

Fall Bird Report for the Pineywoods Audubon Society

(August 10 - November 30, 2014)

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Fall is a prolonged and complex season for birds here in the Pineywoods, with almost anything possible over the course of the season, but this year the fall migration was very ordinary, even slow, much of the time. Generally the weather was not dramatic enough to produce widespread "fallouts" of migrants (there were no tropical storm events), while our breeding birds just quietly slipped away and winter residents were mostly late in arriving. Prolonged "pleasant" and dry weather in late Sept and early Oct contributed to a poor showing from the migrant raptors. With ample rains the water levels in area reservoirs remained high, so shorebird habitat was almost completely lacking, as were shorebirds. Finally, as colder arrived in November, so did numbers of waterfowl and arriving sparrows and other winter songbirds. A major cold front around Nov 11-12 brought a significant freeze overnight on Nov 13-14 (down to the mid-20s in some of our area). This is a few days earlier than our average first-freeze date, but the rest of November remained mild. As I write this (5 Dec 14) birds continue to straggle southward and we have many winter birds yet to appear, so please continue to send reports of your best sightings. Many thanks!

Bird Report:

Reports of migrating geese were few, The first were heard over Central Hts Oct 13 (MHW), while 16 Greater White-fronted were seen on the Angelina Co side of TX 147 over Rayburn the next day (DW). 150 Snow Geese were over Kurth Lake Nov 11 (LD). The first Blue-winged Teal were 10 on Lake Alazan for the PAS meeting on Sept 4 (PAS), while peak counts were 100 on Kurth Lake Sept 23 and 150 there Oct 5 (LD). The first Green-winged Teal were 12 near Douglass Oct 4 (CW). The cool front on Oct 5 produced the first good push of waterfowl to Kurth Lake, where LD, DB, & LS spotted 100 Gadwall; 10 Northern Shoveler; and 5 Redhead (early first). By Nov 4 the number of waterfowl on Kurth had increased to 200 Gadwall; 50 American Wigeon; 10 Northern Shoveler; 35 Redhead; 10 Ring-necked Duck; and 75 Ruddy Duck (LD). Even more ducks were on Kurth Nov 6, including 500 Gadwall; 50 American Wigeon; 2 Mallard (first); 25 Northern Shoveler; 2 Northern Pintail; 10 Canvasback (first); 25 Redhead; 75 Ring-necked Duck; 4 Lesser Scaup (first); and 100 Ruddy Duck (LD). The first Northern Pintail were 2 at the TX 147 causeway Oct 14 (DW), while the season high count was 15 at Kurth Lake Nov 15 (LD); this species is not an especially common migrant in our area. An interesting record that I overlooked for the summer report was a pair of Ring-necked Ducks on Kurth Lake on July 9 (LD), while 4 Ring-necked off the TX 147 causeway Oct 14 were the first and a bit early (DW). The first Bufflehead was one on Ellen Trout Lake Nov 10, but on Nov 15, after the big cold spell, there were 75 there (both LD)! The only Red-breasted Merganser was one on Kurth Lake Nov 14 (LD, PAS field trip), while the first Hooded Mergansers were 5 at Kurth Lake Nov 11 (LD).

The first Common Loon was one on Kurth Lake Nov 4 (LD), but on Nov 14 there were 5 there (LD, PAS field trip). The number of Pied-billed Grebes at Kurth Lake jumped to 15 on Oct 5 as migrants began arriving (LD, DB, LS) and by early Nov about 10X this many were present (LD). 55 Am. White Pelicans

visited Kurth on Nov 8, a good count for there (LD). A Neotropic Cormorant was at Kurth Lake August 12 (LD), while at least 11 (all adults) were seen from the TX 147 causeway as late as August 24 (DW). None were seen after this. 41 Great Egrets at Ellen Trout Park on Nov 10 was a high count for the locality and date (LD). On Oct 14 there were 5 Snowy Egrets at Marion Ferry, one over the TX 147 causeway and 5 at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds, a lot for late in the season (both DW). 1160 Cattle Egrets counted leaving a roost towards Kingstown from Marion Ferry on August 30 was the highest count this fall (DW). The only *Plegadis sp?* ibis were 7 at Marion Ferry Oct 12-14 (DW), while the only Roseate Spoonbills reported were 3 in the Boggy Slough area (ne. Trinity Co near the Neches River) on Sept 2 (CS). Wood Storks seemed to be completely lacking, in contrast to most years when they are a reasonably frequent fall sight in the region.

