

## Fall 2013: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 7346 sightings of 266 species from 1 August to 30 November 2013.

### WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, 30 August, central Pineywoods, "... by late July temperatures were into the upper 90s daily and it remained this way through the end of August with almost no rain or interesting weather (i.e. frontal or tropical storm activity)."

Richard Kinney, 13 November, Wood County, "Lake Fork is very low and the bridge over TX Highway 19 had very little water in it."

### MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Ring-necked Duck – A pair of Ring-necked Ducks that summered at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, remained through October (Louis Debetaz).

Pacific Loon – At Lake Fork in *Wood*, a Pacific Loon accompanied a Common Loon on 13 Nov (Richard Kinney).

Common Loon – D.D. Currie and Dell Little had the unusual experience of hearing a Common Loon's haunting call on 29 Nov at Lake Palestine, *Anderson*. Few loons call while wintering in Texas.

**Least Grebe** – Three Least Grebes were observed 29 Nov (Charles Smith) at Washington-on-the-Brazos SHP, providing only the second record for *Washington*. The first record was at Independence when a pair nested and were observed 14 Jun-7 Jul 2000.

Pied-billed Grebe – An unusually large gathering of 175 Pied-billed Grebes 26 Oct (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, clearly tops the previous record for this location.

**Western Grebe** – Two dancing Western Grebes 28 Nov (David Brotherton) were at the same location as last year: Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*.

Double-crested Cormorant – Odd timing for *Angelina*, 3 Double-crested Cormorants spent the summer season on Kurth Lake and were still present 27 Aug (Louis Debetaz).

**Brown Pelicans** – This season brought single inland Brown Pelicans at Mt. Pleasant City Lake in *Titus* 8-13 Aug (Paul Pruitt, Luanne Brotherton), Lake Palestine in *Smith* 13 Sep (Ray Hodsen) but 2 on 26 Sep (Peter Barnes), Lake Tawakoni in *Rains* 20 Sep-1 Oct (Chris Runk, Richard Kinney), and Lake Livingston in *Polk* 29 Nov (Bill Wright).

**American Bittern** – American Bitterns put on an impressive showing at both *Navarro* and *Freestone* sides of Richland Creek WMA 28 Sep-16 Nov (m.ob), with a peak of 6 on 12 Oct (D. D. Currie, et al. on Big Sit), the highest yet reported at that popular site.

**Reddish Egret** – David Wolf writes, "A very rare and unexpected immature Reddish Egret was photographed at Cassells-Boykin Park on Lake Rayburn, *Angelina*, on August 23 by Mike Dillon, one of the NETFO birders. It was re-located at the base of the TX 147 bridge (*Angelina* side) on August 26 (Louis Debetaz, Les Stewart, David Bell) and again on Sept 8 on the *San Augustine* side of the bridge (David Wolf, Robert Truss). This is the first record for *Angelina* and only the second for the Lake Rayburn counties; there are fewer than 10 records for the entire Pineywoods region."

**Roseate Spoonbill** – An influx of Roseate Spoonbills into the central Pineywoods was a surprise, with multiple reports 7 Sep – 25 Oct (fide David Wolf) in *Nacogdoches* and *Angelina*, topped with a remarkable count of 75 at Attoyac Bayou 17 Oct (Louis Debetaz, Les Stewart).

**Swallow-tailed Kite** – A first record for *Milam*, 2 Swallow-tailed Kites were observed 22-26 Aug (Linwood Heran) near the Brazos River. Providing only the fourth record for *Angelina*, a Swallow-tailed Kite was seen in Lufkin 4 Aug (Gene Hallmark).



**Mississippi Kite** – A few of the local Mississippi Kites were unusually late in departing the Central Brazos Valley. In College Station, *Brazos*, an adult fed a juvenile until 6 Sep (Mary Dabney Wilson), but the begging juvenile was without adults the next day. Meanwhile, in Navasota, *Grimes*, a begging juvenile was still present as late as 14 Sep (Mary Dabney Wilson). These two are the next-to-last breeding bird departures, the latest record being 23 Sep 2002 in *Washington*.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk** – A fresh juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk at Alazan Bayou WMA, *Nacogdoches*, 30 Aug (David Wolf) was almost certainly raised locally.

**Cooper's Hawk** – As evidence for local nesting, a pair of adult Cooper's Hawks were observed regularly from May through Aug and a juvenile was seen 31 Aug (Mimi Hoppe Wolf, David Wolf) in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches*. Elsewhere in the Pineywoods, an adult on 8 Jul and a juvenile in early Aug (Louis Debetaz) were observed on Azalea Trail in Lufkin, *Angelina*. David Wolf remarks, "This species is likely a widespread breeding bird in the Pineywoods, but due to their secretive habits they are not often detected in the summer."

