

Fall 2010: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 1451 sightings of 236 species from 1 August to 30 November 2010.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, August, Pineywoods, "To sum it up, it was a long hot and dry summer. Rain was generally scarce and spotty and some areas were very dry by late August. Few interesting sightings were reported - it was too hot to enjoy getting out birding! The pace did pick up a bit in late August, when a "cool" front August 24-27 dropped temperatures to the upper 60s at night and low 90s in the day, bringing the first significant push of migrants. By this time Lake Rayburn had receded enough to attract shorebirds and long-legged waders, especially in the Marion Ferry and Attoyac Bayou areas."

Keith Arnold, 1 September, Country Club Lake, Brazos County, "Water levels continue to drop, exposing mud flats; nonetheless, no shorebirds other than Killdeer."

Eric Haskell, 3 September, Lake Waco, "It seems our 1 inch rain ushered in a few migrants, and maybe a few First of Season (FOS) winterers at the lake".

Keith Arnold, 8 September, Country Club Lake, Brazos County, "The recent heavy rains and today's strong SE winds combined to make this one of the poorest censuses since I started; to have Northern Mockingbird as the high count is astounding."

Peter Barnes, September, Northeast Texas, "It was a very slow month, with no significant storms to bring migrants down in our area. The number of large wading birds reported was much lower than usual."

Keith Arnold, 19 October, Country Club Lake, Brazos County, "Water levels continue to drop in the absence of significant rainfall in several weeks."

David Wolf, 27 October, Lake Sam Rayburn, "Falcons seemed attracted to the vast flats around receding Lake Rayburn and 8 Merlins seen there from Sept 19 - Oct 27"

David Wolf, 30 October, Pineywoods, "After the long hot summer the extreme heat began to abate in late August, but our region remained extremely dry. Several weak fronts in early and mid-September brought weather that was "perfect" by most people's standards, with cool nights and warm sunny days

when we literally did not see even a wisp of a cloud for weeks. October was unseasonably warm right to the end of the month, with few frontal passages. Rainfall remained sporadic and by the end of the season some areas had recorded had less than half of their expected total so far this year. All of this gorgeous, undramatic weather kept the numbers of migrants low and they just trickled through, but the variety of species found was stunning, perhaps due to the persistence of two observers, Louis Debetaz and yours truly, more than any environmental factor. The best indicator of this was the incredible 29 species of migrant warblers seen from mid-July to the end of October. Louis checked the Azalea Trail in Lufkin often and found an amazing 22 species of warblers at that one site, including the only Worm-eating and Swainson's all fall, while I had 27 species in my wanderings, mostly in the brushy woods around the receding edges of Lake Rayburn. This may sound better than it really was - most days brought only a few birds and it was only a few days after cool fronts that brought more variety. The lesson: persistence pays off! With lake levels low there were also sightings of some interesting waterbirds, though shorebirds never appeared in large numbers in spite of extensive habitat. By the end of October our winter birds were starting to appear, but with the mild season the numbers are not here yet."

Peter Barnes, October-November, Northeast Texas, "The absence of significant cold fronts or rain produced few sightings of passerine migrants or wandering gulls."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Already in 1972 **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** came to the Central Brazos Valley, later reaching northeast, first in San Jacinto (1985), Trinity (1985) and Walker (1979). By the early 1990s a few turned up in the Pineywoods and breeding was confirmed in Angelina in 1997. In his book *Birds of Northeast Texas* (2002), Matt White considers the species a rare visitor with scattered records in the area. With the continued spread northeast, as of 2010 there are now records for 29 counties in the northeast, as well as 14 counties in the Central Brazos Valley. This breeding season Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were widespread, with reports in *Angelina, Bowie, Camp, Franklin, Freestone, Polk, Red River, Smith, Titus, Van Zandt, and Wood*.

With fewer **Ross's Goose** sightings in recent years in East Texas, scattered sightings are noteworthy. Singles were at Texas Eastman at Longview, *Harrison*, 17 Nov (Mark Edmund) and *Brazos* 23 Nov (Laura Sare, Cathy Hamilton, Betty Vermeire) and two flew over Lake Wright Patman, *Bowie*, 23 Nov (Mike Dillon). A Ross's Goose first seen this past winter with domestic geese at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, was still present 20 Sep (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

An impressive concentration of 255 **Wood Ducks** were in shallow marshes at the TX 147 causeway at Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, on 25 Aug (David Wolf). On the same day 360 **Blue-winged Teal** were tallied by Wolf in *Angelina* and the next day 26 Aug (David Brotherton, Mark Edmund) watched 175 at Texas Eastman in Longview, *Harrison*.

A **Pacific Loon** was at Holiday Marina in *Van Zandt* 15 Nov (Richard Kinney).

