

Great Basin



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The ongoing drought continued in the Great Basin this summer, with most of the Region experiencing less-than-normal precipitation. The drought is starting to produce landscape-level changes in many areas in southern Utah and Nevada, particularly in sagebrush and pinyon-juniper habitats. Large tracts of dead mature trees and shrubs are prevalent, and wildfires are increasing in frequency. Although, these factors will likely result in changes in avian populations, species composition, and distributions, the short- and long-term impacts of the ongoing drought are difficult to predict. Even with the drought, there were several significant observations throughout the Region. Highlights of the summer period included many immature Brown Pelicans at Lake Mead N.R.A., Nevada and an adult

Purple Gallinule at the Jordanelle Wetlands in Utah.

Abbreviations: Antelope I. (Antelope Island S.P. & Causeway, Davis, UT); Bear River (Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Box Elder, UT); Corn Creek (Corn Creek Unit, Desert N.W.R., Clark, NV); H.B.V.P. (Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve, Clark, NV); Lake Mead (Lake Mead N.R.A., Clark, NV); Lytle (Lytle Ranch Preserve, Washington, UT); Miller's R.A. (Miller's Rest Area, Esmeralda, NV); Ouray (Ouray N.W.R., Uintah, UT); Pyramid L. (Washoe, NV); Quail Creek (Quail Creek S.P., Washington, UT); Red Hills (Red Hills G.C., St. George, Washington, UT); Zion (Zion N.P., Washington, UT).

PELICANS THROUGH WATERFOWL

The inland invasion of imm. Brown Pelicans witnessed during the spring season continued to gain momentum during the summer in the Great Basin. Incredibly, 28 were observed at Las Vegas Bay, Lake Mead 14 Jul (MB), and up to 20 remained through the end of the season (J&MC et al.). Additional reports came from n. Utah, with an imm. confirmed at Antelope I. 18 Jul (CW). Green Herons, rare in the n. portion of the Region, were confirmed nesting and successfully fledging 3 young at the Jordan River Parkway, Salt Lake, UT (JHo et al.). Two White Ibis were reported near the Salt Lake Airport, Salt Lake, UT 15 Jul (p.a., DF); these would be a first for Utah. With the success of the reintroduction program in Arizona, sightings of California Condors continue to increase in s. Utah. Up to 6 of these spectacular birds were observed spending the summer

in the area around Lava Pt., Zion 30 Jun–31 Jul+ (DS, KW, ph. RF, ph. SS). A male Lesser Scaup and a pair of Hooded Mergansers were surprise residents throughout the summer at Gunlock S.P., Washington, UT (LT).

HAWKS THROUGH TERNS

Common Black-Hawks are rare breeders in the s. portion of the Region, so a juv. observed along the Santa Clara R. near Veyo, Washington, UT (ph. LT) was noteworthy. An ad. Harris's Hawk photographed in a backyard in Draper, Salt Lake, UT 23 Jun (TW) was likely an escaped or released falconer's bird. Imm. Red-shouldered Hawks were reported in Nevada at Corn Creek 17–30 Jul (TL, MME et al.) and at Rancho San Rafael, Reno, Washoe 26 Jul (FP). A pair of Zone-tailed Hawks was observed near Lava Pt., Zion 24 Jun–31 Jul+ (ph. RF, JF, KW). One of the biggest surprises of the season was an ad. Purple Gallinule seen 24–27 Jul at the Jordanelle Wetlands, Wasatch, UT (C&CJ et al., ph. MMo, ph. CN, ph. JBa, †EH)—just the 3rd documented in Utah and the first since 1939!

Snowy Plovers are uncommon to rare breeders in the Region, so 14 (including 3 downy young) at Pyramid L. 13 Jul (MME) were notable. A Whimbrel was a nice find at Antelope I. 19 Jul (ph. CW); it was observed through 23 Jul (CN). Two Sanderlings observed at Soda L., Churchill, NV 25 Jul (ph. MME, TL) were somewhat early. Single Semipalmated Sandpipers were also observed there 25 Jul and at two Utah locations: Antelope I. 20 Jul (CN, TA) and Bear River 23 Jul (CN). A Short-billed Dowitcher was reported from the seldom-birded West Wendover S.T.P., Elko, NV 23 Jul (CW). An imm. Herring Gull visited Sand Hollow S.P., Washington, UT 11–13 Jul (RF, CS). Two migrant Common Terns were at the Lee Kay Ponds, Salt Lake, UT 1 Jun (TA), and a single Least Tern was observed at Mona Res., Juab, UT 19 Jun (p.a., BS et al.).

