

BIRDS OF BRAZOS COUNTY, TEXAS

WITH ONE ILLUSTRATION

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Brazos County, situated in the southeastern part of Texas, is in what Cope (Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., no. 17, 1880) termed the Eastern Texas Plain, a Tertiary lacustrine deposit. The bird fauna consists of eastern, southern, and western elements. Less than sixty miles to the south the fauna is distinctly that of the Gulf Coast, and approximately one hundred miles to the west, where the first abrupt rise in elevation is encountered (the so-called first plateau), the avian fauna contains a large number of distinctly western genera and species.

Topographically, the county varies from nearly flat to gently rolling, with elevations between 300 and 400 feet. The uplands support dense stands of post oaks and open prairies. The river bottoms consist of poorly drained lands and swamps, supporting heavy stands of water oak, pecans, hackberry, and other hydrophilous vegetation.

This report on the birds is based upon specimens in the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, supplemented by the sight records and notes of Mrs. D. Scoates, T. D. Burleigh, Walter P. Taylor, Valgene Lehmann, Dan Lay, Bernard E. Ludeman, and myself. In instances where specimens have been available the name of the species is preceded by an asterisk. I am indebted to Dr. H. C. Oberholser for checking the identifications of all specimens and for many helpful suggestions.

RESIDENT SPECIES

Here are listed those species that are considered permanent residents in the county. Individual birds may move to and from the area seasonally, but the species, as such, are thought to be here the year round.

- Ward Heron (*Ardea herodias wardi*)
- Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)
- *Western Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura teter*)
- Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus atratus*)
- Cooper Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)
- *Eastern Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis borealis*)
- *Florida Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus alleni*)
- *Eastern Sparrow Hawk (*Falco sparverius sparverius*)
- *Texas Bob-white (*Colinus virginianus texanus*)
- *Purple Gallinule (*Ionornis martinica*)
- Western Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura marginella*)
- Killdeer (*Oxyechus vociferus vociferus*)
- Road-runner (*Geococcyx californianus*)
- Barn Owl (*Tyto alba pratincola*)
- Hasbrouck Screech Owl (*Otus asio hasbroucki*)
- Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus virginianus*)
- *Florida Barred Owl (*Strix varia georgica*)
- Southern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus auratus*)
- *Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Centurus carolinus*)
- Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)
- Southern Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus auduboni*)
- *Southern Downy Woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens pubescens*)
- *Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata cyanotephra*)
- Southern Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos paulus*)
- *Plumbeous Chickadee (*Penthestes carolinensis agilis*)
- *Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*)
- White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis carolinensis*)
- *Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus ludovicianus*)
- *Eastern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos polyglottos*)
- *Southern Robin (*Turdus migratorius achrusterus*)

- *Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis sialis*)
- *White-rumped Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus excubitorides*)
- *English Sparrow (*Passer domesticus domesticus*)
- *Southern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna argutula*)
- Rio Grande Red-wing (*Agelaius phoeniceus megapotamus*)
- *Bronzed Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula aeneus*)
- *Louisiana Cowbird (*Molothrus ater buphilius*)
- *Big-billed Cardinal (*Richmondia cardinalis magnirostris*)
- Western Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*)
- *Western Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus strigatus*)

WINTER VISITANTS

In this category are listed those species occurring in this vicinity only in fall, winter, and early spring. None of them is known to breed here.

- Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps podiceps*)
- Florida Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus floridanus*)
- Common Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*)
- Baldpate (*Mareca americana*)
- American Pintail (*Dafila acuta taitzihoa*)
- *Ring-necked Duck (*Nyroca collaris*)
- Western Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis calurus*)
- Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus platypterus*)
- Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter velox velox*)
- *American Coot (*Fulica americana americana*)
- American Woodcock (*Philohela minor*)
- *Wilson Snipe (*Capella delicata*)
- Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia hypugaea*)
- Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus luteus*)
- *Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius varius*)
- *Northern Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius atrothorax*)
- *Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*)
- Prairie Horned Lark (*Otocoris alpestris praticola*)
- Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)
- *Brown Creeper (*Certhia familiaris americana*)
- *Western House Wren (*Troglodytes a'don parkmanii*)
- *Eastern Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum rufum*)
- *Western Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum longicauda*)
- *Eastern Robin (*Turdus migratorius migratorius*)
- *Eastern Hermit Thrust (*Hylocichla guttata faxoni*)
- *Eastern Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa satrapa*)
- *Eastern Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Corthylio calendula calendula*)
- American Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta rubescens*)
- Sprague Pipit (*Anthus spraguei*)
- *Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)
- *Migrant Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*)
- *Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris*)
- *Myrtle Warbler (*Dendroica coronata coronata*)
- *Hoover Warbler (*Dendroica coronata hooveri*)
- Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna magna*)
- *Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)
- *Eastern Red-wing (*Agelaius phoeniceus phoeniceus*)
- Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*)
- Brewer Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)
- *Eastern Cowbird (*Molothrus ater ater*)
- Eastern Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus purpureus*)
- *Red-eyed Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus erythrophthalmus*)
- *Eastern Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis tristis*)
- *Pale Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis pallidus*)
- *Churchill Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis oblitus*)
- *Leconte Sparrow (*Passerherbulus caudacutus*)
- *Eastern Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus gramineus*)
- *Slate-colored Junco (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)

