

Spring Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society

March 1 – May 31, 2018

by David E. Wolf

Every spring is different, but this one stood out as rather unusual. Regular cool fronts, often with associated storms, marched through the region in March and April, clearing rapidly and keeping temperatures pleasantly cool for weeks on end. This undoubtedly influenced migration patterns, but these fronts did not ground large numbers of Trans-Gulf migrants (those which fly across the Gulf of Mexico) in our area. Apparently these birds were caught by the storms elsewhere. Conversely, some of the Circum-Gulf migrants (those which travel overland around the Gulf and inland) did appear in good numbers, examples including Blue-headed Vireo, Nashville and Yellow-rumped warblers and Lincoln's Sparrow. Many species, both local breeders and migrants, were late to appear. May was lacking in dynamic storm activity and after the first week it suddenly warmed up and migration simply petered out.

We had more birding activity this season and observers were great about getting reports to me, so, in spite of the lack of really dynamic movements, almost all of our less common migrants were reported at least once by someone. Thanks again and please send your more interesting summer sightings, and any corrections or additions to this report, to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com

First Dates for Breeding Migrants:

Little Blue Heron – March 15 at Alazan Bayou WMA (Tony Adams)

Cattle Egret – March 24 near Antioch (Shelby Co; SO); 5 over Nacogdoches April 4 (CDF).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron - March 9 in Nacogdoches (Susie Carney)

Yellow-billed Cuckoo – April 16 at Alazan Bayou WMA (TH).

Chuck-will's-widow – heard in Nacogdoches April 6 (CDF)

Chimney Swift – March 24 in Lufkin (GH).

Acadian Flycatcher – April 21 in Carrizo Creek (SL)

Great Crested Flycatcher - April 7 near Antioch (Shelby Co) (SO)

Eastern Kingbird - March 29 in Rusk Co (BW).

White-eyed Vireo – March 8 on Dorr Creek Road (DW)

Yellow-throated Vireo – March 14 in Carrizo Creek (SL) and near Antioch (Shelby Co); SO.

Wood Thrush – April 4 in Lufkin (GH).

Swainson's Warbler – 1 in n. Jasper Co April 9 (CS)

Prothonotary Warbler – March 30 near Antioch (Shelby Co); SO.

Black-and-white Warbler – March 8 on Dorr Creek Road (DW).

Hooded Warbler – 2 in Carrizo Creek March 18 (SL) and 2 in n. Jasper Co March 19 (CS)

Northern Parula - February 27 at Magnolia Ridge Campground (Jasper/Tyler Co) (David Bell); very early.

Yellow-throated Warbler – March 14 near Antioch (Shelby Co; SO); March 17 at SFA Exp Forest (DW); March 18 near Center (Shelby Co; J Sm).

Summer Tanager - April 7 near Antioch (Shelby Co) (SO) and April 8 in Alazan Bayou WMA (DW, RT); Lufkin (GH) and Nacogdoches (TH).

Blue Grosbeak – April 5 near Antioch (Shelby Co; SO); April 8 in Nacogdoches (RT)

Indigo Bunting - March 24 in Lufkin (GH); April 4 in Douglass (CW).

Painted Bunting- April 16 at Alazan Bayou WMA (TH); April 22 in Central Hts (MHW).

Orchard Oriole – April 5 near Antioch (Shelby Co; SO)

Bird Report:

Waterfowl were largely gone after the first week of March and the only noteworthy sighting after this was a pair of Mallards at Alazan Bayou WMA March 17-April 11. No evidence of nesting was found (DW). A migrating Common Loon passed low over Nacogdoches April 26 (DW), while a Neotropic Cormorant in Central Hts April 23 was also unexpected (DW). An Anhinga at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds March 5 may have been an early migrant; 4 over the Dorr Creek Road March 8 definitely were (both DW). 2 late migrants were over Nacogdoches May 7 (TH, DW et al). Single American Bitterns were seen at Alazan Bayou WMA April 8 & 14 (DW, RT) and then 3 were found there April 16 (TH). 38 Little Blue Herons came over Alazan Bayou WMA on the April 4 cool front (DW). Very rare in spring were a **Tricolored Heron** at Alazan Bayou WMA April 11 (DW) and a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** over Nacogdoches April 2 (TH). The spring high count on White Ibis was 125 over Alazan Bayou WMA on April 4 (DW).

