

Late Fall/Winter Bird Report
(October 20, 2011 – February 20, 2012)

by David E. Wolf

Three Greater White-fronted Geese moving south over TX 147 on Jan 1 were late (DW, RT), while single Snow Geese on Kurth Lake Nov 12 (LD) and Ellen Trout Lake Jan 9 (AM) were surprising. A lone **Ross's Goose** was off Etoile Park on upper Rayburn Dec 24 and again Jan 1 (DW). 600 Snow Geese going north over the Azalea Trail Feb 14 must have been quite a sight (LD). A **Cackling Goose** on Kurth Lake Nov 27 (LD) was a rare find and the first Angelina County record in over 10 years. I received a report from a farmer in w. Nac Co that 100 "Canadians" landed in his wheat field in mid-Feb. He was quite sure that they were not "specklebellies" and thought that some of the birds were larger, and it may be that both Canada and Cackling were present. The first push of Mallards was 87 at the TX 147 causeway on the very cold morning of Dec 7 (DW). The first spring migrant Blue-winged Teal were 4 off Townsend Park on Rayburn on Feb 3 (PB). Northern Pintails were more frequent than expected, perhaps due to low water levels. 40-50 on the Etoile flats Dec 28-Jan 1 (DW, RT) was a high count, while small numbers (1-6) were also seen at TX 147 and Ayish Bayou on Rayburn, Kurth Lake and Ellen Trout (5 on Dec 6; LD). 30 Redheads on Kurth Lake on the Nov 19 field trip (LD et al; PAS) increased to 100 on Nov 27 (LD), but declined to very few after the New Year. Small flocks of 15-30 utilized the Nac ponds all winter; 22-28 were on a pond near Melrose in early Feb (PB, RT, DW); and a few were in the TX 147 area (PB, DW). The first Greater Scaup were 2 on the Nac ponds Nov 26 (CW) and one off Cassells-Boykin Park Dec 7 (DW). The first Bufflehead was one at Ellen Trout Park on Nov 13 (LD), and 35 there Dec 2 was a good count (DW), as was 50 at Country Club Lake Feb 23 (LD). The first (and only?) Common Goldeneye was one at Ellen Trout Dec 6 (LD). A well-described female **Common Merganser** visited the Nacogdoches sewer ponds on the Nov 26 cold front (CW), but was not found again. This is a **first for Nacogdoches County**, though we have at least 5 records from Angelina County. There were also **129 Hooded Mergansers** at the ponds Nov 26, a high count (CW). A Red-breasted Merganser was off Rayburn Park Feb 5 (DW). A **Pacific Loon** seen from the TX 147 causeway Feb 19 (DW, MHW, Travis Aud Soc) may have been present all winter, as a "suspicious" loon were seen here Dec 7, 2011 and Jan 1, 2012, but only in flight (DW). The first Common Loon was one on the Nov 19 Kurth Lake field trip (LD et al; PAS), while 45 off Rayburn Park Feb 5 was a high count (DW, RT). A few Horned Grebes wintered on Kurth (LD et al) and Lake Rayburn (DW et al), but no more than 3 were seen in a day in either area. A few **Neotropic Cormorants** lingered around the shallow sloughs off Etoile Park on upper Rayburn, with 2 seen Dec 2 & 7 and singles Dec 24 & Jan 1 (DW). This species was the most numerous ever on Rayburn this year and may be establishing a pattern of a few wintering birds. An Anhinga was found at Ellen Trout Jan 1 (DW, RT) and Jan 5 (LD); then a bird was at the VFW pond in Lufkin in Jan-Feb (LD et al), perhaps the same individual. The last White Ibis of the fall were 3 adults at TX 103 at the Angelina Oct 27 (DW). **16 Roseate Spoonbills** were still around a pool at TX 103 at the Angelina (Angelina Co) on 27 Oct (DW), the last date for their long stay this fall.

An Osprey at TX 147 on Rayburn Feb 19 (DW, MHW, Travis Aud Soc) was a rare winter sighting (though possibly an early arrival). An migrant adult Bald Eagle soaring over the SFASU stadium during the

