

The 121st CBC in Texas

Brent Ortego

Covid affected us in virtually every facet of our lives and data from this year will come with a large asterisk. There will be much discussion on what the data from this season means with the changes in number of participants and the manners in which they surveyed birds. The birding community did take the new safety guidelines by National Audubon Society seriously. We canceled gathering in large groups, canceled count downs, reduced use of out-of-home lodging, altered birding group composition, and in some situations canceled CBCs where the risk of virus transmission was not warranted to conduct the survey.

I had this big empty feeling after the counts were completed. I attended 11 CBCs and almost met nobody in the field. There were no pre-count planning meetings, no car-pooling and no Count Downs where you got to share the results of the day. I hope you enjoy our birding story below because this might be the closest you will get to the results of the counts.

Rarities

This was a difficult season to characterize. If you wanted birds moving south in above average numbers, Texas had large numbers of **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, American Robin, Purple Finch, and Pine Siskin**. If you wanted western birds moving east, Texas had relatively large numbers of **Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak**. If you liked birds with tropical flair, Texas had **Ruddy Ground-Dove, Elegant Trogon, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, and Blue Bunting**. Lastly,

if you wanted an opportunity to find a species at multiple locations which was new to a Texas CBC, we had the **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**.



Pacific-slope Flycatcher at Brazos Bend SP. Photo: Fred Land/Christmas Bird Count

Texas conducted 103 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) including reports of 384 species which included the rarities **Ruddy Ground-Dove, Mew Gull, Elegant Trogon, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Rufous-backed Robin, Painted Redstart, and Blue Bunting. Spotted Rail, Rose-throated Becard, Hammond's Flycatcher, Hermit Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and Orchard Oriole** were reported during Count Week. Each of these species added excitement to the usual drama of each count's pursuit of the best section, and highest local, State and National species tallies.

Compared with the last 10 years, 12 species which were found 60% of the time were missed, along with an additional 66 species that had been reported at least once during that period. Texas has the potential to reach 400 species in a season. The last time this was achieved was during the 2005-2006 season, but it is going to take lots of work and some luck to replicate this. Six hundred eighty-four sets of details for 260 species were provided for the Texas CBCs which included photographs of 232 species. Five species were deleted for inadequate/unconvincing documentation – Semipalmated Sandpiper, Acadian Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Prothonotary Warbler, and Tennessee Warbler.

Matagorda County – Mad Island Marsh led the State and Nation for the 23rd season (14th in a row) with 224 species. This was the 2nd year in a row it had to deal with a major cold front arriving during the day of the count. The worst part of the storm fortunately occurred during the night before the count and gradually abated as the day progressed. Cold temps and strong winds reduced production below expectations.

Guadalupe River Delta – McFaddin Family Ranches had 213 species which placed it 2nd in Texas and 3rd in the Nation. Freeport was next in line with 212 species. Fourteen additional CBCs in Texas had at least 150 species with most of these counts reporting less species than last year.

Jackson-Calhoun Counties reported 191 species and we are looking forward to the day when it will post at least 200. Corpus Christi had a solid 184 species, San Bernard NWR 180, Anzalduas-Bentsen SP 171, Weslaco 167, West Galveston Island 166, Harlingen and Laguna Atascosa NWR 163, Cypress Creek 162, Powderhorn 161, Coastal Tip and Santa Ana NWR 159, and Corpus Christi (Flour Bluff) and Galveston 153.

BEST BIRDS



Pacific-slope Flycatcher on the San Bernard NWR CBC was one of four individuals across Texas on CBCs. Photo: Bob Friedrichs/Christmas Bird Count

Pacific-slope Flycatcher – 1st Texas CBC Record. We knew it was going to be a big year when several Pacific-slope were identified in the fall leading up to the CBC season. The hype did not disappoint us at a State level with the species identified at Brazoria, Brazos Bend, San Bernard NWR, and Weslaco. The disappointments were when it was not found on your CBC.



Elegant Trogon photographed on the Weslaco CBC. Bird was present since 23 November. Photo: Huck Hutchens/Christmas Bird Count

Elegant Trogon – 1st Texas CBC Record. This was a more traditional 1st Record. It was initially reported on 23 November and the bird continued its presence until at least March. The only question being whether it would be found on Count Day.



