

**Summer Bird Report for Pineywoods Audubon Society
(June 1-August 31, 2023)
by David E. Wolf**

This summer was one to remember – relentlessly, brutally hot and dry! It proved to be the 2nd hottest on record for our region (2011 was the hottest ever) and as we go into September it still isn't over.

Most of June was abnormally hot and dry as a “high-pressure heat dome” enveloped our region and by mid-month temperatures were already in the high 90s, well above normal. This persisted for days on end, without any chance of rain, and by the end of the month we were unusually dry. (Many areas had not received a decent rain since mid-May). The first week of July brought some relief, with lower temperatures (highs “only” in the low to mid-90s) and even a few localized showers., but it was short-lived. The heat dome returned and expanded and the unpleasant weather persisted. By mid-July it was seriously hot and dry and a lot of vegetation began looking stressed. August only got worse as the high-pressure persisted through the month until the 28th. Temperatures reached as high as 110°F, tying or breaking all-time highs. Most days were over 100°F and many reached 105-107°F. There was absolutely no rain and we were officially declared to be in a severe drought. It was miserable and it was depressing!

The weather finally shifted a little with the arrival of a weak cool front August 27-28. Some areas got some rain with this front, but others did not and remained shockingly dry. The front did bring a noticeable push of migrants on Aug 28-29, but the most numerous were widespread species that breed locally, like Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Summer Tanager.

Not surprisingly, there was little birding activity this summer. It just wasn't much fun or very productive to be out birding! Thanks to those intrepid observers who did get out and send in their sightings. As I finish writing this on Sept 8 the fall migration is well underway, but the hot dry days have returned. Things just have to get better! And when it does we should get some interesting birds, so please send your best sightings to me at dewolfnac@gmail.com . And thanks!

Bird List:

A few **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were seen at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds all summer, but a clearer idea of the numbers now breeding in the vicinity was obtained Aug 25 when **47** were counted. There were at least 3 broods of varying size present, from nearly full-grown to small ducklings, plus a number of full-sized but dark-billed juveniles that could have been raised elsewhere and flown in (DW, Steve Bryant). HW reported that 5 Wood Duck boxes that he maintains on his pond just outside of West Loop 224 in Nacogdoches had fledged 88 ducklings in 6 clutches by mid-June, one of which proved to be a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, and that there was still a clutch of 11 Wood Duck eggs in a box. That's a lot of Wood Ducks, but since the mother duck leads the young away he has no idea of the survival rate (HW, fide CS). Single Pied-billed Grebes were on a pond near Kurth Lake July 7; at the VFW pond in Lufkin Aug 1-7; and at Kurth Lake Aug 7 & 21 (all GH). After no sightings here all summer a Pied-billed Grebe was off the TX 147 causeway Aug 29 (DW).

An adult Yellow-billed Cuckoo fed a fledgling in Central Hts July 10 (DW). At least 15 Yellow-billed Cuckoos concentrated in a small area at Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 28 was a notable count and likely included migrants (DW). Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were relatively scarce until the front on Aug 28 brought a noticeable increase at feeders in Nacogdoches (CS, JS); Huntington; Lufkin (several sites fide JC); and Central Hts (DW, MHW). The first Common Nighthawks were singles in Nacogdoches Aug 28 (DW, CS) and Lufkin Aug 31 (GH).

Limpkin continues to dramatically increase in Texas (and elsewhere) and there were two reports from our general area this summer. This first one was photographed at Black Cat Lake at Boggy Slough (Trinity Co) on July 20 by James Childress. Then 2 were found at Magnolia Ridge Park on Steinhagen Reservoir (Jasper Co) on July 30-Aug 1 (Richard Lieber eBird) and seen on July 31 by DB & FL. There was an eBird report again on Aug 12, so this may a site close to home where you might find one! In spite

of the drought there were no extensive mudflats exposed on Lake Rayburn and there were very few reports of shorebirds in general. Noteworthy was a Semipalmated Plover at Ewing Park on upper Rayburn Aug 19 (DW). One or two Upland Sandpipers were heard over Central Hts daily from Aug 27-29 (MHW), but none could be found in the very dry pastures in the area. Up to 15 Least and a few Semipalmated Sandpipers frequent the drying up VFW pond in Lufkin Aug 21 into Sept (GH, DW). The only Baird's Sandpiper was one at the VFW pond in Lufkin Aug 21 (GH). The first Spotted Sandpipers were 2 at Marion Ferry July 22 (DW) and the first Solitary Sandpiper was one there Aug 8 (GH). The first Lesser Yellowlegs was one at Marion Ferry Aug 8 and then 3 were there Aug 27 (both GH). One Greater Yellowlegs at Marion Ferry Aug 27 was the only report (GH). **3 Least Terns** at Ellen Trout Park on Aug 10 were nice surprise (GH). This is a rarely-detected migrant that quickly slips through our area in small numbers in the late summer. The only Black Terns were singles off Sabinetown Aug 12 (DB) and the TX 147 causeway Aug 22 (DW). The first Forster's Tern was one off Sabinetown Aug 6 (DB).

