

Spring Report 2011

by David E. Wolf
(June 10, 2011)

Migrants were generally scarce this spring. What else can I say? Although a nice diversity of species was found by a few persistent observers, the numbers were consistently low. And though we had a number of cool fronts, we had very little rain. This would seem to be a key ingredient needed to produce good fallouts here, so it is no surprise that they were lacking this spring. As I write this, we continue setting near-record high temperatures daily and the prolonged drought continues unabated. This report is lengthy – spring is a complex season! – and if I have missed any important sightings, or if any information here is incorrect, please let me know. Thanks and have a good summer: David Wolf at dewolf@myinu.net

Spring firsts: many species seemed to be a week or more late in arriving.

Little Blue Heron - 3 at Alazan Bayou March 19 (DW).

Cattle Egret - 2 over the Azalea Trail March 22 (LD).

Green Heron - 1 in Diboll April 6 (RT).

Chuck-will's-widow - 1 in Central Hts April 9 (DW, MHW).

Chimney Swift - 1 over Marion Ferry March 22 (DW).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird - 1 in Huntington March 18 (NB).

Great Crested Flycatcher - 1 in Huntington March 18 was very early (NB); the next report was one at Alazan Bayou April 2 (RT, DW).

Eastern Kingbird - 1 in Central Hts March 31 (DW).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - 1 e. of Cushing on March 21 (DS); first for Angelina Co was one at Angelina Co AP March 24 (LD).

Red-eyed Vireo - 3 at Alazan Bayou April 2 (DW).

Purple Martin - 1 at Kurth Lake on Jan 15 was extremely early (LD).

Wood Thrush - 1 singing in Melrose April 6 (RT).

Yellow-throated Warbler - 1 in Central Hts March 21 (MHW); 1 at Marion Ferry March 22 (DW); and 1 at Kurth Lake March 23 (LD).

Prothonotary Warbler - 1 at Alazan Bayou April 2 (RT, DW).

Louisiana Waterthrush - 1 heard in Carrizo Creek right on schedule on March 16 (SL).

Summer Tanager - 1 in Nacogdoches April 7 (RH); 1 in Carrizo Creek on April 10 (SL).

Blue Grosbeak - 1 at Alazan Bayou April 9 (RT, DW).

Indigo Bunting - 1 in Central Hts April 7 (DW); 1 in Loco Valley April 10 (RH)..

Orchard Oriole - 4 at Alazan Bayou April 9 (RT, DW).

Main report:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are present in the Diboll area again this year, with a pair near Ryan Lake (s. Angelina Co) May 20 and again May 26 (LD); they were also seen closer to Diboll several times in late May-early June (RT). A pair of Gadwall at TX 147 April 27 were the last, as were 20 Northern Shovelers