**Rufous-backed Robin at El Paso for the 2nd Texas CBC record.
Photo: Barry Zimmer/Christmas Bird Count**



**Spotted Owl at Davis Mountains for the 3rd Texas CBC record.
Photo: Stephen Falik/Christmas Bird Count**



**Painted Redstart at Buffalo Bayou for the 3rd Texas CBC record.
Photo: John Berner/Christmas Bird Count**

Dusky-capped Flycatcher – 4th Texas CBC Record. Found at eight locations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and one to the north at Alice during fall/winter. Santa Ana NWR and Weslaco were the only two CBCs which could locate the species on count day.

Blackpoll Warbler – 4th Texas CBC Record. Rare fall migrant that had been reported on three CBCs during the 80th and 81st CBC seasons. Jerry and Karen Smith reported it on the Weslaco CBC this season.



Cape May Warbler at Harlingen for the 5th Texas CBC Record.
Photo: Donna McCown/Christmas Bird Count

Mew Gull – 7th Texas CBC Record. Found by four birders and photographed by Jay Packard on the Abilene CBC and was not discovered afterwards.



Mew Gull at Abilene CBC. Photo: Jay Packer/Christmas Bird Count



Ruddy Ground-Dove at Anzalduas-Bentsen. Photo: Brad McKinney/Christmas Bird Count



Ruddy Ground-Dove on the Davis Mountains. Photo: Carolyn Ohl/Christmas Bird Count

Ruddy Ground-Dove – 8th Texas CBC Records. Another phenomenal set of records with individuals of a species found at three CBCs during the same season. Anzalduas-Bentsen SP in the Lower Rio Grande Valley found the Ruddy Ground-Dove on 15 November and it lingered in the area through 5 February with it being photographed on the CBC by Brad McKinney. One was found in West Texas at the Davis Mountains SP on 4 December and lingered until 7 January. The bird was photographed by Carolyn Ohl during the CBC. The last individual was found on the Choke Canyon CBC by Willie Sekula on 22 December.

Blue Bunting – 11th Texas CBC Record. Species was found from five Texas locations this winter but only reported on two CBCs. Brian Berry photographed a male at Santa Ana NWR CBC which was

originally found on 9 December and lingered for one month. Tony Leukering photographed a female the day before the Anzalduas-Bentsen SP CBC. This bird was reported from 3 December to 8 February.



Blue Bunting at Santa Ana CBC. Photo: Brian Berry/Christmas Bird Count



**Blue Bunting the day before the Anzalduas-Bentsen SP CBC.
Photo: Tony Leukering/Christmas Bird Count**



**Crimson-collared Grosbeak at Santa Ana NWR. Photo: John
McKee/Christmas Bird Count**

Crimson-collared Grosbeak – 11th Texas CBC Record. There were widespread reports of this species during fall and winter. It was reported from four locations in the Coastal Bend near Corpus Christi and nine locations from Salineno to South Padre Island in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Santa Ana NWR and Weslaco CBCs were the only two counts fortunate enough to locate the species.

Count Week

National Audubon Society Compiler Resources mentions “Count week (cw) birds serve as a place holder for that species on your checklist in a given season. They are not at all a part of your official census data for that season's day.” With this being said, it is still good to know what you missed during count day.

I encourage scouting. It does help locate species for the CBC and manage your time/birder resources. It is a sick feeling when you miss a species you know was there. However, it is a worst feeling when a really rare species is found the day after your count that you did not have a clue was present. Such was the case with the **Spotted Rail**. It was discovered the day after the Choke Canyon CBC.



**Spotted Rail was discovered one day after the Choke Canyon CBC.
Photo: Willie Sekula/Christmas Bird Count**

Hammond's Flycatcher was reported at El Paso by Jim Paton the day before and after the CBC. It has also been reported on seven prior CBCs.



