

Southern Great Plains



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Some changes that occur in the Region are difficult to track, as they may be localized or cover only parts of the Region. As homogeneous as the Southern Great Plains may seem, the region's sometimes wildly varying climatic conditions can make trends in bird distribution difficult to discern; the climate of the region is influenced both by the extremes of the boreal High Rockies and the essentially tropical Gulf, and tornado allies represent the clash of these contrasting influences.

Nonetheless, while the Region at large has benefited from a mostly wet weather regime through the 1990s, the patterns of recent years have shifted to being drier and have brought us into what are effectively drought conditions. Some water and marsh birds still maintain their numbers in refugia of various sorts, but some species, such as Eared and Western Grebes and California Gulls, consid-

ered to be healthy numbers in wetter times, are currently at low ebbs in their populations here.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Pawnee L. (Pawnee L., Lancaster, NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R., Stafford, KS); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Salt Plains (Salt Plains N.W.R., Alfalfa, OK).

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

Among a modest count of 91 Western Grebes at McConaughy 13 Jun were 8 Clark's (SJD). Single Clark's Grebes were in Lincoln, NE 13 Jun (SJD) and Kimball, NE 22 Jun (WRS), presumably nonbreeders. Quite exceptional was the ad. **Brown Pelican** photographed below Gavin's Point Dam, Cedar, NE and over Lewis and Clark L., Knox, NE 27 Jun—2 Jul (DB, *fide* RO et al.), possibly part of the widespread dispersal of birds from the Sea of Cortez as far as Colorado, but probably more

likely from the Gulf of Mexico. Among a scattering of Neotropical Cormorants was one at Cheyenne Bottoms 13 Jul (MG), with up to 6 at Red Slough through the period (DA, BH, m. ob.). An Anhinga was noted in McCurtain, OK 6 Jul (BH), with one wandering out to Lincoln, OK 19 Jul (JAG).

A Least Bittern noted in Sheridan, NE 23 Jun (WM) was rather far west. A Snowy Egret in Harlan 30 Jun (GH, WH) was the only report of this species for Nebraska. Single imm. Little Blue Herons wandered n. to Pawnee L. 9 Jun (LE) and Harlan, NE 18-30 Jul (LR, RH et al.). Tricolored Herons appear to be maintaining their breeding outposts at Quivira (*fide* LM) and the Salt Plains (JWA, SM), and up to 3 were noted at Red Slough (DA et al.).

Part of the recent upsurge of Glossy Ibis reports, singles were at Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira 14 Jun (SJD). Up to 4 ad Glossies were noted at the Salt Plains along with up to 5 possible Glossy Ibis x White-faced Ibis hybrids 31 May—6 Jul (JWA, JAG, see *N. A. B.* 57 [1], forthcoming). Vagrant Wood Storks began appearing at Red Slough 9 Jun, with up to 47 present by the end of the period (DA, m. ob.). Contrary to the recent trend, the only Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were 2 noted in Major, OK 25 Jun (JWA), 3 in Tulsa, OK 25 Jun (PM), and up to 11 at Red Slough through the period (BH, DA, m. ob.). In addition to about 12 breeding pairs of Trumpeter Swans in Nebraska (*fide* WM) was a pair in Grant, NE with 4 young 12 Jul (TEL, DS, MB). Lingering waterfowl have become more routine during the past decade in the Region. Among the more noteworthy finds this season were a male Cinnamon Teal e. to Phelps, NE through 9 Jun (LR, RH) and another male in Douglas, KS 5 Jun (GP), 1-2 Ring-necked Ducks in McCurtain, OK through the period (DA, BH et al.), a pair of Ring-necked Ducks in Scotts Bluff, NE 2 Jun (AK), single male Ring-necked Ducks in Keith, NE 13 Jun (SJD) and Clay, NE 15 Jun (JGJ), a male Canvasback at Hancock L., Scotts Bluff, NE 23 Jun (WRS), a male Bufflehead in Cherry, NE 14 Jun (MB), and a male Common Goldeneye in Keith, NE 13 & 22 Jun (SJD, AK, LR, †RH).

HAWKS THROUGH TERNS

A real surprise was the isolated observation of a **White-tailed Kite** in Pontotoc, OK 1 Jun (WAC et al.). The impression from at least two states (Nebraska and Oklahoma) was that Cooper's Hawks were more common this season. The only reports of Virginia Rails

were of singles at *Knox*, NE 8 & 27 Jun (MB) and *Linn*, KS 16 Jun (MC, MM). Given the dry conditions, a Sora in *Sioux*, NE 8 Jun (AK) was unexpected. Up to 8 of those lovely Purple Gallinules were noted at Red Slough 12 Jun—31 Jul (DA, BH, m. ob.).

