

Fall Bird Report for the Pineywoods Audubon Society
September 1 - November 30, 2017

by David E. Wolf

Although the fall season can be one of our most exciting, this year it was relatively dull, with very few notable pushes of migrants or rarities. Apparently the weather was just too nice. Lake levels were high, so little habitat was available for shorebirds and long-legged waders. After the heavy rains of Hurricane Harvey in late August, a weak cool front on Sept 5 brought a decent rain, but then we dried out and it did not rain again until Oct 22. Modest cool fronts were regular throughout the season, keeping skies clear for days on end and temperatures consistently pleasant. The northern parts of Nacogdoches County had a freak early freeze the night of Oct 27-28 when temperatures dipped to 31-32 for a few hours, but the next freeze was not until around Nov 23, a more normal date. Beautiful weather, but it was not conducive to producing notable movements of birds!

Bird Report:

For the summer report I overlooked a sighting of a **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** near Sabinetown on Toledo Bend on August 19 (DB). Among the few sightings of geese were 3 flocks of Snow Geese over Boggy Slough on Oct 31; amidst them was one **Ross's Goose** (CS). Ducks were generally late in arriving and in low numbers. 7 Blue-winged Teal were still in the Sabinetown area Oct 31 (DB). A Red-breasted Merganser, always noteworthy in our area, was at Kurth Lake Nov 20 (LD). The first Common Loon was one migrating low over Nacogdoches Nov 4 (DW). The first Horned Grebe was one at Kurth Lake Nov 20 (LD). Two Neotropic Cormorants at the SFASU Farm near Central Hts on Oct 1 were at an unexpected location (RT), while 6 on an island off the TX 147 causeway on Oct 15 were the last (DW). A migrating Anhinga came over the TX 147 causeway on the north wind on Oct 11 (DW). An American Bittern at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 12 tied our earliest date ever (CW). Another one was seen there Oct 1 (DW, RT). The last Little Blue Herons were 2 at the base of the TX 147 causeway Oct 15 (DW, RT). 35 Cattle Egrets appeared in Central Hts Oct 15, almost a month after most had left our area (DW). 8 juvenile White Ibis at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 16 were the last (DW). A **Plegadis ibis** (likely White-faced) was at the SFASU Farm in Central Hts Oct 14 (RT, DW). A beautiful **Roseate Spoonbill** low over Central Hts Sept 16 (DW) was the only report this fall and #218 for the Wolf's property list.

An Osprey was in the Sabinetown area on Toledo Bend August 19 (DB). Are there any known nests on this huge reservoir? At least 15 Bald Eagles were spotted around the TX 147 causeway Oct 11, a high count for early in the season (DW). 67 Broad-winged Hawks tallied over Central Hts Sept 30 was the only sizable count noted all fall (DW), but the consistently clear skies that we had were not conducive to spotting migrating raptors! A Virginia Rail was found and photographed near Huntington on Sept 29 (James Childress fide CS). Shorebirds were almost completely lacking this fall, but a flock of 7 American Avocets came over the TX 147 bridge Oct 11 (DW). Upland Sandpipers were heard over Central Hts Sept 19 (MHW), a late date for them. The first American Woodcock was one in Nacogdoches Nov 12 (CDF). Two Ring-billed Gulls at Sabinetown on Toledo Bend August 31 were on the early side (DB). A Herring Gull over the TX 147 causeway Oct 15 was the first (DW).

A Greater Roadrunner was spotted in Cherokee Co on Oct 11 (BW). Most surprising was a **Short-eared Owl** in Nacogdoches on Nov 9 (CDF); this was our first area sighting in 20 years. A carefully identified female Ruby-throated Hummingbird lingered in Central Hts to the very late date of Nov 7 (DW, MHW). A carefully identified female **Rufous Hummingbird** showed up in Nacogdoches Oct 31 and was still present on Nov 25 and perhaps a few days later (CS). After a successful breeding season again this year, Red-headed Woodpeckers vacated Central Hts, where the last one was noted Sept 22 (MHW, DW). Where do they go? The first Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 1 (DW, RT). The first migrating Northern Flicker came over Central Hts Oct 6 (DW), while 24+ over Alazan Bayou Oct 16 was a good push (DW). Merlins were spotted at Alazan Bayou in mid-Oct (ET) and Nacogdoches on Nov 2(SL), but no Peregrine Falcons were spotted this fall.

An Olive-sided Flycatcher was seen daily in Central Hts Sept 13–16 (DW), while a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was there Sept 14 (DW). The last Eastern Wood-Pewee was one in Central Hts Oct 6 (DW). The first push of migrant Eastern Phoebes in Central Hts was 5 on Sept 14 (DW). A gorgeous male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was photographed near Huntington on Oct 7 (James Childress fide CS), while an immature male was at the base of the TX 147 causeway on Oct 11 (DW) and again Oct 15 (DW, RT). Two records of this rare visitor in one month! **Two Couch's Kingbirds** were photographed on the SFASU campus Nov 4. Fortunately they were calling a lot as they vigorously chased each other, confirming that they were Couch's and not Tropical (DW). This is our 6th area record for this stray from South Texas and all have been in the fall/winter season. A flock of 7 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers came through Loco Valley Oct 12 (RH), while the last was one in Nacogdoches Nov 6 (ET). Late White-eyed Vireos were in Central Hts Oct 17 and Oct 22 (DW). Two Warbling Vireos were in Central Hts Sept 16 and one was there Oct 6 (both DW). 35 late migrant Tree Swallows passed over the TX 147 causeway Oct 28 (DW).

