



## TEXAS: UPPER COAST SPRING MIGRATION APRIL 10-15, 2021 | PRIVATE TOUR

**Tour leader: Josh Engel**

[Click here for future Texas Coast trips](#)

[Click here for trip photo gallery](#)

This trip represented our very first out-of-state group trip since the start of the covid-19 pandemic. It was a great way to get back into it, with exciting birding, excellent company, and easy travel. We started out nabbing our the classic piney woods bird in the interior of East Texas before spending the remainder of the trip seeking out migrants and wetlands birds on the coast. We got lucky with an outstanding day of migration on our last day of the trip, the sort of day we always hope for on a Texas Spring Migration tour. The wetland birds were also fantastic throughout the trip, with excellent numbers and diversity of shorebirds plus great views of the saltmarsh specialties. We finished the trip having seen 24 species of warblers, 27 species of shorebirds, and 15 species of wading birds.

### **Top 5 Birds as voted by the group**

- 1. Clapper Rail**
- 2. Bachman's Sparrow**
- 3. (tie) Least Bittern, Swallow-tailed Kite, Painted Bunting**

The group met up in Houston and off we were. Conditions seemed good for migrants to be arriving on the coast, but that was basically a bust. We did see a few **Broad-winged** and **Swainson's Hawks**, but migrant songbirds were nonexistent, so we headed inland where we were spending the night for the first night of the trip.

We woke up for our first full day and headed to the nearby piney woods. It was very quiet at first, but soon we heard a **Bachman's Sparrow** singing. It proved incredibly elusive, but after no

small effort we all got great views of it. In the meantime, while we were trying to see the shy sparrow, both **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** and **Brown-headed Nuthatch** showed up in the same area, and we got excellent views of both. In the dense woods adjacent to the piney woods, we had nice views of **Pine and Hooded Warblers**.

We moved on to Martin Dies State Park, which was full of bird song in the late morning. Here we had great views of **Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers**, plus **Bald Eagle, Northern Parula, and Summer Tanager**. Driving out of the park I heard a **Swainson's Warbler** singing, and it proved very responsive, giving us tremendous views of this uncommon and shy warbler.

After picking up lunch, we headed back to the coast. We came to a screeching halt for a **Swallow-tailed Kite**, which sailed right overhead after we had gotten out of the car. A little later, we swung by wetlands near Winnie to look for long-staying Whooping Cranes, which we quickly found. They put on quite a show, calling, displaying, and flying for us. We finally made it to the coast to look for migrants. Once again, it was very quiet. We did see a few migrants, including **Black-and-white Warbler, Hooded Warbler, and Summer Tanager**. The highlight was the incredible heron rookery, with its innumerable and vociferous **Roseate Spoonbills, Tricolored Herons, Neotropic Cormorant, and other wading birds**. We also saw **Purple Gallinule and Anhinga** here.



**Brown-headed Nuthatch. Photo by Josh Engel.**

For our second full day, we headed east. We started at saltwater wetlands near Sabine Pass. It was extremely birdy. **Seaside Sparrows** were out in force, and we had excellent views several times, including of singing birds. A **Clapper Rail** put on an incredible show, sitting atop some reeds singing its heart out while we admired it in the scope. **Marsh and Sedge Wrens** both showed very well as well. Waterbirds were abundant, including **White-faced and White Ibis** and a variety of shorebirds. As we were about to get into the van, **Least Bittern** started calling. We were able to call it in for amazing views of one that had the shockingly red facial skin of a bittern ready to breed.

Our next stop was Sabine Woods, another of the coastal woodlots that attract migrants that have just crossed the Gulf. It took a bit of effort to find migrants here, but eventually we found a decent variety, including **Worm-eating, Hooded, and the Audubon's form of Yellow-rumped Warbler, a flock of Indigo Buntings, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Swainson's Thrush.**

After lunch we cross the Sabine River into Louisiana, to Peveto Woods. We found out best migrants of the trip so far here. Among 10 species of warblers we got great views of **Worm-eating, Hooded, Blue-winged, Black-throated Green, and Yellow-throated Warblers. Scarlet and Summer Tanager, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Indigo and Painted Buntings** also showed well, with the **Painted Bunting** even taking a bath while we watched. We also walked down the beach where a flock of terns was resting and got nice views of **Royal, Sandwich, and Forster's Terns**, while offshore a shrimp boat was surrounded by hundreds of **pelicans, gulls, and terns.** It was a very nice spot to end our day's birding.



*Clapper Rail. Photo by Josh Engel.*

We started the following day again in wetlands, this time in Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. As it often is, Anahuac was full of birds. Waterbirds filled the wetlands. **Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks** both showed very well. **Gull-billed Terns** fed over the wetlands and two **Franklin's Gulls** flew past. A **Stilt Sandpiper** was among **yellowlegs** and **dowitchers**. Both **Least and American Bitterns** flew between patches of dense reeds, but a calling **King Rail** wouldn't show itself. **Boat-tailed Grackles** were noisy and abundant and a Merlin sped over the wetlands. On our way out of the refuge, a **Crested Caracara** flew past the car, a **Swainson's Hawk** was perched on a fencepost, and a **Loggerhead Shrike** showed off on a wire.