Summer shorebirds invariably provide interpretational problems concerning their status. Among apparent tardy northbound birds were a Black-billed Plover at *Burt*, NE through 9 Jun (JGJ) and a Semipalmated Plover at Pawnee L. 15 Jun (LE). Outside the Platt R. Basin in Nebraska were two breeding Piping Plovers pairs found in *Pottawatomie*, KS 12 Jul (DM). Reports of breeding Black-necked Stilts continue at scattered locations in the Region including *Scotts Bluff*, NE (AK, KD), *Finney*, KS (T&SS, BC), and *Tillman*, OK (LT, MT).

What do you do with reports of a Lesser Yellowlegs and Long-billed Dowitcher 14 Jun at Quivira (SJD), or a Marbled Godwit 13 Jun at McConaughy (SJD)? The godwit is not known to breed in Nebraska. Exceptional were 3 Hudsonian Godwits and a Dunlin at Quivira 14 Jun (SJD). Tardy tardies included 6 Sanderlings at the Salt Plains 8 Jun (JWA) and 3 at Cheyenne Bottoms 14 Jun (SJD). Up to 23 Semipalmated Sandpipers were at McConaughy 13 Jun (SJD), 3 in *Phelps*, NE 13 Jun (SJD), and 9 in *Lancaster*, NE 15 Jun (LE). Clearly a find of the season was a stunning **Curlew Sandpiper** documented 12 Jul at Quivira (MRO, DK, MT).

Reports of Western Sandpipers continue to be few, with only two reports from Nebraska—singles in *McPherson* 27 Jul (DS) and at Pawnee L. 28 Jul (LE). Six Westerns were noted at Cheyenne Bottoms 4 Jul (PJ, DA). White-rumped Sandpipers can linger quite late in Jun, as is true throughout the East, but the single at Quivira 12 Jul (MRO, DK, MT), 6 in *McPherson*, NE 27 Jul (DS), and one or more in *Harlan*, NE 30 Jul (GH, WH) were unusual; the Region needs compelling documentation of these apparently southbound birds in late summer. Among the list of spring tardies were a Baird's Sandpiper at McConaughy 13 Jun (SJD) and 7 Pectoral Sandpipers at McConaughy 13 Jun (SJD), with 2 in *Phelps*, NE the same day (SJD) and 2 at Pawnee L. 15 Jun (LE). An ad. Stilt Sandpiper was also at McConaughy 13 Jun (SJD), with a single in *Phelps*, NE 8 Jun (LR, RH), and 3 at Quivira 14 Jun (SJD). Buff-breasted Sandpipers continue to be a species of interest. Those reported in late Jul are normally ads., as was true this year: 5 in *Sedgwick*, KS 28 Jul (PJ), 2 at Pawnee L. 30 Jul (JG), and one in *York*, NE 31 Jul (CG). A few

Short-billed Dowitchers appeared, including singles at Pawnee L. 26-30 Jul (JG) and *Knox*, NE 27 Jul (MB, ad.), and 3 in *Clay*, NE 28 Jul (JGJ).

Slipping in recent years are California Gulls, the summer high count only 10 at McConaughy 13 Jun (SJD). A "near ad." in *Lancaster*, NE 15 Jun had a mantle only slightly darker than adjacent Ring-billed Gulls, suggesting that it was of the expected prairie race *albertainensis* (JGJ). A vagrant first-summer Herring Gull was at McConaughy 13 Jun (SJD).

DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

Eurasian Collared-Dove numbers are still exploding, particularly across w. stretches of the Region. White-winged Dove are also continuing to increase, with one in *Keith*, NE 3-10 Jun (CWH) and one in *Riley*, KS 3 Jun (SK). Groups of 5 or more White-winged can routinely be found in Lawton, OK (JAG). The only Inca Doves reported were 2 in *McCurtain*, OK 11 Jul (DA). Black-billed Cuckoos maintain difficult-to-track low densities in the Region. Only 4 were reported from Nebraska (*vide* WRS), with only one other, that from *Russell*, KS 1 Jun (MR).

