

Spring Bird Report for East Texas Pineywoods Audubon Society
March 1 – May 31, 2020
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This was an interesting spring, to say the least, as the COVID-19 pandemic changed our lifestyles and forced us to stay at home or at least limit our activities. We certainly focused on our yards and local birding spots more than usual. The results were a mixed bag. Overall it was a rather uneventful spring, yet almost all of the expected migrants were found at least once, by someone, and there were quite a number of rarities seen. Some of you were surprised at just how many birds can be found in your local patch with persistent coverage. Though we had regular storm activity and frontal passages, they did not produce large “fallouts” of migrants and there were no really spectacular days. On the other hand, an amazing variety of species is to be found in this report.

By mid-April some of us began getting out more, “socially distancing”, but birding none-the-less. Pecan Park in Nacogdoches, our local hotspot for passerine migrants, received daily coverage from mid-April through mid-May, after which the weather turned fair and visible migration ended abruptly. April 29 was the single best day for warblers in Pecan Park (DW, CS et al), both in numbers and variety, while April 30 was a good day for David Bell in Sabinetown and May 9 produced a swarm of migrants in Lufkin (GH).

Shorebirds are generally lacking in the Pineywoods in the spring, as there isn’t much stopover habitat for them. However, during stormy weather and heavy rains they appear like magic at puddles and flooded shortgrass. Only rarely do these birds stick around and it is amazing how fast they appear and then leave as the storms abate. Your compiler is lucky to have one such puddle a mile from home in Central Heights and for the Wolfs it provided a spring highlight, with 14 species of migrant shorebirds seen here during the course of the season.

Thanks go to everyone who kept me posted on their sightings. Please, if you find any errors in this report or have additional information to add, send it to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com . And stay healthy!

Some first dates for summer residents:

Chimney Swift – March 20 in Lufkin (GH) and at the Nacogdoches ponds (DW); March 21 in Sabinetown (DB) and 4 over Lake Rayburn the same day (DW).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – March 13 is the day the first males appeared: 2 in Lufkin (JC); 1 in Central Hts (Ty D, DW); and 1 in Nacogdoches (CS, JS). The first females in Nacogdoches (CS) and Central Hts (MHW, DW) appeared March 24.

Chuck-will’s-widow – singles were heard near Huntington April 5 (JC) and in Nacogdoches (CDF), Lufkin (GH) and Central Hts (MHW) on April 8.

Little Blue Heron – 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA March 13 (DW).

Cattle Egret – 1 in Central Hts March 10 (DW).

Eastern Wood-Pewee – 1 in Central Hts April 13 (MHW).

Great Crested Flycatcher – 1 in Lufkin April 1 (GH).

Eastern Kingbird – 1 in Central Hts March 21 (DW).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – singles in Angelina County north of Lufkin March 16 (DW) and Nacogdoches March 18 (CDF).

Yellow-throated Vireo – one heard east of Cushing Creek March 11 (SL) and one seen in Nacogdoches March 14 (CS).

Red-eyed Vireo – March 19-21 near Center (J Sm); March 26 in Lufkin (GH); March 27 near Antioch (SO); and March 29 east of Cushing (SL).

Barn Swallow – 4 in Central Hts March 4 (DW).

Wood Thrush – 1 east of Cushing March 29 (SL); 1 in south Nacogdoches April 6 (AT)

