

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
BIRD RECORDS
DECEMBER - FEBRUARY 1995-96

March 06, 1996

Attached is a list of observations reported by visitors and staff for the period December 1 - February 29. I've compiled only those observations for species which are listed as **Rare, Accidental, Hypothetical** or **Not included** (?) on the park's checklist. A **"?-win"** indicates a species on the checklist but not for the winter season.

It has been a rather strange winter season, not so much from a weather standpoint, but rather from unprecedented government shutdowns that caused us to close the park to visitors. Not only were visitors prohibited from entering, but also staff was not allowed to go out into the park. As a consequence, we have very few observations to report for the months of December and January. Where this was critical was with the reports of the **Elegant trogon** on the Window trail. These observations were never confirmed with photographs or even a detailed report. (One of the reporting parties didn't know what they had seen. They asked if we had parrots in the park and then described a trogon...). All three reports remain unconfirmed.

The shutdown also had an impact on the annual Christmas count. We were allowed to organize a small count but were limited to paved roads and developed areas. Because of this, counters missed some species that were present during the period. Of the species observed, numbers were down from previous years. Again, this was due in part to the limited access but climatic conditions probably also played a role. (See attached Christmas Count results).

Continued drought conditions had a major impact on bird populations in the area. Precipitation totals for the three month period were dismal: Panther Junction: 0.17 ". Chisos Basin: 0.23". Rio Grande Village: 0.12". Castolon: 0.05". Persimmon Gap: 0.09". With the exception of the Rio Grande, there is little surface water available for wildlife populations. The river itself is at very low levels. Traditionally the Big Bend has high concentrations of winter sparrows. This winter, sparrows were almost non-existent. Waterfowl also were in low numbers, although a river patrol by Park Ranger Marcos Paredes in early February revealed that ducks had concentrated in isolated areas of the river with deeper water channels.

On that same trip Paredes reported sighting a **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** at river mile 875 (between Santa Elena, Mexico and Talley campsite). According to Wauer (1996), there have been only two reports of this species in the park; one in April, 1967 at Rio Grande Village, and a second in May, 1988 along the river from Reed camp to San Vicente. Currently this species is listed as "hypothetical" in the spring for the park.

Another hypothetical species reported was a **Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet** on January 8 at Rio Grande Village by Park Ranger Bill Bourbon. Bourbon observed the bird several times during the morning of the 8th, but when he returned to photograph it in the afternoon he was unable to relocate the bird. Again, Wauer lists only two sightings of this species; one in April, 1975 in Green Gulch, and a second in May, 1991 in Blue Creek Canyon.

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DECEMBER - FEBRUARY 1995-96

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>PARK STATUS</u>
Eared grebe	?	2/8	Rio Grande Santa Elena to Talley	Marcos Paredes	rare
Black-crowned night-heron	?	12/29	Rio Grande Vill.	K.Stinnet	acc
	?	2/08	Rio Grande S.E. to Talley	Marcos Paredes	acc
Fulvous whistling duck	1	2/08	Rio Grande mile 875	Marcos Paredes	hyp
Blue-winged teal	?	2/08	Rio Grande S.E. to Talley	Marcos Paredes	rare
Northern shoveler	?	2/08	Rio Grande S.E. to Talley	Marcos Paredes	rare
	10	2/09	Cottonwood Camp.	Mark Flippo	rare
	15	2/13	" "	Mark Flippo	rare
Ring-necked duck	12	12/29	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	rare
	8	2/05	" "	Mark Flippo	rare
Ruddy duck	?	2/08	Rio Grande S.E. to Talley	Marcos Paredes	? win.
Wild turkey	1	1/18	Grapevine Hills	John Goldman	rare
	1	2/25	" "	Roger Barnaby	rare
Gambel's Quail	30	2/05	Estufa canyon	J&N Hurst	rare
Sandhill crane	3	12/16	Rio Grande Vill.	R.Skiles V. Naylor	rare
Greater yellowlegs	?	2/08	Rio Grande S.E. to Talley	Marcos Paredes	? win.
Solitary sandpiper	1	12/01	Mariscal Canyon	Mark Flippo	? win.
	1	2/03	Boquillas Canyon	Mark Flippo	? win
Common ground-dove	1	2/03	Rio Grande Vill.	Bill Bourbon	spo
Anna's hummingbird	5	12/01-02	Mariscal Canyon	Mark Flippo	acc
	1	12/29	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	acc

Elegant trogon	1*	11/28	Window trail	?	acc
	1*	12/08	Window trail	E. Cowan	acc
	1*	1/08	Window trail	Luci Nash	acc

***Review species; report sent to TBRC:Lasley Accepted by TBRC.**

N. Beardless- tyrannulet	1	1/08	Rio Grande Vill.	Bill Bourbon	hyp
Scrub Jay	1	2/12	Basin	Brian Gibbons	spo
	2	2/29	Juniper Canyon	Brain Gibbons	spo
Northern parula	1	1/07	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	rare
	1	2/13	" "	L.C. Olmstead	rare
Black-throated gray warbler	1	1/22	" "	Bruce Dacker	acc.
Clay-colored sparrow	3	2/13	Cottonwood camp.	Mark Flippo	spo
Field sparrow	1	1/27	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	spo.
Scott's oriole	1	1/27	Rte 13, MP 19	Bill Bourbon	acc

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
BIRD RECORDS
MARCH - MAY, 1996

June 5, 1996

Attached is a list of observations reported by visitors and staff for the period March 1 - May 31. I've compiled only those observations for species which are listed as **Rare, Accidental, Hypothetical** or **Not included** (?) on the park's checklist. A "?spr" indicates a species which is documented for the park but not in the spring season.

