

**Spring 2022 Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
(March 1-May 31, 2022)
by David E. Wolf**

This was the duller spring migration in a long time and many days produced very few migrants, even after rain and frontal passages. In spite of this almost all of the regular migrants were found at least once by someone and of course in a season as complex as spring there were some notable movements detected. A summary of the best days that I picked out from the reports received follows.

The best days:

The first noteworthy fallout of migrants came on **March 22** after severe storms with tornados and heavy rains overnight. Flooded fields at the SFASU Ag Farm near Mahl attracted 140+ Blue-winged Teal while at least 235 American Golden-Plover swirled over the fields in multiple flocks and then left, resuming their northward journey. Shortly thereafter 6 species of migrant shorebirds were found at one flooded puddle in a pasture in Central Hts: 3 Upland, 1 Least, 18 Pectoral and 1 Solitary sandpiper and 1 Lesser and 6 Greater yellowlegs. Migrant songbirds were lacking in this fallout (DW).

[In spite of the passage of regular cool fronts, some with considerable storm and rain activity, no significant fallouts of migrants were found in late March and April].

On **May 1**, after locally heavy rains and a weak frontal passage overnight, Gary Hunter had a fallout of a wide variety of migrants in Lufkin, including 1 Olive-sided Flycatcher (only report this spring), 1 Veery (always a good find) and 15 species of warblers, the scarcest among them an Ovenbird and 3 Golden-winged, one Cerulean and one Canada. Gray Catbird was the dominant migrant, with 20+ seen in one small area. He also spotted many birds racing north overhead at treetop level. I observed the same phenomenon in Nacogdoches that morning, but nothing seemed to stop and about all that I could be sure of were 32 Eastern Kingbirds, 33 Baltimore Orioles and 6 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. At least 50 other migrants of varying smaller sizes were noted in less than an hour. Apparently these birds had been put down somewhere by the storms, but were in a big hurry to get going north again!

May 6 was the best day for migrants for David Bell in Sabinetown, as 7 species of warblers came through his yard, including a rare Blackpoll and a high count of 6 Chestnut-sided, plus he tallied 4 Swainson's Thrushes and small numbers of commoner migrants. This date also brought the birders out in force in Pecan Park, where they managed to dig out small numbers of 13 species of warblers, including a Blue-winged and 2 Golden-winged (SL, DS, CS, JS, RT, DW). After this visible migration on the ground abruptly shut down as prolonged hot and dry weather moved into the region from the southwest. Only a very few more passerine migrants were seen after this. **But....read on.**

For your compiler (DW) **May 22 & 25** unexpectedly proved to be the most exciting days of the spring and I'm going to write about them in some detail. The weather finally changed on **May 22 with pre-dawn thunderstorms and rain** associated with a slow-moving cool front. I followed the rain to the TX 147 causeway across Lake Rayburn in hope of adding Black Tern to my local year list, arriving at 7:15 a.m. and almost immediately spotting a distant swirling flock of birds. I back-tracked to check them out and soon realized that they were shorebirds. Thus began an incredible **fallout of shorebirds** in which I found **16 species** and was able to photograph most of them. Many were species rarely recorded anywhere in the Pineywoods in the spring. Highlights were 1 **American Avocet** (only our 6th local spring record and the latest ever for the Pineywoods by 9 days); 1 Black-bellied Plover in glorious breeding plumage; 2 Semipalmated Plover (latest local spring record by 2 days); 1 **Whimbrel** (only our 6th local record (5th for spring) and latest ever for the Pineywoods by 2 days); **18 Ruddy Turnstones** (only our 4th spring record, the first since 1983 and a very high count for anywhere inland in Texas); 7 Sanderlings; 35+ Dunlin; 150-200 White-rumped Sandpipers; 1 **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (always rare in the spring and the latest spring date for the Pineywoods by one day); 35+ Semipalmated Sandpipers; **2 Short-billed Dowitchers** (only our 3rd local spring record and 5th for the Pineywoods); 2 Willets; and insignificant numbers (1-3) of Stilt, Least, Western and Spotted sandpipers. By the time the rain had completely

stopped at 10:30 a.m. most of the birds had moved on. Notably lacking were those species that favor flooded pastures and muddy pond margins, normally our most frequently-seen spring shorebirds – Killdeer, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Pectoral and Solitary sandpipers and Wilson's Phalarope. And yes, I saw Black Terns, a total of 115 in five flocks migrating up the main channel of the lake.

