

Fall 2015 Bird Report Pineywoods Audubon Society
(August 1-November 30, 2015)
(by David E. Wolf)

“Fall” is a prolonged and complex season for birds here in the Central Pineywoods , with movement occurring from the “Dog Days” of August through the first cool fronts in September-October to the chillier weather and first freeze by late November. Summer residents leave, transients pass through and winter birds arrive. This year this fall migration season can best be summed up as “boring” most of the time. It was relatively hot and remained extremely dry until late October. There was almost no dramatic weather in the way of tropical storm activity or strong cool fronts. Instead, weak fronts kept pushing through without rain, keeping us under a high-pressure ridge. It was not until October 23-25 that we finally got good rains, in conjunction with the passage of a weak cool front. After this the rains came regularly and heavily, but by then most non-wintering species had passed through largely undetected. The first freeze came to the northern parts of the region for a few hours overnight on Nov 21-22 and then the next night brought a deeper freeze to the entire area. This is a few days later than our average first freeze. As I write this (Dec 10) it seems that winter is slowly easing its way into our area, as are the expected birds. A few significant trends were detected: (1). Relatively few warblers were seen this fall, but there was a spate of records of very late stragglers; (2). Some winter birds seem to be “on the move” early, including American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Pine Siskin and American Goldfinch. What does this portend? (3). As of the first week of December, numbers of sparrows and many other winter residents were still relatively low. Due to the mild weather, both here and up north?

The only geese seen were a flock of 29 Greater White-fronted low over Alazan Bayou WMA Nov 8 (RT, DW). The first Gadwall were 16 over the TX 147 causeway Sept 12 (DW), while the first American Wigeon were 2 at Ellen Trout Park on Oct 16 (LD) and the first Mallards were 4 at Kurth Lake Nov 19 (LD). The first Blue-winged Teal were 24 at Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 25 (DW). 200 migrants flying past Marion Ferry Oct 11 was the season high count (DW, RT), while the last were 15 at the VFW Pond in Lufkin Oct 21 (LD) and 2 at Ellen Trout Park Oct 23 (LD). A Northern Shoveler at Marion Ferry Aug 26 was an early first (DW). A few Northern Pintail were seen, with the first 6 in an early push of waterfowl at Kurth Lake Oct 17 (LD). Additional sightings were 2 at Kurth Lake Oct 29 (LD); one at Ellen Trout Nov 2 (PAS field trip: AB, DB, LD, SL); and 6 at Kurth Lake Nov 19 (LD). A female Ring-necked Duck that summered on Kurth Lake was last seen Sept 2 (LD). The first Hooded Mergansers were singles at Ellen Trout Nov 2 (PAS field trip: AB, DB, LD, SL) and in Central Hts Nov 6 (DW). The first Ruddy Ducks were 4 at Ellen Trout on Oct 16 (LD). The blustery northeast winds on Oct 17 brought a noteworthy early push of waterfowl to Kurth Lake, including 45 Gadwall; 20 American Wigeon; 6 Northern Pintail; 12 Green-winged Teal; 16 Redhead; 25 Ring-necked Duck; and 6 Lesser Scaup (LD). Almost no waterfowl were at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds until the wet and chilly weather of Nov 29, when RT found 25 Northern Shoveler; 10 Redhead; 10 Ring-necked Duck; 50 Lesser Scaup; 20 Bufflehead and 25 Hooded Merganser (RT). The next day numbers had increased to 35 Redhead; 150 Lesser Scaup and one Canvasback (DW).

The first Common Loon was one at Kurth Lake Nov 19 (LD). 2 ad. and 3 juv. Pied-billed Grebes at Kurth Lake Sept 8 and 15 present Oct 1 indicated a good breeding season for them at this site (LD). On Oct 3

at least 100 were counted, a big push of migrants, while on Oct 29 the count was up to 150+ (LD). The first American White Pelicans were 25 on Kurth Lake Sept 30-Oct 1 (Wayne Forest; LD). 12 over Central Hts Oct 26 (DW) and one over Nacogdoches Nov 8 seemed out-of-place (TD), as did 37 over Ellen Trout Park on Nov 20 (LD) and 35 over this site the next day on the PAS field trip (LD et al). 5 Neotropic Cormorants were still around the TX 147 causeway on Aug 26, but none were seen here after this (DW), though late singles were at Marion Ferry Oct 11 (DW, RT); and the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Nov 12 (DW) and Nov 29 (RT). The last Anhingas were 2 in Lufkin Oct 19 (LD). An American Bittern at the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 12 was our earliest ever by 8 days (DW). At least 102 Great Egrets leaving Alazan Bayou WMA at dawn Aug 30 was the season high count (DW), while 20 at Ellen Trout Park on the PAS field trip on Nov 21 was a good count for late in the season (LD et al). The last Snowy Egrets were 3 at the VFW Pond in Lufkin on Oct 26 (LD) and 2 late birds at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Nov 12 (DW).

