

Summer Bird Report (June 1- August 10, 2014)

Pineywoods Audubon Society

by David E. Wolf

In some ways Summer is our most important season for birds, as it is the end of the nesting cycle and offers many clues as to how successful our local breeders were. However, field conditions aren't very pleasant, with the high temperatures and humidity and ticks, chiggers and poison ivy to contend with, and there was relatively little birding activity by the club. Thanks to those of you that did get out and submit your sightings. Fall migration is now upon us, so don't forget to send your best sightings to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com .

This Summer was about as good as it gets in our area. June and July were relatively cool, with widespread ample rain. The land was lush and green, with lots of flowers and insects. It seems like it has been a long time since we've had a summer like this, though some of us remember these "good years" as more frequent in the now-distant past. Especially unusual was the cool spell from the last days of July well into the first week of August (lows in the upper 50s-60s, highs in the 80s), the media labeling this strong and rare summer cool front "The Polar Plunge". As we moved into August we got our comeuppance and temperature rose into the more normal mid-90s and higher, but as of this writing we still haven't hit the 100 deg. mark. Water levels in area lakes remained high from the rains and there was no shorebird habitat or even much in the way of shallows for the "long-legged waders".

Bird Report:

The only report of **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** was 2 over Burke (just north of Diboll) on June 28 (CS). A few have been seen in the general Diboll area annually over the last decade, but breeding has still not been confirmed there. Otherwise this species seems to be lacking in our area. An out-of-season female Ring-necked Duck on Kurth Lake was last seen June 10 (LD). A Wild Turkey (at least it seemed "wild") in timberlands between Etoile and Woden August 3 was a surprise (RT, DW), as were 4 Northern Bobwhite in Carrizo Creek the same day (SL). Two pairs of Pied-billed Grebes summered on Kurth Lake (LD) and a few were seen off the TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn (DW). For the 2nd year in a row it appears that **Neotropic Cormorant** outnumbered Double-crested in the small breeding colony on an island off the TX 147 causeway. On July 29 at least 35 Neotropic were in the area versus only 12 or so Double-crested. At least a dozen nests could be seen, but the actual ratio could not be determined as the island is too distant to identify them on the nest (DW). Neotropic has increased dramatically in our region over the last decade and all comorants need to be carefully identified. With water levels so high on Lake Rayburn the long-legged waders were scattered and in low numbers. The only noteworthy ardeid was an immature Tricolored Heron over the TX 147 causeway July 29, while 15+ Green Herons there that same day included 2 not-quite-fledged juveniles hiding in a buttonbush (both DW). The **only** reports of Wood Stork were singles at Alazan Bayou WMA June 30 (RT) and July 5 (RH), perhaps the same individual.

A newly-discovered **Osprey** nest on new Lake Naconiche had an adult standing on it June 13 and August 1, but no evidence of breeding success (CR). Ospreys also nested at the traditional site on the pylons below the TX 103 crossing of the Angelina arm of Rayburn (near Etoile), this year on the Angelina County side. They were seen regularly and 5 birds together on or in the vicinity of the nest on August 3 indicated successful breeding (DW, RT). At least 3 seen from the TX 147 causeway on August 12 were

likely from another nest somewhere (perhaps the Shirley Creek area, where they have nested in the past?) on upper Rayburn (DW). **Mississippi Kites** likely nested on the south side of Nacogdoches, where a pair was seen copulating May 11 and at least one juvenile was calling in flight on June 28; single adults were seen in the area several more times through August 7 (DW). Two kites over Crown Colony in Lufkin on July 14 was the 2nd sighting in that area this summer and they likely summered in the vicinity (LD). SB reports that “they nest every year” nearby on FM 58 (fide LD). Cooper’s Hawk nested on the Azalea Trail in Lufkin again this year and 2 juveniles and both adults were seen July 27 (LD). Breeding has been confirmed at this site in the past. A calling Broad-winged Hawk in Carrizo Creek May 28 and June 2 was presumably a local breeder (SL).