On **May 25 there were again pre-dawn storms and rain** so I returned to the TX 147 causeway to see if it would produce. David Bell and John Smelser met me there at 7:30 a.m. and we ended up spending the entire morning studying **11 species of shorebirds** in the scopes, often at very close range as they scuttled around just below us along the shoreline and slopes of the causeway. There were fewer species and individuals than the May 22 fallout, but we noted 1 **Whimbrel** (flew right over us quite low and kept going); **2 Ruddy Turnstones** (we saw them take off and continue north across the lake); 8 Sanderlings (in a variety of confusing plumages); 1 Dunlin; at least 1 and maybe 3 late Baird's Sandpipers; and 3 Least, 135+ White-rumped, 1 Pectoral, 20 Semipalmated, 4 Western and 1 Spotted sandpiper. More amazing was the **Black Tern** flight up the lake, with a new flock appearing every 15 minutes or less until we had carefully counted at least **979 individuals!** Several hundred more that appeared from our right flank may have been additional birds that crossed near the base of the causeway, but we couldn't be sure and didn't count them. (Try as we might we couldn't reach 1000 for sure and by noon the flight seemed to be over). All were in their stunning breeding plumage. Most were in flocks of 10-50, but as the wind abruptly shifted to the northwest a huge stream of 381 birds appeared. Amidst them was a rare **Least Tern** (J Sm, DB), while 6 small flocks totaling 39 **Franklin's Gulls** came over during the same period, our latest local record for the gull by 6 days.

[**Note:** given the detail in the above accounts I have not included these sightings in the main report].

Some first arrival dates:

Chimney Swift – 6 in Center March 20 (J Sm).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – single males in Central Hts March 24 (MHW), south Nacogdoches March 26 (AT) and north Nacogdoches March 28 (CS). **All were 10 or more days later than usual.**

Chuck-will's-widow – heard April 15 in Central Hts (MHW)

Mississippi Kite – 1 over Nacogdoches April 16 (DW).

Broad-winged Hawk- 1 at Alazan Bayou WMA on the March 27 field trip (DW et al; PAS).

Great Crested Flycatcher – 1 in Sabinetown April 5 (DB).

Eastern Kingbird – seen on the Neches River NWR field trip April 2 (CS, JS et al; PAS).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – 2 at the SFASU Ag Farm March 22 (DW) and 1 in Nacogdoches

March 27 (LW).

Eastern Wood-Pewee – seen on the Dorr Creek Road April 20 (CS, James Childress).

White-eyed Vireo – 1 in Central Hts March 5 (DW).

Yellow-throated Vireo – 1 in Central Hts March 21 (DW, MHW).

Red-eyed Vireo – 1 in south Nacogdoches March 30 (AT).

Barn Swallow – 1 on Feb 27 at TX 147 causeway (DW) and 1 in Lufkin Feb 28 (GH).

Cliff Swallow – 25 in Sabine Co on March 19 (J Sm).

Wood Thrush – 1 on April 5 in south Nacogdoches (AT).

Yellow-breasted Chat – 1 migrant in Nacogdoches April 16 (CS).

Orchard Oriole – 1 at start of the St's Rest road April 7 (DW).

Louisiana Waterthrush – singles March 24 in Carrizo Creek (SL); and March 27 on the Dorr Creek road (LW).

Swainson's Warbler – 1 in the SFA Exp Forest April 16 (CS)

Prothonotary Warbler – 1 at Lake Naconiche March 31 (AT).

Kentucky Warbler – 1 in SFA Exp Forest April 11 (CS).

Hooded Warbler – March 27 in SFA Experimental Forest (CS) and Dorr Creek road (LW);
March 28 in south Nacogdoches (AT).

Yellow-throated Warbler – March 20 on Toledo Bend Reservoir (Sabine Co); DB, J Sm.

Northern Parula – 1 on the Dorr Creek road March 6 (DW).

Summer Tanager – single singing males on April 2 on the Dorr Creek road (DW) and the Neches River NWR field trip (CS et al; PAS).

Blue Grosbeak -1 in Huntington April 10 (JC).

Indigo Bunting – 1 in Pecan Park March 29 (AT) and 2 on the Dorr Creek road April 2 (DW).