there the same day (DW). The first Blue-winged Teal were 3 at Ellen Trout Park March 20 (KK) and 2 at Kurth Lake March 23 (LD); the last were 8 late birds at TX 147 on May 25 (DW). Late migrant waterfowl included a Lesser Scaup at Kurth Lake May 14 (LD); a female Common Goldeneye at TX 103 at Etoile March 27 (DW, RT); and a Red-breasted Merganser on Kurth Lake May 11-14 (LD). A Northern Bobwhite heard on the Diboll BBS May 26 was the first in 15 years (LD). 4 **Eared Grebes** on Kurth Lake April 27 were a good find (LD). 3 Neotropic Cormorants at TX 103 at Etoile March 22 were the first, while at least 50, along with 100 Double-crested, were around the nesting island off TX 147 April 27 (both DW). A flock of 40 Anhingas over Alazan Bayou April 8 was the only sizable number of migrants reported (DW). A lingering American White Pelican was on an island n. of TX 147 June 6 (DW). The only American Bittern reported was at Alazan Bayou March 19 (RT, DW). The first Snowy Egret was one at Marion Ferry March 27 (DW). A Tricolored Heron at TX 147 May 2 and 2 there June 6 hint that there may again be a few pairs breeding on the nesting island (DW). Noteworthy White Ibis sightings were 120 at Alazan Bayou March 15 (DW); 270 there March 26 (DW); 30 at Marion Ferry May 15 (LD); and 11 non-breeders at TX 147 June 6 (DW). Rare **White-faced Ibis** sightings were 7 bright adults at TX 147 May 2 (DW) and 2 there May 25 (DW). A Black Vulture flushed from an abandoned building on FM 1878 (Nac Co) already had a single egg on March 6 (SL). An Osprey was back at the nest site off TX 103 at Etoile (Nac Co) March 22; the nest off Shirley Creek was also active this year (both DW). The first Mississippi Kite was an early single over Alazan Bayou April 9 (RT, DW), while 9 over the Azalea Trail on May 1 was the only flock reported (LD); 2 over Alazan Bayou May 24 seemed to be late migrants (DW). One around Diboll in early June was more likely a local breeder; though no nest has yet been found in that area a few seem to be present every summer (RT). Bald Eagles nested at both Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin (m. obs.) and Lake Nacogdoches, where a juvenile learning to fly was accompanied by an adult on May 2 (CW). There were also numerous juveniles around upper and middle Lake Rayburn this spring, indicating a good breeding season locally (DW). **Swainson's Hawks** were seen in our area for the first time in several years, a light morph adult low over Central Hts April 8 (DW, MHW) and a dark morph at Alazan Bayou April 16 (DW, RT). The first Broad-winged Hawks were 2 over Nacogdoches March 26 (MHW), while the only significant flight detected was on April 2, when 526 came over Alazan Bayou in two hours (DW). The first calling bird, presumably a local breeder, was heard in Carrizo Creek April 10 (SL). The only Merlin reported was a late one at Kurth Lake May 18 (LD).

4 Purple Gallinules were back at Kurth Lake May 14, our only regular site for this species (LD). 6 American Coots were at the TX 147 causeway May 25-June 6, but there was no evidence of breeding (DW). A smattering of shorebirds appeared this spring, on rare stormy days or around the extensive exposed flats on Lake Rayburn. 11 American Golden Plover at the Angelina Co Airport on rainy March 8 had diminished to 4 on March 11 (LD, SL); 9 were in Central Hts March 14 (DW); 3 were at the Angelina Co AP March 22 (DW); and one at Kurth Lake April 2 was a first ever for that locality (LD). One Black-bellied Plover was at the TX 147 flats April 27 (DW). The first Greater Yellowlegs were 3 at Alazan Bayou March 19 and the last was one at the Nac ponds May 26 (both DW). A Solitary Sandpiper at Alazan Bayou March 25 was the first (DW). The only numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs were 25 at TX 147 April 27 (DW). The spring high count of Spotted Sandpipers was 25 at Kurth Lake May 21 (LD). It was a good spring for Upland Sandpiper sightings: 2 at Alazan Bayou March 25 were the first (DW); 3 were on FM 1878 in Nac Co on March 26 (SL) and 22 went over Central Hts that same day (DW); 17 were in Central Hts April 4 (DW); 16 at the Angelina Co AP April 5 increased to a spring high count of 43 the next

day (LD, CM); and the last was one at the Angelina Co AP April 26 (LD). Semipalmated Sandpiper sightings were 2 at TX 147 April 27 (DW), one at the Nac ponds May 2 (DW) and 1 at Kurth Lake April 30 (LD). The spring high count of Least Sandpipers was 90 at TX 147 on April 27 (DW). 14 Baird's Sandpiper at TX 147 April 27 was a good count, while a single late one was at the Nac ponds May 26 (both DW). The only White-rumped Sandpipers were one at Kurth Lake April 30 and 2 there May 11 (both LD). A Sanderling at Kurth Lake May 21 was the only one this spring (LD). The first Pectoral Sandpipers were 6 at the Angelina Co AP March 8 (LD). A Dunlin was at Kurth Lake May 21 (LD) and 2 came over the TX 147 causeway May 25 (DW). 30 Wilson's Snipe at Alazan Bayou March 25 was the spring high count (DW). A flock of 70 Wilson's Phalaropes at TX 147 on April 27 was a high count, while a single visited the Nac ponds May 2 (both DW). The first Franklin's Gull were 2 over Central Hts and 1 at TX 103 at Etoile on April 15 (DW); on April 27 there were 300 on an island off TX 147 (DW); and 100 were at TX 103 at Etoile April 28 (LD). Late Bonaparte's Gulls were one at TX 103 at Etoile April 15 (DW) and 3 at Kurth Lake April 27 (LD). A very late Ring-billed was at TX 147 on June 6 (DW), where 3 Herring Gulls were tallied both April 27 and May 2 (DW). 6 Caspian Terns were at the TX 147 causeway April 27 and 7 were there May 2 (DW).

