

Fall Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
September 1 - November 30, 2021
by David E. Wolf

We all seem to be in agreement that the fall season through September and October was best described as...”incredibly slow”; “boring”; “not much around”; “lowest numbers of fall migrants ever”, etc. The weather was consistently moderate, with very little rain, no tropical storm activity and almost no strong cold fronts (with one exception, the extremely windy front of Oct 27-28). Without notable weather to bring them down most migrants apparently passed right over us. November wasn’t any better and many of our winter birds were late in arriving and as of this writing (Dec 4) they are still in remarkably low numbers. Where are the birds? Presumably further north due to the mild conditions.

In general: waterfowl were late in arriving and in low numbers; shorebirds were scarce due to lack of habitat; days with notable raptor migration were few; and flycatchers and other passerine migrants were scarce. A few pushes of small numbers of migrant warblers were seen, especially 9 species in Pecan Park Sept 23 (LW); 8 species in Central Hts Sept 24 (DW); and 6 species in Pecan Park Oct 2 (RT). Almost across the board sparrows were late in arriving and in low numbers.

Some first dates for winter residents:

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – singles in Nacogdoches Sept 26 (AB); Oct 5 in Central Hts (DW); and Oct 6 in Lufkin (GH).

Northern Flicker – 3 over TX 147 causeway Sept 22 (DW, DB, J Sm).

Blue-headed Vireo - 2 in Center Oct 30 (J Sm).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet – 1 in Central Hts Sept 26 (DW).

Golden-crowned Kinglet – 1 in Lufkin Oct 18 (GH).

Cedar Waxwing - several heard over SFASU campus in Nacogdoches Oct 31 (LW).

Red-breasted Nuthatch – 1 in Center Sept 14 (J Sm); very early. More on this winter “invader” in the main report.

Brown Creeper - 1 in Lufkin Oct 18 (GH).

House Wren – 1 in Central Hts Sept 26 (DW).

Hermit Thrush - 2 at Kurth Lake Oct 29 (DB, J Sm); 1 in the SFA Exp Forest Oct 30 (CS).

American Pipit – 1 over Marion Ferry Sept 25 (RT, DW); early.

American Goldfinch – 3 in Nacogdoches Nov 6 (CS).

Chipping Sparrow - singles in Central Hts Oct 16 (DW) and Nacogdoches Oct 22 (AB).

Field Sparrow – 1 in Nacogdoches Nov 9 (CDF).

Dark-eyed Junco - 1 in Nacogdoches Oct 22 (AB).

White-throated Sparrow - 1 in Nacogdoches Oct 18 (CDF).

Song Sparrow – 1 in Nacogdoches Nov 5 (CDF).

Swamp Sparrow – 1 in Lufkin Oct 16 (RP).

Orange-crowned Warbler - 1 in Nacogdoches Oct 23 (CDF).

Yellow-rumped Warbler – 1 in Nacogdoches (TD) and 2 in Lufkin (GH) on Oct 16; heard over Marion Ferry at dawn Oct 17 (RT); and 5 at TX 147 causeway Oct 18 (DW).

Bird Report:

A Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was a one-day wonder near Huntington July 14 (JC). The only migrating geese reported were a flock of Snow over Ellen Trout Park Nov 22 (GH). An **Egyptian Goose** was at Ellen Trout Park Aug 15 (GH) – have there been other sightings here? It’s a bit scary that this invasive showed up in our area twice this year. Will they increase and spread? The first waterfowl were on Kurth Lake Oct 29 (DB, GH, J Sm), but the numbers were low: 8 Gadwall, 1 American Wigeon, 2 Canvasback, 15 Redhead, 19 Ring-necked and 16 Ruddy Ducks. The Nov 21 PAS field trip here found more waterfowl present (DB, J Sm et al, PAS field trip): 15 Northern Shoveler, 5 Gadwall, 250