Orchard Oriole – 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 5 (DW).
Yellow-breasted Chat – east of Cushing April 10 (SL).
Louisiana Waterthrush – 1 in Central Hts March 19 was likely a migrant (MHW); the first one at a regular breeding site in Carrizo Creek was March 25 (SL).
Prothonotary Warbler – 1 on Dorr Creek road March 29 (CS).
Kentucky Warbler – singles in Lufkin April 7 (GH) and near Cushing April 10 (SL).
Hooded Warbler – 2 on Dorr Creek road March 17 (CW); one in Lufkin March 19 (GH).
Northern Parula – 1 on Dorr Creek road March 4 (BB).
Yellow-throated Warbler – March 13 near the Attoyac in sw. San Aug Co (AW); March 15 on Dorr Creek road (RT) and Boggy Slough (Trinity Co) (CS).
Summer Tanager – 1 east of Cushing March 29 (SL) and 1 in Central Hts April 3 (DW).
Blue Grosbeak - 1 in Nacogdoches (CDF) and 2 in s. Nac Co (DW) on April 10.
Indigo Bunting – 1 in Center April 5 (J Sm).
Painted Bunting - 1 in Nacogdoches April 12 (CDF)

Bird Report:

A pair of **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** explored nest boxes just outside of West Loop 224 in Nacogdoches on April 7 (HW), and another pair circled broadly around south Nacogdoches on May 7 (DW), but neither pair was ever seen again. This expanding species still cannot be considered established in our region. Most wintering ducks were gone by the end of February, but 82 Northern Shoveler and 65 Redhead were still at the Nac. ponds March 1; numbers decreased rapidly after this (DW). A pair of **Mallards** circled Alazan Bayou WMA April 5 (DW). The last Hooded Merganser at Alazan Bayou was a female lingering around a nest box April 30 (DW). A male **Red-breasted Merganser** stopped on Lake Nacogdoches April 1 (CA) and a female was found near Huntington April 19 (JC); both were nicely photographed.

White-winged Doves continue to increase in the central Pineywoods and they are now a well-established resident in Center (J Sm). A few were also present in Nacogdoches, while further out in the county, where they are not regular, one was in Central Hts Feb 17-March 4 (DW, MHW, Ty D) and 2 were in Douglass May 18 (CW). The first Common Nighthawk was one over Lufkin April 25 (GH). Single Eastern Whip-poor-wills were heard in n. Nac Co March 24 (BB); Central Hts April 3 (MHW); and Nacogdoches April 5 (CDF).

A truly remarkable flight of 200+ **Sandhill Cranes** noisily passed low over sw. San Augustine County (near the Attoyac Bayou) on March 13 and then 54 were seen overhead near Center (Shelby County) on March 15 (both AW). These numbers have never before been reported anywhere over the Pineywoods, but they hint at a narrow northward migration corridor for birds from the increasing winter population on the Upper Texas Coast.

Most of the shorebirds reported visited “The Puddle” and surrounding pasture in Central Heights during stormy and/or rainy weather (see the introduction), with a few additional reports from puddles in Nacogdoches town, the Nacogdoches and Angelina County Airports and near Center. The first American Golden-Plover were 3 over Central Hts March 17 and then 4 appeared March 22 after heavy rain overnight and 7 were there the next day. The last were 2 there April 5 after a weak frontal passage (all DW). No large numbers were ever seen this spring. The first Upland Sandpipers were 3 in Central Hts March 30 and 6 the next day. 18 were here on April 12 after a severe thunderstorm, while the season high count of 53 appeared here on stormy April 19; 18 were present after storms on April 22 (all DW). The only Baird’s Sandpiper this spring was one in Central Hts after a thunderstorm on April 12 (DW). The only White-rumped Sandpipers were one in Central Hts April 29 and 5 at the Nac. Airport on stormy May 8 (both DW). A single **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** in Central Hts on stormy May 8 was a rare spring sighting (DW, MHW, TH et al). The first Pectoral Sandpipers were 8 at Alazan Bayou WMA March 16 (DW) and 3 on the SFASU playing fields March 18 (CDF). Surprisingly, no large numbers of Pectorals were found anywhere this spring. Single Semipalmated Sandpipers were identified at the puddle in Central Hts May 5, 8 & 17 and 2 were there May 22 (all DW). 30 Wilson’s Snipe at Alazan Bayou WMA March 13 was the season

