

## Fall Bird Report

(September 1 - October 31, 2010)

by David E. Wolf

After the long hot summer the extreme heat began to abate in late August, but **our region remained extremely dry**. Several weak fronts in early and mid-September brought weather that was “perfect” by most people’s standards, with cool nights and warm sunny days when we literally did not see even a wisp of a cloud for weeks. October was unseasonably warm right to the end of the month, with few frontal passages. Rainfall remained sporadic and by the end of the season some areas had recorded had less than half of their expected total so far this year. All of this gorgeous, undramatic weather kept the **numbers of migrants low** and they just trickled through, but **the variety of species found was stunning**, perhaps due to the persistence of two observers, Louis Debetaz and yours truly, more than any environmental factor. The best indicator of this was the incredible **29 species of migrant warblers** seen from mid-July to the end of October. Louis checked the Azalea Trail in Lufkin often and found an amazing 22 species of warblers at that one site, including the only Worm-eating and Swainson’s all fall, while I had 27 species in my wanderings, mostly in the brushy woods around the receding edges of Lake Rayburn. This may sound better than it really was – most days brought only a few birds and it was only a few days after cool fronts that brought more variety. The lesson: persistence pays off! With lake levels low there were also sightings of some interesting waterbirds, though shorebirds never appeared in large numbers in spite of extensive habitat. By the end of October our winter birds were starting to appear, but with the mild season the numbers are not here yet.

Thanks to everyone who sent in their sightings. Please continue to do so as we shift gears to winter birding! My e-mail address is: dewolf@myinu.net

### **First arrival dates for wintering species:**

Gadwall - 4 at Kurth Lake Sept 29; the first numbers there were 35 on Oct 13 (both LD).

American Wigeon - 6 at Kurth Lake on Oct 13 (LD).

Mallard - 8 at Kurth Lake on Sept 29 (LD).

Redhead - 40 at Kurth Lake on Oct 13, a good count for so early (LD).

Ring-necked Duck - 2 at Kurth Lake on Oct 13 (LD).

Greater Scaup - 1 female off the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn on Oct 21; a male was there Oct 27 (both DW). No Lesser Scaup have been reported yet.

Ruddy Duck - 1 at Kurth Lake on Oct 2 (LD).

American Coot - 150 at Kurth Lake on Sept 29 had increased to 1750-2000 on Oct 13-14 (both LD). 3 at Lake Nacogdoches on Oct 2 were the first arrivals at this lake (CW).

American Woodcock - 1 flushed in the SFA Exp Forest on Oct 22 was early (CR).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 1 in Central Hts on Sept 29 (DW).

Blue-headed Vireo - 2 in Pecan Park on Oct 2 (RT, DW).

Brown Creeper - singles in Central Hts (DW) and at Martin Dies SP (RS) on Oct 20.

House Wren - 1 at the TX 147 causeway on Sept 27 (DW); 8 at Alazan Bayou WMA on Oct 24 was the season high count (DW, RT).

Winter Wren - 1 in Central Hts on Oct 23 (MHW).

Sedge Wren - 1 on the Azalea Trail on Sept 29 (LD).

**Golden-crowned Kinglets** seem to be on the move early this season and in good numbers. The first were very early, 2 at Marion Ferry on the PAS field trip Oct 9 (DW, PB et al). The next were singles at Kurth Lake Oct 14 (LD) and in the SFA Exp Forest Oct 15 (RS), and then they were widespread the latter half of the month (m. obs.).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - 1 in Nac on Sept 25 was the first (CS); the next were 2 on the Azalea Trail (LD) and one in Central Hts (DW) on Sept 29.

Hermit Thrush - 1 in Huntington on Oct 14 (NB); 1 in n. Houston Co on Oct 18 (RS).

American Pipit - 2 heard over the flats below TX 103 at the Attoyac on Oct 3 (RT, DW).

Orange-crowned Warbler - 1 on the Azalea Trail from Sept 26-30 (LD) was our earliest ever by a few days.

Yellow-rumped Warbler - 1 at the TX 147 causeway on Oct 12 (DW) and 4 in Lufkin on Oct 15 (LD) were the first seen; the first push was 33 at the TX 147 causeway on Oct 21 (DW).

Eastern Towhee - 1 male at Alazan Bayou WMA on Oct 8 (DW) was our **earliest fall date ever** by six days.

