

Fall 2015: Central Oaks & Prairies and East Texas Pineywoods

By Bert Frenz

This report is reduced from 221 sightings of 124 species, plus a survey of 138,831 records submitted to eBird for the period 1 August to 30 November 2015.

WEATHER REPORTS:

David Wolf, fall season, Central Pineywoods area, "This year this fall migration season can best be summed up as "boring" most of the time. It was relatively hot and remained extremely dry until late October. There was almost no dramatic weather in the way of tropical storm activity or strong cool fronts. Instead, weak fronts kept pushing through without rain, keeping us under a high-pressure ridge. It was not until October 23-25 that we finally got good rains, in conjunction with the passage of a weak cool front. After this the rains came regularly and heavily, but by then most non-wintering species had passed through largely undetected. The first freeze came to the northern parts of the region for a few hours overnight on Nov 21-22 and then the next night brought a deeper freeze to the entire area. This is a few days later than our average first freeze. A few significant trends were detected: (1). Relatively few warblers were seen this fall, but there was a spate of records of very late stragglers; (2). Some winter birds seem to be "on the move" early, including American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Pine Siskin and American Goldfinch. What does this portend? (3). As of the first week of December, numbers of sparrows and many other winter residents were still relatively low. Due to the mild weather, both here and up north?"

David Wolf, fall season, Central Pineywoods area, "Migrant warblers were relatively scarce, not surprising since it seems to take wet and stormy weather to bring them down in any numbers or variety and we did not have much of this weather pattern this fall."

MOST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS:

Gadwall – Early arriving Gadwall include seven at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 23 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little).

Northern Shoveler – A dozen Northern Shovelers arrived 21 Aug (Susan Haney) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*. Farther east, a single shoveler was early at Lake Sam Rayburn Marion Ferry, *Angelina* 26 Aug (David Wolf).

Mallard X Northern Pintail – A hybrid Mallard x Northern Pintail was photographed at Lakeside Park in The Woodlands, *Montgomery* 29 Nov (ph. Eric Carpenter, et al.).

Canvasback – An early Canvasback was described 21 Aug (†Peter Barnes) at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion*, and may be the same one observed in the summer.

Redhead – David Wolf commented, "The blustery northeast winds on 17 Oct brought a noteworthy early push of waterfowl to Kurth Lake, *Angelina* including 45 Gadwall; 20 American Wigeon; 6 Northern Pintail; 12 Green-winged Teal; 16 Redhead; 25 Ring-necked Duck; and 6 Lesser Scaup (Louis Debetaz)."

Ring-necked Duck – A female Ring-necked Duck that summered on Kurth Lake, *Angelina* was last seen 2 Sep (Louis Debetaz).

Pacific Loon – A well-described Pacific Loon was observed through a scope at Texas Eastman at Longview, *Harrison* 25 Nov (†David Brotherton, Mark Edmund).

Pied-billed Grebe – A good breeding season for Pied-billed Grebes at Kurth Lake, *Angelina* was confirmed by two ad. and three juv. 8 Sep and 15 present 1 Oct (Louis Debetaz).

Wood Stork – At Richland Creek W.M.A. Wood Storks gathered in high numbers starting 23 Aug with a maximum of 60 on the *Freestone* side 5 Sep (Dell Little, D. D. Currie, Ben Sandifer, Bill Wright) and 76 on the *Navarro* side the same day (Barbara Tomkins).

American Bittern - An American Bittern at the base of the TX 147 causeway at Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine* 12 Sep (David Wolf) was the earliest record by eight days for the central Pineywoods.

Least Bittern – Finding a Least Bittern in north-east Texas is difficult, but a 4 Oct (†Janie Henderson) sighting was the fifth record for Ferndale Lake Club, *Camp*. A location with a dozen records is Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* where two were found 5 Oct (Carol Wells).

Great Egret – At least 102 Great Egrets took flight at dawn 30 Aug (David Wolf) from Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches*. Elsewhere, many gathered at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 26 Aug – 3 Oct with a peak of 500 5 Sep (Peter Barnes, Brandon Thurston, D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Bill Wright).

Snowy Egret – A massive rookery on Walden Road, *Montgomery* probably included 1000+ Snowy Egrets, with 700 present 5 Aug (Todd White, Madison White).

Black-crowned Night-Heron – Black-crowned Night-Heron is a rarely-found migrant through the central Pineywoods, so two sighted at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 4 Sep (David Wolf) is noteworthy.

Roseate Spoonbill – Scarce for the central Pineywoods was a Roseate Spoonbill at Lake Nacogdoches, *Nacogdoches* 17 Sep (Kathy Griffin) and even more unusual was one 8 Nov (Robert Truss, David Wolf) at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches*.

Northern Harrier – Unusually early was a Northern Harrier 26 Aug (Mike Bloodsworth) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro*.

White-tailed Hawk – Beyond its normal range and a first county record for *Robertson*, a basic II White-tailed Hawk was photographed and was one of two at Wilcox Farm near Calvert 23 Sep (ph. Alberto Manterola).



Common Gallinule – At their only known nesting site, Kurth Lake, *Angelina*, in the central Pineywoods, Common Gallinules had their best year yet with up to 20, about half juveniles, 8 Sep – 3 Oct and the last straggler still present 29 Oct (Louis Debetaz).

American Coot – Kurth Lake, *Angelina* was the gathering place for American Coots, with first arrivals 17 Sep, the first big push of 100 migrants 1 Oct, and large influxes thereafter, culminating in a maximum of 8000+ by 29 Oct (Louis Debetaz). Elsewhere the largest count was up to 2800 reported at Lake Pflugerville, *Williamson* 31 Oct – 30 Nov, including 2500 30 Nov (Dan Callaway).

Black-necked Stilt – Noteworthy counts of Black-necked Stilts again centered at Richland Creek W.M.A., 26 Aug – 7 Sep, where the count of 95 on the *Freestone* side 2 Sep (Mike Bloodsworth) is the highest historical count for the Central Brazos Valley.

American Avocet – Out of the normal, 30 American Avocets were near the dam at Lake Limestone, *Leon* 24 Aug (Ronald Newhouse).

American Golden-Plover – Although a regular spring migrant through the Central Brazos Valley, fall sightings are scarce and a 8 Sep (Alberto Monterola) sighting at a ranch near Calvert is a first fall record for *Robertson*. Also surprising was one golden-plover 5 Oct (Carol Wells) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*, the first fall record for the refuge.

Piping Plover – A photographed Piping Plover at Welch Park, *Burleson* 19 Aug (ph. Dan Cowell, Varick Cowell) is only the second record for the Central Brazos Valley. Curiously, the prior record dates back to 1976 and it was at the exact same location.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper – A rather late record for Buff-breasted Sandpiper is one at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone* 3 Oct (Peter Barnes, Linda Belssner, Dennis Scott, Eamonn Thurmond).

Black Tern – A high count of 350 Black Terns were tallied 23 Aug (D. D. Currie, Dell Little) at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Freestone*.

Common Ground-Dove – Rare in the central Pineywoods but more often found in October than other month, a male Common Ground-Dove was observed at Alazan Bayou W.M.A., *Nacogdoches* 14 Oct (David Wolf).

Chimney Swift – A flock of 500 Chimney Swifts was estimated at Ferndale Lake Club, *Camp* 14 Sep (Janie Henderson). A seasonal high for the central Pineywoods was 425 at Lake Sam Rayburn Marion Ferry, *Angelina* 11 Oct (David Wolf, Robert Truss). The highest fall numbers were at the Travis High School Chimney Swift Roost 7 Aug – 19 Sep, with counts from 644 to 1660, including 6 reports over 1000 swifts. The high count was on 24 Aug (Shelia Hargis).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – Who has the most hummingbirds at their feeders? At Big Sandy, *Upshur* 34 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds attended 13 feeders 20 Aug (Marsha Wells). Thirty-five was the count at each of two sites: Stephen F. Austin S.H.P., *Austin* 12 Sep (John Berner) and La Grange, *Fayette* 13 Sep (Jennifer Prihoda). Forty ruby-throateds were the peak in Kilgore, *Rusk* 18 Sep (Peggy Harding).

Pileated Woodpecker – A vagrant Pileated Woodpecker was observed 7 Aug (†Mike Hernandez) at the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque Rivers at Cameron Park, Waco. Although more common in the 18th and early 19th centuries in *McLennan*, more recent sightings are extremely rare.

Crested Caracara – A bit east of its normal range, a Crested Caracara flew close to the road near Leesburg 15 Nov (†Blaine Carnes, Greg Cook, Steve Glover). It may be a first record for *Camp*.

Olive-sided Flycatcher – Rarely found in north-east Texas, single Olive-sided Flycatchers were reported 21 Aug (Peter Barnes, Kristi Thomas) at Lake O' the Pines, *Marion* and 29 Aug (David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton) at Lake Bob Sandlin S.P., *Titus*.

Vermilion Flycatcher – A first record for *Morris*, a male Vermilion Flycatcher visited a yard southwest of Jenkins 1 Oct+ (Buddy Fowler, ph. David Brotherton, Luanne Brotherton).



Western Kingbird – Single Western Kingbirds extended their range far into north-east Texas with sightings 22 Aug (Allen Cartier) in the Hooks area, *Bowie* and 29 Aug (Mark Gray) at Gilmer, *Upshur*.

Eastern Kingbird – Peak counts of Eastern Kingbirds in *Nacogdoches* were 135 at a roost 29 Aug in Nacogdoches and 155 on stormy 10 Sep in Central Heights (both David Wolf).

Bell's Vireo – A good find for *Smith*, a Bell's Vireo was at Tyler S.P. 10 Sep (†Boyd Sanders).

Tree Swallow – Late Tree Swallows include three at Lake Trinidad, *Henderson* 27 Nov (D. D. Currie, Laurie Foss, Dell Little) and two at Somerville W.M.A., *Lee* 29 Nov (Andy Newman).

Cave Swallow – Cave Swallows continue to make news in north-east Texas and this season two were reported in Marion, *Marion* 22 Aug (Peter Barnes), 16 ad. and juv. were at the TX 147 bridge at Lake Sam Rayburn, *Angelina* 26 Aug (David Wolf); and 14 were at FM 3417, *Titus* 12 Sep (Greg Cook, Steve Glover).

Barn Swallow – An impressive 225 Barn Swallows congregated at Richland Creek W.M.A., *Navarro* 10 Oct (D. D. Currie, Dell Little, Laurie Foss). But that number was blown away by a massive 3500 at John Bunker Sands Wetlands, *Kaufman* 11 Oct (†Blaine Carnes).

Bewick's Wren – While eBird records of Bewick's Wren this fall season exceeded 4000 in Texas, David Wolf commented that there were no Bewick's Wrens reported in the central Pineywoods where the species is becoming scarcer. Elsewhere in East Texas the only sightings were singles at Martin Dies S.P., *Jasper* 6 Sep (Tara Randle), at Tyler-Faulkner Park, *Smith* 11 Oct (Guy Babineau, Susan Babineau), and at Ferndale Lake Club, *Camp* 24 Nov (Janie Henderson).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – A conspicuous Blue-gray Gnatcatcher migration through the central Pineywoods 26 Aug – 17 Sep was capped by a flight of an outstanding 297+ over Central Heights, *Nacogdoches* 10 Sep (David Wolf).

Gray Catbird – Gray Catbird is a scarce migrant through the central Pineywoods, so five sightings in *Nacogdoches* this season is exceptional: one at Alazan Bayou W.M.A. 4 Sep (David Wolf), two in Central Heights 5 Sep (Mimi Hoppe Wolf), one at Angelina River Crossing 4 Oct (Greg Cook, Steve Glover), one at Marion Ferry 11 Oct (David Wolf, Robert Truss), and one in *Nacogdoches* 14 Nov (Cliff Shackelford).

Worm-eating Warbler – Worm-eating Warblers nest at Orwig farm near James, *Shelby* but 25 Aug (Susan Orwig) is an unusually late departure.

Common Yellowthroat – Unusually late for East Texas was a Common Yellowthroat 27 Nov (D. D. Currie, Laurie Foss, Dell Little) at Trinidad Lake, *Henderson*.

American Redstart – A very late American Redstart was in *Nacogdoches*, *Nacogdoches* 4 Nov (Thelma Dalmas).

Magnolia Warbler – Latest in the central Pineywoods by more than a week, a Magnolia Warbler was in *Nacogdoches*, *Nacogdoches* 4 Nov (Thelma Dalmas).

Blackburnian Warbler – Quite a surprise both because it is a rare fall migrant in East Texas and because 26 Aug (David Wolf) is unusually early, a Blackburnian Warbler was sighted at the TX 147 bridge at Lake Sam Rayburn, *San Augustine*. It was the only report for East Texas this fall.

Palm Warbler – Noteworthy sightings of Palm Warblers in East Texas include one 3-31 Oct (Dianne Duke) at Atlanta S.P., *Cass* and another 8 Nov (Sandy Dillard) at Gibbons Creek Reservoir, *Grimes*.

Prairie Warbler – Two Prairie Warblers were reported at Tyler S.P., *Smith* 12 Sep (Cory Norris), unusual by location and number.

Great-tailed Grackle – Notable by their absence, there were no reports of Great-tailed Grackle in the central Pineywoods this season even though they are now common breeders in *Nacogdoches* (fide David Wolf). The grackles depart for the winter.

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