

Winter 2017-18 Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
December 1, 2017 – February 28, 2018

by David E. Wolf

Pineywoods Audubon Society hosted the very successful **TOS Winter Convention** from Jan 11-14 in Nacogdoches, with **30 field trips total**. Together they covered a broad swath of the Central Pineywoods and produced a lot of good information. The birds of greatest significance that were found during all of this birding activity were the **Golden Eagle** at Boggy Slough on Jan 12 (CS et al) and **Red Crossbills** at multiple locations, but there were other birds of note too. These are included in this report.

The **Nacogdoches Christmas Count** was held on Dec 17, 2017, and recorded 113 species, plus 7 more count week but not on count day. This is right on our species average. Rarities were a **Crested Caracara** found by Robert Truss and Eamonn Thurmond near the SFA Experimental Forest, and single **Black-and-white Warblers** seen by Rick Schaefer (La Nana Creek) and David Wolf (Alazan Bayou WMA). Notable high counts were 600 Canvasbacks on Kurth Lake (Louis Debetaz); 34 Blue-headed Vireos; **16 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** (our highest ever; found by 6 of 11 parties) and 71 Orange-crowned Warblers. In other words, the “half-hardy” birds were in high numbers, likely due to the mild conditions through count week.

In mid-February we rapidly turned the corner from a cold and damp late winter to beautiful mild spring weather. As I write this the first migrants are appearing, so keep track of your first arrival dates and significant sightings and report them to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com Thanks in advance!

Bird Report:

The only northbound geese reported were 150 Snows over Nacogdoches on Feb 16 (CS) and 35 over Rusk Co on March 3 (BW). Waterfowl numbers at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds peaked in mid-February, when 500-550 Gadwall (a very high count for here) and numerous other ducks were present, including the season high count of 118 Redheads on Feb 22. Numbers dropped after this and most ducks were gone after the first week of March (DW). 4-5 Mallards were on a pond at the SFASU Farm in Mahl Feb 9-11 (DW, RT), while the first Blue-winged Teal were 5 early arrivals at the Nac ponds Feb 9 (DW). A female Greater Scaup was sporadically detected at the Nac ponds Jan 26 to at least Feb 16-17 (DW). A female Common Goldeneye visited Alazan Bayou WMA Jan 13 (DW, ET et al; TOS) and likely the same bird was seen there again on Feb 10 (DW). These were the only reported sightings of this species this winter. A single Red-breasted Merganser was in Sabine Co below the dam at Toledo Bend Reservoir on Jan 12 (Anthony Hewetson et al; TOS Century Club). A good count of 16 Common Loons was off Sabinetown on Toledo Bend Jan 18 (DB). A **Red-throated Loon** flying past the TX 147 causeway on Jan 7 was reported to eBird with some details (Steve Glover). This is our **first local report ever**. An Eared Grebe on Kurth Lake 12 & 14 January for the TOS field trips was still present Jan 28 (LD et al). 39 Horned Grebes off Sabinetown on Toledo Bend on Dec 14 was a high count, while 12 were still in the area Jan 12 (both DB). 550 American White Pelicans were counted over and on the Attoyac arm of Rayburn Jan 1, from TX 147 to Townsend Park (DW). An Anhinga was in the swamp on the Dorr Creek

