

ITINERARY
TEXAS COAST MIGRATION SPECTACLE

I. April 15-21, 2017

II. April 22-28, 2017



Swainson's Warblers are breeders in the woodlands of East Texas. They are not easy to see, but a recent Field Guides tour was able to get a great look at this one. Photo by participant Brooke Miller.

We include here information for those interested in the 2017 Field Guides Texas Coast Migration Spectacle tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

This short tour is designed to sample some of the most exciting spring birding in North America. We feel that the location chosen for this trip is one of the best on the continent to observe the exciting phenomenon of spring migration. While the exact mix of weather conditions to produce the mind-boggling "fall-outs" that everyone has heard about does not occur every season, there is always a steady flow of migrant warblers, tanagers, orioles, buntings, cuckoos, and grosbeaks as well as shorebirds and waterbirds. By staying near the coast at High Island and within easy access of other birding locales, we are able to offer an outstanding birding experience at a very affordable price.

For the birder, springtime on the Texas coast is Texas at its best. Virtually all the migratory species from eastern and central North America pour northward from Mexico and Central and South America in dazzling variety and numbers. Each evening a flight of warblers, vireos, buntings, grosbeaks, and orioles launches from the southern rim of the Gulf of Mexico and strikes out northward over the dark waters. Depending on the flying conditions they encounter, these birds arrive over the Texas coast at some time the following day. If conditions have been favorable, most may continue well inland before landing; but if headwinds or rain add stressful conditions to the flight, thousands may drop into the very first vegetation they encounter beyond the beach. Under these infrequently encountered conditions, birding the isolated coastal groves can be truly mind-boggling. But some migrants drop into these groves daily in any kind of weather. Each afternoon newly arrived warblers and other migrants gradually increase to a peak before dark, ensuring a good mix of birds daily if not in staggering numbers.

For birders across the continent, the small community of High Island has become a mecca for those who want to experience the dizzying phenomenon of a river of migrating shorebirds and wading birds and a rainbow assortment of Neotropical migrant passerines. Only Point Pelee and Cape May are as well known as migration vantage points. High

Island occupies a low, wooded rise just a quarter mile from the Gulf waters. The venerable spreading live oaks attract weary migrants like a magnet. The low-lying land surrounding High Island is coastal marsh in every direction, making it a true island.

Although it is certainly the focus of this short, introductory tour, passerine migration is not the only thing happening on the Texas coast in spring. Colonially nesting herons, egrets, and spoonbills undergo ephemeral hormonal changes that color their soft parts with brilliant hues that last only a few days. The famous Bolivar tidal flats, now protected as a shorebird preserve, combine with flooded ricefields to produce a list of up to thirty-five species of shorebirds, including such beauties as breeding-plumaged Hudsonian Godwits and Buff-breasted Sandpipers.

A short distance inland from the coast of southeastern Texas lie the great southern forests, which stretch eastward across the Gulf States and up the Atlantic coast to Virginia. These great forests are particularly diverse in southeastern Texas, with bottomland hardwoods, deeply flooded cypress-tupelo swamp, mixed pine-hardwood forest in upland areas, and Longleaf Pine flatwoods that collectively are called the Big Thicket, once a trackless region into which outlaws and Confederate refugees were able to vanish to elude capture. We'll visit areas where the southern pine specialties—Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Bachman's Sparrow—and a host of southern warblers, including brilliant Prothonotarys, Yellow-throateds, and the elusive Swainson's—may be found. These forests are especially rich in woodpeckers, with Red-headed, Red-bellied, Pileated, Downy, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker regularly present in addition to the endangered Red-cockaded.

