

Spring Report 2015
March 1 – May 31, 2015
(by David E. Wolf)

Weather always plays in major role in just what birds we find during our exciting spring migration period – and this year we had plenty of weather! March was dominated by wet and chilly conditions. April was warmer, but after the 10th a remarkable pattern of regular and severe thunderstorms began dumping rain on our region. This pattern continued (with short breaks) through the first three weeks of May, causing much damage and smashing rainfall records for the month in the eastern parts of Texas and Oklahoma. How did this weather affect the birds? Well, many of our local breeding birds seemed to be late in arriving, while the migrants were somewhat disappointing given the stormy conditions. Apparently the numbers of songbirds got put down elsewhere, though we did have some great fallouts of stronger migrants like shorebirds. On the other hand, many species that are rare locally were found and observers that got out often managed to see a great array of species. This long report certainly reflects that!

Bird Sightings:

There were sporadic sightings of 2-4 **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** from the Angelina Co AP to the Diboll area from April 6-June 2 (LD, RT), plus 2 near Huntington April 12 (RT). This species remains very rare in our region and all records from recent years have been from this same area, where they are likely breeding in small numbers. The only migrating geese this period were two flocks of Snow Geese (total 70 birds) over Nacogdoches Co March 14 (DW). **Noteworthy waterfowl sightings** were a pair of Mallards at Alazan Bayou from early March- March 14 (RT, DW) (late, but no evidence of breeding this year); 45 Blue-winged Teal on a small puddle in Central Hts April 5-9 (DW, MHW) and a late male near Alazan Bayou May 31 (DW); a remarkable female **Greater Scaup** seen well at the TX 147 causeway on **May 13** (DW) that was the latest ever for the entire Pineywoods region by well over a month; a late female Common Goldeneye at Alazan Bayou WMA April 8-9 (Bill Adams, Tony Adams, DW); a pair of Hooded Mergansers at Alazan Bayou May 10 (CS, JS) (no evidence of nesting as of May 31); and a female Red-breasted Merganser at Kurth Lake on April 30 (LD). Some last dates for waterfowl were 3 Gadwall at Kurth Lake April 1 (LD); 1 male Ring-necked Duck at Ellen Trout Park April 16 (LD); 16 Lesser Scaup at Ellen Trout Park March 25 (LD); 7 Bufflehead at Ellen Trout Park March 25 (LD); and 25 Ruddy Duck at Kurth Lake April 1 (LD).

One Common Loon was still on Kurth Lake through April 1 (LD), while the last was one at the TX 147 causeway May 13 (DW). Two rare **Eared Grebes** visited Kurth Lake April 1 (LD). At least 40 Neotropic Cormorants were back around the nesting island off the TX 147 causeway on March 15, but later visits to the area showed that neither this species or Double-crested used this nesting site this year, likely because the lake rose too high (DW). The first Anhingas were 3 at Ellen Trout Park March 30 (LD), while additional sightings included 18 over Alazan Bayou March 19 (DW); 12 in Angelina Co April 6 (LD); and 12 over Nacogdoches April 7 (DW). One or more American Bitterns were seen at Alazan Bayou from mid-March through at least April 19 (m. obs.). A total of 15 northbound Great Blue Herons was tallied in Nacogdoches Co on the March 14 cool front (DW). The first Snowy Egrets were 3 at Alazan Bayou April 9 (DW) and the first Little Blue Heron was one there March 19 (DW). A nesting colony of ardeids first discovered this spring on the Patroon Creek arm of Toledo Bend (n. Sabine Co) contained 700+ Cattle

Egret nests on May 24 (mostly with eggs; a few chicks), plus at least 5 Little Blue Heron nests with eggs and one Great Egret nest. An adult Tricolored Heron was seen nearby (Viron Barbay, Susan McCulley, MHW, DW). The first White Ibis were 15 at Alazan Bayou March 17 (RT), while 220 there April 29 was the high count this spring (DW). Late migrants were 45 over Alazan Bayou May 16 and 50 over Central Hts May 22 (both DW).