high count (DW). It was a good spring for **Wilson's Phalaropes**, with 2 in Central Hts after storms on April 19 (DW); 1 on the SFASU fields in Nacogdoches after heavy rains on April 22 (CDF); 12 in Central Hts after violent thunderstorms April 28 (DW); 2 in Central Hts April 30 (DW); and 14 after a violent storm on May 8 (DW, MHW, AT, TH). The first Solitary Sandpiper was one at Alazan Bayou WMA March 13 (DW). 35 Greater and 3 Lesser Yellowlegs were at a puddle just outside of Center on March 21 (J Sm). The season high count for Greater at the puddle in Central Hts was 8 on April 22 (DW). High counts for Lesser at the puddle in Central Hts were 22 on April 12; 52 on April 19; and 30 on April 22. All of these counts were immediately after stormy weather and few of the birds stayed around for more than a few hours (all DW). The only Franklin's Gulls were 2 over Nacogdoches on stormy April 28 (CS). A flock of 16 Ring-billed Gulls passed over Lufkin April 2 (GH). A Herring Gull came over TX 21 at Toledo Bend March 10 (DB), while 3 migrating up the valley in Nacogdoches as the rainclouds broke up on April 3 were a surprise (DW). A beautiful **Least Tern** foraged in the cove at the base of the TX 147 causeway on May 25 (DW). This species is not often seen in our area, but may be regular on the larger lakes in late May-early June. A **Caspian Tern** migrating up the valley in Nacogdoches April 29 was a surprise (DW).

Diurnally migrating Common Loons were 2 over the St's Rest road turnoff March 28 and 5 over the same site April 10 (both DW); and one over the Alazan Bayou WMA area on April 22 (AW). This is a strange context in which to see this species, but by no means unprecedented. An early **Wood Stork** was at Alazan Bayou WMA May 27 (DW, Ty D). The first Anhingas were 3 at Ellen Trout Park March 16 (DW) and 8 over the Dorr Creek Road March 17 (CW). The largest flock of migrants reported was a paltry 17 over Central Hts April 3 (MHW). A tight flock of 375+ Double-crested Cormorants passed over the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn March 21 (DW). A flock of 150 American White Pelicans over southern Nacogdoches Co April 13 was a surprise (RS). The only American Bittern was one at Alazan Bayou WMA April 16 (DW). 35 Great Egrets at Alazan Bayou WMA April 16 was a high count for spring (DW). The first Snowy Egret was one at Alazan Bayou WMA March 18 (DW). The large Cattle Egret colony at TX 103 at the Attoyac on upper Lake Rayburn is active again this year and a brief check on May 31 revealed a few Anhingas, Little Blue Herons and an adult **Tricolored Heron** amidst them (DW). White Ibis reports included 30 at Alazan Bayou April 14 (RT); 4 over Lufkin April 23 and 24 on May 1 (GH); 125 over Alazan Bayou WMA April 30 (DW); and 23 over Nacogdoches May 2 (CDF).

Single **American Swallow-tailed Kites**, a rarity in the Central Pineywoods, were over Central Hts April 3 (MHW, DW); the Sabine River at North Toledo Bend WMA (Shelby Co) on April 27 (J Sm); and Homer (between Lufkin and Huntington) on May 18 (Stan Bohon; ph.). We are north of the breeding range of this spectacular bird in East Texas, but ever hopeful that they will increase and expand into our area. Very unexpected was a **White-tailed Kite** over Nacogdoches March 26 (CDF). 2 Northern Harriers northbound over the clearcut on FM 1275 in southern Nac. Co. on April 10 were the last (DW). A vocal Sharp-shinned Hawk was found in the Davy Crockett NF near Ratcliff (Houston Do) on March 18 and on April 1 a pair was present and appeared to be nest-building. By early June it was clear that the nest effort had been abandoned (RS). Another Sharpie was seen in open upland pine forest near Boykin Springs (s. Ang Co) on May 15 (CS) and on May 18 a nest was found here (RS), but it was never completed and by early June the birds did not seem to be around. They have nested successfully near this site in the past. The largest movements of Mississippi Kites were 31 over Lufkin April 22 (GH); 24 over Central Hts April 22 (DW); 72+ over Nacogdoches April 23 (DW et al); and a very big flight of **225-250** near Huntington on April 28 (JC). Birds that appeared to be local breeders were found in Carrizo Creek and Nacogdoches beginning in early May (KG, SL, DW). On June 7 SL found 9 in Pioneer Park in Nacogdoches; they have likely nested in this vicinity the last two years. Many observers enjoyed the conspicuous Red-shouldered Hawk nest in its usual area in Pecan Park in Nacogdoches this spring. One of the hawks seemed to recognize CDF and really dislike him, buzzing him at close range regularly and actually hitting his head and knocking his cap off on April 19! The young left the nest about May 18 and remained in the vicinity for a few days. The largest Broad-winged Hawk flights detected were 51 over Central Hts March 27 (DW); 250 near Huntington March 29 (JC); 330 over Nacogdoches and 120 over Central Hts on April 3 (both DW); 63 over Central Hts April 6 (DW); and 600+ over Central Hts in 2 hours on April 7 (DW). A copulating pair in Lufkin March 24 was indicative of local breeding (GH), as were birds in flight display and/or calling in

Carrizo Creek (March 28; SL), and Central Hts and elsewhere during April (DW). A rare **Swainson's Hawk** was over Nacogdoches April 28 (DW). A pair of **Crested Caracaras** in eastern Cherokee Co. May 1 was in the general area of previous sightings (AT), but a probable reported between Garrison and Timpson in late May (Ben Rogers) was further east than expected. This species is still quite unexpected in Angelina & Nacogdoches Counties and eastward. There were a surprising number of Merlin sightings this spring, all singles: Nacogdoches March 14 (DW); March 21 over the base of the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn (DW); Angelina Co Airport March 24 (GH); in Nacogdoches April 7 (CDF); over Nacogdoches April 20 (DW); at the Angelina Co Airport on April 25 (BW); and Alazan Bayou WMA April 30 (DW). The only Peregrine Falcons were singles over Nacogdoches March 28 (CDF) and Lufkin May 3 (GH).

It was a good spring for Olive-sided Flycatcher, one of our scarcer passerine migrants, with an early one near Cushing April 23 (SL); 1 in Douglass April 26 (CW); 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 30 (DW); 1 in Sabinetown May 1 (DB); 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA May 2 (CW); and 1 in Lufkin May 9 (GH). It was a poor spring for migrant *Empidonax* flycatchers and the usual mid to late May push never appeared. The only Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was one in Nacogdoches April 30 (DW). On May 9 two Willow Flycatchers were singing at Alazan Bayou WMA and another sang in Central Hts that afternoon and the next day (DW, MHW). It was nice to be able to confirm this species. There were no reports of the very similar Alder Flycatcher this spring, though they are just as likely as Willow in our area. The first Least Flycatcher was one in Pecan Park April 27 (DW); very few others were seen. A **Couch's Kingbird** was seen in Central Hts 3 times from March 12-25, and was heard calling on March 21 for confirmation to species (DW, MHW). This is now the 8th record for Angelina/Nacogdoches Cos., but **the first in spring**. A **Western Kingbird** at the Nacogdoches Airport April 14 (L Wo) was our earliest ever by a week. Singles were also seen in Nacogdoches April 17 (CDF; also very early); and in Central Hts April 30 (DW). This species is a rare migrant in our area, for which we do not have any summer records or indications of breeding. 2 singing White-eyed Vireos on the Dorr Creek road March 7 may have been arrivals (DW). A singing migrant **Bell's Vireo** in Nacogdoches April 29 was the first local report in years (CDF). The first Warbling Vireos were 4 in Nacogdoches on stormy April 19 (DW) and the first Philadelphia Vireo was one in Pecan Park April 29 (DW et al).

