

Fall 2008: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 3569 sightings of 302 species from 1 August to 30 November 2008.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, 14 September, Angelina-Nacogdoches-San Augustine counties, "This was the day after Hurricane Ike smashed northward and then northeastward through East Texas. I checked two sites on this date: (1) Lake Nacogdoches (about 15 miles west of Nacogdoches town in Nacogdoches County) for one hour in the late morning. The storm center passed not too far west of this small reservoir, putting it square in the "dirty" side of the storm; and (2) TX 147 causeway across middle Lake Rayburn (San Augustine County) for 1½ hours in the early afternoon. This huge reservoir is some distance east of the storm track and strongest winds, but still on the "dirty" side of it."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Latest ever for this East Texas area, a **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** flew over *Angelina* 16 Oct (Robert Truss).

A **Long-tailed Duck** was at Lake O' the Pines in *Upshur* 22 Nov (David Brotherton).

A first breeding record – and only the second sight record – for *Fayette* was a pair of **Least Grebes** observed incubating 11 Aug (Darrell Vollert, Willie Vollert) on a pond near Round Top. Extensive photographs were taken 16 Aug (Marsha Seyffert).



Hurricanes brought an unprecedented number of **Brown Pelicans** far inland and many remained for months. Prior to this fall less than 10 records exist for the entire Pineywoods, so this season set new county records in East Texas and the counts in the Central Brazos Valley set new heights. Sightings include: 1 on 13 Sep (Toby Hibbits) in *Waller*, 4 on 15 Sep and 3 on 17 Sep (David Wolf) at the Lake Livingston spillway *Polk-San Jacinto*, 1 on 21 Sep (Toby Hibbits) at Lake Somerville in *Burleson*, 1 on 3 Oct (Charlie Burger) at Richland Chambers Reservoir in *Navarro*, 1 on 13 Oct (Joe Hearn) at Cedar Creek Reservoir in *Henderson*, 1 on 18 Oct (Byron Stone, George Pazdral) at Lake Somerville in both *Burleson* and *Washington*, at least 5 on 9 Nov (Leslie Calvert, Darrell Vollert, independently) observed from three different parks on Lake Somerville, 11 on 16 Nov (Darrell Vollert) at Lake Somerville, 1 on 23 Nov (Jeff Sparks) at Lake Palestine in *Henderson*, 1 on 23 Nov (Bryan Tarbox) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes*, 8 on 26 Nov (Rick Schaefer, Robert Truss, David Wolf) at Lake Livingston.

The number of records for Magnificent Frigatebirds in the Pineywoods more than doubled this fall. Pushed far inland by the hurricanes, **Magnificent Frigatebirds** showed up at many East Texas lakes, including: Wright Patman Lake in *Bowie* on 3 Sep (Mike Dillon), 2 in *Waller* on 13 Sep (Toby Hibbits), Huntsville in *Walker* on 13 Sep (Rich Bello), 3 on Lake Nacogdoches in *Nacogdoches* on 14 Sep (David Wolf, Carol Wells), 2 over Jacksonville in *Cherokee* on 14 Sep (fide Peter Barnes), Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* on 14 Sep (David Wolf), Lake Palestine in *Smith* on 14 Sep (Peter Barnes), Lake Waco in *McLennan* on 14 Sep (Andy Petter), and Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes* on 14 Sep (Toby Hibbits).



The first area record for the central Pineywoods and only the fifth for East Texas, a sub-adult white morph **Reddish Egret** was photographed 6 Nov (David Wolf) from the TX 147 bridge of Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine*. The egret was seen again 9 Nov, 22 Nov and 30 Nov.

A **Glossy Ibis** accompanied two White-faced Ibises 23 Aug (ph. Gil Eckrich) in Coryell, providing a first record for Fort Hood.

Roseate Spoonbills appeared in East Texas in higher than normal numbers and over a longer period starting 3 Aug and including 28 at Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, on 24 Aug (Robert Truss, David Wolf), 92 on 24 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) at Richland Creek WMA in *Navarro* and that count or more four days later (Peter Barnes, Jim Day) at the same refuge. Last report was 7 very late birds at Attoyac Bayou on upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *Nacogdoches*, 23 Oct (David Wolf).