An Osprey was incubating on a nest at 6-Mile Creek on Toledo Bend (Sabine Co) May 2 (CS). The first Mississippi Kites were 7 over western Nacogdoches Co on the April 14 cold front (DW, RT). The main push came through rather late, with 6 over Cushing May 5 (DS); 12 over Caddoan Mounds SP the same day (BB); 5 over Lufkin May 6 (GH); and a peak spring count of at least 70 over Nacogdoches on May 7 (TH, DS, DW). The well-known Bald Eagle pair at Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin fledged their young in early April (Allison Maxwell; m. obs.). A Sharp-shinned Hawk carrying food on the Davy Crockett NF (Houston Co) on May 15 was likely a rare local breeder (RS). A Cooper's Hawk was nest-building in Nacogdoches March 5; 2 juveniles about to fledge were in this nest June 10 (DW). The first Broad-winged Hawks were calling birds that were likely local breeders, one in Lufkin March 21 (GH) and one in Carrizo Creek March 25 (SL). The only sizable flights of migrants detected were 368 over Central Hts April 3 (DW) and a rather late flight of 238 over the Nacogdoches Airport on the April 14 cold front (DW, RT). A beautiful adult **Swainson's Hawk** came over Central Hts April 22 (DW) and there were several intriguing reports of probable **Swainson's** following hay mowers, ca 5 in Central Hts on April 17 (fide MHW) and ca 6 near Douglass on April 27 (Beverly Collins).

A Virginia Rail was heard at Alazan Bayou March 7 (DW). Shorebirds were almost lacking this spring except for a few of the commonest migrants. The only report of American Golden-Plover was 2 over Alazan Bayou WMA April 14 (DW). 2 Greater Yellowlegs were at the SFASU Farm March 6 (DW) and 1 was at Alazan Bayou WMA April 22 (DW, RT). Lesser Yellowlegs were seen as follows: 1 at the SFASU Farm April 7 (RT); 5 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 14 (DW, RT); 5 in Central Hts April 18 (DW) 12 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 22 (DW); 7 in Pecan Park April 23 (CDF; m. obs.); 1 in Central Hts April 24 (DW); and 1

in Central Hts May 17 (DW). 19 Upland Sandpipers were at the Nacogdoches Airport April 7 (DW, RT), but there were almost no other reports. Only a few Pectoral Sandpipers were found, the high count a paltry 14 at the Nacogdoches Airport April 7 (DW, RT). 4 Least Sandpipers were in Central Hts May 17 (DW). **2 Caspian Terns** circled Marion Ferry on upper Lake Rayburn (Angelina Co) on May 16 (DW).

White-winged Doves showed up in Lufkin beginning March 21, the first since last August (GH). One in Shelby County on April 21 may well have been a first county record (J Sm) and another in Sabinetown (Sabine Co) on May 20 (DB) was one of the first reports this far east. One was in south Nacogdoches May 9 (DW) and another in north Nacogdoches May 15 (RS, CDF). Single **Black-billed Cuckoos**, one of our scarcest migrants, were seen in Lufkin May 11 (GH) and Nacogdoches May 14 (CDF). The first Common Nighthawk was one over Lufkin April 29 (GH), while the only numbers were 8 over Lufkin May 15 (GH) and 10 near Cushing May 19 (SL). Eastern Whip-poor-wills were heard at Lake Alazan March 29 (CS); Lufkin March 31 (GH); and Nacogdoches on April 2 (JS) and April 11 (CDF). The **Rufous Hummingbird** present in Nacogdoches since Oct 31, 2017 was last seen April 1 (CS, JS). Red-headed Woodpeckers arrived back at breeding sites in Central Hts April 3 (MHW, DW) and Lufkin April 4 (GH). They had been absent from both areas since late Sept 2017. A somewhat late Yellow-bellied Sapsucker visited Central Hts April 6 (DW). Sightings of Crested Caracara just to the west of our area continue to increase, with one just west of Palestine (Cherokee Co) on March 31 (BW) and a pair elsewhere in Cherokee Co also on March 31 (CW). Pairs of American Kestrels that were presumably local breeders were present around the SFA Exp Forest plots all spring (DW); carrying food to a huge dead snag at the start of the Dorr Creek Road on April 22 (DW); and in Lufkin May 4-26 (GH). The only Merlin was one near the SFA Experimental Forest April 22 (DW). Peregrine Falcons were spotted over Nacogdoches May 5 (DW) and Lufkin May 6 (GH).