- *Eastern Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla pusilla*)
- *Western Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla arenacea*)
- *White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)
- *Eastern Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca iliaca*)
- *Mississippi Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia beata*)

SUMMER VISITANTS

Birds occurring only in summer are placed in this group.

- Eastern Green Heron (*Butorides virescens virescens*)
- *Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus americanus*)
- Cherrie Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor aserriensis*)
- *Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)
- *Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*)
- *Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus tyrannus*)
- *Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscivora forficata*)
- *Northern Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus boreus*)
- Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*)
- Eastern Wood Pewee (*Myiochanes virens*)
- *Purple Martin (*Progne subis subis*)
- *Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliopitila caerulea caerulea*)
- *Northern White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus noveboracensis*)
- *Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)
- Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*)
- Eastern Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica aestiva aestiva*)
- *Western Parula Warbler (*Compothlypis americana ramalinae*)
- Maryland Yellow-throat (*Geothlypis trichas trichas*)
- Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens virens*)
- Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*)
- *Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra rubra*)
- Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)
- *Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris ciris*)
- *Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)

MIGRANT SPECIES

Birds that migrate through the county in spring and/or fall, but do not nest or winter here, are included in this list.

- American Egret (*Casmerodius albus egretta*)
- Little Blue Heron (*Florida caerulea caerulea*)
- American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*)
- Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli*)
- Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea violacea*)
- Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis canadensis*)
- Lesser Snow Goose (*Chen hyperborea hyperborea*)
- Gadwall (*Chaulelasmus streperus*)
- Green-winged Teal (*Nettion carolinense*)
- Blue-winged Teal (*Querquedula discors*)
- Cinnamon Teal (*Querquedula cyanoptera*)
- *Shoveller (*Spatula clypeata*)
- Redhead (*Nyroca americana*)
- Canvas-back (*Nyroca valisineria*)
- Greater Scaup (*Nyroca marila*)
- Lesser Scaup (*Nyroca affinis*)
- American Golden-eye (*Glaucionetta clangula americana*)
- Buffle-head (*Charitonetta albeola*)
- Upland Plover (*Bartramia longicauda*)
- *Western Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria cinnamomea*)
- Greater Yellow-legs (*Totanus melanoleucus*)
- Lesser Yellow-legs (*Totanus flavipes*)
- Least Sandpiper (*Pisobia minutilla*)
- *Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*)
- *Southern Parula Warbler (*Compothlypis americana americana*)
- Black and White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)

- Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens virens*)
- Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*)
- Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*)
- Wilson Pileolated Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla pusilla*)
- Canadian Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*)
- Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)
- *Texas Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris pallidior*)

VAGRANT

In this category are placed those birds that are of rare occurrence in this county.

- *White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)
- Blue Goose (*Chen caerulescens*)
- Red-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes cafer collaris*)
- Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus mexicanus*)
- American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)
- *Great-tailed Grackle (*Cassidix mexicanus prosopidicola*)
- Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

Of the 157 kinds of birds recorded for Brazos County, 40 are permanent residents, 53 are winter visitants, 24 are summer visitants only, and 40 occur in migration or rarely at other seasons. For example, the Great-tailed Grackle, which nests commonly on the

