non-breeding season. Once considered a rare winter vagrant to southern U.S. states, this secretive nocturnal owl appears to migrate farther south and more frequently than previously thought. We recovered a deceased Northern Saw-whet Owl at the Lubbock Lake National Historic Landmark in December 2024, the morning after a cold front passed through the region. Sightings of this rare owl on the Southern High Plains are infrequent and appear to be related to weather shifts such as cold fronts and snowfall events. Of the 42 detections of Northern Saw-whet Owl in Texas since 1951, only nine detections occurred on the Southern High Plains. Seven of these nine detections occurred within five days of a cold frontal passage or snowfall event.

Key words: *Aegolius acadicus,* Northern Saw-whet Owl, Texas, winter migrant, cold front, weather, non-breeding

The Southern High Plains (Llano Estacado) of northwest Texas and eastern New Mexico is a distinct physiographic region covering around 97,000 km^2 (37,452 sq mi) (Fenneman 1931; Hunt 1967). Escarpments along three sides define this elevated plateau with elevation ranges from 900 m (3,000 ft) to 1,525 m (5000 ft). Yellowhouse Draw is within the upper Brazos River basin.

The Lubbock Lake National Historic Landmark (hereafter, Landmark) is a 136-ha archaeological and nature preserve located in Yellowhouse Draw at the northern edge of the city of Lubbock. Patrons can hike through a restored native mixed-grass prairie and are encouraged to participate in citizen science by logging wildlife sightings at the Interpretive Center.

A small, deceased owl was discovered along the Landmark's Archaeology trail on 6 December 2024 at 1030 Central Standard Time (CST) by a group of 3rd grade students on a field trip led by the Landmark's heritage educator. *Rigor mortis* had not set in yet and the owl's eyes were present and plump within the specimen indicating the owl was freshly deceased. The owl was identified as an After Hatch Year (AHY) Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*, hereafter referred to as saw-whet owl) based on plumage and atypical molt pattern found under UV light (Fig. 1). The saw-whet owl was seemingly in good health given the fullness of the pectoralis muscle and lack of obvious signs of injury such as electrocution, poisoning, or broken bones. The specimen was photographed, measured, and transferred to the Natural Science Research Laboratory (NSRL) of the Museum at Texas Tech University (Museum). It was accessioned into the collection and assigned the number TK-249080. The skin was prepared by the curator on 31 January 2025 and represents the first locally salvaged saw-whet owl to be housed at the Museum.

The presence of visceral fat and subcutaneous fat along the saw-whet owl's spine confirms the initial impression of good health meaning the owl did not die due to lack of prey. Methods by Priestley (2008) suggest the owl is male due to its weight (82.3 g) and closed wing chord length (138 mm). Methods by Brinker et al. (1997) and Brinker (2000), however,

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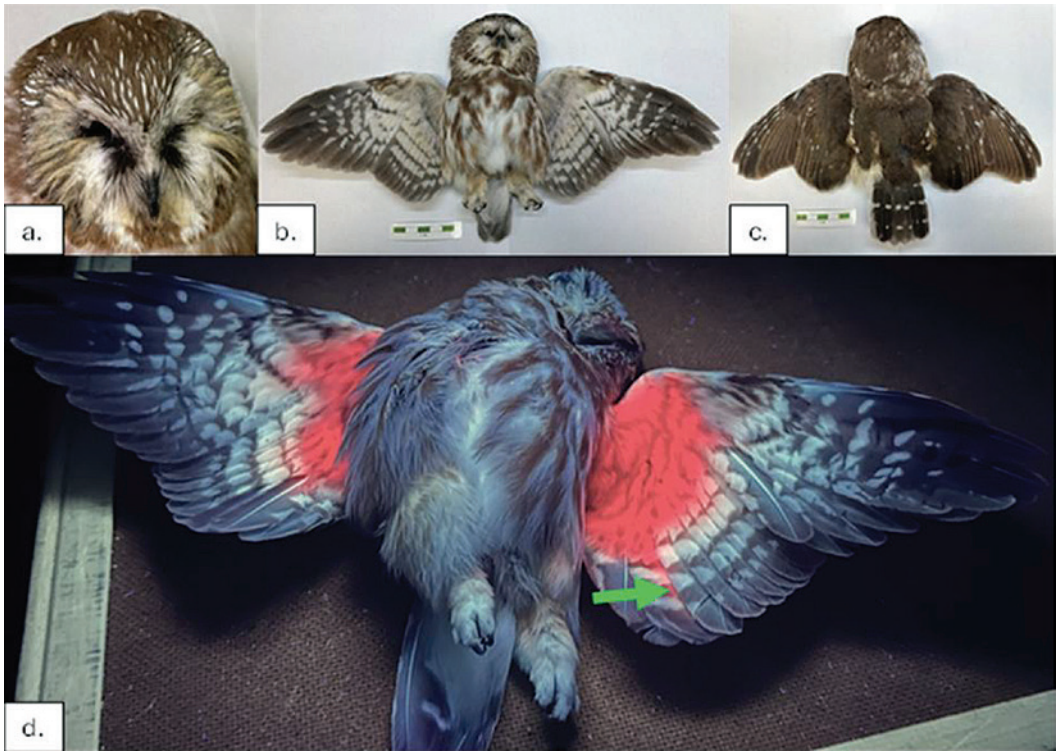

Figure 1. Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) Occurrences on the Southern High Plains, USA.

indicate the owl should be classified as unknown sex. Although lack of gonads observed during skin preparation suggests that the owl was a female in nonbreeding condition, ambiguity remains due to absence of an ovary or oviduct. DNA analysis is recommended to determine the owl's sex (Priestley 2008) and tissue samples were preserved in the NSRL's Genetic Resources Collection for future analyses.

The saw-whet owl was found on the north side of a chain link fence that encloses the Landmark's Quaternary Research compound (Fig. 2). North of the fence is a mixed-grass prairie (Fig. 3a) and south of the fence is an artificial body of water surrounded by non-native Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*). These trees may have provided temporary habitat for the owl, as they generally seek wooded areas for cover often near water (Sibley 2016; Rasmussen et al. 2020; Fig. 3b).

Detections of saw-whet owl in Texas (n = 42) have been recorded since 1951 in 13 counties (TBRC 2025; Fig. 4). Detections include visual sightings, audio detections, and salvaged, deceased individuals. The majority of these have occurred along the western edge of the state, with a few sightings reported from eastern counties (n = 4; TBRC 2025). Nine of the 42 detections have been on the Southern High Plains (SHP), including with our record detections in Lubbock County occurring in 2000, 2001, 2007, and 2024 (TBRC 2025). Saw-whet owls have not been detected in the New Mexico counties within the SHP.

A cold front moved through the SHP the night of 5 December 2024 and the owl was found the morning of 6 December 2024. The maximum temperature on 4 December 2024 was 20.5°C with a minimum low of 4.4°C while maximum temperature on 6 December 2024 was 9.4°C with a minimum low of 1.1°C (NOAA 2025). Weir et al. (1980) and Brittain et al. (2009) found a strong correlation between cold fronts and peak fall migration in saw-whet owls in Ontario and Indiana. Stone and Ramsey (2025) indicated research should be directed to comprehending fine-scale aspects of saw-whet owl migration such as understanding potential relationships between nightly movement

Figure 2. The site of finding of the Northern Saw-whet Owl specimen at the Lubbock Lake National Historic Landmark, (Texas).

patterns of saw-whets and contributing factors such as wind direction. Given the rarity of the owl and the cold front that occurred the night before, we investigated if other sightings of saw-whet owls on the SHP were related to similar weather phenomena (Table 1). We used NOAA's publicly available records of local climatological data to identify cold frontal passages utilizing the following criteria: temperature decrease of approximately 10°C, change in barometric pressure, and shift in wind direction (Ward 1923; Moeller et al. 1993; Schultz 2004).

Of the 9 detections on the SHP, 7 were associated with a cold frontal passage, 3 of which also were associated with snowfall. Saw-whet owl detections that were associated with a cold front occurred 5 days or less after a cold frontal passage while only one detection occurred one day prior to the arrival of a cold front. Weather data for the 1979 detection was unavailable as data were not collected for the associated county and date. These observations seem to suggest the possibility of cold fronts influencing saw-whet owl movements into the Southern High Plains.

DISCUSSION

While anecdotal, not all records were andecdotal, see above, i.e., the authors mentioned recordings and salvaged specimens, these observations present a method for future research on saw-whet owls and their sporadic migrations into Texas. As cold fronts move through the SHP, saw-whet owls may be pushed outside of their intended migration pathway. More research, however, is needed on this species and their typical migration movements before inferences can be made. Saw-whet owl populations may exhibit multiple migration strategies in addition to the classic north to south migration trend. These may include partial, irruptive, nomadic, and resident strategies (Marks and Doremus 2000; Priestley 2008; Pruitt 2018; Rasmussen et al. 2020; Wall et al. 2020; Pruitt et al. 2024). Saw-whet owls are

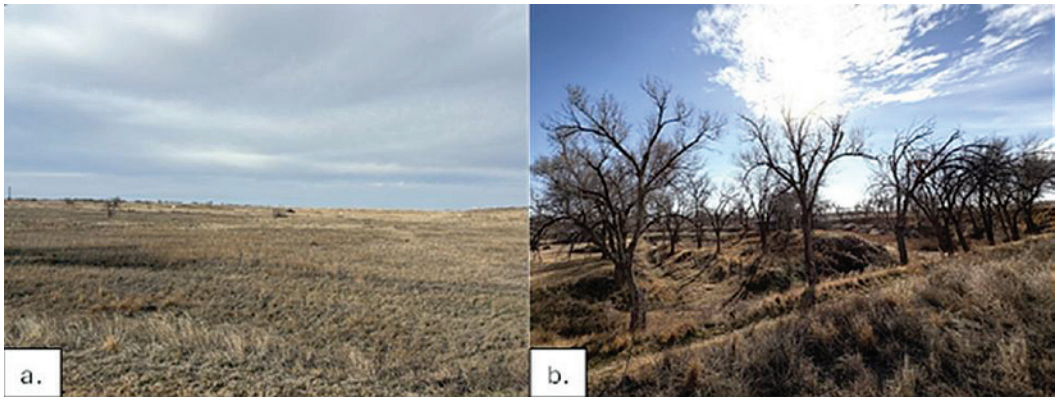

Figure 3. Views of the Lubbock Lake National Historic Landmark. Texas.

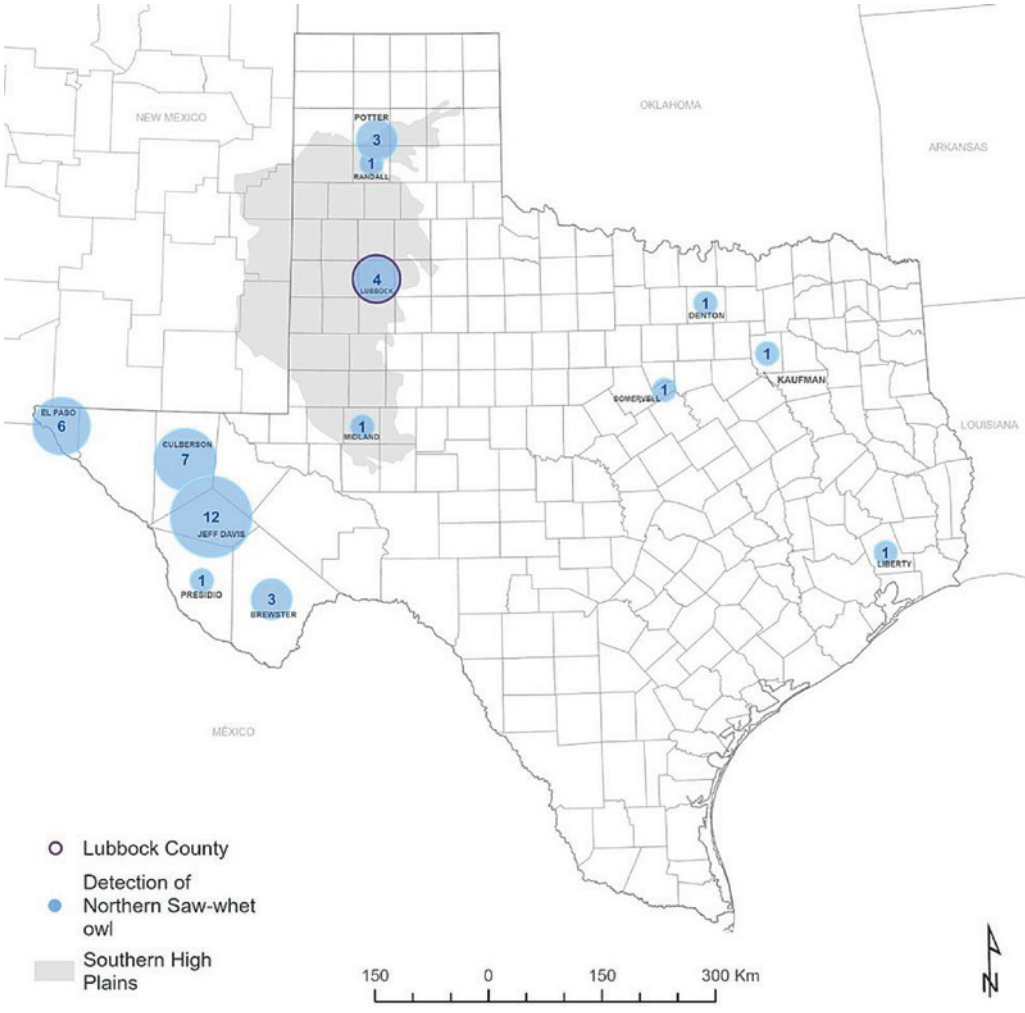

Figure 4. Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) occurrences on the Southern High Plains, USA.

Table 1. Climate data for the Northern Saw-whet Owl detections on the Southern High Plains.