Two **Swallow-tailed Kites** were near Hempstead in *Waller* 3 Aug (Joan Dziezyc) and, more surprisingly, another was at Lake Bob Sandlin in *Franklin* 12 Sep (Matt White), blown in by Hurricane Ike.

A high count for the central Pineywoods, 120 **Mississippi Kites** were tallied over *Nacogdoches* on 24 Aug (David Wolf, Robert Truss).



Incredibly, and a first record for the Pineywoods, a dark-morph adult **Short-tailed Hawk** was picked up by paramedics 6 Oct at Troup in *Smith* and taken to Beverly Grage (ph.), a raptor rehabilitator. Identity was confirmed by Bill Clark from photographs.



Dogs flushed a **Black Rail** from a cow pasture in rural *Trinity*, 10 mi. east of Groveton, on 8 Aug (ph. Brian Truss), providing the first record for the Pineywoods and one of only a few inland migrant records.

Two **Virginia Rails** was on the Sabine River in *Sabine* 9 Nov (Anthony Hewetson).

Two migrating **Whooping Cranes** flew over Temple, *Bell*, 8 Nov (Randy Pinkston) and 3 adults flew over the Bosque River at Lake Waco in *McLennan* on 9 Nov (Ted Drozdowski).

Inland **Piping Plovers** are always a good find and this season one was at Granger Lake dam in *Williamson* 3 Aug (ph. Tim Fennell) and another was at Union Grove WMA on Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir in *Bell* on 13 Sep (Rich Kostecke).

About 20 **Black-necked Stilts** appeared in Huntsville, *Walker*, with Hurricane Ike on 13 Sep (Rich Bello). An immature Black-necked Stilt at Marion Ferry on Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, 20 Sep (David Wolf, Robert Truss) was only the sixth area record.

A **Ruddy Turnstone** 20 Sep (David Wolf, Robert Truss) at Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, was the first area record in quite a few years.

Impressive counts of **Stilt Sandpipers** were 53 at Temple in *Bell* 6 Aug (Randy Pinkston) and 46 at Willis Creek Park on Granger Lake in *Williamson* on the same day (Tim Fennell).

Inland **Laughing Gulls**, sometimes in unprecedented numbers, appeared in East Texas as a result of hurricanes. These included one at Wright Patman Lake in *Bowie* 4 Sep (Mike Dillon), one at Huntsville in *Walker* 13 Sep (Rich Bello), two at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes* 14 Sep (Toby Hibbits), a first county record for *Smith* at Lake Palestine on 14 Sep (Peter Barnes), one at Lake Nacogdoches in *Nacogdoches* 14 Sep (David Wolf), 6 at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* 14 Sep (David Wolf), **280+** at the spillway of Lake Livingston *Polk-San Jacinto* 15 Sep (David Wolf) and still 125 there on 17 Sep. Perhaps not storm-related, as Hurricane Dolly had minimal effects on *Bell*, one was at Temple Lake Park 3 Aug (Randy Pinkston), where it is considered rare, as well as one at Lake Somerville in *Washington* 16 Nov (Darrell Vollert).

An impressive flock of 1100+ **Franklin's Gulls** was the largest seen in central Pineywoods, which is east of their main flight path, viewed 23 Oct (fide David Wolf) at the TX 147 bridge at Lake Sam Rayburn in *Angelina*.



A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was photographed 26 Nov (ph. David Wolf, Rick Schaefer, Robert Truss) at the spillway of Lake Livingston, *Polk*. Although rare in East Texas, this gull is at least the fourth record and all have been at this site.

Prior to this fall, there were only two regional records for **Sooty Tern**, but the hurricanes brought in three more reports. Two and possibly three Sooty Terns were sighted from Atlanta State Park on Wright Patman Lake, *Cass*, 4 Sep (Mike Dillon). Another was at Lake Bob Sandlin in *Titus* on 14 Sep (Matt White) and yet another was seen from Holiday Marina on Lake Tawakoni in *Van Zandt* on the same day (Greg Cook).

Perhaps the most amazing hurricane birds are the two **Bridled Terns** found at Cooper Lake in *Delta* on 3 Sep (Matt White), a species not previously recorded in northeast Texas.

Although **Least Tern** is a rare but regular mid-July to late August fall migrant on Pineywoods reservoirs, 30 on Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* on 14 Sep (David Wolf) breaks the high count record and undoubtedly were swept from the Gulf with the winds.

