

Spring Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
(March 1-May 31, 2019)
by David E. Wolf

Spring is an especially beautiful season in the Pineywoods and with all of the rain this year it was extravagant. It is also the most exciting season of the year for birders and overall I would say that “for those that got out regularly, it was a pretty good spring migration”. **Weather**, of course, is a major factor in determining the migrants that we see in our region. When it is stormy and/or rainy, the heavier the better, we get birds. This spring saw plenty of storm activity and most of it produced birds.

March began with some of our coldest days of the winter. It moderated for most of the rest of the month, but never got really warm, and we had **late freezes** at dawn on April 1 and again on April 2. Unsettled and threatening weather on April 7 brought a good push of wide variety of migrants and arrivals, continuing through April 9. On April 13 **horrible storms** moved southwest to northeast across our region. Tragically a huge EF-3 tornado (40-50 miles long) hit Caddoan Mounds SP and Alto, causing deaths and damage, with a second smaller EF-2 tornado plowing through northwest Nacogdoches County (Sacul/Trawick area) into Rusk County. That was a scary day! A **highlight** for many this spring was the remarkable push of Indigo Buntings, beginning after pre-dawn thunderstorms on April 18. Within days they appeared widely and in substantial numbers at many area feeders and yards; after a late cool front April 25 some sites hosted up to 40 birds at a time! Many lingered through the end of the month (m. obs.). May 2 was a major “**fallout**” day, after heavy pre-dawn storms. Shorebirds were knocked down in flooded fields in several places, plus a good variety of songbird migrants appeared. This push continued through May 5. Unsettled weather again May 9-12, as a late cool front tried to move through, produced the **best flight of warblers and flycatchers** that we have seen in years, especially on May 10. After May 13 visible migration in our region mostly ended and spring went out with a whimper rather than a bang. It always goes by far too quickly!

There is a lot of detail in this report – and I may have gotten some of it wrong – so if you have any additions and/or corrections please send them to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com. Also, any summer sightings of interest would be appreciated.

Bird Report:

A pair of **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** stopped in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches April 28 (DW), only the 2nd county report in this century, though this species is regular in small numbers in Angelina County in the Diboll area (RT). A pair of Mallards flew around Alazan Bayou WMA on March 30, but did not stay around (DW, RT). The wintering female Greater Scaup remained at the Nacogdoches ponds through March 12 (DW). A female Hooded Merganser with 6 small ducklings was found at Alazan Bayou WMA on April 8 (Ron Randle) and then seen sporadically through May 5 (DW), while another female with a brood (at least 4) was found in the SFA Exp Forest April 26 (RS). 6 **Red-breasted Mergansers** were still at the Lake Rayburn spillway (Jasper Co) on March 5 (DW). A very high count of **65** Common Loons was concentrated off Sabinetown on April 8, but most disappeared thereafter (DB). A diurnal migrant flew over Alazan Bayou WMA the same day (DW). A Pied-billed Grebe was still on a pond at the SFA Ag Farm on May 4 (RT). A flock of 160 American White Pelican swirled low over Central Hts ahead of a big storm on April 7 (DW). The only American Bitterns at Alazan Bayou WMA were one on March 30 (DW, RT); 2 on April 2 (TA); and one on April 13 (DW). **105** Great Egrets at Alazan Bayou WMA March 25 was a very large concentration (DW). The first Snowy Egrets were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA March 30 (DW, RT). The first Little Blue Heron was one over the Nacogdoches ponds March 11 (RT). A Green Heron at the Nac ponds April 1 was the first (DW). The first White Ibis were 35 at Alazan Bayou WMA March 25 (DW), while over 200 adults were foraging there April 18 (DW). A few days later two large flocks (**500 total**) flew northward low over the WMA (TA). Very few were seen after this. **4 Wood Storks** over the Pollok area (Angelina Co) on May 1 were unexpected at this season (AW).

The first Mississippi Kite was one over Lufkin April 13, while 11 over Lufkin April 18 was the first sizable flock (both GH). A scattered but very large flight of **134** was tallied over Alazan Bayou WMA in two hours on April 29 (DW). 2 in Nacogdoches May 25 were likely nesting locally, where still a rare breeder (SL). A very big flight of at least **1850+** Broad-winged Hawks swirling over Sabinetown on stormy April 7 was the only large flight this spring (and a spectacular sight!) (DB). The only other flight of any size that was detected was a paltry 130 over Alazan Bayou April 8 (DW). Single **Swainson's Hawks**, rare this far east in the spring, were over Alazan Bayou WMA April 8 (DW) and Lufkin April 21 (GH). 3 Virginia Rails were heard and one of them seen at Alazan Bayou WMA on March 10 (DW, AW, RT), but only one was heard here March 30 and none after that (DW).

