

Spring Bird Report: March 1 – May 31, 2014

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

Spring began cold, not a big surprise after the prolonged cold winter with repeated frontal activity, and we had a very hard freeze in early March that set the vegetation back. Initially many migrants were late in showing up. (How do the birds down there in Central America know that it's still cold up here?!) Things picked up a little with a cold front on March 23 that dropped good numbers of early migrants and winter residents. March 29, the day after a line of violent thunderstorms and a cool front passed through, produced a more widespread push of "downed" migrants, including shorebirds at several sites. Rain overnight on April 27-28 dropped a decent variety of warblers and other passerine migrants, but the numbers involved were not impressive. What is normally "peak period" for migrants in our area, May 1-10, was rather boring as clear still days passed into day after day with strong south winds and partly cloudy skies -- and few birds coming in. Most of the more common species were seen, but numbers were low, and for the first time in some years many of the scarcer migrants like Gray-cheeked Thrush and Golden-winged, Cerulean, Blackpoll and Mourning warblers were not found at all. The most dramatic weather in May was a dumping rain (5-6 inches in most areas) overnight on May 12-13, as a major late cold front pushed into our area. No great numbers of songbirds were put down by this storm, but a remarkable fallout of shorebirds and Black Terns was detected. DW had **14 species of migrant shorebirds** at two locations in Nacogdoches County, including a Whimbrel; 3 Dunlin; 2 Short-billed Dowitchers; 3 Wilson's Phalaropes; and 20 Semipalmated, 35 Least, 15 White-rumped, 80 Pectoral, 40 Stilt and 6 Buff-breasted sandpipers. LD at Kurth Lake added 6 American Avocets to the shorebird list for the day and had high counts of 75 Spotted Sandpipers and 63 Black Terns, while CS had 15 Black Terns were just over the county line at South Boggy Slough in e. Trinity County.

Bird Report:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were back in the Diboll area again this year, with 5 there on May 14 (LD). The last geese were a flock of 250 Snows over middle Toledo Bend on the March 8 field trip (DB et al; PAS). A pair of Mallards was at Alazan Bayou WMA March 14-April 7, but breeding was not confirmed (DW). The last Blue-winged Teal were 3 late birds in Central Hts May 31 (DW). A female **Long-tailed Duck** found at Kurth Lake in the morning on March 20 (LD) was seen again that afternoon (SL, DW), but not thereafter. This is only the 3rd Angelina Co record of this rarity and the first since 1988. 55 Bufflehead on the Lufkin lakes March 26 was a high count for late in the season (LD). The only Red-breasted Merganser was a male on Lake Nacogdoches March 7 (CW), while 4 migrant Hooded Mergansers on a pond near Douglass March 26 were late (CW) and a female at Alazan Bayou April 7 was the last (DW). A late Common Loon lingered on Kurth Lake May 24-31 (LD). 75 Pied-billed Grebes were still on Kurth Lake March 29, but numbers dropped quickly after this (LD). **5 Eared Grebes** on Kurth Lake March 20-25 was our best count in years (LD, DW et al). The last Horned Grebes were 4 there March 22 (LD). 100 Am. White Pelicans were on middle Toledo Bend on the March 8 field trip (DB et al; PAS), while 6 migrating over Nacogdoches March 10 were a surprise (JD, TD). 3 Neotropic Cormorants were on middle Toledo Bend on the March 8 field trip (DB et al; PAS) and 1-2 were seen on most visits to Kurth Lake through the end of May (LD). American Bitterns were not prominent at Alazan Bayou WMA this spring, but 2 were there March 14 and April 7 (DW) and one was seen May 1 (TH). A Little Blue Heron over Alazan Bayou WMA March 16 was the first (DW), while 4 were there by March 22

(TH). The first Cattle Egrets were 7 near Douglass on March 27 (CW) and 10 at Angelina Co Airport March 31 (LD), while the first Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was at Alazan Bayou WMA March 14 (DW). 275 White Ibis at Alazan Bayou WMA on May 7 was the highest count reported (DW).

