

Winter Report
(December 1, 2012 – early March, 2013)

By David E. Wolf

The winter of 2012-13 could be summed up as rather ordinary, not too warm and not too cold. The most significant event may have been the hard freeze on the nights of March 25-27, about 10 days later than our average last-freeze date. This definitely set the vegetation back and may have delayed the arrival of some spring migrants. There were few notable trends this winter. Red-breasted Nuthatches were relatively widespread, both at feeders and in the wild, and Pine Siskins invaded in modest numbers.

Waterfowl variety and numbers remained good on Kurth Lake and the Lufkin area lakes through the first week of March, but dropped-off soon thereafter (LD et al). The first spring Blue-winged Teal were 2 at Alazan Bayou Feb 17 (DW, RT). 3 Northern Pintail visited Ellen Trout Dec 2 (LD) and 20 migrants at Alazan Bayou Feb 10 was a good count for our area (RT). Again this year most of the numbers of Redheads found in December disappeared in January, but 4 appeared in Lufkin Jan 18 (LD). 1300 Canvasbacks at TX 147 on Rayburn Feb 16 was the season high count (DW). The season high count on Buffleheads on the Lufkin lakes was 65 on Jan 20 and 65 again on March 8 (LD et al). Two Common Goldeneyes at Ellen Trout Jan 24 (LD) and one at Alazan Bayou Jan 25 (DW) were the only reports this winter. A Red-breasted Merganser was on Kurth Lake Feb 22 (LD). Six **Neotropic Cormorants** were roosting with Double-crested at Ellen Trout on Jan 1, and 9 were in flooded bushes along the TX 147 causeway on Feb 16 (both DW). All 15 or so previous winter records for the region have been of singles, but this species has increased as a summer resident in recent years and it looks like more may be wintering too. An Anhinga lingered at Ellen Trout through Dec 14 (LD), while a late immature White Ibis was around the Lufkin lakes Nov 29-Dec 2 (LD). Singles Ospreys at Marion Ferry Dec 2 (DW, RT) and Kurth Lake Feb 22 (LD) were out-of-season. A very visible pair of nesting Bald Eagles at Ellen Trout Park caused much excitement for area birders and continues to be enjoyed by many. Two small chicks were visible in the nest by mid-January and both “eaglets” were still in the nest March 8 (LD, m. obs.). A beautiful nearly-white Red-tailed Hawk first spotted in the Melrose area Dec 23 was seen sporadically through January (RT). Winter Merlins are rare in our area, but one was in s. Nac Co on Dec 14 & 16 (DW, MHW et al) and another was at the TX 147 flats on Rayburn Jan 1 (DW). A Virginia Rail first heard at Alazan Bayou Dec 13 was still there Jan 25, when a second one called back (DW). A Spotted Sandpiper was at Kurth Lake Feb 26 (LD). Single late migrant Greater Yellowlegs were over Marion Ferry Dec 2 (DW, RT); Central Hts Dec 22 (DW); Melrose Dec 23 (RT); and TX 147 causeway Jan 1 (DW); and 6 were at a farm in w. Nac Co Jan 25 (DW). A very late **Solitary Sandpiper** visited the VFW Pond in Lufkin Dec 2 (LD). At least 5 Am. Woodcock were displaying over Alazan Bayou Jan 25 (DW). Very late was an adult **Franklin’s Gull** at Kurth Lake Dec 20 (LD), while a Herring Gull visited there Jan 10 (LD).

A **Rufous Hummingbird** appeared near Lufkin Dec 3, but did not stay (KR, AR), while another one successfully wintered in Lufkin from Dec 26, 2012-March 22, 2013 (Ann Reyes fide CS). The first swallows reported were a single Purple Martin in Diboll Feb 4 (RT); a Tree at Kurth Lake Feb 28 (LD); a Northern Rough-winged at Ellen Trout March 1 (RT); a very early Cliff at Kurth Lake Feb 26 and 20 there Feb 28 (LD); and 1 Barn in Angelina Co Feb 22 (LD); 25 Barn were at Kurth Lake Feb 28 (LD). Red-breasted Nuthatches were at several feeders all winter and seen occasionally “in the wild” as well

(m. obs.). Last reports were one in Loco Valley until Feb 25 (RH) and one still in Nacogdoches March 25 (CS). A Bewick's Wren in Central Hts Feb 19 was present only this one day (MHW). Two Marsh Wrens frequented the exact same spots at Alazan Bayou at least Dec 13-Jan 25; one was still present Feb 17 (DW). Single Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, always a good find in winter, were at Marion Ferry Dec 2; Alazan Bayou Dec 13; Dorr Creek Dec 14 (all DW); and Kurth Lake Feb 28 (LD). Good numbers of American Robins passed southward in December, including 9500 from one spot in s. Nac Co on Dec 14 (DW). Cedar Waxwings did not appear in large numbers until mid-Dec; 700 were in one area in s. Nac Co Dec 14 (DW) and a high count of 3898 was recorded on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 16 (m. obs.). Apparently these numbers continued southward as there were not as many around later in the winter. A female Spotted Towhee was at Alazan Bayou Feb 17 (DW, RT). This species is rare in our area, but at least one is found most winters. A male **Lark Bunting** reported near Alazan Bayou on Feb 8 (DWa, VWa) is only the 3rd report ever for Nacogdoches/Angelina Counties and the first since 1980. Up to 5 Lark Sparrows again spent the entire winter in Central Hts (DW, MHW). The first Harris's Sparrow was one in Central Hts Dec 1 and up to 3 spent the winter there, with one still present April 11 (DW, MHW). A nice adult Harris's was photographed near Huntington Dec 9; it was first seen a few days earlier and lingered until at least the end of Dec (Jamie Childress fide CS). A male "**Oregon**" Junco was carefully studied at a feeder in Cushing Dec 22-23 (DS). The only Rusty Blackbirds reported were 4 in Pecan Park on Jan 1 (DW); and 10 found near the Angelina Co Airport March 6-8; one lingered here until the late date of March 15 (LD). The only Brewer's Blackbirds reported all winter were 8 at their regular site in w. Nac Co on Jan 25 (DW) and 15 at the Angelina Co AP March 14 (LD). It may not seem noteworthy, but a flock of 16 **Great-tailed Grackles** (all female-plumaged) found in Diboll from mid-Jan into Feb provided the first mid-winter record for the area (RT). One was back at the Wal-Mart in Lufkin by Feb 22 (LD). The first Purple Finches were 4 in s. Nac Co on Dec 14 (DW), but they were not widespread this winter. The last were a single male and female in Loco Valley Feb 2-20 and then 4 there Feb 23 (RH). The first Pine Siskin was one over Marion Ferry Dec 2 (RT, DW). The first in Cushing were 10+ on Dec 23 (DS); the first large flock reported was 80 in Pecan Park Jan 1 (DW); and in late Feb more began appearing at area feeding stations and feeding on buds in the trees (m. obs.).

Localities:

In Angelina County: Angelina Co AP (= Angelina County Airport); Diboll; Ellen Trout (= Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin); Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin (town); Marion Ferry.

In Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou (= Alazan Bayou WMA); Central Heights; Cushing; Dorr Creek; Loco Valley; Melrose; Nac Co (= Nacogdoches County); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches)

In San Augustine County: TX 147 causeway and flats and Lake Rayburn.

Observers: LD = Louis Debetaz; RH = Ruth Heino; KR, AR = Kent & Ann Richardson; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; RT = Robert Truss; DWa, VWa = Dave & Vicki Wallace; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; m. obs. = many observers.