

## Fall 2014: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 538 sightings of 190 species, plus a survey of 117,834 records submitted to eBird from 1 August to 30 November 2014.

### **WEATHER REPORTS:**

David Wolf, fall season, Central Pineywoods area, "Generally the weather was not dramatic enough to produce widespread "fallouts" of migrants (there were no tropical storm events), while our breeding birds just quietly slipped away and winter residents were mostly late in arriving. Prolonged "pleasant" and dry weather in late Sept and early Oct contributed to a poor showing from the migrant raptors. With ample rains the water levels in area reservoirs remained high, so shorebird habitat was almost completely lacking, as were shorebirds. Finally, as colder arrived in November, so did numbers of waterfowl and arriving sparrows and other winter songbirds. A major cold front around Nov 11-12 brought a significant freeze overnight on Nov 13-14 (down to the mid-20s in some of our area). This is a few days earlier than our average first-freeze date, but the rest of November remained mild."

### **MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:**

Cackling Goose – An out-of-season Cackling Goose at Carter Lake in *Brazos* drew lots of local attention, beginning 24 Aug (Rick & Sarah Laughlin) and was seen well into November (m.ob.). Although it was not tame and showed no indication of clipped wings, its association with a dozen resident Canada Geese and the odd timing strongly suggested it was not wild.

Redhead – A very early arrival for north-east Texas, a Redhead was at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro*, 9 Aug (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton). Also early were 5 Redheads 5 Oct (Louis Debetaz, David Bell, Les Stewart) at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*.

**Greater Scaup** – Rarely reported in the Central Brazos Valley and certainly not in numbers, 12 Greater Scaup were carefully studied in the presence of Lesser Scaup in Marlin, *Falls*, just off the Brazos River 28 Nov (†Rick & Sarah Laughlin).

Bufflehead – A good count was 75 Bufflehead 15 Nov (Louis Debetaz) at Ellen Trout Lake in Lufkin, *Angelina*.

Northern Bobwhite – No longer oft-reported, 4 Northern Bobwhite at Carrizo Creek, *Nacogdoches* 3 Aug (Susie Lower) were a surprise, as was a covey of 15 on Jones-Wilke Road in *Austin* 13 Sep (Darrell Vollert).

Wild Turkey – Wild Turkeys showing up at unusual places included one between Etoile and Woden, *Nacogdoches* 3 Aug (David Wolf, Robert Truss), 2 in *Cherokee* 12 Oct (John Hale), and one near Caldwell, *Burleson* 7 Nov (Steve Welborn).

Common Loon – The peak count for north-east Texas of Common Loons was 49 at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 8 Nov (David Brotherton).

Least Grebe – Least Grebes reported this summer were still present at a private lake in *Washington* 7 Sep (Darrell Vollert).

Horned Grebe – Up to 4 Horned Grebes 27-30 Nov (Andy Newman, Rich Kostecke) in the backwaters near Welch Park, *Burleson* constitute only the fourth record for Lake Somerville.

**Western Grebe** – For now the third fall in a row, a Western Grebe was at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* 22 Nov (David Brotherton).

Brown Pelican – As has become usual, a Brown Pelican was at the spillway of Lake Livingston in *Polk* 4 Sep (Jerry Chen).

**Egrets, herons & ibis** – A phenomenal congregation of long-legged waders gathered at Richland Creek W.M.A. *Freestone/Navarro* 8 Aug to 14 Sep (m.ob.) with peak counts of 800 Great Egrets 23 Aug, 750 Snowy Egrets 13 Aug, 400 Little Blue Herons 13 Aug and 23 Aug, 28 Tricolored Herons 13 Aug, 34 Black-crowned Night-Herons 22 Aug, 1500 White Ibis 31 Aug, 600 White-faced Ibis 14 Sep, and 25 Roseate Spoonbills 24 Aug.

**Reddish Egret** – A Reddish Egret was at Lake Somerville 3 Oct (ph. †James White) at Welch Park, *Burleson* and an immature was at Overlook Park, *Washington* 23 Nov (†Darrell Vollert).



Cattle Egret – A count of 1160 Cattle Egrets leaving a roost towards Kingston from Marion Ferry, *Angelina* 30 Aug (David Wolf) surpassed an estimated thousand Cattle Egrets at Richland Creek W.M.A. *Freestone/Navarro* 31 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) the next day.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron** – Providing the first evidence of breeding in *Washington*, Black-crowned Night-Herons nested this summer at a private lake; 3 adults and 2 immatures were present 24 Oct and a single immature was still there 16 Nov (Darrell Vollert)

Osprey – An Osprey 4 Nov (Louis Debetaz) was a late migrant at Kurth Lake, *Angelina*.

**Mississippi Kite** – A major push of migrating Mississippi Kites were over Richland Creek W.M.A. 23 Aug, with 80 on the *Navarro* side and 400 on the *Freestone* side (Christian Walker). Two days later the coastal hawk watch at Smith Point, *Chambers* reported 1427 kites and that same day 60-76 circled Lake Waco, *McLennan*.