Where to begin with this spring season? It has certainly been one full of surprises, especially in light of continued drought conditions and a very quiet winter preceding. There were several significant weather events during the period; March registered no measurable precipitation at any of the park's rain gauges. April brought an Easter storm that included snow, hail and high winds. May finally saw several heavy rainfalls, including a 1.6 inch downpour at Rio Grande Village that also involved damaging winds (tornado?) which snapped trees like matchsticks. Year to date precipitation as compared to ytd totals for May 1995 (+ or -) is as follows: Panther Junction; 2.07 " (- 0.5") Chisos Basin; 2.25" (- 1.21"), Rio Grande Village; 2.50" (+0.01"), Castolon; 0.57" (- 0.67"), and Persimmon Gap; 1.73" (+0.04"). Obviously the Big Bend area continues to be very dry.

Given the drought conditions and the very quiet winter season, I had no great hopes for the spring.... What ended up happening was an incredible showing of vagrant species, several of which were either new to the park (one new to Texas!) or species which had previously been listed as hypotheticals, lacking documentation for inclusion on the main list.

The surprises began March 30 when a crew of National Biological Survey bird researchers (NBS - Michelle Davis, Brian Gibbons, Alex Lindsay, and Hira Walker) reported a **Violet-crowned hummingbird** at the Barker House. The bird was subsequently seen by many other observers and photo-documented by Bernard Heyman during the two days it was present. Reports and photographs were submitted to the Texas Bird Records Committee. This species has been reported in the park before and is currently listed as "hypothetical". None of those previous records were confirmed.

On April 14 Dale and Carolyn Ohl observed an unusual tanager in Pine Canyon. Their report reached the park two days later with a tentative identification of a male **Flame-colored tanager**. Alex Lindsay of the NBS crew relocated the bird on the 18th and was able to get some excellent photographs.

Later other members of the crew, as well as some park visitors, also observed the tanager. The last reported observation was on April 19th. On April 20th the same NBS crew reported a second tanager, this one possibly a first spring male, in the Chisos Basin near the oxidation ponds. The bird was photo-documented by Alex Lindsay and Brian Gibbons. The last reported observation was on April 22nd. Reports and slides of both birds were also submitted to the TBRC. If accepted, these observation will constitute the first records for Texas.

NBS researcher Brian Gibbons reported and photographed a **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** in Pine canyon on April 23. On May 8 a group involved in a Colima warbler census (Ribble/Parmeter/Flippo) heard two dusky-capped flycatchers calling and one member of the party saw the birds. This species is listed as accidental in the park and is a review species in Texas. Reports and slides were submitted to the TBRC.

Anne Belamy reported a **Greater Pewee** at Rio Grande Village on April 26th. Another Texas review species and listed as accidental in the park, this bird too was reported to the TBRC. Unfortunately no photographs were obtained.

The wave of unusual species continued into May, beginning with a May 1 report from Bill Murphy of a **Baird's Sparrow** on the main park road (Rte 13) 2.6 miles from the Panther Junction headquarters. A large group of birders nearly disrupted traffic as they observed a very cooperative Baird's as close as five feet along the road and road shoulder. The bird had no fear of oncoming traffic, in fact it was almost turned into a specimen by a visitor who was rushing to see the bird. The last reported observation was May 2nd at the same site. A second Baird's turned up at Rio Grande Village on May 4 and was observed until the 6th. (Anne Bellamy and Brian Gibbons). Reports on both birds were submitted to TBRC. Apparently photographs were taken of the first sparrow but none were submitted to the park.

Beyond the above review species, the spring migration also provided other surprises. On May 4 a group of British birders (twitchers?) observed a **Swainson's warbler** in the Boot Springs area of the Chisos Mountains. Several other birding groups also observed the bird for a period of several hours, including Ro Wauer and his tour group. Swainson's warbler is another species which has been reported but never confirmed for the park.

Ro Wauer coordinated a Colima warbler census in th park May 7 - 9. The survey counted 68 pair, down from previous census years. Populations in traditional nesting areas (East Rim, Laguna Meadow, Upper Boot Canyon) were reduced, but up in other areas where nesting in the past has been low, particularly in lower Boot Canyon. Wauer theorizes that the Easter snow storm drove warblers out of traditional nesting areas into lower, more protected zones. The resulting freeze apparently killed buds on early leafing trees in the higher zones, thus reducing cover and insects. In the lower protected areas the birds found suitable habitat and forage and remained, instead of returning to the traditional sites. Wauer also documented a previously unrecorded nesting area in the Upper Green Gulch.

The annual Black-capped vireo survey was also conducted in May. This year only 19 vireos were located and only four nests. As in the previous two years, there was no evidence of brown-headed cowbird parisitism, although one nest had apparently been predated. At this point there has been no supposition on the reason for the decline, although drought conditons may have played a role.

Peregrine falcons were monitored through the season, and will continued to be watched until fledging is completed. To date there are 14 known active pair in and near the park, about the same as last year. Tentatively it appears that at least six of those nests have failed. Nesting success for Peregrines has been low the past several years in the Big Bend, and with the probable down- or delisting of the species, there is special cause for concern.

Pondering this past spring and and the incredible variety of species seen I can't help but feel that drought conditions had something to do with altering migration patterns, causing eastern vagrants to show up in large numbers. Many of the migrants that move through the park in the spring are traveling up along the western slope of the eastern Sierra Madre and are funneled to the park. With drought conditions existing over much of northern Mexico it may be that the lack of available surface water at critical resting areas drove more eastern species our way. This could explain the presence of the flame-colored tanagers. According to Howell and Webb, there are two races

of the flame-colored tanager, one occurring in the west, the other in the east. If the tanagers observed here were from the eastern race, they could have been driven north along with the migrant wave. Unfortunately we don't know at this point which race we had here. The violet-crowned hummingbird most likely came from areas west of here and it could be that drought conditions also had something to do with its presence here. The question that bothers me more is where did these birds go after they left here? Back to Mexico? Quien sabe???