DOVES THROUGH WOODPECKERS

The recent colonization of Eurasian Collared-Doves throughout the Great Basin has been nothing short of remarkable. They were first documented in Utah in spring 2000 and were found in Nevada shortly thereafter. Over the past few years, they have been observed throughout Utah and Nevada, and significant numbers are now regularly observed in small rural towns and agricultural areas. Wandering White-winged Doves were observed in several areas n. of their typical range in Utah, including the Topaz Mts., Juab 1 Jun (MMi), North Ogden, Weber 10 Jun (MSo), and Cedar City, Iron 18 Jul (SH). Two White-winged Doves were also observed 10–23 Jul at Indian Springs, Clark, NV (BG). Yellow-billed Cuckoos, rare in the Region, were observed at two Nevada locations: 3 at Moapa, Clark 13 Jun (JW, BL et al.) and one at Corn Creek 18–19 Jun (J&MC, RS). Singles were also observed in

Utah at Bear River 5 Jun (JCa et al.), Deseret Ranch, Rich 10 Jun (MSa), and Provo Airport Dike, Utah 17 Jul (MMn, J&KB).

A Black Swift was observed flying over Seegmiller Marsh, Washington, UT 11 Jun (KC, RF). Sightings of Anna's Hummingbirds continue to increase in the s. portion of the Region; however, ad. males at Alum Canyon, Washoe (6 Jun, RB) and Oxbow Park, Reno, Washoe, NV (25 Jul, FP) were n. of typical range. Pileated Woodpeckers were found again this summer along the Chimney Beach Trail,



Remarkable numbers of Brown Pelicans were observed throughout the inland West in spring and summer 2004. This juvenile, photographed at Newcastle Reservoir, Iron County, Utah 17 May, was the first of many observed in the Great Basin this year. Photograph by Rick Fridell.

ne. shore of L. Tahoe, Washoe, NV 15 Jun–31 Jul+ (JE, NB, JT, C&RT).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WARBLERS

Although few vagrant flycatchers were reported during the summer season, there were some significant sightings. A singing Eastern Wood-Pewee was observed at Corn Creek 7–9 Jun (JHm, fide MME, JCl). A Least Flycatcher was reported from Deseret Ranch, Rich, UT 10 Jun (MSt), and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was observed along I–15 n. of Parowan, Iron, UT 18 Jun (DA). A singing White-eyed Vireo found at Green River, Emery, UT 24 Jun (p.a., †DC) will likely be Utah's 3rd accepted record. Red-eyed Vireos were observed at Porter Spring, Pershing, NV 4 Jun (DT), Deseret Ranch, Rich, UT 10 Jun (MSt), and along the Riverdale Parkway, Weber, UT 27 May–22 Jun (KP et al.). A female Purple Martin was observed at the West Wendover S.T.P., Elko, NV 23 Jul (CW). A singing Winter Wren was observed near Silver L., Salt Lake, UT 5 Jul (J&KB). Although there are very few documented records, Winter Wrens may be rare breeders in the mts. of Utah. Late-migrating

Swainson's Thrushes were reported from Miller's R.A. 14 Jun (JW, DM) and Gunlock S.P., Washington, UT 18 Jun (LT). Wayward Gray Catbirds were found at Miller's R.A. 5 Jun (GS) and at Porter Springs, Pershing, NV 16 Jun (JW, F&GP, DM). Two very unusual observations of Bendire's Thrasher occurred a month apart during the summer reporting period, both from high-elevation areas in n. Utah: near Randolph, Rich 14 Jun (CR) and from the Uintah Mts., Summit 14 Jul (H&CR). Two Phainopeplas were also observed n. of typical range at Cove Fort, Beaver, UT 6 Jun (SC).