**Broad-winged Hawk** – A spectacular showing for the Pineywoods, at least 1200 Broad-winged Hawks were tallied over Marion Ferry on the *Angelina* side of Lake Sam Rayburn 2 Oct (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton, Louis Debetaz, Les Stewart, David Wolf).

**Swainson's Hawk** – Rare on the eastern edge of its migratory route, a Swainson's Hawk kettled in a small flock of Broad-wings over TX 147 causeway on Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*, on 21 Sep (David Wolf, et al.) and 2 were in a Broad-wing flight over Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, 1 Oct (Louis Debetaz).

**Zone-tailed Hawk** – With less than a handful of records for *Walker* and the last almost a decade ago, a noteworthy Zone-tailed Hawk circled with Turkey Vultures over Huntsville State Park 28 Sep (Romey Swanson).

**Ferruginous Hawk** – Providing a third county record for *Milam*, a Ferruginous Hawk was photographed along CR402 24 Oct (Lee Hoy).

**Golden Eagle** – A sighting of a Golden Eagle over Uteley 7 Nov (Brush Freeman) is one of only two or three records, mostly undocumented, for *Bastrop*, the last being in 1990.

**King Rail** – A heard-only King Rail was located at Lake Tyler in *Smith* 23 Aug (Linda Price), one of the few records for north-east Texas.

**Virginia Rail** – As a rarely detected migrant through the Pineywoods, a Virginia Rail was most clearly documented when one was found dead at a busy intersection in *Nacogdoches*, Nacogdoches, 2 Oct (fide Warren Conway, fide David Wolf).

Purple Gallinule – Four adult Purple Gallinules breeding at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, this summer produced two broods seen 22 Jul – 18 Aug, with one juvenile still present 3 Sep (Louis Debetaz).

**Common Gallinule** – Common Gallinules are very sparsely distributed through a few north-east Texas counties. For the second year in a row, Common Gallinules nested at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, with 2 adults and 3 juveniles seen 3 Aug and another adult and 5 chicks a few days later (Louis Debetaz). Not previously reported here, but apparently resident since at least 2009, 4 Common Gallinules were at Ferndale Club 29 Sep (Janie Henderson, et al.), the only known location in *Camp*. Likewise, the only reported *Navarro* location for the gallinules is at Richland Creek WMA where one was reported 12-26 Oct (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Linda Belssner). It was also been seen on the *Freestone* side of the WMA on 12 Oct (Dell Little).

**Whooping Crane** – A remarkable find and a first for *Angelina*, two radio-tagged color-banded Whooping Cranes were found at a pond near Lufkin in the evening of 20 Oct (Don Lumbery, ph., Ginger Lumbery) before a very heavy fog. The two cranes were still present 21 Oct (Les Stewart, Louis Debetaz, Don Lumbery, Ginger Lumbery) and stayed until 11:30 AM. Cliff Shackelford was able to look at blow-ups of the yellow and blue leg bands and determine the birds are from a flock being re-introduced to Louisiana at the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area south of Lafayette.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/67792745@N02/10393164146/in/photostream/>

More information on those birds can be found at: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/whooping-cranes>

Additional photos by Don Lumbery are at: <http://tinyurl.com/lo2d3u7>

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**Whooping Crane** – Perhaps the largest migrating Whooping Crane flock over Texas ever photographed were photo-documented 14 Nov (Martin Kemper, ph.) over Lake Waco, *McLennan*. The photo included 14 Whoopers and Kemper identified 22 Whoopers in the flock. Typically migrating in groups of 1-5 birds, larger flocks have occasionally been reported, yet they have not been photographed and observers, usually without binoculars, may have included similar Sandhill Cranes in their counts. [photo attached with permission granted for publication].



**Whooping Crane** – This certainly has been the season for Whooping Crane reports, as another provides a first county record for *Robertson* when one was seen in the Calvert area 22 Nov (Alberto Manterola)

and through the Rio Brazos Audubon Society e-group was observed daily well beyond the end of the period (m.ob.).



American Avocet – Rare for *Brazos*, 2 American Avocets were at Carter Lake in College Station 12 Oct (Sandy Dillard). There are only a handful of records since the mid-1970s.