On the other hand, I'm not sure that the large number of birders and bird watching tours in the park this spring didn't have something to do with the variety of reports turned in. The presence of the NBS crew certainly had something to do with the large number of reports this spring. They were censusing in areas not normally looked at by visitors and turned up many rare and accidental species. Another bird researcher, Fred Wong, was also in the park during the season, doing surveys at isolated springs and he too, contributed a number of good observations. So was this just a "normal" spring for Big Bend with more people out looking and reporting, or an unusual season with higher numbers of oddities? I suspect a little of both.

Obviously it is simplifying matters to pin everything on drought conditions. There are probably other factors involved that could also influence movement patterns in migration, i.e. degradation of key habitat areas along the route, unusual severe weather, etc.. Whatever happened to cause the high incidence of vagrants, in general the migration arrived on time here, the biggest push occurring from about the last week of April through the first week of May. There was nothing that was significantly absent during the period, although shorebirds and waterfowl numbers were down, due most likely to extremely low river levels.

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<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>PARK STATUS</u>
Am. white pelican	1	5/19	Rte 11, mp 23	M. Spillers	acc
Neotropical cormorant	1	4/2	Rio Grande Vill.	JoAnn Butler	acc
Least bittern	1	5/6	Rio Grande Vill.	Hando/Mount Solly	rare
	1	5/12	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	"
Black-crowned night-heron	1	4/1	Terlingua Abaja	Mark Flippo	rare
	1	5/25	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	"
Ibis species**	1	3/21	Rio Grande mile 860	V&S Metzger	?
	2	3/22	Talley	M.Paredes B.McKeon	?
** Reported as Glossy Ibis. Unconfirmed.					
Snow goose	65	3/5	Old Ore Road	Brian Gibbons	rare
	1	3/22	Jewels Camp	V&S Metzger	"
Common black-hawk	1	3/23	Rio Grande Vill.	H&M Ellison	rare
	1	3/28	" "	Mark Flippo	"
	1	4/6	" "	Alex Lindsay	"
	1	4/16	" "	" "	"
	1	4/17	Laguna Mdw. Trail	Hira Walker	"
	1	5/1	Rio Grande Vill.	C. Stigale	"
Crested caracara	1	5/9	Panther Pass	S. Wiedenfeld	acc
Wild turkey	1	4/7	Grapevine Hills	Val Naylor	rare
Black-necked stilt	1	3/14	Cottonwood Camp.	D. Brackman J. Frazier	rare
Ring-billed gull	6	5/5	Barker House	Davis/Walker/ Gibbons	acc
Groove-billed ani	1	5/2	Rio Grande Vill.	J.Wimberly	rare
	1	5/5	" "	Ro Wauer	"
Barn owl	1	4/15	McKinney Springs	Fred Wong	rare

Flammulated owl	1	5/9	Boot Canyon	J.Huckabee G.Breece	rare
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Burrowing owl	1	4/3	Rte 12 mp 8/9	B.Gibbons A.Lindsay	rare
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Violet-crowned hummingbird	1*	3/30-31	Barker House	M.Davis B.Gibbons A.Lindsay H.Walker F.Wong	hyp.
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***Review species; Photographs by Bernard Heyman and reports sent to TBRC:Lasley Accepted by TBRC.**

Ruby-throated hummingbird	1	4/22	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	rare
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Green kingfisher	1	4/1	Rio Grande Vill.	JoAnn Butler	rare
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Greater pewee	1*	4/26	Rio Grande Vill.	Anne Bellamy	acc
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***Review species; report sent to TBRC:Lasley Not Accepted by TBRC**

<u>Contopus</u> spp.**	1	5/22	Laguna Mdw. Trail	Pat Lindsay	?
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** Reported as possible Greater pewee - unconfirmed.

Eastern phoebe	1	5/9	Green Gulch	Mike Parmeter	?spr
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Dusky-capped flycatcher	1*	4/23	Pine Canyon	Brian Gibbons	acc
	2*	5/8	Pine Canyon	B&J Ribble M.Parmeter M.Flippo	acc

***Review species; Slides by Brian Gibbons and reports sent to TBRC:Lasley Accepted by TBRC**

Western scrub jay	1	3/11	Chisos Basin	J&L Packer	spo
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	2	3/?	Juniper Canyon	Brian Gibbons	"
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	1	4/12	Lost Mine Trail	Michelle Davis	"
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	1	5/7	Window Trail	Wauer/Flippo	"
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Red-breasted nuthatch	1	3/20	South Rim	John,David & Dorothy Geale	spo
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	1	4/4	Boot Spring	Mark Flippo	"
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	1	4/21	" "	Liston/Fisher	"
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				Kaijser	
	1	5/7	Laguna Mdw	Jim & Lynn Weber	
Brown creeper	1	3/27	Cottonwood Camp.	Sarah Bourbon	spo.
Carolina wren	2	Mar - May	Rio Grande Vill	Many obs.	? spr
Golden-crowned kinglet	1	4/19	Upper Pine Canyon	Michelle Davis	spo.
		3			
Eastern bluebird	1	5/12	Cottonwood Camp.	Michelle Davis	? spr
Wood thrush	1	4/27	Chisos Basin	Davis/Flippo	acc
	1	5/4	" "	Flippo Grediagin	"
	1	5/7	" "	Flippo/Wauer	"
Long-billed thrasher	1	4/21	Dugout Wells	Hira Walker	rare
White-eyed vireo	1	5/1	Chisos Basin	Wauer/Davis	rare
Black-capped vireo	1	4/3	Rio Grande Vill.	Dina Clark	rare
	1	4/6	" "	Dave Jones	"
	1	4/12	Window Trail	H. Walker	"
	1	4/12	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	"
	1	4/19	Juniper Canyon	B. Gibbons	"
	1	5/3	Window Trail	C. Mayhood	"
	1	5/9	Campground Canyon	Mark Flippo	"
Gray vireo		April -May	Chisos Basin	Many obs.	rare
Philadelphia vireo	1	5/2	McKinney Springs	Davis/Wong	rare
Red-eyed vireo	1	4/13	Rio Grande Vill.	Davis/Gibbons Lindsay/Wong	rare
	1	5/2	McKinney Springs	Davis/Wong	"
	1	5/5	Rio Grande Vill.	Ro Wauer	"
	1	5/12	Cottonwood Camp.	Michelle Davis	"
Blue-winged warbler	1	4/24	Chisos Basin	A. Lindsay	acc

