

Pineywoods Audubon Society Fall 2018 Bird Report
(August 15 - November 30, 2018)
by David E. Wolf

“Fall migration” is our most complex season for birds. It is prolonged and includes summer residents disappearing; migrants passing through en route to wintering grounds south of the border; post-breeding wanderers; and winter birds arriving. The **weather** has a huge impact on what we see during this season, so a little background information is in order. The summer of 2018 began with typical weather in June, hot but not extremely so, with occasional rains to keep things green. Then we had prolonged hot weather from early July through August, with sporadic rainfall from Angelina County southward, but very dry conditions from Nacogdoches town northward. Few migrants were grounded and local breeders steadily slipped away. There was **no tropical storm activity**. Then nearly a week of cloudy skies and **widespread rain** from Sept 8-13 brought minor influxes of migrants. After this, it began raining regularly and sometimes heavily. October was **very wet**, with steady rain for a week in the middle of the month and then a break before the rain began again and continued into the first half of November. In Nacogdoches the **first freeze** was the night of Nov 13 and it went down to at least 27° in some parts of the county on the 14th and 15th. This is a little earlier and harder than expected. As I write this in mid-December we have had regular cool fronts weekly, none any colder than this first one, and they have continued to bring **heavy rains**. Some parts of our area had recorded over 60 inches of rain by the end of November (and the first half of December brought several more heavy rains). It’s wet out there!

Brief summation: summer residents just slowly vanished; passage migrants were generally scarce this fall; shorebirds were almost non-existent because water levels were too high; and wintering birds seemed to arrive later than several decades ago. As of mid-December they are still in low numbers, but we do have some **“northern invaders”** to cheer things up: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch and Pine Siskin.

Bird Report:

The only **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were 5 over Martin Creek Lake SP on the Oct 20 PAS field trip (DB et al). This species is still largely lacking in our area. The first geese reported were 40 Snow over Lufkin Oct 17 (AM) and 35 Greater White-fronted over Martin Creek Lake SP on the Oct 20 PAS field trip (DB, J Sm et al; PAS). A big flock of 200 Greater White-fronted passed over w. Nacogdoches Co. on Nov 1 (CW). Few geese were seen after this and many of us “old-timers” really miss the large noisy flocks that used to typify the fall cool fronts. Waterfowl in general arrived late this fall and there were reports of any significance. The first Bufflehead were 9 on the Nac ponds Nov 17 (RT), while 40 there on Nov 21 was a high count for this locality (DW). A single Red-breasted Merganser was at Kurth Lake Dec 1 (RT, DB, J Sm, DW et al; PAS field trip), but was not seen again..

No big numbers of Wood Storks were found this fall, but 4 were at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Sept 8 (DW et al); a season high count of 30 was at the Nac ponds Sept 9 (DW); and 4 were on the Sabine River near Panola Sept 28 (DB, J Sm). The first Horned Grebes were 3 on Kurth Lake Nov 29 (DW, DB) and then 6 were there on the Dec 1 PAS field trip (DB, DW et al). The last Neotropic Cormorants were 4 at Nacogdoches sewage ponds Oct 27 (DW). An Anhinga lingered at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds

through at least Oct 27 (DW). The first American White Pelicans were seen over Lufkin Sept 28 (fide AM). A late migrant Snowy Egret visited the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Oct 27 (DW, RT). Weekly checks of a long-legged wader roost at TX 103 at the Attoyac produced some interesting sightings. The season high count of Little Blue Heron at this site was 200 on Sept 1 (DW, RT). From 6-11 **Tricolored Herons** were counted leaving this roost on 4 occasions from Sept 1-22; the high count was on Sept 1 (DW et al). A very late Green Heron visited Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin on Nov 4 (RT). We had more sightings of **Black-crowned Night-Herons** than usual this fall. 5 were at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Sept 8 (DB, DW et al) and 2 were there Sept 22 (DB, DW et al); one was on the Sabine River near Panola Sept 28 (DB, J Sm); and one was at the Nac ponds Oct 3 (CW, RH). No large numbers of White Ibis were seen this fall and the only "glossy" ibis (*Plegadis sp?*) were one at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 1 (DW, RT) and 5 there on Sept 8 (DW et al). It was good season for wandering **Roseate Spoonbills**. The first was one on St's Rest (Dorr Creek) Road on July 22 (Ben Sandifer on eBird; nice photo); next was one at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Sept 8 & 15 (DW et al); 11 seen from San Augustine Park on the Sept 15 PAS field trip was a high count (DB, J Sm et al); 4 were on the Sabine River near Panola Sept 28 (DB, J Sm); one over Lufkin Oct 14 was a surprise (GH); and one first reported at the Nac ponds Sept 9 was seen sporadically through Oct 31 (DW, RH; CW). One at Alazan Bayou WMA on **Nov 18** was very late (DW); it looked and acted much like the individual that lingered at the Nac ponds through Oct. Could it have been the same bird?

Migrant raptors were not prominent this fall. Two late Ospreys were 2 over Lufkin Nov 1 (GH). Very rare was a **White-tailed Kite** in w. Nacogdoches County Sept 21 (CW). Migrant Mississippi Kites were spotted by numerous observers from mid-August to mid-Sept, but no really large flights were detected. The highest counts were 8 over Nacogdoches Aug 15 (MHW); 15 over Loco Valley Aug 20 (RH); 15 near Douglass Aug 22 (BC); and 10 over Sabinetown Aug 28 (DB). No large flights of Broad-winged Hawks were seen, but a kettle of 40 was over Lufkin Sept 26 (GH). What was believed to be a **King Rail** was heard in northern Nacogdoches Co Sept 12 (SL). A **Common Gallinule** at Kurth Lake Nov 29 (DW) confirmed that at least a few of this small breeding population remain into the colder months. With the high water levels on area lakes shorebirds were almost lacking this fall. Among the few reported were 4 American Avocets over the TX 147 causeway on Oct 21 (DW, RT) and single Upland Sandpipers heard over Diboll Aug 10 and Aug 30 (RT). An American Woodcock in Houston County (Sean Willis fide CS) on Oct 26 was a bit early; the next report of this secretive bird was one near Center on Nov 24 (J Sm). The only Franklin's Gulls were a distant flock of 40 from the TX 147 causeway Oct 21 (DW, RT). A Caspian Tern over Marion Ferry Sept 1 was the only report (DW, RT).

Two **White-winged Doves** on the SFASU campus July 21 was the only report (Ben Sandifer; eBird). A rather late Yellow-billed Cuckoo in Lufkin Oct 23 was the last (GH). Common Nighthawks were seen over Lufkin from Sept 9-Oct 23, with a peak of 27 on Oct 7 (GH). Another late single was over Nacogdoches Oct 21 (fide CS). Single **Whip-poor-wills** were heard by field biologists in Angelina County Sept 5 and near Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 6 (both fide CS). We don't have many fall records of this species. A late push of 25 Chimney Swifts came over the Nac sewage ponds Oct 24 (DW), but the last was one over Lufkin Oct 29 (GH). A **Rufous Hummingbird** visited Nacogdoches Oct 20-29 but was not seen thereafter (CS, JS); it did not appear to be the individual that wintered here last year. A few **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** linger later and later every year and a number of observers had female and/or immature birds at their feeders into November. Last dates were Nov 8 in Lufkin (GH); Nov 10 in Central Hts (MHW); and Nov 11 in Nacogdoches (TD). The first modest push of migrant Northern Flickers was 15 at

the TX 147 causeway Oct 21 (DW, RT). There were three sightings of single Merlins: along the Sabine River near Panola Sept 28 (DB, J Sm); over the base of the TX 147 causeway Oct 21 (DW, RT); and over Lufkin Oct 29 (GH).

