

Summer Bird Report (June-July 2011)

(by David E. Wolf & the Pineywoods Audubon Society)

Prolonged record-setting extreme heat and severe drought sums up the weather this summer. We went into the season hotter and drier than average, and then it proceeded to just get worse...and worse...and worse, until by early August we were reaching temperatures to 106-108 deg. F. daily. Only a few areas received any significant rainfall after mid-June and rare were the days when it even clouded up enough to give us hope. By August much of the vegetation was looking very stressed and some trees were clearly dying. Huge Lake Rayburn continued to recede dramatically and by mid-August was 11 ft. below pool. This record-setting drought now covers most of the state and in many areas is the worst in 116 years of record-keeping.

With temperatures in the upper 90s or higher daily only a few observers were crazy enough to be out birding! However, this weather has to abate eventually and the upcoming months offer some of our best birding of the year. **Two suggestions for enjoying our local birds: first**, if you do not already **provide water** for the birds in your yard **now is the time to do so**. It might be anything from a pan to a fancy water feature, but it should be a big help to our local birds and any migrants passing through, since many creeks, ponds and marshes are bone-dry. A “drip” is especially appreciated. Keep an eye out – you never know what might sneak in. **Secondly**: Lake Rayburn and other **bodies of water are extremely low**, with extensive shoreline and islands exposed, so we have **a chance to see shorebirds and other waterbirds that are normally scarce** or lacking in our region. If you are anywhere near the lake it is worth carrying your binoculars and checking the shorelines and any islands. There may just be something of interest there. Please report sightings to me at dewolf@myinu.net for inclusion in the Fall Report.

Pied-billed Grebes bred on Kurth Lake again, with 3 adults and 2 juveniles seen July 7 (LD). A late Am. White Pelican was on an island off the TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn on 6 June (DW). Two **Least Bitterns** at the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn (San Aug Co) on July 26 provided one of our few regional records in the last 20 years (DW), but they were not found again and the marshes dried up. It is likely that a few pairs of **Tricolored Herons** again nested in the large rookery on the island off TX 147 on Rayburn (San Augustine Co) as breeding-plumaged adults were seen several times in June and July (DW). The first wandering **Roseate Spoonbills** were 2 on upper Rayburn (in San Aug Co) on July 26 (DW). The **only** Wood Stork this period was one on the Attoyac arm of Rayburn (Nac Co) on July 26 (DW). Two **Osprey** nests on Lake Rayburn (both in Nacogdoches Co) fledged young this summer (DW). A **Swallow-tailed Kite** photographed on FM 1669 near Huntington on August 4 had apparently been around for “several weeks” (Beverly and Tim Johnson, fide LD). We have very few records of this species this far north into the Pineywoods. After no early summer sightings of Mississippi Kites in Nacogdoches a very vocal pair was found on July 8; their behavior indicated that they were in the vicinity of a nest (CS). This species nested here for the first time last summer. The first migrant kites were 2 over Central Heights on July 26 (MHW) and the first numbers were 10 over Nacogdoches August 4 (CS). **Cooper’s Hawks** nested on the Azalea Trail in Lufkin again this summer (LD) and 2 begging fledglings in Central Hts

July 26-August 1 confirmed breeding there (DW). A fledgling **Broad-winged Hawk** that could barely fly was seen in Nacogdoches town August 1 for confirmed breeding there. Three adult and one juvenile **Purple Gallinule** were at Kurth Lake July 9 (LD) and this species was still present into August. This species is rare and local in our region and this is the only consistent site for it. 4 American Coots were at TX 147 on Rayburn July 1 (DW), one was at Kurth Lake July 9 (LD), and another summered at the VFW pond in Lufkin (LD), but there was no indication of breeding. A very late Ring-billed Gull was at TX 147 on Rayburn (San Aug Co) on June 6 (DW).

Perhaps the biggest bird news of this hot summer was yet another southern “invader” moving into the Pineywoods. **White-winged Doves** were present in Lufkin (Angelina Co) in significant numbers all summer, and were **confirmed breeding for the first time in our region**. I first heard of them through Louis Debetaz in late May and then Cliff Shackelford tracked down further information. In mid-July they were photographed by Richard Rowlett (including 14 birds at once) and he also found a **nest**. On August 3 Cliff heard at least 5-6 singing from one spot near Winston Park and saw one. It is likely that White-wings will soon be a regular part of our avifauna, but for now this is an **important range extension**. Both adult Greater Roadrunners were observed feeding young in a nest behind Kinfolk’s Restaurant on NW Loop 224 in Nacogdoches in early to mid-July (fide CS). Beginning in mid-June a fledgling Barred Owl, typically accompanied by one or both adults, regularly came to a sprinkler in Carrizo Creek at night, providing quite a show (SL). Recently fledged Red-headed Woodpeckers were found in Nacogdoches on July 13 & 18 (CS) and Central Hts on August 3 (DW). A juvenile Northern Flicker on the TX 147 causeway on July 20 confirmed local breeding (RT, DW).

The first Least Flycatchers were single adults in Central Hts July 28-29 and at Marion Ferry July 31 (both DW). An immature Tree Swallow at TX 147 on Rayburn on July 1 had likely been raised locally (DW). A singing **Swainson’s Thrush** in Nacogdoches **June 11** was our latest spring migrant ever for anywhere in the Pineywoods (CS). A Prairie Warbler at Marion Ferry July 31 (DW), a Louisiana Waterthrush in Central Hts June 20 (MHW), and a male Hooded Warbler in Cushing on June 24 (DS) were already away from breeding territories. Are these birds long-distance migrants or just local wanderers? Large areas of dry lake-bed on upper Rayburn grew up to grass and weeds this summer, and great numbers of singing Common Yellowthroats, Indigo Buntings and Dickcissels moved in to take advantage of this new habitat. Even a few Northern Bobwhite were heard at Marion Ferry and the base of the TX 147 causeway (DW). **Great-tailed Grackles** were confirmed breeding in Nacogdoches for the 2nd year in a row (the first juveniles were seen June 27 by DW), and they have become locally numerous in Lufkin, with more than 20 at one site (LD). They are becoming established, whether we like it or not. The peak count of migrant Orchard Orioles around the Marion Ferry shoreline on Lake Rayburn was 32+ on July 17 (DW); few adult males were seen after this. Bright adult male Baltimore Orioles were seen within blocks of downtown Nacogdoches on June 11 (CS) and July 9 (MHW), likely indicating a local breeding attempt. This species is rare breeder anywhere in the Pineywoods, but has been confirmed in the past.

Observers: LD = Louis Debetaz; WF = Wayne Forrest; SL = Susie Lower; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; RT = Robert Truss; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf

Localities in Angelina County: Marion Ferry on upper Lake Rayburn; Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin. **In Nacogdoches County:** Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Nacogdoches town. **In San Augustine County:** TX 147 causeway on middle Lake Rayburn.