White-winged Doves have rapidly been expanding their range in Texas for decades and we've been waiting for them to show up in our region again. This spring they did, when 2 were at feeders in Nacogdoches April 18; on April 23 there were 3 and 2 were singing (CE). They were also found in Lufkin, apparently nesting and not for the first time (fide LD). Whip-poor-wills were heard in Central Hts March 25 and April 1 (MHW). Northern Flickers independently found in both the Marion Ferry and TX 103 at Etoile areas from 22 March-late May (LD, DW) were likely local breeders. An Olive-sided Flycatcher in Douglass May 3 was the only one this spring (CW). *Empidonax* were largely lacking this spring, but a 2 Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were in Central Hts May 17 (MHW) and a Willow Flycatcher was in Pecan Park May 2 (TR). An Eastern Phoebe on the Diboll BBS May 26 was about as far south as they are known to summer (LD). The first fledged phoebe was in Pecan Park May 2 (DW). No great numbers of migrant vireos were reported, but 2 Philadelphia were in Pecan Park May 2 (DW). 40 Tree Swallows at Angelina Co AP on rainy March 8 was a good count (LD). Two extremely early (or wintering?) Northern Rough-winged Swallows at Kurth Lake on the Feb 12 PAS field trip were unexpected (LD et al). A large flight of swallows at the TX 147 causeway on May 2 included 30 Northern Rough-winged, 35 Bank, 800+ Cliff and 1200+ Barn (DW). **Cave Swallows** continued to rapidly expand in our region this spring. On March 19 at least 12 were back at the Alazan Bayou bridge where they nested last year and by late April they had nests built. This species was then found at a small culvert on TX 7 at the Nacogdoches AP April 10 and 10 nests were confirmed there April 28 (DW). On May 24 at least 6 were a TX 7 bridge over the Angelina Riverbottoms (Nac Co) (DW). They were also confirmed to be breeding again on the TX 7 bridge over the Neches River (Angelina Co) (LD, DW). A Veery, one of our scarcer spring migrants, was on the Azalea Trail April 21 (LD), while a Gray-cheeked Thrush on the Lanana Creek Trail April 27 was the only one this spring (DW). I received two reports of Red-breasted Nuthatches coming to feeders in Nacogdoches in the late winter, one in mid-Feb (TD) and one in Feb-March (fide SL). A single Golden-crowned Kinglet and Brown Creeper were late migrants through Central Hts on March 28 (DW). A huge flock of 2000+ Cedar Waxwings feeding on berries at SFASU March 27 was an impressive sight (CS, JS).