Rose-throated Becard the day after the Falcon Dam CBC. This species has been reported at 18 prior CBCs in Texas. Photo: Jacob Hall/Christmas Bird Count



Hermit Warbler three Days after the Santa Ana NWR CBC. It has been reported on four previous Texas CBCs. Photo: Greg Albrechtsen/Christmas Bird Count



Orchard Oriole found two Days Before the Santa Ana NWR CBC. It has been reported on 47 prior Texas CBCs. Photo: Greg Albrechtsen/Christmas Bird Count

EXCLUSIVES

One exciting aspect of participating in CBCs is finding the only species for a count and maybe for Texas. This season 48 exclusives were distributed over 36 CBCs. One individual of a species was only reported for 34 species. This is amazing when you realize birders spent 2584 days in the field and they only found one individual of each of those species. Production of exclusives varied from four at Davis Mountains, three each at Buffalo Bayou, Matagorda County and Weslaco, and two each at Balmorhea, Buffalo Lake, Freeport, Guadalupe River Delta, Lake Tawakoni, and Old River. One species was found on 25 other CBCs.

Davis Mountains had the only (11) **Montezuma Quail**, (2) **Western Screech-Owl**, **Spotted Owl**, and **Cassin's Finch**. The number of exclusives from this CBC highlights the uniqueness and scarcity of the seven counts within Texas with mountains. **Buffalo Bayou** had the only **Common Nighthawk**, **Painted Redstart**, and **Dickcissel**. **Matagorda County – Mad Island Marsh** had the only (2) **Purple Gallinule**, **jaeger sp.**, and **Brown-crested Flycatcher**. **Weslaco** had the only **Elegant Trogon**, **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**, and **Blackpoll Warbler**, and **Anzalduas-Bentsen SP** had the only **Swainson's Hawk**.



**Long-tailed Duck at Austin was the only one in Texas. Photo:
Susan Andres/Christmas Bird Count**

Balmorhea had the only (2) **Pacific Loons** and **Mountain Plover**.
Buffalo Lake had the only (2) **Ring-necked Pheasant** and (9) **Lapland Longspurs**. **Brazoria** had the only **Yellow Rail**. **Big Bend NP (east)** had the only (4) **Gray Flycatchers**. **Boerne** had the only **Scott's Oriole**, and **Chisos Mountains** had the only (70) **Mexican Jays**.



The Only Prairie Warbler was at Cypress Creek. Photo: Susan Mottin/Christmas Bird Count



Little Gull at Dallas was the only one in Texas. Photo: Chris Runk/Christmas Bird Count

Galveston had the only Western Kingbird. Guadalupe Mountains had the only Steller's Jay. Falcon Dam had the only Red-billed Pigeon. Guadalupe River Delta-McFaddin Family Ranches had the only Wood Stork and Lesser Nighthawk. Freeport had the only MacGillivray's Warbler. Houston had the only California Gull. Jackson-Calhoun had the only American Golden-Plover. Gibbons Creek had the only Great Crested Flycatcher. Lake Tawakoni had

the only **Red-throated Loon** and (2) **Smith's Longspurs**. **Lubbock County** had the only **Long-eared Owl**.



The Common Black Hawk at Freeport lingered until 23 January.

Photo: Fred Collins/Christmas Bird Count

Old River had the only **Broad-billed Hummingbird**. **Spring Creek** is the only Texas CBC with resident **Red-cockaded Woodpeckers**, and they found two on Count Day. **San Bernard NWR** found the only **Painted Bunting**, **White River** had the only **Evening Grosbeak**, and **Uvalde County** reported the only **Allen's Hummingbird**.



Band-tailed Pigeon at the West Kerr CBC is a rarity east of the mountains. Photo: Jimma Byrd/Christmas Bird Count



The 11th Texas CBC record of a Magnificent Frigatebird was at West End Galveston Island. Photo: Martin Hagne/Christmas Bird Count

MISSED

I always do a self-evaluation at the end of a CBC. Did I miss species or were they just not there? Looking at how many species on the count which were represented by one individual provides an index to the likelihood you **Missed** species. Texas CBCs this season individually averaged 13% of their species tally being represented by one bird and 9% state-wide.

Twelve species which were reported in Texas in at least six of the last 10 CBC seasons but were not found during the 121st were: 10 of the last 10 seasons – **Greater (Attwater's) Prairie-Chicken, Red Knot, and Mountain Chickadee**; eight of the last 10 seasons – **Wilson's Phalarope**; seven of the last 10 seasons – **Broad-winged Hawk, Parasitic Jaeger, Greater Pewee, Juniper Titmouse, and Louisiana Waterthrush**; six of the last 10 seasons – **Least Tern, Lewis's Woodpecker, and Wood Thrush**.