**Greater Yellowlegs** – An impressive count of 400 Greater Yellowlegs 16 Nov (Peter Barnes, Janet Cook) at Richland Creek WMA in *Freestone* surpasses the previous high of 350 at this popular stop-over point for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds.

Short-billed Dowitcher – A photographed Short-billed Dowitcher was at Lake Sam Rayburn TX 147 causeway, *San Augustine*, 21 Sep (David Wolf, ph.)

**Long-billed Dowitcher** – An impressive count of 650 Long-billed Dowitchers was made at Richland Creek WMA, *Freestone*, 16 Nov (D. D. Little, Dell Little, Peter Barnes, Janet Cook).

**Least Tern** – A first record for *Madison*, a Least Tern was carefully identified at Lake Madison Park in Madisonville 31 Aug (Drew Dickert). In *San Augustine*, a juvenile Least Tern was observed 13 Sep (David Wolf) at the TX 147 causeway at Lake Sam Rayburn and 2 terns were seen at Cooper Lake in *Delta* 3 Aug (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

**Burrowing Owl** – A rare sight for *Bastrop* was a Burrowing Owl off Old Sayer's Rd 2 Nov (Jason Leifester, ph.); there are only 2-3 records for the county, one in 1999 and the other one (or two) in the 1970s or before.

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**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** – What accounts for an increase in sightings of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds in the Central Brazos Valley: increasing range, more feeders, or better skilled observers? This season one appeared in Chappell Hill, *Washington*, 12 Oct (Darrell Vollert) and remained throughout the season. Another was in College Station, *Brazos*, 7-17 Nov (Laura Sare). These follow extended stays earlier in the year and last of one in Wellborn, another in Bryan, yet another in Chappell Hill. Before 2010, there is only one other record in the Central Brazos Valley.

**Red-headed Woodpecker** – As David Wolf observed, “Red-headed Woodpeckers were widespread again this summer ... likely in continuing response to the abundance of dead trees made available by the drought in 2010-11.” Not only were they found in many places in his central Pineywoods location (*Nacogdoches*, *Angelina*, *San Augustine*), but they also were seen more often in *Brazos* (13 reports) as well as reports from many other Central Brazos Valley and East Texas counties.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – Earlier by 2 days than previous central Pineywoods records, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*, 25 Sep (Thomas Riecke). A high count of 22 sapsuckers passed through *San Augustine* 18 Oct (David Wolf).

**Western/Couch's Kingbird** – A silent yellow-bellied kingbird is either an exceptionally late Western Kingbird or a first county record Couch's Kingbird, seen 10 Nov (Jon Purvis) while the observer was sitting in a deer blind at 4D Ranch in *Hopkins*. Unaware of the possibility of a north-east-Texas-rare Couch's, the observer did not study tail feathers.

Eastern Kingbird – An impressive roost in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches*, 9-10 Sep (Cliff Shackelford) was estimated to contain 420 Eastern Kingbirds and 280 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. The birds started gathering about 7 PM each evening. Surprisingly late was an Eastern Kingbird 30 Nov (Evan Janson) at Sanders Creek Ranch in *Lamar*.

Cedar Waxwing – Cedar Waxwings made an early arrival 21 Sep (Peter Barnes) at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Franklin*.

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**Worm-eating Warbler** – Extremely rare as a fall migrant in the Central Brazos Valley, a Worm-eating Warbler was well-described 23 Sep (John Hale) at Brison Park, College Station in *Brazos*. Since the first fall record in 1963, there have only been 4 other area records.

**Blackburnian Warbler** – Rarely reported in fall migration in north-east Texas, Blackburnian Warblers were recorded on 3 dates 3-21 Sep (Boyd Sanders) at Tyler State Park in *Smith* and also 1 Oct (Richard Kinney) at Lake Tawakoni, *Rains*.

**Chestnut-sided Warbler** – With only 8 fall records in the Central Brazos Valley since first reported there in 1964, the well-described first-winter Chestnut-sided Warbler seen 6 Oct (Mark McDermott) at Brison Park in College Station, *Brazos*, is noteworthy.

Palm Warbler – Rare for central Pineywoods, a Palm Warbler was at Alazan Bayou, *Nacogdoches*, 17 Oct (David Wolf).

Canada Warbler – Rare in fall migration, a Canada Warbler was found 7 Sep (Boyd Sanders) at Tyler State Park, *Smith*.

**Western Tanager** – Only the second record for *Brazos*, the first in 1974, a male Western Tanager was photographed at Bee Creek Park in College Station 29 Sept (Boris Novikov, ph.).

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