

# Southern Great Plains Region

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The report for the period met expectations. A number of rarities — Pacific Loons, Tricolored Herons, and Sabine's Gull, for example — are now being more routinely and multiply reported, where one observation would have been good news 15 years ago. But this current pattern could wane in the next decade. The season also produced a flush of scoters of all three species. Other unusual species, such as Red Phalarope or jaeger, are still not more than occasional. Our knowledge of species such as Greater Scaup, Red-naped Sapsuckers, extralimital (!?) hummingbirds, *Empidonax* flycatchers and others, gleaned from our contributors, continues to establish some insightful patterns.

This report contains observations of the occasional species more frequently reported just this season (at least, so far) — this time it was the Black-throated Blue Warbler. Whether it was a flush of good luck or a real population phenomenon will be decided by comparisons with other accounts.

More records are being documented with photos or written details, but this is still a general weakness of the reporting system, especially for seasonal rarities, which may be exceptional at times. It is difficult to judge whether observations of seasonal rarities are casually or carefully made, or, perhaps, even accidentally made, *i.e.*, "I-didn't-think-them-that-unusual" types of observations. Should these observations become part of our knowledge for assessing the patterns in the wanderings of birds, or will they become the distracting, perhaps detracting and masking, noise in our data — or, worse yet, create patterns of illusion.

The last days of October produced its classic rush of waterfowl through the Region. It is almost as if planetary forces converge on this time period year after year to produce the forceful fronts of motion, and it is, strangely, also the time of large scale, but local, mass wanderings for small individuals of *Homo sapiens*. Hmmm. Musings of a late-night natural-

ist? What do those trans-eastern Atlantic migrants avoiding the United States know about us?

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (*Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton Co., KS*); Crescent Lake (*Crescent Lake N.W.R., Garden Co., NE*); Fontenelle Forest (*Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co., NE*); Gavin's Pt. (*Gavin's Point Dam, Cedar/Knox Cos., NE*); McConaughy (*L. McConaughy, Keith Co., NE*); North Platte (*North Platte N.W.R., Scotts Bluff Co., NE*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R., Stafford Co., KS*).

## Loons to Waterfowl

A Red-throated Loon at Lancaster, NE Nov. 5 (JJ) was the 3rd documented for Nebraska. The 17 additional records (not documented) for Nebraska (*vide* WRS) attest to poorer habits of birders rather than to rarity, as at least some of those are likely valid. This is a pattern found among other state records as well. Hey, please document your rarities! One of the two summering Pacific Loons at McConaughy was last seen Aug. 6 (SJD, WRS). Providing only the 10th record for Nebraska was a juv. Pacific Loon whose chinstrap was detected Nov. 19 in Lancaster, NE (JJ). One-two Pacific Loons were also identified Nov. 5 & 12 in Russell, KS (MR), and Nov. 5 in Noble, OK (JWA). A Com. Loon noted Aug. 6 at McConaughy (WRS) likely summered.

Two Red-necked Grebes were reported from Knox, NE Oct. 24–26 (MB) and Nov. 25 (BFH). Others reports came from Russell, KS Nov. 5 (MR) and Cowley, KS Nov. 11 (MT). Western Grebe numbers at McConaughy peaked in early August when 2200 were observed (SJD, WRS). About 300 were still present Nov. 26 (RCR, DJR). Eight Westerns were noted at 3 localities in e. Nebraska (*vide* WRS); 13 were reported for e. Kansas, including eight Nov. 5–19 in Russell, KS accompanied by three Clark's Grebes (MR).

Neotropical Cormorants, rare summer vagrants, were noted Aug. 19 & 29 in Marshall, OK (JW), and Oct. 15 in Tulsa (JWA). An Anhinga was observed at Johnston, OK Aug. 25 (JS, NV, MG); two were noted in McCurtain, OK, where they breed, until Aug. 23

(BH). A Magnificent Frigatebird documented over Manhattan, KS Oct. 12 (TC) was quite a surprise.

