

Spring Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
(March 1 - May 31, 2017)
by David E. Wolf

Spring came early this year, after a very mild winter without late freezes, and the vegetation responded in kind, with many plants leafing-out and/or flowering before expected. Winter resident birds seemed to leave early, likely in response to the mild conditions, but most summer residents arrived “on schedule” and were not especially early, with a few exceptions. Cool fronts and associated rain and stormy weather were regular right up through the end of May, but they did not drop large numbers of migrants in our area, and no really big or dramatic “fallouts” occurred this spring. Apparently the timing of the passage of these fronts was such that the migrants were not caught over our area. In spite of this, most of our regular migrants were found at least once, albeit in lesser frequency than some years. What seemed lacking was the usual horde of easily-found colorful orioles, grosbeaks, buntings and swarms of warblers that make our so spring season so special.

Stormy April 27 was perhaps the best single day. It brought a good fallout of migrants to some areas (Sabinetown on Toledo Bend; DB) and Caddoan Mounds State Park (BB), but dropped very few in others (Pecan Park in Nacogdoches (DW) and Old Orchard Park in Diboll (LD). Shorebirds are a scarce treat inland here in the Pineywoods, but local observers have learned to check the Angelina County and Nacogdoches Airports for them during wet stormy weather, and this paid off this spring when several minor fallouts were detected. Most moved on very quickly as the storms abated.

Thanks to all who sent in their sightings. If you have any additions or corrections to this report please let me know, and otherwise keep me posted as to any interesting records as we go into the summer doldrums. Send your most interesting sightings to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com

Bird Report:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were again present in small numbers in the general area from the Angelina County Airport to Diboll, and singles and pairs were noted irregularly from April 11 through the end of May (LD, RT). This remains the only part of our region where this species is reported, but breeding still has not been confirmed, though it is likely. A single late Snow Goose stopped at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds March 17 (DW, CW). Waterfowl numbers were never great this winter, due to the mild weather and open water well to the north of us, and most ducks simply disappeared by the end of February, with a few exceptions. 75 American Wigeon at Kurth Lake March 4 was a high count (LD), while 65 Bufflehead at Ellen Trout March 12 were the last numbers there (LD). 85 Hooded Mergansers (mostly females) at Alazan Bayou WMA on March 16 was a very high count (DW). Seven females were still there April 5, while the last were 2 on April 22 (DW). The last Common Loon at Kurth Lake was one on May 9 (Tom Newman). One Neotropic Cormorant at Ellen Trout March 6 (LD) and 3 at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds March 14 (DW) were away from their stronghold on Lake Rayburn and perhaps migrants. 150 Double-crested Cormorants passed over the Angelina Co AP on stormy April 16 (LD). In spite of good habitat at Alazan Bayou WMA the only American Bittern was one on March 16-18 (DW); WMA staff reported that it had been present for “several weeks”. The first Snowy Egrets were 4 at Alazan Bayou April 18, while 12 were there on stormy May 4 (DW). The first Little Blue Herons were singles at Alazan Bayou WMA March 9 (CW) and near Melrose March 11 (RT). A **Tricolored Heron** at Alazan Bayou WMA on the May 4 cool front was very unexpected at this season (DW). The season high

counts of White Ibis were 85 over Alazan Bayou WMA April 30 (DW, RT) and 275+ there on the May 4 cool front (DW, SL).

An early migrant Osprey was over w. Nacogdoches Co on March 3 (CW). Two, including one on a nest, were at Lake Naconiche May 25 (CW) and June 4 (RT). The highest counts of migrating Mississippi Kites were 36 over s. Nacogdoches Co April 20 (DW) and 32 over Central Hts May 3 (DW, MHW). A late immature over Nacogdoches May 21 was the last definite migrant (DW). Scattered sightings of adults in Carrizo Creek and Nacogdoches town after this, into mid-June, were likely birds summering locally (SL, RT, DW, MHW). This species seems to be increasing as a summer resident in the Nacogdoches area. Late **Northern Harriers** was singles over s. Nacogdoches Co April 20 and the Nacogdoches AP May 4 (DW), but **especially noteworthy** was a female near Huxley in Shelby Co on **May 30** (CS). Has this species ever summered in the Pineywoods? Single **Swainson's Hawks**, a rare if regular migrant here on the eastern edge of its range, circled low over Central Hts April 24 (DW) and the Nacogdoches AP on the May 4 cool front (DW). No significant flights of Broad-winged Hawks were detected this spring. A Sora flushed at the Nacogdoches Airport April 30 was a surprise (DW, RT). Though not often detected, this species may be a fairly widespread migrant in our area. 2 Purple and 1 Common Gallinule were back at Kurth Lake on April 29 (LD). This is their only regular site in the region and there were no reports of either one from elsewhere. An adult **Whooping Crane**, presumably from the Louisiana flock, briefly stopped at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds March 17 (CW). It was no longer present a few hours after first reported (DW).