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THE COUNT SEASON

The 121st Season started on Monday 14 December with five CBCs being conducted and ran for 23 days through Tuesday 5 January for a total of 103 CBCs. Twenty registered CBCs were not conducted. Saturdays the 21st and the 2nd were the busiest days with 21 and 11 CBCs, respectively. The 23rd – 25th and 31st were not used to conduct CBCs.

Texas rain dancers, holders of weather charms and focused wishes to the Weather Makers were a little more effective this year. Weather

hampered 49% of the CBCs. Freezing temps occurred on 18% with the 17 degrees at **McNary** being the coldest. Fog was not much of a problem with it occurring on only 5%. Rain only occurred on 17% of the CBCs during this drought. It was generally welcome except when it occurred on your CBC. Winds 20+ mph occurred on 18% of the counts with the strongest at 45 mph at **Turkey Creek**. The worst weather was likely experienced by the **Turkey Creek** CBC which had a major frontal passage in the afternoon which included heavy rains.

Total CBCs - 103 (lowest since the 109th season), **birder-days – 2584** (926 below last season and the lowest since the 108th season), and **party-hours – 7965** (216 below last season and the 2nd highest for Texas).

Even though we lost 10 CBCs and 900 birder days mostly due to Covid, party-hours were the 2nd highest this decade. Compilers were mostly successful at surveying the same areas. They just did it with it with less people and had to modify transportation. Multiple vehicles in a section were common. Birder composition on boats typically were modified if they were available. Marsh buggies may not have been available on national wildlife refuges. Surveys by airboats on state wildlife management areas were restricted to staff. Lodging at distant CBCs was challenging. Lodging/facilities on conservation areas were generally not available. Many birders made long day trips or canceled because of perceived virus risks at motels.

My wife and I managed to participate in 11 CBCs with seven in a row during the first week. It was a Great Experience on the Coast being able to participate in many of the Texas Highest Species CBCs. They were all day tripped.

NEW COUNTS

Texas keeps adding and dropping CBCs as birder interest shifts in the State. Texas added **Wharton Peach Creek** as the newest CBC this season.

Brownsville, Hueco Tanks, La Sal Vieja, Lake Meredith – East, and Richland Creek Wildlife Management Area CBCs need a new compiler.

POPULATION TRENDS

[Population trend report will compare number of individuals of a species tallied this season to the last 10-years in Texas. Population changes indicated will be for those reports which deviated by more than one standard deviation from that species 10-year average unless otherwise indicated. Percent decreasing is underrepresented because missed birds are not part of the %. National trend data for > 50 years can be found at <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone>]

Table 2. Percentage of species increasing or decreasing by season in Texas.

SEASON	INCREASING	DECREASING	NO CHANGE	
109 th	19%	16%	65%	Hurricane Ike
110 th	24%	14%	60%	drought
111 th	30%	4%	66%	
112 th	26%	22%	52%	drought
113 th	19%	24%	57%	drought
114 th	13%	21%	66%	drought
115 th	25%	15%	60%	
116 th	21%	16%	63%	
117 th	20%	15%	65%	warm

118 th	17%	20%	63%	Hurricane
Harvey				
119 th	15%	27%	58%	wet fall
120 th	17%	24%	59%	dry fall
121 st	20%	24%	55%	drought

Dry ground conditions prevailed during fall and winter for the 2nd year in a row. **Rainfall** accumulation was **10 inches below average** for the 40 inches rain-belt in the Central Coast where I live and **16 inches below average** during the previous year. These extended dry conditions in Texas and most of the western states likely influenced migration patterns and survival of various species.

