

Birding is for Everyone!

The Four Seasons / Texas Coastal Bend 2021

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It was not so long ago that any person having an interest in anything other than gardening, fishing, hunting or sports would have been considered less than normal. It is gratifying to realize that in the U.S. today, many people appreciate the natural world and one out of four adults is especially interested in birds. In the United States and Canada the hobby of birding is exceeded only by gardening.

The Coastal Bend of Texas is not usually known for its majestic scenery and for some people it may appear to be a paradigm of roads that lead to somewhere else. This is a false conception, for the region is the richest place in the US and Canada to find a great variety of birds. Slightly over 650 species are known to breed in the US and Canada. More than 510 species have been found within the Texas Coastal Bend, with 402 species on the tiny Angelia Ranch, 15.5 square miles immediately west of Corpus Christi. In comparison, the famous Big Bend National Park, 1,106 square miles has recorded only 385 species.

Christmas Counts (CBC) within the United States can easily score in excess of 150 species. In 1996, Corpus Christi established a new National CBC high with an impressive 233 species! The previous National high was 227. More than twenty species of New World tropical (Neotropical) birds are known for the Coastal Bend. Unusual Mexican and pelagic species appear with some frequency. Birding in this area can be a very exciting and rewarding experience.

A Review of the Seasons

Summer (May 15 - August 15): This can be an exceptionally exciting time of year, especially during periods of inclement weather, when marine birds can be seen near shore. More than 140 species of birds breed in this area. Large numbers of pelicans, herons, spoonbills, gulls, terns and skimmers have large breeding colonies here and are of special interest. During July and August look for huge concentrations of shorebirds and thousands of black and least terns that annually stage along the gulf beaches. In addition a variety of songbirds can be seen in austral oak and riparian woodlands.

Fall (August 15 – November 15): This is the season when tremendous numbers of shorebirds can be seen feeding and loafing in local bays. Most eventful is the migration and concentrations of ruby-throated hummingbirds and buzzards (hawks). During late August and September, feeders often attract hundreds of hummingbirds! The annual migration of buzzard hawks can be spectacular! Other than a site in Veracruz Mexico, Hazel Bazemore Park sees the greatest concentration of hawks in the world. The peak for the fall hawk migration in this area is late September through mid October.

Considerable concentrations of migrating passerines can usually be seen in riparian habitats through the Coastal Bend and local "Hot Spots".

Winter (November 15 – March 15): One hundred thousand redhead ducks, thousands of other ducks, geese, cormorants and one million shorebirds winter in the area. South Texas contains the greatest numbers of reddish egrets and piping and snowy plovers in the world. More than six species of hummingbirds may be found at local feeders. Occasionally a green-breasted mango, broad-billed, blue-throated Mountain-gem and/or Lucifer hummingbird can be seen. Boat tours are available from Rockport and Port Aransas to see and photograph Whooping Cranes. Birds of special interest that have been observed during or immediately after weather that originates from the southwest (northwestern Mexico) are: Flammulated owl, green-breasted mango, green violet-ear, Allen's Lucifer and Costa's hummingbirds, white-collared swift, clay-colored robin, rufous-collared robin, tropical parula, hermit and red-faced warblers, varied and blue buntings, blue-black grassquit, crimson-collared grosbeak and black-vented oriole.

Spring (March 15 – June 15): During this season, it is not unusual for an experienced birder to see more than 150 species in a day. Large numbers of Neotropical birds, such as thrushes, vireos, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks and buntings, can be grounded during periods of inclement weather. These weather events usually originate from the north and northwest. Exceptional concentrations of songbirds may be observed at eye level during and immediately following periods of rain and strong north wind. Thousands of buzzards (hawks) move north from the tropics and may, at times, be concentrated at several inland sites. The peak period for the spring hawk migration is from March 20 – April 20. The most exciting weather event here in spring is called a "Nor'easter". This is when a low becomes stationary over south Florida and the northern most islands of the West Indies. This can cause heavy rain and strong winds from the northeast. West Indian migrating birds can be caught up in this weather event and are therefore forced to take refuge on coastal barrier islands in Texas. Birds of special interest that have appeared during and after such storms are: green violet-ear hummingbird, mangrove cuckoo, gray kingbird, black-whiskered vireo, bobolink, and black-throated blue, blackpoll, Cape May, and Connecticut Warblers.

If you have an interest in natural history there is no better place in the temperate Nearctic where a person can find such an exciting diversity of beautiful birds! The Texas Coastal Bend is a place to be; birders come here from all over the world. Experience good food, great birds, cordial hospitality; visitors are always welcome!

For more information see:

Birds of Texas: A field Guide (Rappole & Blacklock, Texas A&M Press 1984) and

Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend (Rappole & Blacklock, Texas A&M Press, 1994).