Golden-winged warbler	1	5/6	Cottonwood Camp.	B. Gibbons	acc
	1	5/9	Sam Nail Ranch	B. Ribble	"
"Brewster's" warbler	1	4/28	Cottonwood Camp.	Michelle Davis	?
Tennessee warb.	1	4/18	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	acc
	1	5/4	Cottonwood Camp.	Hando/Mount/Solly	
	1	5/10	Chisos Basin	Michelle Davis	
4					
Tropical Parula	1	4/26-27	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	acc.
Chestnut-sided warbler	1	5/6	Rio Grande Vill.	Hando/Mount Solly	acc
	1	5/8	Oak Springs	Fred Wong	"
Black-throated Blue warbler	1	5/11	Window Trail	J. Huckabee G. Breece	acc
	1	5/22	Dugout Wells	Pat Lindsay	"
Black-throated Gray warbler	1	4/23	Chilicotal Spring	Fred Wong	rare
	1	4/29	Window Trail	Ro Wauer	"
	1	5/3	Dugout Wells	Davis/Gibbons/Walker	
Black-throated Green warbler	1	4/3	Glenn Springs	Fred Wong	rare
	1	4/7	Cottonwood Camp.	Michelle Davis	"
	1	5/3	Dugout Wells	Davis/Gibbons/Walker	
	1	5/4	" "	Flippo/Grediagin	
Pine warbler	1	4/17	McKinney Springs	M. Davis	rare
Palm warbler	1	5/7	Rio Grande Vill.	C. Wilkins	acc
Blackpoll warb.	1	5/3	Cottonwood Camp.	Ro Wauer	acc
Prothonotary warbler	1	4/16	Rio Grande Vill.	Tom Peal	acc
	1	5/4	" "	Tom Gill	"
	1	5/4	" "	Anne Bellamy	"

	1	5/25	" "	Mark Flippo	"
Worm-eating warb.	1	4/16	Rio Grande Vill.	Tom Peal	rare
	1	5/9	Campground Canyon	Mark Flippo	"
Swainson's warbler**	1	5/4	Boot Springs	Hando/Mount Solly/Wauer Many obs.	hyp.

** Previously reported but never confirmed for park.

Ovenbird	1	4/21	Cottonwood Camp.	M. Davis	rare
	1	5/4	Chisos Basin	Flippo/Grediagin	"
	1	5/7	" "	Flippo/Wauer	"

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Kentucky warb.	1	4/11	Cottonwood Camp	Ro Wauer	acc
	1	4/16	Red Ass Spring	Fred Wong	"
	1	5/3	Rio Grande Vill.	J&P Riezz	"
	1	5/5	Dugout Wells	Bill Dobbins	"
Hooded warbler	1	4/23	Chisos Basin	Michelle Davis	rare
	1	4/27	" "	Mark Flippo	"
	1	5/14	Dugout Wells	Michelle Davis	"
Painted redstart	1	3/14	Juniper Canyon	B. Gibbons	spo.
	1	4/16	Window Trail	M. Davis	"
	1	5/7	Pine Canyon	H. Walker	"
	1	5/7	Boot Canyon	A. Bellamy M. Millican	"
Scarlet tanager	1	3/30	Rio Grande Vill.	B. Stark	rare
	1	5/6	Chisos Basin	H. Walker	"
Flame-colored tanager	1*	4/14-19	Pine Canyon	Dale Ohl Carolyn Ohl A.Lindsay Davis/Gibbons/Walker Barrow/Newman/Coulos	new

*Review species; Slides of adult male by Alex Lindsay and reports sent to TBRC:Lasley Accepted by TBRC

Flame-colored tanager	1*	4/20-22	Chisos Basin	A.Lindsay M.Davis B.Gibbons P.Kaijser	new
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***Review species; Slides of first spring male by Brian Gibbons and reports sent to TBRC:Lasley. Accepted by TBRC**

Rose-breasted grosbeak	1	4/19	Chisos Basin	B. Gibbons	rare
	1	5/5	Dugout Wells	Val Naylor	"
	1	5/8	Rte 13	Michelle Davis	"
	1	5/21	Barker House	Davis/Gibbons/Lindsay Walker	
Lazuli bunting	1	4/14	Glenn Springs	B. Gibbons	rare
	1	4/24	Dugout Wells	Davis/Gibbons	"
	1	5/4	Chisos Basin	Flippo/Grediagin	
Lazuli bunting	1	5/4	Rio Grande Vill.	Hando/Mount/Solly	rare
	1	5/6	Cottonwood Camp.	" " "	"
	1	5/19	Rio Grande Vill.	Fellows/Camarda	"
Field sparrow	1	3/7	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	rare
	1	3/22	" "	" "	"
	1	3/23	Dugout Wells	" "	"
	1	5/2	Rte 13 mp 2	Dave Trochlell	"
Sage sparrow	1	4/4	Cottonwood Camp.	Ronald Nuiver	?spr
Baird's sparrow	1*	5/1-2	Rte 13 mp 2.6	Bill Murphy Many obs.	acc