Catching the increasingly diverse hummingbird migration has become a focus in w. Kansas. The front end of this season in Jul saw 4 Calliopes at residences in *Pawnee* and *Finney*, KS beginning 19 Jul (T&SS, DKA, OS). The first Rufous Hummingbirds noted for the season were in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 12 Jul (KD) and 14 Jul in *Finney* (T&SS). Trickier to identify, a female and 3 imm. Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were identified 27 & 31 Jul, respectively, in *Finney*, KS (T&SS). A Broad-tailed Hummingbird was claimed in *Sioux*, NE 17 Jul (HKH), with at least one in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 31 Jul—1 Aug (KD).

The boundary between Western and Eastern Wood-Pewees is always a question Regionally. A Western was e. to *Cherry*, NE 13 Jun (MB). Among the westernmost Easterns was one near Valentine, *Cherry*, NE 13 Jun (KP) and one in *Harlan*, NE 23 Jun (GH, WH). A species of quite sporadic occurrence, a male Vermilion Flycatcher was in *Morton*, KS 21 Jun (JN). Westerly was a Great Crested Flycatcher in *Morrill*, NE 28 Jun (HW). Only occasionally transgressing westward, a Yellow-throated Vireo was near *Knox*, NE 8 Jun (MB). Two Plumbeous Vireos were reported, both from Sowbelly Canyon, *Sioux*, NE, apparently an isolated breeding locale (AK, MB). A Purple Martin in *Cherry*, NE 13-14 Jun (MB) was w. of the known breeding range. Nesting Violet-green Swallows using a

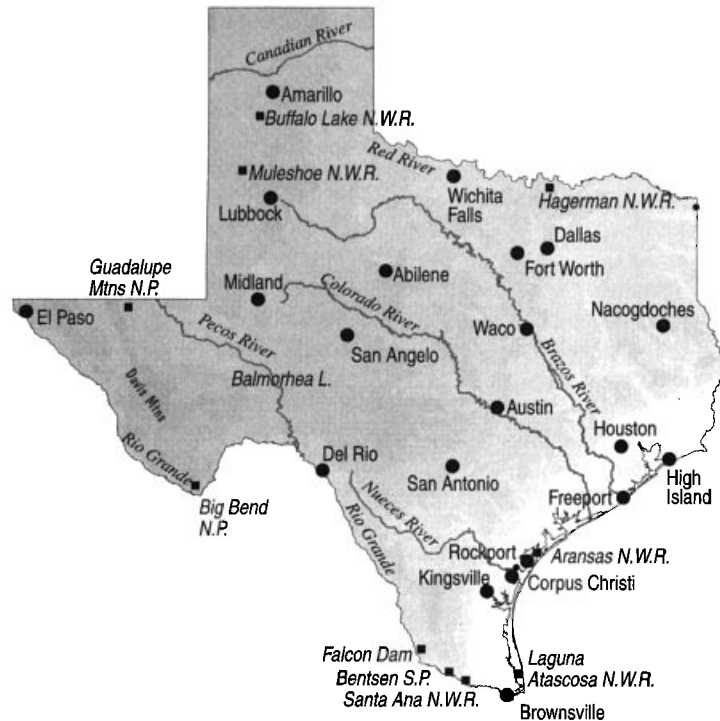
nest box in *Scotts Bluff*, NE were first seen 16 Jun with five eggs (HW) and provided a rare local breeding record.

A Red-breasted Nuthatch in *Sedgwick*, KS 13 Jun (H&SG) fits a pattern of occasional summer vagrancy in the Region. Quite intriguing was a Swainson's Thrush in riparian forest in *Harlan*, NE 23 Jun (GH, WH). A singing Blue-winged Warbler in *Knox*, NE 8 Jun (MB) seemed part of a recent group of sightings since 1998 in this border area between Nebraska and South Dakota (*vide* WRS). A Townsend's Warbler in *Sioux*, NE 11-12 Jun (HKH) was a very late migrant or nonbreeding wanderer. A male Cerulean Warbler in *Linn*, KS 30 Jun—14 Jul (MM, GP) was one to watch, a bird the very edge of the species's fractured range. Kentucky Warblers were found w. to *Alfalfa*, OK 5 Jul (JAG). Probably a spring migrant (as the species is notoriously late in most springs), a female Mourning Warbler was in *Otoe*, NE 13 Jun (LF, CF).