About 26 Great Egrets were counted at Phelps, NE Aug. 20 (JJ), a healthy number for Nebraska. Snowy Egrets made a good showing in s. Nebraska, with  $\leq 16$  in Phelps (SJD, WRS). Little Blue Herons wandered to Washington, NE Aug. 27–28 (JJ), Phelps, NE Sept. 4 (four birds; LR, RH), and Lancaster, NE Sept. 23 (LE). Quite rare in the Region were a Tricolored Heron and Roseate Spoonbill noted in Garvin, OK Aug. 25–27 (JS). Other Tricoloreds included one Aug. 2 in McCurtain, OK (JW), one-two Aug 4–Sept. 3 at Quivira (m.ob.), 1–2 Aug. 5–Sept 3 at Cheyenne Bottoms (m.ob.), one Aug 27–Sept 17 in Marshall, OK (JW), and one in Kearney, KS Sept. 16 (SA, CH, SP). Yellow-crowned Night-Herons made it n. to Fillmore, NE Aug. 11 (JJ), Phelps, NE Sept. 4 (LR, RH), and Otoe, NE (two birds) Aug. 7 (SJD).

Vagrant White Ibises appeared in McCurtain, OK Aug. 2 (JW) & 5 (JW, JM, JN, JS); in Cleveland-McClain, OK Aug. 9 (NK, KL), and Aug. 29–30 in Marshall, OK (JW). Most unusual were the one-two Glossy Ibises noted at Cheyenne Bottoms and vicinity Aug. 6 & 18 and Sept. 13 (CH, SP *et al.*), with an observation from Quivira Aug. 19 (SP *et al.*). These were accepted by the Kansas Bird Records Committee.

The only Tundra Swan reported was at Quivira Nov. 4 (MR). Single Ross' Geese were noted Nov. 4 in Washington, NE (JJ) and Nov. 23 in Sheridan, NE (RCR, DJR). The latter represents an



exceptionally low count in comparison to recent years.

The 71 Wood Ducks at North Platte Oct. 6 (LK) reinforces the recent westerly range extension of this species. Two Am. Black Ducks in *Washington*, NE Nov. 1 (JJ) were the only reported. Two Mottled Ducks were identified at Quivira Sept. 8 (MR), where breeding has been known. About 2000 N. Shovelers were still present in *Lincoln*, NE Nov. 25 (RCR, DJR), an exceptional number for time and locality.

The movements of Greater Scaup are difficult to characterize in the Region, as a flush of migrants may precede scattered wintering birds. Twenty-one were counted in Noble, OK Nov. 5 (JWA), two were present in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Nov. 11 (LKM), two Nov. 19 in Tulsa (JL, PS), and 24 were identified in *Keith*, NE Nov. 24 (RCR, DJR). A Ring-necked Duck Sept. 1 in *Blaine*, OK was early (JAG, NK). Oldsquaws were reported Nov. 4 from Gavin's Pt. (BFH), another was at *Knox*, NE Nov. 11–24 (MB), and still others were seen Nov. 23–26 in Tulsa (JWA), Nov. 24 in *Keith*, NE, Nov. 25 in *Butler*, KS (PJ, JNo), and Nov. 26 in *Lincoln*, NE (RCR, DJR).

Black Scoter is the rarest of the scoters in the Region; one appeared with a Surf Scoter Oct. 23 in *Lancaster*, NE (JJ), and another was discovered in *Keith*, NE Nov. 24 (RCR, DJR). Other Surf Scoters were observed Oct. 5 and Nov. 5 in *Sarpy*, NE (JJ), Oct. 21 at *Lincoln*, NE (JMo), and Oct. 29 at a 2nd location in *Lancaster*, NE (JJ). The three White-winged Scoters noted in *Bryan*, OK Nov. 1 (JW), and singles in *Washington*, NE Nov. 2 (JJ), *Quivira* Nov. 4 (TB), *Noble*, OK Nov. 5 (JWA), in *McClain*, OK Nov. 6–30 (JS, MO), *Lancaster*, NE Nov. 8 (LE), in *Riley*, KS Nov. 9 (TC), and *Garvin*, OK Nov. 9 & 17 (JS) set an interesting pattern.