Late Eastern Wood-Pewees were in Central Hts Oct 20 (DW); at the base of the TX 147 causeway Oct 21 (DW, RT); and at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Oct 27 (DW, RT). All appeared to be the expected Eastern and the first two were heard for confirmation. A Willow Flycatcher was heard and seen near Antioch ____ (SO) and a calling Alder Flycatcher was in Central Hts Aug 21 (DW). The last Great Crested Flycatcher was one at Ragtown Rec. Area Sept 24 (DB). 190+ Scissor-tailed Flycatchers at a traditional roost site in Central Hts Sept 21 was the season high count (DW), while the last were ____ (RT). A late or wintering White-eyed Vireo was at the SFA Exp Forest Nov 24 (DW, RT). The first Blue-headed Vireos were singles in Lufkin Oct 20 (GH) and the TX 147 causeway Oct 21 (DW, RT). 15 Bank Swallows in Central Hts Aug 31 was the season high count (DW). The last Barn Swallows were singles over Martin Creek Lake SP on the Oct 20 PAS field trip (DB et al) and a very late bird over Kurth Lake Nov 29 (DW).

Red-breasted Nuthatches were on the move this fall, with the first one in Nacogdoches Oct 12 (CS) and the next in Center Oct 14 (J Sm). Next were singles in Central Hts Oct 22 (DW) and Lufkin Oct 24 (GH) and 2 in s. Nacogdoches Co Oct 28 (SK). We are definitely part of a broad incursion southward this fall and by early December they were fairly widespread, favoring stands of more mature pines. The first Brown Creepers were singles in Lufkin Nov 1 (GH) and Nov 4 in Nacogdoches (CDF). Tycho Drahn, 4 1/2 years of age, spotted his lifer Brown Creeper in Central Hts Nov 23 and showed it to his amazed grandparents (MHW, DW). 10 House Wrens at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 20 was a good count of migrants (DW, RT). Single migrant Marsh Wrens were at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 20 (DW, RT) and in Diboll Oct 23 (RT). As expected, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were very widespread from late August through September. Higher counts included 21 in Sabinetown Aug 27 (DB); 22 at Townsend Park Sept 4 (DB); and 30 in Central Hts Sept 23 (DW). 14 at Alazan Bayou Oct 20 was a lot for late in the season (DW), as were 15 along the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Oct 21 (DW, RT). A few singles continued to straggle through right to the end of November. The first Golden-crowned Kinglet was one in Lufkin Oct 24 (GH). The first Hermit Thrush hit a window in Nacogdoches Oct 22 (CDF). Locally breeding American Robins again concentrated in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches in the late summer, with a high count of 55 there on Sept 13 including many spotted juveniles (DW). The first migrant Gray Catbird was one in Central Hts Aug 29 (MHW) and the last was one in Nacogdoches Nov 5 (CS, JC); there were no other reports.

Single **Blue-winged Warblers** were seen near Antioch on 7 days from Aug 25-Oct 4 (SO), while another was in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches Sept 13 (DW). This is more sightings of this species than expected, especially during a fall when warblers were generally scarce. The only Tennessee Warbler was one in Lufkin Oct 5 (GH). The first Orange-crowned Warbler was one in Lufkin Sept 26 (GH), a bit early. The first Nashville Warbler was one in Central Hts Sept 18 (DW). A Northern Waterthrush inside the Nacogdoches Wal-Mart Sept 29 was a surprise (SS). The last Kentucky Warbler was one near Antioch Sept 29 (SO). The only Mourning Warblers were singles in Central Hts Sept 8 & 22 (DW). The last Swainson's was one near Antioch Sept 4 (SO) and the last Hoodeds were a male and female there Oct 10 (SO). The last Prothonotary Warblers were singles in Sabinetown Aug 29 (DB); near Antioch Sept 2 (SO) and at Townsend Park Sept 4 (DB). This species pulls out quite abruptly at this time. Single American Redstarts were at McAlister Park Sept 15 (J Sm); near Antioch Sept 20 and Oct 3 (SO); and in Lufkin Oct 2 (GH). The last Northern Parulas were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 20 (DW, RT). Yellow Warblers were scarcer than usual, but small numbers were found in late August (DB, DW) and a late one came through