A very early Nashville Warbler on the Azalea Trail March 21-22 was the first, as was an early Tennessee Warbler there April 5 (both LD). The first numbers of Tennessee in Pecan Park were 12 on April 26 (DW); they peaked there at a paltry 35+ on May 2 (DW). The first Chestnut-sided Warblers were singles in Nacogdoches April 27 (TR, DW), while the first Magnolia Warblers were 2 in Pecan Park April 28 (DW). A female **Black-throated Blue Warbler** on the Azalea Trail May 10 was a stunning find, a first for Angelina Co and a first spring record for our region of the Pineywoods (LD). The first Black-throated Green Warbler was heard in Central Hts March 27 (MHW), but this species was notable for its absence most of this spring. Single Bay-breasted Warblers were in Pecan Park May 1 and Old Orchard Park May 2 (DW). A male **Blackpoll Warbler** on the Azalea Trail May 22 was another great find by Louis and the only one this spring (LD). An Ovenbird was on the Lanana Creek Trail April 27 (DW) and a Mourning Warbler was at the Angelina College Trail May 17 (LD). A male Common Yellowthroat at Alazan Bayou March 15 likely had over-wintered (DW). The only Wilson's Warbler was one on the Azalea Trail May 22 (LD). A female Scarlet Tanager at Kurth Lake May 11 was somewhat late and the only reported this spring (LD). A migrant **Cassin's Sparrow** singing at Alazan Bayou April 27 was the 4th spring record for Nacogdoches County and the Pineywoods (DW). Later this species was found in numbers and singing on territory in the stripmines and clearcuts well to the north of our region in the NETFO area, a stunning surprise (further info available on the NETFO website). These birds were likely displaced by the drought in central and west Texas. Clay-colored Sparrows were found in relatively good numbers this spring, with 6 at Alazan Bayou on April 16 and 27 (DW, RT); 3 in Pecan Park April 27-28 (TR, DW); one on the Azalea Trail April 30-May 1 (LD); and 2 at Alazan Bayou May 2 (DW). Single migrant Field Sparrows were in Central Hts April 17 (DW) and on the Azalea Trail April 26 (LD). The first Lark Sparrow was back at the Angelina Co AP March 9 (LD), while the wintering flock of 15 in Central Hts dispersed in mid-March (DW, MHW). A Grasshopper Sparrow in Pecan Park on April 11 was a surprise (TR), while the only others were 2 at Alazan Bayou April 16 (DW, RT). 4+ Henslow's Sparrows **singing** at Alazan Bayou at dawn on April 8 were a surprise (DW); they were not present the next morning. This is our latest date ever for this species and may also be the first report of singing birds in our area. The first migrant Lincoln's Sparrow appeared in Central Hts March 17 (DW), while the only large numbers were 55 at Alazan Bayou April 16 (RT, DW). The last Harris's Sparrows wintering in Central Hts was seen March 14 (DW). A migrant White-crowned Sparrow in Pecan Park May 2 was the last (DW). The last Dark-eyed Juncos were 2 in Central Hts March 18 (DW). The first Rose-breasted Grosbeak was one in Loco Valley April 17 (RH). Large numbers of Dickcissels at Alazan Bayou April 27 (210) and May 2 (230) included many flocks of migrants (DW). **Bobolinks** made a decent showing this spring, with 4 males at Alazan Bayou April 27 down to 2 on May 2 (both DW); 6 were found in Central Hts May 13 and a few remained through May 21 (MHW); and 10 were at Marion Ferry on May 15 (LD). At least 6 Brewer's and 6 Rusty Blackbirds amidst other icterids at the Angelina Co AP on March 11 were the last sightings this winter (LD, SL). At least 2 male **Great-tailed Grackles** were back in the vicinity of the Nacogdoches Wal-Mart by March 1 (SL); they were also present in Diboll (RT) and at the Lufkin Wal-Mart (LD et al) from March onwards. They are likely nesting at all three locations – and are now becoming a regular, if unwanted, part of our avifauna. No large numbers of Baltimore Orioles were reported, but the first was one in Central Hts April 13 (MHW) and 15 were in Pecan Park April 26 (DW). While most American Goldfinches left the feeders by late Feb, Pine Siskins stayed around and even increased: 20 siskins were in Huntington March 10 (NB); 5+ were singing in Nac March 16 (TR); then a high count of 140 was found in Nac April 14 (TR); and the last was one in Pecan Park May 3 (DW).

Observers: NB = Nancy Bird; CE = Chuck Ely; TD = Thelmas Dalmas; LD = Louis Debetaz; RH = Ruth Heino; KK = Kara Kaplowitz; SL = Susie Lower; TR = Thomas Riecke; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS, JS = Cliff and Julie Shackelford; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf

Localities: in Angelina County: Angelina College Trail (Lufkin); Angelina County Airport (= Angelina Co AP); Azalea Trail (Lufkin); Diboll; Ellen Trout Park (Lufkin); Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Marion Ferry; Old Orchard Park (Diboll); Ryan Lake (near Diboll); and TX 103 at Etoile (unless specified as Nacogdoches Co). **In Nacogdoches County:** Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Douglass; Lanana Creek Trail (in Nacogdoches); Loco Valley; Melrose; Nacogdoches town; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Pecan Park; SFASU (= Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches); and Shirley Creek (upper Lake Rayburn). **In San Augustine County:** TX 147 area on Lake Rayburn (unless specifically indicated as Angelina County end of causeway).