While an impressive 250 **American White Pelicans** were on Lake Waco in McLennan 3 Nov (Bill Ravenscroft), these are dwarfed by 931 counted at Atlanta State Park in *Cass* 26 Nov (David Brotherton).

Once a very rare visitor before Hurricane Ike, yet another **Brown Pelican** has showed up in East Texas, this one in upper Lake Murvaul in *Panola* 6 Sep (Rick Schaefer).

Not reported annually in northeast Texas, an **American Bittern** was at the Grand Saline Marsh in *Van Zandt* 11 Nov (Richard Kinney).

While Peter Barnes reports few large wading birds in Northeast Texas in September, with only two **Tricolored Herons** at Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, 18 Sep (Tyler Audubon field trip), in the Pineywoods David Wolf reports the herons are more frequent than usual on upper Lake Rayburn, *Angelina*, with 1-4 seen on 10 dates 25 Aug – 21 Sep and 6 on 19 Sep. **White-faced Ibis** were also well represented in multiple sightings at Lake Rayburn, including 19 on 19 Sep (Louis Debetaz, Robert Truss, David Wolf).

Roseate Spoonbills were widely scattered across East Texas with 20+ sightings 1 Aug – 3 Oct (m.ob) in *Angelina*, *Bowie*, *Freestone*, *Morris*, *Nacogdoches*, *Navarro*, *Red River*, *San Augustine*, especially around Lake Sam Rayburn.

As usual, **Ospreys** were present at Lake Waco in *McLennan* throughout Sep-Nov; however, a peak of ~20 there 5-7 Oct (Eric Haskell) is unprecedented.

Apparently nesting in Nacogdoches for the first time, several **Mississippi Kites** spent the summer, including an observed recently-fledged juvenile, to at least 10 Aug (Thomas Riecke, Cliff Shackelford, Julie Shackelford). Migrants passed through mid-August to 22 Sep (fide David Wolf).

Northern Harriers are unusual for *Smith*, so singles at Tyler State Park (Boyd Sanders) and Camp Tyler (Tyler Audubon field trip) 23 Oct are noteworthy. Another was in *Gregg* 5 Nov (Linda Price), where it has not been reported in the past decade, if at all.

Notable **Swainson's Hawk** sightings were singles 7 Aug (Linda Price, Peggy Harding) in *Lamar* and 28 Aug (Peter Barnes) in *Red River*.

The earliest fall record ever for the Pineywoods, an adult **Peregrine Falcon** was at Attoyac Bayou on Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, 6 Sep (David Wolf). The receding lake produced 4 additional area sightings 19-23 Sep.

Grand Saline Marsh in *Van Zandt* had an impressive 16 **Soras** and 2 **Virginia Rails** on 11 Nov (Richard Kinney).

A sighting of 3 **Purple Gallinules** at Huntsville State Park 16 Oct (Laura Sare, Bruce Neville, Chuck Hamilton, Betty Vermeire) is quite surprising for *Walker*.

A **Common Moorhen** 18 Sep (Tyler Audubon field trip) was a good find for Richland Creek WMA, *Navarro*, as were some at Lake Bob Sandlin in *Camp* 20 Aug (Mike Dillon).

With very few records for East Texas Pineywoods two **Sandhill Cranes** at the vast flats along Attoyac arm of Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, 20 Oct (Rick Schaefer) were rare and also the earliest fall record.

A rare **Piping Plover**, one of only 5 sightings in the past decade in East Texas, was on the Lake Sam Rayburn flats at Attoyac in *San Augustine* 112 Sep (David Wolf, Thomas Riecke).

American Avocets were well represented 10-27 Oct with five reports at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* (David Wolf), a single at Lake Jacksonville in *Cherokee* (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) and two birds at Lake Waco in *McLennan* (Eric Haskell).

The very few *McLennan* records for **Long-billed Curlew** got an addition 30 Aug (Eric Haskell) at Lake Waco.

A rare migrant, not reported annually, was a single **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at Lake Waco in *McLennan* 1 Sep (Eric Haskell).

An early **American Woodcock** was flushed in Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest in *Nacogdoches* 22 Oct (Craig Rudolph).

Undoubtedly the best find of the season for East Texas was an adult **Sabine's Gull** off the TX147 causeway at Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, 27 Sep (ph. David Wolf). Most remarkable is that it was an adult, unlike most Texas records of immatures.

While 1895+ **Franklin's Gulls** over Central Heights and Nacogdoches 26 Oct (David Wolf) is an impressive number, the next day a massive flight—and unprecedented number—of at least **8370** left Lake Sam Rayburn in *Angelina* the

first hour of daylight, flying north up the lake to form a massive kettle that disappeared into the clouds.