Date of Owl Detection	County	Date of Weather Event	Weather Event Description	Days Between Weather Event and Detection
12/6/2024	Lubbock	12/5/2024	Cold front followed by a stronger cold front 4 days later	|1|
2/9/2007	Lubbock	2/7/2007	Cold front	|2|
2/14/2001	Lubbock	2/09/2001	Cold front	|5|
2/10/2001	Potter	2/08/2001	Cold front; 0.3” of snow	|2|
12/6/2000	Lubbock	12/2/2000	Cold front; 0.2” of snow on 12/3/2000	|3-4|
11/4/2000	Potter	11/5/2000	Cold front; 8.9” of snow on 11/7/2000	|1-3|
10/30/2000	Potter	Unknown	Cold front on 10/4/2000. Tornado (F0) on 10/23/2000. Thunderstorm wind on 10/28/2000. Hail on 10/31/2000. Cold front on 11/5/2000.	Unknown
5/6/1979[a]	Randall	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
11/6/1960	Midland	11/5/1960	Cold front	|1|

[a]Climate data partial or missing for that year.

considered a common northern species in montane and boreal forests, but a lack of research exists into the southern extent of their nonbreeding range (Pruitt and Smith 2016; Pruitt et al. 2024).

Migration pathways from breeding territories to over-wintering are starting to be understood better as the number of banding stations have increased overall. Efforts, however, remain largely focused on the northern United States (Whalen and Watts 2002; Frye and Gerhardt 2003; Beckett and Proudfoot 2011; Priestley et al. 2010; Rasmussen et al. 2020). Determining migration pathways and movements of saw-whet owls are limited by available techniques, technology, and funds (Priestley 2008; Fiedler 2009). Although satellite transmitters (such as GPS transmitters) have revolutionized migration research for other species, these types of transmitters currently are too heavy to use on saw-whet owls as the owls do not weigh enough to carry the additional weight of the satellite transmitters (Priestley 2008; Fiedler 2009; Pruitt 2018).

Although a rare species in Texas, evidence of saw-whet owls breeding in the Davis Mountains (Jeff Davis County; Fig. 4) of the Trans-Pecos region of far West Texas have been recorded, as newly fledged saw-whet owls were photographed in June 2023 (Kostecke 2023; Moreno 2023). Part of the Chihuahuan Desert, the largest mountain ranges (that includes the Davis Mountains) are mesic mountains dominated by woodlands (mixed coniferous and deciduous) at mid and higher elevations with well-watered valleys (Gelhbach 1981; Powell and Worthington 2018). Peterson and Zimmer (1998, p. 68) note the presence of saw-whet owls in the higher Trans-Pecos mountains as migrant and winter visitors and summer visitors in the Guadelupe and Davis mountains. Saw-whet owls prey on harvest mice, voles, and deer mice (Marks and Doremus 1988; Swengel and Swengel 1992; Rains 1997) all of which are found in the mountain ranges (Yancey et al. 2023) as well as the SHP (Schmidly and Bradley 2016). The Davis Mountains provide suitable habitat and prey for saw-whet owls, as would the other higher elevation mesic mountains. Coniferous trees are sought by saw-whet owls during the non-breeding season provide cover from inclement weather, predators, and mobbing by birds (Pruitt 2023; Pruitt et al. 2024; Stone and Ramsey 2025).

Future research could focus on saw-whet owls nesting in Texas and fledglings dispersal. It is possible that fledglings/or adults, from the Davis Mountains move to other regions of Texas in the nonbreeding months. Although common in coniferous and mixed-deciduous forests across its northern range, saw-whet owls are nocturnal and secretive, making them difficult to detect especially during the nonbreeding season. It is possible this species, once thought to be a rare winter migrant, occurs more frequently in parts of Texas and other southern states of the U.S. than previously thought.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Nancy E. McIntyre, Curator of Birds for the Museum, for allowing Landmark staff members to observe the skin preparation of the Northern Saw-whet Owl specimen. We thank Madison Westfall (Landmark staff) for contributing additional photographs of the owl.

PERMITS AND ETHICS PROTOCOLS.

The deceased Northern Saw-whet Owl was recovered and transferred to the NSRL of the Museum of Texas Tech University that possess salvage permits for migratory bird species.

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NOTEWORTHY MARINE AND COASTAL BIRD SPECIMENS FROM THE UPPER GULF COAST OF TEXAS

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ABSTRACT.— Documenting the current range of marine and coastal birds is greatly aided by salvaging and preserving museum specimens. This is especially true for voucher specimens representing the first physical record of the species within a county or region outside the species traditional range. We report new county records of the Sargasso Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*), Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates leucorhous*), Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*), and Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) from the Texas coast.

Colonial nesting birds, such as shearwaters, storm-petrels, terns, and jaegers spend the majority of their lives in oceans, coming to land only under specific circumstances, such as breeding seasons, searching for food when it is limited (Catry et al., 2009), or washing up on the beach if they are sick or deceased (Harrington, 1974; Brooks et al., 2022). Ducks nesting in the northern part of the continent spend winter in the Southern United Sates and Gulf of Mexico (Meehan et al., 2021, McSweeny et al., 2024).

The Houston Museum of Natural Science's Vertebrate Zoology Collection received salvaged specimens of Sargasso Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*, it was formerly known as Audubon's Shearwater; Fig. 1) and Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates leucorhous*; Fig. 2) from wildlife rehabilitator Dana Simon. The shearwater was found on a beach in Matagorda (Matagorda County, Texas) on 24 July 2022 (Fig. 3). The storm petrel was salvaged from a boat 56 km offshore of Freeport (Brazoria County, Texas; Fig. 4) on 2

Figure 1. Sargasso Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) specimen (VO 4410).

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Figure 2. Leach's Storm Petrel specimen (VO 4481).

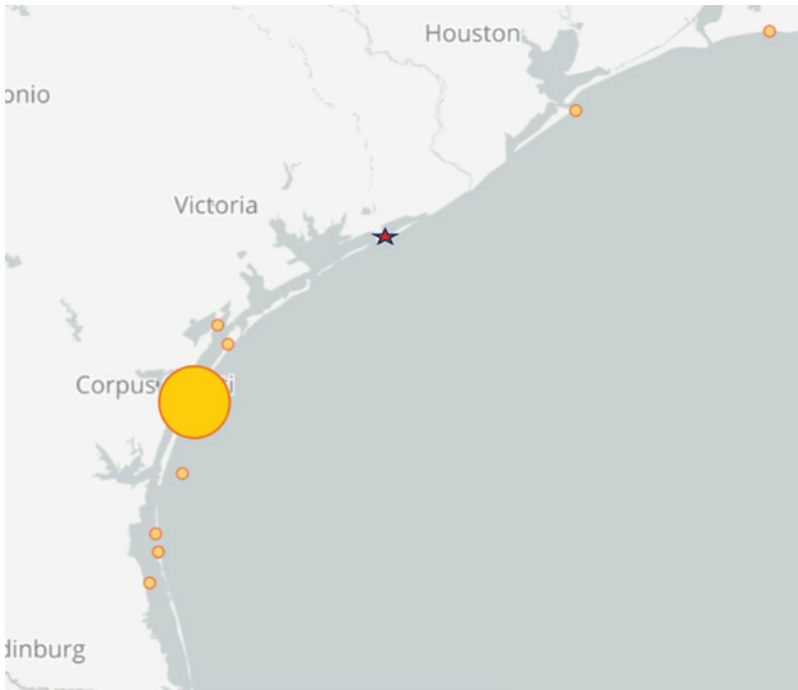

Figure 3. Locations of salvaged specimens of Sargasso Shearwater along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Dots represent historic specimens, the large dot represents multiple specimens from Nueces Co. (8); star represents HMNS.VO 4410.

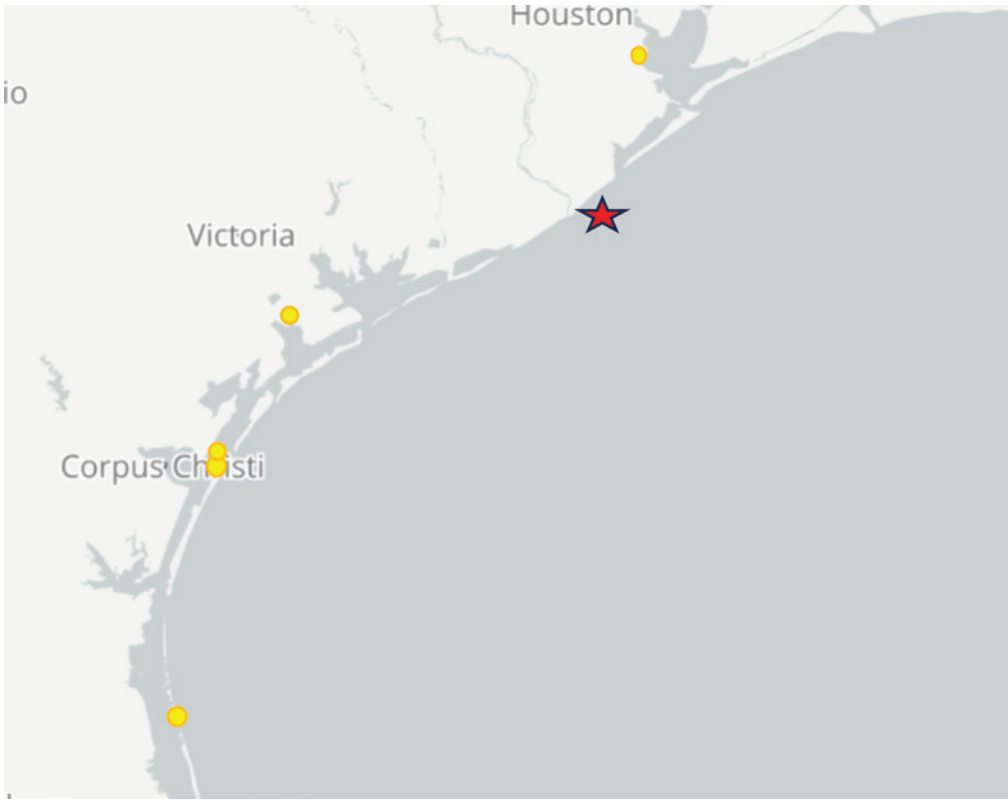

Figure 4. Locations of salvaged specimens of Leach's Storm Petrel along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Dots represent historic specimens; star represents HMNS.VO 4481.

August 2024. Both were prepared as study skins by TM and accessioned into the collection (HMNS. VO 4410, 4481, respectively). Specimens of Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*; Fig. 5) and Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*; Fig. 6) were salvaged by Sharon Schmaltz from

Figure 5. Common Golden full specimen (VO 3387, upper left) and a wing specimen (VO 1117, lower right).

Figure 6. Parasitic Jaeger specimen (VO 1096).

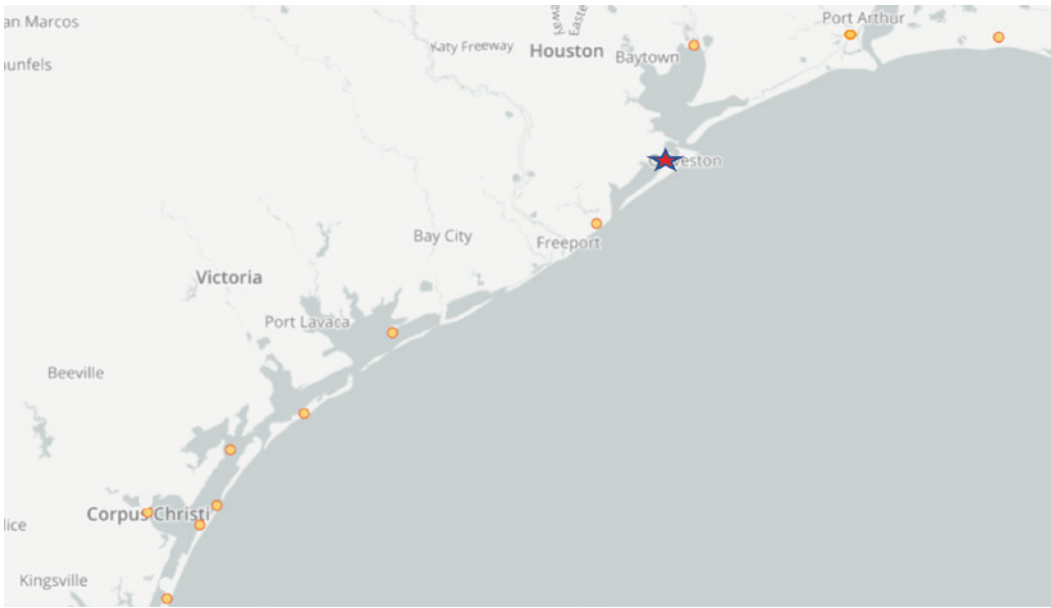

Figure 7. Locations of salvaged specimens of Common Goldeneye specimens along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Dots represent historic specimens; star represents HMNS.VO 1117.

Galveston County, Texas (Fig. 7, 8) on 10 February 2001. The jaeger was prepared as a study skin and the goldeneye was prepared as a study wing by DMB and accessioned into the collection (HMNS. VO 1096, 1117 respectively). In 2005 the museum received two salvaged specimens of Sooty Terns (*Onychoprion fuscatus*; Fig. 9a, b) from Sheree Etie, both found in Brazoria County (Texas; Fig. 10) during summer 2006. They were prepared as study skins by Martha Magee and accessioned into the collection (HMNS. VO 1960, 1961).