A Red-breasted Nuthatch in Nacogdoches Nov 23 was our first local report this winter (RS), but there may be more around than we realize as both SL and MHW thought they heard one in October. The first Brown Creeper was one in Sabinetown on Oct 31 (DB). The first Winter Wrens were singles in Nacogdoches Oct 20 (CS) and Carrizo Creek Oct 23 (SL). The first Sedge Wren was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 1, while 2 Marsh Wrens were there the same day (both RT, DW). The first Golden-crowned Kinglet was one in Central Hts Oct 28 (MHW). Season high counts of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were 32 at Sabinetown on Sept 5 (DB) and 28 in Central Hts Sept 13 (DW). A late migrant came through Central Hts Oct 22 (DW) and one was still in Sabinetown Oct 31 (DB). The first Hermit Thrush was one in Carrizo Creek Oct 23 (SL). The first migrating American Robins were 30 over Melrose Oct 19 (RT). No significant numbers have been reported yet. A Gray Catbird was found in Douglass Dec 5 (CW). The first 2 migrant Brown Thrashers came through Central Hts Sept 14 (DW). The first Cedar Waxwings were 15 in Central Hts Nov 22 (DW).

Migrant warblers were notably scarce this fall and even the commonest species were largely lacking. A Northern Waterthrush visited Central Hts Sept 17-18 (MHW). The first Orange-crowned Warbler was one in Central Hts Oct 17(DW). The first Nashville Warbler was one in Central Hts Sept 14 (DW), while the last were 2-3 seen daily at a birdbath in Nacogdoches Oct 31-Nov 4 (CS, JS). The season high count for Common Yellowthroat was 10 seen (and more heard chipping) at Alazan Bayou on Oct 1 (DW, RT). Oddly, American Redstart was one of the most frequently seen migrant warblers this fall, with

1 in Central Hts Sept 11 (DW); 2 in Central Hts Sept 24 (MHW, DW); 2 at Sabinetown Sept 27(DB); 1 in Nacogdoches Sept 29 (CS); and a very late one in Central Hts Nov 2 (MHW). Single migrant Northern Parulas in Central Hts Sept 24 (MHW) and Nacogdoches Sept 30 (CS) were far fewer than usual. A few Yellow Warblers were spotted through Sept 24. 10 Pine Warblers in Central Hts Sept 14 was the first detectable push of migrants, while 45+ at the base of the TX 147 causeway on Oct 11 was a high count of migrants (both DW). The first Yellow-rumped Warblers were 4 at the TX 147 causeway Oct 11 (DW). The last of the very few Black-throated Green Warblers this fall was in Nacogdoches on Nov 8, our latest ever by two days (CDF). The only Wilson's Warblers were singles in Nacogdoches Sept 14-15 (CS, JS) and Central Hts Sept 15 (DW).

The only **Clay-colored Sparrow** reported was an early one in Central Hts on Sept 8 (DW). Three Lark Sparrows showed up in Central Hts Nov 3 and were still present into Dec (DW). The first, Dark-eyed Juncos were singles in Nacogdoches Oct 31 (LS) and Central Hts Nov 1 (DW). The first White-throated Sparrow was an **extremely early** one at Sabinetown on Sept 22-23 (DB). Our previous two earliest dates for the area are Sept 24 and October 5. The next reports were not until Oct 17 in Central Hts (DW) and Oct 19 in Nacogdoches (LS). The first Savannah Sparrows were on Oct 1, one at Alazan Bayou WMA (DW, RT) and 2 at the SFASU Farm in Central Hts (RT). More sparrow "firsts" were single Lincoln's and Swamp at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 1 (DW, RT), while on Oct 16 they had increased to 10+ Lincoln's and 45+ Swamp at this locality (DW). A late Summer Tanager came through Loco Valley Nov 13 (RH). A **Scarlet Tanager**, always a rarity in the fall, visited Central Hts Sept 8 (DW).. The only Rose-breasted Grosbeak this fall was one in Central Hts Sept 25 (DW). 125 Indigo Buntings at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 1 was the season high count (DW, RT), while the last was a late one in Nacogdoches Nov 8 (CDF). A Painted Bunting lingered in Central Hts to the late date of Oct 9 (DW). The first Rusty Blackbirds were 5 in Nacogdoches on Dec 8 (CS, James Childress, Josh Pierce). This species is always one of our last winter birds to arrive.

12 Brown-headed Cowbirds in Central Hts Sept 11 were the first there in months (DW). The only numbers of Baltimore Orioles were 10 in Central Hts Sept 6 (DW). An immature male **Baltimore Oriole** carefully studied in Central Hts on Nov 1 was our **latest ever** by almost three weeks (except for one Dec record) (DW). Hopefully a very early **Purple Finch** in Nacogdoches on Oct 31 was a harbinger of more to come (CS). It looks like this winter will be a flight year for **Pine Siskins**, as a few were heard going over Melrose and Central Heights in early November (RT, MHW). The next report was 7 seen in the SFA Experimental Forest on Nov 25 (RT, DW).

The first American Goldfinch was one in Central Hts Nov 3 (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; LD = Louis Debetaz; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; RH = Ruth Heino; SL = Susie Lower; RS = Rick Schaefer; CS, JS = Cliff & Julie Shackelford; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; ET; CW = Carol Wells; BW = Becky Whisenant; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

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

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Douglass; Loco Valley; Melrose; Nacogdoches (town); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest; Stephen F. Austin State University (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Farm (in Central Heights)..

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

Localities in Sabine County: Sabinetown (on Toledo Bend Reservoir).