Road Jan 7, but was not seen again (DW). Single American Bitterns, likely the same individual, were at Alazan Bayou WMA Jan 10 and Feb 10 (DW). Two **Little Blue Herons** (one adult, one white im.) were found at San Augustine Park on Lake Rayburn Jan 13, for a rare winter sighting this far north (Anthony Hewetson et al; TOS Century Club). A flock of **16 Cattle Egrets** near Lake Naconiche (Nac Co) on Jan 28 was unexpected (JS). This species is not regular in our area in the winter. A **Golden Eagle** on the TOS field trip to Boggy Slough (ne. Trinity Co) on Jan 12 was a convention highlight (CS et al; TOS). Wandering Greater Yellowlegs were found several times this winter. 3 at Alazan Bayou WMA on Jan 6 had not been around (CS); 4 were counted there on Jan 10 (Tony Adams); and one was still present Jan 13-14 on the TOS field trips (DW, ET et al; TOS). A single was in w. Nacogdoches Co Jan 27 (DW). A Spotted Sandpiper at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Jan 9 was not seen again (DW). 5 Wilson's Snipe near Antioch (Shelby Co) on Dec 13 were the first she has seen in the county (SO). A Jan 28 visit to the spillway at Lake Livingston produced at least **115 Laughing Gulls**, a very high count, while an amazing **21 Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were counted around the lower basin of the lake from the West Dam Overlook (San Jacinto Co), reflecting the incredible increase in this species in North America (DW, RT). 570 Forster's Terns over the TX 147 causeway Jan 1 was the season high count (DW). A White-winged Dove was over the SFASU campus in Nacogdoches Dec 15 (DW), while the first for 2018 was heard on California Street in Nacogdoches on Feb 6 (RS). From here to the SFASU campus has been the most consistent part of town for this species, which is just beginning to colonize our area and is still quite uncommon and local. A **Barn Owl** was clearly heard to call twice as it flew over Nacogdoches after dark on Jan 26 (CS). We have very few records of this easily overlooked species. A carefully identified female **Rufous Hummingbird** wintered in Nacogdoches from Oct 31 to at least March 12 (CS, JS). A **Crested Caracara** was spotted on TX 21 about 2 1/2 miles east of Alto (Cherokee Co) on Dec 5 (Brad Williamson), while single Merlins came through Central Hts Dec 28 (DW) and another was found in Sabine Co Jan 12 (Anthony Hewetson et al; TOS Century Club).

A **Vermilion Flycatcher** at the base of the TX 147 causeway Jan 7 (Steve Glover; on eBird) may well have been the bird seen here Oct 11-15, 2017. Blue-headed Vireos were easier to find than usual all winter, but the only White-eyed Vireo was one singing at Lake Naconiche Feb 26 (CS). The first Purple Martin reported was a male over Lufkin Feb 16 (GH). From 25-50 **Cave Swallows** were at Kurth Lake Dec 16 and again for all three TOS field trips Jan 12-14 (LD et al; TOS), while 10 distant swallow sp? over Lake Nacogdoches Dec 30 were likely this species. A single **Cave** was at the Nacogdoches ponds Jan 1 and at least 8 were there Feb 22 (both DW). Winter sightings of this recent colonist to the region continue to increase!. A Barn Swallow at Kurth Lake Feb 22 was the first spring sighting. There were only a few reports of Red-breasted Nuthatch this winter. The first showed up in Lufkin Nov 13 and was last seen Feb 1 (GH), while another was in Nacogdoches Nov 23 (RS) and one was heard along Dorr Creek road Jan 21 (RT).. A pair of White-breasted Nuthatches was already carrying material to a cavity in Lufkin Feb 20 (GH). **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers**, once a rare winter find, were remarkably widespread this winter, with some birds still around after significantly cold weather in January. The Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 17 recorded **16**, a record high count, and they were found on 13 of 30 TOS Convention field trips Jan 12-14. One was in the Sabinetown area Jan 18 (DB) and another was on the Dorr Creek road Jan 28 (RS). There were more reports of Gray Catbird than usual, with one in Douglass Dec 5-24 and perhaps a different bird there Feb 17 (CW); one in Cushing Feb 1 (DS); and one in Nacogdoches Feb 18 (RS). The largest flock of American Pipits reported this winter was 120 in Central Hts Dec 25 (DW). From 1-3

Sprague's Pipits were flushed at the Nacogdoches Airport Dec 16-17 and on all three days of the TOS field trips Jan 12-14 (SL, MHW et al; TOS). Cedar Waxwings invaded downtown Nacogdoches for a few days to feast on the berries of ornamental holly trees, with an amazing **high count of 4000+** on Feb 7 (CS, D Wa, VW). A male Common Yellowthroat in the swamp on the Dorr Creek Road Jan 7 was never re-located (DW).