Migrating raptors were few and far between this fall and no significant flights were detected. Three Ospreys, seemingly immature, around the TX 147 causeway on August 12 were probably raised locally on Lake Rayburn (DW). A late migrant was at Kurth Lake Nov 4 (LD). The first Mississippi Kites were 6 over Nacogdoches August 14 (MHW), while the season high count was 15 birds over Nacogdoches August 23 (DW). 7 Bald Eagles at Kurth Lake Oct 5 was a high count and likely included some migrants; 3 Sharp-shinned Hawks were tallied there the same day (LD, DB, LS). No significant flights of Broad-winged Hawks were spotted, but 24 over McAlister Park on upper Rayburn on Oct 14 were somewhat late (DW). A Peregrine Falcon low over Central Hts on Sept 25 was the only one reported (DW) and no Merlins were reported this fall.

Very interesting was a moribund Sora found in Nacogdoches on Sept 13 (CS). This species may be a widespread migrant, but it isn't detected very often. Common Gallinules nested successfully at Kurth Lake again this year, and 2 adults and 4 juveniles were present as late as Sept 18, while the last report was one on Oct 5 (LD). Purple Gallinules also nested at Kurth again this year, and 3 adults and 3 juveniles were still present on Sept 18 (LD). 30 American Coots on Kurth Lake on Sept 23 were the first arrivals, while numbers had reached 6000+ by Oct 21, a remarkable increase (LD). Large numbers were also present at the TX 147 causeway, at least 8000 on Nov 30 (DW, RT). Almost no shorebirds were found this fall due to the lack of habitat, but among the few seen were a Solitary Sandpiper in Central Hts August 10-11 (RT, MHW) and a late Spotted Sandpiper at Kurth Lake Nov 8 (LD). 3 Upland Sandpipers were in Diboll August 19 (RT) and at least 5 came over Central Hts on Sept 3 (MHW, DW). Oddly, American Avocets were seen more often than usual, with 3 at Marion Ferry August 30 (DW); 5 at a pond in Nacogdoches Co. Oct 11 (Micah Poteet fide CS); 55 (in two flocks) from the TX 147 causeway Oct 14 (DW); and 3 at Kurth Lake Oct 21 (LD). The first Bonaparte's Gulls were 2 on Kurth Lake Nov 14 (LD, PAS field trip). A high count of **865+ Franklin's Gulls** swirled around the TX 147 causeway on the blustery cool front on Oct 14 (DW). An early Ring-billed Gull visited Kurth Lake on August 23 (LD). An early Black Tern was at Kurth Lake July 2 (LD) and then good numbers were counted later in the season, including 50 on August 31; 75 on Sept 2; 25 on Sept 4; and 35 on Sept 10 (all LD). 50 Forster's Terns over the TX 147 causeway August 12 was the first high count this fall (DW).

200 Common Nighthawks over the SFASU Stadium in Nacogdoches during the home game on Sept 13 must have been a stunning sight (CS, JS); the following weekend only one was noted (CS). This is by far our highest count for this declining species in many years; comparably large flocks have never been reported here in the fall before. A Chuck-will's-widow foraging at dusk in Central Hts on Sept 2 may have been a migrant (MHW). A female *Selasphorus sp?* **hummingbird (Rufous/Allen's)** visited Central Hts August 13 but was not seen again. A different individual (immature male) appeared there Nov 25

and was seen daily to at least Dec 4 (DW, MHW). A Northern Flicker heard at the base of the TX 147 causeway August 12 had likely summered there, as they have in the past (DW). The first migrant Northern Flicker was one over Alazan Bayou Sept 26 (DW); no large flights were detected.