After a brief and mosquito-filled stop in High Island, we carried on to the coastal wetlands of the Bolivar Peninsula. We stopped in at Rollover Pass, where a flock of hundreds of **Black Skimmers** and many dozens of terns was conveniently resting in the parking lot, giving tremendous views. A **Reddish Egret** fed in the adjacent bay and a **Wilson's Plover** gave us nice views.

We grabbed lunch and took it to a park to eat. The lawns of the park held some shorebirds, including several **Whimbrel** and two **American Golden-Plovers**. While we walked over to get better views, a group of **Upland Sandpiper** flew over. We then stopped at a couple of access points to the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. The number of birds was astounding, with thousands of **American Avocets** and thousands of other shorebirds. **Snowy, Wilson's, and Piping Plovers** were all present. We had great views of **Marbled Godwit, American Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Western Sandpiper**, and large flocks of **Sanderlings**. **Least Terns** were calling all around us while a **Horned Lark** fed in the wrack line. It was a fantastic spectacle of birds.

We made one last stop on the way back to the hotel, popping into High Island's Smith Oak Woods. Here we found **Golden-winged** and **Blue-winged Warbler** and a **Western Kingbird** among many **Easterns**. It was a lovely way to end the day.

We had one final full day to scour the Texas Coast. But we didn't need to scour--the birds came to us. Before we had even gotten to our first stop we had seen two very early **Magnificent Frigatebirds**, including one even perched on a utility pole. Immediately upon arriving to Peveto Woods we started seeing birds around the parking lot, and it basically didn't let up the whole time. **Tennessee and Hooded Warblers** were abundant, and we also found **Worm-eating, Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Kentucky, and Yellow-throated** among 17 warblers. We got to watch **Painted Buntings** bathing and just enjoyed the show of **orioles, buntings, warblers, and vireos** everywhere.



*Swallow-tailed Kite. Photo by Josh Engel.*

After a lunch break (and a **Fish Crow** break), we returned to the coast, this time to Sabine Woods. Along the way we scanned some grass fields and found a **Long-billed Curlew** feeding actively. It was pulsating with birds, too. We added a few more warblers to our list, including both male and female **Cerulean**. **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were super active and **Wood Thrushes** seemed to be everywhere. Flocks of **Tennessee Warblers** contained many other species, including **Blue-winged, Golden-winged, and our first Chestnut-sided**.

It's hard to imagine a better end to the trip than a day where there were so many birds we only made it to two spots all day! It was a great trip, a perfect way to get back to guiding.



***There were lots of birds to look at!***

**BIRD LIST.** 189 species (including 5 heard only and 1 leader only). Taxonomy follows the Clements/eBird Checklist, 2019 update. Former (or alternate) English names are in parentheses. (Heard) = heard only; (Leader) = tour leader only. The global IUCN red list status is listed for threatened and near-threatened species: CR=Critically Endangered, EN=Endangered, VU=Vulnerable, NT=Near-threatened.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck  
 Fulvous Whistling-Duck  
 Blue-winged Teal  
 Northern Shoveler

*Dendrocygna autumnalis*  
*Dendrocygna bicolor*  
*Spatula discors*  
*Spatula clypeata*

Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Mottled Duck	<i>Anas fulvigula</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia (Feral Pigeon)</i>
Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>
Common Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>
Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>
King Rail (NT) (Heard)	<i>Rallus elegans</i>
Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus crepitans</i>
Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>
Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>
Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>
Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>
American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>
Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
American Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>
Snowy Plover (NT)	<i>Charadrius nivosus</i>
Wilson's Plover (NT)	<i>Charadrius wilsonia</i>
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>
Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>
Upland Sandpiper	<i>Bartramia longicauda</i>
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>
Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Red Knot (NT)	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
Stilt Sandpiper	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>
Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>
Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>