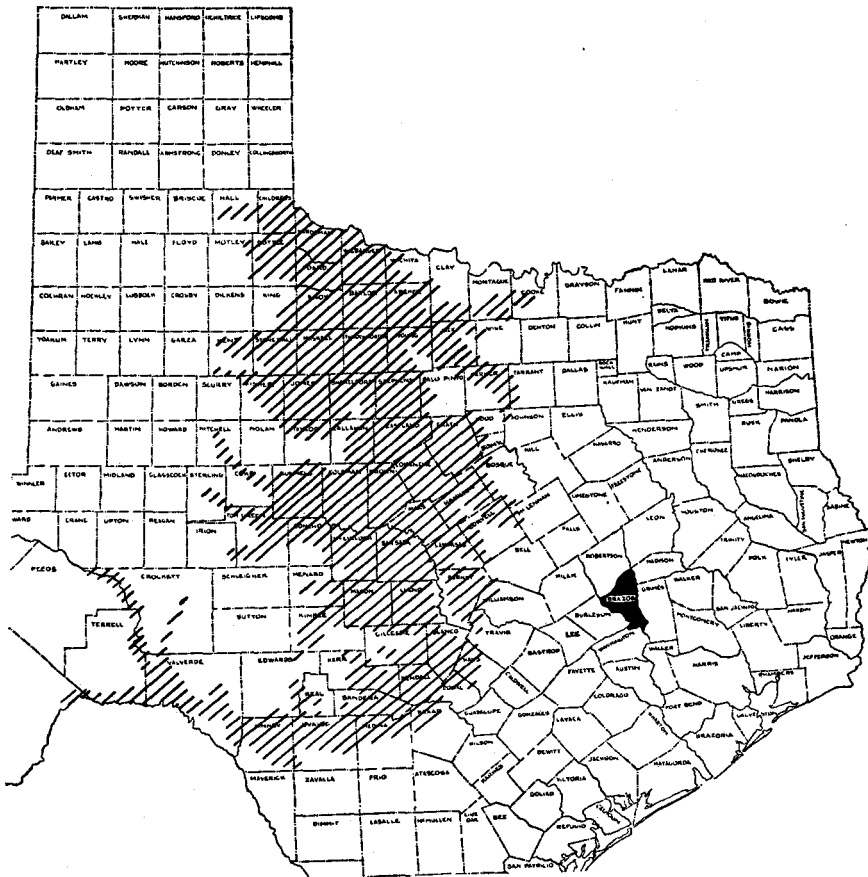


Fig. 23. Map of Texas showing locations of Brazos County (solid black) and "first plateau" (shaded).

coastal plains fifty miles to the south, and the Vermilion Flycatcher, a common breeding bird on the "first plateau" one hundred miles west, occur in the county only for a brief time after the nesting season. Perhaps their occurrence should be attributed to postbreeding wandering.

Analysis of the avifauna of the county reveals that it consists predominantly of eastern and southern forms; slightly more than 8 per cent of the birds are distinctly western. In Kerr County, situated largely on the "first plateau" in central Texas, however, the percentage of western elements is considerably greater. For example, cursory examination of the catalog of specimens in the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection reveals that no less than 16 kinds of distinctly western birds breed in that county. In Brazos County the number is 4, whereas in Walker County, some 60 miles east of Brazos County, the number drops to 3. A tabular comparison of the western forms breeding in each of these three counties suggests that the eastern edge of the "first plateau" (see map) marks the eastern limits of the ranges of most of the western birds occurring at this latitude in Texas. Toward the north, the plateau swings eastward, thus probably accounting for the occurrence of several western birds in Dallas County (see Stillwell, Check-list of birds of Dallas County, Texas, 1939).

WESTERN BIRDS FOUND BREEDING IN KERR, BRAZOS, AND WALKER COUNTIES, TEXAS
(LATITUDE 30° — 31° N)

Kerr County	Brazos County	Walker County
Western Mourning Dove	Western Mourning Dove	Western Mourning Dove
Road-runner	Road-runner	Road-runner
Western Lark Sparrow	Western Lark Sparrow	Western Lark Sparrow
Western Turkey Vulture	Western Turkey Vulture	.....
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	.....	.....
Ash-throated Flycatcher	.....	.....
Western Wood Pewee	.....	.....
Vermilion Flycatcher	.....	.....
Bush-tit	.....	.....
Bewick Wren	.....	.....
Canyon Wren	.....	.....
Western Mockingbird	.....	.....
Long-tailed Chat	.....	.....
Bullock Oriole	.....	.....
Western Blue Grosbeak	.....	.....
House Finch	.....	.....
Western Chipping Sparrow	.....	.....

It seems worthwhile to compare the bird population of Brazos County, 30° N, with that of Bannock County, Idaho, 43° N (Davis, Condor, vol. 37, 1935, pp. 233-238), to bring out the effect of latitude and other factors of geographic position on seasonal composition.

Classes	Brazos County Texas		Bannock County Idaho	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Permanent residents	40	25.5	35	22
Summer visitants	24	15	91	56
Winter visitants	53	34	11	7
Migrants	40	25.5	24	15
Total	157		161	

In Idaho the majority of birds are summer visitants, whereas in Texas winter visitants constitute the largest class. Actually, the number of species and individual birds in Brazos County is lower in summer than it is in winter. The reverse is true in the northern states.

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