***Review species; reports sent to TBRC:Lasley. Accepted by TBRC**

Baird's sparrow	1*	5/4-6	Rio Grande Vill.	A. Bellamy B. Gibbons	acc
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***Review species; reports sent to TBRC:Lasley. Not accepted by TBRC**

LeConte's sparrow	1	3/21	Rte 11, mp 8/9	M. Davis	acc
	1	3/23	Rte 11, mp 14	Gibbons/Lindsay	"
Fox sparrow	1	4/20	Hot Springs	Mark Flippo	?spr
Dark-eyed Junco					

White-winged race** 1 5/16 Laguna Mdw. Brendan Glynn ?

** No previous records of this race in park. This report unconfirmed. Only one documented record in Texas per TOS checklist.

Chestnut-collared longspur	5	3/10	Woodson's	B. Gibbons	rare
	1	3/11	Maverick Rd.	" "	"
	1	3/12	Boquillas Canyon	" "	"
	?	3/15	Rio Grande Vill.	Brackman/Frazier	"
Common grackle	1	3/11	Panther Junction	Val Naylor	rare
	1	4/21	Cottonwood Camp.	M. Davis	"
Hooded oriole	1	3/22	Barker House	Davis/Gibbons Walker/Lindsay	rare
	1	3/23	Rio Grande Vill.	H&M Ellison	"
	1	4/27	Hannold Draw	Mark Flipppo	"
Cassin's finch	4	5/8	Dugout Wells	S. Wiedenfeld	spo.

Mr. Kelly Bryan
POB 786
Fort Davis, TX 79734

June 5, 1996

Hello John,

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Given the drought conditions and the very quiet winter season, I had no great hopes for the spring.... What ended up happening was an incredible showing of vagrant species, several of which were either new to the park (one new to Texas!) or species which had previously been listed as hypotheticals, lacking documentation for inclusion on the main list.

The surprises began March 30 when a crew of National Biological Survey bird researchers (NBS - Michelle Davis, Brian Gibbons, Alex Lindsay, and Hira Walker) reported a **Violet-crowned hummingbird** at the Barker House. The bird was subsequently seen by many other observers and photo-documented by Bernard Heyman during the two days it was present. Reports and photographs were submitted to the Texas Bird Records Committee. This species has been reported in the park before and is currently listed as "hypothetical". None of those previous records were confirmed.

On April 14 Dale and Carolyn Ohl observed an unusual tanager in Pine Canyon. Their report reached the park two days later with a tentative identification of a male **Flame-colored tanager**. Alex Lindsay of the NBS crew relocated the bird on the 18th and was able to get some excellent photographs.

Later other members of the crew, as well as some park visitors, also observed the tanager. The last reported observation was on April 19th. On April 20th the same NBS crew reported a second tanager, this one possibly a first spring male, in the Chisos Basin near the oxidation ponds. The bird was photo-documented by Alex Lindsay and Brian Gibbons. The last reported observation was on April 22nd. Reports and slides of both birds were also submitted to the TBRC. If accepted, these observation will constitute the first records for Texas.

NBS researcher Brian Gibbons reported and photographed a **Dusky-capped Flycatcher** in Pine canyon on April 23. On May 8 a group involved in a Colima warbler census (Ribble/Parmeter/Flippo) heard two dusky-capped flycatchers calling and one member of the party saw the birds. This species is listed as accidental in the park and is a review species in Texas. Reports and slides were submitted to the TBRC.

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Anne Belamy reported a **Greater Pewee** at Rio Grande Village on April 26th. Another Texas review species and listed as accidental in the park, this bird too was reported to the TBRC. Unfortunately no photographs were obtained.

The wave of unusual species continued into May, beginning with a May 1 report from Bill Murphy of a **Baird's Sparrow** on the main park road (Rte 13) 2.6 miles from the Panther Junction headquarters. A large group of birders nearly disrupted traffic as they observed a very cooperative Baird's as close as five feet along the road and road shoulder. The bird had no fear of oncoming traffic, in fact it was almost turned into a specimen by a visitor who was rushing to see the bird. The last reported observation was May 2nd at the same site. A second Baird's turned up at Rio Grande Village on May 4 and was observed until the 6th. (Anne Bellamy and Brian Gibbons). Reports on both birds were submitted to TBRC. Apparently photographs were taken of the first sparrow but none were submitted to the park.

Beyond the above review species, the spring migration also provided other surprises. On May 4 a group of British birders (twitchers?) observed a **Swainson's warbler** in the Boot Springs area of the Chisos Mountains. Several other birding groups also observed the bird for a period of several hours,

including Ro Wauer and his tour group. Swainson's warbler is another species which has been reported but never confirmed for the park.

Ro Wauer coordinated a Colima warbler census in the park May 7 - 9. The survey counted 68 pair, down from previous census years. Populations in traditional nesting areas (East Rim, Laguna Meadow, Upper Boot Canyon) were reduced, but up in other areas where nesting in the past has been low, particularly in lower Boot Canyon. Wauer theorizes that the Easter snow storm drove warblers out of traditional nesting areas into lower, more protected zones. The resulting freeze apparently killed buds on early leafing trees in the higher zones, thus reducing cover and insects. In the lower protected areas the birds found suitable habitat and forage and remained, instead of returning to the traditional sites. Wauer also documented a previously unrecorded nesting area in the Upper Green Gulch.