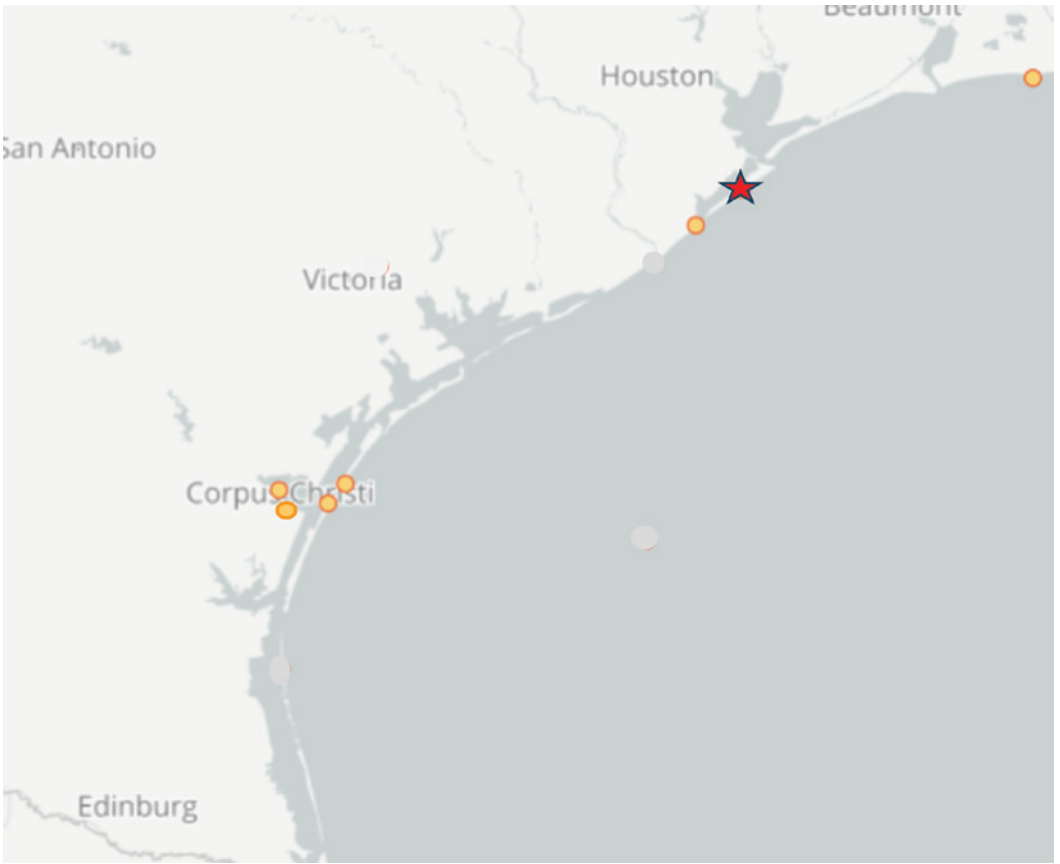

Figure 8. Locations of salvaged specimens of Parasitic Jaeger specimens along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Dots represent historic specimens; star represents HMNS.VO 1096.

SPECIMEN DIAGNOSES

The Sargasso shearwater (recently split from Audubon's Shearwater) specimen was an adult (skull completely ossified) male (left testicle = 1.11 × 1.97 mm, right = 1.04 × 1.54 mm), with a mass of 100 g and no traces of subcutaneous fat. During preparation the stomach was dissected, finding 0.1 g of unidentified invertebrate material from a prior meal. Several ectoparasites (*Austromenonpon* sp. and *Halipegus* sp.) were collected from all over the body, except for the tail region. It is possible the presence of parasites was the result of the specimen living in a breeding colony where it would be in close proximity to other individuals (Snow, 1965).

The Leach's Storm-Petrel specimen was an adult (skull completely ossified) male (left testicle = 2.02 × 3.1 mm, right = 2.16 × 2.95 mm), with a mass of 29 g and no traces of subcutaneous fat. During preparation the stomach was dissected, though no material was found. The specimen was showing evidence of emaciation and was moribund when salvaged from the boat where it had landed. The right leg was also damaged, though the cause of these ailments are unknown.

The Common goldeneye specimen was as an adult male (skull completely ossified) male (left and right testicles = 1 × 7 mm), with a mass of 548 g and light traces of subcutaneous fat. During preparation the stomach was dissected, though no material was found.

The Parasitic Jaeger specimen was as a juvenile (skull not completely ossified) of an indeterminate sex due to reduced testes, with a mass of 225 g and trace levels of subcutaneous fat. During pre paration the stomach was empty. The cause of death is unknown.

Figures 9a and b. Sooty Tern specimens (VO 1960 [left] and 1961 [right]).

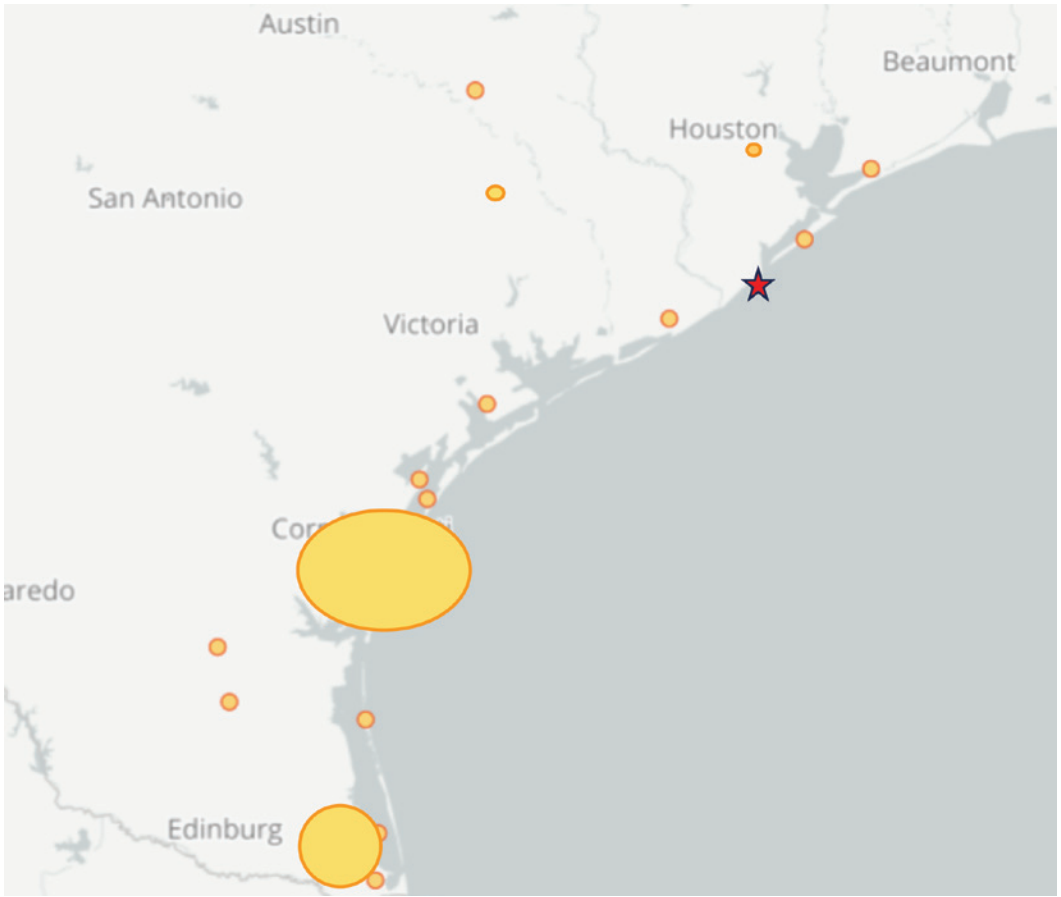

Figure 10. Locations of salvaged specimens of Sooty Tern along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Dots represent historic specimens, larger dots representing multiple specimens from Nueces (101) and Cameron (29) Counties; star represents HMNS.VO 1960 and 1961.

The first of the Sooty Tern specimens (VO 1960) was an adult (skull completely ossified) male (left testicle = 2.5 × 4.5 mm, right = 2.5 × 4.0 mm), with a mass of 106.4 g and no traces of subcutaneous fat, with signs of emaciation. The second (VO 1961) was an adult (skull completely ossified) male (left testicle = 2.0 × 3.0 mm, right = 2.0 × 2.5 mm), with a mass of 111.3 g and no traces of subcutaneous fat, also with signs of emaciation. A dissection of the stomach was performed on both specimens; both stomachs were empty, with evidence of intestinal sepsis. The severe lack of fat and emaciation in these terns could be the result of long and strenuous migration, which has been a cause of mortality in other species (Deppe et al., 2015).

RESULTS

The Sargasso Shearwater is the first specimen record from Matagorda Co. and links populations found in the northern and southern Texas Gulf Coast (Fig. 3). The nearest documented records were from Sabine Pass (Jefferson Co., 225 km to the northeast) and Goose Island (Nueces County, 128 km to the southwest, and the beginning of records from the southern half of the Gulf Coast).

The Leach's Storm-Petrel is the first record from Brazoria County and the second from the Upper Texas Coast (Fig. 4). The nearest Leach's Storm-Petrel record was found approximately 94 km southwest of Seabrook (nearest specimen to the north) and 150 km east of San Antonio Bay (the beginning of records from the southern half of the Gulf Coast).

The Common Goldeneye and Parasitic Jaeger specimens are the first records from Galveston County (Fig. 7, 8), and the Sooty Terns are the first records from Brazoria County (Fig. 10).

All five species are known from the Gulf of Mexico and have occurred along the Texas coast, with a strong focus on the Mid and South Texas Coast (Gallardo et al., 2009). We reported the first county records, which in some cases link populations from upper and lower regions of the Gulf Coast.

DISCUSSION

The Sargasso Shearwater has been found along the Gulf Coast of Texas, with observations made in previous years and with salvaged specimens (Duncan and Havard, 1980; VertNet search, https://vertnet.org, accessed 25 July 2024), e.g., Nueces County (8 specimens), Kleberg (4), Jefferson (1) in 1929 (USNM 300257; NMNH, Smithsonian Institute) and an indeterminate location in Texas (LSUMZ 20388; Louisiana State University Museum of Natural Science). The most recent specimen came from Port Aransas (Nueces County) in 2015 (TCWC 23217; BRTC, Texas A&M University). The number of records from Texas is lower compared to other coastal states, (Toups et al., 1989; Alderfer and Dunn, 2014).

The Leach's Storm Petrel has five specimens salvaged from the Texas Gulf Coast (Brooks and Arnold, 2003; https://vertnet.org, accessed 14 January 2025). One was salvaged from the Upper Gulf Coast at Seabrook, Harris County (HMNS. VO 1095). Additionally, four specimens were salvaged from the Mid Texas Coast: three from Padre (Kleberg County; TCWC 13327, 14090) and Mustang (Nueces County; TCWC 12818) islands, and one from San Antonio Bay (Aransas County; TCWC 22794).

Common Goldeneye has been recorded in mainland and coastal Texas, with eight specimens salvaged from the coast (https://vertnet.org, accessed 10 October 2025). Of these, three specimens were from the Upper Texas Coast: Southeast Cove of Mesquite Pond (Chambers Co.; TCWC 8718), Rattlesnake Point (Brazoria Co.; CUMV 650) and Port Arthur (Jefferson Co.; LSUMZ 175725).

Parasitic Jaegers have been recorded across the Gulf of Mexico (Haney et al., 2025), with five specimens salvaged from along the coast (https://vertnet.org, accessed 7 October 2025). Of these four were found in Nueces County along the Mid Texas Coast: one from Port Aransas (WFVZ 50394), one from Mustang Island State Park (TCWC 13529), and two from Corpus Christi (TCWC 12815, 13263). The fifth specimen came from the Upper Texas Coast on Follet's Island (Brazoria County, TCWC 14599).

Sooty Terns have been recorded across the Gulf of Mexico, with a total of 145 specimens salvaged and collected on the Texas coast (VertNet search, https://vertnet.org, accessed 25 July 2024). The majority in Nueces (101) and Cameron counties (29). In addition, five specimens have been recovered from the Upper Texas Coast: two from Galveston (TCWC 9654, 22628), one from Harris (UTEP 1883), one from Matagorda (ASNHC 1869), and one from Chambers counties (TCWC 13367).

Additionally, four specimens were salvaged more inland; one from Colorado County (ORN 1962), two from Brooks County (TCWC 12924, 12925), and one from Brazos County (TCWC 34844). These birds may have been driven inland due to severe weather (Sealy and Carter, 2004; Beven II and Brown, 2007).

Salvaging and recording specimens of seabirds can help improve our understanding of their range and migration, and contribute to new county records (Fall, 1973; Brooks and Arnold, 2003). This is especially noteworthy for specimens found in counties with few to none of a given species recordss.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2025 ANNUAL REPORT
TEXAS BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FOR 2025

Blaine Carnes

The Texas Bird Records Committee (hereafter "TBRC" or "committee") of the Texas Ornithological Society requests and reviews documentation on any record of a TBRC Review List species (see TBRC web page at http://www.texasbirdrecordscommittee.org). Annual reports of the committee's activities have appeared in the Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society since 1984. For more information about the Texas Ornithological Society or the TBRC, please visit www.texasbirds.org. The committee reached a final decision on 50 records during 2025: 41 records of 35 species were accepted and 9 records of 9 species were not accepted, an acceptance rate of 82.0% for this report. A total of 109 observers submitted documentation (to the TBRC or to other entities) that was reviewed by the committee during 2025.

The TBRC accepted 4 first state records in 2025: Gray Gull, Nazca Booby, Yellow-headed Caracara, and Asian Stonechat. In addition, Herring Gull was split into American Herring Gull and Vega Gull, and Warbling Vireo was split into Eastern Warbling Vireo and Western Warbling Vireo. The four state additions plus the two splits bring the official Texas State List to 677 species in good standing. This total does not include the 2 species on the Presumptive Species List, nor the 2 species on the Supplemental List.

In addition to the review of previously undocumented species, any committee member may request that a record of any species be reviewed. The committee requests written descriptions as well as photographs, video, and audio recordings if available. Information concerning a Review List species may be submitted to the committee secretary, Blaine Carnes (email: blainehcarnes@gmail.com). Guidelines for preparing rare bird documentation can be found in Dittmann and Lasley (1992) *How To Document Rare Birds*. Online submission forms can be found at https://www.texasbirdrecordscommittee.org/home/forms.