A ♂ Barrow's Goldeneye was first noticed in *Hall*, NE Nov. 25 (JJo). The earliest sighting of Red-breasted Merganser was Oct. 26 at North Platte (LKM).

### Raptors to Terns

Up to nine Mississippi Kites were noted in *Keith*, NE (SJD, WRS); the last was Aug. 19 (BFH). Only two N. Goshawks were reported: in *Dawes*, NE Oct. 28 (LKM), and *Russell*, KS Nov. 15 (MR). A Harris' Hawk reported last winter in Tulsa was present through the period (*fide* JL). Merlins made a good showing, with 16 from Nebraska (*fide* WRS), eight from Kansas (*fide* LM), and three from Oklahoma (JS, NK). Six Peregrine Falcons were reported from Nebraska (*fide* WRS, RCR), and four from Oklahoma (*fide* JL, IS, VB, JW).



The southern Great Plains had a fair showing of Peregrine Falcons during the season. This one was in Bryan County, Oklahoma, September 20, 1995. Photograph/Jeff Webster.

About 100,000 Sandhill Cranes were a sight to behold in *Meade*, KS Nov. 11 (SS). Whooping Cranes traversing Nebraska were noted from Nov. 12–25 (*fide* WRS), and in Kansas Oct. 21–29 in *Barton* and *Stafford* (*fide* LM). A Virginia Rail was retrieved in downtown Tulsa Sept. 8 (JWA). Black Rails mentioned from Crescent Lake in the summer report were last noted Sept. 6 (LKM, BB); these observation may imply a breeding population.

Obviously at a population stronghold were the estimated 300 Snowy Plovers at Quivira Aug. 14 (MR). Migrant Piping Plovers were noted in *Russell*, KS Aug. 16 (MR), Quivira Aug. 18 (SP *et al.*), *Platte*, NE Aug. 26 (JJ), and *Texas*, OK Sept. 2 (JM *et al.*) & 3 (JAG, NK).

Two Ruddy Turnstones in Tulsa Aug. 2 (JM, JN), and one at Quivira Aug. 7–Sept. 12 (JR) were the only reported. Red Knots, rare but regular in fall, were found at Quivira Aug. 7 (JR), in *York*, NE Aug. 13 (JJ), and from *Canadian*, OK Aug. 22 (NK, MO). The 67 Sanderlings at *Platte*, NE Sept. 10 (JJ) was unusually high for the Region. Another 41 was tallied in North Platte Sept. 22 (LKM). A W. Sandpiper Nov. 2 in Tulsa (PS) was tardy. Only small groups of Buff-breasted Sandpipers were reported windowing the period from Aug. 4–Oct. 1, the latter in *Douglas*, KS (SA). Not so easy to identify, but carefully done, were the 40–45 Short-billed Dowitchers in *Phelps*, NE Aug. 6 (SJD, WRS), and two in Tulsa Aug. 2 (JL, PS).

Red-necked Phalaropes were noted at Quivira Aug. 18 (SP *et al.*), with 15 there Sept. 3 (SP *et al.*). Others were found Sept. 10–17 in Nebraska, with six noted at Crescent Lake Sept. 12 (LKM). Much rarer, a juv. Red Phalarope molting in first-winter plumage was observed in *Lancaster*, NE Oct. 1 (JJ); almost all observed during fall in the Region are of this plumage. Of uncertain documentation status was a Pomarine Jaeger in *Russell*, KS Oct. 31 (MR).