Painted Bunting–1 in Bullard (Cherokee Co) April 16 (LaW) and 2 in Central Hts April 21 (DW).

Dickcissel – 3 in Central Hts April 23 (DW).

Main report:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck sightings have slowly increased in Nacogdoches in recent years and this spring 4 were on the soccer fields in south Nacogdoches May 3 (DW); a pair was seen in flight over NW Loop 224 on May 9 (CS); and a pair in flight was seen near the Nacogdoches sewage ponds May 17 (DW). A flock of 9 **Canada Geese** was seen on FM 1878 east of Nacogdoches April 3 (SL) and 9 flew low over North Loop 224 in Nacogdoches April 18 (DW). Could these have been the same birds? Presumably they are from the feral population that is rapidly expanding in East Texas. The only reports of migrating geese were 10-15 Snow over Nacogdoches March 3 (LW) and goose sp? heard over Melrose the same day (RT). 140+ Blue-winged Teal were in the flooded fields at the SFASU Ag Farm March 22 after severe storms overnight. The **hybrid Redhead X Ring-necked Duck** present at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds since January 1 was last seen March 15 (DW). Late migrant or wandering Hooded Mergansers frequented Alazan Bayou WMA until the small ponds dried-up, but there was no evidence of breeding this year. 14 were there March 22 after severe storms overnight (DW) and then there were 5 females March 27 (DW); one female April 4-5 (DW); 5 (including several immature males) April 8 (AT); and 3 (one adult male) April 14 (DW).

White-winged Dove continues to increase in the region. They appeared back at a regular site in Center in late March, the first here since last fall (J Sm). One that wintered in Central Hts was last seen April 13 (DW, MHW), another was seen in south Nacogdoches April 16 (DW). Noteworthy were one at a feeder in north Nacogdoches May 8 (CS, JS) and 2 at a feeder not far away on May 25 (RS). A Black-billed Cuckoo in south Lufkin May 10 was a good find and the only report this spring (GH). The first Common Nighthawk was one over Center April 28 (J Sm) and the season high count was a mere 16 over south Lufkin May 17 (GH). Can anyone else remember the good ole days when flocks of many dozens regularly passed overhead? The spring status of **Sandhill Crane** in East Texas has changed dramatically over the last decade and it now seems clear that substantial numbers migrate north up a narrow corridor on the eastern side of the region in a tight window from March 2-18. Several observers were lucky enough to see and hear flocks of these magnificent birds this spring. 45 over northeast Nacogdoches March 2 provided the first spring record for the county (RP), while **295** over Center March 4 was the largest flock ever reported in the Pineywoods (J Sm). Ron Randle from TP & W also noted migrating cranes, 30 near Center March 4 and three flocks with ca 120-150 total near Hemphill “at around the same time”.

[**Note:** the following shorebird sightings were in addition to those from the May 22 & 25 fallouts discussed in detail at the start of this report]. After severe storms overnight at least **235 American Golden-Plover** in multiple flocks swirled around the SFASU Ag Farm on March 22, but only a few came down into the fields (DW). The only other reports of golden-plover were 8 in Central Hts (DW) and 7 at the SFASU Farm (LW) on March 28 and 5 in Central Hts April 8 (DW). A Semipalmated Plover stopped at a small puddle in Central Hts after pre-dawn storms May 3 (DW). Three Upland Sandpipers in Central Hts March 22 were somewhat early (DW). The only numbers of this species were a flock of 16 over Central Hts April 6 and 30 in a field in Central Hts April 8 (both DW). The first White-rumped Sandpipers were 2 at a puddle in Central Hts May 13 (DW). Very few Pectoral Sandpipers were found this spring and a paltry 18 in flooded fields in Central Hts and the SFASU Farm on March 22 was the

season high count (DW). The first Lesser Yellowlegs was one in Central Hts March 22 while 11 in Central Hts after pre-dawn storm May 3 was a low “high count” (DW). The highest counts of Greater Yellowlegs were 19 near Shelbyville March 13 (DB, J Sm), 6 at the SFASU Farm March 22 (DW); and 11 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 8 (AT). The first Solitary Sandpiper was one in Central Hts March 22 (DW). 4 Wilson’s Phalaropes at a puddle in Central Hts after the pre-dawn storm May 3 were the only ones found this spring (DW).

4 Common Loons migrating together over Center on April 7 surprised the observer and was a great addition to his yard list (J Sm). The only American Bittern sightings were singles, perhaps the same bird, flushed from the swamp on the Dorr Creek road April 2 & 15 (DW). A single Cattle Egret in Central Hts March 26 was an early first (DW). The first White Ibis were flocks of 70 over Nacogdoches (DW) and 45 over Center (J Sm) on April 16. A rare **White-faced Ibis** flew north over Nacogdoches April 30 (LW). Ospreys appeared to be incubating on 2 nests at Lake Naconiche on March 31, but one was blown down by storms a few days later (AT). The only Northern Harriers were a male over the SFASU Farm March 7 and a female over Nacogdoches April 16 (both DW). A very vocal Sharp-shinned Hawk in the SFA Exp Forest April 9 was likely on a breeding territory (CS); breeding has been confirmed here in the past. The season high count on migrating Mississippi Kites was 49 over Pecan Park April 23 (DW). Singles seen here and there in Nacogdoches in late April and May were likely breeding birds from the expanding population here (DW). The first Broad-winged Hawk was one over Alazan Bayou WMA on the March 27 field trip (DW et al; PAS). No large flights of Broad-winged Hawk were ever detected this spring. The only **Merlin** was one at the SFASU Ag Farm on the early date of March 7 (DW) and no Peregrine Falcons were spotted this spring.

The only Olive-sided Flycatcher was one in Morris Frank Park in Lufkin in the May 1 fallout (GH). Single Willow/Alder flycatcher sp? were in the Pecan Park area May 5-6, but neither would call or sing to confirm their identity (DW, CS et al). A Least Flycatcher in Pecan Park May 17 (DW) was the only sighting of this usually fairly common migrant. No Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were found at all and in general migrant *Empidonax* were remarkably lacking. 32 Eastern Kingbirds racing north over Pecan Park May 1 was the season high count (DW). The first Warbling Vireos were 2 at Alazan Bayou WMA April 14 (DW) and the first Philadelphia Vireo was one in Center April 27 (J Sm). As expected, a few Blue-headed Vireos were spotted in the early May movements (GH, DW et al). **Fish Crow** continues to expand its range locally and 4-5 were heard in Nacogdoches April 4 (LW) and one was heard in north Nacogdoches May 30 (CS). 5 Cave Swallows were back at a breeding site on the SFASU campus in Nacogdoches March 4 (LW). After the widespread winter flight Red-breasted Nuthatches stayed late, with singles near Mahl April 27 (BB), in Nacogdoches April 30 (LW) and in south Nacogdoches on the very late date of May 15 (AT). The first migrant Gray Catbird was one in Pecan Park April 13 (AT), while the season high count was 20 in south Lufkin on the May 1 fallout (GH). Two Veery were photographed in south Lufkin April 28 and one was seen there during the May 1 fallout (GH). Single Gray-cheeked Thrushes on the Lanana Creek Trail in Nacogdoches May 3 & 6 were the only ones (DW). The first Swainson’s Thrush was one in Nacogdoches April 13 (DW), while 4 in Sabinetown in the May 6 fallout was a good count (DB). The last Hermit Thrush was one in Nacogdoches April 4 (DW).

Although very few Pine Siskin ever appeared this winter 5 were still in Nacogdoches April 18 (RS). None were reported after this. An Eastern Towhee visited Central Hts April 13 (DW). A blotchy **Clay-colored Sparrow** attracted to birdseed in Central Hts April 18-30 had molted into fresh plumage by the time it left (MHW, DW). The last Dark-eyed Juncos were 2 in Central Hts March 20 (MHW). A migrant White-crowned Sparrow visited south Lufkin April 19 (GH) and 4 Vesper Sparrows were still at Alazan Bayou March 22 (DW). The only **Bobolink** was a single singing male at Alazan Bayou WMA May 7 (DW). The first Baltimore Orioles were several in Huntington April 18 (JC) and one in San Augustine Park April 19 (J Sm). The high count was 33 tallied as they raced north over the treetops in Pecan Park on May 1 (DW). 3 male Brown-headed Cowbirds in Central Hts March 7 may have been spring arrivals as this species was remarkably lacking all winter (DW). Numbers increased thereafter. Much remains to be learned about local movements of this species, though it’s hard to think of them as a

migrant! The first Great-tailed Grackle back in Nacogdoches was a male on March 15 (DW). Once again there were no reports all winter and either they leave for the season or we are failing to detect them.

31 species of warblers were found by area observers this spring, with Mourning and Wilson's warblers the only regulars missed. **This sounds great, but it was not!** Migrants were relatively few and far between, there were no really sizable "fallouts", and many days went by with none found. Apparently most passed right over us without stopping. The only Ovenbirds were singles in south Lufkin April 28 and May 1 (GH). A singing **Worm-eating Warbler** at the start of the Dorr Creek Road April 20 (CS, JC) was re-located the next morning (DW) and singing males were also found at different sites in the SFA Exp Forest April 30 and May 4 (CS). None were located after this and it is unclear whether or not any of these birds stayed around and possibly bred. Three Golden-winged Warblers in the May 1 fallout in Lufkin (GH) and two in Pecan Park May 6 (DW et al) were the only ones. The only Blue-winged Warblers were singles in south Nacogdoches (AT) and Pecan Park (DW) on April 13 (DW) and a somewhat late one in Pecan Park May 6 (JS, DW et al). A female Black-and-White Warbler was observed gathering nesting material at the Neches River NWR on the April 2 field trip (CS, JS et al; PAS). The local breeders begin early! The first Tennessee Warbler was one in Pecan Park April 13 (AT), but the great numbers that we've come to expect never appeared. Male Cerulean Warblers were found twice, one in Lufkin May 1 (GH) and one in Nacogdoches May 3 (DW). 6 silent Northern Parulas at North Toledo Bend WMA March 13 were likely migrants (DB, J Sm). A pair of Northern Parulas was feeding a dull stub-tailed juvenal just out of the nest at the end of the Dorr Creek road May 14 (DW). A Blackburnian Warbler in Pecan Park April 21 and a Chestnut-sided there on April 23 were a bit early (DW), while 6 Chestnut-sided in Sabinetown May 6 was a high count for that locality. Male **Blackpoll Warblers** were seen in both south Lufkin (GH) and Sabinetown (DB) on May 6. A **Palm Warbler**, very rare in spring anywhere in the Pineywoods, was photographed near Center on April 9 (J Sm). 60 Yellow-rumped Warblers on the Dorr Creek road April 2 was the season high count (DW). The first Black-throated Green Warblers were 3 near Alazan Bayou WMA March 27 (AW); 1 in south Nacogdoches March 30 (AT); and 2 in Nacogdoches April 2 (RS). Single Canada Warblers were seen in Lufkin May 1 (GH), the SFA Exp Forest May 13 (CS) and Nacogdoches May 16 (CS, JS). The commoner migrant warblers, including Black-and-white, Nashville, Magnolia, Bay-breasted and Yellow warblers, Common Yellowthroat and American Redstart, were found widely but only in very low numbers.

Scarlet Tanagers made a decent showing, with a male near Alazan community April 18 (KB); 5 sightings in south Lufkin from April 15-May 1 (GH); and a male in Nacogdoches May 2 (DW). The first Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were singles at feeders in Douglass April 16 (CW), Central Hts April 19 (MHW) and Cushing April 20 (DS). Indigo Buntings appeared widely in late April, but the numbers were not impressive and the highest count reported was 20 (half males) in Central Hts April 27 (MHW, DW). The first Dickcissels were 3 in Central Hts April 23 (DW), but no numbers were reported anywhere and apparently few remained to attempt breeding.

Observers: DB = David Bell; KB = Ken Braddock; BB = Brent Burt; JC = James Childress; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; RP = Ryan Phelps; RS = Rick Schaefer; CS = Cliff Shackelford; Sm = John Smelser; AT = Anne Tindell; RT = Robert Truss; AW = Ashley Wahlberg; CW = Carol Wells; La W = Laura Wilson; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf; LW = Liam Wolff

Localities in Angelina County: Huntington; Lufkin

Localities in Cherokee County: Bullard; Neches River NWR.

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan; Alazan Bayou WMA; Carrizo Creek; Central Heights; Dorr Creek/St's Rest Road; Douglass; Lake Naconiche; Mahl; Melrose; Nacogdoches town; Pecan Park (in Nacogdoches); Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest; Stephen F. Austin State University Ag Farm (near Mahl).

Localities in Sabine County: Hemphill; Sabinetown; Toledo Bend Reservoir.

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

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