The brackish and freshwater marshes that occupy much of the coastal plain are home to Fulvous Whistling-Duck, White, White-faced, and (rarely) Glossy ibises, King and Clapper rails, Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, and Seaside Sparrow. American Bittern, Sedge Wren, and Nelson's (Sharp-tailed) Sparrow are some of the wintering species that inhabit these marshes and should still be present in late April.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: Nearly all of our birding will be from roadsides and trails in the preserves at High Island, with beach walking a requirement at the Bolivar Flats. The woods at High Island are an excellent place simply to stand or sit and watch migrants circulate through the trees or bathe at a small pool. We will have full birding mornings with a picnic breakfast in the piney woods and generally picnic lunches along the coast. Usually we will meet for a 6:00 a.m. breakfast at our motel and head out for our morning birding soon afterwards. Our afternoon activities will depend on weather conditions but will likely involve checking the woods at High Island or nearby Sabine Pass at a relaxed pace. The terrain is flat throughout but may involve some walking in soggy conditions.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

Tour I may be combined with TEXAS'S BIG BEND & HILL COUNTRY, April 22-May 1, 2017.



We will get amazing views of Roseate Spoonbills, several species of herons and other birds breeding in the rookery at the Houston Audubon Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary. Photo by participant Brooke Miller.

About the Birding Areas



High Island—This small community lies on a salt dome, a tremendous underground salt deposit that forms a low rise above the surrounding coastal marshes just a short distance from the Gulf beach. Naturally wooded in a generally treeless area, the town's two main migration sanctuaries are magnets for weary migrants coming in off the Gulf of Mexico after their 650-mile overnight flight. We will be checking these migrant traps on a daily basis, usually in the afternoon, when newly arriving migrants tend to "fall-out."

Bolivar Flats and Other Coastal Areas—We will range along the Gulf beaches, salt marshes, and tidal flats from Sabine Pass near the Louisiana border to the tip of Bolivar Peninsula, across Galveston Bay from Galveston Island. Bolivar Flats, near the tip of the peninsula, is now protected as a shorebird

preserve and supports amazing concentrations of migrating and breeding shorebirds, including Snowy, Wilson's, and endangered Piping plovers, hundreds of American Avocets in high breeding plumage, and twenty-odd other species of shorebirds, in addition to up to thirteen species of gulls and terns.

Southern Forests—Lying twenty to thirty miles inland, the great southern hardwood and pine forests extend hundreds of miles to the north and east. Although much "managed" by the forestry industry, the woodlands feature excellent examples of all the major southern forest types—open pine forest that

supports the "big three" pine specialists, deeply flooded cypress swamp, and bottomland hardwoods. All are protected within the Big Thicket National Preserve and various state parks and preserves.

Marshes, Coastal Prairies, and Rice Fields—Between the beaches and the forests lies a band of fresh and brackish marshes, coastal prairies largely given to grazing, and rice fields, many of which will be flooded to induce germination, incidentally attracting large numbers of migrating shorebirds, including beautiful Hudsonian Godwits, Wilson's Phalaropes, and Buff-breasted and White-rumped sandpipers. Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge protects 55,000 acres of marsh and prairie and is home to up to six species of rails, including the hard-to-see Yellow and Black rails (which we are unlikely to see) and the beautiful Purple Gallinule.

Itinerary for Texas Coast Migration Spectacle

Day 1, Sat. Arrival in Houston. Participants will arrive today at the Houston Intercontinental Airport. (Please note that Houston has two airports, Houston Intercontinental and Hobby; when you make your flight arrangements, be sure that you will arrive and depart from Houston Intercontinental. Hobby is on the other side of Houston and thus a very long drive through traffic from our hotel.) Upon arrival, contact the Double Tree airport location for courtesy transportation to the nearby hotel. We will plan to meet in the lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a short get-acquainted session and then go to dinner, where we will discuss our plans for the tour. Night in Houston.

Day 2, Sun. Southern pine forests; to Silsbee. We will check out of our hotel after breakfast this morning and travel about forty-five minutes into the forests of southern pine and hardwoods that lie north and east of Houston. We will spend the morning birding a fine example of these forests. Birding will be on foot on level sandy roads and paths. Waterproof footwear could be desirable if it has recently rained. The weather should be warm and pleasant, but be sure to check the forecast before dressing for the field. We will continue to the small town of Silsbee in the late morning for some afternoon birding nearby. Night in Silsbee.

