

## Late Winter Bird Report (Late January - March 15, 2010)

by David E. Wolf

Wet and cold pretty well sums up our late winter, with the exception of the two dates in February when we had major snowfalls! They were still wet and cold, but at least it was beautiful outside. For the longest time it seemed as if this winter would hang on forever – and then suddenly spring burst forth March 8-15. Many of our birds were late in appearing, just as many of our plants were later to bloom or re-appear than in recent years, and there still is little evidence of spring migration. Have faith – the birds WILL get here! As they arrive, please send reports to dewolf@myinu.net

Almost no significant movement of northbound migrant waterfowl was reported this season and locally wintering ducks had largely disappeared by mid-March. A pair of Mallards was lingering at Alazan Bayou March 10-15 (DW). Females have raised broods here in the past, so it will be interesting to keep an eye on this pair. The first Blue-winged Teal were 4 at Alazan Bayou March 10 (DW) and 2 near Alto (Cherokee Co) on March 14 (CW). 50 Redheads were on Kurth Lake Feb 10-20 (LD, CM). From 2-4 Greater Scaup at the Nac ponds since Dec increased to a tight flock of 8 present at least Feb 11-23; they stayed apart from the Lesser Scaup (DW et al). 10 Horned Grebes on Kurth Lake Feb 13 was the high count this winter (LD). **Five Brown Pelicans** were at the Lake Livingston spillway on Feb 6 (DW, RT); they have been somewhat regular here since Hurricane Ike. An American Bittern in the swamp on the Dorr Creek road on Feb 9 was a nice surprise (CS, JN). The first Cattle Egrets were 2 in Douglass March 16 (Ron Wells). A **Crested Caracara** over Pecan Park in Nacogdoches on Feb 25 was a **first record** for Nacogdoches and surrounding counties (TR). This species has steadily been increasing in distribution and numbers along the western and northern edges of the Pineywoods. A flock of **55 Sandhill Cranes** over the Angelina NF (n. Jasper Co) was remarkable for the Pineywoods (RS); this species is very rarely seen in our region and most of the few records have involved single birds or flocks of less than 6. Two Ospreys at the Lake Livingston spillway on Feb 6 again confirmed that they over-winter here. (DW, RT). The first Ruby-throated Hummingbird reported was a male near Nac on March 14 (Jerry Winker). Thanks to careful note-taking by the observers, we had good documentation for the three **Rufous Hummingbirds** that successfully wintered in Nacogdoches this season. The adult male at the Rohrer's was present from Oct 24, 2009-March 9, 2010 and was likely the same bird that wintered here last year (when it was last seen March 1, 2009). The female at Chuck Ely's was present from December 2009 through at least March 13, 2010. it was banded Jan 21. As of this writing (15 March) the female at the Rohrer's was still present.

The first Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was in Nac March 17 (RT, DW). A few single White-eyed Vireos were heard or seen in early March, but some of these may have been over-wintering birds: Alazan Bayou on March 4 (CW); near Nac on March 9 (BB); in Carrizo Creek on March 14 (SL); and at Alazan Bayou March 15 (DW). As I write this (March 18) they are still late in arriving and there are very few around. The first Yellow-throated Vireo was detected along Dorr Creek March 17 (RT, DW); several singing Blue-headed were in the same area. Purple Martins were generally late in returning; the first were 6 at Kurth Lake on Feb 10 (LD), but no others were reported until March: 1 at Lake Nac on March 4 (CW); 4 in Loco Valley on March 10 (RH) and 2 at Alazan Bayou that same day (DW). few others were seen until well into

March (m. obs.). Spring firsts for other swallows were 1 Tree at Alazan Bayou March 10 (DW); 1 Northern Rough-winged in Nac March 14; 20 Cliff at the TX 147 bridge March 11; and 15 Barn at TX 147 March 11 (all DW). The first Northern Parula was one at Alazan Bayou WMA March 10 (DW), while the first Black-and-white Warblers were 3 singing males along the Dorr Creek road March 17 (DW, RT). Two Louisiana Waterthrush were also along Dorr Creek March 17 (RT, DW). Common Yellowthroats at Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin March 11 (JP) and Alazan Bayou March 10 (DW) were likely over-wintering birds rather than early arrivals.

At least 4 wintering Lark Sparrows were still present in Central Hts March 13 (DW). A Henslow's Sparrow was flushed at a Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony in Angelina NF (n. Jasper Co) on March 5 (RS) and one was still present at a known site in s. Nac. Co March 17 (DW, RT). On the Feb 12 snow day at least 8 Harris's Sparrows were seen in Central Hts (in three places), the high count for the winter. At least 4 were still present March 13 and one on March 14 (DW, MHW). A male Great-tailed Grackle was back at the Nacogdoches Wal-Mart on March 5 (SL), the first reported since fall. A singing **oriole** near Douglass on March 11 was most likely an **Orchard**, but this is almost a month early for this species, and the bird was not seen well enough to eliminate the possibility of a rare stray like the very similar Hooded (CW). **Purple Finches** were almost entirely absent all winter, until they suddenly showed up in small numbers at many places in late Feb-March. Were these birds that were (1). returning north? From where?; (2). Still moving south? In search of food?; or (3). A low-density winter population suddenly fattening up at feeders before heading north? The first report came from near San Augustine on Feb 11 and there were still 3 here on March 11 (MA). Then several showed up in Huntington Feb 28 and were last seen March 14 (NB). One near Hudson March 1-4 was the only one there all winter (JP). Two in Central Hts March 11 were the first here all winter, but only stayed at the feeders for 30 minutes and were never seen again (DW). One near Melrose March 15 was the first here all winter (RT). Three were seen "in the wild" at Alazan Bayou March 15 (DW, RT). Just like the Purple Finches, almost no Pine Siskins showed up this winter, quite a contrast to last year's huge invasion. A few were present in Cushing Jan through mid-March (DS); 1-2 came to feeders in Central Hts Feb 4-mid March (DW, MHW); one was banded in Nac this winter (CE); a migrant was in Huntington March 10 (NB); and one appeared in Loco Valley March 12, while 4 were there on March 15 (RH). A number of observers reported not having any this winter, in spite of lots of goldfinches at their feeders.

**Observers:** MA = Marcus Arreguin; NB = Nancy Bird; BB = Brent Burt; LD = Louis Debetaz; CE = Chuck Ely; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; CM = Carroll Moore; JN = Jim Neal; JP = Jimmie Putnam; RS = Rick Schaefer; DS = Dennis Scheef; TR = Thomas Riecke; CS = Cliff Shackelford; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf

**Localities** **In Angelina County:** Hudson; Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin. **In Nacogdoches County:** Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Dorr Creek road; Douglass; Loco Valley; Melrose; Nacogdoches (= Nac); Nac ponds (= Nacogdoches sewage ponds). **In San Augustine County:** San Augustine; the TX 147 causeway over Lake Rayburn (unless noted as the Angelina Co end).