Lufkin Oct 2 (GH). The first Yellow-rumped Warblers were 3 in Nacogdoches Oct 12 (DW), while the first numbers were 30 over the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Oct 21 (DW, RT) and 25 in Central Hts Oct 22 (DW). Single migrant Yellow-throated Warblers were in Loco Valley Aug 27 (RH); Henderson Sept 8 (BM); and Lufkin Sept 9 and Oct 23 (GH). The first Black-throated Green Warbler was an early one in Lufkin Aug 13 (GH); the next was one in Central Hts Sept 4 (DW) – and none were reported after that. Usually this is one of our commoner fall warblers. The first Wilson's Warblers were singles in Central Heights Aug 21 (DW) and Sabinetown Aug 27 (DB), while this species was seen near Antioch on five dates from Sept 20-Oct 4 (SO). Two Canada Warblers were near Antioch Sept 12 and another was there Sept 27-28 (SO).

First dates for some of our wintering sparrow were 4 Chipping in Lufkin Sept 9 (GH); one Fox in the SFA Exp Forest Nov 24 (RT, DW); a White-crowned in Douglass Nov 27 (CW); a White-throated in Sabinetown Oct 2 (DB); 1 Vesper at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 20 (DW, RT); 2 Song at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 20 (DW, RT). 20+ Lincoln's Sparrows at Alazan Bayou Oct 20 was a good push of migrants (DW, RT). The first Dark-eyed Junco was one in Nacogdoches Oct 26 (LS). The last Summer Tanager was one in Lufkin Oct 18 (GH). Single Rose-breasted Grosbeaks showed up in both Nacogdoches (CS) and Lufkin (GH) on Oct 19. Peak numbers of migrant Blue Grosbeaks in Central Hts were 10+ Sept 20-22 (DW). A calling Western Meadowlark visited Central Hts Nov 4 (MHW). The first Baltimore Orioles were 3 in Central Hts Aug 29 (MHW), the last was one in Nacogdoches Oct 3 (RH, CW), and the season high count was 20 Baltimore Orioles near Cushing Sept 12 (SL). Smaller numbers were widely reported during this period (m. obs.). **Purple Finches** are moving into our area in good numbers this winter. The first was one heard in the SFA Experimental Forest Nov 24 (RT), and the next were singles in Douglass (CW) and s. Nac Co (BK, SK) on Dec 4. One appeared at feeders in Central Hts Dec 7 and by Dec 11 there were 8 there (DW, MHW). **Pine Siskins** are also appearing this winter. The first were 5 in Hemphill on Nov 19 (J Sm) and one over the SFA Exp Forest Nov 24 (RT). The first American Goldfinches were several on the PAS field trip to Ellen Trout Park on Nov 10 (DB et al) and 4 in Nacogdoches Nov 11 (CDF).

Observers: DB = David Bell; JC = James Childress; BC = Beverly Collins; TD = Thelma Dalmas; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; RH = Ruth Heino; GH = Gary Hunter; BK, SK = Billie & Steve Kennaird; SL = Susie Lower; AM = Allison Maxwell; BM = Bonnie McKenzie; SO = Sue Orwig; PAS = Pineywoods Audubon Society; CS = Cliff Shackelford; JS = Julie Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; LS = Les Stewart; SS = Sarah Stovall; RT = Robert Truss; AT = Ashley Tubbs; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Localities in Angelina County: Diboll; Lufkin.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Cushing; Douglass; Loco Valley; McAlister Park; Nacogdoches; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp For); St's Rest (Dorr Creek) Road.

Localities in Panola County: Panola; Sabine River above Toledo Bend.

Localities in Rusk County: Henderson; Martin Creek Lake State Park.

Localities in Sabine County: Sabinetown.

Localities in San Augustine County: San Augustine Park; Townsend Park; TX 103 at the Attoyac Bayou; TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn.

Localities in Shelby County: Antioch; Center; Ragtown Recreation Area.