Flooded fields and puddles from the heavy rains attracted **shorebirds** to unexpected places on several occasions. It was a good spring for American Golden-Plover. The first were singles in Diboll March 6 (RT) and Central Heights March 8 (DW). Next were 8 in Central Hts March 13 (RT); 25 over Central Hts March 25; 4 there March 30 and 27 in the same field March 31 (all DW). 4 were at the Angelina County Airport April 4 (GH) and then came the season high count, 65 in Central Hts April 5 (DW). 2 **Semipalmated Plover** at the puddle in Central Hts May 4 were a big surprise (RT, DW). The first Solitary Sandpiper was one in Central Hts March 24 (DW). The first Greater Yellowlegs was one in Central Hts March 13 (CDF, DW), while the season high count was 17 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 8 (DW). An unexpected **Willet** visited a puddle in Central Hts May 3 (DW). The first Lesser Yellowlegs was one in Central Hts April 4 (DW). There were few reports of Upland Sandpiper, but 33 in one field in Central Hts April 13 and 40 there the next day (April 14) were high counts (DW). The only other report was 15 here on April 20 (DW). Storms on May 2 flooded fields and dropped shorebirds at both Alazan Bayou WMA and Central Heights, including Least (7 total); Semipalmated (9 total); White-rumped (7 total) and Pectoral (total 11) sandpipers, plus a single Wilson's Phalarope in Central Hts (DW). Storms on May 4 again dropped shorebirds, especially at the Nacogdoches Airport but also in Central Hts. Totals included 17 Lesser Yellowlegs; 2 Baird's, 12 Least, 45 White-rumped, 75 Pectoral and 11 Semipalmated sandpipers (DW). The first Pectoral Sandpipers were singles in Diboll March 7 (RT) and Central Hts March 12 (DW). 11 Semipalmated Sandpipers at the puddle in Central Hts May 13 were only present for a few hours (DW) – amazing how fast they appear and then leave! **Wilson's Phalaropes** stopped briefly at a puddle in Central Hts twice, one on May 2 (DW) and 7 on May 9 (both DW). 2 adult **Laughing Gulls** were at the Lake Rayburn spillway on March 5 (DW), while a first-summer bird passed over the TX 147 causeway May 25 (DW). This species is very rare and irregular on area lakes. Three flocks of Franklin's Gulls were spotted this spring, all of them during or just after powerful storms: 20 over n. Nacogdoches County on April 13 (CS); 25 circling the flooded SFASU playing fields April 18 (DW); and 15 over Alazan Bayou WMA May 13 (JC, MB). A **Caspian Tern** low over Nacogdoches on stormy May 2 was a surprise (TH).

A White-winged Dove showed up in Central Hts March 4 and stayed around for weeks (MHW, DW), while others were present in the Pollok area (AW). This species is slowly expanding beyond Nacogdoches and Lufkin towns. The first Yellow-billed Cuckoo appeared in Carrizo Creek April 22 (SL). A **Black-billed Cuckoo**, a rare-but-regular spring migrant, was in Lufkin May 7 (GH). The first Common Nighthawks were 2 over Lufkin April 25 (GH). An Eastern Whip-poor-will was heard in Central Hts March 28 (MHW) and 3 were heard in Nacogdoches April 8 (CS). The first Chuck-will's-widow was heard in Central Hts April 7 (MHW). The last Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was one in Lufkin April 6 (GH). Red-headed Woodpeckers returned to a yard in Lufkin April 2 (GH) and Central Hts April 9 (MHW, DW). A **Crested Caracara** on May 13 on TX 21 two miles east of Alto (Rusk Co) was almost in Nacogdoches County (CS), for which there are only two records. The only Merlin was one at the SFA Exp Forest April 26 (RS).

The first Eastern Wood-Pewees were singles in Nacogdoches April 22 (RT) and Carrizo Creek April 23 (SL). This was a dominant migrant in the May 10 fallout in Nacogdoches, when a high count of 30+ was in Pecan Park (DW et al). Single Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were identified in Pecan Park May 4, 5, 9 & 10, while another was at the Nac ponds May 19 (all DW). The first Acadian Flycatchers were a migrant in Nacogdoches April 18 (DW) and an arriving breeder in Carrizo Creek April 21 (SL). Hard-