A **Black-necked Stilt** at "the puddle" in Central Hts May 22-23, after heavy rain on the 22nd, was a rare surprise and only the 4th Nacogdoches Co spring record in almost 50 years (DW). (Fall records of this species inland are almost completely lacking). No great numbers of American Golden-Plover were found this spring. The first was one near Melrose on March 15 (RT, DW); 4 at the Angelina Co AP March 29 were down to one March 30-31 (LD); 20 were at the Nacogdoches AP April 5 (DW); and the last was one at the Angelina Co AP April 11 (LD). 26 Spotted Sandpipers at Kurth Lake on April 29 was the season high count (LD), while the last was one at Lake Naconiche June 4 (RT). Greater Yellowlegs were scarce, but one was near Melrose March 15 (RT, DW); 10 were at the Nacogdoches AP on stormy April 2 (TH); and 2 were at the Angelina Co AP April 11 (LD). The first Lesser Yellowlegs were 7 at the Angelina Co AP (LD) and one at the Nacogdoches AP (TH) on stormy April 2. The season high count was 25 at the Angelina Co AP after storms April 16 (LD) and 12 appeared in Central Hts on May 3 after a stormy frontal passage (DW). Upland Sandpipers were in low numbers all spring. The first were 2 at the Angelina Co AP March 29 (LD) while the last was a late single in Central Hts on stormy May 3 (DW). Somewhat surprisingly, **Baird's Sandpiper** was one of the most frequently noted shorebirds this spring, over a prolonged period from March 30-May 23. The first were 6 at the Angelina Co AP on March 30, down to 4 the next day (LD). 7 were at the Nacogdoches AP on the brisk cool front of April 5 (DW). Additional sightings were one was at the Angelina Co AP April 14 (LD); 5 at a puddle in Central Hts on the April 22 cool front (DW); 3 at the Nacogdoches AP April 30 (DW, RT); and 4 late birds at the Nacogdoches AP May 23 (DW). The only Least Sandpipers were 2 in Central Hts April 30 (DW). The only White-rumped Sandpipers were found at "the puddle" in Central Hts, one on May 13; another May 19; 15 on May 28; and the last one on May 29 (all DW). **15 Buff-breasted Sandpipers** visited the Angelina Co AP after tremendous thunderstorms on April 16 (LD); this is a rare spring migrant inland. The first Pectoral Sandpipers were 2 at the Angelina Co AP March 29 (LD), while the season high counts were 65 at the Nacogdoches AP on

stormy April 2 (TH) and 35 at the Angelina Co AP after storms on April 16 (LD). A total of 25 at several sites in Nacogdoches Co on May 4 was also a good count (DW). The last was one in Central Hts May 29 (DW). The only Semipalmated Sandpipers were 2 in Central Hts on the April 22 cool front and one there May 16 (DW). 17-20 Wilson's Snipe at Alazan Bayou WMA March 16-18 was a good push of migrants for this locale (DW). **16 Wilson's Phalaropes** in a puddle in Central Hts after heavy rainstorms on May 3 were a treat. Two were still there the next day, when another one showed up at the Nacogdoches ponds (DW). At least one briefly stopped at Alazan Bayou May 12 (DW). Two flocks of Franklin's Gulls (38 birds total) passed over Alazan Bayou WMA on the cool front of April 22 (DW, CS, JS et al), while **5 Caspian Terns** low over the WMA on the May 4 cool front were quite unexpected (DW).