Purple Gallinules again nested in the backwaters of Kurth Lake, with the first juvenile seen fed by an adult on June 28. By late July there were 3 pairs with young (LD). **Common Gallinules** bred on Kurth Lake again this summer, with 2 adults seen June 28 and July 6, and then 2 pairs with juveniles seen in late July (LD). This remains the only known site for both of these species in our area. A pair of American Coots also summered at Kurth Lake, but there was no evidence of breeding (LD). The last spring shorebirds were 4 Spotted Sandpipers at Kurth Lake June 1, while the first southbound “fall” shorebird was a Spotted Sandpiper at Kurth Lake July 11 (both LD). Next was a Lesser Yellowlegs in Central Heights July 15 (MHW), followed by a Solitary Sandpiper in Central Heights July 28 (DW). The first Upland Sandpiper was heard over Central Heights August 1 (MHW). Almost no other shorebirds were found, with the major exception of 4 American Avocet at Kurth Lake August 5 (LD). The first Forster’s Terns were singles at Kurth Lake July 11 & 28 (LD); none were seen on Lake Rayburn in late July (DW). A **White-winged Dove** visited Central Heights July 9 (MHW). Apparently a small colony is now well-established in Lufkin, with 8-10 coming to feeders regularly, for the 3rd or 4th year in a row at this site. Calling birds were heard in the area and young-of-the-year have been banded here (fide LD, CS). 15 northbound Common Nighthawks went over Alazan Bayou June 1 (RT), but there were no summer reports (nor is this species expected as a breeder in our area). Red-headed Woodpeckers were again widespread for the 3rd year in a row and successful breeding was confirmed at several sites, with the first fledgling seen July 30 in Central Heights (DW). The many dead trees left from the drought have clearly benefitted this species. Recently-fledged and begging Red-bellied Woodpeckers were at several sites in Nacogdoches and Central Heights through August 10 (DW), indicating a prolonged breeding season with the good conditions. Single Northern Flickers near middle Toledo Bend Reservoir (Sabine Co) on August 7 (DB) and at the base of the TX 147 causeway August 12 (DW) likely summered locally.

An early fall-migrant *Empidonax* flycatcher on the TX 147 causeway July 29 was almost certainly a Willow (DW). Acadian Flycatchers were still calling in Carrizo Creek into mid-August (SL). 25 **Cave Swallows** on the long-running Livingston Breeding Bird Survey on May 25 were new for the survey (LD, LS), while 14 (adults and immatures) on the wires in Etoile town August 3 were likely from yet another new breeding site in Nacogdoches County (DW, RT). This species has expanded rapidly in our area in the last few years. A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at Kurth Lake July 24 was the first there this summer, either a post-breeding wanderer or early migrant (LD). A Wood Thrush was still singing in Carrizo Creek into mid-August (SL). A Yellow-throated Warbler singing in Central Heights June 20-30 was more likely a post-breeding wanderer than local breeder (MHW, DW). A Prairie Warbler on the TX 147 causeway July 29 was either a migrant or had wandered some distance, as there is no breeding habitat close to here (DW). A Swainson’s Warbler was heard in Carrizo Creek July 11 and 1-2 Kentucky Warblers were heard there in the latter half of July (both SL). Lark Sparrows were more common than usual in Central Heights

and had a successful breeding season, with 15-20 birds from 4-5 family groups or territories noted in just 1 ½ miles of road in late July-August 2 (DW). Recently-fledged Painted Buntings were fed by a female and guarded by an adult male in Central Heights July 30 (MHW). On July 29 there was much evidence of successful breeding of Red-winged Blackbirds along the TX 147 causeway, with small flocks of fledged young foraging together, females carrying food and several males still displaying. On August 12 almost none were seen here. Where do they go? (DW). This species is not as widespread as a breeder in our area as you might expect. Much to our displeasure, **Great-tailed Grackles** are now firmly established in Nacogdoches, with breeding confirmed at 3 sites this year and likely at another (m. obs.). A single over Marion Ferry August 3 (DW) was one of the few Angelina County sightings away from known colonies in Lufkin and Diboll. 16 Orchard Orioles along the TX 147 causeway July 29 was the highest count and likely included migrants as well as local breeders (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; SB = Stan Bohon; LD = Louis Debetaz; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; CR = Craig Rudolph; CS = Cliff Shackelford; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; DW = David Wolf; m. obs. = many observers.

Localities in Angelina County: Azalea Trail (in Lufkin); Burke; Diboll; Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Marion Ferry.
Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Etoile; Lake Naconiche; Nacogdoches; Woden. **Localities in San Augustine County:** the TX 147 causeway over middle Lake Rayburn (unless specified as the Angelina County side of the bridge).