

Fall Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
September 1 – November 30, 2022
Compiled by David E. Wolf

Fall can be our most dynamic season, but this year it certainly was not. Our summer residents quietly disappeared and migrants just trickled through in low variety and numbers. Without significant storm activity we just don't see many fall migrants. By late October many of our winter residents were appearing, but most were still in low numbers at the end of November.

To set the stage for this fall migration: The entire months of June and July were abnormally hot and dry as we suffered under a persistent high-pressure dome. The weather finally shifted in mid-August, bringing much-needed rainshowers, but they were scattered and did little to replenish soil moisture. Lake levels continued to drop. This pattern persisted through early September, but then began a succession of weak cool fronts. They kept temperatures reasonably pleasant and skies clear, but did not produce significant rainfall – or pushes of birds. As Lake Rayburn continued to drop, extensive flats were exposed at the TX 147 causeway and elsewhere. A major cool front moved through on October 17 and some areas recorded a remarkably early freeze for a few hours the night of Oct 19-20. This is almost a month earlier than our average first-freeze date. Mid to late-November brought a succession of weak fronts and prolonged damp and chilly weather, including a widespread light freeze Nov 12-13.

Bird Report:

31 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Oct 12 were late and the biggest flock ever seen locally (DW); they were gone after this. The only report of southbound geese was a flock of 42 Snows high overhead south of Kurth Lake on Nov 19 (DB, GH). The first movement of waterfowl reported came with a fast-moving front on Oct 13, with 60 Blue-winged Teal, 4 Northern Shoveler, 6 Gadwall, 4 American Wigeon, 1 Northern Pintail and 2 Green-winged Teal on the TX 147 flats on Lake Rayburn (DW). More waterfowl were present here on Oct 17 after another front, including 130 Blue-winged Teal, 20 Gadwall, 3 American Wigeon, 4 Northern Pintail, 150 Green-winged Teal, 1 Redhead and 2 Ring-necked Ducks (DW). 11 Northern Pintail were here the next day, the season high count (DW, DB). A late Blue-winged Teal was at the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Nov 25 (DW, RT). One Greater Scaup was amidst other waterfowl at the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Nov 12 (DW). 6 Buffleheads at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Nov 15 were the first, as were 16 Hooded Mergansers (DW). A female Common Goldeneye at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Nov 30 was the first report of this hardy duck this winter (DW). The first Ruddy Ducks were 2 at Ellen Trout Park Oct 17 (GH). The first Horned Grebe was one on Kurth Lake Nov 7 (DB, GH).

19 Eurasian Collared-Doves in a small feedlot in Central Heights Sept 22 seemed to be flocking before disappearing for the winter (DW). We still have much to learn about the movements of this species in our area. The last Yellow-billed Cuckoo was one in Lufkin Oct 1 (GH). 70 Chimney Swifts low over TX 147 on Rayburn on chilly Oct 18 was a high count for so late in the season (DW, DB). Ruby-throated Hummingbird numbers peaked in mid-September, as expected (m.obs.). A **Rufous Hummingbird** in Center Sept 8 was a one-day wonder and yard first for the observer (J Sm). Another appeared in Huntington Nov 13 and stayed for a couple more days (JC). Yet another turned up in Lufkin about this time and stayed (Katrina Barr-Echols). Very few Common Nighthawks were seen, but one was over north Nacogdoches Sept 4 (CS, DW); 2 were over south Lufkin Sept 5 (GH); and the last were 2 near Huntington Oct 8 (AW).

A **Common Gallinule** at North Toledo Bend WMA Sept 5 may have been a first for Shelby County (DB, J Sm, FL, EL). By early Oct there were extensive mudflats exposed at the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn and **American Avocets** were seen there on a number of occasions: 3 on Oct 8; 13 on Oct 13; 3 on Oct 17; and one on Nov 12 (all DW). 2 **Black-bellied Plover** were on the TX 147 flats on Rayburn Oct 13 and one was still there Oct 17 (both DW). Few Upland Sandpipers were noted, but 7 were over north Nacogdoches at dusk on Sept 4 (CS, DW); one was at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 11 (DW); and at

least one was heard over Central Hts Sept 12 (MHW). An American Woodcock in s. Nacogdoches Co Oct 8 was early for a migrant (Jeff Reid fide CS). Perhaps it had summered locally? Flocks of Franklin's Gulls were spotted over the TX 147 causeway on four occasions; most were seen as stormy cool fronts cleared or on north winds the next day (all DW). The first were 24 on Oct 8, somewhat early. After overnight storms at least 2050 were seen at dawn on Oct 13 (mostly very high up) and 1020 came over this site Oct 17 after overnight storms. The last were 350 on Oct 18 (DW, DB). The only Caspian Tern reported was one at the TX 147 causeway Sept 26 (DW). A single late **Least Tern** was spotted amidst a flight of 275 Forster's Terns over the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn on Oct 8 (DW), while 535+ Forster's Terns tallied there Oct 18 was the season high count (DW, DB).