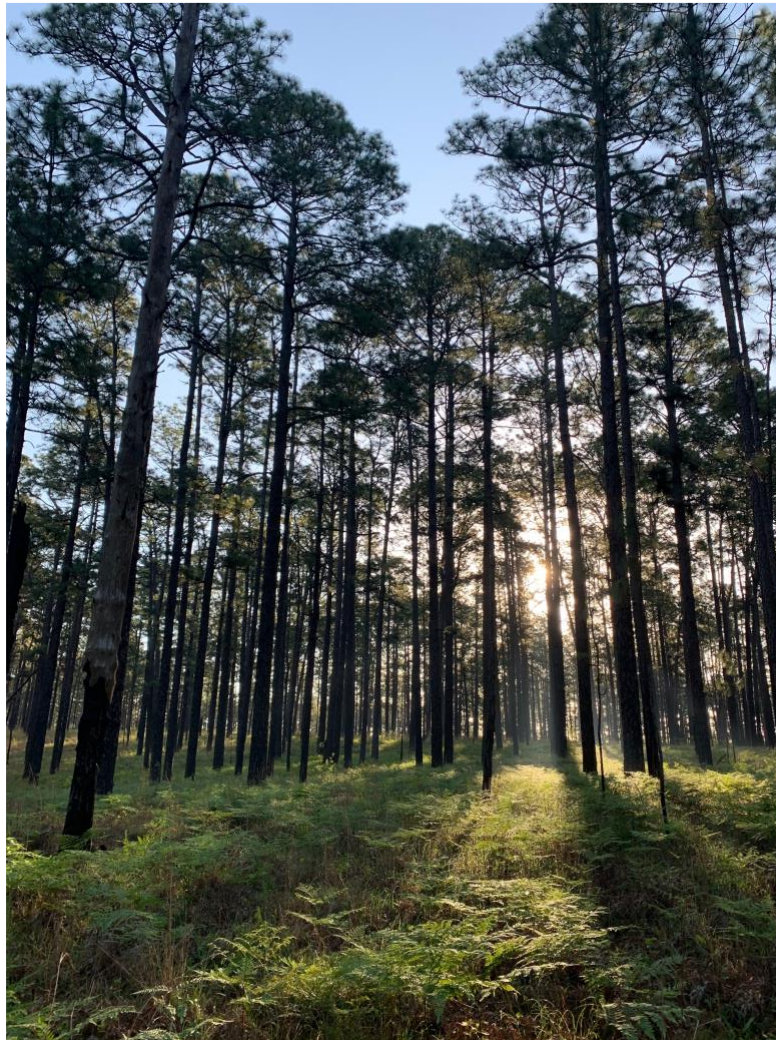
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>
<i>We saw both Eastern Willet and Western Willet</i>	
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>
Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>
Franklin's Gull	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Least Tern	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>
Royal Tern	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
Black Skimmer	<i>Rynchops niger</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Anhinga	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>
Neotropic Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>
Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>
Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>
Reddish Egret (NT)	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>
White Ibis	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>
White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>
Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>
Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>
Swallow-tailed Kite	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>

Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>
Red-cockaded Woodpecker (NT)	<i>Dryobates borealis</i>
Pileated Woodpecker (Heard)	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>
Crested Caracara	<i>Caracara cheriway</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Eastern Wood-Pewee	<i>Contopus virens</i>
Acadian Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax virescens</i>
Great Crested Flycatcher (Heard)	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>
Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>
White-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo griseus</i>
Yellow-throated Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>
Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
Loggerhead Shrike (NT)	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
Fish Crow	<i>Corvus ossifragus</i>
Carolina Chickadee	<i>Poecile carolinensis</i>
Tufted Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>
Purple Martin	<i>Progne subis</i>
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>
Bank Swallow (Leader)	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>
Brown-headed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pusilla</i>
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>
House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
Sedge Wren	<i>Cistothorus platensis</i>
Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>
Carolina Wren	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>



Brown Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>
Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>
Wood Thrush (NT)	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
American Goldfinch (Heard)	<i>Spinus tristis</i>
Bachman's Sparrow (NT)	<i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>
White-throated Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>
Seaside Sparrow	<i>Ammospiza maritima</i>
Nelson's Sparrow	<i>Ammospiza nelsoni</i>
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>
Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>
Eastern Towhee (Heard)	<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>
Yellow-breasted Chat	<i>Icteria virens</i>
Eastern Meadowlark (NT)	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>
Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>
Common Grackle (NT)	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>
Boat-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus major</i>
Great-tailed Grackle	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>
Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>
Worm-eating Warbler	<i>Helmitheros vermivorum</i>
Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>
Golden-winged Warbler (NT)	<i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>
Blue-winged Warbler	<i>Vermivora cyanoptera</i>
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>
Prothonotary Warbler	<i>Protonotaria citrea</i>
Swainson's Warbler	<i>Limnothlypis swainsonii</i>
Tennessee Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis peregrina</i>
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>
Nashville Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis ruficapilla</i>
Kentucky Warbler	<i>Geothlypis formosa</i>
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
Hooded Warbler	<i>Setophaga citrina</i>
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>
Cerulean Warbler	<i>Setophaga cerulea</i>
Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>
Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>
Chestnut-sided Warbler	<i>Setophaga pensylvanica</i>

Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>
Pine Warbler	<i>Setophaga pinus</i>
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>
<i>Both eastern "Myrtle" Warbler and western "Audubon's" Warbler seen</i>	
Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>
Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>Setophaga virens</i>
Summer Tanager	<i>Piranga rubra</i>
Scarlet Tanager	<i>Piranga olivacea</i>
Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>
Blue Grosbeak	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>
Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>
Painted Bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>



*Sunrise in the piney woods. Photo by Josh Engel.*