A Laughing Gull appeared in *Jefferson*, KS Sept. 8 (MM, LM) and Tulsa Sept. 30 (JL *et al.*). This is fewer than in most recent years. The largest concentration of Franklin's Gulls was 25,000 in *Lincoln*, NE Aug. 26 (RCR, DJR), somewhat early for such numbers. The disappointing next best counts were 7500 in *Oklahoma* Oct. 21 (NK) and 3,000 in *Lancaster*, NE Oct. 5 (JJ); tens of thousands would have been respectable 15 years ago. A group of 500 Bonaparte's Gulls in *Lancaster*, NE Sept. 16 (LE) was exceptional at such an early seasonal date. A Little Gull in *Bryan*, OK Oct. 11 (JW) was the only reported, but the species was unheard of in the Region 10 years ago.

McConaughy was the only location for California Gulls, with 66 noted Aug. 6 (SJD, WRS) and 140 Nov. 26 (RCR, DJR). Reports of two Thayer's Gulls were received for Nebraska and one for Kansas, with one Nov. 23 at *Douglas*, NE supported by written documentation (JJ). Glaucous Gulls arrived at *Douglas*, NE by Nov. 23 (JJ), with others in *Lincoln*, NE Nov. 25 (RCR, DJR), and *Lancaster*, NE Nov. 26 (JJ). Black-legged Kittiwakes in first-winter plumage were photographed at *Douglas*, NE Nov. 21 (JJ), and *Burt*, NE Nov. 27 (JJ). Another was reported from Quivira at the surprising date of Sept. 4 (JB).

Becoming expected, but rare, were Sabine's Gulls in *Ellis*, OK Sept. 6 (JM *et al.*), *Bryan*, OK Sept. 11 (JW), *Douglas*, KS Sept. 24–Oct. 1 (MM *et al.*), and *Lancaster*, NE Oct. 22–26 (JJ, B&LP); the latter was the tenth for Nebraska. Eight–nine Com. Terns were reported from 3 localities in Nebraska (*fide* WRS), and ≤12 were noted in *Cleveland*, OK Sept. 12–30 (VB, NK).

### Doves to Swallows

A White-winged Dove in *Morton*, KS Nov. 15–30 (ED, m.ob.) was the only extralimital native dove reported. Of uncertain status was a Eur. Collared-Dove observed beginning Sept. 16 in *Muskogee*, OK (VJ, m.ob.).

Perhaps three Com. Poorwills were noted at Williams Center Green, downtown Tulsa, Sept 8–Oct. 18 (JWA) and likely represent a more frequent than suspected migrant in n.e. Oklahoma. This migrant trap also added a few to the scant fall records of Chuck-wills-widow Sept. 8, and Whip-poor-will Sept. 22 (JWA). Other Whip-poor-wills were seen Sept. 3 in *Pawnee*, KS (D&AR) and Sept. 9 in *Adair*, OK (BH, WH). Among the later seasonal occurrences of Com. Poorwill for Nebraska was one Oct. 9 in *Thomas*, NE



**In Muskogee County, Oklahoma, this Eurasian Collared-Dove present much of the fall was regarded as "origin uncertain." However, it could well have been an outrider from the rapidly expanding population in the southeastern United States. Photograph/Ieri McMahon.**

(BFH, NR). Perhaps a high count for the Regions was 150 White-throated Swifts in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Aug. 18 (BFH).

A Ruby-throated Hummingbird in *Sheridan*, NE Aug. 28 was westerly for the species (RCR, DJR). A ♀ Black-chinned Hummingbird in *Russell*, KS Nov. 8 was keyed in the hand (JH); Kansas has few records of this species. Female Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were reported from *Sioux*, NE Aug. 4 (SJD) and Aug. 20 (BFH), where they might be expected. Much less so were those from *Finney*, *Sedgwick*, and *Pawnee*, KS (*vide* LM). Rufous Hummingbirds were observed in *Harvey*, KS Aug 12–17 (CS), *Stafford*, KS Aug. 22–30, *Sedgwick*, KS Aug. 23–Sept. 1 (PJ), *Tulsa* Sept. 5–Oct. 26 (CM), and *Douglas*, KS Sept. 13 (JH).

