

Tropical Audubon South Texas Birding

March 27-April 4, 2010

Brian Rapoza and Robin Diaz, Leaders

Participants: Rick and Nancy Blanchett, Roxanne Featherly, Nancy Freedman, Bob and Alice Pace, Jeanette Rawls, Joan Renninger, Maria Rodriguez and David Schaffter

Saturday, March 27: After a late-morning arrival, then lunch in San Antonio (with an unintended drive past the historic Alamo in the downtown area), our group of twelve headed south to the trip's first stop, Choke Canyon State Park. Several Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were spotted while driving to the park, the first of hundreds we would see during the tour. Also seen were the first of dozens of Crested Caracara for the trip. At 75-Acre Lake in the park's Calliham Unit, we searched for a Northern Jacana that has resided at this location for the past several months. The jacana managed to elude us despite an intensive search. Birds seen while hunting for the jacana included Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Wild Turkey, Neotropic Cormorant and both Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. Our first Harris's Hawk was seen shortly after exiting the park. At a farm in Beeville, a **Northern Wheatear**, present for several weeks and only the second Texas record for this Arctic species, was easily found and provided outstanding looks. Satisfied with this victory, the group headed to our first night's lodging in Rockport.



Sunday, March 28: Our first full day began with a Rockport Whooping Crane cruise on the Skimmer, captained by the irrepressible Tommy Moore. We encountered thirteen **Whooping Cranes** while exploring the waters in and around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge; also seen were Eared Grebe, American Golden-Plover, American Oystercatcher, American Avocet (in spectacular breeding plumage), **Long-billed Curlew**, Gull-billed Tern, Horned Lark and Seaside Sparrow, plus Coyote and Bottle-nosed

Dolphin. After lunch in Rockport, we drove north to explore Aransas via the refuge's auto tour road. Along the way, we spotted our first White-tailed Hawk. Thousands of Broad-winged Hawks formed kettles over the refuge's entrance road, a spectacular site. We were surprised to find a Townsend's Warbler in an oak hammock near the refuge visitor center; this bird had been reported several weeks ago but was assumed to have moved on. Two distant Whooping Cranes were scoped from an observation tower along the auto road, our last looks at this beautiful bird. We then headed south to Kingsville, where Hooded Orioles greeted us at the hotel.





Monday, March 29: Today, we visited the Norias Unit of **King Ranch**; our guide for this amazing eight-hour tour was Tom Langschied, who knows the avifauna and natural history of this huge ranch like no one else. An Audubon's Oriole, perched on a wire along the unit's entrance road, was among the first target species spotted. At a location on the ranch where Tom consistently finds **Ferruginous Pygmy-**



Owl, an owl was soon heard, but only after considerable searching was it finally seen. Another pygmy-owl was found at our next stop; this one flew into a tree directly over our heads, providing crippling looks! Other



species seen during the tour included Harris's and White-tailed Hawk, Inca and White-tipped Dove, **Greater Roadrunner**, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Vermilion Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, Sprague's Pipit, Long-billed and Curve-billed Thrasher, Tropical Parula, Olive Sparrow and Pyrrhuloxia. Following the tour, we headed south to Harlingen, stopping in the Sebastian area en route, where in an agricultural field, we found fifteen **Mountain Plovers**, along with Horned Lark and Lark Sparrow.



Tuesday, March 30: Our first stop today was Hugh Ramsey Nature Park, near our hotel in Harlingen. Our first Plain Chachalacas were found here; also seen were Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Verdin and Lesser Goldfinch. We next headed to Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and in an agricultural field outside the refuge, three Ferruginous Hawks were spotted. Even at mid-day, bird activity was high around the refuge's visitor center. Species seen in this area included Plain Chachalaca, Buff-bellied

Hummingbird, **Green Jay** (we were surrounded by these beautiful corvids during our picnic lunch) and Bronzed Cowbird, plus Mexican Ground Squirrel. Along the auto tour road, we added several ducks and shorebirds to our growing list, including up-close looks at American Golden-Plover and Long-billed Curlew; we also spotted a few White-faced Ibis. Back in Harlingen at dusk, we located a noisy flock of Red-crowned Parrots before returning to our hotel.