From 1-6 Henslow's Sparrows were located at the Nac Airport all three days of the TOS field trips (SL, MHW et al; TOS). This was a remarkable feat and much appreciated by participants! A Lark Sparrow visited Douglass Dec 10 (CW); one was in s. Nacogdoches Co on the Dec 17 CBC (MHW, TH); and 2 again wintered at their usual site in Central Hts (DW, MHW). A singing Fox Sparrow at the Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches Feb 16 was a surprise (CS, JS). 3 White-crowned Sparrows near Antioch (Shelby Co) on Dec 13 were noteworthy for the area (SO). It was a good winter for Harris's Sparrow. The first was one in Douglass Dec 12 (CW) and then at least 3 wintered at Alazan Bayou WMA, from at least Dec 17-Jan 14 (DW et al; TOS). The only sightings in Central Hts this winter were one on Dec 26 and 2 on Jan 2 (DW). 12 Eastern Towhees in Carrizo Creek on Nov 23 indicated a major push (SL). The first Rusty Blackbirds were 5 in Nacogdoches on Dec 8 (CS, JC, JP) and then during the TOS field trips Jan 12-14 very small numbers were found at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds, in Nacogdoches town, and in Sabine Co (TOS). On the snow day of Jan 16 at least 7 were seen in Central Hts (DW). Then we had a "mini-invasion" in mid-February, when a flock of 120 appeared in Nacogdoches town Feb 9. Smaller numbers were seen sporadically at several sites in town through Feb 21, with 50 still present on the latter date (CS, RS, DW). A flock of 50 was found at the Nacogdoches ponds on Feb 11 (RT, DW). The only Brewer's Blackbirds were 15 on the Nacogdoches CBC on Dec 17 (RH) and some in Sabine Co on Jan 12 (Anthony Hewetson et al; TOS Century Club). A remarkable male **Baltimore Oriole** was photographed at a suet feeder in Nacogdoches Feb 8; it stayed around for almost two weeks (HG). Purple Finches were almost completely lacking this winter and the only reports were a single female in Cherokee Co Dec 26 (BW), and one at Hickory Creek in the Davy Crockett NF (Houston Co) on Jan 12 & 14 (RS et al; TOS). The biggest news of the winter was the **Red Crossbill** invasion beginning in mid-January. The first were found at Lake Ratcliff (Houston Co) by Rick Schaefer, where he heard them on Jan 8 and then saw 20+ at the same spot on Jan 11. On Jan 12-13 he heard them at Hickory Creek (off FS 511 in Houston Co) with the TOS field trips but could not see them. On Jan 13 a flock of 8 or so was found on the Dorr Creek (St's Rest) Road by the TOS trip led by Randy Pinkston and Byron Stone; another group with Brent Burt and Tyson Hart also got to see/hear them. On Jan 14 Brent and Tyson saw 4 birds at this spot. Susie Lower and Nina Rach had good looks at 9 of them in a bare tree at this spot on Jan 15. On Jan 18 at least 7 flew low over this spot (DW, MHW). On Jan 19 a flock of 4 came over (DW, CDF, D Wa, VW) and later a single male landed and sang from a hardwood (DW; photos). On Feb 22 Rick Schaefer had 10 at Ratcliff and finally got good recordings that will hopefully, with the help of experts, determine what "Type" our birds were. A **Common Redpoll** was photographed at a feeder in Lufkin Feb 11-12 (Ernest Iverson). This species is extremely rare anywhere in Texas, but this was our third local record in 6 years. Pine Siskins staged a modest flight into the region this winter. They were widespread beginning in late Dec, but no one feeding station reported more than 25 and most had disappeared by mid-Feb (m. obs.). The first were 4 near Antioch (Shelby Co) on Nov 22 (SO).

Observers: DB = David Bell; JC = James Childress; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; HG = Heinz Gaylord; TH = Tyson Hart; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; SO = Sue Orwig; JP = Josh Pierce; PAS = Pinewoods Audubon Society; RS = Rick Schaefer; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; JS = Julie Shackelford; Jo S = John Smelser; ET = Eamonn Thurmond; RT = Robert Truss; TOS = Texas Ornithological Society; D Wa = Dave Wallace; VW = Vickie Wallace; CW = Carol Wells; BW = Becky Whisenant; DW = David Wolf; Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Localities in Angelina County: Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin), Kurth Lake; Lufkin

In Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Dorr Creek (St's Rest) road; Douglass; Lake Nacogdoches; Lake Naconiche; Mahl; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds).

In San Augustine County: San Augustine Park; Townsend Park; TX 147 causeway over Lake Rayburn

In Sabine County: Indian Mounds Wilderness Area; Sabinetown (on Toledo Bend Reservoir).

In Shelby County: Antioch.