No Olive-sided Flycatchers were reported this spring. Singles of the easily-overlooked Yellow-bellied Flycatcher were in Pecan Park (DW) and Nacogdoches (CS) on May 13 and Nacogdoches May 27 (CDF). The only "Traill's" flycatcher was one at Alazan Bayou WMA May 7, but it could not be identified to species (RH, CW). The first Least Flycatcher was one in Central Hts April 24 (DW). 45 Eastern Kingbirds at Alazan Bayou WMA May 7 was the spring high count of migrants (RH, CW). For some unknown reason Blue-headed Vireos were more frequent than usual all season through the end of April (m. obs.). The first Warbling Vireos were singles in Nacogdoches (BB) and Alazan Bayou WMA (DW) on April 11, while the first Philadelphia Vireo was one in Pecan Park April 27 (DW, CDF). The nest burrow of a pair of Northern Rough-winged Swallows, a rather uncommon breeder, was found in Sabine Co May 2 (CS). A fledged White-breasted Nuthatch appeared with an adult in Pecan Park April 26 (DW, CDF). The last date for a regular Winter Wren in Nacogdoches was March 18 (CS). At least 8 Sedge Wrens were heard at Alazan Bayou WMA April 28, but none thereafter (DW), while a Marsh Wren at Lake Alazan March 24 was the only report of this species (RS et al). High counts on Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were 20 in Nacogdoches April 4 (CS) and 10 in Central Hts April 6 (DW). A pair at Alazan Bayou WMA April 11 already had a nest nearly completed (DW). 25 Ruby-crowned Kinglets on the Dorr Creek Road March 8 was a good push of restless migrants while the last was one in Pecan Park May 5 (both DW). **Veery** was found twice this spring, one in Nacogdoches April 26 and another in Central Hts

April 30 (both DW). The only Gray-cheeked Thrushes were singles in Nacogdoches April 26 (DW) and April 29 (CDF). The first Swainson's Thrush was one in Nacogdoches April 10, a bit early (CDF). A Gray Catbird in Nacogdoches March 16 had likely overwintered (JS), but one in Rusk (Cherokee Co) on April 5 may have been a migrant (BW).

Migrant warblers were never especially numerous, but most of the expected species were found at least once. Ovenbird, a hard-to-detect though regular migrant, was found twice, one seen in Nacogdoches April 25 (BB) and one heard singing in Carrizo Creek April 28 (SL). **Worm-eating Warbler** is one of our scarcest migrants and breeders, but one was found near Antioch (Shelby Co) April 5 (SO). The first Louisiana Waterthrush in Carrizo Creek appeared April 11, almost a month later than usual (SL). The season high counts on Northern Waterthrush were 6 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 22 (DW) and 10 there April 28 (DW, RT). **Golden-winged Warblers**, both females, were found twice. One hit a window in Carrizo Creek May 1 but recovered with care (SL) and another visited Lufkin May 2 (GH). The only Blue-winged Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 24 (BB). A Prothonotary Warbler nest near Antioch (Shelby Co) had 5 eggs on May 13 (SO). The season high count for Tennessee Warbler was a mere 80 in Pecan Park on May 6 (m. obs.). The last Orange-crowned Warblers were singles in Pecan Park April 25 (DW) and near Cushing April 27 (SL). Nashville Warblers were more numerous than usual in late April and on some days outnumbered Tennessee in Pecan Park, with 15 there April 22 & 24 (TH, DW). A migrant Kentucky Warbler was in Lufkin April 25 (GH). The first American Redstart was a male in Central Hts April 25 (DW). The only **Cerulean Warblers** were in Lufkin, a male on April 22; a female on April 23; and another male on May 2 (all GH). The first Magnolia Warbler was a bit early, one in Lufkin April 22 (GH), while the peak count was 8 in Pecan Park May 6 (TH, DW et al). The only Bay-breasted Warblers were a female in Nacogdoches May 5 (JS) and at least 3 males in Pecan Park May 6 (TH, DW et al). The first Blackburnian Warblers were 4 males in Pecan Park April 24 (BB, TH, DW et al); this was the season high count. The first Yellow Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 22 (DW). The peak count of Chestnut-sided Warblers in Pecan Park was 10 on May 6 (TH, DW et al). A very rare **Palm Warbler** was in Nacogdoches May 1 (CDF). Yellow-rumped Warblers were even more prominent than usual this spring (m. obs.). High counts included 135 on the Dorr Creek Road March 8; 160 in one flock at Alazan Bayou WMA April 4; and 85 in one flock in Central Hts April 6 (all DW). The last was a late female in Pecan Park May 7, the only one reported in May (DW). A Prairie Warbler was heard singing inside the loop in Nacogdoches on May 13 (CDF). High counts on Black-throated Green Warbler were 15 in Pecan Park on April 24 (TH) and May 6 (TH, DW et al). The only Canada Warbler was one in Lufkin May 16 (GH), while the only Wilson's Warblers were 2 in Pecan Park May 6 (TH, DW et al).

The only Grasshopper Sparrow was one at Alazan Bayou WMA April 28 (DW). A well-seen Henslow's Sparrow inside the Loop in Nacogdoches March 2 was a surprise (CDF). A LeConte's Sparrow still at Alazan Bayou WMA on April 11 was the last (DW). At least one **Clay-colored Sparrow** was heard at Alazan Bayou WMA April 28 (DW). Definite migrant White-crowned Sparrows were singles in Lufkin April 24 (AM) and in Nacogdoches April 25 (BB), while the last was one at Alazan Bayou WMA May 5 (DW). A migrant Vesper Sparrow was in Central Hts March 18 (DW). Lincoln's Sparrow were especially numerous at Alazan Bayou WMA this spring, with high counts of 35 on April 11 and 85 on April 28 (both

DW). 2 singing Eastern Towhees in Sabine Co May 2 were either late migrants or possibly on territory (CS) and a quiet bird was seen in the Angelina NF May 11 (Howard Williamson). There were 3 reports of **Scarlet Tanager**, a female in Central Hts April 12 (DW) and males in Lufkin April 29 (GH) and Nacogdoches May 5 (TH). Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were widespread at area feeders late April-early May (m. obs.). The season high count on migrant Indigo Buntings was 120 in Nacogdoches April 29 (CDF). A Dickcissel at Alazan Bayou WMA April 14 was a few days early (DW). **Bobolinks** visited Alazan Bayou WMA again this spring. The first reports were 5 males on April 27 (Anne Tindell) and 7 on April 28 (DW). There were ca 10 still present May 1 (AT), while the last were 2 on May 7 (RH, CW). A singing **Western Meadowlark** was seen near the SFA Experimental Forest March 7 (DW). The first Baltimore Orioles were singles in Pecan Park April 14 (TH) and Lufkin April 18 (GH), but no great numbers were seen (m. obs.) **Pine Siskins** staged a widespread return flight this spring. They were conspicuous in Pecan Park and Nacogdoches from early April-April 23 (CDF, CS, m.obs.). From 150-200 used feeders in Shelby Co from mid-December through their abrupt departure on April 12 (J Sm). 6 were still at feeders in Sabinetown March 21 (DB) and 3 were in Cherokee Co on April 6 (BW). The last were 5 in Lufkin May 5 (GH) and a few were still in Nacogdoches May 7 (CS).

Rick Schaefer did a fantastic job of documenting the very unusual **Red Crossbill** flight into our region this winter. On Feb 22 got sound recordings of calling birds at Lake Ratcliff (Houston Co) and these were later diagnosed by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology as Type 5. This type is from the Rocky Mountains and this is only the 2nd time that this Type has been confirmed in Texas. 10+ were seen again at Lake Ratcliff (Houston Co) on March 2, but not recorded. Then the plot thickens. Poor-recordings of a single bird on the Davy Crockett NF on May 4 were identified by Cornell as Type 1 or 2 and then a better recording of a single late bird in the same area on May 18 was identified as Type 4 by Cornell. What all of this means is that crossbills invaded the Pineywoods from several directions this past winter, a very rare event indeed!

Observers: DB = David Bell; BB = Brent Burt; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; TH = Tyson Hart; RH = Ruth Heino; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; AM = Allison Maxwell; SO = Sue Orwig; RS = Rick Schaefer; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS, JS = Cliff & Julie Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; RT = Robert Truss; AT = Ashley Tubbs; CW = Carol Wells; BW = Becky Whisenant; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; m. obs. = many observers.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Dorr Creek Road (s Nac Co); Douglass; Lake Alazan; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp For); SFASU Farm (in Mahl);

Localities in Angelina County: Lufkin.

Localities in Sabine County: Sabinetown.

Localities in Shelby County: Antioch; Center.