The first Osprey was seen at the TX 147 causeway March 15 (DW, RT). A **Swallow-tailed Kite**, always a very rare find in our area, was over the Angelina Co AP on March 31 (LD). The first Mississippi Kite was one over Douglass April 11 (CW). No large flocks were seen this spring, but additional sightings included 4 over Angelina Co AP April 25 (LD); 9 over Pecan Park April 26 (TH, RT); and 4 late migrants over Alazan Bayou May 16 (DW) and one over Central Hts that same day (MHW). The clearing trend and south wind on April 7 brought a major Broad-winged Hawk flight over Central Hts and Nacogdoches, with 795+ tallied in just 2 hours (DW, MHW). No other sizable flights were detected, but a single late migrant was over Central Hts May 7 (DW). The begging young Bald Eagles were still in the Ellen Trout Park nest April 15, but had fledged by the end of the month (LD et al). The last Northern Harrier was one at the Angelina Co Airport April 6 (LD). The first fledged Red-shouldered Hawks were seen at two popular birding spots on the same date of May 22, at Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin (LD) and Pecan Park in Nacogdoches (RT, DW). A Virginia Rail heard at Alazan Bayou March 19 was the last (DW). A Common Gallinule was at Kurth Lake April 23 (LD).

The time to look for spring migrant shorebirds in our area is clearly during and after thunderstorms and heavy rain and this spring brought multiple opportunities to demonstrate this! The Angelina Co and Nacogdoches Airports are the best sites, but some also come down in flooded fields. The best **shorebird fallouts** this spring all followed violent pre-dawn storms: **April 27** in Nacogdoches County produced 14 Lesser Yellowlegs; and 5 Least, 25 White-rumped, 62 Pectoral and 2 Western sandpipers (DW). On **May 11** the Nacogdoches AP and nearby had 4 Spotted Sandpipers; 1 Lesser Yellowlegs; 12 Least, 18 White-rumped, 7 Pectoral and 8 Semipalmated sandpipers; and 1 Wilson's Phalarope (DW). **May 21** brought the biggest shorebird fallout (after 4 inches of rain in Lufkin) and the Angelina Co AP had **3 Black-bellied Plover; 85 Dunlin;** and 4 Baird's, 4 Least, 50 White-rumped, 3 Pectoral, and 10 Semipalmated sandpipers (LD). At the Nacogdoches AP the same day were **18 Dunlin;** one **Buff-breasted** and 15 Pectoral sandpipers (DW). A **Black-necked Stilt** flying north low over the TX 147 causeway on stormy May 13 was one of very few spring records for our area (DW). From 4-12 American Golden-Plover were at the Angelina Co Airport on 9 dates spanning March 13-April 4, with high counts of 12 on March 28 and 11 on April 1 (all LD). 8 were at the Nacogdoches AP March 14 (DW). 13 Spotted Sandpipers at Kurth Lake April 16 was the season high count (LD). The first Greater Yellowlegs were 2 in Central Hts March 10 (DW). The first Upland Sandpipers were one at the Nacogdoches AP March 21 (SL) and 2 at the Angelina Co Airport March 30 (LD); counts of this species were low all spring. **Dunlin** are rarely found in our area in the spring, but the fallout on May 21 brought 85 to the Angelina Co AP (LD) and 18 to the Nacogdoches AP (DW). Baird's Sandpiper was found only at the Angelina Co AP, with 4 on March 27; one on April 15; 8 on April 20; 2 on May 13; and 4 April 21 (all LD). The first Least Sandpiper was one at the Angelina Co AP April 25 (LD), while the spring high count was 30 near Alazan Bayou April 29 (DW). A single **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was at the Angelina Co AP April 6-7 (LD), while one at the Nacogdoches AP May 21 (DW) was the latest ever for the Pineywoods by a week. The first Pectoral Sandpipers were 6 at the Nacogdoches AP March 14 (DW), while the spring high count was 70 near

Alazan Bayou April 29 (DW). A single Semipalmated Sandpiper in Central Hts May 9 (RT, DW) and 12 at the Angelina Co AP May 13 (LD) were in addition to those seen in the fallouts. The only Western Sandpipers all spring were 2 at the Nacogdoches AP April 27 (DW). Single female Wilson's Phalaropes near Alazan Bayou April 29 and May 11 were the only sightings this spring (DW). Two breeding-plumaged adult **Laughing Gulls** over the TX 147 causeway March 15 were a surprise (RT, DW), while 30 Franklin's Gulls here May 13 were the only ones reported (DW). 130+ Black Terns seen from the TX 147 causeway May 13 was a high count (DW); a few also visited Kurth Lake the last two weeks of May (LD).

