

Summer Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
(June 1 – August 31, 2020)
By David E. Wolf

Summer is our slowest season for birding, with the heat, humidity, insects and noxious plants combining to keep many of us from spending much time afield. This year, of course, we had the additional stress of COVID-19. Nevertheless, many interesting and significant sightings were reported. The weather was generally “normal” – increasingly hot as we moved into July, with scattered rains throughout the season. Early “cool fronts” on July 31 and August 17 dropped temperatures a bit and pushed a few migrants along, but after this it became very hot and dry into early September. Apologies to all for the tardiness of this report and if you have any corrections or additions please send them to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com

Most noteworthy was the passage of **Hurricane Laura** up the Texas/Louisiana border on August 27, which brought hurricane force winds to 100 mph, heavy rain and considerable damage to the eastern part of our area. Local birders were too occupied surviving the storm and surveying the damage to get out birding, but several intrepid birders from elsewhere did manage to check the dam at Toledo Bend Reservoir. They found an amazing variety of storm-driven birds (fide eBird). Especially noteworthy was the entry from Greg Cook at Toledo Bend Dam (Newton County) on August 27. It included the following, all of which are rarely found in our region: **Whimbrel** – 1 (photo); **Ruddy Turnstone** – 2; Sanderling – 3; Laughing Gull – 20; **Sooty Tern** – 2 (photo); Least Tern – 4; **Common Tern** – 2 (photo); and **Royal Tern** – 17 (photo). Erik Atwell checked the Toledo Bend dam in the early morning on August 28 and reported these outstanding birds: Laughing Gull – 27; **Royal Tern** – 12; **Sandwich Tern** – 1; **Magnificent Frigatebird** – 1. Tony Frank checked the dam later that morning and found most of the noteworthy birds gone, except for **2 Common, 3 Royal and 1 Sandwich tern**. DW checked the TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn about noon on August 27, as the hurricane swirled to the east, but did not find any birds of note. This was the first storm since Hurricane Ike in 2008 to bring some of these coastal species into the Pineywoods.

Bird List:

On July 7 a pair of **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** with 9 small ducklings was found at the Nacogdoches sewer ponds, the first confirmed breeding record for the county (DW). The entire family group was seen regularly after this and by early Sept all of the young were grown and capable of flight. The entire group disappeared shortly thereafter (DW; sewer pond personnel). A total of 7 **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** was noted around Old Orchard Park in Diboll and nearby Angelina County Airport on June 18 (DW, TD). They have been regular in small numbers in this area for years, but seem to be slowly increasing. The first southbound Blue-winged Teal were 34 (in 3 flocks) at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Aug 18 (DW). A female **Hooded Merganser** near Appleby July 13 was the only report this summer (CS). At least 2 Northern Bobwhite were found in the Angelina NF southeast of Zavalla June 25 (LW). This species is almost gone from our region except for a few places in the National Forests. A calling White-winged Dove briefly visited Central Hts on July 3; they are not regular here (DW). A Common Nighthawk over south Lufkin on July 19 was likely an early migrant or wanderer as they are not known to breed locally (GH). Shorebirds were almost completely absent this summer due to the lack of suitable stopover habitat. The most interesting report was 5 American Avocets at Marion Ferry on July 30 (GH). 17 Black Terns foraged over Lake Nacogdoches after a rainstorm on July 20 (DW). On June 10 at least 63 distant Forster's/Common terns flew north in strings low over the middle section of Toledo Bend Reservoir (Sabine Co) (DB). This is an odd late date for any tern movement.

Stunning were the multiple reports of **Brown Booby** by anglers and boaters on our two big area reservoirs, Toledo Bend and Lake Rayburn. The first report was posted online on June 27 by one Troy Shivley, a photo of an adult sitting on a dock house. It was taken by his aunt who lives on Toledo Bend on the Texas side, but I have no further information and do not know the exact date. Then CS sent me a photo taken by an angler, Ed Snelson, on June 25 near Bill's Landing on Toledo Bend north of Huxley

(Shelby County). As best I can figure out this observation was independent of the first posting, but it was likely the same bird. The next report was an adult photographed by one Carlene Fontenot on July 2 on Lake Sam Rayburn. The bird was in Angelina County as it rode on their boat from near the TX 147 bridge into the dock at Monterey Park. She posted the photo on Facebook's "Birds of Texas", asking for help with the identification. All three reports were of very tame adults and it is not unlikely that it was the same bird. This pelagic species has no business appearing inland, but this has been happening with increasing frequency throughout the eastern United States in the last decade.

In mid-June DB reported that Double-crested Cormorants were again nesting at Carrice Creek on middle Toledo Bend Reservoir, with about 55 nests counted and several hundred birds in the vicinity. DW checked this site on July 11 and counted 58 nests, most of them no longer in use, but at least 200 adults and immatures were lingering in the vicinity. At least 50 more were seen nearby at the base of the TX 21 bridge. This species has nested in this vicinity since at least 1972, when it was one of the very few breeding sites in the entire state. The first wandering or migrant Snowy Egrets were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA June 26 (DW), while the first Tricolored Heron was one over TX 103 at the Attoyac Aug 18 (DW). Again this year there was a large nesting colony of Cattle Egrets in the buttonbush swamp just north of the TX 103 bridge over the Attoyac Bayou. On July 19 at least 2500 were lingering in the vicinity and most seemed to be recently-fledged juveniles, while a few nests still held large chicks (DW).

A vocal **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was found in the Davy Crockett NF near Ratcliff (Houston Co) on March 18 and on April 1 a pair was present and appeared to be nest-building, but 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 the nest site. They have nested successfully near this site in the past. Another vocalizing Sharp-shinned Hawk was discovered on recordings from the Norwood area of Angelina NF made on July 21 (LW). There were sporadic sightings of Cooper's Hawk in various locations all summer, but no nests were located. KBE was surprised when an adult checked out her bird feeders in Lufkin July 17, yielding nice photos. Mississippi Kites again summered in small numbers in towns throughout our area, including Center, Diboll, Huntington, Lufkin, Nacogdoches and Zavalla (m. obs.). Especially noteworthy were 9 in Pioneer Park in Nacogdoches June 7 (SL) and again on June 15, when a group of 8 (5 adults) was observed sunning together on the ground (DW). The first definite fall migrants were 5 over Cushing Aug 17 (DS) and 9 over Lufkin the same day (GH) and the one-day high count was 50 over Central Hts Aug 19 (DW). After seeing a pair of Broad-winged Hawks near her home in s. Nacogdoches all spring, in mid-July at least one noisy juvenile was present (AT). This species is a widespread summer resident in East Texas and presumably breeds widely, but confirmation of this has been hard to come by. At least one Red-headed Woodpecker fledged from a nest hole in a snag in Central Heights around June 8-9, but remained in the vicinity, begging vociferously. Later a pair re-used the same nest hole and had noisy babies on July 29, but they did not survive to fledging (MHW). LW found American Kestrels with young at different sites in Angelina NF on June 1 and June 10; and at the start of the St's Rest Road June 13 and on the SFASU campus June 26 (LW). The latter two sites have been traditional breeding sites.

Single Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were studied in Central Hts Aug 2 and Aug 22 and in Nacogdoches Aug 12 (DW). The first "Traill's" (Willow/Alder sp?) flycatcher was one in Central Hts Aug 4-6 (DW). Few others were found, but on Aug 16 an Alder repeatedly called back in response to playback at Alazan Bayou WMA (DW). The first Least Flycatcher was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 16 (DW). A wandering Eastern Phoebe that moved south along the shore at Etoile Park Aug 1 was unexpected at this site and perhaps an early migrant (DW). 11 Eastern Kingbirds over Central Hts Aug 2 seemed to be migrants on the move already (DW). The first migrant Red-eyed Vireo came through Central Hts July 31 and the first push there was 6 on Aug 17 (DW). Two **Fish Crows** were heard and seen repeatedly in Old Orchard Park in Diboll on June 18 (DW). GH first found this species here on April 20, when he sound-recorded the voice for confirmation of the first record for Angelina County. Two more were heard at the Angelina Co Airport on July 5 (GH). This species seems to be undergoing a sudden expansion beyond the Sabine River system. The first Bank Swallows were 2 over Central Hts

Aug 2 (DW). Cliff Swallows nesting under the bridges south of downtown Nacogdoches had many fledged young in the air on June 13 (DW, TD) and by mid-July most local breeders were gone from their large colonies (DW). This species leaves early, as do many (most?) of our locally breeding Purple Martins and Barn Swallows. The first migrant or wandering Blue-gray Gnatcatcher showed up in Central Hts July 11 (MHW) and the first push of migrants there was 9 on July 31 (DW). Several Gray Catbirds summered in south Lufkin and were seen sporadically through at least July 14 (GH). Chipping Sparrow is surprisingly hard to find in our area in the summer, but a pair of adults was at Lake Nacogdoches July 26 and one appeared in Central Hts Aug 12 (DW). An **Eastern Towhee** was in the thick young clearcut on the first part of the St's Rest Road on June 13 (LW). This species may summer and breed in very low numbers in East Texas, but confirmation of this is lacking. The high count on migrant Orchard Orioles in Central Hts was 12 on Aug 15 (DW), while a male Baltimore Oriole there Aug 26 was the first of the fall season (DW).

It is known that many of the breeding warblers of eastern North America leave the nesting grounds surprisingly early. They seemingly just disappear from the continent, with relatively few sightings of migrants en route. This summer, with more of us staying at home and diligently watching our local "patches", we had a number of sightings of early migrants or birds that had wandered away from breeding territories. The first was a Louisiana Waterthrush in Nacogdoches July 3 (AT), followed by one at Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin July 15 (GH) and one in Nacogdoches July 26 (DW). 2 **Worm-eating Warblers** (maybe a pair) in the Angelina NF east of Broadus on June 30 were likely local breeders (LW). A bright male **Blue-winged Warbler** graced Central Hts on the early date of Aug 6 (DW). 5 singing Swainson's Warblers were located in upland sites with a dense yaupon understory in Shelby Co on July 19 (J Sm). Single migrant Kentucky Warblers visited Central Hts Aug 7 (male) and Aug 17 (female); in 35 years we have had only one or two previous sightings here (DW). A Hooded Warbler in Central Hts Aug 7 was away from a breeding area and likely a migrant (DW). A Northern Parula showed up in Central Hts Aug 2 (DW). The first Yellow Warblers detected were 2 in Central Hts (DW) and 1 in Lufkin (GH) on Aug 2. A migrant Yellow-throated Warbler came through Central Hts Aug 27 (DW). The only Prairie Warbler was a migrant along the TX 147 causeway Aug 14 (DW). A very late spring migrant Black-throated Green Warbler was caught by a game camera at a drip in Center on June 7 (J Sm). A stub-tailed Blue Grosbeak in Central Hts Aug 17 was barely out of the nest and a late fledging date (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; TD = Tycho Drahn; KBE = Katrina Barr Echols; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; RS = Rick Schaefer; CS = Cliff Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; AT = Anne Tindell; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; LW = Liam Wolff; m.obs. = many observers.

Angelina County: Angelina County Airport; Boykin Springs; Diboll; Huntington; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Lufkin; Marion Ferry (on upper Lake Rayburn); Old Orchard Park (in Diboll); Zavalla.

Nacogdoches County: Appleby; Central Heights; Cushing; Etoile Park (on upper Lake Rayburn); Lake Nacogdoches; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Pioneer Park (in Nacogdoches); Saint's Rest Road (= Dorr Creek Road); Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches (= SFASU).

Sabine County: Carrice Creek; Sabinetown; TX 21 on Toledo Bend Reservoir.

San Augustine County: Broadus; Norwood; TX 103 at the Attoyac (upper Lake Rayburn); TX 147 causeway (middle Lake Rayburn).

Shelby County: Center.