

Spring 2014: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 630 sightings of 213 species from 1 March to 31 May 2014.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, central Pineywoods, spring season, "... overall this seemed to be the dullest spring in many years, without much rain or frontal activity to produce major fallouts. Winter lingered late and many migrants were initially late in showing up (how do they know it's still cold here when they are in Central America?)."

David Wolf, central Pineywoods, 29 March, "March 29, the day after a line of violent thunderstorms passed through, produced a push of "downed" migrants: 16 Upland Sandpipers at Nacogdoches Airport and 5 in Central Heights; 34 Am Golden-Plover, 5 Pectoral and 2 Baird's sandpipers at Angelina County Airport; an early first Great Crested Flycatcher at Kurth Lake; and first Eastern Kingbird and Common Yellowthroat at Alazan Bayou WMA and 2 migrant Yellow-throated Warblers in Nacogdoches."

Darrell Vollert, Washington County, 12 May, "Portions of the Brazos River bottom east of Chappell Hill were flooded as a result of last night's 4.2" rain. Hundreds of Black Terns were feeding above a flooded cow pasture."

David Wolf, central Pineywoods, 12-13 May, "The most dramatic weather and fallout was thunderstorms and a dumping rain (5-6 inches in most parts of our area) overnight on May 12-13, as a major late cold front pushed into our area. No great numbers of passerines were put down by this storm, but a remarkable fallout of shorebirds was found in Nacogdoches County, when David Wolf found 14 species of migrant shorebirds in flooded grassland at two locations in Nacogdoches County, including a Whimbrel, single Short-billed Dowitchers at two locations, 40 Stilt and 6 Buff-breasted Sandpipers and 3 Dunlin amidst the commoner species. Louis Debetaz at Kurth Lake added 6 American Avocets to the rare shorebird list for the day and had a very high count of 75 Spotted Sandpipers and 63 Black Terns, while 15 Black Terns were just over the county line at South Boggy Slough in e. Trinity County (Cliff Shackelford). We do not often see many spring migrant shorebirds inland in the Pineywoods, probably largely due to lack of habitat as they are clearly passing over - as demonstrated on the rare occasions like this when they get knocked down!"

Harvey Laas, Waller County, 13 May, "I encountered the big flock of Black Terns working a fallow rice field that was flooded from our 4 to 5 inch rain we received yesterday am."

Philip Rostron, Bastrop County, 14 May, "For the first time in a long time there is water in Shipp Lake (far E. Bastrop Co), at least on the south side. Quite a change from the sea of grass."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Gadwall – An impressive count of 1700 Gadwall was tallied 1 Mar (Peter Barnes, et al.) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.

Mottled Duck – Only the fifth record for *McLennan* in the past 20 years is the Mottled Duck at Lake Waco 3-4 Mar (ph. Ted Drozdowski, †Matt York).

Northern Shoveler – An exceptional count of 2500 Northern Shovelers was tallied 1 Mar (Peter Barnes, et al.) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*, the highest single count in the central Oaks & Prairies region.

Northern Pintail – An impressive count of 1800 Northern Pintails was tallied 1 Mar (Peter Barnes, et al.) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.

Green-winged Teal – An exceptional count of 1300 Green-winged Teal was tallied 1 Mar (Peter Barnes, et al.) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*, the highest single count in the central Oaks & Prairies region.

White-winged Scoter – The White-winged Scoter first reported 19 Feb remained at Tyler State Park, *Smith* until 22 Mar (Boyd Sanders et al.). [Elsewhere this spring, single White-winged Scoters were observed 9 Mar at Proctor Lake in *Comanche*, 18-24 Mar at Baytown Nature Center in I, and 24 Mar at Bolivar-Galveston Ferry in *Galveston*.]

Long-tailed Duck – Not since 1988 has a Long-tailed Duck been reported in *Angelina*, so a female at Kurth Lake 20 Mar (Louis Debetaz, Wayne Forrest, Susie Lower, David Wolf) is certainly noteworthy. Within the central Pineywoods, this is only the ninth record in the last 45 years.