A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Sept. 27 in *Douglas*, NE (JJ) was early. Adding to the yet skimpy list of records for Red-naped Sapsucker in the Region was a bird Sept. 24–25 in *Dawes*, NE (RCR, DJR).

Olive-sided Flycatchers made a good showing in Nebraska this fall beginning Aug. 6 in *Lancaster*, NE (LE). A Hammond's Flycatcher was carefully studied Sept. 2 in *Cimarron*, OK (JAG, NK, EW). Cordilleran Flycatchers fed three fledglings Aug. 5 in Sowbelly Canyon, *Sioux*, NE (SJD, WRS). Migrant Cordillerans are still scarce, even in far w. Nebraska, where one was identified in *Garden* on the early date of Aug. 9 (LKM). Another was suspected in *Cimarron*, OK Sept 3 (JM *et al.*). Wandering substantially E was a Say's Phoebe in *Oklahoma* Sept. 27 (NV, JV).

Among lingering swallows were Purple Martins Oct. 8 in *Cherry*, NE (m.ob.), six N. Rough-winged Swallows in *Tulsa* Nov. 7 (NL), Bank Swallows in *North Platte* Sept. 22 (LKM) and *Crescent Lake*

Sept. 22 (MF), and a Barn Swallow in *Crescent Lake* Oct. 22 (MF) and in *Tulsa* Nov. 18 (JWA).

### Jays to Vireos

Scrub Jays were noted at 2 locations in *Morton*, KS Oct. 28 (four birds; SP *et al.*) and Nov. 12 (two birds; BP, VT). Surprising were 35 Pinyon Jays in *Morton*, KS Sept. 16 (SP *et al.*), though scattered records exist for w. Kansas. Black-billed Magpies occurred e. to *Lancaster*, NE Aug. 9 (JMo) & 26 (JJ), *Saunders*, NE Oct. 29 and Nov. 4 (THo), and *Cuming*, NE Nov. 4 (LE).

A Mt. Chickadee was noted e. to *Keith*, NE Nov. 24 (RCR, DJR) and *Morton*, KS Oct. 27 and Nov 13–18 (SP *et al.*). After a year lull, Red-breasted Nuthatches made a good showing, with the earliest (progressing southward) in *Sarpy*, NE Aug. 31 (B&LP), in *Kansas* Sept. 8 (*vide* LM), and in *Tulsa* Sept. 13 (AR *et al.*).

A Rock Wren ventured to *Douglas*, KS (MR). A Canyon Wren Nov. 25–31 in *Morton*, KS (D&FV) provided only the 3rd documented record for Kansas. A Carolina Wren made it n. and w. to a feeder in *Hall*, NE (*vide* WRS). A Ruby-crowned Kinglet lingered until Nov. 3 at *North Platte* (LKM).

A Mt. Bluebird made it e. to *Malcolm*, NE Nov. 5 (JJ) and *Cleveland*, OK Nov. 11 (VB). The highest count was 250 in *Russell*, KS Nov. 5 (MR). Also easterly was a Townsend's Solitaire in *Douglas*, NE Sept. 17 (B&LP). A Wood Thrush lingered to Oct. 20 in *Tulsa* (BC). Also tardy were a Gray Catbird in *Tulsa* Oct. 21 (JL), and a Brown Thrasher to at least Nov. 30 in *Washington*, NE (JJ). A Curve-billed Thrasher wandered to *Morton*, KS Sept. 17 (*vide* LM).