**White-tailed Hawk** – Out of normal range was a White-tailed Hawk at the turf farms in the Brazos River bottoms of *Burleson* 22 Aug (Ronald Newhouse) and two were seen at the same location 28 Oct (Katharine Cupps, John Hale). Even farther out of range was one in the Rosebud area of *Falls* 21 Sep (ph. David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) where it was a first county record.



**Sora** – A rarely detected migrant in the central Pineywoods, a moribund Sora was found in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 13 Sep (Cliff Shackelford). Farther west at Richland Creek W.M.A. up to 30 Soras were tallied each in *Freestone* and *Navarro* 10 Oct (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

**Common Gallinule** – Common Gallinules again bred at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* and were still present 5 Oct (Louis Debetaz), but more noteworthy is 3 chicks and 3 sub-adults found at Cox Cemetery 17 Aug (Rick & Sarah Laughlin), a newly found site for *Brazos*.

**American Coot** – At a newly discovered breeding site, 4 chicks and 4 sub-adult American Coots were running around marshy areas at Cox Cemetery, *Brazos* 17 Aug (Rick & Sarah Laughlin). Thirty migrant coots were at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 23 Sep and increased to 6000+ by 21 Oct (Louis Debetaz). By 30 Nov (David Wolf, Robert Truss) at least 8000 coots were at the TX 147 causeway over Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*.

**Black-necked Stilt** – On 13 Aug (Peter Barnes) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*, 70 Black-necked Stilts included many recently fledged birds. On the *Navarro* side 90 were reported 24 Aug (Shannon Love, Jane Ramberg) and numbers diminished until just one was present 11 Oct (Peter Barnes).

**American Avocet** – American Avocets were unusually numerous and widespread in East Texas with reports in at least 12 north-east counties and 4 Central Brazos Valley counties; the high counts were 43 in *Cass* 25 Oct (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton), 45 in *Trinity* 13 Sep (Andy Newman), and 55 in *San Augustine* 14 Oct (David Wolf).

**American Golden-Plover** – A rare fall migrant through East Texas, a single American Golden-Plover was reported in a flock of 20 Killdeer in a grassy field at the Exotic Animal Farm, *Houston* 26-28 Sep (†Drew Dickert).

[NOTE TO EDITOR: I am not sure this was correctly identified and I noticed the observer has a list of rejected sightings on eBird. His description is as follows: larger than Killdeer next to it, bill about same size as Killdeer (perhaps slightly thicker at base and slightly shorter); basic plumage, with dark brown cap,

bold white supercilium and forehead, dark auricular patch, dark wing tips extended well past tail tip - on east dirt shore of pond with Killdeer."--- Bert]

**Willet** – Historically rare at Richland Creek W.M.A., Willets were common in both *Freestone* and *Navarro*, with many sightings 9 Aug – 20 Sep and a peak count of 8 on 22 Aug (Mike Bloodsworth) in *Freestone*.

**Marbled Godwit** – Richland Creek W.M.A. hosted 1-2 Marbled Godwits in both *Freestone* and *Navarro* 9 Aug – 6 Sep (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, m.ob.); this is the first fall record for the refuge.

**Ruddy Turnstone** – A first county record for *Freestone* was a Ruddy Turnstone 31 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, et al.) at Richland Creek W.M.A.

**Stilt Sandpiper** – With only a very few historical records of Stilt Sandpiper in fall migration through Richland Creek W.M.A. it is noteworthy that multiple sightings were recorded 6 Aug – 11 Oct in both counties; peak counts were 200 in *Freestone* 13 Aug (Peter Barnes) and 153 in *Navarro* 17 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little)

**Short-billed Dowitcher** – A calling Short-billed Dowitcher was in a flock with 5 Long-billed Dowitchers and 50 unidentified dowitchers 17 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro*.

**Wilson's Phalarope** – In prior years Wilson's Phalaropes rarely stopped at Richland Creek W.M.A. in fall migration. This fall they were present 6 Aug – 14 Sep (m.ob.) with a peak of 500 23-24 Aug.

**Laughing Gull** – A surprising number of Laughing Gulls were found far inland, including one at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 24 Aug (Mike Cameron), up to 10 at Lake Livingston, *Trinity* 5 Sep – 4 Nov (Donna Cannon) and *Polk* 20 Oct (Marcus Wheeler), and up to 5 on the upper reaches of Lake Livingston on the Trinity River, *Walker* 31 Oct – 14 Nov (Andy Newman); 2 were over Lake Bryan, *Brazos* 8 Nov (Bruce Neville, Betty Vermeire, Rick & Sarah Laughlin) and yet another one was at Lake Somerville, *Burleson* 27 Nov (Andy Newman).

Franklin's Gull – An impressive count of 865 Franklin's Gulls swirled around the TX 147 causeway at Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine* 14 Oct (David Wolf).