Long-tailed Duck – A first county record for *Freestone* is a male Long-tailed Duck transitioning to breeding plumage 18-20 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, ph. Brandon Thurston, Blaine Carnes) at Richland Creek W.M.A. [Other Long-tailed Ducks this season are singles at Inks Lake National Fish Hatchery in *Burnet* 1-30 Mar, at Fort Martin Scott in *Gillespie* 7-11 Mar, at Riverside Canal in *El Paso* 7 Mar, and at Indianola in *Calhoun* 5 May.]

Pacific Loon – One of the 3 Pacific Loons present since 8 Feb at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* one was still there 9 Mar (ph. †David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).

Least Grebe – Only the second breeding record for *Washington*, a pair of Least Grebes with one chick swimming and another on the hen's back were watched at a private lake 18 May (Darrell Vollert). Perhaps these are some of the 3 grebes at Washington-on-the-Brazos S.H.P. observed 29 Nov to 1 Jan. since the park and the lake are separated by less than 9 miles.

Glossy Ibis – A Glossy Ibis 27 Apr – 3 May (†D. D. Currie, Dell Little) is the fourth record for Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.

Swallow-tailed Kite – Wandering Swallow-tailed Kites were 2 at Cedar Creek in *Bastrop* 5 Apr (†Brush Freeman), 1 at Kurten in *Brazos* 12 Apr (Dan Wilkerson), and 1 at Bryan in *Brazos* 3 May (Sandy Dillard). Others may be near nesting sites: 2 carrying branches in their claws in *Montgomery* 12 Apr (Gwen Lanning), 1 at Martin Dies S.P. in *Tyler* 28 Apr (Anthony Hewetson), 1 at Lake Livingston in *Polk* 29 Apr (Anthony Hewetson), 1 at Oakhurst Country Club in *Montgomery* 29 Apr (Gordon White), 1 at Angelina Neuches Dam in *Tyler* 9 May (Bill Wright), and 1 near Keenan in *Montgomery* 22 May (Debbie Layer),

Cooper's Hawk – Although a known winter resident in *Brazos* since 1936 and a year-round resident in the past 4 years, it was not until this year that breeding was established when on 22 Mar (ph. Bryan Calk) a nest was discovered in College Station, on 20 May two chicks were attended by both adults, and on 31 May one brancher chick left the nest while 3 more remained in the nest.

Purple Gallinule – Three inland Purple Gallinules were reported at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 26 Apr (Louis Debetaz); one was at Caddo Lake, *Harrison* 19 Apr (Ashely Tubbs), another was one at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro* 3 May (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Ed Wetzal) and up to 4 were present 10-11 May (Bruce Neville et al.) at Cox Cemetery, *Brazos*.

Black-necked Stilt – At widely separated locations in *Brazos*, 2 Black-necked Stilts were reported 10 May (Rick Laughlin, Sarah Laughlin, Laura Biddle) west of College Station and 13 May (Laura Sare) at the sod farms off FM159.

American Avocet – A rare spring record for the central Pineywoods is the 6 American Avocets found at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 13 May (Louis Debetaz).

American Golden Plover – Unusually early were 2 American Golden Plovers at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 1 Mar (†Peter Barnes, Bill Wright et al.).

American Golden Plover – A single American Golden Plover 22 Apr (Chuck Sexton) at Marlin is a first county record for *Falls*.

American Golden Plover – An influx of American Golden Plovers into the central Pineywoods 14-29 March peaked at 110 on 16 Mar (David Wolf).

American Golden Plover – Two American Golden Plovers 23 May (Ken Hartman) southwest of Sealy in *Austin* were late.

Snowy Plover – The first spring record ever for the central Pineywoods and only the fourth record in 45 years is a Snowy Plover at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* 6 May (Louis Debetaz).

Spotted Sandpiper – An exceptional count of 75 Spotted Sandpipers graced Kurth Lake in *Angelina* 13 May (Louis Debetaz) and even more amazing is 90 Spotted Sandpipers at Richland Creek W.M.A. in *Freestone* 27 Apr (Dell Little).

Whimbrel – A major cold front, thunderstorms and dumping rain brought down a Whimbrel, extremely rare in the Pineywoods and only the fourth area record in 45 years, to Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 13 May (David Wolf).