Canvasback, 20 Redhead, 15 Ring-necked Duck, 12 Lesser Scaup, 5 Bufflehead and Hooded Merganser. Northern Shovelers numbers at the Nacogdoches ponds suddenly jumped to 175 on Nov 29 (DW). By far the most noteworthy duck of the season was **White-winged Scoter**. A female-plumaged bird was found and photographed at Ellen Trout Park in the morning on Nov 22 by Gary Hunter. He immediately posted it on Facebook (thanks Gary!) and when DW checked that afternoon there were 2 birds present, confirmed later by AW. Both were seen again the next day (GH), but after that only one remained (GH, RT). The last report that I know of was Nov 26 (AT). This is only the **3rd record in over 50 years for Angelina and Nacogdoches Counties and Lake Rayburn and the first since 1977**. 17 Buffleheads and 19 Hooded Mergansers on the front pond at the Nacogdoches ponds Nov 29 were a colorful sight and the fall high counts for there (DW). A female Red-breasted Merganser was on Lake Nacogdoches as a weak cool front moved over Nov 25 (DW). The first Ruddy Ducks were 5 on Lake Pinkston Oct 26 (AT). At least 180 Pied-billed Grebes were on Kurth Lake on the Nov 21 PAS field trip (DB, J Sm et al), as well as 4 Horned Grebes.

A White-winged Dove in Central Hts Nov 26 was the first one there since spring (DW). A remarkable **18** Yellow-billed Cuckoos were found at a webworm infestation in Yellow Dog Co Park Sept 26 (DB, J Sm). The last cuckoos were singles in Lufkin Oct 7 (GH) and Nacogdoches Oct 9 (RP) and 3 in Center Oct 10 (J Sm). The first surge of migrant Ruby-throated Hummingbirds appeared Sept 4 in Nacogdoches (CS) and near Huntington (JC). Peak numbers were in mid Sept, when they swarmed at many feeders, and they remained relatively numerous through Oct 15. Almost all were suddenly gone the next day after an overnight wind shift to the north (m.obs.). Single late stragglers visited Nacogdoches Oct 22 (AB); Oct 23 (JD, TD) and Oct 31 (CS). An immature male **Rufous Hummingbird** showed up in Central Hts Dec 2 (DW), the only report since a one-day wonder in August. The first Common Nighthawk was one over south Lufkin Aug26 (GH), but very few others were seen.

3 Common Gallinules were still at Kurth Lake Oct 29 (DB, GH, J Sm). The shorebird showing this fall was poor due to lack of much habitat – water levels remained high on the large reservoirs even as ephemeral wetlands dried out. **20 American Avocets** at Lake Nacogdoches Oct 11 were noteworthy (Susan Heath fide CS), as was a flock of 75 that repeatedly circled Kurth Lake Oct 29 (DB, J Sm, GH). The only concentration of shorebirds found was at Swede Johnson WMA (Shelby Co) on upper Toledo Bend on Sept 5 (DB, J Sm): 2 Semipalmated Plover; 3 Least and 10 Western sandpipers; **2 Willets**; and 3 Lesser Yellowlegs. 2 Semipalmated Plover were seen here Sept 19 as well as 7 Least and 5 Spotted sandpipers (DB, J Sm). 47 Killdeer on the SFASU soccer field on Nov 11, after a heavy rain overnight, was a good count of migrants (CDF). Very few Upland Sandpipers were detected this fall, but at least 4 passed over Central Hts Sept 9 (MHW) and one at Alazan Bayou Sept 23 was our latest ever by 3 days (DW). A few Least Sandpipers visited Ellen Trout Park this fall, 4 on Sept 8 and 2 on Sept 15 (both GH). **14 Stilt Sandpipers** at Ellen Trout Park Sept 5 and one still there Sept 15 (both GH) were unexpected at this site. 4 flocks (total 145+) of **Franklin's Gulls** passed high over the TX 147 causeway on the howling west winds on Oct 28. On Oct 30 at least 9 flocks (total 510+) came over the causeway (both DW). More tantalizing on both days were huge kettles of hundreds of distant birds at dawn, likely this species. Do they roost on the lake overnight and then depart with first light? A juvenile Bonaparte's Gull over the TX 147 causeway Oct 30 was early (DW). The first Herring Gull was a distant first-cycle at Kurth Lake Nov 21 (DB, J Sm, DW, LW et al; PAS). A Caspian Tern migrating south down the valley in Nacogdoches Sept 10 was the only report this fall (CDF). Very few Black Terns were spotted: 5 over TX 147 on Sept 6 and a late one over the causeway Oct 3 (both DW). A **Common Tern** low over the TX 147 causeway Oct 30 was alone and not with the 135 Forster's tallied that morning (DW).

A flock of 110 American White Pelicans passed over Huntington Sept 25 (JC), but there were few arrivals on area lakes until the end of Oct and later (DB, J Sm, DW). 13 Anhinga were spotted amidst the Broad-winged Hawk flight over Lufkin Oct 2 (eBird). A Neotropic Cormorant was still at Kurth Lake Oct 29 (DB, J Sm). At least 175 Little Blue Herons left the roost at TX 103 at the Attoyac on Sept 22 (DB, J Sm, DW), while an adult at Palo Gaucho on Toledo Bend Oct 18 was the last (J Sm). 8 Tricolored Herons left the roost at TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 22 (DB, J Sm, DW). At least 4000 Cattle Egrets left the Attoyac roost Sept 6, comparable to counts in late August (DB, J Sm), but on Sept 22 numbers had

dropped to 1900 (DW, DB, J Sm). The last White Ibis were 13 headed south over TX 147 causeway on Oct 28 (DW, DB). A juvenile *Plegadis* ibis at the SFASU Ag Farm Sept 7 could not be identified to species, but White-faced is much more likely (DW). No other dark ibis were spotted this fall. 3 **Roseate Spoonbills** were found in Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin Sept 28 (Stine Diamond-Owens) and they were still present on the Oct 2 PAS field trip (DW et al). One bird lingered to Oct 7 (GH). Then none were seen until Oct 15, when a single was present (Stine Diamond-Owens). This was the last report here, but 4 were seen high over the Angelina Co side of the TX 147 bridge Oct 18, seemingly migrants moving out (DW).

At least 250 Black Vultures got up over the valley in Nacogdoches Sept 30 and most drifted southwest like migrants (DW). On Sept 6 an **American Swallow-tailed Kite** circled the base of the TX 147 causeway for 15 minutes before drifting north (DW, RT). The first Northern Harrier was an adult male over Marion Ferry Sept 25 (DW, RT). At least 12 Bald Eagles around the basin above TX 147 on Rayburn on Oct 28 seemed to be “playing” on the howling west winds (DB, DW). The first migrating Broad-winged Hawks seen were 25 high over Nacogdoches Sept 28 (CDF), but few others were spotted in late September in spite of considerable watching (DW). Then, a big flight of 1498 over Lufkin Oct 2 was reported on eBird. The next day, Oct 3, at least 1904 were over the base of the TX 147 causeway (DW, RT). A **Crested Caracara** was seen in north Nacogdoches Nov 13 (Brad Williamson fide CS). It was a good season for Merlin sightings: 2 were dog-fighting past the TX 147 causeway Sept 14 (DW) and then singles were seen at Marion Ferry Sept 25 (DW, RT); Central Hts Sept 26 (DW), the TX 147 causeway Oct 3 (DW, RT); Angelina Co Airport Oct 6 (GH); Marion Ferry Oct 17 (DW et al; PAS) and Nacogdoches Oct 29 (CDF). A Peregrine Falcon passed low over south Lufkin on Oct 14 (GH) and a perched adult was observed in Diboll that same day (RT).

The last Eastern Wood-Pewee was one in Central Hts Oct 26 (DW). The rarest find of the season was a **Say's Phoebe** found and photographed by Anne Tindell at the Alazan Bayou WMA campground on Sept 30. Word went out and the bird was enjoyed by many observers that afternoon. It was still present Oct 1 (AT), but there was no access to the WMA after this so we don't know how long it stayed. There is **only one previous record for our area (March 6-8, 1979)**, though there are several from the strip-mine country north of us. Somewhat late were a Great Crested Flycatcher heard at Marion Ferry Sept 25 (RT) and another seen in Central Hts Sept 28 (DW). The traditional flycatcher roost in north Nacogdoches was checked regularly from August 27-Sept 9, but no great numbers of Eastern Kingbirds ever materialized and a mere 80 birds on Aug 27 was the high count. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher numbers varied from 60 to 95 during this time (CS, DW, LW et al), but on Sept 30 at least 195 came in to roost (DW). 90 Eastern Kingbirds in three flocks passed by the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 6 (DW, RT). A rare-in-fall Philadelphia Vireo was found at Yellow Dog Co Park Sept 26 (DB, J Sm). The first Warbling Vireos were 2 at the TX 147 causeway Sept 6 (DW, RT), while one studied carefully in Central Hts Oct 23 was our latest ever by 9 days (DW). The last Red-eyed Vireo was one in Lufkin Oct 6 (GH). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** appeared early and widely and this definitely seems to be an “invasion year” for this species. The first was a very early one in Center Sept 14 (J Sm); then 2 at Marion Ferry Sept 25 (RT, DW); 1 in Nacogdoches Sept 26 (AB); 1 in Nacogdoches Sept 29 (CDF); 2 in Center Sept 29 (J Sm); 2 in south Nacogdoches Sept 30 (AT); several in the SFA Exp Forest Oct 3 (CS, RT); and several in Nacogdoches Oct 5 (JD, TD). 2 Marsh Wrens were seen at the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 22 (DB, J Sm, DW). Sedge Wrens had returned to the weedy field on North University Drive in Nacogdoches by Nov 11 (LW). 34 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers came through Central Hts in a single flock Sept 4 (DW). The season high count of this conspicuous migrant was 140 at the TX 147 causeway Sept 11 (DB, S Sm). A late migrant came through Central Hts Nov 21 (MHW). It seems that a “good winter” for Golden-crowned Kinglet is shaping up. The first was one in Lufkin Oct 18 (GH) and by late October and early November they were reported widely (m. obs.). The first migrant Brown Thrasher appeared in Central Hts Sept 17 and the first migrant Gray Catbird was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 23 (DW).

Almost across the board sparrows were notably late in appearing and in very low in numbers through the end of November. First dates for some are at the start of the report. A migrant Grasshopper Sparrow in Pecan Park on windy Oct 29 was out-of-place (DW). A family group of Lark Sparrows in Central Hts was last seen Sept 26 and none were found after that (DW). It seems that our local breeders

leave for the winter. 8 Chipping Sparrows at Swede Johnson Rec Area Sept 19 had likely summered locally (DB, J Sm), while the first arriving singles were in Central Hts Oct 16 (DW) and Nacogdoches Oct 22 (AB). Single migrant White-crowned Sparrows were at Sabinetown Nov 5 (DB) and Nacogdoches Nov 9 (CDF). A Henslow's Sparrow in Nacogdoches Nov 3 was a surprise (CDF). Lincoln's Sparrow, typically a common fall migrant, was remarkably scarce. Singles in Nacogdoches Oct 17 (CDF) and Center Oct 30 (J Sm) were among the few seen. A migrant Yellow-breasted Chat skulked around at the Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches Sept 2 (JS). The first definite migrant meadowlark was an Eastern at the TX 147 causeway Oct 18 (DW). 700 Common Grackles straggled through the buttonbush at TX 103 at the Attoyac at dawn on Sept 6 (DW, RT). Clearly our local breeders had bunched up at this roost site! No big push of Baltimore Orioles ever materialized this fall, but the first was one in Central Hts Sept 3 (DW) and a late female was at Palo Gaucho Creek on Toledo Bend Oct 21 (J Sm).