An occasional **Caspian Tern** in Central and East Texas is not unexpected, but the numbers and spread this season is another story: 56 at Lake Tawakoni in *Van Zandt* 9 Sep (Richard Kinney), 3 at Lake Palestine in *Smith* on 12 Sep (Peter Barnes), 60 at Lake Bob Sandlin in *Titus* 12 Sep (Matt White), 13 at Granger Lake in *Williamson* 14 Sep (Tim Fennell), 10 at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes* on 14 Sep (Toby Hibbitts), 28 at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* 14 Sep (David Wolf), **360** at Lake Livingston in *Polk* on 15 Sep (David Wolf), 250 still there on 17 Sep (David Wolf), 1 at Richland Creek WMA in *Navarro* on 20 Sep (David Ringer) and 1 at Lake Sam Rayburn on 7 Oct (fide David Wolf).

Black Tern is another fall migrant that appeared this season in big numbers as a result of storms: 16 over Tyler in *Smith* 6 Aug (Peter Barnes), 5 at Martin Creek Lake in *Rusk* on 22 Aug (David Ringer), 24 at Trinidad in *Henderson* on 24 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little), 20 at Huntsville in *Walker* on 13 Sep (Rich Bello), 2 at Lake Palestine in *Smith* on 14 Sep (Peter Barnes), 15 at Lake Nacogdoches in *Nacogdoches* on 14 Sep (David Wolf), **255** at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* on 14 Sep (David Wolf), 100 at Lake Livingston in *Polk-San Jacinto* on 15 Sep (David Wolf), and 90 still there on 17 Sep (David Wolf).

A **Common Tern** at Lake Waco 6 Sep (Eric Haskell) is only about the 6th *McLennan* record and the first in 6 years.

For East Texas, 375 **Forster's Terns** 29 Sep (David Wolf) on a sandbar on the Attoyac arm of Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, is a good count.

Royal Terns rarely show up far inland, so it was Hurricane Ike that pushed many into East Texas and the Central Brazos Valley; 13 Sep birds included 1 at Huntville in *Walker* (Rich Bello), 1 in *Waller* (Toby Hibbits), 2 at Lake Somerville in *Burleson* (Byron Stone, Aletha Snowden), and 14 Sep birds included 4 at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* (David Wolf), 2 at Gibbons Creek Reservoir in *Grimes* (Toby Hibbits), 1 at Lake Nacogdoches in *Nacogdoches* (David Wolf); also 3 at Lake Livingston in *Polk* on 15 Sep (David Wolf), two at Wright Patman Lake in *Bowie-Cass* on 16 Sep (Mike Dillon), 12 at Lake Livingston in *Polk* on 17 Sep (David Wolf, Charles Dean Fisher). Prior to Hurricane Ike, only one documented record for Royal Tern existed for the entire Pineywoods region. In the Central Brazos Valley, the Gibbons Creek sighting was a first *Grimes* record and the Lake Somerville sighting was only the third for that lake.

First records for Northeast Texas are storm-driven **Sandwich Terns**, including one showing signs of being an intergrade with the “Cayenne” Tern yellow-billed subspecies of Sandwich Tern at Cooper Lake in *Delta* 13 Sep (Matt White) and another at Lake Livingston spillway in *Polk-San Jacinto* 15 Sep (David Wolf); too distant to be absolutely certain but likely two more were at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* 14 Sep (David Wolf) and likely two more were at Lake Livingston spillway 17 Sep (David Wolf, Charles Dean Fisher).

With only two prior regional records for **Black Skimmer**, also storm-driven, noteworthy additions are singles at Lake Palestine in *Smith* and *Henderson* 14 Sep (Peter Barnes) and Huntsville in *Walker* the same day (Rich Bello). Incredibly, 7 were at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* that day (David Wolf) and 25 were at Lake Livingston spillway *Polk-San Jacinto* on 17 Sep (David Wolf, Charles Dean Fisher).

Adding to a very few local records, a **White-winged Dove** visited Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, 13-17 Nov (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, David Wolf).

Twelve **Inca Doves** in Longview, *Gregg*, is a good count for northeast Texas, seen throughout Nov (Candra Troop).

Farther east of its usual range, 5 **Western Kingbirds** were in *Smith* 5 Sep (Boyd Sanders) and another near Camp Tyler in *Smith* on 16 Sep (Jim Day).