A belated report of a pair of **White-tailed Kites** at the Angelina Co Airport on Nov 22, 2013 came complete with photos (Randy Carswell fide LD). The first Mississippi Kite was one over Central Hts April 13 (MHW). A courting and copulating pair in Nacogdoches May 11 hinted at local breeding, but they were not seen after this date (DW). A Cooper's Hawk carrying nesting material was seen on the Azalea Trail in Lufkin in March (LD); breeding has been confirmed here in the past. 187 Broad-winged Hawks over Central Hts on April 1 (DW) was the only triple-digit flight detected this spring. Single Peregrine Falcons were seen over Nacogdoches April 19 (TH) and the Nacogdoches Airport May 13, the latter bird flushing the shorebirds present (DW). The first Purple Gallinule was back on Kurth Lake May 6; on May 12 there were 2 (LD). A **Common Moorhen** was back at Kurth Lake March 21 (LD, LS) and 1-2 were seen here through April and May (LD). Kurth remains the only regular site for these two species in our area. Am. Golden-Plover made a good showing this spring. The first 2 were at the Angelina Co Airport on March 14 (LD), while the highest counts were 110 in Nacogdoches Co on March 16 (DW), and 100+ at the Angelina Co Airport on March 27 (airport personnel fide LD); 55 were also in Central Hts on March 27 (DW). Most were gone from both places the next day. One of the rarest sightings of the season was a **Snowy Plover** on the dam at Kurth Lake May 6 (LD). This was the first spring record for our area and only the 4th record ever. The only American Avocets were 6 at Kurth Lake on stormy May 13 (LD). This species is rare in our area in the spring. 75 Spotted Sandpipers at Kurth Lake on May 13 was the season peak and a very high count (LD). A Lesser Yellowlegs with 2 Greater in Central Hts March 16 was the first (RT, DW). Upland Sandpipers appeared early, with the first 2 at the Ang Co AP March 21 (LD, LS). On March 29 there were 16 at the Nacogdoches Airport (SL) and 5 in Central Hts (DW), while the season high count was 50 was at the Nacogdoches Airport April 7, along with 6 Am. Golden-Plover, 4 Greater and 3 Lesser yellowlegs and 10 Pectoral Sandpipers (SL). A **Whimbrel** calling repeatedly as it flew low over Nacogdoches in the rain on stormy May 13 was a surprise (DW) and only our 4th area record in 45 years (but the 3rd in the spring season). The only Western Sandpipers reported were 2 at Kurth Lake on May 8 (LD); this peep can be common in the fall but is scarce in the spring. 20 Semipalmated Sandpipers were in the shorebird fallout at the Nacogdoches Airport May 13 and one was in Central Hts May 14 (both DW); this peep is more common in the spring than fall. 2 Baird's Sandpipers with the commoner shorebirds at the Angelina County Airport March 28 were the only ones this spring (LD, SL, LS), as were 15 White-rumped Sandpipers at the Nacogdoches Airport May 13 and 3 in Central Hts May 15 (both DW). The first Pectoral Sandpipers were 9 at Alazan Bayou March 14 (DW), while the highest count was 80 in Nacogdoches County May 13 (DW). 3 Dunlin in the shorebird fallout at the Nacogdoches Airport on May 13 were in gorgeous breeding plumage, as were 40 Stilt Sandpipers found at 2 sites in Nacogdoches County the same day (both DW). Buff-breasted Sandpipers are not often detected in our area in the spring, but 6 were amidst other shorebirds at the Nacogdoches Airport May 13 (DW). Single **Short-billed Dowitchers** were found amidst other shorebirds at 2 locations in Nacogdoches County (Airport and Central Hts) on stormy May 13 (DW). We have only one previous spring record from our area and very few others from anywhere in the Pineywoods. 50 Wilson's Snipe wheeling around the SFA Ag Farm in Central Hts March 16 was a good count and had likely been flushed by a nearby Cooper's Hawk (RT, DW). A nice flock of 55 Franklin's Gulls came over Alazan Bayou WMA on April 7 (CS, DW, Tim