The annual Black-capped vireo survey was also conducted in May. This year only 19 vireos were located and only four nests. As in the previous two years, there was no evidence of brown-headed cowbird parasitism, although one nest had apparently been predated. At this point there has been no supposition on the reason for the decline, although drought conditions may have played a role.

Peregrine falcons were monitored through the season, and will continued to be watched until fledging is completed. To date there are 14 known active pair in and near the park, about the same as last year. Tentatively it appears that at least six of those nests have failed. Nesting success for Peregrines has been low the past several years in the Big Bend, and with the probable down- or delisting of the species, there is special cause for concern.

Pondering this past spring and the incredible variety of species seen I can't help but feel that drought conditions had something to do with altering migration patterns, causing eastern vagrants to show up in large numbers. Many of the migrants that move through the park in the spring are traveling up along the western slope of the eastern Sierra Madre and are funneled to the park. With drought conditions existing over much of northern Mexico it may be that the lack of available surface water at critical resting areas drove more eastern species our way. This could explain the presence of the flame-colored tanagers. According to Howell and Webb, there are two races of the flame-colored tanager, one occurring in the west, the other in the east. If the tanagers observed here were from the eastern race, they could have been

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driven north along with the migrant wave. Unfortunately we don't know at this point which race we had here. The violet-crowned hummingbird most likely came from areas west of here and it could be that drought conditions also had something to do with its presence here. The question that bothers me more is where did these birds go after they left here? Back to Mexico? Quien sabe???

On the other hand, I'm not sure that the large number of birders and bird watching tours in the park this spring didn't have something to do with the variety of reports turned in. The presence of the NBS crew certainly had something to do with the large number of reports this spring. They were censusing in areas not normally looked at by visitors and turned up many rare and accidental species. Another bird researcher, Fred Wong, was also in the park during the season, doing surveys at isolated springs and he too, contributed a number of good observations. So was this just a "normal" spring for Big Bend with more people out looking and reporting, or an unusual season with higher numbers of oddities? I suspect a little of both.

Obviously it is simplifying matters to pin everything on drought conditions. There are probably other factors involved that could also influence movement patterns in migration, i.e. degradation of key habitat areas along the route, unusual severe weather, etc.. Whatever happened to cause the high incidence of vagrants, in general the migration arrived on time here, the biggest push occurring from about the last week of April through the first week of May. There was nothing that was significantly absent during the period, although shorebirds and waterfowl numbers were down, due most likely to extremely low river levels.

That's all for now. If you need further information please feel to contact me: (915) 477-2251 ext. 110 (work) (915) 477-2210 (home).

Sincerely,

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
RARE BIRD RECORDS
JUNE-AUGUST, 1996

September 06, 1996

Attached is a list of observations reported by visitors and staff for the period June 1 - August 31. I've compiled only those observations for species which are listed as **Rare, Accidental, Hypothetical** or **Not included (?)** on the park's checklist. A "?sum" indicates a species which is documented for the park but not in the summer season.

Weather for June and July was "normal"; hot and dry punctuated by periodic rainfalls. There were heavy, isolated downpours throughout June, and one very wet week during the second week of July. August brought tremendous rainfall on the heels of Hurricane Dolly. Year to date precipitation as compared to ytd totals for August 1995 (+ or -) is as follows: Panther Junction; 11.00" (+ 5.07"), Chisos Basin; 14.10" (+ 5.91"), Rio Grande Village; 4.95" (- 0.11"), Castolon; 7.29" (+ 4.28"), and Persimmon Gap; 6.06" (+ 0.41"). As you can see, the higher elevations benefited most from the clouds. The resulting bloom and green-up in that area of the park has been very gratifying to watch. Even though rainfall has been less in the lower elevations, we expect to eventually see some good recharge in the lower springs and seeps. This bodes well for the coming fall migration.

It has been relatively quiet in the park with regard to unusual birds but there have been a couple of highlights. First was an intriguing report of **elegant trogon** in the Boot Canyon area in mid-June by Linda and David Hedges and Mark Adams. Unfortunately we were not able to confirm this report with a follow-up sighting or photograph. We had better luck documenting **tropical kingbirds** at Cottonwood Campground. Barry Lyon and Rob Day observed one bird on June 24 and were able to get photographs. Victor Emanuel and Barry Zimmer saw three kingbirds on July 19 and were able to get recordings of the calls. I found two kingbirds at the same site on July 22 and observed one of them on a nest. A visit on August 3 revealed that the nest had apparently blown down in a storm, but the birds were still present in the area. Jan and Will Risser reported a **broad-billed hummingbird** along the Laguna Meadow trail, about 200 yards below the point where the trail tops out. Mountain sage is in full bloom throughout the high Chisos and is attracting quite a show of hummingbirds; Lucifer, rufous, broad-tailed, black-chinned and calliope.

To reiterate other breeding bird information from the spring report; Ro Wauer coordinated a Colima warbler census in the park May 7 - 9. The survey counted 68 pair, down from previous census years. Wauer also documented a previously unrecorded nesting area in the Upper Green Gulch. The annual black-capped vireo survey was conducted in May. This year only 19 vireos were located and only four nests. As in the previous two years, there was no evidence of brown-headed cowbird parasitism, although one nest had apparently been predated. At this point there has been no supposition on the reason for the decline, although drought conditions may have played a role. Peregrine falcons had another poor year; of 14 known eyries in and near the park, only three were successful, producing a total of six fledglings. Nesting success for Peregrines has been low the past several years in the Big Bend, and with the probable down or delisting of the species, there is special cause for concern.