Single Olive-sided Flycatchers were in Central Hts August 18 and Sept 25 (both DW) and at Alazan Bayou Sept 24 (CW). A calling Eastern Wood-Pewee in Central Hts Oct 11 was a late migrant (DW). The first Least Flycatcher was one at the TX 147 causeway August 24 (DW, RT). Eastern Phoebe peaked at Alazan Bayou Oct 23-26, with 25+ counted both days (CDF, LS, DW). Locally breeding Eastern Kingbirds had largely disappeared by mid-August (DW, MHW), while the season high count of migrants at a roost in Nacogdoches was a paltry 75 on August 22 (DW). A huge push of southbound Scissor-tailed Flycatchers was seen Oct 12 while driving back from Austin, including 500+ in Crockett (Houston Co) at dusk (CS). A White-eyed Vireo at Alazan Bayou Oct 26 was late by several weeks (DW). The first Blue-headed Vireo was one at Alazan Bayou Oct 30 (PAS field trip). No great numbers of migrant swallows were reported, but on Oct 12 the commonest species over the Marion Ferry/Etoile area was Northern Rough-winged, with 35+ tallied. Several months after local breeders had disappeared **Cave Swallows** made a remarkable appearance at Kurth Lake, with 15 on Nov 11 (LD) and then 45 counted on the Nov 14 field trip (LD, PAS). Will they stay around for the winter as the species did last year for the first time? The first House Wren showed up in Central Hts Sept 30 (DW). A Bewick's Wren was at Ellen Trout Park Nov 18 (DB). This migrant to our region has become increasingly scarce in recent years. A Marsh Wren was at Kurth Lake Nov 14 (LD, PAS field trip). The first definite migrant Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were 2 at the TX 147 causeway August 12 (DW); while 30 at Etoile Park August 30 was the season high count (DW). At least one was still at the TX 147 causeway Nov 30 (RT, DW). A Golden-crowned Kinglet in Central Hts Oct 28 was the first (MHW). The first migrating American Robins were 8 over Central Hts Oct 22 (DW). A Gray Catbird in Lufkin August 12 may have summered locally (LD), while a migrant was at Alazan Bayou Sept 26 (DW). The first push of Brown Thrashers noted in Central Hts was 7 on Sept 25 (DW), while peak count was 20 at Alazan Bayou Oct 11 (DW). A high count of 8 Sprague's Pipits at the Nacogdoches Airport Nov 13 was noteworthy (CDF, LS). The first American Pipit was one over the TX 147 causeway Oct 14 (DW) and the first Cedar Waxwings were 30 over Melrose on Nov 27 (RT).

Reports of migrant warblers were few. Single Tennessee Warblers were at Alazan Bayou Sept 24 (CW) and Oct 26 (DW). The first Orange-crowned were 3 at Alazan Bayou Oct 26 (DW), while one came to a suet feeder in Nacogdoches Nov 16 (LS). Last Nashville Warblers were singles at Alazan Bayou Oct 23 (CDF, LS) and Oct 26 (DW). 6 Yellow Warblers at the TX 147 causeway August 12 were the first this fall (DW). A migrant Prairie Warbler was at the TX 147 causeway August 12 (DW). A Black-throated Green was at Kurth Lake Oct 5 (LD, DB, LS) and 2 were at Alazan Bayou Oct 26 (DW). A Wilson's Warbler visited a yard in Nacogdoches Oct 13-15 (LS). 8 Common Yellowthroats at Alazan Bayou on Oct 15 was a significant push of migrants after the local breeders had left (DW). The only Northern Waterthrush was one in Lufkin Sept 15 (LD). The last Kentucky Warbler was one in Shelby Co. Sept 12 (SO). A wandering Chipping Sparrow visited Central Hts August 18 (DW). A Clay-colored Sparrow in Central Hts Oct 11-14 was the only one reported this fall (MHW, DW). Sparrows firsts included 4 Vesper at Alazan Bayou Oct 15 (DW); 5 Savannah at Kurth Lake Oct 5 (LD, DB, LS); one LeConte's Sparrow at Alazan Bayou Oct 30 (PAS field trip); 2 Song at Alazan Bayou Oct 21 (DW); 4 Swamp at Alazan Bayou Oct 15; one White-throated in Nacogdoches Oct 15 (LS); and one White-crowned in Central Hts Oct 21 (MHW). Oct

15 brought a large influx of 65+ migrant meadowlarks to Alazan Bayou (DW). 6 Great-tailed Grackles were still in Nacogdoches Oct 29 (DW), but none were found thereafter (m. obs.). They still seem to disappear from our area for the winter! 3 Baltimore Orioles were seen near Alazan Bayou August 31 (DWa, VW) and a male was in the same area Sept 21 (DWa, VW). A male **American Goldfinch** photographed in Shelby Co north of Center on August 18 was very out-of-season, but not unprecedented (SO).

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

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Douglass; Etoile Park (on upper Lake Rayburn); Kingtown; Lake Alazan; McAlister Park (on upper Lake Rayburn); Melrose; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nacogdoches ponds).

Localities in San Augustine County: TX 147 causeway across middle Lake Rayburn.

Observers: DB = David Bell; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; SO = Susan Orwig; PAS = Pineywoods Audubon Society; CS, JS = Cliff & Julie Shackelford; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; DWa, VW = Dave & Vickie Wallace; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf