

Summer Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
June 1 – August 31, 2021
by David E. Wolf

The summer season is our slowest time of year for birding in East Texas. Most of our year-round residents have fledged their young by early June and become less conspicuous. Even most of our summer residents have finished breeding by the end of the month. Typically, “fall migrants”, or at least local breeders wandering around, begin appearing in July and migration picks up a little in August. It is always most noticeable when we have weather events – but this year we really didn’t have any interesting weather to bring them down, nor did we have much habitat to attract shorebirds and other waterbirds. All of this made for a rather dull season overall. Thanks to all who sent their sightings – and keep me posted as fall migration develops (dewolfnac@gmail.com).

The remarkably wet and relatively cool weather of May continued through the first week of June. By then the soil was saturated; river levels were high; and Lake Rayburn was **10.7 feet above pool**, its highest level ever. Parts of coastal Texas had their wettest May on record, including 15.55 inches of rain in Port Arthur and 20.28 inches in Victoria, while Houston recorded nearly 14 inches from May 11-June 3. After that the weather was more typical. Regular rainfall was enough to keep the humidity high and plants thriving, but it was not especially hot until late July. Then we went into a long relatively hot and very dry period through mid-September, not at all conducive for producing early migrants.

First, a few sightings omitted from the Spring Report:

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were present in Diboll in numbers this spring: 18 on March 30; 23 April 10; and 26 May 11 (all GH). An Olive-sided Flycatcher was seen May 12 in Douglass (CW). Two **Fish Crows** were detected in the Chireno area May 20 (AW) and there were several reports from Ebenezer Park and the Dam Overlook on lower Rayburn (both Jasper Co) this spring (eBird). This species seems to be colonizing the Central Pineywoods. Two Scarlet Tanagers visited Sabinetown April 26 (DB) and 100+ Dickcissels were at Alazan Bayou WMA April 25 (RP).

Summer Bird Report:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck continues to increase in our area, with one was at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds) July 10 (RT); another at a farm pond near Huntington July 14 (JC); and on Aug 18 there were 17 ducklings from two broods (very different sizes) and 3 adults at the Nac ponds, for the 2nd Nacogdoches County breeding record (DW). They were also seen regularly in the Diboll area (RT). The first “fall” Blue-winged Teal was one at the SFASU Farm near Mahl Aug 23 (DW). A female Hooded Merganser was at Alazan Bayou May 30 (DW), but no young were seen this summer. An out-of-season male **Ring-necked Duck** was photographed at Pinkston Lake July 25 (AT). A Northern Bobwhite was heard in the Sabine NF (DB). White-winged Doves are now well-established in Center and on July 17 at least 6 were heard from one spot (J Sm). A male Rufous Hummingbird in Nacogdoches August 12 may have been the same bird that visited this yard last fall, but it did not stay around (Tammy Stanaland fide CS).

With lake levels so high shorebird habitat was mostly lacking and very few were found. A drying-up puddle in Central Heights attracted 1 Least and 2 Solitary Sandpipers July 9-11 (DW, RT). The first Spotted Sandpipers were singles on July 18 at Alazan Bayou WMA (AT) and on the Sabine River near North Toledo Bend WMA (DB, J Sm). The first Wood Storks were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA July 11 (RT). By July 17 they had increased to 9 there (AT); the next day there were 11 (DW); and on July 19 there were 16 (AT). Then the puddle dried up and they were gone. 11 out-of-season American White Pelicans were on the Sabine River near North Toledo Bend WMA July 18 (DB, J Sm). A Snowy Egret in San Augustine Co May 31 was probably a late spring migrant (DB, J Sm). DB and J Sm counted the birds leaving the ardeid roost above TX 103 at the Attoyac on Aug 21 and tallied at least 85 readily-recognized adult Little Blue Herons (there were likely many more white immatures that could not be

picked out from the abundant Cattle Egrets); a phenomenal **55 Tricolored Herons**; and approximately 4100 Cattle Egrets, many of them recently-fledged juveniles. Two more Tricolored were on the Sabine River near North Toledo Bend WMA July 18 (DB, J Sm).

At least 5 Ospreys were around Lake Rayburn at TX 147 on July 12 (DW). It is likely that some had recently fledged from nests on the lake. On June 2 a **White-tailed Kite**, very rare and irregular in the Pineywoods, was seen just into Jasper Co (near Scrappin) from the Newton Co line (LW). On July 15 a **Swallow-tailed Kite** was seen near Nedville (FM 1747) in Jasper Co (DW, RT), just east of the known breeding area on upper Steinhagen Res. Summering and presumably breeding Mississippi Kites continue to slowly increase throughout our area, especially in towns like Diboll (6 on June 2; RT), Lufkin (GH), Nacogdoches (SL, CS, DW) and San Augustine (DB, J Sm), but also in country areas like Carrizo Creek (KG, SL) and Central Hts (DW, MHW). A very vocal pair in north Nacogdoches June 13 was likely nesting nearby (CS), as was an adult on the edge of Pecan Park July 12 (RT). The highest count of migrant Mississippi Kites was 43 over the base of the TX 147 causeway as Hurricane Ida moved inland well to the east on Aug 30 (DW). Three barely-fledged Cooper's Hawk played in a rain puddle in Pioneer Park in Nacogdoches July 11 (DW). This is the 3rd year in a row that fledged young have been found at this site. Broad-winged Hawks become quite secretive when nesting, but there were occasional sightings at various sites in late May-early June (DB, J Sm, AT, DW). A barely-fledged American Kestrel was photographed on the SFASU campus (Susie Carney fide DS). This area has hosted a nesting pair for many years. Kestrels were also seen sporadically at other known sites in north Nacogdoches and the northeast Loop in Lufkin (DW). Single Northern Flickers were at the base of the TX 147 causeway July 12 (DW) and on the Sabine River near North Toledo Bend WMA July 18 (DB, J Sm). This species is inconspicuous and uncommon as a breeding resident, but it is widespread.

The first migrant Eastern Wood-Pewee in Central Hts appeared Aug 15 (DW), while the first "Trail's" flycatcher showed up there the next day. The first Least Flycatcher visited Central Hts Aug 21 (DW). A yellow-bellied kingbird at Ellen Trout Park in Lufkin June 6 was thought to be a **Western** (GH) and another **Western Kingbird** was spotted in the open field at the SFA Experimental Forest July 9 (L Wo). These are **the first summer sightings from our area**. Fish Crows continue to expand and consolidate their range in our area, with several sightings in the Diboll/Angelina Co Airport area in late May-early June (GH, RT). On July 18 they were noted along the Sabine River near North Toledo Bend WMA (DB, J Sm) and on Aug 8 at least 20 were found in Diboll (RT). An early migrant Bank Swallow passed southwest along the TX 147 causeway July 12 (DW), while almost all of the hundreds of Cliff Swallows that nest here were gone by that date. The first sizable push of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers in Central Hts was 20 on Aug 28 (DW).

A male **American Goldfinch** in breeding plumage photographed in Center Aug 29 was an out-of-season surprise (J Sm). Chipping Sparrow is not conspicuous as a summer resident in our area, but one was in Sabine Co May 28 (DB, J Sm). Lark Sparrow is more frequent in the more open western part of our region, but one was found all the way to the east in Sabine Co May 28 (DB, J Sm). A migrant Yellow-breasted Chat appeared in Central Hts Aug 21 and stayed several days (DW). A flock of 15 Orchard Orioles at the TX 147 causeway July 12 was the season high count (DW); this common breeding species departs very early. A Louisiana Waterthrush was heard singing in the Norwood area May 31 (DB, J Sm), while singles in Carrizo Creek July 5, Aug 5 and Aug 11 were either local birds wandering around or the first "fall" migrants (SL). The first Black-and-white Warbler was one in Central Hts July 12 (MHW, DW). Two pairs of Prothonotary Warblers were feeding 10 young in two nest boxes at Antioch the last days of May (SO). Swainson's Warbler is more numerous in the eastern part of our area, with multiple singing birds located in Shelby (J Sm) and Sabine (DB, J Sm) Cos. and another one singing all day in Antioch May 30-June 1 (SO). Kentucky Warbler seems to be holding up in the eastern part of our area, with numerous singing males in Sabine and Shelby Cos. in late May and early June (DB, SO, J Sm). The first fall migrant Yellow Warbler was one at Pinkston Lake Aug 6 (AT). Migrant Prairie Warblers were a male at Alazan Bayou WMA July 22 (RT) and a juvenile at the TX 147 causeway Aug 30 (DW). The first migrant Yellow-throated Warbler in Central Heights appeared Aug 28 (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; JC = James Childress; KG = Kathy Griffin; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; SO = Sue Orwig; RP = Ryan Phelps; DS = Dennis Scheef; CS = Cliff Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; AT = Anne Tindell; RT = Robert Truss; AW = Ashley Wahlberg; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; LW = Liam Wolff.

Angelina County: Diboll, Huntington, Lufkin

Jasper County: Ebenezer Park (on lower Lake Rayburn); Rayburn Dam Overlook; Nedville; Steinhagen Reservoir.

Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA, Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Chireno; Douglass; Nacogdoches (town); Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin State University (= SFASU); Stephen F. Austin SU Farm near Mahl (= SFASU Farm).

Sabine County: Sabinetown; Sabine NF.

San Augustine County: Norwood area; San Augustine (town); TX 103 at the Attoyac; TX 147 causeway.

Shelby County: Antioch; Center; North Toledo Bend WMA; Pinkston Lake.