

Fall 2011: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 6134 sightings of 293 species from 1 August to 30 November 2011.

WEATHER REPORTS:

Ann Gordon, 28 August, McLennan County, "I had more visits from the Northern Parula. I am still surprised every time I see it as I never have had it in my yard before the last week or so that I know of. It must be because of the heat and drought that it is coming down for water. ... It was 109 degrees when I took these 5 [photos]. I was in the blind with my dish pan of cold water with ice packs in them. A cloth dipped in the cold water and draped over my shoulders and legs enables me to do it. Otherwise I could not stay out there even for 5 minutes." [Ann had a plethora of birds visit her backyard water features in the extreme heat and drought].

Kathy Blocker, 28 August, Grimes County, "The Texas Drought has been tough on the birds. I keep 5 "watering stations" on the farm here. I get to see a great number of birds coming in to drink or bathe."

Kathy Blocker, 16 September, Grimes County, "In this area, we are enduring an exceptional drought. We have had NO rain since last Fall (now down 24+ in.) and numerous wildfires (burning up to 30,000 acres) in this area."

Keith Arnold, 20 September, Country Club Lake, Brazos County, "The recent rains have increased the water levels significantly, as well as increasing the humidity."

Peter Barnes, September, NETFO Region, "The continued drought led to the exposure of more mudflats than usual, with a good variety of shorebirds at local lakes. Passerine migrants, particularly warblers, were concentrated in remaining patches of vegetation and water. The ponds by Pleasure Acres Lake in Chapel Hill provided the most excitement, with a total of 19 warbler species reported this month. This would be an excellent total in spring and was extraordinary for fall migration. "

Deloris Sellin, 24 November, Marion County, "We spent about 8 hours birding the Lake O' the Pines South Shore area (Marion County in NE Texas) ... The lake is about 8 feet below normal."

David Wolf, fall season, Pineywoods, "It was a big fall for birds in our area, with many more notable rarities than usual, plus some record early arrival dates. This was mostly due to the low lake levels from the extreme drought plus lots of birding activity ... Our weather was extreme this fall. For the entire season our region was classified as in "exceptional drought", the highest category of drought, as was most of Texas. For the 12-month period ending Sept 30 we were down 30-33 inches of rain below average and this was considered the driest year ever recorded in Texas. Temperatures continued extreme in August, with only one day that didn't reach 100 deg. or higher. September brought relief from the extreme heat, but almost no rainfall. October is normally one of our driest months, and we had many clear and cool days, but we were also blessed with three good rains associated with frontal passages. November continued to bring much-needed rain with frontal passages, but the effects of this on-going drought will be with us for a long time to come. Shorebirds and other waterbirds are a major feature of this report. With reservoir levels very low they have been prominent, especially around Lake Sam Rayburn, but also on smaller bodies of water."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Cackling Goose - A Cackling Goose at Kurth Lake 27 Nov (Louis Debetaz) is the first report from *Angelina* in over 10 years.

Canada Goose - A local surprise was 5 Canada Geese at the unusually early date of 30 August (Keith Arnold) at Country Club Lake, Bryan. Arnold has monitored this *Brazos* location weekly since 1996 and this is only the second occurrence of Canada Goose at the lake, the first being the late spring season report of 2 on 22 Mar 2011 (Keith Arnold).

White-winged Scoter - A first county record for *Polk*, a male White-winged Scoter was at a private lake near Goodrich 13-16 Nov (ph. Linda Taylor, ph. Tommy Taylor).

Red-breasted Merganser - Unseasonably early, a single Red-breasted Merganser was at Lake Gilmer in *Upshur* 5 Aug (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton), while a large gathering of 500 were at Lake Tawakoni, *Van Zandt*, 17 Nov (Richard Kinney).

Masked Duck - A first record for *Washington* and the Central Brazos Valley was an alternate-plumaged male Masked Duck on a stock pond near Zionville 16 Aug – 3 Sep (Robert Smith Sr., ph. Nathan McGowan, ph. Darrell Vollert, ph. Hemant Kulkarni, m.obs.).

Ruddy Duck - A remarkable total of 1071 Ruddy Ducks were counted on Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, on 23 Nov (David Brotherton).

Common Loon - At Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, seeing 137 Common Loons must have been quite a sight on 23 Nov (David Brotherton).

Least Grebe - At least one of the Least Grebes reported this summer at Lakeside Park in *Montgomery* was still there 11 Oct (Larry Carpenter).

Horned Grebe - A count of 671 Horned Grebes were in small groups on the side of Lake O' the Pines in *Marion* 23 Nov (David Brotherton).

American White Pelican - A massive flock of 2000 - 3000 American White Pelicans was a one-day wonder at *San Jacinto* side of Lake Livingston 4 Oct (George Russell). Smaller flocks were 500 at Cooper Lake, *Hopkins*, 2 Oct (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) and 850 at Lake Wright Patman, *Bowie*, 18 Nov (Mike Dillon, Ray Berry).

Brown Pelican - After many residual reports of inland Brown Pelicans following hurricanes a few years ago, this season brought only one report in East Texas, a single at Lake Livingston, *San Jacinto*, 23 Oct (George Russell).

Green Heron - A very late Green Heron was in *Gregg* 19 Nov (Linda Price).

White Ibis - A late record for *McLennan* was 3 White Ibises 2 Oct (Byron Stone) at Waco Wetlands.

White-faced Ibis - Dark ibis, presumably all White-faced, were found in extraordinary numbers in the Pineywoods and north-east Texas. Reports came from *Harrison*, *Henderson*, *Marion*, *Nacogdoches*, *Smith*, *Trinity*, and *Walker*, with a high count of 95 leaving a roost on upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *Nacogdoches*, 15 Sep (David Wolf).

Roseate Spoonbill - Record numbers of Roseate Spoonbills were seen 26 Jul - 27 Oct (David Wolf) on upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina/Nacogdoches*, with a peak of 63+ 1 Sep. Sixty were at Lake Somerville, *Washington*, 3 Sep (Ellen Baker, William Tarbox, Bryan Tarbox).

Swallow-tailed Kite - Post-breeding wandering Swallow-tailed Kites were oft reported this fall. Multiple reports of 1-2 kites in *Grimes* near the confluence of Brazos and Navasota Rivers prompted a review of old records. This one site boasts 9 records since 2006 and, curiously, it is close to the known breeding site of Swallow-tailed Kites in 1866 (fide Bert Frenz). Other notable sightings this season are East Texas reports 4 Aug (Beverly Johnson) and 8 Aug (Allison Maxwell) in *Angelina*, a county with few records, and one 28 Aug (Stanley Senner) in *Hardin*. In Central Texas, a Swallow-tailed Kite 10-11 Sep (Jason Leifester, ph. Byron Stone, et al.) is the first photo-documented *Williamson* record and the first report since 2003.

Broad-winged Hawk - A fledgling Broad-winged Hawk that could barely fly confirmed breeding in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*, 1 Aug (David Wolf).

Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's) - Usually only found in East Texas in winter, a Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk was in *Camp* 24 Sep (Linda Price).

Merlin - David Wolf reports "a phenomenal number of sightings 7 Sep - 21 Oct of Merlins in the Pineywoods, including two early migrants 7 Sep (David Wolf, Susie Lower) in *Angelina*, and a high count of 7 the morning of 27 Sep (David Wolf) over TX 103, *Angelina*.

Common Gallinule - An adult Common Gallinule 18 Sep (Louis Debetaz) at Kurth Lake is only the second record for *Angelina*.

Sandhill Crane - With barely a record per decade, two Sandhill Cranes over southern *Nacogdoches* 30 Oct (Monty Whiting) is a good find.

Whooping Crane - A first record for *Washington*, 3 adult Whooping Cranes were viewed at a farm pond a mile east of Brenham 13 Nov (ph. Darrell Vollert, Ronny Manchester). Two, an adult and a juvenile, touched down in a pasture 17 Nov (ph. Sharon Saunders, Joe Ed Saunders), a first county record for *Falls*. Yet 3 more, an immature with adults, were walking in a plowed field and later flying towards Thorndale Lake in *Williamson* 21 Nov (Raymond Beckermann).

American Golden-Plover - While known as a spring migrant through East Texas, American Golden-Plover is rare in fall. In the central Pineywoods there were no fall records since 1977 until singles found twice on upper Lake Sam Rayburn: 15 Sep (David Wolf) on the Etoile Flats, *Nacogdoches*, and 27 Oct (David Wolf) at Ewing Park, *Angelina*. Other north-east Texas finds this season were singles 15 Oct (Peter Barnes) at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus*, and 30 Oct (Richard Kinney) at Lake Tawakoni, *Van Zandt*.

Snowy Plover - A late Snowy Plover was observed 20 Nov (Richard Kinney) and 29 Nov (Chris Runk) on the *Rains* side of Lake Tawakoni.

Piping Plover - A rare inland migrant through East Texas, Piping Plovers were seen 4 times 7-16 Aug (David Wolf) at Lake Sam Rayburn (Marion Ferry, TX 103, TX 147 causeway) in *Angelina* and *San Augustine*, including 5 together 8 Aug. A late Piping Plover was at Lake Tawakoni, *Rains*, 30 Oct (Richard Kinney), the previous north-east Texas record being 3 Oct.

Black-necked Stilt - A good find in *Bowie*, a Black-necked Stilt was observed 8 Oct (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Walter Brotherton), and on the same date (Rick Bello, Terry Thibodeaux) another was in *Trinity*.

Upland Sandpiper - Setting a new early date for Upland Sandpiper migrating through the Pineywoods is two 26 Jul (David Wolf) at TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine*. Also set this season are new late dates:

singles east of Nacogdoches 19 Sep (Les Stewart) and over Central Heights 20 Sep (Mimi Hoppe Wolf), both in *Nacogdoches*.

Whimbrel - Extremely rare in north-east Texas, only the second fall record for the central Pineywoods, and a first record for *Angelina* is a Whimbrel at Angelina County Airport 19 Sep (Louis Debetaz) found after overnight storms.

Long-billed Curlew - The low water levels at Lake Sam Rayburn could account for yet another rarity, a Long-billed Curlew on Marion Ferry Flats, *Nacogdoches*, 7 Aug (David Wolf, et al.), only the second fall migration record for the Pineywoods, and the first since 1989.

Marbled Godwit - With only two prior Pineywoods records in the past 42 years, 4 sightings 16 Aug - 15 Sep (David Wolf) of the same or different Marbled Godwits at 3 sites around Lake Sam Rayburn in *Angelina*, *Nacogdoches* and *San Augustine*, were remarkable.

Ruddy Turnstone - A Ruddy Turnstone 2 Sep (Mike Bloodsworth) at Lake Palestine, *Henderson*, was a great find and the only north-east Texas report this season.

Sanderling - Three Sanderlings at Gibbons Creek Reservoir on 18 Sep (ph. Bryan Tarbox) provided a first record for *Grimes*.

Dunlin - Another first record for *Grimes* was a Dunlin 6 Nov (†Bryan Tarbox) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper - A surprise result of extensive shorebird surveys of Lake Sam Rayburn 4 Aug - 27 Sep (David Wolf) is that Buff-breasted Sandpiper was the fourth most common species. They were recorded on 17 of 20 visits, with a season total of 597, one-day counts of 75-85 in the Marion Ferry area, *Nacogdoches/Angelina*, 8-14 Aug and 100 on 11 Sep. Good numbers were reported elsewhere in East Texas and the Central Brazos Valley, including *Burleson*, *Grimes*, *Harrison*, *Henderson*, *Limestone*, *Madison*, *San Augustine*, and *Smith*.

Short-billed Dowitcher - An inland Short-billed Dowitcher was observed at Texas Eastman in Longview, *Harrison*, on the 3 Sep NETFO field trip.

Wilson's Phalarope - Making good showings in the Central Brazos Valley were 1-2 Wilson's Phalaropes in *Madison* 3-6 Sep (Drew Dickert), 20-25 in *Brazos* 18-19 Sep (Betty Vermeire), 3 at Lake Somerville in *Burleson* 30 Sep (Mark Gray). In the central Pineywoods, where it is very rare, one was at Attoyac Bayou, *Nacogdoches*, 18 Sep (David Wolf) and yet another was at Lake Palestine in *Smith* 8 Sep (Rick Shaefer).

Laughing Gull - Wandering from the coast, a single Laughing Gull reached Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, 3 Aug (Louis Debetaz, Wayne Forrest), and two juveniles were on an island in Lake Sam Rayburn off the TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine*, on 16 Aug (David Wolf).

Franklin's Gull - Reporting for north-east Texas, Peter Barnes remarked "Franklin's Gulls were more numerous than usual." High counts included 600 at Lake Palestine in *Henderson* 19 Oct (Peter Barnes), 1500 at Lake Tawakoni in *Van Zandt* on 7 Nov (Richard Kinney) and another 1500 at Cedar Creek Lake in *Henderson* 11 Nov (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Sooty Tern - One of the most unusual observations this season for the Pineywoods is 2 adult Sooty Terns fighting blowing rain and wind over Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, on 4 Sep (David Wolf, †Peter Barnes, et al.) following Tropical Storm Lee. This is only the second record for the Pineywoods.

Black Tern - A first record for *Grimes*, two Black Terns were over Gibbons Creek Reservoir 18 Sep (†Bryan Tarbox).

Chuck-Will's-Widow - In the category of rarely observed behavior, consider the Chuck-Will's-Widow that visited a small pond in *Bastrop* to 15 Aug (Charles Alberty). It appeared at dusk every night, took two sips and left for the evening.

Buff-breasted Hummingbird - A relatively new visitor to *Montgomery* - first record in 2010 - an adult female Buff-breasted Hummingbird was photographed 3 Oct (ph. Samantha Davis).

Black-chinned Hummingbird - Rare in the Pineywoods, an adult male Black-chinned Hummingbird visited feeders in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*, 25 Oct - 8 Nov (ph. Molly Smith), leaving with a cool front. Another adult male was a late departure at China Spring, *McLennan*, 14 Nov (Frank & Jeanette Bumgardner).

Anna's Hummingbird - Only the fifth and sixth occurrences for the Central Brazos Valley, single Anna's Hummingbirds were seen 19 Nov+ (ph. Toby Hibbitts) at Millican, *Brazos*, and 29 Nov+ (Darrell Vollert) at Chappell Hill, *Washington*.

Calliope Hummingbird - A first county record for *Montgomery*, a Calliope Hummingbird visited The Woodlands 25 Nov+ (Kathy Merritt, ph. Kathy Clark, Gary Clark). A second record for Bell and the first photo-documented, a Calliope visited feeders in Harker Heights, overlooking Stillhouse Hollow Lake in *Bell* 27 Nov+ (ph. Terry Lairmore).

Vermilion Flycatcher - A vagrant to *McLennan*, a juvenile Vermilion Flycatcher was photographed at Lake Waco 2 Oct (ph. Byron Stone).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher - An impressive spectacle was 90 migrating Scissor-tailed Flycatchers carpeting the mudflats and bushes at Texas Eastman in Longview, *Harrison*, 3 Sep (Peter Barnes, NETFO field trip).

Bell's Vireo - Bell's Vireos are infrequent visitors to *Brazos*, the last reported in 2003, so one photographed in College Station 18-19 Sep (ph. Sarah Laughlin) is noteworthy.

Bewick's Wren - A nicely photographed eastern Bewick's Wren was one of two observed 25 Nov (ph. Linda Price) in *Wood*.

Sage Thrasher - Included in the invasion of Sage Thrashers into eastern Texas was a first county record for *Bastrop*: 9 Nov (Jake McCumber, John Lindsey) at Camp Swift, soon followed 13 Nov (Brush Freeman) by another at Shipp Lake.