Vesper Sparrow - 2 early migrants at the west side park on Lake Nacogdoches on Sept 30 (CW) missed being our earliest ever by one day.

Savannah Sparrow - on Oct 13 there were 15 at Kurth Lake Oct 13 (LD) and 3 at the TX 147 causeway (DW).

Song Sparrow - 1 in Lufkin on Oct 15 (LD).

Lincoln's Sparrow - 2 on Azalea Trail (LD) and 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA (DW) on Oct 1.

Swamp Sparrow - 3 at Alazan Bayou on Oct 8 (DW).

White-throated Sparrow - 1 on the Azalea Trail on Oct 13 (LD); several were in Central Hts the next day (MHW, DW).

### **Everything else (and it's a lot):**

The first (and only) geese were 16 Greater White-fronted over Huntington on the Oct 12 cool front (DW). Blue-winged Teal continued to move through, including 250 at Marion Ferry on Sept 4 (LD, SL); 150 at Kurth Lake Oct 2 (LD); and 60 on Lake Rayburn Oct 13 (DW). The first numbers of Northern Shoveler were 45 at Kurth Lake on Oct 2 (LD). Only a few Northern Pintail were seen: 2 at Kurth Lake Sept 29 (LD); 6 at Kurth Lake Oct 2 (LD); 7 from the TX 147 causeway Oct 13 (DW); 2 at Kurth Lake Oct 14 (LD); and 3 at TX 147 on Oct 27 (DW). On Sept 29 there were already 25 Pied-billed Grebes on Kurth Lake, but on Oct 14 the number had jumped to 150 (both LD). The first American White Pelicans were 5 from the TX 147 causeway on Sept 27 (DW). A **Brown Pelican** on upper Lake Murvaul from FM 1971 (Panola Co) on Sept 6 was an inexplicable rare surprise (RS), though inland sightings of this species have increased dramatically since Hurricane Ike. Lingering Neotropic Cormorants were 1 at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 and 2 off the TX 147 causeway Oct 21 (both DW). 240 Great Egrets on upper Rayburn on Sept 26 was the season high count, while 130 were still along the Attoyac arm on Oct 21 (both DW).

**Tricolored Herons** were more frequent than usual and were recorded on upper Lake Rayburn on 10

dates from Aug 25 - Oct 21, usually 1-4 birds but 6 were seen from Marion Ferry in the dawn flight on Sept 19 (LD, RT, DW). White Ibis were conspicuous around Rayburn, with a season high count of 200 at Marion Ferry on Aug 31 (DW). The last were 2 (im.) along the Attoyac arm Oct 21 (DW). There were more sightings of **Plegadis ibis** than normal this fall, but none were close enough to study carefully and identify to species: 19 at Marion Ferry Sept 19 (LD, RT, DW); 9 over Marion Ferry Sept 26 (DW); 2 at Marion Ferry Sept 29 (RS); and 12 over the TX 147 causeway Oct 12 (DW). It was a good fall for **Roseate Spoonbills** on upper Rayburn and they were seen on 10 dates from Aug 11 - Oct 3, including 21 at Marion Ferry and 2 at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Aug 31 (DW; season high count); 7 at Marion Ferry on Sept 4 (LD, SL); 10 at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Sept 6 (DW); 13 on upper Rayburn on Sept 10 (DW); 14 on upper Rayburn Sept 12 (DW, TR); 11 at Marion Ferry Sept 19 (LD, RT, DW); and 9 flying up the Attoyac arm on Oct 3 (DW). It was not a fall for large numbers of Wood Stork and a meager 86 at Marion Ferry Sept 19 was the season high count (LD, RT, DW). The last were 5 over TX 21 at the Neches River (Angelina/Houston Counties) Oct 18 (RS).