homecoming game on Oct 29 was apparently undetected by most of the thousands of football fans, except CS (and at least one friend of the Wolfs who mentioned seeing it). Northern Harriers were reported more often than expected, including a one-day high count of 5 around Lake Rayburn (TX 147 and TX 103 at the Angelina) on Dec 7 (DW) and one that spent the entire winter along the dam at Kurth Lake. A **Merlin** at Kurth Lake Dec 3 was a rare winter sighting (LD). On Dec 7 a **Peregrine Falcon** was harassing 2 eagles at TX 147 (DW).; quite possibly the same bird was seen there Jan 1 (DW, RT). 2 **Sandhill Cranes** were in s. Nacogdoches County on Oct 30 (Monty Whiting); this species is very rare in the Pineywoods. A single **Common Gallinule** was reliably found at the same spot on Kurth Lake from Nov 30 through Jan 14 (LD et al); it was found on the CBC Dec 17, the first ever on the count. An **American Golden-Plover** photographed on Oct 27 on the flats at Ewing Park (DW) was only the 2nd one recorded this fall. 2 late Black-bellied Plover were at the base of the TX 147 causeway Nov 22 (DW). Killdeer numbers on upper Rayburn peaked at 220 at TX 103 at the Angelina on Oct 23 (DW, RT). 25 American Avocets at the TX 103 crossing of the Angelina on Nov 20 (LP) was peak count for the season; 12 were still there Nov 22; 3 on Dec 2 and 7 on Dec 7 (DW). A Spotted Sandpiper wintered at Ellen Trout through at least Feb 17 (m. obs.). 42 Greater Yellowlegs at TX 103 at the Angelina on Dec 2 was the fall high count (DW), while one at Ellen Trout Park Nov 6 was a surprise there (LD). 32 were still on upper Rayburn on Dec 7 (DW), while the last were 8 on upper Rayburn Jan 1 (DW). One in s. Nacogdoches Co Dec 14 was found again on the Dec 17 CBC (DW, MHW et al), a new (and long overdue) species for the count. 2 late Western Sandpipers were with Least on the flats off Etoile Park on upper Rayburn on Dec 2 (DW). A few Long-billed Dowitchers lingered around the base of the TX 103 crossing of the Angelina (Angelina Co), with 9 there Nov 22 and 3 on Dec 2 (DW); one was at the TX 147 causeway Dec 7 (DW). The first American Woodcock were singles in Pecan Park Nov 12 (CS) and Loco Valley Nov 15 (RH), while one flushed at close range in Nac Jan 5 gave the observer a thrill! (CDF). The last Franklin's Gulls were 2 on the Angelina arm and 1 off TX 147 on Nov 22 (DW), while the first Bonaparte's Gulls were 5 at Kurth Lake Nov 27 (LD). A Herring Gull at the base of the TX 147 causeway Nov 22 was the first (DW). On Feb 19 a first-cycle **Thayer's Gull** was photographed on an island just off the TX 147 causeway (DW, Travis Aud Soc). This is our first area record and one of the few confirmed records for the Pineywoods; the bird may have been seen as early as Dec 7, 2011, but not well enough to identify (DW). Our first-ever winter records of **White-winged Doves** were 15 together in Nac on Dec 15 (DW) and 10 still in the same area on the CBC Dec 17 (CW et al). A single bird was a one-day wonder at a feeder in Douglass Jan 7 (CW). A pair of **Common Ground-Doves** in s. Nac Co on the CBC on Dec 17 (MHW) were a rare surprise, though not unprecedented.. This was the best winter for **hummingbird sightings** in our area in a long time. Solicitations for feeder watchers for the Nac CBC brought to light an immature male **Anna's Hummingbird** in Nacogdoches that had been present since at least early Nov at the home of Tim and Vicki Baggett. Its identity was confirmed when it was seen and photographed by Vicki on Dec 17 on the Nac CBC. DW photographed it on Dec 19, and several more observers got to view it before the bird was last seen on Dec 29. Special thanks go to the Baggetts for letting us come view it during the hectic holiday season. A beautiful adult male **Black-chinned Hummingbird** at Molly Smith's feeders in Nacogdoches Oct 25-Nov 7 was confirmed by CDF; great photos are posted on the PAS website. Almost certainly the same bird appeared nearby at the Native Plant Center on Dec 1 (JS) and then was seen very sporadically at Molly's again through at least Jan 22 (CDF). An apparent immature male Rufous Hummingbird showed up at the Native Plant Center in Nac Dec 2-12 (JS, CS et al) and then disappeared

until seen again Jan 23 (JS). Female or immature *Selasphorus* (Rufous/Allen's) hummingbirds were in Central Hts Nov 3-Dec 16 (MHW, DW) and in Lufkin Nov 26-Jan 19 (Gene Hallmark).

The last Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was one in Nac on Nov 16 (SL). The first Purple Martins were 3 at Kurth Lake Feb 11 (LD). A migrant Bewick's Wren was in Central Hts Oct 29-31 (MHW). Single Marsh Wrens wintered at Kurth Lake (LD et al; PAS) and Ellen Trout (LD et al; PAS). From 1-3 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were at the base of the TX 147 causeway all winter through Feb 19 (DW et al). 3 Hermit Thrushes in Central Hts Nov 4 were the first reported (MHW). Small flocks of migrant American Robins were first noted over Central Hts Oct 27 (DW); by late Nov they were numerous in northern parts of our area, but they did not reach further south in numbers until Jan. A Gray Catbird on the Azalea Trail Jan 31 was the only one reported (LD). Several Sprague's Pipits again wintered at the Nac Airport (SL, DW et al), The first Cedar Waxwings were 3 in Nacogdoches Nov 13 (LS). They were "on the move" in good numbers in early December, with high counts of 450 in s. Nacogdoches Co Dec 3 (DW) and 2838 total on the Nac CBC on Dec 17; they remained reasonably widespread and common through Jan-Feb. A Common Yellowthroat at Ellen Trout on the Jan 22 PAS field trip (LD, SL et al) was the only one found this winter. A female-plumaged **Summer Tanager** on the Nov 13 PAS field trip to the Native Plant Center was late (CS, JS et al; PAS). Possibly this same bird was confirmed here on Jan 24, after seeing a "flash of yellow around for weeks" (JS). It was seen here again Jan 30 (CDF), then photographed at a nearby feeder Feb 1 (Diana Walker) and seen for several more weeks. Does anyone have a last date for this bird? A migrant **Spotted Towhee** was in Central Heights Nov 13 (MHW) and another was at Alazan Bayou WMA Dec 15-17 (DW). The first Eastern Towhee was one in Loco Valley Nov 15 (RH). Up to 5 Lark Sparrows were seen sporadically in Central Hts from Nov 7 through Feb (MHW, DW); a flock has wintered here in most recent years. At least one Henslow's Sparrow was at the Nac Airport from late Nov-Dec 17 (SL et al), but none were found later in the season. An out-of-place migrant Grasshopper Sparrow was found on the SFASU campus Nov 4 (TR) and seen later in the day by MHW. Another found in s. Nac Co Dec 14 was re-located on the CBC Dec 17 (MHW), while 2 were at Etoile Park Jan 1 (DW, RT). The first Fox Sparrow reported was one at the SFA Exp Forest on Dec 3 (DW). This was a big winter for **Harris's Sparrows** in our area. One in Central Hts on Oct 30 was our **earliest ever by six days** (MHW); at least 2 were present there by Nov 23 and more showed up in Dec (DW). Another one turned up about 1 ½ miles away on FM 698 on Nov 24 and 3-6 were here through Feb (LS et al). One at the SFA Exp Forest gate on Dec 3 (DW) stayed through the CBC and on Jan 1 there were 5 at this spot (CW). Another showed up in Nac town Jan 22 (CDF). The first Dark-eyed Junco was one in Central Hts Oct 29 (MHW). This species was more common and widespread than it has been for many years and a high count of 504 was tallied on the CBC Dec 17. Three Lapland Longspurs were flushed at the Nac Airport Jan 28 (DW, MHW et al). At least 2 **Western Meadowlarks** were singing in Central Hts on Feb 4 (DW, MHW); this species was also heard in the same general area by people waiting for the redpoll to show (DW, CS et al); and one was singing in e. Nac Co on Feb 12 (SL). Though few blackbirds (and no cowbirds) were present at the time of the CBC, very large flocks (up to 10,000 birds or more) appeared widely from late Jan through Feb, including hundreds of cowbirds (m. obs.) Unlike the previous winter, rather few Rusty Blackbirds were found: one at the Nac ponds Dec 5 was the first (DW); 15-20 were in Central Hts Dec 28-30 (MHW, DW); 1-6 in were in Nac Jan 22-30 (CDF, CS); and 7 were near Libby (e. Nac Co) Feb 12 (SL). The only Brewer's Blackbirds were one with cowbirds in Nac on Jan 24 (CDF) and 20 in w. Nac Co on Feb 24 (DW). The only reports of Purples Finch were 1-2 in Central Hts Jan 15-Feb 18 (MHW), and one in Nac

Jan 18 (CDF). Were there any others around? A **Common Redpoll** discovered in Central Hts Jan 27 stayed through at least Feb 21 (DW, LS et al) and was photographed to confirm the sighting. There are fewer than 10 records for Texas and this is the first for the Pineywoods, so this was a very exciting and rare bird. Quite a few people got to see it, including visitors from out-of-town, and we especially thank Brian and Julie Farrell for so patiently putting up with the birders who came to watch for it! The first Pine Siskin was one heard in Central Hts Dec 5 (DW); on Dec 6 there were 15 in Ellen Trout Park (LD) and 12 were seen on the Nac CBC Dec 17. Numbers remained low and only a few were seen in Jan-Feb. Small numbers of American Goldfinches over Central Hts on Nov 4 were the first (MHW); one at a feeder in Loco Valley Nov 9 was the first there (RH).

Observers: PB = Peter Barnes; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; AM = Allison Maxwell; LP = Linda Price; TR = Thomas Riecke; CS = Cliff Shackelford; JS = Julie Shackelford; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; m. obs. = many observers.

Localities in Angelina County: Azalea Trail (in Lufkin); Cassells-Boykin Park (on Rayburn); Country Club Lake (Lufkin); Ellen Trout Park; Kurth Lake; Ewing Park (TX 103 at the Angelina arm of Lake Rayburn in Angelina County); Lufkin town.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Central Heights; Douglass; Etoile Park and Flats (TX 103 at the Angelina arm of Lake Rayburn); Libby; Loco Valley; Melrose; Nacogdoches town (= Nac); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewer ponds (= Nac ponds); Native Plant Center (in Nac town); Pecan Park; SFASU = Stephen F. Austin State University; SFA Exp For = SFA Experimental Forest.

Localities in San Augustine County: Ayish Bayou (lower Rayburn); Rayburn Park (lower Rayburn); Townsend Park (Attoyac arm of upper Rayburn); TX 147 causeway (across upper Lake Rayburn).