As usual, vagrant warblers made a good showing during the early-summer period. A female Northern Parula was observed at Corn Creek 12 Jun (RS). Chestnut-sided Warblers were found at three Nevada locations: males at Porter Springs, Pershing 3 Jun (JW) and Miller's R.A. 5 Jun (GS), plus a female at Rancho San Rafael, Reno, Washoe 11 Jun (†D&RS, F&GP). A singing male Black-throated Blue Warbler observed at Marlette L., Washoe, NV 8 Jun (WR, NW) provided one of only a handful of spring records in the Region. A male Yellow-throated Warbler at Porter Springs, Pershing, NV 3 Jun (p.a., JW) was another exceptional find. A Black-and-white Warbler was also at Porter Springs 3 Jun (JW), and another was found near Cedar Mesa Campground, Capitol Reef N.P., Garfield, UT 22 Jun (TC). An American Redstart that was captured and banded in 1999 at the Jordanelle Wetlands, Wasatch, UT returned for its 6th consecutive summer 27 May–18 Jul (AH et al.). Additional American Redstart sightings included a female at Corn Creek 3 Jun (J&MC) and a male at Deseret Ranch, Rich, UT 10 Jun (MSt). Rounding out the warbler observations was a single Ovenbird at Corn Creek 10 Jun (JC, RSc).

SPARROWS THROUGH FINCHES

Several observers noted higher-than-normal numbers of Lark Buntings in n. Utah this summer. For example, over 60 were observed on the Randolph B.B.S. route, Rich 2 Jun (BB), and several were observed at Bear River 6 Jun+ (BO). A White-throated Sparrow graced a yard in Taylorsville, Salt Lake, UT 17 Jun (CD). Singing male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were observed at Rancho San Rafael, Washoe, NV 8 Jun (FP et al.) and 13 Jun at Moapa, Clark, NV (JW, BL et al.), with 3 at Lytle 11 Jun (LT). Male Indigo Buntings were reported from Corn Creek 12 Jun–17 Jul (C&RT et al.), Lytle 13 Jun (LT), and Moapa, Clark, NV the same day (JW, BL et al.).

A female Bobolink at Corn Creek 4 Jun (JHm fide MME) and a male at H.B.V.P. 2 Jul (MK, fide JBo) were out of range. There were several observations of Great-tailed Grackles n. of expected range, including a male at Ran-

cho San Rafael, Reno, Washoe, NV 1–8 Jun (FP), 10 at Miller's R.A. 6 Jun (JW), and 2 at the West Wendover S.T.P., Elko, NV 23 Jul (CW). A male Bronzed Cowbird was located at Corn Creek 7 Jun (JHm fide MME). Three Scott's Orioles reported from the Topaz Mts., Juab, UT 1 Jun (MMi) were in an unusual location, as was a flock of 7 Red Crossbills observed flying over Dinosaur N.M., Uintah, UT 22 Jun (RH et al.). Up to 4 White-winged Crossbills were regularly observed in the Wasatch Mts., Salt Lake, UT 3 Jun–27 Jul (LG, DS, TB, BC, SC). Seven American Goldfinches, including courting males, were observed in the Independence Mts., Elko, NV 20 Jul (CW, fide TF), suggestive of a possible Nevada breeding location for this species.

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With the success of the California Condor reintroduction program in northern Arizona, observers once again have the chance to experience the sight of these regal birds aloft. This summer, up to six condors thrilled observers in the Kolob/Lava Point area of Zion National Park, Washington County, Utah, where this photograph was taken 10 July 2004. Photograph by Rick Fridell.

Meyers (MME), M.J. Mitts (MMi), Don Molde, Mike Monson (MMn), Milton Moody (MMo), Jens Munthe, Colby Neuman, Bridget Olson, Fred Petersen, Gail Petersen, Kristin Purdy, Will Richardson, Cal Robbins, Hal and Cathy Robins, Rick Saval (RSa), Rita Schlageter (RSc), Greg Scyphers, Dennis and Rebecca Serdehely, Charlie Sheard, Bryan Shirley, Dennis Shirley, Mark Stackhouse (MSt), Mort Somer (MSo), Steve and Priscilla Summers, Jane Thompson, Carolyn and Richard Titus, Larry Tripp, Dennis Trousdale, Neal Walker, Jack Walters, Kevin Wheeler, Trish Wlodarczyk, Chris Wood. ●

State of the Region

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In approaching the matter of bird conservation in Nevada and Utah, two fundamentals of human demography need to be borne in mind. First, these two states, taken together, are by far the fastest-growing region of North America. In annual population growth, Nevada far exceeds all other U.S. states, and Utah is not far behind. Second, and often surprising to easterners, is that this region is by far the most heavily urbanized in the nation. The "Rural West" is a complete and utter myth. A much larger proportion of the people in Nevada live in cities than is the case in New Jersey or New York. One more time: The people of Nevada and Utah live in large metropolises that are metastasizing at unprecedented rates; and all efforts at bird conservation in the region must acknowledge this fact.

The basic challenge of life in the West is to move resources—water, wind, cows, etc.—from uninhabited wilderness to places where people live. The result has been an astonishing, and ongoing, transformation of the Western landscape. Deserts have gotten drier, and cities have gotten greener. Large lakes have dried up, and vast irrigation networks have sprung up. Whole ecosystems have been replaced. The result: across very broad geographic and taxonomic levels, bird populations in the West are highly dynamic and presumably unstable. Case in point: in Nevada, there are about 250 species of breeding birds, approximately 100 of which have shown population declines during the past half-century, and more than 100 of which have shown population increases during the same period (Floyd et al. 2005). The list of increasing species is long and sprawling—everything from Anna's Hummingbird to American Crow, from Bald Eagle to Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, from Double-crested Cormorant to Bewick's Wren, from Chukar to Clapper Rail.

Management and conservation priorities:

I. Phenomenological

Sagebrush conversion • Grazing-induced conversion of biologically rich sagebrush deserts to cheatgrass monocultures was compellingly documented as early as Leopold (1949). The crisis has become especially acute in recent years, with more than 1.5 million acres of sagebrush in Nevada—2% of the state's total landmass, an area twice that of Rhode Island—consumed by flames in 1999 alone (Hunt and Stiver 2000). And there seems to be no end in sight to the damage. Indeed, many experts (e.g., Knick et al. 2003) are now seriously entertaining the possibility that we may lose the sagebrush ecosystem outright. Two courses of action are being considered: (1) protection of existing high-quality sagelands; and (2) restoration of degraded or destroyed habitat. The second option is prohibitively expensive at any ecologically sensible spatial scales. Thus, the first option, which has the potential to create considerable hardship for humans, is our only realistic choice.

Water diversion • The massive translocation of bodies of water in the West is well known. Quite simply, the recent growth of the West could not have happened without engineering marvels such as the L.A. aqueduct, Hoover Dam, and so forth. But there have been terrible consequences for the region's birdlife, famously documented for the Great Basin in works such as Gaines (1988) and Williams (1991). Unlike the sagebrush crisis, the water disaster is a rallying point for community and government activism. In particular, the federal courts and government agencies (especially the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) have achieved recent successes on behalf of beleaguered waterways in the Great Basin. It is an uphill battle, though, as future human population increases in the Region will necessarily be accompanied by intensifying demands for the Region's limited water.

Riparian habitats • Clearly related to the problem of large-scale water diversion, riparian habitat quality is nonetheless usually treated as a separate problem. Typically, the problem is approached on an acre-by-acre basis, rather than at the landscape level of water diversion. And solutions tend to be of the sweat-blood-and-tears sort (tearing out tamarisk, planting cottonwoods, restoring stream banks, etc.), rather than of the court-mandated variety. Major culprits include grazing (the region's "wild horses" are arguably more of a problem than are range cattle), exotics (especially tamarisk and Russian Olive), canalization, and residential development. An impressive plan of posi-

tive, proactive approaches to protecting, restoring, enhancing, and creating riparian habitat in the Region is provided by Neel (1999).

Management and Conservation Priorities: II. Avian Guilds

Sagebrush obligates • Host-plant specificity in birds is uncommon worldwide, and rare in North America. Yet sagebrush (*Artemisia*) species have five so-called obligate bird species: Greater Sage-Grouse, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Sage Thrasher, Sage Sparrow, and Brewer's Sparrow. (It is best to term these five taxa "near-obligates" or "oligotrope," as they are not specialists in the strictest sense.) Greater Sage-Grouse is the poster-child for bird conservation in the Great Basin, and creative grassroots-and-government partnerships for sage-grouse conservation have been on the table for several years now (Stiver 2001). Protection of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, whose range barely extends into southeastern Utah, is being overseen primarily by government and citizen interests based out of Colorado. And among the sagebrush-obligate passerines, it is the Brewer's Sparrow—with its well-documented population declines—that is receiving the bulk of the attention (Neel 1999).