to-identify *Empidonax* flycatchers were prominent in the May 10 fallout in Pecan Park, including a definite calling Alder and a singing Willow, with at least 5 more Alder/Willow sp? seen. The first Least Flycatcher was one in Pecan Park April 28 (DW; PAS field trip) while 4 on May 10 was the one-day high count. Fledged Eastern Phoebes were first noted in Nacogdoches April 25 (DW). The first Great Crested Flycatcher was one in Carrizo Creek April 5 (SL). Vireo firsts included a Yellow-throated Vireo was near Joaquin March 16 (DB, J Sm), Warbling in Central Hts April 18 (DW), Philadelphia Vireo in Pecan Park April 25 (DW) and Red-eyed at Alazan Bayou WMA April 4 (AT). 5 Philadelphia in Pecan Park May 10-11 was the season high count (DW et al), while Red-eyed was a dominant migrant in Pecan Park on the May 9 fallout, with at least 20 present (DW et al). 3 early Cliff Swallows at the Nac ponds March 4 were perched with 3 Cave Swallows for direct close comparison (DW). 18 Cave Swallows were over Lake Naconiche on a cold March 3 (CS). The last Red-breasted Nuthatches of the winter "invasion" were singles in Sabinetown April 12 (DB) and Nacogdoches April 29 (AT). The last Brown Creeper was one in Nacogdoches March 27 (AT), while the last Golden-crowned Kinglet was one in Lufkin April 2 (GH). The first Wood Thrush was one in Nacogdoches on April 4 (AT) and a migrant visited Central Hts April 8 (MHW, DW). A Veery heard singing in Nacogdoches May 3 was the only one this spring (TH). There were no large numbers of Swainson's Thrushes seen and I did not find any reports of Gray-cheeked Thrush. A pair of American Robins nesting in Pecan Park had a fledged juvenile May 11 (RT, DW et al), while a Brown Thrasher nest with young was found in Center May 5 (J Sm). Cedar Waxwing numbers peaked in mid-March, including 1000+ in one huge flock in Nacogdoches on March 11 (CS), but they continued to come through, in much smaller numbers, well into May. The last sighting was in Lufkin May 20 (GH).

A Louisiana Waterthrush returned to Carrizo Creek April 5 (SL). It was a very good spring for sightings of the uncommon and declining **Golden-winged Warbler**, as follows: 1 in SFA Exp Forest April 27 (RS); 2 in Lufkin May 2 (GH); singles in Pecan Park May 2-3 (DW); 1 at the Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches May 6 (JS); 2 males in Pecan Park May 9 (DW, MHW); and a female in Pecan Park May 10 (DW). Single Blue-winged Warblers were in the SFA Exp Forest April 27 (RS) and Pecan Park May 3 (DW). A female Black-and-white Warbler at Alazan Bayou WMA March 10 may have been an over-wintering bird rather than a migrant (AW, DW, RT). Migrant Swainson's Warblers are rarely detected, but one was seen in Central Hts April 7 (MHW; the 35th species of warbler for our property list!) and another in Lufkin May 4 (GH). The first sizable push of Tennessee Warblers was 25 in Pecan Park on stormy April 25 (DW). The spring high counts here were 100+ on May 2 and 100+ again on May 4 (both DW et al). The last big push, mostly females, was 60+ in the May 10 fallout in Pecan Park (DW et al). The first Nashville Warbler was one in Central Hts April 9 (DW). Only two Mourning Warblers were found, one heard singing at Alazan Bayou WMA May 5 (CS, JS et al) and one seen in Lufkin May 16 (GH). The first Common Yellowthroat was back on territory at Alazan Bayou WMA March 25 (DW). No large fallouts of yellowthroats were detected. A male Hooded Warbler came through Central Hts on the odd date of May 20 (MHW) – late migrant or local wanderer? American Redstarts were prominent in the mid-May warbler push. 20 in Pecan Park on May 10 included many males, but a high count of 45+ there May 11 had far more females; 40+ were present on May 12 (DW et al). Four **Cerulean Warblers** were found, a female in Pecan Park April 25 (DW); a male in Pecan Park April 30 (BB); a female in Lufkin May 2 (GH); and a female in Pecan Park May 10 (DW, AT). The first Magnolia Warbler was one in Nacogdoches April 29 (AT) and 16+ in Pecan Park May 10 was the season high count (DW et al). It was a good spring for Bay-breasted Warbler in Pecan Park. The first was a male on stormy April 25 (DW); the first multiples were 3 on May 3 (DW) and 4 on May 4 (DW); at least 5 were present May 9 (DW) and the season high count was at least 8 on May 10 (DW et al). The first Blackburnian Warbler was seen in Nacogdoches on May 1 (CS, JS), while 15+ in the May 10 fallout in Pecan Park was a very high count for this species (DW et al). The first Yellow Warbler was one in Nacogdoches April 17, a bit early (CS), while 25+ in Pecan Park May 10 was the season high count (DW et al). 12 Chestnut-sided Warblers in Nacogdoches May 10 was the season high count (DW et al). A **Blackpoll Warbler** was heard singing in Pecan Park May 5, but never spotted (DW et al). This is our rarest "semi-regular" warbler and there were no other reports. The last Yellow-rumped Warbler lingered