Tricolored Herons at Alazan Bayou WMA had increased to 4 on Aug 25, but by Sept 4 their puddle had nearly dried-up and only one was left. None were seen after this (DW). A single late Cattle Egret was in Central Hts Oct 28, long after most had left the area (DW, MHW). The last Green Herons were singles at Kurth Lake Oct 3 and in Lufkin Oct 5 (both LD). Two Black-crowned Night-Herons at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 4 (DW) provided a sighting of a migrant rarely found in our area. The only Plegadis sp? ibis this fall were singles over Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 11 (DW) and at Goldeneye Pond near Melrose on Sept 26-27 (RT). A Roseate Spoonbill low overhead (going north!) at Alazan Bayou WMA on Nov 8 was certainly out-of-place and time (RT, DW). It was also the only sighting of this species all fall. Almost no Wood Storks were detected, except for 25-30 at TX 94 at the Neches River (Angelina Co) on Sept 4 (Tom Newman fide LD).

2 Turkey Vultures fledged from a nest site at Alazan Bayou WMA ca Aug 20 (Tony Adams fide DW) and remained, rather awkwardly, in the vicinity for several weeks longer (m. obs.). An Osprey was at the VFW pond in Lufkin on Oct 17 (LD) and a late bird passed southward over Alazan Bayou Nov 8 (RT, DW). The only sizable migration of Mississippi Kites detected was 27 in Nacogdoches Co. Aug 25 (DW). The first Northern Harrier was a juvenile over the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 12 (DW). A Sharp-shinned Hawk at Kurth Lake Sept 17 was the first (LD). The last Purple Gallinule sightings at Kurth Lake were 3 (1 adult, 2 young) on Sept 8 and 2 on Sept 17 (both LD). Common Gallinules had their best year yet for successful breeding at Kurth Lake, their only known site in our region. On Sept 8 at least 15 were still there (6 ads.; 9 young), while one adult and 3 juveniles were on another part of the lake on Sept 10. On Sept 17 there were 13 (6 ad, 7 juv) and on Oct 3 there were still 20 here, but apparently most left shortly thereafter as only 2 were present on Oct 17 and one on Oct 29 (all LD). The first American Coot was one at the TX 147 causeway Aug 26 (DW), while 4 at Kurth Lake Sept 17 were the first arrivals there (LD). The first push of migrants at Kurth was 100 on Oct 1, but large influxes brought the numbers to 2000-3000 on Oct 13; 5000 Oct 17; and 8000+ Oct 29 (LD).

There was almost no shorebird habitat available this fall and very few were seen. An American Avocet at Kurth Lake on Oct 1 was one of the few unusual shorebird sightings (LD). Single lingering Spotted Sandpipers were at Kurth Lake Nov 19 (LD) and Ellen Trout Park through at least Nov 30 (LD et al). Late Solitary Sandpipers were seen in Lufkin on Oct 14 & 16 (LD). The only Upland Sandpipers were singles at

Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 25 (DW) and Aug 30 (RT, DW); and one in Diboll Sept 11 (RT). This species was also heard over Central Hts on Aug 31 (MHW). The only report of Franklin's Gull was a good count of 100 at Kurth Lake on Oct 29 (LD), while the first Bonaparte's Gull was one at Kurth Lake Nov 19 (LD). A Ring-billed Gull at Ellen Trout Park Nov 30 was an unexpected migrant at that locale (LD). The only numbers of Black Terns were seen from the TX 147 causeway, 14 on Aug 26 and 45 on Sept 12 (both DW). A late single was at Kurth Lake Oct 3 (LD). A Caspian Tern over Central Hts Sept 10 was a surprise (DW), as was one at Kurth Lake on Sept 15 (LD).