Colonial and gregarious waterbirds • The lower elevations of the Great Basin consist essentially of an ocean of desert with islands of wetlands. And these "islands," in turn, host some of the most astonishing concentrations of waterbirds in the world. A (very) short list includes: Eared Grebe, Snowy Plover, and Wilson's Phalaropes at Great Salt Lake, Utah (Manning and Paul 2003); Common Loon and other deepwater species at Walker Lake, Nevada (McIvor 2003); Western Sandpiper and Long-billed Dowitcher at the Carson Sink, Nevada (Chisholm and Neel 2002); White-faced Ibis and other long-legged waders in the Lahontan Valley, Nevada (Neel 1999); and even overland pelagic migrants at Pyramid Lake, Nevada (Mack 2000). There have been recent waterbird conservation successes in the Great Basin (Neel 1999, Chisholm and Neel 2002), but considerable challenges remain, foremost among which is the preservation of existing habitat.

Riparian dependents • Riparian habitat is—and always has been—scarce in the Great Basin, yet it supports a greater diversity of bird species than any other sort of habitat in the Region (see Rich 2004). Riparian-dependent birds in the northern Great Basin are a major element in The Nature Conservancy's Great Basin Ecoregional Plan (Nachlinger et al. 2001), but it is really in the southern portion of the Region that riparian-dependent birds are a hot-button issue. In particular, riparian-dependent birds are a centerpiece of the controversial, unprecedented—and successful—Clark County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (see Fleishman et al. 2003). It is significant to note that the major players here are designated primarily at the subspecies level: *yumaensis* Clapper Rail, *occidentalis* Yellow-billed Cuckoo, *extimus* Willow Flycatcher, *arizonae* Bell's Vireo, for instance.

Management and conservation priorities: III. Methodological

From monitoring to implementation • There is a fundamental problem in the contemporary approach to bird conservation: bird monitoring (and birding) is fun, whereas implementation (e.g., digging pits, girdling trees, building dikes) is not. Thus, in so much of North America, we are spinning our wheels—running our point-count surveys for yet another year, attending yet another seminar on DISTANCE sampling, devising yet another method for aerial surveying of heron colonies. Felicitously, bird conservation in the Great Basin really has moved wholeheartedly into the realm of active, on-the-ground implementation of bird-conservation strategies. Neel (1999) was a landmark publication that identified quantitative, measurable, tangible on-the-ground implementation strategies for each species of concern in Nevada, and today the proactive, implementation-based approach to bird conservation continues under the energetic leadership of John Swett, Genny Wilson, Elisabeth Ammon, Jim Parrish, Larry Neel, and others.

Adaptive management • Bird conservation in the Great Basin needs to get away from the pipe dream of "population stabilization," "long-term objectives," and so forth. That is because bird populations are inherently dynamic, and because birds live in increasingly unstable human-dominated



Greater Sage-Grouse has declined up to 80% over the past 20 years because of the loss and degradation of its sagebrush habitats, which are under additional development pressures from oil and gas industries. In 2003, at least 27 deaths from West Nile virus were documented in sage-grouse. Fortunately, the Bureau of Land Management, the largest owner of sagebrush habitats, is moving to protect the species on its lands, and the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service is considering petitions to list this species under the Endangered Species Act, but political machinations may undermine its prospects.

Photograph by Bret M. Whitney/VIREO.

landscapes. Instead, bird conservation needs to be guided by the adaptive management paradigm, compellingly articulated in our region by the Clark-County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan. The idea, in a nutshell: it is absurd for wildlife managers to plan for the future in and around fast-growing Las Vegas; instead, we must make policy, we must *adaptively manage*, as we go; and we must have the full power of the courts and agencies behind us as we do so.

Recognition that bird populations are dynamic • The idea of a "balance of nature," that populations are stable, is really as fallacious as the notion that species are immutable. All efforts at bird conservation in the Great Basin, and elsewhere, must accept the reality that bird populations are spatially and temporally dynamic.