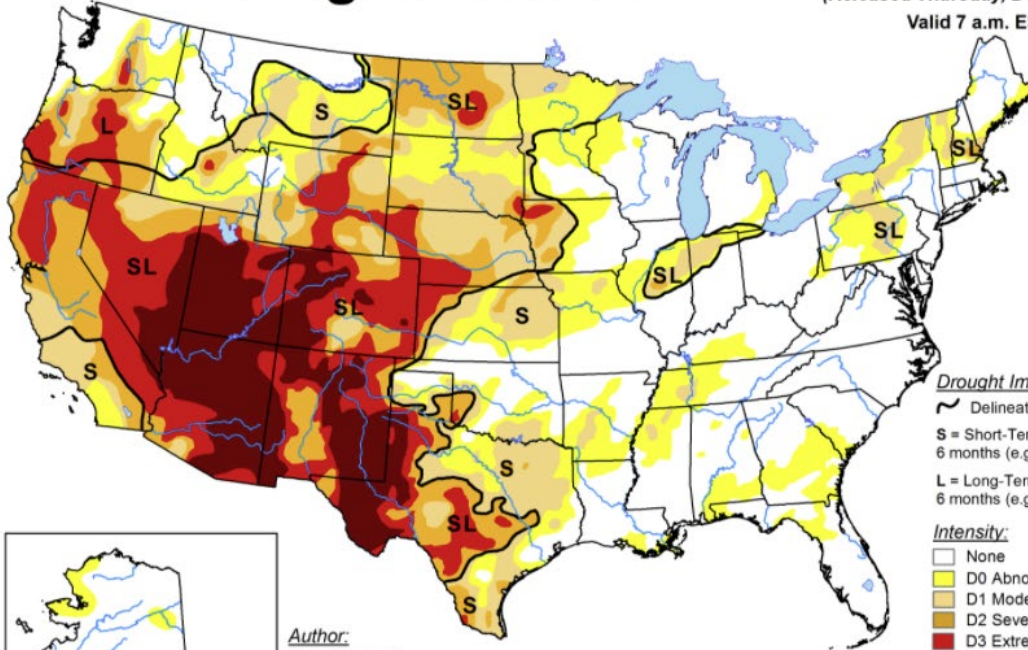
Texas CBCs this season had the **2nd highest rate of declining species** over the last 13 years. Population declines appeared to be evenly spread between resident and migratory species. Migratory species had a higher percentage of species above average than resident species with 25% increasing versus 12% for resident.

U.S. Drought Monitor

December 15, 2020

(Released Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020)

Valid 7 a.m. EST



Drought Impact Types:

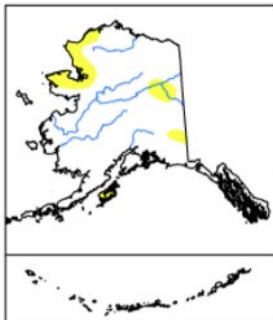
~ Delineates dominant impacts

S = Short-Term, typically less than 6 months (e.g. agriculture, grasslands)

L = Long-Term, typically greater than 6 months (e.g. hydrology, ecology)

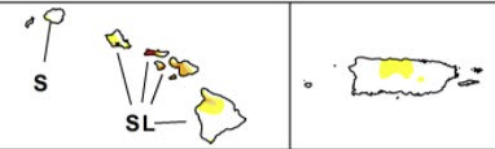
Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought



Author:

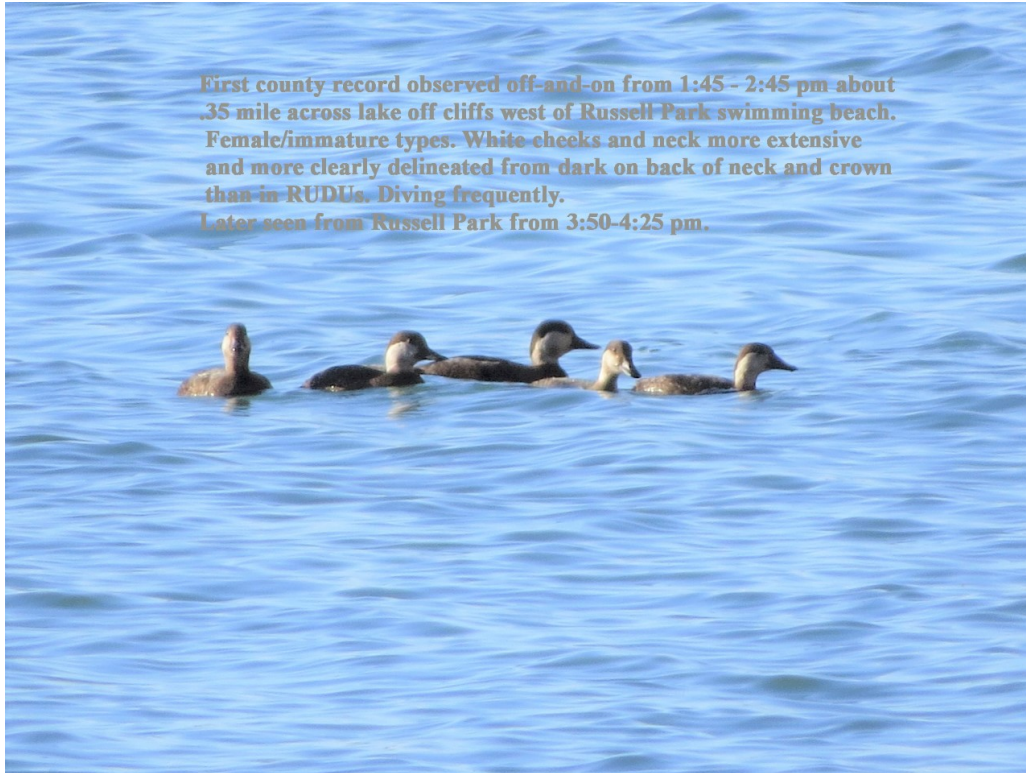
David Simeral
Western Regional Climate Center