With the prolonged clear skies this was not a good fall for detecting migrant raptors. The largest flight of Turkey Vultures was 325+ over Central Hts on Sept 11 (DW). Two Ospreys fishing in Ellen Trout Lake on Sept 27 were a surprise (KK). Late sightings of Mississippi Kites were 2 (im.) over Central Hts Sept 21 (DW, MHW) and 2 over Nacogdoches Sept 22 (SL). A Sharp-shinned Hawk in Central Hts Sept 4 was likely a local resident (MHW). Only one significant Broad-winged Hawk flight was observed but it was a good one, with **1315** counted high over Alazan Bayou WMA and Central Hts on Sept 23 (DW). Falcons seemed attracted to the vast flats around receding Lake Rayburn and 8 Merlins seen there from Sept 19 - Oct 27 were more than usual (all DW). An adult Peregrine Falcon at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 was our earliest fall record ever (DW), while additional Peregrine sightings were an adult sitting on the flats below Marion Ferry Sept 19 (LD, RT, DW); 2 over Central Hts Sept 21 (DW, MHW); and singles over Alazan Bayou WMA and Central Hts Sept 23 (DW). Two **Sandhill Cranes** at the vast flats along the Attoyac arm below TX 103 on Oct 20 were a rare find (RS) and the earliest fall record ever for the Pineywoods. We have very few records of this species in our region.

Good shorebird habitat was available at several sites around upper Lake Rayburn throughout the season, but the number of birds using the flats was mediocre. Black-bellied Plover were 3 at the TX 147 causeway Oct 12; 7 on upper Rayburn Oct 13; 3 on a distant island off the TX 147 causeway Oct 21; and 4 there Oct 27 (all DW). A rare **Piping Plover** on the flats at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Sept 12 (DW, TR) was the first seen in our region in some years. American Avocets were more frequent than normal, including 2 on the Attoyac arm below TX 103 on Oct 12-13 (DW); a good count of 23 on a distant island off TX 147 on Oct 20 (RS); 7 on the Attoyac arm on Oct 21 (DW); and 20 in the TX 147 area Oct 27 (DW). 13 Spotted Sandpipers at Marion Ferry on Sept 4 was the season high count (LD, SL). On Aug 31 there were 4 Solitary, 10 Spotted, 6 Semipalmated, 48 Least, 1 Baird's and 20 Pectoral sandpipers on upper Rayburn at Marion Ferry and TX 103 at the Attoyac (DW). On Sept 4 there were 25 Semipalmated, 20 Western, 35 Least and 15 Pectoral sandpipers at Marion Ferry (LD, SL). 260 Least Sandpipers on the Attoyac flats below TX 103 on Oct 13 was the season high count (DW). One Stilt Sandpiper was at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 18 (DW) and 15 dowitcher sp? on the Attoyac flats Oct 20 was the season high count (RS). The only Buff-breasted Sandpiper all fall, in spite of good habitat, was one at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 (DW). **4 im. Laughing Gulls** flew north over the TX 147 causeway Oct 12 (DW), the only report of this wandering species this fall. A single im. **Franklin's Gull** on an island close to the TX 147

causeway Oct 13 (DW) was the first, while the mild cool front on Oct 26 brought flocks totalling **1895+** over Central Hts and Nacogdoches. The next day (Oct 27) a massive flight of at least **8370** left Lake Rayburn in the first hour of daylight, flying north up the lake to form a massive kettle that disappeared into the clouds (both DW). This is an unprecedented number for our region. An adult Herring Gull from the TX 147 causeway Oct 12 was the first this fall (DW). A **Sabine's Gull** off the TX 147 causeway on Sept 27 (DW) was only our **2<sup>nd</sup> area record** ever (the first was Sept 19, 1980; CDF, SL) and was an **adult** (most Texas records are immatures). This was definitely **"the"** bird of the fall for me. Poor, but diagnostic, digi-scope photos can be viewed on the PAS website. Six Caspian Terns at Marion Ferry on Sept 4 were the first (LD, SL), while the only others were one at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 (DW); 2 there Sept 12 (DW, TR); and 2 over Nacogdoches (with Franklin's Gulls) on Oct 26 (DW). 7 Black Terns from Etoile Park Sept 18 (DW) were the only ones reported all fall.

A singing male **Common Ground Dove** was at Alazan Bayou on Oct 24 (DW, RT). About 1/3 of our 28 area records are from October, and this species has been heard singing in October before, making me wonder: could this species possibly be a low-density very late breeder here? The last Yellow-billed Cuckoo was one near Zavalla Oct 12 (DW). A Great Horned Owl on the Azalea Trail Oct 4 was a great surprise and a first for the trail (LD). The first Common Nighthawks were 3 over Central Hts Sept 6 (MHW). The last Ruby-throated Hummingbirds reported were one s. of Nacogdoches Oct 15 (Jerry Winker); one in Loco Valley Oct 20 (RH) and in Nacogdoches to at least Oct 20 (JR). On Oct 24 an adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** showed up at the Rohrer's house in Nacogdoches, likely the same bird that has spent the last two winters here. His timing is precise – last year he arrived on Oct 23! Two Northern Flickers at Marion Ferry on Aug 31 were probably local residents, but one of 2 at the TX 147 causeway Sept 13 acted like an early migrant. The first definite push of migrants was 12 over the TX 147 causeway Sept 27 (all DW), while 16 around TX 103 at the Attoyac on Oct 3 (DW, RT) was the season high count of migrants. A migrant Acadian Flycatcher was in Central Hts Sept 24 (DW). Single **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were at the TX 147 causeway on Sept 13 (DW); Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 14 (DW); and in Pecan Park on Oct 2 (DW, RT). Eastern Phoebe was the dominant migrant at Alazan Bayou Oct 24, when 23+ were tallied (DW, RT). An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** on a brushy island off the TX 147 causeway on Oct 27 (DW) was only our **2<sup>nd</sup> area record ever** and one of very few (less than 6) credible reports from the entire Pineywoods region. This species adds to the list of western vagrants that have been found in this area over the years, perhaps because it is brushy and "southwestern" in aspect when lake levels drop. 50 Eastern Kingbirds over Central Hts Sept 3 was the season high count (DW). At least 250 noisy Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were gathering at a roost in Crockett (Houston Co) Sept 18 (DW, MHW). White-eyed Vireo numbers peaked at 25+ at Alazan Bayou WMA on Sept 14 (DW). The highest one-day tally of Warbling Vireos was 5 at Marion Ferry on Sept 26 (DW). The only **Philadelphia Vireo** was one at Kurth Lake Sept 18 (LD). Swallows were on the move on the Sept 4 cool front, with 25 Tree, 7 Northern Rough-winged, 100 Cliff and 7 Barn over the Marion Ferry area (LD, SL). 2 **Cave Swallows** foraged around the TX 103 bridge over the Attoyac Sept 6 (DW) and a single late Barn Swallow came over Central Hts Oct 20 (DW). We have not had any local reports of Red-breasted Nuthatch yet, but one was seen near Tyler by a Tyler Audubon field trip on Oct 23 (PB et al), so we should be watching (and listening) for this winter invader. Migrant Marsh Wrens were 1 at Marion Ferry Sept 26; 4 were at the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 27 (season peak); 1 in Central Hts Oct 2-4 (DW); 3 at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 5; and 1 at TX 147 Oct 27 (all DW). Single migrant Wood Thrushes were on the Azalea Trail Sept 15 and Oct 1

(both LD). 50 American Robins on the Azalea Trail Oct 18 was the only sizable flock of migrants yet this fall (LD). From 1-5 migrant Gray Catbirds were reported on 13 dates from Sept 10 - Oct 15 (LD, DW), giving us a good idea of their main fall migration period. Brown Thrasher was a widespread migrant and arrival after mid-Sept; the peak count was 32+ at Alazan Bayou WMA on Oct 1 (DW).