in Pecan Park to May 5 (DW et al). The first Yellow-throated Warbler was at Martin Dies SP March 10 (DB, J Sm, PAS), while 2 along Dorr Creek March 12 were closer to home (DW). 2 were north to Joaquin by March 16 (DB, J Sm). Single migrant Yellow-throated Warblers visited Central Hts March 25, April 1-2 and April 9 (MHW, DW) and Lufkin March 30 (GH). A late migrant was in Pecan Park April 27 (DW). As usual, Black-throated Green Warblers were seen over a prolonged period, but there were no large one-day flights (m. obs.). A Canada Warbler in Pecan Park April 30 was the only report (DW), while single Wilson's Warblers were there May 12 & 13 (both DW). The first Yellow-breasted Chat visited Central Hts April 4 (MHW).

A migrant White-crowned Sparrow seemed out-of-place in Pecan Park April 27 (DW). A Harris's Sparrow was at Martin Dies SP (Jasper Co) on March 10 (J Sm), the same day that one that wintered at Alazan Bayou WMA was last seen (DW, AW, RT). The last White-throated Sparrow was in Lufkin to May 12 (GH). A singing Eastern Towhee in central Sabine NF (Shelby Co) on May 9 (RS) was tantalizing. Is this species a rare low-density breeder in far eastern Texas? The first Summer Tanagers were males in Central Hts April 6 (DW) and Carrizo Creek April 10 (SL). Four sightings of **Scarlet Tanagers** was about average: a female in Lufkin May 2 (GH) and a male in Nacogdoches the same day (SFASU Ornithology students); a male in Pecan Park May 4 (DW); and a female in Pecan Park May 9 (DW). Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were widespread at feeders the last days of April and the first week of May (m. obs.). The highest count I received was 7 at once in Center on May 5 (J Sm). The first arriving Blue Grosbeaks were single males at Alazan Bayou WMA April 6 (TA); Central Hts April 7 (DW); and Cushing April 8 (DS). The first Indigo Bunting was one in Central Hts April 7 (DW). A highlight for many this spring was the remarkable push of Indigo Buntings, beginning after pre-dawn thunderstorms on April 18. Within days they appeared widely and in substantial numbers at many area feeders and yards; after a late cool front April 25 some sites hosted up to 40 birds at a time! Many lingered through the end of the month (m. obs.). The first Painted Bunting was one in Central Hts April 20 (DW). The only **Bobolinks** found were 4 males in Central Hts after the heavy rain on May 2 (DW); large numbers of Dickcissels were put down at the same time. A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was found in Shelby County after the heavy rains on May 2 (Justin Lee fide MHW), while a female was at a puddle with shorebirds at the Nacogdoches Airport on May 4 (DW). This species is rare this far east and certainly not found every year. A male Great-tailed Grackle was back in n. Nacogdoches by March 9 (CS). We still don't understand where these birds go for the winter, but they don't seem to be here at that season. The first Orchard Oriole appeared at Alazan Bayou WMA April 4 (AT). The first Baltimore Oriole was one in Pecan Park April 20 (DW; PAS field trip), while the spring high count was 33 there on stormy April 25 (DW). The last were 2 in Center May 12 (J Sm). After their major irruption into the region this winter, the last **Purple Finches** were a male in Central Hts March 6 (DW), several near Cushing March 10 (SL) and one in Joaquin March 16 (DB, J Sm). Most Pine Siskins had pulled back from feeders in February and seemed gone by mid-March, but a return flight appeared in April, peaking at 250+ in Pecan Park April 23 (DW). A single there May 4 (DW) and one in Lufkin May 7 (GH) were the last.

Observers: TA = Tony Adams; DB = David Bell; MB = Matt Buckingham; BB = Brent Burt; JC = James Childress; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; TH = Tyson Hart; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; RS = Rick Schaefer; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; JS = Julie Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; AT = Anne Tindell; RT = Robert Truss; AW = Ashley Wahlberg; David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf. PAS = Pineywoods Audubon Society; m. obs. = many observers.

Localities in Angelina County: Angelina County Airport; Diboll; Lufkin; Pollok.

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); 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 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn.

Localities in Sabine County: Joaquin; Sabinetown.

Localities in Shelby County: Center.