A male Common Ground-Dove was at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 14 (DW). This species is always a rare find in our region, but we have more records for October (at least 10) than any other month. A late fledgling Yellow-billed Cuckoo was fed by an adult in Central Hts Aug 27 (DW). Very few Common Nighthawks were reported this fall, with the first 2 over Central Hts on Sept 10 (DW). A good count of 425+ Chimney Swifts over Marion Ferry Oct 11 was the season high count (DW, RT). Peak numbers of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds visited area feeders ca Sept 10-20 (m. obs.). The last one reported was in Loco Valley on Oct 7 (RH), but an *Archilochus* sp? in Central Hts Oct 23-28 was likely this species (DW). No rare hummingbirds were reported. The first Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were singles at Alazan Bayou Oct 8 (DW) and Loco Valley Oct 12 (RH), while the first notable push was 11 over Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 14 (DW). A Northern Flicker at the base of the TX 147 causeway Aug 26 was probably a local breeder, as they have nested at this site in the past (DW). The first migrant Northern Flicker in Loco Valley was Oct 10 (RH), while the first good push was 23 over Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 14 (DW). The only Merlin reported all fall was one in Central Hts Nov 11 (MHW) and no Peregrines were spotted.

The only Olive-sided Flycatcher this fall was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 4 (DW). The last Eastern Wood-Pewee was a late one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 19 (DW). Single migrant Acadian Flycatchers were at the TX 147 causeway Sept 12 (DW) and Central Hts Sept 17 (DW, MHW). The only Yellow-bellied Flycatchers this fall were singles in Central Hts Sept 3 and Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 11 (both DW). The first Least Flycatcher was 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 25 (DW). 5 "Traill's-type" Empidonax flycatchers at Alazan Bayou Aug 25 was the season peak (DW). Eastern Phoebes away from known nest sites in late August may have been dispersing local breeders or early migrants (DW). A Great Crested Flycatcher at Kurth Lake Sept 17 was the last (LD). Season peaks of Eastern Kingbirds were 135 at a roost in Nacogdoches Aug 29 (DW) and 155 over Central Hts on stormy Sept 10 (DW). Interestingly, none were seen at the roost site in Nacogdoches on the latter date, though a season peak of 200 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers was counted that evening (CS). Only 45 Scissor-tails had been counted at this site on Aug 29 (DW). Last dates for Scissor-tails were one in Nacogdoches Nov 9 (TD) and one in Sabine County Nov 15 (CW). The first Loggerhead Shrike showed up at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 13 (DW, RT). Migrant White-eyed Vireos were moving through in numbers by early September, with 21+ at Alazan Bayou Sept 4 the season peak (DW). A late one came through Central Hts Nov 6 (DW). Single migrant Yellow-throated Vireos were in Central Hts Aug 27-31 (MHW, DW) and Melrose Sept 7 (RT). The first Blue-headed Vireo was one in Central Hts Oct 27 (DW), while the only Warbling Vireo seen this fall was in Central Hts Sept 14 (DW). The first migrant Red-eyed Vireos appeared the last days of Aug (DW). In general the swallow migration was insignificant, but Cave Swallow continues to make news in our area, with 16 present (both ads. and juvs.) around the TX 147 bridge on Aug 26. No Cliff Swallows were seen on this date, though they nest here in great numbers (DW). 20 Cave lingered over Central Hts Sept 17