A calling **Fish Crow** in Diboll on April 20 was sound-recorded for excellent documentation (GH) and a long-awaited **first** for Angelina County. Nacogdoches County does not have any reports. Until further notice I have to consider this bird a migrant or wanderer, but it is possible that this species is slowly establishing itself in some new areas in East Texas away from the Sabine and Red River systems. The first Bank Swallow was one in Central Hts April 12 (DW). March 13 was the last date for a Winter Wren present all winter in Central Hts (DW, MHW). A **Bewick's Wren** was still at the clearcut on FM 1275 near the St's Rest road on March 7 (DW where one was first found last November. The last Golden-crowned Kinglet was a late one in Lufkin March 28 (GH), while the last Ruby-crowned Kinglet was one in Nacogdoches April 28 (AT). The only **Veery** found was one photographed in Lufkin May 13-14 (GH) and the only Gray-cheeked Thrushes were singles in Sabinetown May 6 (DB) and Nacogdoches May 8 (DW). Both of these are among our less frequent migrants and both are typically secretive and hard to detect. The first Swainson's Thrush, a more numerous migrant, were singles in Lufkin April 11 (GH) and Central Hts April 15 (DW). An early Gray Catbird in Lufkin March 28 (GH) may have been an overwintering bird. The next were 2 near Cushing April 6 (SL) and singles in Lufkin and Nacogdoches April 8 (fide CS).

A **Red Crossbill** in far southern Angelina National Forest (Angelina Co) on May 14 (RS) was completely unexpected, as this past winter was not a flight year for this species in Texas. A migrant flock of 65 Chipping Sparrows quickly passed through Central Hts April 5 (DW). The last one in Pecan Park lingered to May 1 (DW et al). A well-marked **"Pink-sided" Junco** studied in Central Hts March 6 had likely been glimpsed earlier in the winter (DW). Two "Slate-colored", our normal race, lingered there to March 24 (DW). Single migrant White-crowned Sparrows were in Lufkin (GH) and near Antioch (Shelby Co; SO) on March 29, and 2 were still at the SFASU Farm in Mahl April 30 (DW). A bright **Harris's Sparrow** studied at length at close range in Cushing on May 2 was our latest ever by two weeks (DS). A late migrant Vesper Sparrow was on the SFASU fields April 23 (CDF). 30 Lincoln's Sparrows at Alazan Bayou WMA March 16 was the season high count (DW). One male **Bobolink** found and photographed at

Alazan Bayou WMA May 12 (MB) was still present May 14 (DW). This is a traditional site for this scarce migrant, but most of the old-field habitat has been destroyed, so this was an unexpected bonus this spring. 7 Brewer's Blackbirds were still present in sw. Shelby Co on March 21 (J Sm). A **Bronzed Cowbird** photographed in s. Nacogdoches April 23 (CS, JC) was only our 3rd area record and the first since 2002. 8 Baltimore Orioles in Nacogdoches April 20 may have been the first (DW); no larger numbers were reported this spring.