Few Wood Storks were found, but 2 were at Steinhagen Reservoir July 12 (FL); 8 were seen west of Reklaw (Cherokee Co) on TX 204 on July 15 (SL); and singles were over Marion Ferry Aug 16 (GH) and Aug 25 (DW). A recently-fledged Anhinga at the TX 103 at the Attoyac crossing (Nac Co) July 8 was still fuzzy about the head and neck (DW). A high count of 295 Double-crested Cormorants was tallied at the Clarice Creek colony on Toledo Bend on June 7; more typical counts through the summer were 100-200 birds (DB). The first wandering Great Egrets in Central Hts were singles on June 11 & 17 (DW) and the first Snowy Egrets were 3 at the Nacogdoches sewage ponds July 12 (DW). The only reports of Tricolored Herons were 2 that flew past Marion Ferry July 29 and one on the recently-exposed islands at the TX 147 causeway on Rayburn Aug 29 (both DW). Two juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were still at Morris Frank Park in Lufkin Aug 31 (GH). An early *Plegadis sp?* ibis photographed at the Old Jasper Fish Hatchery Aug 18 was likely a juvenile White-faced, but could not be identified conclusively (Gabrielle Hargrove, FL),

A high count of 9 Ospreys in the Sabinetown area Aug 22 hints at breeding success on Toledo Bend (DB), while 2-5 were in the TX 147 area every visit in July and August (DW). Mississippi Kites fledged young at opposite ends of Nacogdoches in mid-July (CS, DW). The only numbers reported were 12 hawking low over Central Hts Aug 15 and 7 the next day, and these may have been local birds that disappeared after this (MHW, DW). Very few were seen over Nacogdoches later than this, which is unusual, and no large flocks of migrants were seen. A brood of at least 3 unconcerned Eastern Screech-Owls entertained us in our yard in Central Hts every evening the last week of June (MHW, DW). An adult and juvenile Northern Flicker were at Marion Ferry July 8 and another was at the base of the TX 147 causeway Aug 29; they have nested at both sites in the past (DW).

A noticeable influx of Great Crested Flycatchers at various sites Aug 26-29 gives some idea of when they leave and migrants pass through (DW). The first fledgling Eastern Kingbirds were 4 at Ewing Park July 8 (DW) and the first push of migrants of any size was 36 at Alazan Bayou WMA on the Aug 28 front (DW). The first fledged Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in Central Hts were noted June 26 (DW). The kingbird and scissor-tail roost on North Loop 224 in Nacogdoches that so delighted us over several decades in the past was not in use this year (CS, DW). Eastern Wood-Pewee was a dominant migrant at Alazan Bayou WMA on Aug 28 when at least 13 were tallied (DW). Single Alder Flycatchers were confirmed by voice at the VFW pond in Lufkin Aug 21 (GH, Merlin); the TX 147 causeway Aug 22 (DW); and Ellen Trout Park Aug 23 (GH, Merlin); A bit more frequent in the latter half of August were "Trail's" flycatchers that could not be identified to species (Alder vs Willow) (DW). To my knowledge a close **Fish Crow** calling repeatedly at Marion Ferry on Aug 25 was a first ever for the upper Angelina arm of Lake Rayburn and perhaps the entire upper end of the lake (DW). 45 Cave Swallows packed onto the wires at a big farm between Etoile and Woden Aug 29 had likely nested locally (DW). A few were also seen near breeding colonies at Alazan Bayou WMA and the TX 147 causeway in July and August (DW). The first migrant or wandering Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were singles in Central Hts July 11 (MHW) and Sabinetown July 16 (DB). 33 at the TX 147 causeway Aug 29 was the highest count so far this fall (DW). Barn Swallows gathered in small flocks of 2-20 in Central Hts in mid-July, but were gone by the end of the month (DW).

The first Chipping Sparrow all summer appeared in Sabinetown August 28 (DB). Migrant Orchard Orioles were trickling through by early July, but no large numbers were reported. The highest count that I am aware of was 8 at Ewing Park on upper Rayburn July 8 (DW). The first Baltimore Orioles were singles in Central Hts Aug 27 (DW); the TX 147 causeway Aug 29 (DW) and Sabinetown August 30 (DB). Early migrant warblers were few and far between, but persistent observers found a few. A Louisiana Waterthrush was at McAlister Park Aug 19 (DW) and the first Northern Waterthrush was at the TX 147 causeway Aug 29 (DW). Single migrant Black-and-white Warblers were at Marion Ferry July 22 (DW) and Sabinetown Aug 21 (DB). Prothonotary Warbler is known to leave the breeding grounds early and restless birds that seemed to be migrants were noted at Marion Ferry July 22 (2); the TX 147 causeway July 23; and McAlister Park Aug 19 (all DW). A Mourning Warbler was seen at Alazan Bayou WMA Aug 28 (DW) The first migrant or wandering Hooded Warbler at Sabinetown showed up Aug 4 (DB). A ragged juvenile Northern Parula visited Central Hts July 9-22 (DW, MHW). The first Yellow Warblers were singles at Carrice Creek Aug 14 (DB); south Lufkin Aug 15 (GH); and Marion Ferry Aug 19 (DW). 5 were tallied at Alazan Bayou WMA on the Aug 28 front (DW). 2 scruffy fledgling Yellow-throated Warblers at Marion Ferry July 22 were fed by the female while the male sang nearby (DW). Summer Tanager was a dominant migrant the last 10 days of August; the high count was at least 13 tallied at Alazan Bayou on the Aug 28 front (DW).

Observers: DB = David Bell; JC = James Childress; GH = Gary Hunter; SL = Susie Lower; FL = Fred Lyons; CS = Cliff Shackelford; HW = Howard Williamson; DW = David Wolf; MHW = Mimi Hoppe Wolf.

Localities in Angelina County: Ellen Trout Park (in Lufkin); Ewing Park (TX 103 at the Angelina on Lake Rayburn); Huntington; Kurth Lake; Lufkin; Marion Ferry on upper Lake Rayburn; Morris Frank Park (in Lufkin).

Localities in Nacogdoches County: Alazan Bayou WMA; Central Heights (= Central Hts); Etoile; McAlister Park on upper Lake Rayburn; Nacogdoches; Nacogdoches sewage ponds (= Nac ponds); Woden).

Localities in Sabine County: Clarice Creek on Toledo Bend Reservoir; Sabinetown.

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