The records in this report are arranged taxonomically following the AOS Check-list of North American Birds (AOU 1998) through the 66th supplement (Chesser et al. 2025). A number in parentheses after the species name represents the total number of accepted records in Texas for that species at the end of 2024. Species added to the Review List because of population declines or dwindling occurrence in recent years do not have the total number of accepted records denoted as there are many documented records that were not subjected to review (e.g. Brown Jay, Pinyon Jay, Tamaulipas Crow, and Evening Grosbeak). All observers who submitted written documentation or photographs/recordings of accepted records are acknowledged by initials. If known, the initials of those who discovered a particular bird are in boldface but only if the discoverer(s) submitted supporting documentation. The TBRC file number of each accepted record will follow the observers' initials. Specimen records are denoted with an asterisk (*) followed by the institution where the specimen is housed and the catalog number. The information in each account is usually based on the information provided in the original submitted documentation; however, in some cases this information has been supplemented with a full range of dates the bird was present if that information was made available to the TBRC. All locations in italics are counties. Please note that the county designations of offshore records are used only as a reference to the nearest point of land.

TBRC Membership—Members of the TBRC during 2025 who participated in decisions listed in this report were: Tony Frank, Chair; Clayton Leopold, Secretary (until Aug 2025); Blaine Carnes, Secretary (since Aug 2025); Sheridan Coffey, Greg Cook, Mel Cooksey, Steve Glover, Matt Heindel, Jesse Huth, Arman Moreno, and Willie Sekula.

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Additional Abbreviations—AOS = American Ornithologists' Society; AOU = American Ornithologists' Union; BBNP = Big Bend National Park; GMNP - Guadalupe Mountains National Park; NP = National Park; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; SHS = State Historic Site; SNA = State Natural Area; SP = State Park; WMA = Wildlife Management Area.

ACCEPTED RECORDS

Brant (*Branta bernicla*) (42). One at Southeast Park, Amarillo, *Randall* on 17-18 December 2024 (**JR**, DS; 2024-106).

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) (17). One east of Pampa, *Gray* on 31 December 2024 - 3 January 2025 (**VW**; 2024-113).

Eurasian Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) (69). One at Port Aransas Wetland Park, *Nueces* on 19 November - 7 December 2024 (**TL**, MC, DaS, BC, SG; 2024-96).

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) (37). One at Brownwood Country Club Lake, *Brown* on 26 January - 6 February 2025 (**SL**, MC, CT; 2025-07).

Costa's Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*) (56). One at Sheridan, *Colorado* on 5-31 December 2024 (**BM**; 2024-108).

Berylline Hummingbird (*Saucerottia beryllina*) (6). One at El Paso, *El Paso* on 12 November 2024 - 25 March 2025 (JS, SL, SC, MC; 2024-98).

Double-striped Thick-knee (*Hesperoburhinus bistriatus*) (2). One west of Nixon, *Wilson* on 14 September 2025 (**GC**, WS, TY, TF, FA, SH, LT, JS, JH, ShC, ; 2025-53).

Northern Jacana (*Jacana spinosa*) (46). One at Santa Ana NWR -- Pintail Lakes, *Hidalgo* on 21-25 September 2025 (**LE**, LW, TH, DSa, MBS, LT, JH, JS; 2025-55).

Surfbird (*Calidris virgata*) (14). One at San Luis Pass, *Galveston* on 25 April 2025 (**JiS**, CL, JS; 2025-44).

Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) (60). One at Hagerman NWR, *Grayson* on 13-27 October 2024 (**PA**, NG, PG, BB, JaS, JB; 2024-102).

Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) (31). One at Brownsville Ship Channel, *Cameron* on 17 December 2024 (**SB**, JL; 2024-107). One at Packery Channel jetty, *Nueces* on 5-6 April 2025 (CT, JR, MC; 2025-25).

Gray Gull (*Leucophaeus modestus*) (1). One at Brownsville Landfill, *Cameron* on 3-6 January 2025 (**JL**, MC, JS, DaSa, ToF; 2025-02). This represents the first documented record for Texas.

Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*) (51). One at Grapevine Lake, *Tarrant* on 27 February 2025 (KC; 2025-14).

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) (67). One at Bolivar Flats, *Galveston* on 4 May 2025 (**IP**; 2025-31).

Kelp Gull (*Larus dominicanus*) (7). One at Padre Island Nat'l Seashore and Brownsville Landfill, *Nueces, Kleberg, Cameron* on 26 December 2024 - 25 January 2025 (MC, JS, DS; 2024-112).

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*) (2). One ~75 miles east of N. Padre Island, *Kenedy* on 12 September 2025 (**JR**, BF, PB, BrC; 2025-54).

Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*) (10). One at Balmorhea Lake, *Reeves* on 15 December 2024 (**EB**, SF, NV; 2024-105).

Sooty Shearwater (*Ardenna grisea*) (28). One at Boca Chica Beach, *Cameron* on 7 November 2024 (**NP, RV**; 2024-99). One at Port Mansfield jetty, *Willacy* on 29 May 2025 (**EF**; 2025-32).

Nazca Booby (*Sula granti*) (1). One ~63 miles ese. of S. Padre Is., *Cameron* on 3 August 2024 (**KS**; 2025-41). This represents the first documented record for Texas.

Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) (15). One at Bolivar Flats, *Galveston* on 13-14 April 2025 (WE, JaR, FC, CL; 2025-26). One ~25 miles east-southeast of Port Aransas, *Nueces* on 12 September 2025 (**BrC**; 2025-58).

Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) (6). One at Cullinan Park, *Fort Bend* on 1-6 September 2025 (**RS**, ZTH, FF, DSa; 2025-51).

Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) (42). One at Lubbock Lake, Lubbock, *Lubbock* on 6 December 2024 (SM; 2025-08).

Yellow-headed Caracara (*Milvago chimachima*) (2). One at El Jardin Park, *Harris* on 7-9 June 2024 (**StB, AH**, KK; 2024-61). One at Galveston Island and Texas City, *Galveston* on 6 December 2024 - 16 December 2025 (**CL**, DSa, JaR, JS, MBS, MC, RG, SL, JOB; 2024-109). These represent the first documented records for Texas.

Nutting's Flycatcher (*Myiarchus nuttingi*) (4). One at El Paso Museum of Archeology Nature Trail, El Paso, *El Paso* on 16-20 November 2024 (**DH**, JG, CB; 2024-100).

Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher (*Myiodynastes luteiventris*) (41). One at Keystone Heritage Park, *El Paso* on 29-30 August 2025 (**JG**; 2025-52).

Gray Kingbird (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) (22). One at Artist Boat Coastal Preserve, *Galveston* on 28 April - 4 May 2025 (**JiS**, JS, WE; 2025-42).

Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*) (59). One at Galveston Island SP, *Galveston* on 3-4 April 2025 (**KOH**, WE, CL; 2025-43).

Rufous-backed Robin (*Turdus rufopalliatus*) (32). One at Wink, *Winkler* on 25 January 2025 (**AnH**; 2025-10). One at South Llano River SP, *Kimble* on 9 February - 28 March 2025 (**CH**, EC, JR, LT, SL; 2025-22). One at El Paso, *El Paso* on 10 February 2025 (**JG**; 2025-12).

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) (60). One at Big Bend Ranch SP, *Presidio* on 2 January 2025 (**KD**; 2025-03).

Asian Stonechat (*Saxicola maurus*) (1). One at East Unit, Jocelyn Nungaray NWR, *Chambers* on 19 December 2024 - 24 April 2025 (ToF, MA, MC, JOB, SL, WE, CTL; 2025-16). This represents the first documented record for Texas.

Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) (59). One at Concan, *Uvalde* on 7 May 2025 (**BS**; 2025-39).

Yellow-eyed Junco (*Junco phaeonotus*) (12). One at El Paso, *El Paso* on 23 November 2024 - 21 March 2025 (**DA**, JG, JS; 2024-97).

Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) (55). One at Inks Lake SP, *Burnet* on 16 January - 3 May 2025 (CT, RoS, WE; 2025-05).

Flame-colored Tanager (*Piranga bidentata*) (21). One at Marathon, Gage Gardens, *Brewster* on 28 April 2025 (**SF**; 2025-46).

Crimson-collared Grosbeak (*Periporphyrus celaeno*) (67). One at San Juan, *Hidalgo* on 26 November 2024 (**BW**; 2024-104).

NOT ACCEPTED

A number of factors may contribute to a record being denied acceptance. It is quite uncommon for a record to not be accepted due to a bird being obviously misidentified. More commonly, a record is not accepted because the material submitted was incomplete, insufficient, superficial, or just too vague to properly document the reported occurrence while eliminating *all* other similar species. Also, written documentation or descriptions prepared *entirely from memory* weeks, months, or years after a sighting are seldom voted on favorably. It is important that the simple act of not accepting a particular record should by no means indicate that the TBRC or any of its members feel the record did not occur as reported. The non-acceptance of any record simply reflects the opinion of the TBRC that the documentation, as submitted, did not meet the rigorous standards appropriate for adding data to the formal historical record. The TBRC makes every effort to be as fair and objective as possible regarding each record. If the committee is unsure about any particular record, it prefers to err on the

conservative side and not accept a good record rather than validate a bad one. All records, whether accepted or not, remain on file and can be re-submitted to the committee if additional substantive material is presented.

Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*). One at Whites Ranch Road, *Chambers* on 19 April 2025 (2025-45).

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*). One at Port Isabel Reservoir, *Cameron* on 17 November 2024 (2025-09).

Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*). One at Texas City Prairie Preserve, *Galveston* on 20 January 2025 (2025-06).

Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*). One at White Rock Lake, *Dallas* on 23 December 2024 (2024-111).

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). One at Quintana, *Brazoria* on 12 September 2023 (2023-140). One at Quintana, *Brazoria* on 26 September 2023 (2023-141). One at Aransas NWR, *Aransas* on 10-24 January 2025 (2025-21).

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Ardenna pacifica*). One at Lake Conroe, *Montgomery* on 8 July 2024 (2024-76).

Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*). One ~38 miles southeast of Mustang Island, *Nueces* on 12 September 2025 (2025-57).

Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*). Three south of Fort Davis, *Jeff Davis* on 6 January 2025 (2025-50).

Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*). One at San Angelo, *Tom Green* on 5 December 2022 (2023-66). One at Davis Mountains Preserve, *Jeff Davis* on 8 February 2023 (2023-14).

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SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

ELTON PERRY, JR. AND THE BIRDS OF TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

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Elton Perry, Jr. collected birds and their eggs in Travis County, Texas, during the early 1900s. Over 300 of his specimens are now found in 17 museums in the United States. Perry was also an accomplished photographer of birds and their nests. Perry's specimen and nesting records are found in Birds of Austin Region published in 1925 by George Finlay Simmons who acknowledged Perry's valuable assistance during the research for his book. This paper chronicles the life of Elton Perry, Jr., his collaboration with Simmons and the eggs, study skins and photographs of Travis County birds that represent his legacy to later generations.

EARLY LIFE AND EXPERIENCES

Elton Perry, Jr. (1873-1928, Fig. 1), the son of Elton and Mary Ann Smith Perry, was born in Austin, Texas. He attended the public schools in Austin, and it was during his time that he became interested in natural history and began to collect birds' eggs in the surrounding area. Following his graduation, he attended business college for two years before deciding on dental surgery as a profession. Perry then served as an apprentice in a local dental office before attending Baltimore College of Dental Surgery in Baltimore, Maryland, from which he graduated in 1894. He began his dental practice in Gloversville, New York, where he met and married Eugenia Van Slyke in 1896. He later practiced in New York City (1897-1899) and Bridgeport, Connecticut (1899-1904) where he collected with Jesse C. A. Meeker and Henry W. Beers. Eight sets of eggs collected by Perry in Connecticut during 1904 are now at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo, CA, as well as the skin of a Connecticut Warbler (*Oporornis agilis*) at the Yale Peabody Museum in New Haven, CT (ORN 003364). During 1904 Perry also made the acquaintance of A.O.U. members Louis B. Bishop of New Haven, Connecticut and Johanthan Dwight of New York City who encouraged him to prepare study skins of birds. Perry joined the A.O.U. in 1902 and retained his associate membership until 1912 (Simmons 1925).

Figure 1. Elton Perry, Jr. Photograph from Simmons (1925).

Perry's health began to deteriorate during the early 1900s due to stress at work and an operation for

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appendicitis. He returned to Austin from February 1901 to March 1902 to recuperate and again from December 1904 to August 1905 during which times he collected eggs and prepared study skins. His health finally became so debilitating that he retired and moved to Austin in March 1906 (Simmons 1925). There is no evidence that Perry practiced dentistry after returning to Austin although his specimen cards are signed "Elton Perry, Jr., DDS."

FIELD WORK FOLLOWING RETIREMENT

The nature of Perry's medical issues is unknown. He was, however, advised by his physicians to spend as much time outdoors as possible (Simmons 1925). Perry kept detailed notes while observing, collecting and photographing birds and their eggs in Travis County. Thirteen egg sets taken during March through June 1901 represent the first collections made in Travis County. These eggs are now at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology in Berkeley, CA (8 egg sets) and the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (5 egg sets).

Perry's work in the field increased following his retirement in March 1906. In January 1915, he made the acquaintance of George Finlay Simmons from Houston, Texas (Anon. 1915). Perry was 22 years older than Simmons, yet the two men became life-long friends based on their common interest in the birds of Travis County. Simmons described Perry as "quite some ornithologist [who] has a rather intimate acquaintance with the birds of Austin and vicinity." He was also impressed by Perry's ability to distinguish the calls of wrens from those of other birds, most likely referring to the repertoire of Bewick's Wren which "on account of its varied songs and calls… becomes a nuisance to the newcomer ornithologically inclined (Simmons 1925)."

Simmons enrolled in the Zoology Department at the University of Texas in Austin following his discharge from the army in December 1918. He then resumed his study of the local birds which became his master's thesis, Birds of the Austin Region, which was later published as a book (Casto 2018). Perry and Simmons spent many days in the field during this time, as well as discussing the notes taken by Perry in previous years.

Simmons recognized several local collectors and naturalists for their contributions to Birds of the Austin Region. These contributors were not named in the species accounts but were instead identified by an alphabetical letter, e.g., A, B, C, D, etc. Simmons was contributor "A" and Perry was contributor "B." In addition, Simmons stated in the foreword of his book that Perry was his main source of information—"a field companion from whom I received much encouragement in my youth as well as later excellent criticisms." Simmons also noted that subspecific determinations of many of the birds named in his book were based on specimens collected by Perry.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY ELTON PERRY

It is not known when Perry first began photographing birds and their nests. In 1915 it was noted that Perry had the best photographer's equipment in the Southwest and that he had taken many snapshots of birds and their nests at remarkably close range (Anon. 1915). Perry placed a notice in the January 1916 issue of The Oologist that he had 5x7 photographs of the nests and eggs of 26 species of birds in the Austin locality. The identities of these 26 species of birds are unknown.

Six of Perry's photographs were published during the years 1916 through 1918 (see literature cited). The first photograph, published in Bird-Lore, was of a Western Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura marginella*) incubating eggs in a cedar tree on the slope of Mount Barker, northwest of Austin (Perry 1916a, Fig. 2). This same image, as well as a photograph showing the nest of a Mourning Dove with two eggs, was also published in Bulletin of the University of Texas, Department of Extension, No. 57 (Perry 1916c). A second photograph published in Bird-Lore was of a Howell's Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor howelli*) sitting on its eggs on a gravel bed at Austin (Fig. 3).

Figure 2. Western Mourning Dove incubating eggs. Perry is credited with the earliest nesting date [18 March 1916] for this species in Travis County (Perry 1916a, Simmons 1925).

Fig. 3. Howell's Nighthawk sitting on its eggs in a gravel bed at Austin (Perry 1916b). Perry is credited with the earliest [23 May 1910] and latest [20 June 1905] nesting dates for this species in Travis County (Simmons 1925).

Perry's photographs in Bird-Lore, a publication of the National Association of Audubon Societies, reached a wide audience of bird-lovers and naturalists. An even larger audience viewed Perry's photograph of the nest of a Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) containing the egg of a Dwarf Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater obscurus*) published by the National Geographic Society in its 1918 edition of The Book of Birds, Common Birds of Town and Country and in subsequent editions of this popular book (Fig. 4). In contrast, his photographs of the nest and eggs of the Western Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus strigatus*) and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) published in The Oologist were viewed primarily by other egg-collectors (Perry 1917a, 1917c).

Fig. 4. Nest of a Yellow-breasted Chat with four eggs and the egg of a Dwarf Brown-headed Cowbird. Photograph taken by Perry on 17 May 1915 and later published by the National Geographic Society (1918).

PERRY'S COLLECTION OF EGGS, NESTS AND STUDY SKINS

A search on the vertnet.org portal shows a total of 308 specimens, eggs and museum skins, collected by Perry in Travis County, four specimens in Comal County and a Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*) at Bellville in Austin County. These specimens are in 17 North American museums but the majority (86%) of them are found in just four museums—The Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (127 specimens), the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (66 specimens), the University of Arkansas Collection Facility in Fayetteville, AK (55 Specimens) and Yale Peabody Museum (18 specimens).

Perry collected many of his specimens within or near the city limits of Austin which in 1905 had a population of only 25,299. Locations noted on Perry's data cards include Bee Creek, the rural communities of Fiskville and Sprinkle, Mount Barker, Colorado River, Hyde Park neighborhood [138 acres], Shoal Creek, Bull Creek, Deep Eddy Pool and Cliffs, Pease road and pasture, I&GN Railroad bridge, Crockett and 6th Street, East 6th Street, 10th Ward, Dam Boulevard, Barton Creek, grounds of the Texas Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Institute for Colored Youth [100 acres], the gardens and man-made ponds at the Texas State Lunatic Asylum [50 acres] and Camel's Hole on Barton Creek. This swimming hole, known as Camel's Hole by old-timers, is now called Campbell's Hole for a family named Campbell who once lived nearby (Vance 1986).

Nesting records in Birds of the Austin Region attributed to Perry are often presented as the earliest or latest dates of the season for various species. Dates of the first arrival of migratory birds are also noted, as well as the dates and numbers of birds taken for identification and preparation of museum skins, e.g., five birds were taken by Perry on 24 April 1907 from a large flock of Clay-colored Sparrows (*Spizella pallida*). Unusual numbers of birds were sometimes noted, e.g., thousands of Cliff Swallows were seen circling over Mt. Bonnell [aka Covert Park] on 3 April 1905. Thousands of Blue-winged Teal and Ruddy Ducks, as well as hundreds of American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler and Mallards were recorded during October-November 1917. An unusual case of parasitism was noted on 9 May 1905 when the nest

of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*) was found with two eggs of the host and three eggs of a Dwarf Brown-headed Cowbird.

Inca Doves (*Columbina inca*) were first seen in Travis County in 1889 (Simmons 1925). Their numbers increased in the following years, but it was not until 1905 that Elton Perry found their nests in the southwestern and southern parts of Austin. The egg of an Inca Dove taken by Perry on 31 May 1905 is in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ:5871). Additional eggs were later collected by Perry in April 1909 (MVZ:5872,5873,5874) by which time Inca Doves were becoming common in Austin (Simmons 1925).

Perry collected eggs in Travis and Comal counties, as well as obtaining egg sets from collectors in other states. In October 1917, he advertised that he had skins of crow, roadrunner, coot, Hermit Thrush, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Vesper Sparrow, Western Lark Sparrow, Myrtle Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, and Bell's Vireo that he would trade for good full sets of eggs (Perry 1917d). Perry's exchange partners included well-known oologists such as George Brem, Jr., (CA), John R. Cruttenden (IL), Walter B. Sampson (CA), Dudley S. DeGroot (CA), Sidney B. Peyton (CA), Nelson Hoy (PA) and Dan Bernard Bull (CA). Perry's prominence as a collector became more widely known after a photograph showing the arrangement of eggs in his collection was published in The Oologist and The American Oologist's Price List by Simmons (1916, 1922).

Fig. 5. Eggs of the Texas Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris pallidior*) collected by Elton Perry, Jr. on 25 May 1917. Perry traded the eggs to Nelson D. Hoy in Media, Pennsylvania, and they are now in the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (EN-136117). The data card records that the nest was in a cedar tree 5 feet up, made of bits of paper, grass leaves and lined with fine grass stems.

PERRY'S OBSERVATIONS OF DICKCISSELS

Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*), formerly known as Black-throated Buntings, were serious agricultural pests in Texas from the mid-1850s through the early 1890s (Casto 2002) but their numbers began to decrease by the early 1900s. Dickcissels "started to invade" Travis County sometime around 1904 or 1905 (Perry 1919). A Dickcissel collected by Perry on 30 April 1905 is now in the Yale Peabody Museum (ORN-003861). A second Dickcissel was also taken by Perry in Comal County on 19 May 1905 (YPM 136817).

Dickcissels returned every spring after 1905 in increasing numbers to rear their young. During the spring of 1915, Perry and Simmons were able to find two or three nests on their daily walks. However, in the spring of 1916, Dickcissels passed though by the thousands, but none stayed to nest. Dickcissels did not nest during the springs of 1917 and 1918, their absence attributed to the fact that Travis County had been in a drought during 1917 and 1918 and that field conditions were not conducive for nesting. Simmons (1925) summarized this phenomenon by stating that Dickcissels were an "abundant migrant and common summer resident though, rather irregular, abundant in some years and rare in others."

LAST YEARS AND DEATH

The year 1920 was a turning point in the life of Elton Perry. In March of that year he shot Goebel Reeves, son of Texas State Representative Icel B. Reeves, when Goebel attempted to force his way into Perry's home. Reeves' wound was not life-threatening, and the subsequent investigation resulted in the charges against Perry being dropped (Anon. 1920a,b,c,d).

Perry collected his last specimens during early May 1920 and in July of that year he advertised the sale of his shotgun and 22-rifle (Anon. 1920e). Although no longer collecting, Perry continued to work closely with Simmons who was at that time attending the University of Texas and gathering information for this thesis on the Birds of the Austin Region.

Perry and Simmons stayed in contact after Perry stopped collecting in 1920 and Simmons had left Texas to become the leader of a collecting expedition to the South Atlantic (Casto 2018).

In early September 1923, Perry received a letter from Simmons who was then in New London, Connecticut, describing preparations for the expedition. This letter, printed in The Austin Statesman (Anon. 1923), is the last known communication between the two old friends who had shared a common interest in the birds of the Austin region.

Perry died at the age of 55 at his home in Austin on 11 August 1928 as the result of "Strychning" [sic]. Strychnine, a highly toxic substance, was used to treat various medical conditions during the early 1900s and its medicinal use by Perry may have been a contributing factor in his death. Nothing is known of the disposition of Perry's specimens, photographs and ornithological notes following his death.

Perry made two major contributions to the ornithology of Travis County. The bird skins and eggs that he collected represent a physical record of the avifauna of the area during the early 1900s. Secondly, the inclusion of his extensive field notes in Bird Life of the Austin Region document the occurrence, nesting, migration and other events of bird life in Travis County. In addition, although little is known of Perry's activities as a photographer, he may have been one of the earliest individuals in Texas to produce quality film images of birds and their nests in a natural setting.

Perry's work in Travis County was overlooked by later generations of ornithologists. Oberholser's omission of Perry from his list of collectors (1974, pp. 6-7) suggests that he did not know of the specimens collected by Perry in Travis County or that he did not have the opportunity to examine them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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EARLY BREEDING BY WHITE-TAILED HAWKS IN SOUTH TEXAS

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The White-tailed Hawk (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) is a permanent resident of southern Texas. Published accounts indicate that breeding activity in Texas typically begins in winter, with egg-laying usually occurring from February through May and the earliest documented clutches reported in late January (Stevenson and Meitzen 1946, Morrison 1978, Farquhar 1986, Farquhar and Boal 2022). Here, we document an occupied nest containing nestlings in late December in South Texas, representing an exceptionally early breeding record for this species.

An occupied White-tailed Hawk nest was discovered by J.R. on 30 December 2025 approximately 8.9 km northwest of Riviera, Kleberg County, Texas (27° 21′ 19.7″ N, 97° 44′ 34.9″ W). The nest was situated in a honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) approximately 8.3 m above ground (Fig. 1), based on the mean of three measurements obtained using a Nikon Forestry Pro II laser rangefinder/hypsometer . The nest was revisited on 6 January 2026 by M.S., at which time two nestlings were photographed in the nest (Fig. 2). On 15 January 2026, two young were observed in the nest during an early-morning visit; however, by late morning only one young remained in the nest, suggesting that at least one young had fledged.

Both nestlings observed on 30 December 2025 were fully feathered and exhibited dark brown juvenile plumage with distinct tawny-buff (off-white) spots on the sides of the head, a characteristic of juvenile White-tailed Hawks and inconsistent with newly hatched or very young nestlings (Pyle 2008). The nestlings appeared similar in size and development and were clearly well into the nestling stage at the time of discovery. The presence of two developed nestlings in late December, followed by evidence consistent with fledging on 15 January, indicates that the young were nearing the end of the nestling period when the nest was first located.

Published incubation periods for White-tailed Hawks range from approximately 29–32 days, and nestlings typically fledge at approximately 47–52 days of age (Stevenson and Meitzen 1946, Farquhar 1986). Using 15 January 2026 as the fledging date and applying these published developmental intervals, hatching likely occurred in late November to early December 2025, with egg-laying most plausibly occurring in early to mid-November 2025. Even under conservative assumptions, this timing substantially predates the earliest egg-laying dates previously reported for this species.

Early pair formation and nest-building by White-tailed Hawks in Texas have been noted in late fall and early winter, but the presence of nestlings in late December has not been previously reported. This observation provides clear evidence that successful breeding can occur earlier in South Texas than is currently reflected in the published breeding chronology. Additional documentation of late fall and early winter nesting activity may improve understanding of reproductive timing and flexibility in this species at the northern edge of its range.

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Figure 1. Honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) nest tree containing an occupied White-tailed Hawk (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) nest, photographed on 3 January 2026 by Michael Stewart.

Figure 2. Two White-tailed Hawk (Geranoaetus albicaudatus) nestlings photographed on 6 January 2026 by Michael Stewart.

The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

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INTERSPECIFIC NEST REUSE BETWEEN TWO SPECIES OF VIREO (VIREONIDAE)

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Black-capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*) (hereafter BCVI) and White-eyed Vireo (*V. griseus*) (hereafter WEVI) are small passerines with some breeding range overlap in Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. They also have very similar nesting habits and frequently co-occupy the same shrubland mosaic habitats. Despite the similarities, they have strongly partitioned ecological niches, and their breeding activities are considered entirely distinct (Kovar et al. 2018). In July 2025, I found a WEVI reusing a BCVI nest on Fort Hood Military Installation in Coryell County near 97° 47' 42" W, 31° 12' 47" N. This appears to be the first documented record of any vireo reusing the nest of another species.

I found the nest on 2 May 2025 while monitoring territorial BCVI following the species' Post-delisting Monitoring Plan (USFWS, 2018). I checked the nest 3 times weekly until it fledged, using an extendable mirror to observe its contents. One or both adults were present during 6 of the 8 checks. All 4 eggs hatched, but only 2 nestlings survived to fledge on 15 May. I banded each with

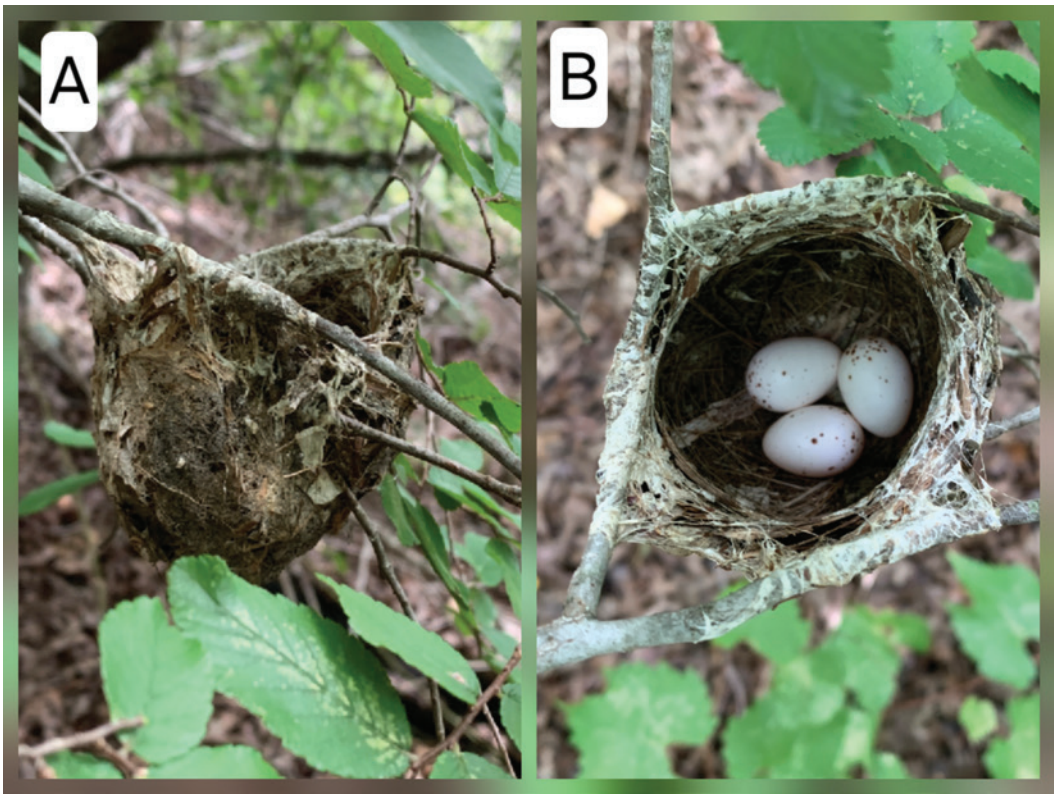

Fig. 1. The nest on 8 July. Panel A shows the worn outer layer. Panel B shows the WEVI eggs within

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Fig. 2. A typical WEVI nest during incubation. The fresh exterior materials contrast with the much older subject nest. Fort Hood, TX, May 2023.

Fig. 3. A BCVI nest parasitized by a Brown-headed Cowbird. The size, shape, and dense spotting distinguish cowbird eggs from those of any vireo. Fort Hood, TX, May 2024.

a numbered leg band issued by the United States Geological Service (USGS), and a single-colored leg band. I banded both adults with a USGS band and unique combinations of color bands. I regularly observed the fledglings through 11 June while monitoring the territory's second nest.

I returned to the fledged nest on 8 July to measure its position in the cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*) substrate, and saw an adult WEVI sitting in it. When the bird flew off, I looked into the nest and saw 3 eggs inside. I took a few photographs and departed without disturbing it further. I was unable to return until 28 July, when I found the nest torn apart on the ground with no sign of its former contents. By comparing the observed clutch size and date to published mean clutch size (3.29), date of laying a

first egg (≤ 17 June), and incubation period (13.9 days) (Kovar et al. 2018), I estimate that it was near the end of incubation on 8 July. If so, there is some chance that it produced WEVI fledglings, and was destroyed later. However, with the limited data I have of such an unusual nesting behavior, I cannot estimate if success or depredation is the more likely outcome.

I considered explanations that may have led me to misinterpret the observation, but the evidence best supports it being a true interspecific reuse. If the WEVI had replaced the BCVI nest, it would have been visibly fresh. Instead, the structure and materials had clear signs of heavy wear. (Figs. 1A, 2). I searched the ground underneath the substrate and found no sign of a fallen predecessor. The eggs (Fig. 1B) were small and speckled with reddish-brown spots in a gradient from the broad end to the narrower tip. If they were nest-parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) eggs rather than WEVI, they would have been distinctly larger, more elliptical, and patterned more evenly with dark brown spots and streaks (Fig. 3).

Records of vireos reusing nests are extremely rare, and there are no reports of them reusing nests of other species. Within published ornithological literature I have found only single cases of 3 species reusing their own nests (Bent 1950, Greaves 1987, Boves et al. 2013). From 1996 through 2025, biologists with Fort Hood's Endangered Species Management Team have monitored over 7,200 BCVI nests. At least 6,700 of those were still intact at the end of their nesting season, but prior to this case only 1 was reused (Boves et al., 2013). Many studies have investigated WEVI nesting habits across their breeding range, including on Fort Hood (e.g. Campomizzi et al. 2013, Kovar et al. 2018). None has reported them to reuse more than scavenged bits of old nests. Given the lack of records within such large datasets, this case seems to be an anomaly rather than indicative of any trends. Still, it is worth documenting that vireos can reuse nests of other species, and it may be a viable reproductive strategy.

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VISUAL CUES ARE USED BY TURKEY VULTURES TO DETECT CARRION

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The Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) is the most widely distributed vulture in the New World, occurring throughout much of North, Central, and South America (Kirk et al. 2024). Turkey Vultures are soaring, near-obligate scavengers that feed on a diversity of wild and domestic carrion (Ruxton and Houston 2004, Kirk et al. 2024), with mammal carrion comprising the bulk of the diet (Yahner et al. 1986, Hiraldo et al. 1991, Hill et al. 2022, Platt and Rainwater 2023). In common with other cathartids (Houston 1988, Graves 1992, Gomez et al. 1994), Turkey Vultures have a well-developed sense of smell (Stager 1964, Grigg et al. 2017) and use olfactory cues to detect carrion (Owre and Northington 1961, Stager 1964, Houston 1986, McShea et al. 2000). Although some uncertainty surrounds the specific volatile compounds involved in scent-guided foraging (Smith and Paselk 1986), Turkey Vultures are responsive to ethyl mercaptan, an odorant produced during the decomposition of vertebrate carcasses (Stager 1964).

Turkey Vultures also have excellent vision (Stager 1964), although what role—if any—visual cues play in detecting carrion is unclear. In an attempt to disentangle the respective roles of visual and olfactory cues in foraging, Stager (1964) placed a taxidermy mount of an adult mule deer (*Odocoileus hemonius*) in an open area frequented by Turkey Vultures; numerous vultures passed directly overhead, although none descended to investigate or alight on the decoy. However, Turkey Vultures responded almost immediately when the decoy was replaced with the fresh carcass of a road-killed mule deer. Based on these observations, Stager (1964) concluded that visual cues are unimportant for detecting carrion, and Turkey Vultures are unlikely to descend and feed on a carcass without a reinforcing olfactory signal. Others have likewise concluded that visual cues are of minimal importance to foraging Turkey Vultures (Houston 1986, Smith and Paselk 1986, Houston 1988), and according to Grigg et al. (2017), Turkey Vultures rely "almost entirely" on olfaction to detect carrion. We herein report the results of field trials similar to those conducted by Stager (1964) and demonstrate that visual cues are used by Turkey Vultures when searching for carrion.

METHODS

Our field trials were conducted on a ranch owned by Sul Ross State University (SRSU) adjacent to the main campus in Alpine (Brewster County), Texas. The SRSU Ranch (30° 21´ N; 103° 39´ W; elevation ca.1370 m) consists of 300 ha of desert grassland and mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) scrub grazed by small numbers of livestock (McCleery et al. 2005, Platt et al. 2015). During September and October 2010, we conducted field trials similar to those described by Stager (1964). However, instead of a mule deer decoy, we used a black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), which are common to abundant on the SRSU Ranch (SG Platt, pers. obs.). The black-tailed jackrabbit we used as a decoy was collected on 11 May 1964, prepared as a stuffed museum skin, and deposited in the SRSU vertebrate collection (SRSU 554). We salvaged the black-tailed jackrabbit skin after the specimen was deaccessioned because of damage sustained while the collection was being transferred

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to a new building. We were unable to discern any odors emanating from the decoy other than the faint smell of mothballs (naphthalene) used to protect the museum skins from insect damage. That said, we acknowledge that odors may have been present on the decoy that our relatively limited olfactory abilities were unable to detect.

Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) often aggressively dominate and exclude Turkey Vultures from carrion (Wallace and Temple 1987) but are rare in the Trans-Pecos Region of Texas (Peterson and Zimmer 1998) and were not observed on the SRSU Ranch during our study (see also Platt et al. 2016).

Our field trials were conducted between 1100 and 1500 H during September and October 2010. During each trial we placed the stuffed decoy (dorsal surface facing upwards) in an open location (bare soil or closely cropped grass) ≥ 30 m from brush and visible to vultures passing overhead. After deploying the decoy, we quickly retreated to a vehicle parked about 30–40 m away and made observations using binoculars. We recorded the time elapsed between decoy deployment and appearance of the first Turkey Vulture and noted any behaviors directed at the decoy. We terminated a trial if vultures failed to appear after two hours. At the time of our trials, mammal carcasses were available to foraging vultures as part of concurrent studies on carrion use and carcass exhumation being conducted on the SRSU Ranch (Platt et al. 2015, 2016).

RESULTS

We conducted seven field trials with the black-tailed jackrabbit decoy between 12 September and 3 October 2010 (Table 1). Two trials were terminated; one due to inclement weather and another when vultures failed to appear after two hours. During two trials, Turkey Vultures passed over the decoy at altitudes normally associated with foraging (≤ 50 m; Estrella 1994) without circling or descending to investigate the decoy. In two other trials, Turkey Vultures circled overhead, and then descended and made repeated low-level (1–2 m) passes directly over the decoy before moving off without alighting. During the two trials when vultures investigated the decoy, the first vultures appeared overhead 6 and 33 minutes after we deployed the decoy.

Only during one trial did Turkey Vultures alight and attempt to feed on the decoy (Table 1). In this instance, two Turkey Vultures began circling above the decoy 15 minutes after it was deployed; four minutes later a large group (ca. 10–12 vultures) had gathered overhead with some individuals descending and making repeated low-level (1–2 m) passes over the decoy. Other vultures landed briefly on fenceposts ca. 15 m from the decoy, before taking wing and rejoining the group circling overhead. The vultures were joined by two Chihuahuan Ravens (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) that remained with the group until the trial was terminated. The vultures and ravens circled overhead or perched on nearby fenceposts for 23 minutes before one vulture landed beside the decoy (42 minutes after decoy deployed). This vulture remained on the ground < 1 minute before departing without interacting with the decoy. However, five minutes later (47 minutes after decoy deployed), a vulture (possibly the same bird) landed and began to tear open the venter of the decoy. Other vultures rapidly descended and appeared to be preparing to land when the vulture grasped the

Table 1. Outcomes of seven field trials conducted at the Sul Ross State University Ranch (Brewster County, Texas) using a black-tailed jackrabbit decoy during September and October 2010.

Date	Outcome
12 September	One Turkey Vulture passed overhead; ignored decoy.
19 September	Turkey Vultures (10–15) circled decoy and made low-level (1–2 m) passes; one vulture landed and attempted to feed on decoy. Two Chihuahuan Ravens among Turkey Vultures.
21 September	Observations terminated owing to inclement weather.
22 September	Five Turkey Vultures passed overhead without investigating decoy.
23 September	Four Turkey Vultures made repeated low-level (1–2 m) passes over decoy without landing.
25 September	Observations terminated when no vultures appeared after two hours.
3 October	One Turkey Vulture made repeated low-level (1–2 m) passes over decoy without landing.

decoy in its bill, flew 8–10 m, and then dropped the decoy. At this point we terminated the trial to prevent further damage to the decoy.

DISCUSSION

Overall, Turkey Vultures responded to the decoy in three of the six trials (50%; excluding one trial terminated due to inclement weather), either descending well-below typical foraging altitudes to investigate the decoy or landing and attempting to feed on the decoy. Given the absence of decomposition odors emanating from the jackrabbit, we assume vultures detected the decoy using only visual cues. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that Turkey Vultures were attracted to the decoy by the faint, but novel odor of naphthalene. Because Turkey Vultures prefer fresh over decomposing carrion (Owre and Northington 1961, Houston 1986) and must compete with other invertebrate and vertebrate scavengers (DeVault and Rhodes 2002; Jennelle et al. 2009, Grootaers et al. 2025), we speculate the development of multiple mechanisms (visual and olfactory) for rapidly detecting carrion would be adaptive and strongly favored by natural selection. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that scent-based foraging is the primary mode employed by Turkey Vultures to locate carrion (Stager 1964, Houston 1986, Grigg et al. 2017).

That said, we noted some hesitancy among vultures to alight and interact with the decoy. The arrival times (6 to 33 minutes) of vultures over the decoy was similar to the arrival times (5 to 82 minutes) of vultures at the mammal carcasses we deployed on the SRSU Ranch (Platt et al. 2016). However, when carcasses were deployed, vultures usually descended and initiated feeding < 5 minutes after appearing overhead. In contrast, in two of our trials vultures made repeated low-level passes to investigate the decoy without landing and during another trial vultures circled overhead or perched nearby for 27 minutes before one landed and began interacting with the decoy. These observations are consistent with the suggestion of Stager (1964) that odors produced by a carcass act to reinforce visual cues when vultures are investigating carrion. In the absence of chemical signals, vultures risk approaching "carrion" that is actually alive, perhaps even a predator feigning death to ambush vultures. In practice, olfactory and visual cues probably function in tandem, allowing vultures to rapidly detect carrion while at the same time reducing the predation risk to foraging vultures.

Lastly, our observation of Chihuahuan Ravens among the group of Turkey Vultures interacting with the decoy complements two previous reports of a feeding association between these species. In our camera trap study of carrion exhumation by Turkey Vultures, Chihuahuan Ravens were photographed alongside vultures at two carcasses unearthed by the latter (Platt et al. 2015). We also observed single ravens together with feeding Turkey Vultures on three other carcasses and a group of four ravens with 25 Turkey Vultures feeding at a pig carcass (Platt et al. 2016). Sequential camera trap photographs taken at buried mammal carcasses indicate the ravens arrived after the vultures had gathered, similar to our observations at the jackrabbit decoy (Platt et al. 2015). Collectively, our observations suggest the Chihuahuan Ravens were attracted to carrion by vulture activity. The foraging association between Turkey Vultures and Chihuahuan Ravens that we documented appears commonplace, but to our knowledge has not been previously reported (Dwyer et al. 2020).

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DESCRIPTION OF AN APPARENT BACKCROSS BLACK-CHINNED (*ARCHILOCHUS ALEXANDRI*) X RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*ARCHILOCHUS COLUBRIS*) IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

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On 2 February 2026, we observed an Archilochus hummingbird at the hummingbird feeding stations in the campus garden at Rice University in Houston, Texas. The bird was an adult male with a long, slightly decurved bill, dull green upperparts, and a dark throat (Figure 1). Based on these characteristics, we initially identified the bird as a Black-chinned Hummingbird (*A. alexandri*). The individual behaved timidly, visiting feeders only briefly before being chased off by two aggressive immature male Rufous Hummingbirds (*Selasphorus rufus*). This limited our opportunities for detailed observation of this Archilochus hummingbird. Due to low light conditions, throat coloration could not initially be assessed in the field. Over the following days, the bird continued to be reported as a Black-chinned Hummingbird.

On 4 February, improved lighting conditions allowed for clearer photographs, revealing that the lower gorget displayed a burgundy hue, unlike the deep purple typical of Black-chinned Hummingbirds (Figure 1). While we speculated that the burgundy coloration was a reflection from the red plastic hummingbird feeders, further photographic evidence (without flash) confirmed that the burgundy gorget was genuine. No purple was detected in any of the photographs. The burgundy color also differed from the more typical scarlet or crimson red of Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*A. colubris*). Additionally, the upper two-thirds of the gorget was consistently black (lacking in iridescence), a pattern matching Black-chinned Hummingbird (Williamson, 2001) but unlike Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, where the black is restricted to a narrower band across the chin (Williamson, 2001). These observations regarding the gorget prompted photographic efforts (Figure 1).

Photographs suggest that the bird closely resembles a Black-chinned Hummingbird but with several subtle features typical of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds as shown in Figures 1-4 and summarized in Table 1. The presence of a complete gorget suggests the bird is an after-hatch-year (AHY) male. Plumage analysis indicates that the bird had not completed its prebasic molt, with dull primaries P8–P10 retained from a previous generation and dark black P1–P7 representing newly replaced primaries. Consistent with Black-chinned, the bill is long and slightly decurved, and the bird has an extensive black chin. The shape of P10 is slightly broad and rounded, aligning with Black-chinned and differing from the more tapered or pointed P10 of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (Williamson, 2001) (Figure 3). The lower third of the gorget is burgundy, while the upper two-thirds remain black across all lighting conditions (Figure 4). The extensive black on the throat is characteristic of Black-chinned, but the burgundy hue is intermediate between Ruby-throated and Black-chinned (Figure 4). Deep notching on P5 and P6, a trait common in adult Ruby-throated Hummingbirds but absent in Black-chinned, was noted (Figure 3). However, P1–P4 lacked notching, typical in Black-chinned and atypical in Ruby-throated. Although spread tail photographs were not available, field observations suggested the tail was uniformly black and unforked, a feature aligning with Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

The mixed structural features (long decurved bill and broad P10 as in Black-chinned versus the notched P5 and P6 as in Ruby-throated) rules out a color morph of either Black-chinned or Ruby-throated Hummingbird. These mixed characters suggest a Black-chinned x Ruby-throated hybrid (Williamson, 2001; Graves et al., 2016). This bird,

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Figure 1. Collage of the Black-chinned x Ruby-throated Hummingbird hybrid (2-10 Feb 2026) in Houston, TX. Photos by Cin-Ty Lee.

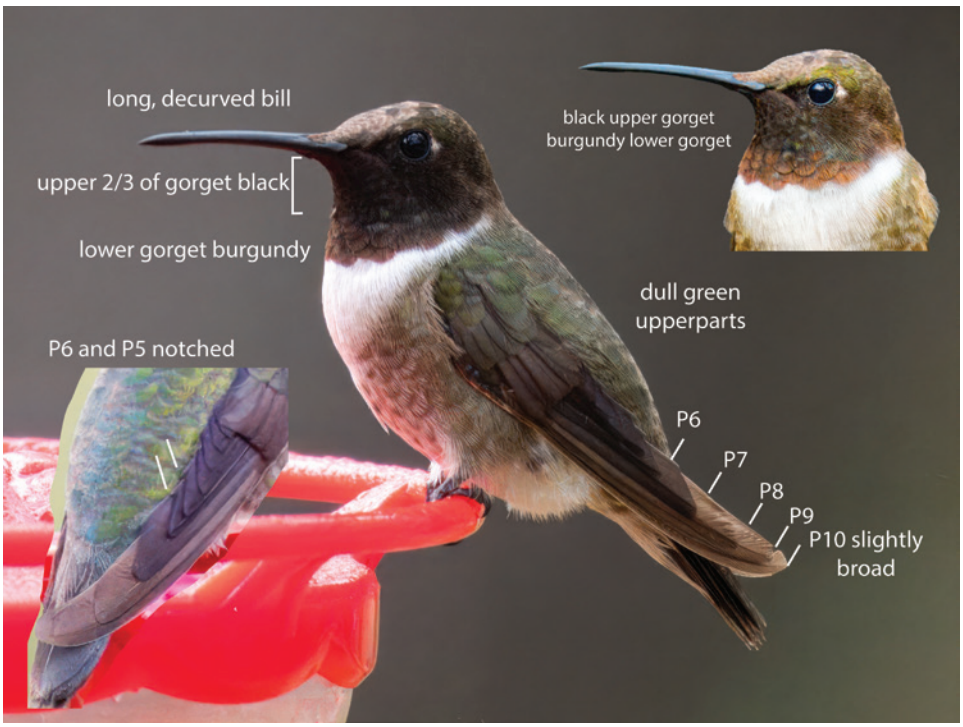

Figure 2. Annotated collage of the Black-chinned x Ruby-throated Hummingbird hybrid in Houston, TX. P7 to P10 represent older generation of primaries (dull gray in color). P1 to P6 are freshly grown primaries (black in color). P5 and P6 are notched. Bill is long and decurved. P10 is broad. Photos by Cin-Ty Lee.

Table 1

	Ruby-throated (adult male)	BC x RTHU hybrid (this study)	Black-chinned (adult male)
lower gorget color	red	burgundy	purple
extent of black on gorget	<30%	~66%	~66%
color of crown and mantle	bright green	dull green	dull green
bill shape	straight	decurved	decurved
P10 shape	narrow	broad	broad
inner primary shape	notched	P5 and P6 notched	unnotched

*data for RTHU and BCHU are from Williamson (2001) and Williamson et al. (2024)

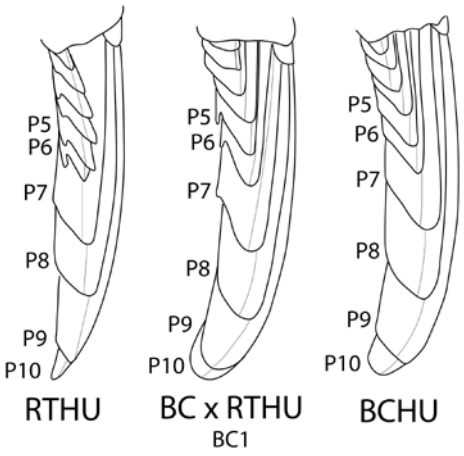

Figure 3. Wings of adult Ruby-throated (RTHU) and Black-chinned (BCHU) Hummingbirds compared to the Black-chinned x Ruby-throated (BC x RTHU) Hummingbird hybrid studied here. P6 and P5 are deeply notched like RTHU, but P10 is broad like BCHU. Illustration by Cin-Ty Lee.

however, displays some notable differences from Black-chinned x Ruby-throated hybrids described in Graves et al. (2016) or reported in eBird, which display pink gorgets, intermediate between Black-chinned and Ruby-throated. The bird we studied shows a burgundy lower gorget, more closely resembling Black-chinned. In addition, its gorget pattern (two-thirds black throat) matches that of Black-chinned, whereas other Black-chinned x Ruby-throated hybrids have more limited black on the gorget. We hypothesize that the hybrid studied here could be a backcross hybrid, specifically a first generation (F1) hybrid backcrossed with a Black-chinned, but without genetic data, this suggestion remains speculative.

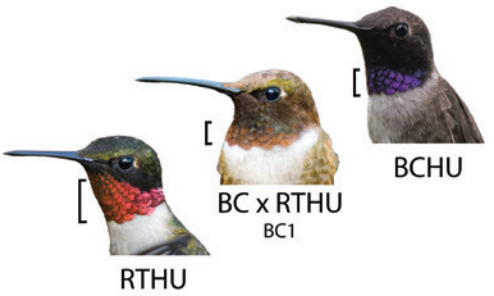

Figure 4. The gorgets of typical adult Ruby-throated (RTHU), the Black-chinned x Ruby-throated hybrid (BC x RTHU, BC1) and Black-chinned (BCHU) Hummingbirds. Note the burgundy lower gorget in BC x RTHU, but upper two-thirds of gorget is black. We speculate that the BC x RTHU is a backcross (BC1) with Black-chinned Hummingbird. Photos by Cin-Ty Lee.

In summary, our observation represents one of very few Black-chinned x Ruby-throated Hummingbird hybrids previously reported in the literature (Clark et al., 2022). Hybridization has been reported in Oklahoma and central Texas where the breeding ranges of these two species overlap slightly (Judd et al., 2011). Outside of the breeding season, reports of this hybrid are even fewer. This bird from Houston and one from Louisiana (Graves et al., 2021), both wintering males, are the easternmost reports of this hybrid. It seems likely that Black-chinned x Ruby-throated hybrids, while rare, are under-reported. Differences between Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are already subtle, so most hybrid reports come from specimens or banding. Backcrosses are even more challenging to detect, especially in the field. Documentation of primary tip structures, as

presented in our photographic study, can aid in detecting hybrids in the field (Williamson et al., 2024).

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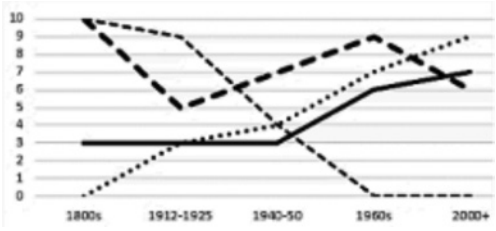
EFFECT OF TURFGRASS FARMS ON SHOREBIRD MIGRATION

By Bert Frenz

Turfgrass farms surprised me the most. How could these barren grass fields have such an impact on bird migration?

I produced graphs like the one shown here by analyzing historical data since 1835. Each line shows a distinct species, vertically marking abundance, and horizontally through nearly two centuries. The question is, "What historical factors caused Texas birdlife to change?"

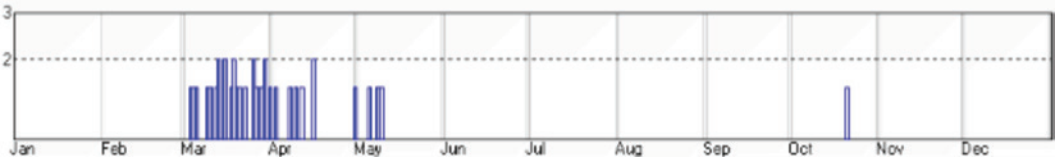
In my book, I detail 18 changes broadly, plus other more narrow factors in individual species accounts. Some are obvious to anyone who has studied Texas ecology, such as the effect of converting grasslands to farmlands in the second half of the nineteenth century.



I focused on eastern Texas, away from the coast: the central oaks and prairies. I lived in Bryan-College Station from 1971-1998, and then regularly visited another decade. In that timeframe, I saw 234 species in Brazos County, the longest list of anyone. Yet, in those 37 years, I never found an American Golden Plover, nor, for that matter, a Black-bellied Plover. My list of shorebirds in Brazos County was short, principally drawn from Lake Bryan.

American Golden Plover by Sean Verkamp

I was not the only one missing the plovers. Keith Arnold kept expansive notebooks of dated sightings for the Central Brazos Valley, gathered from his own, his students, and local birders, that showed precious few of these obvious large plovers. After an extensive search for records, I found only 31 dates when a golden plover was reported, and almost all of these were at private Moore Farms where Arnold's "snipe crew" conducted detailed banding surveys around its wetlands and fields.



American Golden Plover sightings in Brazos County before turfgrass farms

The migration path of American Golden Plovers passes over Texas' central prairies, and the birds once were commonly seen. In Navarro County in 1883, James Douglas Ogilby wrote,

> During the first week in March enormous flocks of these plover appear upon the prairie resorting to the low lying flats along the edges of the creeks, especially where these have been lately overflowed ... Their numbers are so great that I have often received my first notice of the approach of a flock through the noise made by their wings, which may be heard at a great distance, and long before the flock itself becomes visible, sounding as if a strong breeze were approaching.

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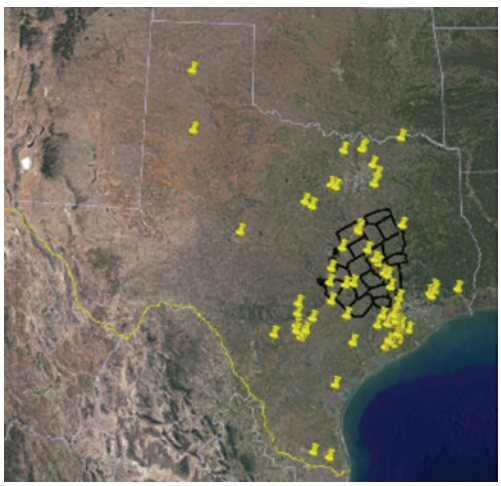
The development of agriculture and the removal of freshwater marshes nearly put an end to inland reports of the plovers. In the first state-wide account, entitled The Birds of Texas (1912), John Kern Strecker, Jr. listed the golden plover as a common migrant along the coast; however, for his 1927 ornithology of McLennan County he included it as "formerly common migrant." In Travis County, George Finlay Simmons (1925) said it was a rare migrant. The golden plover's status remained unchanged until it was found at the newly opened Hornsby Bend in 1965. That location now accounts for one-third of all regional reports of the golden plover. In Freestone and Navarro counties, the first records since Ogilby's in the 19th century were at the 5000-acre wetland refuge of Richland Creek WMA which opened in 1987. Elsewhere, except for a few lakes under low water conditions, they were still rarely reported.