Day 3, Mon. The Big Thicket; to High Island. This morning we will venture out early with a picnic breakfast into the Big Thicket, an area of once trackless southern forests of several types, from dry, sandy Longleaf Pine flatwoods to deeply

flooded cypress-tupelo swamps. We will spend the morning in this region before continuing to the coast in time for an afternoon check of the “migrant traps.” Birding will mostly be along dirt roads and paths on level ground. Take precautions against chiggers in the Big Thicket and mosquitoes near the coast in the evening. Night in High Island.

Days 4-7, Tue-Fri. Coastal woodlots; Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge; Bolivar Flats; and rice fields. While we are based in High Island, our exact day-to-day activities will depend on local weather. If conditions conducive to a “fall-out” of migrants occur, we will want to maximize our time in the nearby sanctuaries and in other coastal groves. Otherwise we will range afield daily, sometimes along the coast, other times to the inland marshes, rice fields, and forests. We’ll visit all major habitats during the course of the tour to insure that we see the greatest variety of birds—and here on the Texas coast that could be in the neighborhood of 200 species during this short tour. No matter what other areas we visit, we’ll find ourselves at a migrant trap each afternoon to check the sanctuaries, as the greatest number and variety of migrants are generally present from mid-afternoon on into the evening.

Most days will find us meeting for a 6:00 a.m. breakfast, where we’ll decide upon the morning’s activities. We will have full birding mornings, often with a picnic lunch. Afternoon activities also depend on the weather but will certainly include birding the migrant traps at High Island or nearby Sabine Pass. Daily requirements in terms of clothing, especially footwear, will vary accordingly and you will be apprised daily of plans, but generally the terrain is flat with light to moderate walking. Weather is generally warm and humid, and some rain is possible. Although quite variable from year to year, mosquitoes could be moderately troublesome inside wooded areas and during the evenings. Nights in High Island.

On Friday, Day 7 (the last day of the tour), we will plan our birding so as to arrive at the Houston Intercontinental Airport by 11:00 a.m. **Homeward flights may be scheduled for anytime after 1:00 p.m.**

About Your Guide

John Coons combines birding excellence with a natural ability as a tour guide. He has been leading tours since 1985. Since then his great group skills, attention to detail, easy laugh, and unfailing sense to spot (and remember!) what’s fascinating in things large and small have brought delight to innumerable Field Guides participants on tours from the High Arctic to the tip of South America and throughout Australasia. When not on tour, John enjoys exploring and birding the remote mountains, canyons, and mesas of his home in northern Arizona. His ambition of developing a completely sustainable yard of native wildflowers, grasses, trees, and shrubs is an unending goal that consumes more time than expected each spring and summer. John has guided numerous previous Field Guides Texas tours.

*“Brilliant guide. **John Coons** is thoughtful, very skilled at considerate group management, endlessly patient, and terrific at finding birds. Whether planned or not, finishing the trip with great birds going to the airport is a strong strategy!” P.A., Texas Coast Migration Spectacle*

Visit <http://fieldguides.com/guides> and click on John’s photo for his complete tour schedule.

Financial Information

FEE: \$2150 from Houston (Please plan to arrive and depart from Houston Intercontinental Airport—not Hobby)

DEPOSIT: \$215 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: December 16, 2016 (I); December 23, 2016 (II)

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$375

LIMIT: 7

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Ruth Kuhl. Ruth will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS: All accommodations are in comfortable motel/hotels.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please plan to arrive and depart from the Houston Intercontinental Airport (IAH; not Hobby). You will need to arrive on the first day in time for dinner. **Please do not schedule your homeward flight on Day 7, the last day of the tour, until after 1:00 p.m.** Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees. **Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$2150 for one person in double occupancy from Houston. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 6, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 7, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Houston (IAH), airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$375. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$215** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by December 16, 2016 (Tour I) or December 23, 2016 (Tour II).** **We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at www.fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.htm and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

7/16JC

7/16 peg