

Winter Bird Report for the Pineywoods Audubon Society

(December 1, 2014 - February 28, 2015)

by David E. Wolf (dewolfnac@gmail.com)

The early winter was mild and this was reflected in the lingering birds and migrants found on the Nacogdoches CBC on December 14, but not long afterwards the weather turned colder and more of our hard-weather birds moved into the region. Generally the rest of the winter was chilly and wet, with a few notably cold days, but nothing extreme. It was noteworthy that even though it was not extremely cold it did not warm up much either, and as I write this spring appears to be late generally.

Waterfowl numbers on area lakes peaked from mid-December to mid-January and then decreased through the rest of the winter, until relatively few were present as the season drew to a close. Nor was there any obvious push of spring migrants. 80 Snow Geese northbound over Nacogdoches on Feb 22 (DW) were the only spring migrants reported. A late male Blue-winged Teal was at Mize Lake (s. Nacogdoches Co.) on Dec 12 only (TD, JD), while the first of spring were 20 at Kurth Lake on rainy Feb 16 (LD et al) and 12 at the TX 147 causeway on Feb 22 (DW). Northern Pintail sightings were 2 at Ellen Trout Park Feb 2 (LD); 30 at Kurth Lake Feb 16 (LD et al); 6 at the TX 147 causeway Feb 22 (DW); and 30 at Ellen Trout Park Feb 25 (LD). The season high counts of Canvasbacks were 525 at Kurth Lake on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14 (LD et al) and a paltry 250 at the TX 147 causeway Feb 22 (DW). The high count of Redheads was 200 on Kurth Lake Dec 24 (LD); this species largely disappeared after the New Year. A female Red-breasted Merganser at Ellen Trout Park on Dec 4 was a rare surprise at this locality, but did not stay around (LD). The high count for Common Loons this winter was 19 in the TX 147 area of Lake Rayburn on Feb 22 (DW). 6 Horned Grebes on Kurth Lake Dec 5 was the highest count this winter, but 5 were seen regularly through the end of February (LD). None were found on Lake Rayburn. 1-6 American White Pelicans that sporadically visited Ellen Trout Park Dec 17-Feb 11 seemed out-of-place (LD, RT et al), while a few also visited Kurth Lake through at least Jan 23; this is a more expected locale (LD). Small numbers were also scattered around Lake Rayburn all winter (DW). A **Neotropic Cormorant** was spotted at Ellen Trout Park Jan 2 (RT), while 5 adults were back at the TX 147 causeway on Feb 4 and 12 adults were there Feb 22 (both DW). One immature visited the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Feb 5, but was not seen again (DW). Apparently this species, which has increased greatly in our area, is one of our first returning spring migrants!

Two Virginia Rails were heard at Alazan Bayou WMA on Dec 2 & 11, with one of them seen on the latter date (DW). Spotted Sandpipers spent the entire winter at both Ellen Trout Park and Kurth Lake (LD, RT et al) and one was along the TX 147 causeway Feb 4 (DW). Two Greater Yellowlegs were southbound over Central Hts Dec 7 (MHW), while 6 late migrants were found in a flooded pasture in Nacogdoches Co. on Dec 12 and again on the CBC on Dec 14 (SL et al). A single Greater Yellowlegs was on a pond near Melrose on Feb 1, as were 30 Wilson's Snipe flushed by a pair of Bald Eagles (RT). One American Woodcock was heard displaying at Alazan Bayou WMA Feb 19 and several others were seen (DW). From 1-3 Herring Gulls were seen at the TX 147 causeway throughout the season, amidst the more numerous Ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls. A **Thayer's Gull** that visited Kurth Lake on Feb 8 was a first county record of a species that is very rare in the entire state (LD, LS). A Great Horned Owl nest in Jones Park in