Wednesday, March 31: We began this day at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, one of my favorite birding locations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. An Inca Dove was discovered on nest in the refuge parking area and a Green Kingfisher was along the canal beyond the visitor center. Three **Collared Peccaries** scurried past us as we headed down to Willow Lake. In and around the lake, we found our first Least Grebes, Clay-colored Thrushes and Altamira Orioles, plus an early migrant Swainson's Thrush. Around the new hawk tower, we found a Great Kiskadee nest and obtained our first satisfying looks at Black-crested Titmouse. Swainson's Hawks were seen from atop the tower. A Buff-bellied Hummingbird was visiting a feeder upon our return to the visitor center. After a quick lunch at Whataburger, we headed to Estero Llano Grande State Park. Cinnamon Teal and Sora were seen in and around Ibis Pond, near the visitor center. We headed to feeders in a residential area adjacent to the park where both a Rose-throated Becard and a day-roosting Common Pauraque had been reported in recent weeks. We failed to see either of these species during our visit, but had great looks at a Clay-colored Thrush plus Buff-bellied and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. At a sod farm south of the state park, we found numbers of American Golden-Plover and Upland Sandpiper. We ended the day as we did the last, searching for parrots at dusk. As darkness descended, we located a raucous flock of Green Parakeets in a shopping center north of our hotel in McAllen.



Thursday, April 1: We spent the morning at beautiful Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Clay-colored Thrush and Altamira Oriole were active at feeders along Hackberry Road, the park's entrance road, while a Gray Hawk soared overhead. Nearby, a Collared Peccary posed cooperatively for photos. Our first Chihuahuan Raven was spotted at Kingfisher Overlook. At a feeder in Acacia Loop, the former campground, we saw Indigo Bunting and Lincoln's Sparrow but missed the Black-headed Grosbeak seen minutes before we arrived. During our brief visit to the hawk tower at the entrance to the Rio Grande Trail (accessed via the park tram), several hundred Broad-winged Hawks were spotted overhead and counted by hawk watch volunteers. After lunch, we visited nearby Anzalduas County Park, where we added Black Phoebe to our trip list, but failed to locate the Rock Wren that was reported from near the park entrance. Late in the afternoon, after an early dinner, we returned to Bentsen in search of night birds. As we walked along Hackberry Road, a Bobcat crossed the road ahead of us. We stood vigil at a snag along the road where Elf Owls were suspected to nest; as dusk approached, Lesser Nighthawks fluttered overhead and the calls of Common Pauraque were heard in the distance. Soon, a tiny owl poked its head out of a hole near the top of the snag and began to call. As owls eventually began to fly in and out of the cavity, we were surprised to discover that there were three different Elf Owls in residence! When it became too dark to observe the owls, we turned our attention to searching for pauraque. One was found near the entrance to Acacia Loop, its red eyes glowing in the beam of my spotlight. As we exited the park, we also heard the distant calls of Eastern Screech-Owl and Whip-poor-will.

Friday, April 2: This day involved our longest drive, from McAllen in the Rio Grande Valley to Uvalde, west of San Antonio on the Edwards Plateau. Our first stop was Roma Bluffs, overlooking the Rio Grande River, where our best sighting was two “Audubon’s” Warblers. At Salineño, which also provided river access, three Red-billed Pigeons flew overhead and distant Muscovy Ducks were spotted upriver. On the Salineño dump road, we found Cassin’s and Black-throated Sparrow, Curve-billed Thrasher and Northern Bobwhite. At Falcon State Park, there was no sign of the Roadside Hawk that caused so much excitement just a couple of weeks earlier; birds seen here included Harris’s Hawk, Ash-throated and Vermilion Flycatcher and Pyrrhuloxia. After lunch at El Paraiso, an excellent restaurant in Zapata, we stopped at City Park, but were unable to find any resident White-collared Seedeaters. At our last stop at San Ygnacio Bird and Butterfly Park, we searched again for seedeaters as well as for the Brown Jay coming to resident Jim Ringo’s feeders, but failed to find either. Jim graciously invited us to wait for the jay in his yard, but with 150 miles still to go before reaching our hotel and evening quickly approaching, we had to say goodbye to Jim and the Rio Grande Valley and we headed for Uvalde.

Saturday, April 3: Our last full day in Texas began at scenic Lost Maples State Natural Area, home to two Edwards Plateau specialties, Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler. We spotted the trip’s first Western Scrub-Jay just outside the park entrance. Carolina Chickadee, Black-crested Titmouse, Rufous-crowned and Lincoln’s Sparrow and House Finch were among the birds coming to feeders near the trailhead for the park’s extensive trail system. Singing Golden-cheeked Warblers were easily found as we began our hike into Sabinal Canyon. Other birds found in the canyon included Black and Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-throated Vireo, Common Raven, Canyon Wren, Black-and-white Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush. To see Black-capped Vireos, we had to hike up to the rim of the steep canyon. To the group’s credit, everyone was willing to attempt the climb, and every one of us made it all the way to the top! We heard vireos almost as soon as we reached the rim, but were initially unable to see any. At a canyon overlook, some of us had brief looks at vireos in flight; Bewick’s Wren Spotted Towhee and Scott’s Oriole were also seen from this area. It wasn’t until we began our return to the trail leading back to the canyon floor that we found cooperative vireos; most of us had excellent views of this beautiful bird. After lunch at the memorable **Lone Star Motorcycle Museum**, we headed north to South Llano River State Park, near Junction. Four bird blinds at this park provided the perfect venue for spending our last afternoon in Texas. Birds seen at the blinds’ very active feeders and water features included Inca Dove, Wilson’s Warbler, Spotted and Canyon Towhee, Clay-colored, Field, Lark, Black-throated, Lincoln’s and White-crowned Sparrow, House Finch and Pine Siskin. After visiting all four blinds, we headed to our final night’s lodging in Kerrville.