White-winged Doves are slowly colonizing Nacogdoches and this spring brought the most reports yet, including one in Central Hts April 16 (DW); 4 over the SFASU campus April 19 (DW, RT); one in Central Hts May 3 (MHW, DW); and 2 in Pecan Park May 14 (DW, TH et al). The first Yellow-billed Cuckoo was one in Central Hts April 14, a bit early (DW). The only numbers of Common Nighthawks were 25 near Alazan Bayou WMA May 13 (SK) and 17 over Central Hts May 20 (DW, MHW). At least one Eastern Whip-poor-will was heard nightly in Central Hts from April 9-12 (MHW). The first Chimney Swifts were 3 over Nacogdoches March 17 (TH). A late Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was in Pecan Park April 18 (TH). The only report of Merlin was one over Alazan Bayou WMA April 24 (DW). There were no reports of Peregrine Falcon this spring.

Single Olive-sided Flycatchers, one of our less common migrants, were in Douglass May 4 (CW) and Pecan Park May 13 (DW). A few Least Flycatchers appeared in Pecan Park, the first on May 1 (DW, BB et al), but otherwise migrant *Empidonax* were scarce to lacking. The first Great Crested Flycatchers were one on the Dorr Creek Road April 6 (SL) and 2 in Nacogdoches April 7 (TH). **Western Kingbird** is a rare migrant here at the eastern edge of its range. This spring brought singles to Alazan Bayou WMA on April 30 (DW) and Central Hts May 1 (DW). The first Eastern Kingbirds were 2 at the Angelina Co Airport April 1 (LD), while the season high counts of migrants were 60+ over Nacogdoches Co April 30 (DW) and 65+ in Nacogdoches Co on May 4 (DW). The first Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was one in Nacogdoches March 25 (TH). The first Yellow-throated Vireos were 3 singing at Alazan Bayou March 18 (DW) and one in Carrizo Creek March 19 (SL). 3 migrant Blue-headed Vireos were in Pecan Park May 1 (DW, BB et al). The spring high count of Warbling Vireo was at least 5 in Pecan Park May 1 (DW, BB et al), while the last was one there May 14 (DW). The first Philadelphia Vireos were singles in Carrizo Creek April 29 (SL) and Pecan Park April 30 (DW). The first Red-eyed Vireo was one along the Dorr Creek Road on March 28 (BB). Inclement weather brought an early swallow flight to Kurth Lake on March 4, when 6 Tree, 10 Barn and 15 Cave were noted (LD). The first Northern Rough-winged Swallows were 2 at the Nac ponds March 14, with 25 Cave also present (DW). At least 525 migrating Cliff Swallows over Alazan Bayou WMA on May 4 were struggling against the north winds (DW). A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** coming to feeders in Douglass all winter lingered through the very late date of May 16 (CW); the past winter brought a good flight of this species to the region. 18+ Sedge Wrens were singing at Alazan Bayou April 18, but all were gone a few days later (DW). The last Golden-crowned Kinglets were singles in Sabinetown March 13 (DB) and Central Hts March 14 (DW). Remarkably few migrant thrushes were noted all spring and there were no reports of Veery or Gray-cheeked Thrush. A Swainson's Thrush sang daily from the same spot in Carrizo Creek April 29-May 10 (SL), but very few others were reported. A late migrant American Pipit in

breeding plumage was at a puddle in Central Hts April 30 (DW). Migrant Cedar Waxwings were numerous well into May, the last being 37 (4 small flocks) in Nacogdoches May 23 (DW).