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
RARE BIRD RECORDS
JUNE-AUGUST, 1996

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>PARK STATUS</u>
Snowy Egret	1	6/20	Rio Grande Vill.	Barry Lyon	? sum.
Cattle Egret	1	6/30	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	? sum.
Swainson's Hawk	1	6/01	Castolon - Rte 16	Mark Flippo	rare
Wood Duck	1	7/24	Rio Grande Vill.	Judy Quick	? sum.
Broad-billed Hummingbird	1*	8/23	Laguna Mdw. Trail	Jan & Will Risser	acc.
* Review Species; Report sent to TBRC.Lasley Unconfirmed. Accepted by TBRC					
Calliope Hummingbird	2	8/9	Boot Canyon	John Gee Carol Edwards	rare
	1	8/17	Pinnacles Trail	Eric Carpenter	rare
	1	8/23	Boot Canyon	J&W Risser	rare
Elegant Trogon	1*	6/16	Boot Cyn Trail	Linda&Dave Hedges M.Adams	rare
* Review Species; Report sent to TBRC.Lasley Unconfirmed. Accepted by TBRC					
Green Kingfisher	2	8/18	Rio Grande Vill.	Ro Wauer	rare
	1	8/18	" " "	Mark Flippo	rare
Brown-crested Flycatcher	1	6/20	Rio Grande Vill.	Barry Lyon	rare
	2	7/27	" "	Mark Flippo	
Tropical Kingbird	1*	6/24	Cottonwood Camp.	B.Lyon,R.Day	?
	3*	7/19	Cottonwood Camp.	V.Emanuel,B.Zimmer	"
	2*	7/22-nest	Cottonwood Camp.	Mark Flippo	"
* Review Species; Report/photos/voice recording sent to TBRC:Lasley If accepted by TBRC represents first records for park. Accepted by TBRC					
Eastern Bluebird	1	6/04	Cottonwood Camp.	Bryan Tilley	? sum.
American Robin	1	6/01	" "	Mark Flippo	? sum.
Black-capped Vireo	1	8/8	Chisos Basin	J.Gee,C.Edwards	rare
	1	8/9	Pinnacles Trail	" "	rare
	1	8/10	Blue Creek	" "	rare
Red-eyed Vireo	1	8/12	Pine Canyon	" "	rare

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>PARK STATUS</u>
Grace"s Warbler	1	8/12	Boot Canyon Trail	Phyllis & Tony Frank	rare
Black&White Warb.	1	6/08	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	rare
Louisiana Waterthrush	1	7/27	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	acc.
Red-faced Warbler	1*	8/12	Pine Canyon	J.Gee,C.Edwards	spo.
* Review Species; Report sent to TBRC.Lasley Unconfirmed. Accepted by TBRC					
Indigo Bunting	2	6/02	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	rare
	2	7/19	Window Trail	Emanuel/Zimmer	"
Red-winged Blackbird	2	6/19	Basin oxid. ponds	Mark Flippo	acc.
	1	6/21	" "	Jan & Will Risser	acc.
Red Crossbill	2	7/20	Boot Springs	Emanuel/Zimmer	spo.
Pine Siskin	1	6/24	Basin VC	Mark Flippo	rare

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
RARE BIRD RECORDS
AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1996

December 05, 1996

Attached is a list of observations reported by visitors and staff for the period August 01 - November 30. I've compiled only those observations for species which are listed as **Rare**, **Accidental**, **Hypothetical** or **Not included** (?) on the park's checklist.

Weather for the period included tremendous August rainfalls on the heels of Hurricane Dolly. Panther Junction received 6.35" in August alone - more than 40% of the ytd total. Year to date precipitation as compared to ytd totals for November 1995 (+ or -) is as follows: Panther Junction; 14.44" (+ 6.00"), Chisos Basin; 16.34" (+ 0.95"), Rio Grande Village; 6.78" (+ 0.05"), Castolon; 9.91" (+ 5.68"), and Persimmon Gap; 8.24" (+ 1.05"). As you can see, not all areas of the park benefitted from the drought-breaking rains but, even though rainfall was less in the lower elevations, we did see some good recharge in the lower springs and seeps. Rainfall gradually diminished, as expected, through the remainder of the fall season. Several cold fronts entered the area beginning in late October, bringing some minor movements of birds, but it wasn't until late November that things really began to move through the park.

The fall season began rather quietly with a thin trickle of post-breeding hummingbirds and migrant warblers. The most notable observations for the early fall were those of a **broad-billed hummingbird** on the Laguna Meadow trail on 8/23 by Jan and Will Risser and a **red-faced warbler** in Pine Canyon on 8/12 by John Gee and Carol Edwards. Unfortunately we were not able to confirm these reports with a follow-up sighting or photograph. In late September an influx of red-breasted nuthatches reached Big Bend. For a period of a month individuals could be found at all elevations, including three down along the river in the Lower Canyons in October. A cold front that moved through in the latter days of October brought two **Lewis's woodpeckers** to Rio Grande Village on 10/29 (Jim Hines). About this time we began to witness a steady and increasing movement of mountain bluebirds, american robins, and sage thrashers, all moving on the heels of extreme cold fronts to the north. They arrived to find excellent supplies of fruits and berries that had gone relatively untouched. (Robins cleaned my pyracantha bush in a week!) Another indicator of cold weather to the north was a **rough-legged hawk** observed on 11/22 along the south end of the Maverick road on the west side of the park. I received one verbal report of a probable rough-leg outside the park in the Study Butte area at about the same time (fide Jim Hines). According to Wauer, rough-legs haven't been reported in the park since 1988.

November cold fronts also blew in a tremendous variety of sparrows and finches. Michelle Davis and the NBS bird survey crew reported 5-6 **LeConte's sparrows** on 11/23 in the grassy areas along Tornillo Flat. Subsequent visits by other birders have, so far, failed to turn up any more LeContes, but chipping, Brewer's, clay-colored, vesper, sage, **grasshopper**, savannah, Lincoln's, song, and white-crowned sparrows are thick. In late October Jim Hines reported **Lawrence's goldfinches** at Lake Ament in the Terlingua Ranch.

(Report to be submitted to TBRC:Lasley). Davis and others reported Cassin's finches and **red crossbills** in the Boot Canyon and Chisos Basin between 11/18 and 11/22. **Evening grosbeaks**, another unusual visitor, were reported twice in November - the 3rd at Panther Junction (Betty Baker), and the 9th in the Basin (Brian Zimmerman). Conspicuously absent or reduced this fall were shorebirds and ducks. After the late summer/early fall rains the river came up dramatically, but has since gone down, though not quite as low as it was in the spring and early summer. I think that all the rain in August and early September, falling over a wide-spread area, encouraged migrating shorebirds to keep on moving. The ducks seem to have retreated to the deeper and more inaccessible Lower Canyons area of the Wild and Scenic River.

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
RARE BIRD RECORDS
AUGUST - NOVEMBER, 1996

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>PARK STATUS</u>
Black-crowned Night-heron	1	11/25	Rio Grande Vill.	H&M Ellison	rare
Rough-legged Hawk	1	11/22	Maverick Road	Mark Flippo	acc.
Wood Duck	2	10/29	Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River	Bourbon, Flippo McAllister, Paredes	rare
Canvasback	1	10/31	RGW&S River	" "	rare
Ruddy Duck	4	10/31	" "	" "	rare
Common Moorhen	1	11/18	Rio Grande Vill.	Sharon Simmons	rare
	1	11/18	" " "	Doug Falkner	rare
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1	10/12	Sam Nail Ranch	Mark Flippo	late
	1	10/13	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	late
Anna's Hummingbird	3	10/8-31	Chisos Basin	Juanette Willis	rare
	many	10/27-31	RGW&S River	Bourbon, Flippo McAllister, Paredes	rare
Calliope Hummingbird	2	8/9	Boot Canyon	John Gee Carol Edwards	rare
	1	8/17	Pinnacles Trail	Eric Carpenter	rare
	1	8/23	Boot Canyon	J&W Risser	rare
	1	9/16	Chisos Basin	Juanette Willis	rare
Broad-billed Hummingbird	1*	8/23	Laguna Mdw. Trail	Jan & Will Risser	acc.
* Review Species; Report sent to TBRC.Lasley Unconfirmed. Accepted by TBRC					
Green Kingfisher	2	8/18	Rio Grande Vill.	Ro Wauer	rare
	1	8/18	" " "	Mark Flippo	rare
	3	9/20	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	rare
	1	9/26	" " "	Dieter Kamm	rare
	3	9/27	" " "	Mark Flippo	rare
	4	10/27-30	RGW&S River	Bourbon, Flippo McAllister, Paredes	rare
	1	11/03	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	rare
	1	11/25	" " "	H&M Ellison	rare

PARK

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
Lewis' Woodpecker	2*	10/29	Rio Grande Vill.	Jim Hines	acc

*** Review Species; report sent to TBRC.Lasley (Accepted 7/25/99)**

Williamson's Sapsucker	1	9/17	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	spo.
Brown-crested Flycatcher	1	11/26	Dugout Wells	Mark Flippo	rare-late
Western Scub Jay	1	10/12	Oak Spring	Mark Flippo	spo.
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	9/27	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	spo.
	1	9/28	Dugout Wells	Mark Flippo	spo.
	1	10/07	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	spo.
	3	10/27	RGW&S River	Flippo,Paredes	spo.
Winter Wren	1	11/01	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	rare
Mountain Bluebird	4	11/02	Chisos Basin	Mark Flippo	spo.
	1	11/16	Glen Springs	Davis,Falkner Pomara,Punjabi	spo.
	many	11/01-30	Maverick Entrance	Bill Bourbon	spo.
Sage Thrasher	many	11/01-30	Parkwide-desert	Many observers	spo.
Black-capped Vireo	1	8/8	Chisos Basin	J.Gee,C.Edwards	rare
	1	8/9	Pinnacles Trail	" "	rare
	1	8/10	Blue Creek	" "	rare
Philadelphia Vireo	1	10/19	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Adams	rare
Red-eyed Vireo	1	8/12	Pine Canyon	" "	rare
Tennessee Warbler	1	10/12	Sam Nail Ranch	Mark Flippo	acc.
Grace"s Warbler	1	8/12	Boot Canyon Trail	Phyllis & Tony Frank	rare
Red-faced Warbler	1*	8/12	Pine Canyon	J.Gee,C.Edwards	spo.

*** Review Species; Report sent to TBRC.Lasley Unconfirmed. Accepted by TBRC**

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>PARK</u> <u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
Sage Sparrow	1	11/25	Rte. 11 MP 10	Mark Flippo	spo.
Grasshopper Sparrow	2	11/23	Rte. 11 MP 10	Davis,Falkner Pomara,Punjabi	rare
	3	11/25-26	" " "	Mark Flippo	rare

LeConte's Sparrow	5-6	11/23	Rte 11 MP 10	Davis, Falkner Pomara, Punjabi	acc.
Great-tailed Grackle	1	11/24	Rio Grande Vill.	Mark Flippo	rare
Cassin's Finch	1	9/28	Panther Junction	Mark Flippo	spo.
	2	11/18	Boulder Meadows	Davis, Falkner Pomara, Punjabi	spo.
	8	11/22	Boot Canyon	" " "	spo.
Red Crossbill	6-8	11/18	Chisos Basin	" " "	spo.
	2	11/22	Boot Canyon	" " "	spo.
Evening Grosbeak	2	11/03	Panther Junction	Betty Baker	acc.
	3	11/09	Chisos Basin	Brian Zimmerman	acc.