Barksdale) and another flock of 150 was seen here April 28 (TH). On stormy May 13 there were 63 Black Terns at Kurth Lake (LD) and 15 near Boggy Slough (e. Trinity County) the same day (CS). Kurth Lake had another 10 on May 17 and 60 on May 28 (both LD).

The White-winged Dove that wintered in Central Hts was last seen March 18 (DW). Another was seen over the south side of Nacogdoches on May 18 (RT, DW), but this species is still not established in our region. The first Chimney Swift was one over Nacogdoches on March 22 (TH). The first Ruby-throated Hummingbird in Central Hts appeared March 18 (DW), with another was in Nacogdoches the next day (TD). This is about a week later than most years. A migratory push of 16 Northern Flickers was noted at Alazan Bayou March 16 (DW). First dates for locally-breeding flycatchers were Eastern Wood-Pewee in Central Hts April 11 (MHW); Acadian Flycatcher in Carrizo Creek April 24 (SL); Great Crested Flycatcher at Kurth Lake March 29 (LD); Eastern Kingbird at Alazan Bayou March 29 (TH); and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Nacogdoches March 19 (TD). Few migrant *Empidonax* were found this spring, but 2 Alder Flycatchers were singing at Alazan Bayou May 24 (DW). The first White-eyed Vireo was one in the SFA Exp. Forest March 19 (DW); the first Yellow-throateds were singles singing in the SFA Exp Forest March 19 (DW) and Carrizo Creek March 21 (SL), while 3 migrants were in Nacogdoches March 27 (TH). The first Red-eyed Vireo was one in Carrizo Creek March 31 (SL). A Warbling Vireo in Central Hts April 9 was an early first for this migrant (DW). A good push of early migrant swallows at Kurth Lake on March 4 included 45 Purple Martins as well as 5 Tree, 5 Northern Rough-winged and 50 Barn swallows (LD). 75+ Tree Swallows over Alazan Bayou April 7 was a good count for our area (DW). The first Cliff Swallows were 4 in Lufkin March 19 (DW). 9 **Cave Swallows** were back around the nesting bridge at Alazan Bayou WMA March 16 (DW), while 3 at Ellen Trout Park March 26 were at a more unexpected site (LD). 4 around Pecan Park May 8-9 may have been nesting nearby (DW) and 20+ were at a bridge near Woden May 18 (DW, RT). Both of these are new sites for this rapidly-expanding species. A pair of Tufted Titmouse were already feeding a fledgling at Alazan Bayou April 7 (DW). A late Brown Creeper visited Nacogdoches April 7 (TH). An overlooked winter report was a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher on Rayburn (San Aug Co) Feb 3 (TH); there were no other reports this winter. Pushes of migrant gnatcatchers included 25 along Dorr Creek March 23 (DW, RT); 16 in Central Hts March 29 (DW); and 25 near Nacogdoches March 31 (LS). The last Golden-crowned Kinglets were 2 amidst 25+ migrant Ruby-crowned on the Dorr Creek Road March 23 (DW, RT). Migrant thrushes were very scarce this spring – no Gray-cheeked were reported; the only Veery was one in Nacogdoches April 20 (TH); and very few Swainson's were seen (DW). The last 2 Sprague's Pipits were still at the Nacogdoches AP March 29 (SL).