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>



droughtmonitor.unl.edu



Black Scoters occurred more frequently inland this season. Photo: Tim Fennell/Christmas Bird Count

Waterfowl numbers fluctuate dramatically from year to year depending on food availability in the Flyways. **Greater White-fronted Goose** (2860) and “**white**” geese (56,113) continued to occur in below average numbers. Half of the **puddle duck** species and four species of **diving duck** were below average. Some of the lower numbers may have been influenced by a major cold front arriving on the first day of the CBC season with strong winds creating shallow bays. Shallow water and rough conditions made difficult survey conditions for three of the CBCs which typically report large numbers of waterfowl.



**Record numbers of Brown Booby included 14 at Corpus Christi –
Flour Bluff CBC.**

Brown Boobies occurred again in record numbers with 17 spread over four CBCs. **Northern Gannet** was almost missed this year with only two being reported. Most other fish-eating birds occurred in expected numbers. Exceptions were mostly related to water conditions. Lake Balmorhea was very low in West Texas resulting in fewer grebes, and it was very difficult to survey bay waters being whipped by 20+ mph winds.

Bald Eagles (338) and **Zone-tailed Hawks** (11) were above average. **Osprey** (1142), **Northern Harrier** (1363), and **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (203) were below average.



Zone-tailed Hawks were found on seven CBCs with this bird being at Westcave Preserve. Photo: Jeffrey Jackson/Christmas Bird Count

Rails and Cranes as a group were difficult to survey this year with access to boats and marsh equipment being reduced. **Whooping Cranes** (110) had their 3rd lowest tally this decade but was within its normal year-to-year variation.

Whimbrel (24) and **American Woodcock** (215) were the only two shorebird species reported above average. Half of the remaining 27 species were below average. Bad weather and **Kenedy County-Wind Turbines** not being conducted hampered results.

Ten species of **gulls** were reported with three being above average and two below. Four of the seven species of **terns/skimmers** declined with **Gull-billed Tern** (118), **Forster's Tern** (4379), and **Black Skimmer** (1467) being reported at their lowest level this decade for the 2nd year in a row.

Five of the seven main dove species declined again. **Rock Pigeon** (27,111), **Eurasian Collared-Dove** (4196), **White-winged Dove** (16,666) and **Mourning Dove** (16,731) being at their lowest level this decade. These low numbers are not a one-time dip because of conditions this year. It is a **continuation of several years of low numbers.**

The **Barn Owl** (72) occurred at the lowest level this decade while all other owl populations were reported as expected. I enjoy the occasional owls found during the day. I particularly enjoy **screech-owls** when they respond to your calls from inside a hollow tree.



The Eastern Screech-Owl like this one at Lake Lewisville are typically surveyed at night. The 192 nocturnal hours this season were 10% below last season. Photo: Doug Ghrist/Christmas Bird Count

The expected nine species of hummingbirds were tallied. **Anna's** (43) and **Broad-tailed** (14) were reported at the highest level of the decade. Twenty-one reports of **Ruby-throated, Black-chinned, and Rufous** lacked documentation. Compilers do not appreciate how difficult it is to accurately identify the females and immatures of these species.