The first Common Loon was one on Toledo Bend Reservoir at Sabinetown Nov 10 (DB). After a strong showing in late summer more Wood Storks were seen into the fall, including 79 over Marion Ferry on the Sept 17 PAS field trip (DW et al; PAS); 12 over TX 21 at the Angelina River (Nacogdoches Co) on Sept 21 (CW); and 35 over the Shirley Creek area on Rayburn Sept 26 (DW). An adult Neotropic Cormorant at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds Nov 15 did not stay around (DW). The last Snowy Egret was one at the TX 147 causeway Oct 17 (DW). A juvenile Tricolored Heron in Ellen Trout Park still present for the Oct 15 field trip (DB et al; PAS) was last seen Oct 17 (GH). Another was at the TX 147 flats on Rayburn Oct 17 (DW). A migrant flock of 150 Cattle Egrets stopped in Central Hts Sept 30 (DW). A juvenile **night-heron** at Ellen Trout Park Oct 11 was likely a **Black-crowned** (GH), not often found in our area. An adult White-faced Ibis at Ellen Trout Park Oct 13-17 allowed a close approach for photos, including on the Oct 15 field trip (DW, DB, GH et al; PAS field trip). *Plegadis sp?* that could not be identified to species were a flock of 7 headed south low over Nacogdoches on Sept 25 (DW); 6 juveniles at TX 147 flats Oct 17 and 4 still there the next day 18 (DW, DB); and a juvenile at the VFW Pond in Lufkin Oct 18 (GH). 6 Roseate Spoonbills over Marion Ferry on the Sept 17 field trip were the only report of this post-breeding wanderer (DW et al; PAS).

2 Swallow-tailed Kites near North Toledo Bend WMA Sept 5 were exciting and a little north of their expected range (DB, J Sm, FL, EL). The first Northern Harrier was one low over TX 103 at the Attoyac Sept 26 (DW). 3 late Broad-winged Hawks were over the base of the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Oct 18 (DW, DB). No large flights were ever detected this season in spite of considerable watching. The first Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were singles in Lufkin Oct 1 (GH) and Nacogdoches Oct 2 (DW). A Northern Flicker in ne. Cherokee Co Sept 4 was unexpected there at this season, but was likely a "local" bird (CS). The first definite southbound migrant was one over Nacogdoches Sept 25 (DW), while the season high count was 26 that passed the base of the TX 147 causeway Oct 8, the day after a weak front (DW). **Two Crested Caracaras** were in a field not far east of Nacogdoches on Sept 26 (Tatiana Suarez Joaqui fide AW; ph..) and an adult flew low over Central Hts Nov 26 (DW) (yea! I finally got one in Nacogdoches Co). This species is slowly colonizing our area. It was a good season for Merlins, with singles over Central Hts Sept 27 (DW); TX 147 on Rayburn Oct 13 (DW); at Kurth Lake on the Nov 19 field trip (PAS; DB, DW et al); and one at Sabinetown Nov 20 (DB). There were no reports of Peregrine Falcon.

An Olive-sided Flycatcher in Central Hts Oct 2 was the latest record ever for the Pineywoods (DW). A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher visited Central Hts Sept 4 (DW). An Acadian Flycatcher was still calling and responsive to playback at Marion Ferry on the Sept 17 field trip (DW et al; PAS). An Alder Flycatcher in Central Hts Sept 10 responded strongly to playback by coming very close and calling repeatedly (DW). The first migrant or wandering Eastern Phoebe visited Central Hts Sept 4 (DW). The last Great Crested Flycatcher was a somewhat late one in the SFA Exp Forest Oct 2 (CS, JS). A late **Myiarchus flycatcher** in Lufkin on Oct 29 may have been something other than a Great Crested (GH). The last Eastern Kingbird was one in Lufkin Oct 3 (GH). The roost in north Nacogdoches did not attract any numbers of kingbirds this year, a disappointment, and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher numbers at this roost dropped sharply to almost none by early September (CS, DW). A **Loggerhead Shrike** in Central Hts Sept 10 had not been around and was presumably a migrant; it was never seen again (DW). Remarkably, another one was at Alazan Bayou WMA the next day (Sept 11); this was the first that I've seen here in several years and it too did not stay around (DW). Is this declining species an early migrant? Another