Curious were single Spotted Towhees in *Russell*, KS 13 Jun (BB), and *Riley*, KS 14 Jun (TC), both s. and e. of the edge of the known breeding range in Nebraska. A group of 6-8 Cassin's Sparrows in *Lincoln*, NE 6 Jul (LR, RH) provided one the easternmost locations for this species in Nebraska. Encouraging were 15 Bachman's Sparrows counted in *Pushmataha*, OK 8 Jun (WAC, MD, MH), and at two locations in *McCurtain*, OK during late Jun (BH, JM). A male Henslow's Sparrow was noted in *Lancaster*, NE 13 Jun (KP). The Song Sparrow population in *Phelps*, NE continues to increase, with 23 counted there 2 Jun (LR, RH).

About 60 Lazuli Bunting territories were mapped in the Wichita Mountains, OK this season (VF, JAG et al.), far more than anticipated to be present in this fluctuating population. A male Lazuli mated to a female Indigo fledged a brood during late Jul in *Blaine*, OK (JAG). A surprise was a female Painted Bunting in *Dixon*, NE 2 Jun (JJ). An encouraging observation was a pair of Bobolinks with 3 young in *Lancaster*, NE 10 Jul (MU). Two Brewer's Blackbirds were a surprise in *Cherry*, NE 13 Jun (MB). Three Red Crossbills at Valentine N.W.R., *Cherry*, NE 14 Jun (MB) seemed out of range, while the 12 in *McCurtain*, OK (BH) were quite unexpected, even for this typically wandering species. But even more remarkable were the **White-winged Crossbills**, remnants of the spring incursion, lingering until 1 Jun in Omaha (NR) and until 20 Jun in *Rock*, NE (CH).

Texas



Cited observers (area editors in boldface):
KANSAS: David Arbour, Bill Busby, Ted Cable, Mark Corder, Barbara Campbell, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Matt Gearheart, Harry & Sharon Gregory, Pete Janzen, Steve Kramer, Dan Kazmaier (DKa), Dan Kluza, **Lloyd Moore**, Mike McHugh, Dan Mulhern, John Northrup, Galen Pittman, Mike Rader, Mark Robbins (MRo), Omar Schartz, Tom and Sara Shane, Max Thompson. **NEBRASKA:** Doug Backlund, Mark Brogie, Kathy DeLara, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Larry Einemann, Carol Falk, Laurence Falk, Carlos Grande, Joe Gubanyi, Carolyn Hall, Robin Harding, Glen Hoge, Wanda Hoge, Helen K. Hughson, C.W. Huntley, Jan Johnson, Joel G. Jorgensen, Alice Kenitz, Thomas E. Labeledz, Wayne Mollhoff, Ricky Olson, Kevin Poague, Lanny Randolph, Neal Ratzlaff, **W. Ross Silcock**, Dave Stage, Moni Usasz, Harley Winfrey. **OKLAHOMA:** Dave Arbour, James W. Arterburn, William A. Carter, Mickle Duggan, Vic Fazio, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, Mark Howery, Jeri McMahon, Steve Metz, P. Moser, Lou Truex, Mary Truex.



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The spring rains at Big Bend National Park continued through the summer and eventually spread through the remainder of the Trans-Pecos, providing at least temporary relief from the decade-long drought. Overall, the summer was cooler than normal, if you can call the mid-90s Fahrenheit cool. In many areas of the state, temperatures did not reach 100° F until well into July. The major weather event of the season, however, was the downpours that deluged south-central Texas. During a two-week period, Wiedenfeld recorded an unbelievable 109 cm near

Comfort, Kendall County—where the annual rainfall is about 81 cm. The resulting flooding pushed the Comal, Guadalupe, Medina, and San Marcos Rivers out of their banks and caused millions of dollars of property damage. Sekula estimated that the San Antonio River was over 3 km wide at Falls City, Karnes, at the height of the event.

This summer was one of the most exciting in many years as far as bird records are concerned. First nesting records for the state were established for two species in the Trans-Pecos (Greater Pewee and MacGillivray's Warbler), and one rarity after another was found in the Lower Rio Grande Valley during June. One of the highlights of this season was the discovery of multiple territorial male Yellow-green Vireos in the Valley. The number present eclipsed those documented during the previous decade. Astounding finds included a Yellow-faced Grassquit at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, a Common Redpoll in Galveston, and a Lawrence's Goldfinch at Guadalupe Mountains National Park. We are not sure which granivore is more enticing!

Abbreviations: T.B.R.C. (Texas Bird Records Committee); U.T.C. (Upper Texas Coast),