Nesting **Cave Swallows**, the first confirmed record for the Pineywoods in May, remained until 7 Sep (Louis Debetaz, Charles Dean Fisher, Carroll Moore) at the Neches River bridge on TX 7 spanning *Angelina-Houston*.

Although finding a **Winter Wren** in northeast Texas is not unusual, finding 10 in a weekend is noteworthy; Anthony Hewetson found them 8-10 Nov in *Red River*, *Bowie*, *Cass*, *Harrison*, *Sabine*, *Newton* and *Liberty*.

Two **Golden-crowned Kinglets** 18 Oct (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) in *Henderson* were early; further reports didn't commence until 8 Nov.

With only a few records for *Bell* and none in the past 10 years, a **Sage Thrasher** 9 Nov (Randy Pinkston) between Holland and Belton was a surprise.

Early arrivals, 26 **Cedar Waxwings** were at Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell* on 8 Nov (Rich Kostecke).

David Wolf reports, "Migrant warblers were particularly scarce this season" for the Pineywoods, so the very scarce fall migrant **Blue-winged Warbler** 28 Sep (David Wolf, Robert Truss) at Alazan Bayou WMA, *Nacogdoches*, is interesting.

Rare for the Central Brazos Valley and a first county record for *Washington*, a **Black-throated Blue Warbler** was at Chappell Hill 19 Oct (Darrell Vollert).

Single **Blackburnian Warblers**, rare in fall for northeast Texas, were at Tyler State Park in *Smith* on 3 Sep (Boyd Sanders) and Lake Tawakoni State Park in *Hunt* on 9 Sep (Richard Kinney).

Latest fall record by several weeks for the Pineywoods, a **Yellow-throated Warbler** was at the TX 147 causeway at Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, on 23 Oct (David Wolf).

Palm Warblers were at Alazan Bayou WMA 18 Oct (David Wolf) and McAlister Park 25 Oct (David Wolf, Robert Truss), both in *Nacogdoches* and rare in the Pineywoods.

A fall male **Bay-breasted Warbler** carefully studied in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, on 14 Sep (Mimi Hoppe Wolf) was one of very few credible fall reports for this species in the Pineywoods region. The sighting occurred the day after Hurricane Ike hit the Texas coast.

A possibly-breeding adult male **American Redstart** was at Caddo Lake in *Harrison* 5 Aug (Tim Fennell).

A **Worm-eating Warbler**, possibly a fledgling, was on Plant Road near Caddo Lake in *Harrison* on 5 Aug (Tim Fennell).

Seventeen **Mourning Warblers** in one day's birding included 14+ at San Gabriel WMA and 3 at Willis Creek Park at Granger Lake in *Williamson* on 7 Sep (Tim Fennell).

Very rare as far east as the Central Brazos Valley, a **MacGillivray's Warbler** was nicely described 23 Oct (John Hale) in College Station, *Brazos*.

Very rarely detected in the fall in East Texas, 3 different **Scarlet Tanagers** were found in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, 4-5 Sep, 9 Sep and 27 Sep (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, David Wolf).

An **Eastern Towhee** on 7 Oct (Phil Rostron) was not only scarce for *Bastrop* but also quite early.

Unusual for *Smith*, a **Bachman's Sparrow** was described at Tyler State Park 16 Oct (Boyd Sanders).

Not reported annually in central Pineywoods, a **Harris's Sparrow** was seen 18 Nov (Mimi Hoppe Wolf) at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*.

A high count of 240 **Indigo Buntings** was at Alazan Bayou WMA in *Nacogdoches* on 28 Sep (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

First fall record for the Pineywoods since 1976, a **Bobolink** was in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, on 1 Oct (David Wolf).

Not reported annually in East Texas, a **Western Meadowlark** was heard at Cedar Creek Lake in *Henderson* 2 Nov (D. D. Currie, Greg Cook).

The only report of **Purple Finch** this fall for East Texas was 28 Nov (Jane Purtle) in *Cherokee*.

A **Pine Siskin** at Lake Waco, *McLennan*, was early on 31 Oct (Eric Haskell). East Texas didn't get a major invasion until late November, with flocks of up to 60 birds (fide David Wolf).

CONTRIBUTORS:

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