The only Blue-winged Warbler was one in Nacogdoches April 15 (TH). The first Nashville Warblers were 2 in Nacogdoches April 2 (TH), while a Tennessee Warbler in Carrizo Creek April 4 was an early first (SL). The season high count of Tennessees in Pecan Park was a paltry 50+ on May 9 (DW, RS). 20+ Northern Parulas, mostly migrants, were tallied along the Dorr Creek Road March 23 (DW, RT). A male **"Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler** molting into bright breeding plumage was found in the SFA Experimental Forest March 19 (DW). 2 Black-throated Green Warblers in Nacogdoches March 19 were early (TH), as were 3 along Dorr Creek March 23 (RT, DW). The first Prairie Warbler was one near Douglass April 21 (CW). The first Black-and-white Warblers were singles in w. Nacogdoches County March 10 (CW); in Melrose on March 16 (RT); and near Rusk (Cherokee Co) on March 16 (BW). The first Yellow-throated Warbler was one near Rusk on March 16 (BW). The first Louisiana Waterthrush was one

in Carrizo Creek March 22 (SL); the first Common Yellowthroat was back at Alazan Bayou WMA March 29 (TH); and a Hooded Warbler at Alazan Bayou WMA March 22 was an early first (TH). It was a poor spring for the scarcer migrant warblers and no Golden-winged, Cerulean, Blackpoll or Mourning warblers were reported. A Henslow's Sparrow was at Alazan Bayou Feb 17 (TH). Relatively late last dates for some sparrows were a Savannah in Lufkin May 14 (LD); a Song at Alazan Bayou WMA April 7 (DW); and a Lincoln's in Pecan Park May 15 (DW). A Dark-eyed Junco in Nacogdoches April 7 was very late (TH). The first Summer Tanager was one at Kurth Lake April 3 (LD), while the only Scarlet Tanager was a male in Cushing April 19 (DS). The first Rose-breasted Grosbeak was one in Carrizo Creek April 25 (SL), but this species was never numerous this spring. Indigo Buntings never made an impressive showing this spring (m. obs.). The first Painted Buntings were 2 at the Nacogdoches Airport April 16 (TH). At least 1-3 male Bobolinks were in the usual area at Alazan Bayou April 28-May 11 (m. obs.), but this is a low count for this area.. After their major winter invasion **Rusty Blackbirds** stayed later than usual at several sites in Nacogdoches, with 25 at the Native Plant Center March 11 (LS) and 15 at Lanana Creek Park March 15-16 (DW). This last sighting was the latest date ever that I can find for the entire Pineywoods region. On March 16 a huge flock of **350+ Brewer's Blackbirds** was found at their regular site in western Nacogdoches Co (DW). This was not only our latest local date ever, but also the greatest number ever reported here. 2 Great-tailed Grackles had returned to south Nacogdoches by March 16 (DW) and 14 were at the Nac. Wal-Mart on March 24 (TH). Within a few weeks they were widespread and breeding at these and other localities. This species can now be considered an established, if unwanted, member of our local breeding avifauna. We still don't know where they go in the winter. Large flocks of Brown-headed Cowbirds (1200+ total) were in Nacogdoches March 23, but not thereafter (DW, RT). After a winter when there were very few reports single Purple Finches were banded in Nacogdoches on Feb 14 and March 6 (CE). And finally...An adult male **Lesser Goldfinch** was photographed at a feeder near Nacogdoches on March 16 (Katie Newsome, Sunni Morris). The bird was around for about two hours but not seen again (fide CS). This is only the 4th record for the entire Pineywoods region. All have been since 2003 and this species may slowly be expanding its range.

Observers: DB, AB = David & Abigail Bell; JD, TD = John & Thelma Dalmas; CE = Chuck Ely; LD = Louis Debetaz; TH = Tyson Hart; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; RS = Rick Schaefer; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; BW = Becky Whisenant; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Localities in Angelina County: Angelina County Airport; Azalea Trail (in Lufkin); Diboll; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Kurth Lake; Lufkin.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights (= Hts); Cushing; Dorr Creek Road; Douglass; Lake Nacogdoches; Melrose; Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches (town); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp Forest); Woden.

Localities in Cherokee County: Rusk.