Single **Common Ground-Doves** were a good find for East Texas, found in *Nacogdoches* 24 Oct (David Wolf, Robert Truss) and *Henderson* 18 Nov (ph. James Booker).

Peter Barnes reports, "A **Short-eared Owl** at the Grand Saline Marsh [*Van Zandt*] on 11 Nov (Richard Kinney) was the first one reported in northeast Texas since 2007. It will be interesting to see if they return to their traditional wintering area at the Sabine Mining Company land in *Harrison*." [in East Texas, the only records in the past decade, outside *Harrison* are *Franklin* (2001, 2003) and *Cass* (2001).]

Only the fifth record for East Texas Pineywoods, a **Green Violetear** was nicely photographed 18-19 Sep (ph. Becky Baker) in *Houston* near Ratcliff.

Black-chinned Hummingbird is not recorded annually in East Texas and within the northeast area it has only been reported four times previously, including two sightings at Peggy Harding's feeders in Kilgore, *Rusk*, where it again appeared 12 Aug.

Amazingly, Harding also had a **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** at her *Rusk* feeders 15-28 Aug, where the species has occurred periodically since 1998. Her backyard is the only northeast Texas location known to have had the species, although it has also appeared farther south in *Montgomery*.

A rare female **Anna's Hummingbird** was photographed in *Smith* 30 Nov (Mike Bloodsworth), the other 5 East Texas records are from *Gregg*, *Montgomery*, *Morris*, *Rusk*, and *Upshur*.

David Wolf reports, "On 24 Oct an adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** showed up at the Rohrer's house in Nacogdoches, likely the same bird that has spent the last two winters here. His timing is precise - last year he arrived on 23 Oct! "

David Wolf reports, "An **Ash-throated Flycatcher** on a brushy island off the TX 147 causeway on 27 Oct (David Wolf) was only our second area record ever and one of very few (less than 6) credible reports from the entire Pineywoods region. This species adds to the list of western vagrants that have been found in this area over the years, perhaps because it is brushy and "southwestern" in aspect when lake levels drop."

A **Western Kingbird** 20 Aug (Linda Price) at Sabine Mining Company land in *Harrison* is notable as there are few records for that part of northeast Texas.

A late **Yellow-throated Vireo** was in *Smith* 16 Oct (Linda Price).

Scarce in fall in East Texas, a **Philadelphia Vireo** was at Kurth Lake in *Angelina* 18 Sep (Louis Debetaz).

Only recently invading the East Texas Pineywoods, 2 **Cave Swallows** 6 Sep (David Wolf) foraging around the TX103 bridge at Lake Sam Rayburn in *San Augustine* is noteworthy.

It could be a good year for **Red-breasted Nuthatches** as there were multiple East Texas reports since mid October.

Good numbers of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were reported this season, beginning with two very early birds at Marion Ferry on Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, 9 Oct (David Wolf, Peter Barnes, et al.).

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** 26 Sep (Louis Debetaz) marks the earliest arrival ever for the East Texas Pineywoods; this one was on the Azalea Trail in *Angelina*.

A new early migration record for **Nashville Warbler** in East Texas Pineywoods was set 30 Aug (David Wolf) in *Angelina*.

A **Blackburnian Warbler** 6 Sep (David Wolf) in *Nacogdoches* was an early migrant.

The earliest fall record for **Palm Warbler** in East Texas Pineywoods was set 27 Aug (David Wolf) in *Angelina*. Two more were seen 5 Oct (David Wolf) at Alazan Bayou in *Nacogdoches*.

For fall migration in the Pineywoods, a rarely reported **Worm-eating Warbler** was on the Azalea Trail of Lufkin in *Angelina* 7 Sep (Louis Debetaz); two days earlier the trail produced a singing **Swainson's Warbler**. With these and other fall rarities **an incredible 29 species of migrant warblers were tallied** from mid-Jul to the end of Oct in the tri-county area of *Angelina-Nacogdoches-San Augustine*, mostly through the efforts of David Wolf and Louis Debetaz.

Not since 1987 has **Lark Bunting** been reported in *Waller*, making the one seen and photographed 10 Oct (Bob Honig, et al.) during the Katy Prairie Conservancy's Big Sit a highlight.

Adding to only a few fall records in East Texas Pineywoods is a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** with a flock of Red-winged at Lake Sam Rayburn in *Angelina* 11 Aug (David Wolf).

The status of **Great-tailed Grackle** in East Texas Pineywoods is still evolving, so one flying south over Lake Sam Rayburn in *Angelina* 27 Oct (David Wolf) is noteworthy.

The first fall **Purple Finch** was in *Rains* 17 Nov (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

A bright male **American Goldfinch** 27 Aug (Robert Truss, David Wolf) in *San Augustine* was unusually early.

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