

Late Fall/Winter Bird Report
(November 1, 2010 - February 25, 2011)

by David E. Wolf

Though the first part of this winter started off relatively mild, the weather sure changed after Christmas, as repeated Arctic blasts brought some of the coldest weather that we have had in many years (remember the 80s?). Throughout the season we had occasional rains to help alleviate the near-drought conditions, but they were not enough to replenish ground water. Lake Rayburn remained extremely low, due to both the prolonged dry conditions and purposely lowering the level for bridge repairs. There were few trends with the birds this winter, the most notable being flights of Harris's Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch and Pine Siskin. My apologies for not getting some of this report out to you sooner, but please keep sending your sightings. Our winter birds are leaving and spring migration is already here! Many thanks – David and Mimi Wolf (dewolf@myinu.net)

25 **Ross's Geese** amidst a flock of 150 Snow Geese over Nacogdoches Nov 23 was a high count (TR), while 3 circled low over Alazan Bayou WMA on the Dec 18 Nac CBC (DW). The only Northern Pintail were one at Kurth Lake Nov 20 (LD, CM) and 3 at the TX 147 causeway 23 Feb (DW). Redheads were prominent on Kurth Lake and the Nac sewage ponds in the latter half of Dec, with a high count of 204 at the Nac ponds Dec 30 (DW), but they were largely gone by early January. The peak count of Canvasback on Rayburn was 2100 off the TX 147 causeway Jan 2 (DW). 6 Greater Scaup wintered at the Nac ponds from at least mid-Dec to Feb 10 (DW et al). The first Common Goldeneye were 3 at the Nac ponds Nov 29 (CW) and up to 4 were here into early January (DW et al). Another was in n. Nacogdoches County on Dec 4 (RT). Hooded Merganser numbers peaked at the Nac sewage ponds Nov 27, when 38 were counted (CW). They were largely gone from here by early January, but pairs and small flocks were seen on several area ponds during Jan-Feb (m. obs.). 9 Red-breasted Mergansers were at Lake Nacogdoches Nov 4 (CW) and a single female was off the TX 147 causeway Dec 5 (DW). The season high count of 28 Common Loons off of TX 147 came on Feb 23 (DW), while 24 Horned Grebes there Nov 27 was a high count for Lake Rayburn; they did not stay around (DW). American White Pelicans were scarce on Rayburn until after the New Year, when 206 were counted along the Attoyac arm Jan 2 and 195 were off TX 147 Feb 23 (both DW). With their general increase throughout the region we are now getting occasional winter records of Neotropic Cormorant. This season single adults were along the TX 147 causeway Dec 5 and Feb 23 (both DW). An Anhinga was at Ellen Trout Lake in Lufkin Jan 1 (AK, KK); does anyone know if it continued to be seen? Up to 13 Great Egrets were at Ellen Trout Lake through January (m. obs.), but very few were present elsewhere. Two late Cattle Egrets were at the Nac ponds Nov 2 (CW). Two Wild Turkeys on FM 225 west of Nacogdoches Dec 26 were a surprise (CW).

A migratory flight of 500+ Turkey Vultures came over Central Hts Nov 25 as a front approached (MHW). An **Osprey** at Kurth Lake on the Dec 18 Nac CBC was a first ever for count day (CM, HG), while a surprising late migrant came south over Central Hts Jan 3 (MHW). A late Peregrine Falcon was at the TX 147 causeway on Dec 5 (DW), but was not seen again during the winter (unlike the previous two years). Different late Merlins were chasing robins around Central Hts on Dec 11 and Dec 17 (both DW), while another near Melrose Dec 25 was a nice Christmas surprise (RT). Additional fall American Avocets were

7 at Lake Nacogdoches on Oct 12 and 9 there Oct 22 (both CW). A Semipalmated Plover on an island off TX 147 on Nov 27 was very late (DW). 10 Greater Yellowlegs on the flats off the TX 147 causeway Dec 5 were the last fall migrants while one here on Feb 23 may have been an early spring migrant (both DW); none were found during the mid-winter. Two Spotted Sandpipers were at Ellen Trout Lake on Jan 1 (AK, KK). In spite of extensive habitat around Lake Rayburn only a very few Least Sandpipers were found, including 2 at TX 147 causeway on Jan 2 and 16 there on Feb 23 (both DW). Two were at the Nac ponds Feb 10 (DW). A single Long-billed Dowitcher was at Townsend Park on Rayburn on Nov 27 (DW). 4 American Woodcock in Douglass on Nov 14 was a good count for so early in the winter (CW). A Bonaparte's Gull at Lake Nacogdoches Nov 4 was the first reported and a bit early (CW), while a late Franklin's Gull was at the TX 147 causeway Nov 27 (DW) and 4-6 Herring Gulls were there on several Jan-Feb visits (DW). An adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was photographed at the Lake Livingston spillway on Dec 28 (DW, RT). This remains the only locality within the Pineywoods from which this species has been reported. Even more significant was the first-cycle **Black-legged Kittiwake** discovered there on the same day (RT, DW) and seen again by RS on Jan 1. It remained through at least Feb 10 (TR) and was seen by many observers in January once word got out on the hot-lines. The high count for Forster's Terns on Rayburn was 410+ on Jan 2 (DW).