showed up at a different site in Central Hts Nov 26 and was seen sporadically thereafter (DW). At least some of the 20+ distant swallows over Kurth Lake on the Nov 19 field trip were Cave (DW et al; PAS). Cedar Waxwings were on the move early this season, with numerous sightings in mid-Nov (m.obs.). There were two reports of Red-breasted Nuthatch, a noisy one in the SFA Exp Forest Oct 2 (CS, JS) and one near Huntington Oct 22 (JC), but no more were reported. The first Golden-crowned Kinglets of a good flight were 2 in Central Hts Oct 19 (DW). By the end of the season they were widespread, at times outnumbering Ruby-crowned (m.obs.). The first Ruby-crowned Kinglets were seen Sept 26, 2 in Lufkin (GH) and one at the TX 147 causeway (DW). 20 in a small area at the TX 147 causeway Nov 12 was a good push of migrants (DW). The only sizable pushes of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were 51 in Central Hts Sept 7 and 50 at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 11 (both DW). The first Winter Wren was one in far ne. Cherokee County Oct 19 (CS) and the first Sedge Wren was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 4 (DW). An out-of-habitat migrant Marsh Wren was photographed on the SFASU campus Sept 27 (Marlys Baldwin fide CS). The first American Pipits were 13 at the TX 147 flats Oct 18 (DW, DB) and one at TX 103 at the Angelina the same day (GH).

The first American Goldfinch was one over Central Hts Nov 11 (MHW). The only Clay-colored Sparrows found were singles in Central Hts Oct 7 and Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 14 (both DW). Single Grasshopper Sparrows were detected at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 21 (DW) and near Huntington Oct 22 (JC). A **Nelson's Sparrow** at the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Oct 13-17 (DW; ph.) was our first sighting of this rarely-detected migrant since 2002. Most of our previous fall records have been from this site in mid-October when lake levels are low and isolated clumps of marsh grass grow up – like this year. The first White-crowned Sparrows were 3 at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 21 (DW) and the first White-throated Sparrows were 2 in Central Hts Oct 19 (DW) and one in Nacogdoches Oct 20 (CS). The first Lincoln's Sparrows were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 4, while the season high count was 25 there Oct 21 (both DW). The first Swamp Sparrow was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 4, a bit early. At least 14 were there on Oct 14 and on Oct 21 it was the commonest migrant there, with at least 55 counted (DW). A Western Meadowlark was identified on the TX 147 flats on Rayburn Oct 13 and there may have been more in the flock of 8 meadowlarks that were present. At least 2 were here Oct 17 (both DW).

Migrant warblers were few and far-between this fall. An Ovenbird was at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 23 (DW). The only Tennessee Warblers were singles at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 24 (DW) and in Lufkin Oct 18 (GH). Nashville is usually one of our commonest fall warblers, but few were seen this season. The first was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 11 (DW) and the last was a very late one in Sabinetown Nov 20 (DB). The only Mourning Warbler found was one at Ellen Trout Park Sept 4 (GH). The season high counts of Common Yellowthroat were a paltry 7 at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 28 and 6 at the TX 147 causeway Oct 8 (both DW). The only Magnolia Warbler was one in Lufkin Oct 1 (GH). A bright "**eastern**" **Palm Warbler** was in the buttonbushes at the base of the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Nov 25 (RT, DW); this race is rare anywhere in Texas. The last Yellow-throated Warbler was one in Lufkin Oct 6 (GH). The first Yellow-rumped Warblers were 3 in Pecan Park Oct 9 (DW). The best finds of the season were **two Townsend's Warblers, the first records ever for the entire Pineywoods region.** Both were brightly marked individuals that were photographed for great documentation of these rare sightings! The first was at the old Jasper Fish Hatchery (Jasper Co) on Sept 8 (Gabrielle Hargrove; ph.). The second one visited Sabinetown on Toledo Bend Reservoir on Oct 11 (DB; ph.). Very few Black-throated Green Warblers, typically one of the most frequent fall warblers, were seen this season (m.obs.). The only Canada Warbler was one at Alazan Bayou WMA Sept 23 (DW). Among the few Dickcissel recorded this fall were 12 at Ellen Trout Park Sept 4 (GH) and a somewhat late one at Alazan Bayou WMA Oct 21 (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; JC = James Childress; GH = Gary Hunter; FL, EL = Fred & Elke Lyons; CS, JS = Cliff & Julie Shackelford; J Sm = John Smelser; AW = Ashley Wahlberg; RT = Robert Truss; CW = Carol Wells; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Localities in Angelina County: Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Marion Ferry on upper Lake Rayburn.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights; Nacogdoches sewage ponds; Nacogdoches; Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Shirley Creek on Lake Rayburn; Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest.

Localities in Sabine County: Sabinetown; Toledo Bend Reservoir.

Localities in San Augustine County: TX 103 at the Attoyac Bayou; TX 147 causeway on Lake Rayburn.

Localities in Shelby County: Center; North Toledo Bend WMA.