

DISTRIBUTION SHIFTS OF COMMON TEXAS BIRDS

State of the Birds *February, 2009*

The potential effects of climate change on birds continue to be mistakenly perceived as far off in both time and locale. New analyses by Audubon scientists from 40 years of Christmas Bird Count data revealed 177 bird species that winter in the continental U.S. have experienced significant northward shifts in their latitudinal center of population over the last 40 years.

Many factors may contribute to these distributional shifts that exceed hundreds of miles for some species. Habitat loss and fragmentation are certainly playing a role, along with increases in temperatures which allow birds to winter and wander farther north. Changes can be seen among the birds of Texas, which is the winter home for numerous species in the list.

Visit www.audubon.org/climatebirds to learn more on the national findings.

Visit www.tx.audubon.org to learn about the bird conservation programs of Audubon Texas and how you can help!

TEXAS BIRDS MOVE NORTH



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis tristis*)

This woodland and feeder bird has moved 219 miles north. Its population in Texas has decreased 41% in 40 years, but it has increased nationally by 81% in areas north of Texas. Many Texas backyard birders have noticed fewer goldfinches at feeders in recent years, and this northward shift offers an explanation. Woodland and feeder birds generally show the most northward movement, able to winter farther north with warmer winters and readily available food at feeders. However, as these birds move north, they may be at increased risk from unusually cold winters or harsh storms.



CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

This woodland bird has moved 189 miles north. While its population in Texas has decreased 76% in 40 years, it has increased nationally by 158% in areas farther north. Although waxwings visit feeders infrequently, their lower numbers and absence at Texas backyard bird feeders have been noticed. Waxwings depend upon winter berry crops and are seen more often at feeders when their natural food is in short supply. As this species shifts its winter range, quality habitat with winter berry-producing trees and shrubs and other food sources will be important.



AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

One of the sentinel species in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, this bird's population center has moved 206 miles north. It has declined 66% in Texas over 40 years and increased 22% nationally, with more birds found wintering in northern habitats and fewer in Texas. Robin populations have always fluctuated widely in Texas as food supplies and conditions change, but have been occurring in noticeably fewer numbers in general compared to numbers in Texas 40 years ago.



WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

The center of population for this colony-nesting wading bird of the deep south has moved 100 miles north in the last 40 years. It has increased in Texas, but is a species of conservation concern due to habitat loss for nesting (undisturbed islands with trees and shrubs) and foraging (freshwater and brackish marsh). Audubon Texas Coastal Program manages the largest nesting colonies of this species along the Texas coast together with our conservation partners, and these efforts will be increasingly important for conservation of this species and others that nest on Audubon islands.

Help Texas' Birds and Habitat in a Shifting Climate



Become a citizen scientist or volunteer: Many Texas birds are seen farther north today than they were even a decade ago. Species such as the Least Grebe (pictured above) were found in the U.S. exclusively on the southern half of the Texas coast only 10 years ago, but have been seen recently as far north as the Trinity River Audubon Center in Dallas. Northern extensions like this are increasing each year for a number of Texas birds. One of the ways we understand these occurrences is with the help of citizen scientists who participate in Backyard Bird Counts and Christmas Bird Counts each year.

Support conservation initiatives that protect and restore essential bird habitat:



Audubon Texas' Coastal Program manages the majority of waterbird nesting islands on the Texas Coast, including critically important sites such as Green Island and Sundown Island, recently identified as Globally Important Bird Areas for colony-nesting wading birds. North Deer Island, owned and managed in partnership with Houston Audubon and nominated as a Globally Important Bird Area for White Ibis, is the largest breeding colony for White Ibis in Texas. Sites such as these will become more critical as habitats elsewhere disappear and more birds utilize Texas nesting islands.



Audubon Texas Quail and Grassland Birds Initiative works with private landowners to restore and conserve native grassland and shrubland habitats for numerous bird species listed in this report. Most notably, grassland birds as a group are the fastest declining bird guild in North America.

Join Audubon Texas in Bird Conservation

- You can help by contributing financially to our Coastal Waterbird Program or Quail and Grassland Birds Program and directly affect bird habitat restoration and conservation.
- Volunteer to help on a waterbird island habitat project or an Audubon bird count.
- Stay informed, write your leaders and voice your support for new approaches to deliver a clean energy future, increased energy efficiency and wise use of renewable energy.
- For more information, visit www.tx.audubon.org or contact:
Dr. Andrew Kasner, Audubon Texas Director of Bird Conservation, 10750 Pleasanton Road, San Antonio, TX 78221, (830) 480-2770, akasner@audubon.org