A **White-winged Dove** that showed up in Loco Valley March 16 was still present May 22 (welcome home Ruth!) (RH). This species was also found in mid-April in Nacogdoches just north of the SFASU Campus and one was still calling in this area May 21 (RS). A singing bird in Central Hts May 1 was a one-day wonder (DW). It looks like this species is slowly colonizing Nacogdoches and Lufkin. Single Yellow-billed Cuckoos at Alazan Bayou WMA (CS, RM et al) and Peavey Switch (JP) on April 19 were the first. The first Common Nighthawk was one over Central Hts April 25 (DW), while 75 over Nacogdoches May 29 was our best spring count in years (CS, JN). Eastern Whip-poor-wills were heard in Central Hts April 7 (MHW) and Douglass April 30 (CW), while the first Chuck-will's-widow was in Central Hts April 9 (MHW). The first Chimney Swift was seen in Nacogdoches March 28 (JD, TD). An immature male **Rufous Hummingbird** that over-wintered in Central Hts (first seen Nov 25, 2014) was last seen March 17 (MHW, DW), while what appeared to be a different bird was there April 5 only (DW). The first Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were singles near Peavey Switch March 26 (JP) and in Nacogdoches March 28 (JD, TD); they were late in appearing this spring. An adult Hairy Woodpecker was carrying food to 2 noisy fledglings in Central Hts May 1 (DW). A remarkable **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** video-recorded near Appleby (Nacogdoches Co) on May 8 (BB) was to my knowledge the first sighting in the county since April 1985! Apparently a few of them wander away from their colonies. A late American Kestrel was at the Angelina Co AP April 16 (LD). Single Merlins at the Angelina Co AP March 13 (LD) and the Nacogdoches AP April 27 (DW) were the only sightings this spring, as were single Peregrine Falcons over Ellen Trout Park March 30 (LD); Alazan Bayou April 27 (DW); and the TX 147 causeway May 13 (DW). Single Olive-sided Flycatchers found at different sites in Nacogdoches, on April 23 (CDF) and April 24 (DW) were our earliest ever by 1-2 days. The only other sighting this spring was one in Central Hts May 1 (DW). A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Nacogdoches May 5 was the only report (DW), while a Least Flycatcher in Pecan Park April 23 was our earliest ever by a few days (DW). A silent "Traill's" flycatcher was at Alazan Bayou May 9 (TH, DW) and a singing Alder Flycatcher was in Central Hts May 13 (MHW). Single **Western Kingbirds** were at Alazan Bayou April 24 (DW) and in Central Hts April 25 (DW). The first Eastern Kingbird was at the SFA Exp Forest April 3 (CW) and the first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were singles in Nacogdoches March 24 (JD, TD) and the Angelina Co AP March 30 (LD). The first Yellow-throated Vireo was singing in Carrizo Creek March 22 (SL). The first Philadelphia Vireo was one in Pecan Park April 25 (DW, CDF, CW), while the season high count was 10 there April 28 (MHW). The first Red-eyed Vireo was at the SFA Exp Forest April 3 (CW). A Tree Swallow on the Patroon Creek arm of Toledo Bend (n. Sabine Co) April 24 was likely breeding locally (DW). 25+ Bank Swallows over the TX 147 area April 28 was the season high count (DW). 25 Cliff Swallows were back at the TX 147 bridge March 15 (DW) and one Cave Swallow had returned to the Alazan Bayou breeding site by March 14 (DW). A belated report of a Red-breasted Nuthatch from Antioch (Shelby Co) on Nov 19 was the only area report

all winter (SO). A White-breasted Nuthatch in Central Hts on March 11 only may have been a migrant (MHW, DW) as this was the first seen here in 30 years. The first Wood Thrush were singles in Carrizo Creek April 4 (SL) and Melrose April 6 (RT). A Sprague's Pipit was still at the Nacogdoches AP April 6, but none were seen after this (SL). A big migratory push of Cedar Waxwings came through our area mid-April to mid-May, with hundreds seen going north on many days (m. obs.). The last were 6 in Central Hts May 26 (DW).