Red-headed Woodpecker like this one in Victoria were more common on the Coast than normal, but not (86 this year vs 116 average) across the State. This raises the question – was food scarce inland? Photo: Bob Friedrichs/Christmas Bird Count

Woodpeckers were reported in highs and lows. **Acorn Woodpecker** (143) was reported at its highest level this decade. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** (1425) and **Northern Flicker** (1991) were well above average. However, **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** (1687), **Red-bellied Woodpecker** (3342), and **Hairy Woodpecker** (38) had their lowest tally for the decade. **Ladder-backed Woodpecker** (1173) was also well below average.

The **Prairie Falcon** (16) was the only falcon which was not below average.



The Peregrine Falcon at Matagorda County was representative of one of five species of falcons which were reported at their lowest level this decade in Texas. Photo: Andrew Hamlett/Christmas Bird Count

Texas reported 17 species of flycatchers with 10 being at normal levels. The 245 **Couch's Kingbirds** was below average, but what was making the headlines was the relatively high numbers of **Pacific-slope** and **Dusky-capped flycatchers**. **Gray Flycatcher** (4) and **Black Phoebe** (173) were also at record levels for this decade and **Ash-throated Flycatcher** (43) and **Tropical Kingbird** (164) were above average.

It was great to read the two reports of **Northern Shrikes** in the Panhandle but disturbing to read the results of the tally for Loggerhead Shrike (1971). This species has been declining in numbers for the last six years.

It was odd this season when only three species of vireos were reported. There usually are one or more uncommon species. Corvids were also quiet. The five species of jays, two species of crows, and two species of ravens occurred at expected population levels.



The Common Raven at McNary appears to be making more noise than corvid tallies.

Swallows were all at normal population levels. **Black-crested Titmouse** (2580), **Verdin** (383), and **Bushtit** (462) had their highest tallies for the decade which was a continuation of high numbers from last season.

Brown-headed Nuthatch (78) was at its lowest level. All nine **wren** species' populations were average. **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** (3553) had its highest tally for the decade and **Black-tailed** (93) was above average.

Most thrush populations declined last season. **Eastern Bluebird** (6837) tally was average and all other regular occurring species were above average. **Western Bluebird** (456), **Hermit Thrush** (2422), **Clay-colored Thrush** (85), and **American Robin** (102,763) had their highest counts for the decade.



Mountain Bluebird at Corpus Christi. Photo: Skip Cantrell

The **Mountain Bluebird** would have been the Poster Bird for this season if we did not have so many other rarities in the State. The major excitement generated by the Mountain Bluebird was that it was found on 26 CBCs when 10 or less in a season is the norm. This species is primarily found on CBCs in the Panhandle, West Texas, and western Edwards Plateau regions. It was found this season as far east as Lewisville, College Station, and Jackson-Calhoun Counties, and as far south as Falcon Dam. The 1152 Mountain Bluebirds reported were the highest for this decade, but that number had been topped 11 other times

since the 67th CBC season. This species was special this season for the 15 normally Mountain Bluebird deprived counts, including first count records on eight of these CBCs.

The 33 **Crissal Thrashers** was the highest tally for the decade and the 48 **Sage Thrashers** was twice its average. The Sage was reported at dozens of localities on eBird this winter but was only found on nine CBCs which was below expectations.

Sprague's Pipit bounced back from two subpar seasons to produce a tally of 168 which was higher than those two seasons combined. **Cedar Waxwings** (50,464) were above average. The 68 **Phainopeplas** reported were twice as high as its 10-year average. The 586 **Chestnut-collared Longspurs** at Fort Hood were 10 times higher than their 10-year average.

Warblers. Texas produced 22 species of warblers this season of which five were only located on one CBC. High numbers of warbler species typically occur in diverse woodland habitats near the Coast with some of the more skilled birders required to locate the species. This season **Freeport** had the most species with 15, **Guadalupe River Delta-McFaddin Family Ranches** had 14, **Brazoria-Columbia Bottomlands, Harlingen, Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh, and Santa Ana** each had 11. The other 97 Texas CBCs had less.

Yellow-breasted Chat (2) was the only regular “warbler” reported which occurred below average. This was an unusual change since Texas led the Nation several times with the most chats.

Eight other warbler species whose populations have normally moved south occurred in above average numbers (those whose tallies are usually less than five). **Yellow Warbler** (15), **Yellow-rumped Warbler** (17,179), **Black-throated Gray Warbler** (16) and **Wilson's Warbler** (111) were also above average.