Among the odd sightings were seven Cedar Waxwings Aug. 29 in *Cherokee*, OK (D&NV). Northern Shrikes were reported across Nebraska and Kansas, the earliest in *Dawes*, NE Oct. 19 (RCR, DJR). A tardy



**This Say's Phoebe wandered east to Oklahoma City September 27, 1995. Photograph/Jim Vicars.**

Loggerhead Shrike was present Nov. 3 at *North Platte* (LKM). Philadelphia Vireos were reported from *Fontenelle Forest* Sept. 3 (WRS), *Tulsa* Sept. 9 & 17 (JWA), *Otoe*, NE Sept. 10 (LF), *Lancaster*, NE Sept. 16 (LE), and *Wagoner*, OK Sept. 22 (JM). Red-eyed Vireos were observed w. to 2 localities in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Aug. 5 (AK, LKM).

### Warblers to Finches

Among few fall records of Blue-winged Warbler was one Sept. 9–10 in *Dixon*, NE (JJo). Also "scoops" were Golden-winged Warblers Sept. 11 in *Washington*, NE (JJ); the latest noted in Nebraska, and Sept. 17 in *Washington*, OK (BG). An early migrant Nashville Warbler was seen Aug. 20 in *Cleveland*, OK (VB). A Tennessee Warbler Sept. 24 in *Sheridan*, NE (RCR, DJR) was westerly. Four N. Parulas were noted Sept. 11 in *Washington*, NE (JJ).

Yellow Warblers were observed to Sept. 30 in *Tulsa* (JL *et al.*). Perhaps part of a small surge, Black-throated Blue Warblers were located in *Sedgwick*, KS Sept. 12 (CG), *Cherokee*, OK Sept. 16 (JM *et al.*), *Douglas*, NE Sept. 19 (JJ), and *Lancaster*, NE Oct. 11 (TEL). Just one per season would normally be "lucky dog" news. A Yellow-rumped Warbler in *Sarpy*, NE Sept. 14 was early (B&LP). The only Townsend's Warbler reported was one Sept. 13 in *Sedgwick*, KS (PI). A Palm Warbler, rare in fall, was observed Sept. 30 in *Creek*, OK (PS *et al.*). Blackburnian Warblers were found Sept. 9 in *Otoe*, NE (LF) and Sept. 4 in *Fontenelle Forest* (WRS).

Among the later records for Prothonotary Warblers was one in *Cherokee*, OK Sept. 20 (JN). One–two Ovenbirds lingered Oct. 21–Nov. 21 in downtown *Tulsa* (JWA *et al.*). A wayward MacGillivray's Warbler was found dead there Sept. 2. Always a find, a Connecticut Warbler was well documented at *Fontenelle Forest* Sept. 1 (B&LP). Early was a Wilson's Warbler in *Garden*, NE Aug. 9 (LKM). Unusual for locality was a Hooded Warbler in *Cleveland*, OK Sept. 8 (MB, NK).

East of most was a W. Tanager in *Kearney*, KS Sept. 16 (SP, CH, SA). Downtown *Tulsa* attracted a Black-headed Grosbeak Sept. 17 (JWA). Tardy was a Dickcissel Nov. 13 in *Wagoner*, OK (IL).

About 2000 Am. Tree Sparrows were found in *Buffalo*, NE Nov. 19 (LR, RH). A Field Sparrow at *Crescent Lake* Sept. 27 (LKM) was w. of most occurrences. Downtown *Tulsa* attracted a Grasshopper Sparrow Nov. 7 (JWA). Sharp-tailed Sparrows were reported from *Douglas*, KS Oct. 7 (AP), and from 2 localities in *Lancaster*, NE Oct. 10 (JMo) and Oct. 4–29 (LE).

August reports of Song Sparrows at 4 sites in Lancaster, NE and with Swamp Sparrows along the Platte R. in s.c. Nebraska likely represented summering birds for both species (*fide* WRS).

Eastern Meadowlarks at Crescent Lake Sept. 27 and Oct. 24 (LKM, MF) were beyond the w. limits of their normal range. For Brewer's Blackbirds, a count of 75,000–100,000 was impressive from Barton, KS Nov. 5 (GP *et al.*). Yellow-headed Blackbirds were still present in Scotts Bluff, NE Nov. 21 (LKM) and Lincoln, NE Nov. 25 (RCR, DJR). Among the only noteworthy finches, a Com. Redpoll at Douglas, NE Oct. 31 (JJ) was early.

**Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):**  
KANSAS: Stephen Addinal, Tim Barksdale, James Barnes, Ted Cable, Elsa Durkee, Chet Gresham, Jan Hall, Chris Hobbs, **Pete Janzen**, Mike McHugh, Lloyd Moore, John Northrup (JNo), Sebastian Patti, Brandon Percival, Galen Pittman, Alexi Powell, Mike Rader, John Rakestraw, Mark Robbins, David & Amy Rose, Carolyn Schwab, Scott Seltman, Max Thompson Van Truan, Don & Fran Vannoy. NEBRASKA: Bob Behrends, Mark Brogie, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Larry Einemann, Laurence Falk, Marlin French, Robin Harding, Thomas Hoffman, Bill F. Huser, Jan Johnson (JJo), Joel Jorgensen, Alice Kenitz, Lucy Koenig, Tom Labedz, Larry K. Malone, Jim Mountjoy, Babs and Loren Padelford, Lanny Randolph, Dorothy J. Rosche, **Richard C. Rosche**, **W. Ross Silcock**, Edna Clair Thomas. OKLAHOMA: James W. Arterburn, Michael Beverlein, Vicki Byre, Bonnie Gall, Mike Goddard, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, William Heck, Vera Jennings, Nathan Kuhnert, Ina Lindsey, N. Lowrie, Jo Loyd, Kent Lucas, **Janet & Louis McGee**, Jeri McMahon, Coy Montgomery, John G. Newell, Jim Norman, Mitchell Oliphant, Aline Romero, Pat Seibert, John Sterling, Don & Nadine Varner, Jim Vicars, Nancy Vicars, Jeff Webster, Ernie Wilson.

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# Texas Region

## GREG W. LASLEY AND CHUCK SEXTON

There was a little bit of everything weatherwise. Torrential rains came here and there in association either with cold fronts or remnants of tropical storms. Despite such rains, drought conditions persisted in much of north and west Texas. Temperatures were unseasonably warm early, mild well into the season, and unseasonably cool in the last days of November. In the first few days of the season, tropical storm *Dean* brought rains but little avian fallout to east Texas. Hurricane *Gabrielle's* landfall in northeast Mexico August 11–13 began to relieve the drought conditions in adjacent parts of south Texas, and brought heavy rains as far west as El Paso. While much of the active Atlantic storm season passed by the Gulf of Mexico, the remnants of tropical storm *Ismael* from the Pacific brought lots of rain to west and north Texas September 14–16 and interacted with the season's first strong cool front September 18–20 to put a charge into migration movements. As the latter front spun off the Texas coast September

19–23, major pushes of hawks, hummingbirds, and other species were much in evidence. The landfall of hurricane *Opal* in Florida October 4 also seemed to enhance the strength of an on-coming cool front, which brought windy conditions to Texas. Hurricane *Roxanne* in the southern Gulf of Mexico fizzled out in mid-October without much of a meteorological or ornithological punch in Texas. We could only speculate on which birds blew in with the various storm systems through September and October.

A preponderance of observers described this as a rather dull migration season, although folks in the Panhandle and in El Paso were blessed with numbers of interesting regional rarities. Having just bemoaned the lack of hummers in the summer, we were deluged with one of the most diverse hummingbird influxes in recent years. It was a season in which Red-breasted Nuthatches abounded while Lark Buntings hid from us; winter finches, kinglets, and bluebirds teased with possible invasive movements, but then withdrew or dispersed. Most observers' attention seemed occupied by the pleasant combination of early arriving winter residents in October and a diversity of neotropical migrants which lingered well into November.

A new wetland restoration project at Balmorhea State Park showed early success when it was visited by migrant Black Terns in September and a pair of Wood Ducks