and 4 were seen here Oct 9 (both DW), while the last was one was at Alazan Bayou WMA Nov 8 (DW, RT). 33 Barn Swallows over Marion Ferry Oct 11 was a good count for late in the season (DW, RT). The first Brown Creeper was one at Ellen Trout Park Nov 9 (LD) and the second was one in Loco Valley Nov 13 (RH). The first Winter Wren was one in Central Hts Nov 6 (DW) and the first Sedge Wren was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 14 (DW). No Bewick's Wrens were reported this fall. Is this species becoming scarcer or are we just not looking for them? The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher migration was conspicuous this fall. The first definite push of migrants was 26+ at the TX 147 causeway Aug 26 and the next was 40 at Alazan Bayou Sept 4 (both DW). A remarkable flight of 297+ was tallied over Central Hts Sept 10 (DW). Some were in the trees but most were flying WSW at various heights, without stopping, and most were following the same "pathway". Fascinating! The last high count was 32 in Central Hts Sept 17 (DW), but late singles were at Ellen Trout Park Nov 6 (LD) and the Nac ponds Nov 12 (DW). The first Golden-crowned Kinglet was one in Central Hts Oct 20 (MHW), while the first Ruby-crowned Kinglets were singles in Melrose Oct 4 (RT) and Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 10 (DW). The first good push of Ruby-crowned was 25 in Nacogdoches Co. Nov 6 (DW). The first Hermit Thrush was in Carrizo Creek Nov 1 (SL). A push of 4+ migrants came through Central Hts Nov 6 (DW, MHW) and 3 were noted at Ellen Trout Park Nov 9 (LD). The only Wood Thrush reported was one at Kurth Lake on Sept 17 (LD). The first migrant American Robin was one over Alazan Bayou Oct 14 (DW), while the first small push was 60 over Central Hts Oct 23 (MHW, DW). The next numbers were 230 over Central Hts Nov 6 (DW) and 340 over Alazan Bayou WMA Nov 8 (DW, RT). This species seems to be "on the move" in good numbers a bit earlier than usual this fall. Gray Catbird is a scarce fall migrant in our area, but one was at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 4 (DW); 2 were in Central Hts Sept 5 (MHW); one was at Marion Ferry Oct 11 (DW, RT); and one was in Nacogdoches Nov 14 (CS). The first migrant Brown Thrasher was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 12 (DW, RT), while the first push was 21 there on Oct 14 (DW). The first American Pipit was heard over Central Hts Nov 6 (DW) and the first Sprague's Pipits were 2 at their regular site at the Nacogdoches Airport on Nov 16 (SL). The first Cedar Waxwings were heard in Central Hts Nov 8 (MHW) and a flock of 19 was seen there the next day (DW). Flocks continued to be seen through the month in increasing numbers, indicating that this species is "on the move" early this fall.

Migrant warblers were relatively scarce, not surprising since it seems to take wet and stormy weather to bring them down in any numbers or variety and we did not have much of this weather pattern this fall. A migrant waterthrush sp? was heard in Central Hts Aug 26 (MHW), while 3 Northern Waterthrushes were at the TX 147 causeway Sept 12 and one was in Central Hts Sept 17 (both DW). A Tennessee Warbler at Alazan Bayou Sept 11 was the only report this fall (DW). The first Orange-crowned Warbler was one in Central Hts Oct 16 (DW), while the first Nashville Warblers were 2 in Central Hts Sept 14 (DW). Single Mourning Warblers were at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 13 and in Central Hts Sept 17 (both DW). The first push of Common Yellowthroats at Alazan Bayou WMA was 8 on Sept 13 (DW). A male Hooded Warbler at Marion Ferry Oct 11 tied our latest date (DW, RT). The only American Redstarts were singles in Central Hts Sept 12 (MHW); on the Azalea Trail Sept 16 (LD) and a very late one in Nacogdoches Nov 4 (TD). 4 Northern Parulas were at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 10 (DW), while a juvenile in Central Hts Nov 6 was our latest ever by 6 days (apart from several winter records) (DW). A Magnolia Warbler in Nacogdoches Nov 4 was our latest ever by more than a week (TD). A juvenile Blackburnian Warbler at the base of the TX 147 causeway Aug 26 (after a weak front) was an unexpected early sighting of a rare fall migrant (DW). The first Yellow Warblers were 4 at Alazan Bayou Aug 25 (DW).

Over 60 Pine Warblers in one straggling flock at Ewing Park on upper Rayburn on Oct 11 must have included many migrants (DW, RT). The first Yellow-rumped Warblers were singles in Central Hts Oct 10 (DW) and Loco Valley Oct 15 (RH), while the first push was 35+ in Central Hts Oct 27 (DW). A wave of 30+ in Nacogdoches on Nov 4 had our latest-ever Magnolia Warbler and a very tardy American Redstart amidst them (TD). Single migrant Yellow-throated Warblers were at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 4 (DW) and on the Azalea Trail Sept 16 (LD). Single migrant Prairie Warblers were at the TX 147 causeway Aug 26 (DW) and Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 30 (DW, RT). The only Black-throated Green Warblers reported this entire fall were 2 in Central Hts Oct 28 (DW); normally this is one of our more frequent late fall warblers. A Canada Warbler on the Azalea Trail in Lufkin on Sept 13 was the only one this fall (LD). Single Wilson's Warblers were at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 6 (RT); Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 13 (DW, RT); and on the Azalea Trail Sept 16 (LD), while 2 were together in Central Hts Sept 17 (DW). Different migrant Yellow-breasted Chats visited Central Hts Sept 16 and 17 (DW).