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Summer 2004 brought widespread and occasionally heavy rains to much of the state, providing at least temporary relief from persistent drought and allowing extended breeding by many species.

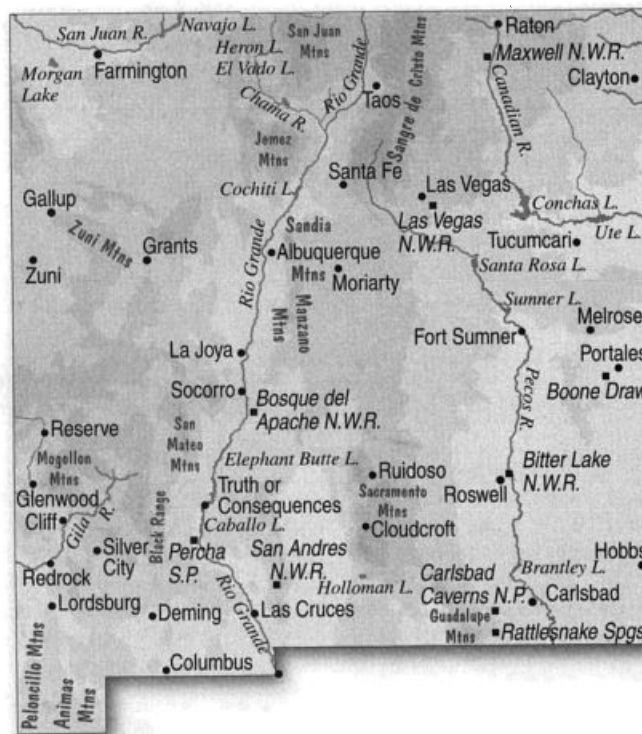
Abbreviations: B.L.N.W.R. (Bitter Lake N.W.R.); Bosque (Bosque del Apache N.W.R.); G.B.A. (Gila Bird Area, riparian habitat on Gila R. below Riverside); K.K. (Katfish Kove, private ponds and trees adjacent to Mimbres R., nw. Luna); L.V.N.W.R. (Las Vegas N.W.R.); Maxwell (Maxwell N.W.R. and vicinity); R.G.N.C. (Rio Grande Nature Center, Albuquerque); R.G.V. (Rio Grande Valley).

GREBS THROUGH RAPTORS

There was news both good and bad for nesting grebes in n. New Mexico. Eared Grebes fared well in Rio Arriba, with 225 nests at Horse L., 125 nests at Stinking L., and 10 nests at Stone L. 18–20 Jun (DS), and with reproduction noted in Jul but failed in Colfax, where 24 nests at Stubblefield L. 23 Jul and nine at Maxwell 7 Jul (DC) were all lost to high water by late Jul. Up to 45 Western Grebe nests were at Stone L. 20 Jun, and ads. were feeding young there 1 Jul (DS). A Western Grebe nest at Stubblefield L. 6 Jul (ph DC) produced at least one young, but four Clark's nests there by 23 Jul (ph. DC) all failed when flooded.

Unexpected were 32 ad. American White Pelicans at El Vado L. 19 Jun (DS) and 15 at nearby Heron L. 1 Jul (DS); noteworthy were 33 migrants at Red L., McKinley 24 Jul (CR, BN). An imm. Brown Pelican wandered to Morgan L. 24 Jul (CR, BN), where it remained into Aug (AN); another imm. Brown was captured near Las Cruces 2 Jul (P. Hinde). A Great Blue Heron nest with a nestling near Bloomfield 2 Jul (*fide* TR) was at a new San Juan breeding locale. A flock of 265 Cattle Egrets was near Lemitar 23 Jul (DH). Rare in the

New Mexico



state, an imm. White Ibis visited Bosque 27–31 Jul (G. Parker, JEP, ph. JO). An imm. Roseate Spoonbill was at B.L.N.W.R. 21–28 Jun (GW), the 3rd consecutive year the species has appeared there. Summering Wood Ducks where seldom reported included 2 below Conchas Dam 15 Jun (WW) and others at San Juan Pueblo throughout Jun (DS). The irrigated fields of s. Luna remained a Mexican

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