Sunday, April 4: We only had time for one stop this morning before heading to the airport, but that one location, Friedrich Wilderness Park, just west of San Antonio, proved difficult to find. After a number of wrong turns, we found the park and we began a quick exploration of its trail system. The park provided an unexpected sighting and our last new bird of the trip: a Hutton's Vireo, a rare migrant through central Texas. We ended the tour with 209 bird species and a lifetime of memories. I would like to thank co-leader Robin Diaz and all who participated for a truly fantastic trip.

The bird list:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
Fulvous Whistling-Duck
Muscovy Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mottled Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Cinnamon Teal
Northern Shoveler
Green-winged Teal
Redhead
Lesser Scaup
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Plain Chachalaca
Wild Turkey
Northern Bobwhite
Least Grebe
Pied-billed Grebe
Eared Grebe
Common Loon
American White Pelican
Brown Pelican
Neotropic Cormorant
Double-crested Cormorant
Anhinga
Great Blue Heron
"Great White" Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Reddish Egret
Cattle Egret
Black-crowned Night-Heron
White Ibis

White-faced Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Harris's Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Gray Hawk
Swainson's Hawk
White-tailed Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Ferruginous Hawk
Crested Caracara
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Sora
Common Moorhen
American Coot
Whooping Crane
Black-bellied Plover
American Golden-Plover
Wilson's Plover
Killdeer
Mountain Plover
American Oystercatcher
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Upland Sandpiper
Whimbrel
Long-billed Curlew
Marbled Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
Sanderling
Least Sandpiper

Pectoral Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Forster's Tern
Royal Tern
Sandwich Tern
Black Skimmer
Rock Pigeon
Red-billed Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-winged Dove
Mourning Dove
Inca Dove
Common Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Green Parakeet
Red-crowned Parrot
Cockatiel (non-countable escapee)
Greater Roadrunner
Eastern Screech-Owl
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
Elf Owl
Lesser Nighthawk
Common Pauraque
Whip-poor-will
Chimney Swift
Buff-bellied Hummingbird
Black-chinned Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
Golden-fronted Woodpecker
Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet
Black Phoebe
Eastern Phoebe
Vermilion Flycatcher
Ash-throated Flycatcher
Great Crested Flycatcher
Brown-crested Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Couch's Kingbird

Western Kingbird
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Black-capped Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Hutton's Vireo
Green Jay
Western Scrub-Jay
Chihuahuan Raven
Common Raven
Horned Lark
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Cave Swallow
Barn Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Black-crested Titmouse
Verdin
Cactus Wren
Canyon Wren
Carolina Wren
Bewick's Wren
House Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Northern Wheatear
Swainson's Thrush
Clay-colored Thrush
Northern Mockingbird
Long-billed Thrasher
Curve-billed Thrasher
European Starling
Sprague's Pipit
Cedar Waxwing
Orange-crowned Warbler
Tropical Parula
"Myrtle" Yellow-rumped Warbler
"Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler
Golden-cheeked Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Townsend's Warbler

Palm Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Louisiana Waterthrush
Common Yellowthroat
Wilson's Warbler
Olive Sparrow
Spotted Towhee
Canyon Towhee
Cassin's Sparrow
Rufous-crowned Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Black-throated Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Seaside Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Pyrrhuloxia
Indigo Bunting
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Brewer's Blackbird
Boat-tailed Grackle
Great-tailed Grackle
Bronzed Cowbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Hooded Oriole
Altamira Oriole
Audubon's Oriole
Scott's Oriole
House Finch
Pine Siskin
Lesser Goldfinch
House Sparrow

The mammal list:

Nine-banded Armadillo
Desert Cottontail
Swamp Rabbit
Eastern Fox Squirrel
Mexican Ground Squirrel
Bobcat
Coyote

Raccoon
Collared Peccary
White-tailed Deer
Bottle-nosed Dolphin
Bat sp.