Cedar Waxwing - Unusually early was a Cedar Waxwing 11 Sep (Peter Barnes) at Pleasure Acres Lake in *Smith*.

Golden-winged Warbler - Rare in the fall and the latest seasonal record for the Central Brazos Valley is a Golden-winged Warbler 1 Oct (Hugh Brown) in *Lee*.

Orange-crowned Warbler - An extremely early Orange-crowned Warbler was at Pleasure Acres Lake in *Smith* 3 Sep (Mike Bloodsworth). Other early sightings soon followed: widely separated *Brazos* sightings 4 Sep (Louis Ridlon), 5 Sep (Jackie Girouard) and 10 Sep (Bryan Calk), and, in *Lee* 11 Sep (Hugh Brown).

Northern Parula - Rare in McLennan, especially in fall, a Northern Parula visited a McGregor backyard water feature 20 Aug - 17 Sep (ph. Ann Gordon), with sightings on at least 19 of 28 days, more sightings than twice the sum of all historical records. The parula's residence corresponded with the extensive fires farther south and the bird disappeared after a 1.25" rain storm. Still later in fall, two more sightings at Lake Waco in *McLennan* were 1 Oct (ph. Bill Ravenscroft) and a different parula 15 Oct (ph. Bill Ravenscroft).

Black-throated Gray Warbler - Certainly the best find of the fall season in the Pineywoods was a female Black-throated Gray Warbler at Alazan Bayou WMA 20 Oct (David Wolf). This is the first record for *Nacogdoches* and surrounding counties and the first fall record for the entire Pineywoods, the only other records being from *Walker*, far southwest.

Prairie Warbler - Far from reported annually in the Central Brazos Valley, a Prairie Warbler was nicely photographed in *Brazos* 14 Aug (ph. Shirley Wilkerson).

Mourning Warbler - Often missed, but not this fall season in East Texas, Mourning Warblers were reported in unprecedented numbers. Many reports came from Pleasure Acres Lake in *Smith* 10-23 Sep (fide Peter Barnes). A high count of 5 was found at Lake Fork in *Wood* 4 Sep (ph. Janet Cook). *McLennan* made a good showing with sightings 9 Sep (†Charles Smith) and photographed birds 10-28 Sep (ph. Ann Gordon). Other counties represented in the 26 reports include *Brazos*, *Henderson*, *Montgomery*, and *Washington*.

Wilson's Warbler - David Wolf, reporting for the Pineywoods, remarked, "It was a banner fall for Wilson's Warblers and far more than usual were seen." Observed 6 Sep - 17 Oct, the high count was 7 on 6 Sep (David Wolf) at upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *Nacogdoches*.

Canada Warbler - Pleasure Acres Lake in *Smith* was the place to be for Canada Warbler, with multiple sightings 8-19 Sep (Linda Price, Peter Barnes, Mike Bloodsworth).

Green-tailed Towhee - This season's influx of Green-tailed Towhees include a new record for *Grimes*, seen 6 Nov (†Rick Laughlin, Sarah Laughlin) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir. After much searching, Harvey Laas finally found one on his farm 20 Nov, a new record for *Waller*.

Spotted Towhee - Spotted Towhees pushed eastward into *Brazos* 9 Nov+ (m.ob.) in much higher numbers than usual and farther east into *Hopkins*, *Nacogdoches*, *Smith*, and *Waller*.

Clay-colored Sparrow - Declared "the best fall for Clay-colored Sparrows in more than a decade", David Wolf reported 16 records at various central Pineywoods (*Angelina*, *Nacogdoches*, *San Augustine*) sites 11 Sep - 21 Oct. Other north-east Texas counties with sightings, 13 Sep - 10 Nov, include *Harrison*, *Montgomery*, *Rusk*, *Smith*, and *Wood*. Also, Central Brazos Valley reports were much higher than usual, including *Brazos* (9 reports), *Lee*, *Limestone*, and *McLennan* (4 reports).

Savannah Sparrow - Earliest ever by 9 days for the Pineywoods, a Savannah Sparrow was at Ewing Park on upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, 11 Sep (David Wolf, Cliff Shackelford, et al.). Coincidentally, another in north-east Texas was observed the same day (Peter Barnes) at Lake Palestine, *Henderson*.

Henslow's Sparrow - Always a good find, especially in the Central Brazos Valley, a Henslow's Sparrow was observed in the Shiro area of *Grimes* on 1 Oct (†Jennifer Backo).

Le Conte's Sparrow - Setting a new early arrival date for the Pineywoods, a Le Conte's Sparrow was at Ewing Park on upper Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina*, 6 Oct (David Wolf).

Harris's Sparrow - Earliest ever by 6 days for the Pineywoods was a Harris's Sparrow 30 Oct (Mimi Hoppe Wolf) at Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*.

Scarlet Tanager - A Scarlet Tanager in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*, 18 Aug (David Wolf) is not only rare in fall in the Pineywoods, but also the earliest record.

Black-headed Grosbeak - A rare bird for *Brazos*, a Black-headed Grosbeak was in a Bryan backyard 2 Oct (†Sandy Dillard, Cindie Dillard).

Painted Bunting - Two female/immature Painted Buntings were very late departures 25 Oct (Keith Arnold) at Country Club Lake in *Brazos*.

Yellow-headed Blackbird - A good record for fall in the Pineywoods is the Yellow-headed Blackbird found 15 Sep (Robert Truss) in Diboll, *Angelina*.

Rusty Blackbird - A hundred Rusty Blackbirds is a good find in Kilgore, *Gregg*, 21 Nov (Linda Price).

Baltimore Oriole - A highly unusual fall migration of Baltimore Orioles passed through the Central Brazos Valley 27 Aug - 4 Oct (m.ob.). Some 52 reports for just a few counties included comments like "eating all the oranges she had", "chirping all around the house, and fussing and fighting", "fighting over the hummingbird feeders, like the myriad of hummingbirds", "fighting over sugar water feeders ... never seen more than one oriole at a feeder before", "the orange madness continues." At backyard feeders, as many as 20 were viewed 6 Sep (Darrell Vollert) in *Washington*, 20 more 8 Sep (Debra Corpora) in *Robertson*, 20 reported 12 Sep (Shirley Wilkerson) in *Brazos*, and 30 watched 13 Sep (fide Miranne Merritt-Pellerin) in *Leon*.

American Goldfinch - Early sightings of American Goldfinch include one 24-25 Sep (ph. Ann Gordon) in *McLennan*, five 26 Sep (Mike Bloodsworth) in *Smith*, and two 29 Sep (Linda Price) in *Gregg*.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Keith Arnold, Ellen Baker, Peter Barnes, Raymond Beckermann, Rick Bello, Ray Berry, Mike Bloodsworth, David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Walter Brotherton, Frank & Jeanette Bumgardner, Larry Carpenter, Gary Clark, Kathy Clark, Janet Cook, Debra Corpora, D. D. Currie, Samantha Davis, Louis Debetaz, Drew Dickert, Mike Dillon, Bert Frenz, 221 Rainbow Dr. #12190, Livingston, TX 77399-2021, bert2@bafrenz.com, Ann Gordon, Mark Gray, Toby Hibbits, Richard Kinney, Hernant Kulkarni, Harvey Laas, Terry Lairmore, Sarah Laughlin, Jason Leifester, John Lindsey, Dell Little, Susie Lower, Ronny Manchester, Allison Maxwell, Jake McCumber, Nathan McGowan, Kathy Merritt, Miranne Merritt-Pellerin, Linda Price, Chris Runk, George Russell, Joe Ed Saunders, Sharon Saunders, Cliff Shackelford, Rick Shaefer, Molly Smith, Charles Smith, Robert Smith Sr., Les Stewart, Byron Stone, Bryan Tarbox, William Tarbox, Terry Thibodeaux, Robert Truss, Darrell Vollert, Monty Whiting, Shirley Wilkerson, David Wolf, Mimi Hoppe Wolf.