A very late male Ruby-throated Hummingbird visited Central Hts Nov 11 (MHW). A **Cave Swallow** at the Lake Livingston spillway Feb 10 (TR) was only the 2nd winter record for the Pineywoods of which I am aware, and 2 **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** at the VFW Pond in Lufkin on Feb 3 (LD) were almost as unusual. A Red-breasted Nuthatch in Nacogdoches Oct 27-31 (SS) did **not** prove to be the vanguard of a good flight; the only other report all winter was 2 at the s. end of Davy Crockett NF (Trinity Co) (RS). A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was still along the TX 147 causeway Jan 2, but none were found here later in the winter after it got really cold (DW). The first big push of American Robins was 750 over Central Hts Dec 11 (DW); they were widespread this winter but not in huge numbers. A Gray Catbird was at Kurth Lake Jan 12 (LD). The first Cedar Waxwings were 3 over TX 103 at the Attoyac Dec 5 (DW); this species was in low numbers all winter. At least one Sprague's Pipit was still at the Nac Airport Feb 10 (DW). A late Black-throated Green Warbler came through Central Hts Nov 2 (MHW) and a Common Yellowthroat was at the base of the TX 147 causeway Nov 27 (DW). Most surprising was an adult male **Summer Tanager** nicely photographed at a suet feeder in Nacogdoches Jan 13-14 (JR); it was not seen again after this. On Jan 4 a male **Spotted Towhee** was seen with 6 Eastern Towhees at Alazan Bayou WMA (DW), our most regular local site for this rare western visitor. A flock of **15 Lark Sparrows** again wintered in Central Hts and were seen through at least Feb 25 (MHW, DW). A single Henslow's Sparrow was found in Central Hts Feb 25 (MHW, DW), but LeConte's were almost non-existent anywhere this entire winter. 18+ Fox Sparrows at Alazan Bayou Jan 4 was a definite increase from mid-Dec (DW). Harris's Sparrows were in good numbers again this winter, with a total of 10 found by 3 parties on the Nac CBC Dec 18; several were back in Central Hts for the third winter in a row, with a first sighting Dec 14 (DW). The super-cold weather seemed to push more Dark-eyed Juncos into our region; on Jan 25 at least 30 were in Central Hts and many were acting like restless migrants (DW). A single Lapland Longspur on the dried-up flats off the TX 147 causeway on Dec 5 was a surprise at this site (DW, RT), while 5 were at the Nac Airport Dec 17 as a norther blew in (DW); 2 were still there the next day on the Nac CBC (SL); and 2 were there on Feb 10 (DW). A late **Indigo Bunting** in Houston County (s. of TX 21) on Dec 26 was an unexpected late migrant (PB). The northern Pineywoods, including the Tyler and Longview areas north of us, had the

best flight of Rusty Blackbirds in years. Significant local reports included from 8 in Central Hts Dec 17, increasing to 22 on Jan 5 (MHW, DW); 125 between Center and Joaquin (Shelby Co) Dec 30 (RS); and 30 in Loco Valley Jan 8 (RH); smaller numbers were also seen at Alazan Bayou WMA and the Nac sewage ponds. The only reports of Brewer's Blackbirds were 75 near Chireno on Nov 26 (RS) and 70 in s. Angelina County Feb 23 (DW). We finally got our first winter records of the dreaded **Great-tailed Grackle**, when 4 were at the Lufkin Wal-Mart on Dec 31 and 2 were seen again on Jan 5 (LD). A flock of 4500 Common Grackles over Central Hts on the very cold day of Dec 23 was the first big push reported (DW). Purple Finches staged their best "invasion" in several years, though few came to feeders. The first report was 2 near Peavey Switch on Nov 26 (JP), while the largest single flock reported was 12 in n. Shelby County on Dec 30 (RS). They also showed up at Alazan Bayou WMA; around Lake Rayburn; at Kurth Lake; and at the SFA Exp Forest (m. obs.) and 2 appeared at feeders near Huntington Jan 11 (NB). The first American Goldfinches were 2 in Central Hts Nov 5 (MHW), while possible Pine Siskins were there Nov 15 (MHW). The first confirmed sighting of Pine Siskin was 9 in the SFA Exp Forest Dec 4 (RT, DW). A few siskins were found on the Nac CBC and then they showed up amidst the hordes of goldfinches at feeders in January. Numbers were never very high (most observers had fewer than 10 at once at their feeders) and most had seemingly disappeared by mid-February (m. obs.).

Observers: PB -- Peter Barnes; NB = Nancy Bird; LD = Louis Debetaz; RH = Ruth Heino; HG = Heinz Gaylord; AK = Allan Kaplowitz; KK = Kara Kaplowitz; SL = Susie Lower; CM = Carroll Moore; JP = Jimmie Putnam; TR = Thomas Riecke; JR = Jack Rohrer; RS = Rick Schaefer; SS = Sarah Stovall; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; m. obs. = many observers.

Localities in Angelina County are Ellen Trout Park and Lake (Lufkin); Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin (town); Peavey Switch. **In Nacogdoches County** are Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Chireno; Douglass; Lake Nacogdoches; Loco Valley; Melrose; Nacogdoches (= Nac); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewage ponds; Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp Forest). **In San Augustine County** are Townsend Park on Lake Rayburn and the TX 147 causeway over Lake Rayburn (unless specifically noted as the Angelina County end).