3 Northern Waterthrush at Alazan Bayou WMA April 16 were the first (DW), while one east of Cushing May 20 was the last (SL). A **Worm-eating Warbler** at the Old Aldrich Sawmill (n. Jasper Co) on March 21 was **very early** (CS), while another was near Alazan Bayou WMA April 11 (AW). Single male Golden-winged Warblers were seen in south Nacogdoches April 26 and May 4 (both AT); 2 visited Sabinetown on April 30 (DB); a female was seen in Lufkin May 6 and another was there May 9 (both GH). The only Blue-winged Warbler reports were singles in Central Hts (MHW, DW) and south Nacogdoches (AT) on April 6 and one in Pecan Park April 26 (LWo). Swainson's Warbler is rarely detected as a migrant, but one visited Douglass on stormy April 16 (CW). The first Tennessee Warbler was one in Douglass April 7 (CW), while the season peak in Pecan Park was 50 on April 29, not an especially high count for here (DW et al). The first Nashville Warbler was one in Lufkin March 26 (GH), while the last was one in Pecan Park May 10 (DW). A female Common Yellowthroat at Alazan Bayou WMA March 18 (DW) and a male on the Dorr Creek road the same day (DB, LW) may have been over-wintering birds rather than early migrants. The first American Redstart was in Pecan Park April 25 (DW). The only Cerulean Warbler was a male in Nacogdoches on stormy April 19 (DW). The first Magnolia Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 25 (DW). Bay-breasted Warblers were found in small numbers (1-2) on many dates from April 28 (male in Pecan Park; DW, DS) to May 16 (2 in Nacogdoches; CS, JS). The first Blackburnian Warblers were males in Pecan Park (LWo) and south Nacogdoches (DW) on April 26, while a male in s. Nacogdoches May 21 was one of the last 2 migrant warblers reported (AT). The first Yellow Warbler briefly visited Central Hts April 18 (DW), while the season high-count was 14 in Pecan Park April 29 (DW, CS et al). The first Chestnut-sided Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 24 (CDF), while the one-day high count there was 8 on April 29 (DW, CS et al). Male **Blackpoll Warblers** were seen in Lufkin May 4 (GH) and Pecan Park May 6 (DW, DS). A "**Western**" **Palm Warbler** in Central Hts on March 22 was watched for over 15 minutes (DW, MHW, RT). This is the earliest of 9 spring records for Nacogdoches/Angelina Cos. by 18 days! It was amidst a huge flock of 75+ Yellow-rumped Warblers brought down by heavy rain overnight. This proved to be the season high count for Yellow-rumped; almost all were gone the next day (DW). The last Yellow-rumped lingered in Pecan Park to April 29 (DW et al). The first Black-throated Green Warbler was one in Nacogdoches March 20 (RA), while the high count in Pecan Park was 8 on April 25 (DW et al). The only Wilson's Warblers were singles in Pecan Park May 1 (DW, DS) and SFASU May 17 (CDF). Canada Warbler was reported four times, singles in Lufkin May 3 (GH); Sabinetown May 6 (DB); s. Nacogdoches Co May 17 (AW); and in Nacogdoches May 21 (CDF).

It was a good spring for Scarlet Tanager (or were we just watching more carefully?), with 2 females in Nacogdoches April 20 (DW); a male near Center April 21 (J Sm); one in Sabinetown April 30 (DB); a female in Lufkin May 1 (GH); a male in Nacogdoches April 29 (DW); and a male over Alazan Bayou WMA April 30 (DW). Indigo Buntings appeared widely April 10-13 (m. obs.) – they are always a joy! The season high count of migrants was 40 in Sabinetown April 30 (DB). The first Dickcissel was one in Central Hts April 23 (DW), while April 27 brought a major movement of 200+ over Nacogdoches (DW).

Observers: CA = Cory Adams; RA = Robert Allen; DB = David Bell; MB = Matt Buckingham; BB = Brent Burt; JC = James Childress; Ty D = Tycho Drahn; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; KG = Kathy Griffith; TH = Tyson Hart; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; SO = Sue Orwig; 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; CW = Carol Wells; BW = Bob White; HW = Howard Williamson; LW = Laura Wilson; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; LWo = Liam Wolff.

Localities in Angelina County: Angelina County Airport; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Homer; Huntington; Lufkin.

Localities in Jasper County: Lake Rayburn dam/spillway.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Cushing; Dorr Creek road (= Saint's Rest road); Douglass; Lake Nacogdoches; Mahl; Nacogdoches town (= Nac); Nacogdoches Airport; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Native Plant Center (in Nacogdoches); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); FM 1275/Saint's Rest Road (s. Nac Co); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp Forest).

Localities in Sabine County: Carrice Creek (TX 21) on Toledo Bend Reservoir; Sabinetown.

Localities in San Augustine County: San Augustine town; TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn.

Localities in Shelby County: Antioch; Center; Joaquin; North Toldeo Bend WMA.