Then came the turfgrass farms. Of the 10,000 grass species around the world, approximately a dozen are classified as turfgrass. These slender-leaved plants are commercially valuable for creating uniform ground cover in residential yards, parks, golf courses, and other lawns, while also being resilient to foot traffic and capable of thriving with low mowing. The demand for ready-made lawns has boomed, and turfgrass farms have popped up throughout eastern Texas. The Texas map shows 75 locations of turfgrass farms, mostly collected from addresses on Turfgrass Producers at https://texasgrass.com/. The grid in central Texas shows the 21 counties from which statistical data were gathered for my book.



King Ranch alone has 15 turfgrass farms with locations stretching from Amarillo to Victoria. King Ranch Turfgrass began in Florida in 1965. It started its Texas turfgrass business in Gonzales on the Guadalupe River in 2003. The second farm opened in 2005 near Navasota off FM 159 and along the Brazos River. Many of the King Ranch turfgrass properties were originally developed by other companies which it bought out. These included Turfgrass America, Central Texas Turfgrass, and Crenshaw Turf Farm. Turfgrass America formed from a merger of Thomas Brothers Grass and others, and provided the turf for sports fields, including Texas A&M University's Kyle Field and the Cotton Bowl.

Sodding Kyle Field © Sod Solutions

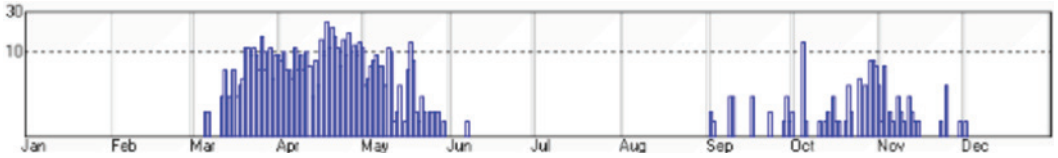
The earliest bird reports from turfgrass farms appear to be from Crenshaw Turf Farm at Barton Ranch, Bastrop County. The first identified record was a then-rare-inland Pectoral Sandpiper found by Jean Martin and Joan Richardson on 22 Aug 1992. A notable sighting at the same location was two Sanderlings on 13 Aug 1994 seen by Brush Freeman.

In the prior century in Burleson County, a few shorebirds could be found near the isolated community of Chances Store (no longer on the map) at Chance Ranch and Varisco Ranch, later Buffalo Ranch, and at Middle Bayou, all in the Brazos River bottoms, one of my favorite birding sites. Most sightings there in the 1970s and 80s were small numbers of common shorebirds such as Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, and yellowlegs. Rarely seen were Long-billed Dowitchers and Least Sandpipers. A few unique birds were a Dunlin in 1973 and a Pectoral Sandpiper in 1987.

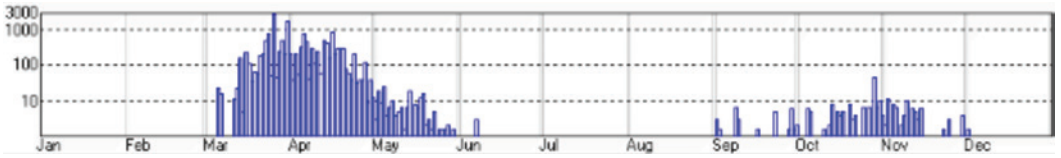
Then, starting in late 2000, about the time of the Christmas Bird Count, near the unincorporated community of Wilcox, shorebirds gathered at a new turfgrass farm in the well-irrigated Brazos River bottoms. Sighting reports at Horizon Turfgrass began with a then-rare sighting of a Long-billed Curlew on 14 Dec 2000. Another Pectoral Sandpiper was reported, this time at the turfgrass farm. A surprisingly large flock of 400-500 "peeps" including Least, Western, and Semipalmated, was present 2 Sep 2001. In the following two weeks, shorebird high counts were 14 Black-necked Stilts, 7 American Avocets, 1 American Golden Plover, 9 Upland Sandpipers, 10 Long-billed Dowitchers, 3 Wilson's Phalaropes, 2 Spotted Sandpipers, 2 Solitary Sandpiper, 25 Lesser Yellowlegs, 30 Greater Yellowlegs, 5 Stilt Sandpipers, 54 Buff-breasted Sandpipers, 1 Sanderling, 1 Baird's Sandpiper, and 8 Pectoral Sandpipers. The finding was unprecedented for the local area and likely owed to recent rains that flooded the turfgrass and adjacent muddy ground. Clearly, shorebirds had found a new stop-over site.

Across the Brazos River in Brazos County, the first turfgrass field was along FM 159, not far from Moore Farms. Toby Hibbits found 20 Golden plovers there on 22 Mar 2008 and a high count of 50 Killdeer on 8 Nov 2008. In the spring of 2009, Hibbits found Upland Sandpipers, Wilson's Phalaropes, Solitary Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, and up to 120 Golden plovers at the FM 159 turfgrass farm. A flock of 75+ Buff-breasted Sandpipers was counted 1-12 May. The turfgrass farm was a shorebird hotspot in the 2009 fall migration as well, adding Stilt, Semipalmated, and Western sandpipers to the local list.

Observers in Bastrop County had a lackluster history of finding golden plovers, and the species was not even listed on three Bastrop County checklists 1976–2003. However, in 2005, with the introduction of turf farms in the Utley area, the plover readily could be found, sometimes in impressive numbers as high as 450 in 2011. The largest flock sizes were at the turf farms on Sims Lane Cutoff in Brazos, where 500+ were frequently counted, topped by 2500 in 2020.



American Golden Plover sightings in Brazos County including turfgrass farms



American Golden Plover high counts in Brazos County including turfgrass farms

In recent years, substantial numbers of Semipalmated Plovers have been found at the turf farms in Burleson and Brazos. Starting in 2014, Dunlins were found at turf farms, most notably in 2019–2021 at Sims Lane turf farms.

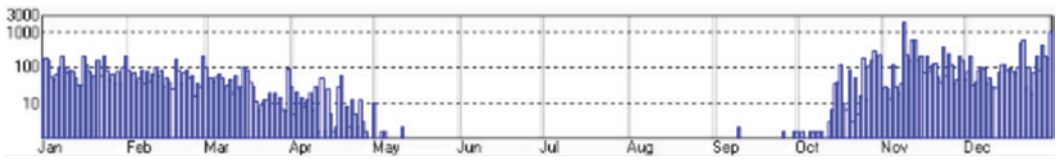
Counts estimated at 1000 Buff-breasted Sandpipers have been reported in 2004 at Horizon turfgrass farms in Burleson County and 2006 at Seasons Turf Grass in Waller County. In earlier years, rice fields were the principal habitat for the Buff-breasted Sandpipers, but after 2010, turf farms became a key habitat site. Buff-breasted Sandpiper was rarely found in Bastrop County before 1996. On 9 Aug 1999, a remarkable 117 were counted at the turfgrass farm at Barton Ranch, and most subsequent sightings were at turf farms. A high count was 450 at a 200-acre Utley turf farm in 2014.

Longspurs—including Lapland, Chestnut-collared, and Thick-billed—were attracted to turfgrass farms, first noted in Bastrop County in 2000 and Brazos and Burleson counties in 2011. In recent years, the most cited spot for the longspurs in all three counties has been the turf farms.

Undoubtedly, the most bird-surveyed turfgrass farm is Fortex Grass, known by the eBird hotspot labeled "Brazos Co.—Sims Lane/Sims Lane Cutoff." An astounding 232 species have been recorded at these fields since 2011, including at least 44 species in Order Charadriiformes.

The presence of hundreds of shorebirds entices hawks to forage for prey. Prairie Falcons were common in Navarro County in 1879–1880. With the disappearance of the Greater Prairie Chicken and Eskimo Curlew, so went the Prairie Falcon. In 1883, Ogilby wrote that Northern Harrier was "by far the most abundant of the large hawks upon the prairie." However, in 1972, it was added to the National Audubon Society's Blue List of Imperiled Species, and yet it still lost another 37% of its population from 1972 to 2014. Nowadays, at turfgrass farms, Northern Harriers are a common site with about 625 sightings from 2001 to 2022. Other bird-eating hawks and falcons that have shown up at turfgrass farms have been Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, White-tailed, Red-shouldered, Broad-winged, Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine, and Prairie.

Although the highlight of turfgrass birding is during shorebird migration, the winter season can also be productive. The highest counts of American Pipits are almost exclusively at turf farms, including 400 at Turfgrass America in Bastrop in 2013, 400 at Horizon Turf Grass in Burleson in 2020, 500–600 at Fortex Grass in Brazos in 2020, and 600–1900 at King Ranch Turfgrass in Brazos in 2020. In Brazos County, all counts exceeding 200 have been at turfgrass farms. Sprague's Pipits have also been found at turfgrass farms. After I gave a presentation at the Central Texas Audubon Society in mid-November, I took a few local birders to nearby turfgrass farms they were unaware of. Shorebird migration had passed, but we found 427 American Pipits. The Christmas Bird Count compiler told me she would emphasize checking it out for the count.



American Pipit high counts in Brazos County, mostly at turfgrass farms

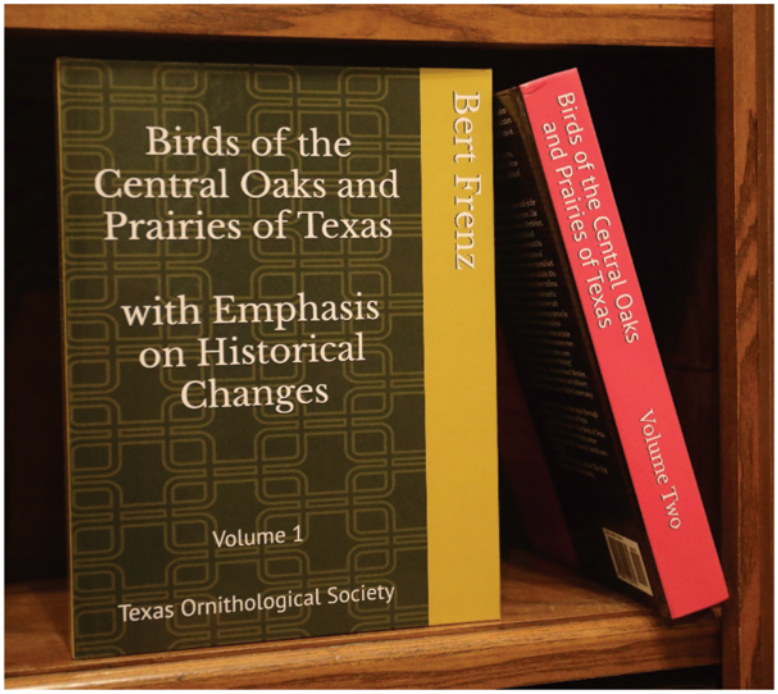
A few owls winter too, especially Burrowing and Short-eared owls. Year-round species include Horned Larks; 175 were counted at Horizon Turfgrass in 2013. Lark Sparrows and Dickcissels summer at Horizon Turfgrass with high counts of 25 and 445, respectively. On the surprise list at Sims Lane are Whooping Crane, Ruff, Black Skimmer, Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Harris's Hawk, and Ferruginous Hawk.

This article is excerpted in part from Bert Frenz's two-volume Birds of the Central Oaks and Prairies of Texas, with Emphasis on Historical Changes, published by the Texas Ornithological Society, 2024.

Notable species seen at turfgrass farms (high counts in parentheses)		
Black-necked Stilt (26)	Red-necked Phalarope (1)	Bonaparte's Gull (1)
American Avocet (200)	Spotted Sandpiper (10)	Laughing Gull (1)
Black-bellied Plover (14)	Solitary Sandpiper (15)	Franklin's Gull (1000)
American Golden Plover (2500)	Lesser Yellowlegs (150)	Ring-billed Gull (85)
Killdeer (3000)	Willet (5)	Black Skimmer (1)
Semipalmated Plover (5)	Greater Yellowlegs (325)	Least Tern (2)
Piping Plover (1)	Ruddy Turnstone (13)	Caspian Tern (1)
Mountain Plover (1)	Ruff (1)	Black Tern (800)
Snowy Plover (2)	Stilt Sandpiper (202)	Forster's Tern (10)
Upland Sandpiper (63)	Buff-breasted Sandpiper (1600)	Common Tern (1)
Whimbrel (16)	Sanderling (4)	Royal Tern (1)
Long-billed Curlew (5)	Dunlin (450)	American Pipit (600)
Hudsonian Godwit (58)	Baird's Sandpiper (550)	Sprague's Pipit (5)
Marbled Godwit (12)	White-rumped Sandpiper (1600)	Horned Lark (175)
Short-billed Dowitcher (3)	Least Sandpiper (800)	Dickcissel (445)
Long-billed Dowitcher (350)	Pectoral Sandpiper (1200)	Lapland Longspur (195)
Wilson's Snipe (89)	Western Sandpiper (40)	Thick-billed Longspur (175)
Wilson's Phalarope (750)	Semipalmated Sandpiper (40)	Chestnut-collared Longspur (1)

Turfgrass harvesting at Fortex Grass by Bert Frenz

Photo captions: **(Previous page starting top left)** American Golden Plover by Sean Verkamp, American Golden Plover by John Hale, American Pipit by Bert Frenz, Plover catching worm by Simon Kiacz, Plovers in flight by Sean Verkamp, Mixed flock by Ronald Newhouse; **(This page starting top left)** Field of golden plovers by Simon Kiacz, Plovers in flight by Robert Tizard, American Pipits on turf by Bert Frenz, Sprinkling system by Bert Frenz, Flooded Sims Lane field by Simon Kiacz, Rolled turfgrass by Bert Frenz.



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