Hudsonian Godwit – Averaging only about one area record every 4 years lends significance to the sighting of 6 Hudsonian Godwits at the FM159 turf farms in *Brazos* 13 May (Laura Sare).

Stilt Sandpiper – A first county record for *Leon* is a Stilt Sandpiper 30 Mar (Laura Sare, Bruce Neville) at OSR and FM 2485.

Stilt Sandpiper – The Pineywoods lacks habitat for finding spring migrant shorebirds, so 40 Stilt Sandpipers brought down by a storm 13 May (David Wolf) in flooded grasslands at 2 *Nacogdoches* locations is significant.

Dunlin – Two Dunlins 13 May (Laura Sare) at the FM159 sod farms is a good find for *Brazos* where it has not been reported in more than a decade.

Dunlin – Even more unusual is the 3 Dunlins brought down by the same storm 13 May (David Wolf) in *Nacogdoches* flooded grasslands.

Baird's Sandpiper – Seen in spring perhaps once per decade in the central Pineywoods, two Baird's Sandpipers were downed by violent thunderstorms at Angelina County Airport 29 Mar (Louis Debetaz).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper – Thrown off course by storms, 6 Buff-breasted Sandpipers landed in the central Pineywoods at Nacogdoches Airport 13 May (David Wolf) where it is one of the rarest shorebirds to be found in spring.

Pectoral Sandpiper – Five Pectoral Sandpipers were among the downed migrant shorebirds following violent thunderstorms at Angelina County Airport 29 Mar (Louis Debetaz) where they are rare. A high count of 200 were at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 27 Apr (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Short-billed Dowitcher – Highly unusual and only the second spring record for the tri-county central Pineywoods area, single Short-billed Dowitchers were at two locations in *Nacogdoches* 13 May (ph. David Wolf), pushed down in dumping rain of 5-6 inches.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – A Lesser Black-backed Gull seen at Lake Tyler 15-16 Mar (Dennis Scott, Rick Shaefer) could be the same one seen last December at another *Smith* location.

Black Tern – Many observers commented on the exceptionally large numbers of Black Terns 13 May following substantial rains of 4-5 inches 12 May. These included hundreds feeding above a flooded cow pasture in the Brazos River bottoms of *Washington* (Darrell Vollert), at least 100 over fallow rice fields near Brookshire in *Waller* (Harvey Laas) with another hundred in the Stalknecht/Neuman Rd area of *Waller* (John Berner), an estimated 200 over the FM159 sod farms of *Brazos* (Laura Sare), 63 at Kurth Lake in *Angelina* (Louis Debetaz), and smaller numbers that day and the next in *Waller*, *Trinity*, *Smith* and *Bastrop*.

Black Tern – Significant is 3 Black Terns flying over flooded fields on Beckendorf Rd 13-16 May (†John Berner), providing a first county record for *Austin*, soon followed 23-24 May (Ken Hartman, John Berner) with 1-2 more in the Sealy area.

White-winged Dove – White-winged Doves reached as far east as *Wood*, with 6 at Winnsboro City Park on 15 Mar (Dale Ohl).

White-winged Dove – In *Nacogdoches* where they are still very rare, one that overwintered was still in Central Heights 18 Mar (David Wolf) and another was seen in *Nacogdoches* town 18 May (David Wolf, Robert Truss).

Black-billed Cuckoo – Rare and always an exciting find at inland sites, single Black-billed Cuckoos were reported 13 May (Bryan Calk) at Brothers Pond Park in *Brazos* and 19 May (Peter Barnes, Ross Rickett) at Tyler in *Smith*.

Common Nighthawk – An uncommonly large count of 54 Common Nighthawks passed over Henderson 9 May (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Buff-bellied Hummingbird - At the northern edge of its range, single Buff-bellied Hummingbirds were observed in Bryan, *Brazos* 13-22 May (Burnie Kessner, Rick Laughlin, John Hale) and north of Bellville, *Austin* 14-15 May (Darrell Vollert).

Red-headed Woodpecker – Continuing a trend noted last year, the drought and subsequent death of trees resulted in a substantial increase in both the number of Red-headed Woodpeckers and the diversity of their reported locations. Brazos County is a good case in point where from 1994-2012 the average number of reports was 3 from 2 locations whereas in 2013 there were 17 reports from 12 locations. 2014 is on trend for an even higher count with 6 reports at 5 locations in the first 4.5 months. Other sightings from the Central Brazos Valley this spring are in *Austin*, *Falls*, *Leon*, *Waller*, and *Washington*. In May, David Wolf reported for the central Pineywoods, “Yes, we are seeing Red-headed Woodpeckers around in lots of places and they continue to be more widespread and easier to find than expected.” On eBird are 172 reports from north-east Texas, covering 22 counties.

Red-headed Woodpecker – A Red-headed Woodpecker outside of Marlin 16 May (Frank & Jeanette Bumgardner) is a first record for *Falls*.

American Kestrel – A pair of American Kestrels are again at the same spot 3-10 May (John Hale et al.) near Carter Lake as last spring, where breeding has yet to be documented for *Brazos*.

Great Crested Flycatcher – A Great Crested Flycatcher 22 Mar (Ronald Newhouse) in Bryan was early for *Brazos*.

Red-breasted Nuthatch – After being sparse this winter, there were few reports of Red-breasted Nuthatch in spring. An eBird search showed only 1 report for East Texas in *Henderson*, 7-22 Mar (D. D. Currie, Dell Little), 1 report 8 Mar (Laura Sare) from *Brazos* for Central Brazos Valley and scattered reports in *Bastrop*, *Bell*, *Bexar*, *Blanco*, *Brazoria*, *Brewster*, *Culberson*, *El Paso*, *Fort Bend*, *Galveston*, *Guadalupe*, *Harris*, *Hays*, *Pecos*, *Taylor*, *Travis*, and *Yoakum*.

Winter Wren – A count of 6 Winter Wrens at Lick Creek Park 1 Mar (Bryan Calk) is very high for *Brazos*.
Yellow-rumped Warbler – A male Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warbler 19 Mar (David Wolf) is west of expected range at Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest, *Nacogdoches*.

Black-headed Grosbeak – Only the second record for *Austin*, a Black-headed Grosbeak was at a residence north of Bellville 25 Apr (Darrell Vollert).

Lazuli Bunting – Unexpected in East Texas, a male Lazuli Bunting was present in Tyler 24 Apr (ph. Mike Bloodsworth) and another or the same was at Tyler State Park 9 May (†Boyd Sanders), both in *Smith*.

Western Meadowlark – West of normal range, 2 Western Meadowlarks were at CR2630 in *Fannin* 6 Mar (Caleb Frome) and 2 more were at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 9 Mar (D. D. Currie, Dell Little),

Rusty Blackbird – David Wolf reported for the central Pineywoods, “After their major winter invasion Rusty Blackbirds stayed later than usual and 15 in Nacogdoches town on 16 Mar (David Wolf) was our latest date ever.” Even later were 6 at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 29 Mar (Betsy Baker, Susan Tiholiz). On the *Navarro* side of the refuge a high count of 40 was present 1 Mar (Bill Wright).

Brewer's Blackbird – The highest number ever for the tri-county central Pineywoods was 350+ Brewer's Blackbirds 16 Mar (David Wolf) at a farm in west *Nacogdoches*.

Bronzed Cowbird – Although rare in *Brazos*, this spring provided 3 Bronzed Cowbirds 6 May (John Hale, Linda Hale, Laura King) at Brison Park and 1 was still there 10 May (m.ob.).

Purple Finch – As in the winter, only a few Purple Finch were reported in spring, including singles 6 Mar (Chuck Ely) banded in Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches and 9-12 Mar (Sandy Dillard) at Bryan in *Brazos*, and 8 in *Wood* 27 Mar (Elizabeth Davis).

Pine Siskin – While there were Pine Siskins scattered across Texas, only 3 reports came from north-east Texas – in *Franklin*, *Montgomery*, and *Morris*.

Lesser Goldfinch – Far from normal range and only the fourth record for the entire Pineywoods ecoregion, an adult male Lesser Goldfinch was photographed at a feeder near Nacogdoches, Nacogdoches 16 Mar (ph. Katie Newsome, ph. Sunni Morris).

CONTRIBUTORS:

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