Overall it was a rather disappointing spring for warblers, in spite of the many turbulent storms. They must have gotten "put down" elsewhere! **The best push** came through Pecan Park April 23-28, with April 24 the single best day for both variety and numbers. After this the Park attracted only a few birds on most days. The first Northern Waterthrush were 2 in Carrizo Creek April 24 (SL). The only Golden-winged Warbler was a male in Pecan Park April 24 (DW), while single Blue-winged Warblers were at Alazan Bayou April 9 (DW); Alazan Bayou April 11 (TH); and Pecan Park April 24 (DW). The first Tennessee Warbler was one at Alazan Bayou April 9 (DW). High counts for Tennessee were 120+ in Pecan Park April 24 (DW, RT); 80+ on April 28 (m. obs.); and 30+ on May 14 (DW). 10 Nashville Warblers in Pecan Park April 24 was a good one-day count (DW, RT). The only Mourning Warbler was one in Central Hts May 14 (MHW). The first American Redstarts were 2 in Pecan Park April 27 (BB). Single Cerulean Warblers, all females, were in Pecan Park April 23-24 (DW); Central Hts April 23 (MHW); and Pecan Park April 29 (DW). The first Magnolia Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 25 (TH). A male Bay-breasted Warbler in Pecan Park April 25 was our earliest ever by one day (DW et al) and 1-2 or more males were seen here almost daily through May 5 (m. obs.), while the last was a female there May 14 (DW). The first Blackburnian Warblers were 2 in Pecan Park April 23 (DW, DS). The first Yellow Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 18 (RT), while 12 there April 24 was a good count for early in the season (DW, RT). The last Yellows were 2 in Pecan Park May 26 (DW). The only **Blackpoll Warblers** were a male in Pecan Park April 24 (DW, RT) and a female there April 28 (MHW). A late migrant Yellow-throated Warbler was in Pecan Park April 23 (DW, DS). The first push of Black-throated Green Warblers in Pecan Park was 5 on April 18 (RT), while 12 there April 24 was a good one-day count (DW, RT). The only Canada Warbler was one in Nacogdoches May 13 (DW). A **Wilson's Warbler** in willows on the TX 147 causeway **March 15** was out-of-season (DW, RT), while the first normal migrant was in Central Hts on May 1 (DW). First sightings of some of our locally-breeding warblers were a Louisiana Waterthrush singing in Carrizo Creek March 23 (SL); a Kentucky Warbler in the SFA Exp Forest April 19 (CS, RM et al); 2 Yellow-throated Warblers on the Dorr Creek Road March 16 (DW); and a Hooded Warbler in Carrizo Creek April 1 (SL).

Lark Sparrows singing on territory were widespread this spring, likely due to the lush conditions (m. obs.). The high count of Lincoln's Sparrows was 25+ at Alazan Bayou April 29 (DW). Some last dates for wintering sparrows were a single Savannah at the Nacogdoches AP on May 12 (DW); White-throated in Nacogdoches April 17 (JD, TD) and April 27 (DW); a Harris's in Central Hts April 5 (DW); and the last White-crowned in Central Hts on May 6 (DW). The last Dark-eyed Juncos were 2 in Nacogdoches March 19 (DW). The first Summer Tanager was one in Carrizo Creek April 7 (SL). The first Rose-breasted Grosbeak was one in Loco Valley April 19 (RH), but within a few days other observers were reporting them at their feeders too (m. obs.). Two males at a feeder in Nacogdoches May 10-14 were the last (JD, TD). A very rare **Black-headed Grosbeak** was photographed nicely at a feeder in Nacogdoches April 18 and stayed through April 25 (LS). The first Indigo Bunting was one in Central Hts April 8 (MHW, DW),

while the season high count was 125+ in Nacogdoches Co April 24 (DW). The first Painted Bunting was an adult male in Central Hts April 16 (DW). The first Dickcissels were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 19 (CS, RM et al). Two male **Bobolinks** at Alazan Bayou April 24 (RT) and April 26 (DW, MM) were the only ones found this spring. It was a remarkable spring for **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, a species not found here annually. Single males were at Alazan Bayou April 19 (CS, RM et al); at the Nacogdoches High School playing fields April 20 (JR); and at the Angelina Co AP April 27-28 (Claude Riddle), while 4 (3 males) were in Diboll April 28 (RT) and a female flew over Alazan Bayou May 9 (DW). The first Baltimore Oriole was one in Pecan Park April 18 (RT), while 30 there April 23 was the season high count (DW, DS). The first Great-tailed Grackle was back in Nacogdoches March 12 after their winter absence and by March 16 they were present at all 4 known breeding localities in Nacogdoches (DW, m. obs.) The first fledgling was seen May 17 (DW). This species now seems to be well-established, unfortunately. Single Purple Finches lingered in Carrizo Creek until March 2 (SL) and Central Hts until March 16 (DW). Pine Siskins appeared widely in Nacogdoches in early to mid-April (m. obs.), including 40+ in Pecan Park April 18 (RT); 20 there April 24 (DW, RT); and a late one on April 27 (DW).

Observers: BB = Brent Burt; JD, TD = John & Thelma Dalmas; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; TH = Tyson Hart; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; RM = Roger Masse; MM = Milton Moorer; JN = Jim Neal; SO = Susan Orwig; JP = Jimmie Putnam; JR = Jack Rohrer; RS = Rick Schaefer; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; JS = Julie 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: Angelina County Airport (= Angelina Co AP); Diboll; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Old Orchard Park (in Diboll); Peavey Switch.

In Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA (= Alazan Bayou); Carrizo Creek; Central Heights (=Hts); Dorr Creek (St's Rest) Road; Douglass; Loco Valley; Nacogdoches; Nacogdoches Airport (= Nacogdoches AP); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp Forest).

In San Augustine County: TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn.