

Fall 2019 PAS Bird Report
September 1 - November 30, 2019
(by David E. Wolf)

Fall can be one of our most exciting seasons for birds, but this year it sure wasn't! After a relatively cool early part to the summer the heat hit us hard in late August and continued right on through September into early October. The dearth of migrants during this period was especially noticeable (CDF, DW), the takeaway being that it clearly takes "weather", especially stormy or wet, to bring them down in our area. Things did pick up a little in October. In spite of early freezes overnight on Oct 31-Nov 1 and Nov 12-13 the weather moderated after that and remained mild through November. Species that winter in our area were late in arriving and still in low number as of this writing (Dec 10). Perhaps the most significant trend this fall was the number of late sightings of Neotropical migrants, some of them record-setting.

Bird Report:

Large numbers of waterfowl, mostly dabbling ducks, moved through on the early cold fronts on Oct 31 and Nov 13 (DW). A pair of **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** with 12 ducklings was found in Rusk Co Sept 26 (BW). The first geese were heard over Lufkin Oct 25 (AM), but the only other report of geese was a big flock of 200+ Greater White-fronted over Central Hts on Nov 8 (MHW). 450 Gadwall at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds Nov 13 was a very high count. 75 Blue-winged Teal were already at the upper end of Toledo Bend Reservoir (Shelby Co) on Sept 2 (J Sm, DB); this was the season high count. A female Greater Scaup visited the Nac ponds Nov 13-17 (DW). Buffleheads had arrived back at Ellen Trout Park by Nov 9 (GH) and the Nacogdoches sewer ponds Nov 13 (4; DW). The season high count on Hooded Mergansers at the Nac ponds was 24 on Nov 13 (DW). Two American White Pelicans were on the Sabine River flats at the upper end of Toledo Bend Reservoir Sept 2 (DB, J Sm). The first Horned Grebe was seen on Kurth Lake Nov 20 (DB, GH et al). A Neotropic Cormorant was photographed at Kurth Lake Nov 23 (GH). A late Anhinga passed over Marion Ferry on the howling north wind Oct 31 (DW). Snowy Egrets remained late at the Nac ponds, with 18 there Oct 15, 4 on Oct 26 and 2 on Oct 30 (DW). The last Little Blue Heron was a juvenile at the Nac ponds Oct 12 (DB et al; PAS field trip). 5 Tricolored Herons that left the roost at TX 103 at the Attoyac on the Sept 21 PAS field trip was the season high count (DB et al; PAS). The last White Ibis were 25 in a V headed south over the TX 147 causeway on the Oct 31 cold front (DW). 3 juvenile **Plegadis ibis** at the Nac ponds Oct 30 could not be identified to species (DW), but were likely White-faced. There were no reports of Roseate Spoonbills this fall. Two late Wood Storks over the Angelina bottoms on the Dorr Creek (Saint's Rest) Road on Oct 12 were a nice surprise (DB et al; PAS).

The weather this fall was generally not conducive to spotting migrating raptors and there were few reports of any significant movements. A migrating flock of 200+ Turkey Vultures came over Nacogdoches Nov 2 (AT). An adult Bald Eagle passed southward over Central Hts Sept 19 (MHW) and at least 12 were around Lake Rayburn from the TX 147 causeway on the Oct 31 cold front (DW). A beautiful albinistic Red-shouldered Hawk was photographed 4 miles east of Nacogdoches on Nov 19 (Paul Hughes) and seen again on Nov 29 (LS). Common Gallinules lingered through the season at Kurth Lake (J Sm, DB et al), including 3 on the PAS field trip Nov 23 (DB, DW et al). A small breeding population is now established there and some remain through the winter. Shorebirds were few and far between, Water levels were too high in most places all season, but Toledo Bend was lowered for repairs to the dam and on Sept 2 on the Sabine River at the upper end of the lake (Shelby Co) J Sm and DB found mudflats with **14 Semipalmated Plover** (a high count); and 45 Least, 8 Semipalmated and 2 Western sandpipers. Two American Avocets were at Marion Ferry on the Oct 31 front (DW). Single Greater Yellowlegs were heard over Central Hts Oct 28 (MHW) and seen Nov 1 (MHW, DW). 3 juvenile **Laughing Gulls** were amidst the big tern flock over the TX 147 causeway Oct 31 (DW). An outstanding record, well documented by photos taken by GH, was a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at the TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn on Sept 21 (DB, J Sm, GH). This was the **first record** for the

“Nacogdoches County & Lake Sam Rayburn” checklist area and one of the few from anywhere in East Texas away from Lake Livingston. A second gull present may have been an even more remarkable **Great Black-backed Gull**, but unfortunately it was not photographed to eliminate all other possibilities (and there are several). Gulls are tricky! A single Caspian Tern came over Marion Ferry Sept 22 (GH). On Oct 31 a high count of 350+ Forster’s Tern flew over the TX 147 causeway in one big flock (DW).

As expected, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were mostly gone by Oct 20, but an *Archilochus sp?* visited Sabinetown Nov 9 (DB). An immature male **Rufous Hummingbird** appeared in Sabinetown Nov 10 (DB; nice photo) and was still present as of this writing (Dec 10). A **Selasphorus sp?** hummingbird, likely a Rufous, briefly visited Central Hts Nov 1 (DW). A Merlin photographed in Nacogdoches Oct 17 was a surprise (CDF). An Olive-sided Flycatcher in Central Hts Sept 7 was the 2nd and last of the season (DW). Two Eastern Wood-Pewees in SFA Exp Forest Oct 20 called to confirm their identity (DW, RT) and one **very late Eastern Wood-Pewee** photographed in Lufkin on Nov 4 was our latest ever by 6 days (GH). *Empidonax* flycatchers, typically some of our commonest fall migrants, were scarce this season. The most noteworthy was a late Least in Nacogdoches Oct 17 (CDF). A **Great Crested Flycatcher** in Nacogdoches **Oct 19** provided a new late date for the entire Pineywoods (CDF). A spectacular flycatcher roost at a traditional site in north Nacogdoches had 150 Eastern Kingbirds and 100 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on Sept 8 (CS) and then on Sept 9, after several rainshowers during the afternoon, a carefully estimated **810** Eastern Kingbirds and 180 Scissor-tails came in (CS, DW). The last Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was a late bird in Central Hts Dec 1 (MHW). Lingering or late migrant White-eyed Vireos were in Lufkin Nov 6 (GH), the Dorr Creek Road Nov 17 (DW, RT), Kurth Lake Nov 20 (DB, GH et al) and Lufkin Nov 21 (GH). The first Blue-headed Vireo was one Central Hts Oct 20 (DW). The one and only Warbling Vireo of the season visited Central Hts Sept 7 (DW); this species is usually seen more frequently than this in the fall. The PAS field trip to the Nacogdoches ponds on Oct 12 had a nice study of 4 Northern Rough-winged Swallows (DB et al; PAS), while 25 were foraging low over the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Oct 16 and at least 10 were over Central Hts Oct 17 (both DW). A bit surprisingly, this species is regularly the most numerous swallow seen in mid-Oct. A Red-breasted Nuthatch in Lufkin Oct 28 was the only report so far this winter (GH). Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is a common and conspicuous migrant in September – what a delightful little bird! Season high counts were 35 at the TX 147 causeway Sept 1; 51 through Central Hts on 8 Sept and 72+ at the TX 147 causeway on Sept 14 (all DW). They continued to straggle through in November, with singles in Lufkin Nov 3 & 10 (GH); Central Hts Nov 7 (MHW); the Nacogdoches Airport Nov 10 (DW, RT); and 4 along the Dorr Creek Road Nov 17 (DW, RT). The first good push of Ruby-crowned Kinglets noted in Central Hts was a flock of 15+ on Nov 5 (DW). A **Bewick’s Wren** in a clearcut in s. Nac Co Nov 17 was the first local sighting in several years (RT). This species has clearly declined greatly as a winter visitor to our region. A migrant flock of 40 Eastern Bluebirds came through Carrizo Creek Nov 22 (SL). A Hermit Thrush in Nacogdoches Nov 8 was the first (CDF). Single Gray Catbirds were in Nacogdoches Oct 12 (CDF); Central Hts Oct 17-18 (DW, MHW); the SFA Exp Forest Oct 20 (RT); and in Nacogdoches Nov 16-17 (CS). The first migrant Brown Thrasher in Central Hts appeared Sept 13 (MHW). 20+ post-breeding American Robins were in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches Sept 5 (CDF), while the first that were clearly migrants were 14 over Central Hts Oct 26 (DW). The first American Pipit was heard over Diboll Oct 17 (RT) and 2 Sprague’s Pipits were at the Nacogdoches Airport Nov 10 (RT, DW). The first Cedar Waxwings were 6 in Nacogdoches Nov 20 (CDF).

Migrant warblers were relatively few and far between this fall, but some good ones were seen. An **Ovenbird** was spotted in s. Nacogdoches County on Oct 19 (AW). A **Worm-eating Warbler** was present in Antioch Sept 26-Oct 3 and a **Swainson’s** lingered there through Oct 3 (SO; both were photographed beautifully). Regular visits to Pecan Park and nearby in Nacogdoches produced 3 Nashville Warblers Oct 5; a **Blue-winged** Oct 17; and 3 or more Tennessee Warblers Oct 17 (all CDF). The first Orange-crowned Warbler was one in the SFA Exp Forest Oct 20 (DW, RT). Single American Redstarts were seen in Sabinetown Aug 30 (DB) and Lufkin Oct 8 and 19 (GH). The last Yellow Warbler was one in Nacogdoches Oct 2 (CDF). Single Magnolia Warblers, uncommon in the fall, were in Nacogdoches Oct 17 (CDF) and Lufkin Oct 22 (GH). A huge flock of 60+ Pine Warblers in the SFA

Exp Forest Oct 20 must have included many migrants (DW, RT). The first Yellow-rumped Warbler was one in Nacogdoches Oct 19 (CDF). The last dates for Yellow-throated Warbler were in Lufkin Oct 30 (GH) and a **late migrant** at Sabinetown Nov 7 (DB). **Late** Black-throated Green Warblers visited Central Hts Nov 5 (immature male; DW) and Nov 13 (female; DW), the latter our latest local record ever by 5 days. A Canada Warbler in Nacogdoches Sept 12 (CDF) and a Wilson's on Oct 3 were the only reports of these typical fall migrants (CDF).. Single Yellow-breasted Chats that were clearly migrants were on the TX 147 causeway Sept 1 & Sept 14 (DW) and in Nacogdoches Sept 16 (CDF).

Some sparrow first dates were single Chipping in Nacogdoches Sept 24 (CDF) and s. Nacogdoches Co Sept 29 (AW); one Savannah at Indian Mounds in Sabine NF (Sabine Co) Oct 8 (DB); 3 White-crowned in Central Hts Nov 7 (DW); and a White-throated in Nacogdoches Oct 16 (CDF). The first Dark-eyed Junco was one in Nacogdoches Nov 6 (CDF). At least 10 White-crowned in a clearcut near the St's Rest Road on Nov 17 (RT, DW) were not re-located here later in the season and were presumably migrants. 8 Lincoln's Sparrows in a clearcut near the St's Rest Road on Nov 17 was the season high count (DW, RT), but this species was still easy to find in early Dec (DW). The first Eastern Towhee was one in Nacogdoches Nov 15 (CDF). A **late** Summer Tanager visited Lufkin Nov 4 (GH). The only Rose-breasted Grosbeak reported was one in Antioch Oct 5 (SO). A **Black-headed Grosbeak** coming to a feeder in Lufkin Sept 6-22 (GH; photos) appeared to be an immature male molting into adult plumage. This is a rare western vagrant to our area. The last Indigo Bunting was one in Lufkin Oct 25 (GH), while the last Baltimore Oriole was one in Center Oct 1 (J Sm). 6 Brewer's Blackbirds were back at a feedlot in San Augustine Co east of Martinsville on Nov 23 (J Sm), while the first Rusty Blackbird was one in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches Nov 28 (CDF). The first American Goldfinch was one in Central Hts Nov 7 (MHW) and as of this writing (10 Dec) there still are not many around. There were no reports of Pine Siskins or Purple Finches, both of which were present in good numbers last winter.

Observers: DB = David Bell; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; AM = Allison Maxwell; PAS = Pineywoods Audubon Society; SO = Sue Orwig; RS = Rick Schaefer; CS = Cliff Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; LS = Les Stewart; RT = Robert Truss; AW = Ashley Wahlberg; BW = Becky Whisenant; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Localities in Angelina County: Diboll; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Lufkin; Marion Ferry (on upper Lake Rayburn)..

Localities in Jasper County: Lake Rayburn dam/spillway; Martin Dies State Park.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Lake Naconiche; Nacogdoches (town, = Nac.); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Native Plant Center (in Nacogdoches); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Saint's Rest Road (s. Nac Co); Stephen F. Austin State University (= SFASU); SFASU Agricultural Farm (Mahl) (= SFA Ag Farm); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp Forest).

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

Localities in Sabine County: Sabinetown.

Localities in Shelby County: Antioch; Center; upper end of Toledo Bend Reservoir.