WHERE WERE THE SPARROWS?

Sparrow populations trended downward during the last two years. Twelve species were below average during the 119th Season and 18 during the 120th. Seven species are below average and four above this season. Top Sparrow CBCs were Balcones Canyonland with 24 species, Cypress Creek 22, Fort Hood 21, and Austin, Guadalupe River Delta, and Harlingen 19 species.



Nelson's Sparrow at West End Galveston had the highest tally (82) of the decade due to calm conditions. Photo: Dora Ann Ortego/Christmas Bird Count

Quality Spartina salt marsh habitat and calm conditions helped locate the secretive **Nelson's Sparrow** on the West End Galveston CBC. The "excited calls" from an IBIRD PRO Common Yellowthroat did the rest. This was the first time I had used this recording for this species, and Dora Ann and I tallied 43 of the 82 Nelson's on this CBC which was the most I have found in a couple of decades. I will definitely try it again in other setting to test its effectiveness.

Seaside Sparrows were reported at their lowest level this decade. Chipping and Lark Sparrows were below average and Black-throated Sparrow above average.



Clay-colored Sparrow at Guadalupe River Delta was reported above average in Texas. Photo: Bob Friedrichs/Christmas Bird Count

Harris's, Vesper, and Swamp sparrows and Canyon Towhee were below average. Eastern Towhee was above.



Lark Bunting at Westcave Preserve was more common this season on eastern CBCs but was only average in abundance in Texas. Photo: Jeffrey Jackson/Christmas Bird Count



This Western Tanager at Victoria was one of seven reported in Texas for the highest tally this decade.

This was a good season for lingering grosbeaks with four species being reported.



This Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Jackson-Calhoun Counties helped produce the highest tally (4) for the decade. Photo: Sue Heath/Christmas Bird Count



The all-time record for Black-headed Grosbeak on Texas CBCs was established this season with 11. This individual was at Harlingen and the highest count was three at College Station. Photo: Stephanie Bilodeau/Christmas Bird Count



McNary Reported 17,889 Yellow-headed Blackbirds for an all-time high Texas CBC count. Photo: Barry Zimmer/Christmas Bird Count

Most blackbird tallies declined this season. **Red-winged Blackbird** (587,480), **Brewer's Blackbird** (10,670), **Common Grackle** (32,557), **Great-tailed Grackle** (107,823) and **Bronzed Cowbird** (720) were below average for the past decade.



This Bullock's Oriole at Matagorda County was one of two found on Texas CBCs. Photo: Clay Taylor/Christmas Bird Count



The two Audubon's Orioles at Kerrville were part of an all-time CBC record of 78. Choke Canyon had the most in Texas with 16. Photo: Bob Nelson/Christmas Bird Count



This Baltimore Oriole at Guadalupe River Delta was one of five in Texas which tied the highest count for the decade. Photo: Brent Ortego/Christmas Bird Count

Purple Finch (247) and **Lesser Goldfinch** (1889) were above average for the decade and **Pine Siskin** (9324) was 2X as high as their average. **House Sparrows** (11,882) are still declining, and the **Evening Grosbeak** at White River was the 1st reported this decade.

MOST COMMON BIRDS

Nine species occurred in at least 95 of the 103 CBCs in Texas last season. Five made the century mark. **Red-tailed Hawk** occurred in all 103 Texas CBCs. **Northern Mockingbird** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**

were the next most widespread occurring in 102 CBCs. **Mourning Dove** occurred in 101, **Northern Cardinal** 100, **American Kestrel** and **Savannah Sparrow** 98, **Great Blue Heron** 96, and **Killdeer** 95.

PHOTOGRAPHS

A record 451 photographs were received to document 232 species. I used 38 of these photos from 26 CBCs in this report. I encourage compilers to submit photos of birds reported on their CBC. I need more photos for documenting unusual species. I also use photos of common species to help tell the story of population trends of many species that are not rare.

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This was my 15th season editing Texas CBCs. I have come to appreciate the effort that must have been required by my predecessor, Keith Arnold, who edited Texas CBCs for 35 years.

We reported this season on many birds moving north, east, west and south of their normal winter ranges. These were not just vagrants. There were numerous major movements of species seeking habitat and food resources. Did they survive? Will they return? Join us during the next CBC Season to find out.