Since it was such a good season for migrant warblers I am listing all records of those considered "scarce or occasional" in the fall. Single **Blue-winged Warblers** were on the Azalea Trail Aug 29 (LD) and at Marion Ferry Aug 31 (DW). Single Tennessee Warblers were at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 (DW); on the Azalea Trail Sept 7; Sept 15 and Sept 18 (LD); and in Central Hts Oct 25 (DW). A Nashville at Marion Ferry Aug 30-31 was our **earliest fall record ever** (DW), while others were noted from Sept 16-Oct 20 (LD, RH, DW). The highest one-day count of Yellow Warblers was 10 at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 (DW), while one on the Azalea Trail Oct 14 was **our latest ever** by two days (LD). The only **Chestnut-sided** was an im. at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 6 (DW). Single Magnolia Warblers were found on the Azalea Trail Sept 16 (LD); at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 23 (DW); and at Marion Ferry Sept 26 (DW). Single **Blackburnians** were at Etoile Park Sept 6 (DW; **earliest ever by 4 days**); TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 12 (TR); and on the Azalea Trail Sept 24 (LD). A **Palm Warbler** at the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 27 (DW) was our **earliest fall record ever** (digi-scoped) and then 2 were with a bluebird flock at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 5 (DW). This species is always very rare and unexpected in our region, but has been found almost annually in Oct in recent years. Black-and-white Warblers turned up throughout this period, with one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 24 the last (RT, DW). Single American Redstarts were found at various sites on 7 days from Sept 6-Oct 2 (LD, TR, DW). The last Prothonotary was an im. at McAlister Park Sept 6 (DW). The only **Worm-eating** all fall was on the Azalea Trail Sept 7 (LD), while a singing **Swainson's** there Sept 5 was also unique (LD). Northern Waterthrush were widespread in wet areas from Aug 24-Sept 21 (LD, DW), with a peak of 10+ (at 3 sites) on upper Rayburn Sept 6 (DW). One late bird was at Marion Ferry Oct 9 (DW, PB). A Louisiana Waterthrush at TX 103 at the Attoyac Aug 31 (DW) was the last; this species is a very early migrant in the fall. Three migrant Kentucky Warblers were noted from Aug 26-Sept 6 (LD, DW). The only Mourning Warblers were in Central Hts Aug 28 and at Marion Ferry Sept 26 (both DW). The first migrant Common Yellowthroat on the Azalea Trail was Sept 20 (LD); peak counts were 10 at Marion Ferry Sept 26 (DW); 14 at the TX 147 causeway (DW) and 6 on the Azalea Trail (LD) on Sept 27; 10 at Alazan Bayou WMA (DW) and 6 on the Azalea Trail (LD) Oct 1; and 10 at Marion Ferry Oct 9 (DW, PB et al). Hooded Warblers were widespread around Rayburn throughout Sept, with the highest count 9 on Sept 6 (DW). Single Wilson's Warblers were seen on 9 dates from Aug 24-Oct 4, mostly by LD on the Azalea Trail. The only Canadas were singles at Marion Ferry Aug 26 (DW) and on the Azalea Trail Sept 29 (LD). A few migrant Yellow-breasted Chats were noted Aug 23-Sept 28 (LD, DW). Additional species of migrant warblers found this fall, from mid-July to the end of October, were Northern Parula and Black-throated Green, Yellow-throated, Pine and Prairie warblers, for a total of **29 species**. (If only we had found an Ovenbird to make an even 30...).

A late Summer Tanager remained in Central Hts through Oct 22 (MHW, DW). A streaky juv. Chipping Sparrow in Loco Valley on Aug 20 had likely been raised locally (RH), while the first migrant was one in Central Hts Oct 6 (DW). The only **Clay-colored Sparrow** all fall was one at the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 27 (DW). Two flocks of Lark Sparrows (20 total) in Central Hts Sept 3 were likely local breeders gathering before leaving (DW). A late Blue Grosbeak on the Azalea Trail Oct 18-24 was a first for the trail (LD). The season high count for Indigo Bunting was a mere 55+ at Alazan Bayou WMA on

Oct 8 (DW). Both adult Painted Buntings were feeding late fledglings in Central Hts Sept 8-11 (DW, MHW), while a very late migrant visited the Azalea Trail Oct 21 (LD). The first migrant Eastern Meadowlark noted was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 5 (DW). A **Great-tailed Grackle** flew south over the base of the TX 147 causeway Oct 27 (DW). Is this species migratory in our region? (The small numbers that breed in Nacogdoches and Lufkin seem to disappear for the winter). Baltimore Orioles were seen in small numbers (6 or fewer) from Aug 25-Sept 24 (LD, DW) and then a late flock of 7 appeared on the Azalea Trail on Oct 1 (LD).

**Observers:** PB = Peter Barnes; NB = Nancy Bird; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; RH = Ruth Heino; KK = Kara Kaplowitz; SL = Susie Lower; TR = Thomas Riecke; JR = Jack Rohrer; CR = Craig Rudolph; RS = Rick Schaefer; CS = Cliff Shackelford; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

**Localities in Angelina County:** Azalea Trail (Lufkin); Ellen Trout Park and Lake (Lufkin); Huntington; Kit McConico Park (Lufkin); Kurth Lake; Marion Ferry; Zavalla.

**In Nacogdoches County:** Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Etoile Park; Loco Valley; Lake Nacogdoches; McAlister Park; Nacogdoches (town); Pecan Park (Nacogdoches); SFA Experimental Forest.

**In San Augustine County:** TX 103 at the Attoyac (crossing of upper Lake Rayburn); TX 147 causeway (across middle Lake Rayburn).