Most of the expected migrant warblers were reported at least once, by someone, but in general numbers were low and there were no large fallouts. The only **Worm-eating Warbler** was one in Sabinetown April 10 (DB), while the only **Golden-winged** were a male in Pecan Park April 23 (DW) and 2 in the April 27 fallout in Sabinetown (DB). Surprisingly, there were no sightings of Blue-winged Warbler this spring. A Prothonotary Warbler on the Dorr Creek Road on March 28 was a good first date (BB). No really high numbers of Tennessee Warblers were tallied this spring and the best counts were 28 in Sabinetown in the April 27 fallout (DB); 30 in Pecan Park May 5 (mostly males; DW, DS); and 35 in Pecan Park May 13 (mostly females; DW). The first Nashville Warbler was one in Carrizo Creek March 30 (SL). A Mourning Warbler in Pecan Park May 18 showed some features of the closely related MacGillivray's and may have been a hybrid (TH). A Kentucky Warbler in Pecan Park May 10 was clearly a migrant at this locale (CW). American Redstart was one of the more frequent warblers in Pecan Park in mid-May, with 12 on May 13 the one-day high count (DW, m. obs.). The declining **Cerulean Warbler** was found three times this spring, a male in Pecan Park April 22 (DW); a female at their birdbath in Nacogdoches on May 8 (CS, JS); and a female in Pecan Park May 12 (DW). The first Magnolia Warbler was in Pecan Park April 23, our earliest ever by one day (DW, RT). It was a decent season for Bay-breasted, one of our less common migrant warblers, with a male in Pecan Park April 24 (DW); one in Sabinetown April 27 (DB); 2 in Pecan Park April 30 (DW, RT); a male in Pecan Park May 12 (DW); and 2 in Pecan Park May 13 (TH, DW). The first Blackburnian Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 23 (DW, RT), while the one-day high count was 8 there on May 13 (DW). Yellow Warblers were not especially common and the one-day high counts were a mere 10 in Pecan Park on May 5 (DW, DS) and 10 there on May 13 (DW). A Chestnut-sided Warbler in Nacogdoches April 19 was a bit earlier than expected (RT). **Blackpoll** is the rarest of our regular spring warblers, but males were found twice this spring, one in Sabinetown in the fallout of April 27 (DB) and another in Pecan Park May 14 (TH). A Canada Warbler in Nacogdoches May 13 was the only one reported (DW), as was a Wilson's Warbler in Pecan on May 1 (DW, BB et al). A singing Chipping Sparrow in Central Hts in for a week in mid-May did not stay around and may have been a late migrant (DW, MHW). **Clay-colored Sparrow** is a scarce migrant this far east and the only report this spring was one at Alazan Bayou April 24 (DW). A singing Lark Sparrow was back on territory in Nacogdoches March 22 (CS), while the first arrivals at the Angelina Co Airport were 2 on March 31 (LD). A migrant White-crowned Sparrow was at the Nacogdoches AP April 22 (DW). An unseasonal **Summer Tanager** at the Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches **March 9** had likely wintered locally (JS). The first spring arrivals appeared early, with one on the Dorr Creek Road March 29 (CS, JS) and another in Carrizo Creek March 30 (SL). More normal first dates were birds in Lufkin (LD), Nacogdoches (DW, VW) and Central Hts (DW) on April 6. Though conspicuous on the Upper Texas Coast, Scarlet Tanager is an uncommon migrant here. There were three sightings this spring, a male in Pecan Park April 22 (DW), a pair there April 23 (DW, RT), and a male over the SFA Experimental Forest April 24 (DW). These dates coincide nicely with their peak passage on the UTC. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were widespread in low numbers, including numerous reports at feeders (m. obs.), but the one-day high count was only 8 (all males) in Nacogdoches on April 23 (DW, RT). A late male was in Pecan Park May 21 (DW, RT). A very early first Indigo Bunting came to feeders in Nacogdoches March 29 (TD, JD). The first Painted Buntings were 2 silent males at Alazan Bayou WMA April 18 (DW), while the first Dickcissels were 30 near

Melrose and at least one at Alazan Bayou WMA on April 22 (both RT). East Texas is the only part of the state where **Bobolink** is a regular, if rare and local, inland migrant. The only report this spring was at least 12 males amidst hundreds of Dickcissels at Caddoan Mounds SP on stormy April 27 (BB). Very rare and unexpected was a male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** in a stand of re-generating longleaf pine in Sabine Co near Fox Hunter's Hill on May 2, an unusual habitat for this species (CS). The first Orchard Orioles were in Central Hts April 4 (BB) and Douglass April 6 (CW). The first Baltimore Oriole was one in Pecan Park April 18 (BB), while the last was one there on May 14 (RT), but no numbers were noted all spring. **Purple Finches** lingered in Sabinetown until March 25, and then a late female, perhaps impaired, showed up there **April 12**, a very late date for this species (DB). The only Pine Siskins reported in our region all winter were in Sabinetown on Toledo Bend, where the last sighting was 9 on April 24 (DB).

Observers: DB = David Bell; BB = Brent Burt; TD, JD = Thelma and John Dalmas; LD = Louis Debetaz; TH = Tyson Hart; RH = Ruth Heino; SK = Steve Kinnaird; SL = Susie Lower; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS, JS = Cliff and Julie Shackelford; Da W, VW = Dave and Vickie Wallace; 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); Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Old Orchard Park (in Diboll).

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Douglass; Lake Naconiche; Melrose; Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); SFASU (= Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest.

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