**Least Tern** – First county records for the fall in *Freestone* and *Navarro* were Least Terns at Richland Creek W.M.A. 5-31 Aug (Ashley Tubbs, m.ob.). In *Bowie* on the Red River from the Oklahoma border to the Arkansas 41 ramp, a survey found 16 Least Terns, including fledglings and chicks 11 Aug (Ryan Risher). Three more Least Terns were found at Lake Bob Sandlin, *Titus* 15 Aug (David & Luanne Brotherton).

White-winged Dove – A record number of ~300 White-winged Doves were streaming over Country Club Lake in Bryan, *Brazos* 23 Sep (Bruce Neville).

Black-billed Cuckoo – A hard find in fall migration, Black-billed Cuckoo was described at Lake Houston State Park, *Montgomery* 2 Oct (†James Kessler).

Great Horned Owl – A Great Horned Owl on 12 Oct (John Hale) in *Cherokee* was the 200<sup>th</sup> species recorded on eBird for the county; only two other counties (*Red River* and *Camp*) have not broken the 200-barrier for north-east Texas.

**Burrowing Owl** – A first county record for *Robertson*, a Burrowing Owl first found 14 Feb, but not reported, was again (or another) seen 13 Nov (Alberto Manterola) in the Calvert area. Coincidentally, Manterola was familiar with the species because it was also on a family farm he managed in Central Mexico.

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**Common Nighthawk** – The sight of 200 Common Nighthawks over the SFASU Stadium in Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* during their home football game 13 Sep (Cliff Shackelford, Julie Shackelford) must have been an incredible experience.

**Prairie Falcon** – Only the second record for *Lee*, a Prairie Falcon was near Lexington 26 Oct (†Carlos Ross).

Eastern Wood-Pewee – Late for the central Pineywoods, a migrant Eastern Wood-Pewee was calling in Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 11 Oct (David Wolf).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – Large numbers of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were gathering in College Station, *Brazos* with estimates of 300 2-6 Aug (George McIlhane, Bryan Calk). In Brenham, *Washington* 200-300 gathered 18 Aug (Darrell Vollert). And 12 Oct (Cliff Shackelford) 500+ were gathering in Crockett, *Houston* at dusk.

**Bewick's Wren** – Now quite scarce in the central Pineywoods and not reported in *Angelina* in nearly a decade, a Bewick's Wren was at Ellen Trout Park 18 Nov (David Bell).

Sprague's Pipit – Eight Sprague's Pipits at Nacogdoches airport, *Nacogdoches* 13 Nov (Charles Dean Fisher, Lew Stewart) is a notable number for the Pineywoods. A flyover Sprague's Pipit at Welch Park is a first for the *Burleson* side of Lake Somerville and only the fourth for the 3-county lake.

Blue-winged Warbler – Rare for north-east Texas in fall, a Blue-winged Warbler was seen on CR 1582 in Cass 16 Aug (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

**Kentucky Warbler** – The latest record by 10 days for the Oaks & Prairies region, a Kentucky Warbler was identified by call 25 Oct (Rich Kostecke) at Long Trussel Rd, *Brazos*.

Prairie Warbler – A migrant Prairie Warbler was a good find at the TX 147 causeway on Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina* 12 Aug (David Wolf).

Chipping Sparrow – Chipping Sparrows are rarely noted in the central Pineywoods in August, so one at the TX 147 causeway on Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina* 18 Aug (David Wolf) is noteworthy. Elsewhere in East Texas 3 were noted in *Gregg* 1 Aug (Robert Bowker), 1 in *Harrison* 2 Aug (Rosa Lovelace), and 1 in Cass 16 Aug (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

Savannah Sparrow – Early was a Savannah Sparrow at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 31 Aug (Susan Heath).

Harris's Sparrow – Tying for the earliest record for the Central Brazos Valley, a Harris's Sparrow was at Cox Cemetery in *Brazos* 9 Nov (Rick & Sarah Laughlin).

Western Meadowlark – An extremely large count of 225 Western Meadowlarks was at Lake Tawakoni, *Rains* 14 Nov (Richard Kinney).

**Yellow-headed Blackbird** – Only the fourth record for the tri-county area of Lake Somerville, a Yellow-headed Blackbird was at the backwaters of *Burleson* 27 Nov (Andy Newman).

**Great-tailed Grackle** – David Wolf writes, "Much to our displeasure, Great-tailed Grackles are now firmly established in *Nacogdoches*, with breeding confirmed at 3 sites this year and likely at another (m. obs.). A single over Marion Ferry August 3 (David Wolf) was one of the few *Angelina* sightings away from known colonies in Lufkin and Diboll." Later in the season, David added, "6 Great-tailed Grackles were still in Nacogdoches 29 Oct (David Wolf), but none were found thereafter (m. obs.). They still seem to disappear from our area for the winter!"

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**Bullock's/Baltimore Oriole** – A reported Bullock's X Baltimore Oriole hybrid was described at Tyler State Park, *Smith* 24 Sep (†Boyd Sanders).

American Goldfinch – Very out-of-season was a male American Goldfinch photographed north of Center, *Shelby* 18 Aug (ph. Susan Orwig).

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**CONTRIBUTORS:**

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