The only Clay-colored Sparrow this fall was one at Alazan Bayou WMA on Oct 10 (DW). The first Field Sparrows were 3 at Alazan Bayou WMA Nov 8 (DW, RT). Two Lark Sparrows at the flycatcher roost in n. Nacogdoches on Sept 10 were a surprise at this site (CS). Local breeders were gone from Central Heights after late August (MHW, DW), but one showed up there on Nov 23 and was still present Dec 2 (DW). The first Dark-eyed Junco was one in Nacogdoches Oct 27 (LS). The first White-crowned Sparrow at their regular wintering site in Central Hts showed up Oct 27 (DW), while the first Harris's Sparrow was there on Dec 2 (DW). The first White-throated Sparrows were one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 10 (DW); 4 in Loco Valley Oct 15 (RH); one in Nacogdoches Oct 15 (TD) and one in Nacogdoches Oct 16 (LS). A single Vesper Sparrow at Alazan Bayou WMA Nov 8 was the first (DW, RT), as were 7 Savannah Sparrows at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 10 (DW) and 7 at Kurth Lake Oct 13 (LD). More "firsts" were a Song Sparrow at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 24 (DW); an early Swamp Sparrow at Ellen Trout Park Oct 2 (LD); and a towhee sp? heard in Central Hts Nov 6 (MHW, DW). Late migrant Summer Tanagers were in Central Heights Oct 27 (DW) and Nacogdoches Nov 2 (CDF). 125+ Indigo Buntings in one field at Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 25 were likely local breeders bunching up before leaving rather than migrants (DW). The first definite migrants were 8 in Central Hts Sept 10 (DW) and 15 on the Azalea Trail Sept 12 (LD), and then 40-65 were counted on multiple visits to Alazan Bayou WMA from Sept 14-Oct 10; numbers quickly dropped off to very few after this (DW). A late Painted Bunting visited Central Hts Oct 10-11 (DW), while late Dickcissels were 3 at Alazan Bayou on Oct 14 and a very late single in Central Hts Nov 6 (both DW). The Red-winged Blackbirds that breed around the base of the TX 147 causeway had largely deserted the area by the end of August (DW); where do they go? By late October migrants had started appearing widely in small numbers. The first migrant meadowlark, likely an Eastern, was over Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 10, where 12 arrivals were tallied on Oct 14 (both DW). Even though Great-tailed Grackles are now common breeders in Nacogdoches they still leave for the winter and there were no sightings mid-October (m. obs.). The first southbound Baltimore Orioles were 3 in Central Hts Aug 27, while 8 were there Sept 1 and 12 were counted Sept 10 (all DW). 16 at Alazan Bayou WMA on Sept 11 was the season high count (DW). The first Purple Finch was one in Central Hts Nov 23 (DW); the next was one in Nacogdoches Dec 2 (TD). A total of 22 Pine Siskins (singles and small flocks) were at or over Alazan Bayou on Nov 8 (DW, RT). This is rather early for this species to be "on the move" into our area. Does this indicate that we are in for a major flight year? Singles were in Central Hts Nov 22 & 24 (MHW, DW) and then 2 came to feeders in Loco Valley Nov 28 and 2-6 were seen daily after that (RH). American

Goldfinch were also on the move early, the first being one in Central Hts and 2 over Alazan Bayou WMA Nov 6 (DW); one in Loco Valley Nov 9 (RH); and one in Nacogdoches Nov 13 (LS). By the end of November their numbers were considerable.

Observers: AD, DB = Abigail & David Bell; TD = Thelma Dalmas; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; CS = Cliff Shackelford; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; m. obs. = many observers.

Localities in Angelina County: Azalea Trail (in Lufkin); Diboll; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Ewing Park (TX 103 crossing on upper Rayburn); Kurth Lake; Marion Ferry (on upper Lake Rayburn); VFW Pond (in Lufkin).

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Goldeneye Pond (near Melrose); Loco Valley; Melrose; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds)..

Localities in San Augustine County: TX 147 causeway (over Lake Rayburn).