Lufkin, first found by photographer Bob Newman, had a single owlet visible on March 6, with an adult nearby (LD). The only hummingbirds this winter were an adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** in Cushing Nov 24-Dec 13 (DS) and an immature male **Rufous** that visited feeders in Central Hts from Nov 25-at least March 9 (DW, MHW), gradually attaining enough rufous feathers on its back to confirm it as this species. 2 White-eyed Vireos were at Alazan Bayou Dec 11 (DW) and 3 were found on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14 (3 parties), but there were no reports of this rare lingerer later in the season. The first Purple Martins were 2 over Lufkin Country Club Lake (LD) and one over Ellen Trout Park (DW) on Feb 4. The first push was 25 at Kurth Lake as a wet cold front came through on Feb 16 (LD et al); 25+ were at the TX 147 causeway on a cold front on Feb 22 (DW); and 45 were at Kurth Lake on a cold Feb 25 (LD). The first Tree Swallows were 12+ at the TX 147 causeway on the Feb 22 cold front, with at least one early **Northern Rough-winged** and 2 **Cave swallows** were amidst them (DW). **Cave Swallows** wintered in our area again this season, with 1 roosting under the bridge at Alazan Bayou WMA Dec 11 & 14 (DW); and **20-30** seen irregularly over Kurth Lake from Dec 24-Feb 16, especially on rainy days (LD et al). A high count of **65** on Feb 26 likely included arriving migrants (LD), as this recent colonist to our area returns early. A pair of White-breasted Nuthatches in Jones Park (Lufkin) on Jan 14 was a nice surprise (DB, LD, LS); at least one was seen here later in the season (LD). This species was also present in Pecan Park (Nacogdoches), a regular site (DW). Red-breasted Nuthatches were completely lacking the entire winter and there were no reports. A Bewick's Wren in Central Hts Jan 4 was seen only on that date (MHW, RH, CW). Two Marsh Wrens seen at Alazan Bayou WMA Feb 21 confirmed wintering at this site, where first noted Dec 11 (DW). Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were scarce this winter, but 2 were at Ellen Trout Park on the Dec 3 field trip (LD, PAS); 1 was along Dorr Creek on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14 (MHW, TH); 1 was at Ellen Trout Park Jan 21 (DB, LD); and 1 was at the TX 147 causeway on Feb 22 (DW). Single Gray Catbirds were at different sites in s. Nacogdoches Co. on Dec 13 (DW) and on the CBC on Dec 14 (TH, MHW). At least 3225 American Robins swirled around the base of the TX 147 causeway on the cold front of Feb 22, but which direction were they going? Over 5200 Cedar Waxwings were tallied here at the same time (both DW). At least 4 Sprague's Pipits wintered at the Nacogdoches Airport and were flushed regularly (TH, SL, DW, MHW).

A female Common Yellowthroat was at Alazan Bayou WMA Dec 2 (DW), while 2 males were found here on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14 (BB, CS, DW). A well-marked "**Audubon's**" **Warbler** visited Central Hts Jan 8 (MHW), but no other unexpected warblers were found this winter. A **Spotted Towhee** at Alazan Bayou WMA Dec 11 was never re-located (DW). At least 3 **Lark Sparrows** again spent the entire winter in Central Hts (DW, MHW), but the only other report was a late migrant at Alazan Bayou WMA Dec 2 (DW, TH). After numerous failed attempts to confirm Henslow's Sparrows at the Nacogdoches Airport this winter, 2 were seen well on Feb 24 (DW, MHW). It was a good winter for Harris's Sparrows, with 2 found on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14; 4-6 near the entrance to the SFA Experimental Forest Jan 19 (CW et al)-Feb 14 (DB, LD, LS); and 1-3 in Central Hts Dec 27 through February (DW, MHW). The Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14 recorded a high count of **251** Rusty Blackbirds, all except one in Pecan Park (CW et al). At least 90 were here the next day (DW). The only other reports of Rusty this winter were 65 in Pecan Park Jan 1 (DW) and 2 on the Marion Ferry road Feb 4 (DW). The only report of Brewer's Blackbirds was 55 at a traditional site in w. Nacogdoches Co. on Feb 21 (DW). 7000+ Common Grackles at the base of the TX 147 causeway Jan 4 had likely been driven south by bad weather (DW). A male **Great-tailed Grackle** over Nacogdoches on Dec 13 (CDF) added this long-awaited species to our Count Period list, but they still are not wintering here and there were no other sightings. This winter brought

the **best flight of Purple Finches in over a decade** and they were widespread “**in the wild**” from mid-December through February, but very few visited feeders (m. obs.). The first were 5 along the Dorr Creek Road in s. Nacogdoches Co. on Dec 13 (DW). On the Nacogdoches CBC the next day (Dec 14) they were found by 5 of our 12 parties for a grand total of **51**. Later sightings include 7 at Ellen Trout Park Dec 17 (DB, LD, LS); 2 at feeders in Central Hts Dec 23-Jan 1 (DW, MHW); 3 at the TX 147 causeway Jan 4 (RT, DW); 2 at Etoile Park Feb 4 (DW); 1 at feeders in Loco Valley Jan 29 (RH); and 1 at feeders in Antioch (Shelby Co) Feb 11-19 (SO). Pine Siskins were also around this winter in modest numbers, but very few came to feeders. They were first detected on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 14 when 4 of our 12 parties found them, for a total of 75. Among the later reports received were 2 at the TX 147 causeway Jan 4 (RT, DW); 50 at Townsend Park Jan 29 (DB, LD); and 1 at feeders in Loco Valley on Feb 25 (RH).

Observers: DB = David Bell; BB = Brent Burt; JD, TD = John & Thelma Dalmas; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; TH = Tyson Hart; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; LS = Les Stewart; m. obs. = many observers; SO = Susan Orwig; PAS = Pineywoods Audubon Society field trip; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf

Localities in Angelina County: Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Jones Park (in Lufkin); Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Marion Ferry (on upper Rayburn).

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Cushing; Dorr Creek Road; Loco Valley; Melrose; Mize Lake; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewage ponds; Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest.

Localities in San Augustine County: TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn; Townsend Park.