Migrant warblers were few and far between. Northern Waterthrush was much scarcer than usual, but 1 was at the base of the TX 147 causeway Sept 22 (DB, J Sm, DW). Given the overall scarcity of migrant warblers it was a good season for Tennessee Warbler: 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 16 (DW); 2 in Pecan Park Sept 22 (LW); 1 at Yellow Dog Co Park Sept 26 (J Sm); 1 in Central Hts Sept 26-30 (DW); 1 in Pecan Park Oct 2 (RT, CDF); 1 in Central Hts Oct 6 (DW) and a very late bird in Central Hts Nov 5 (DW). 2 Nashville Warblers in Central Hts Sept 10 were the first (DW). A paltry 5 Common Yellowthroats at Alazan Bayou Sept 23 was the season high count (DW). A Hooded Warbler in Sabinetown Oct 22 was the latest ever for the central Pineywoods by 10 days (DB). Single adult male American Redstarts were at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 23 and Central Hts Sept 24 (both DW), while female-plumaged singles visited Nacogdoches Sept 30 (CDF); the base of the TX 147 causeway Oct 3 (DW, RT); Lufkin Oct 6 (GH); and south Nacogdoches Oct 16 (AT). The last Northern Parula was one at Ellen Trout Park Oct 18 (GH). A Blackburnian Warbler was in Pecan Park Sept 22-23 (LW) and a Chestnut-sided was spotted there Sept 23 (CDF). Both of these are scarce in the fall. A **Palm Warbler** was photographed at the SFA Exp Forest fields Oct 23 (RP) and another was seen well in Lufkin Nov 1 (GH). The first migrant Pine Warbler in Central Hts appeared Sept 24 (DW). 3 Yellow-throated Warblers were in Pecan Park Oct 2 (RT) and singles were in Lufkin Oct 3, 5 & 12 (GH). There were only 3 reports of Wilson's Warbler this fall, singles in Central Hts Sept 24 (DW); Lufkin Oct 5 (KBE; great photos) and a rather late one in south Nacogdoches Oct 30 (AT). The only Canada Warblers were one at Marion Ferry Sept 4 (DW) and 2 at Yellow Dog Co Park Sept 26 (DB, J Sm). There were two Western Tanagers found this fall, a female seen well in Center Oct 10 (J Sm) and then one photographed in Lufkin Nov 9 and seen sporadically to at least Nov 24 (GH). This is a very rare western stray to our region, but most sightings have been in the late fall and early winter. The only Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were singles in Lufkin Oct 7 (GH) and Center Oct 8-10 (J Sm). No large numbers of Indigo Buntings were found and the last Painted Bunting was one in Central Hts Sept 26 (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; AB = Aaron Bradley; JC = James Childress; JD & TD = John and Thelma Dalmas; KBE = Katrina Barr Echols; CDF = Charles Dean Fisher; GH = Gary Hunter; m.obs. = many observers; RP = Ryan Phelps; RS = Rick Schaefer; CS = Cliff Shackelford; JS = Julie Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; PAS = Pineywoods Audubon Society; AT = Anne Tindell; RT = Robert Truss; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; LW = Liam Wolff.

Localities in Angelina County: Angelina Co Airport; Diboll; Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Huntington; Lufkin; Marion Ferry.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Lake Nacogdoches; Native Plant Center (in Nacogdoches); Nacogdoches; Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest (= SFA Exp For); SFASU Ag Farm (near Mahl).

Panola County: Yellow Dog County Park.

Localities in Sabine County: Sabinetown.

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

Localities in Shelby County: Center; Lake Pinkston, Swede Johnson Recreation Area.