

ITINERARY
TEXAS COAST MIGRATION SPECTACLE

I. April 13-19, 2024

II. April 20-26, 2024



The Upper Texas coast is a magical place in spring! A major draw is the influx Neotropical songbird migrants such as this male Cerulean Warbler, as they rest and fuel up after the grueling journey across the Gulf of Mexico.

Photograph by Sam Wilson.

We include here information for those interested in the 2024 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

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- 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 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 Winnie, Texas 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.



*The Texas coast is home to many gulls and terns, including the large Black Skimmer.
Photograph by participant Eric Gustafson.*

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, and Downy 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 Sparrow are some of the wintering species that inhabit these marshes and should still be present in late April.



In the rice fields, marshes and coastal beaches, we'll find numerous shorebird migrants such as these Dunlins and Stilt Sandpiper. Photograph by participant Jeff Wahl.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** Moderate amounts of walking on flat ground (up to 2 miles per day), some of it on paved roads, some on gravel or dirt roads, some on trails that have no significant obstacles but could be soggy in spots. We will walk up to a mile round-trip on a sandy beach at Bolivar Flats.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** In the migration woodlots we will wander trails perhaps multiple times for up to 3 hours. We may stand for long periods to observe flocks of birds, especially at High Island where there are benches. In these woodlots we will never be more than a few hundred yards from the vehicle.
- **PACE:** Early mornings (6:00 a.m. breakfasts); both morning and afternoon birding sessions, with picnic lunch on some days. One picnic breakfast for the morning in the piney woods. The afternoon activities depend on weather conditions but will usually involve checking the woods at High Island or nearby Sabine Pass at a relaxed pace.
- **WEATHER:** Spring weather is usually pleasant on the Texas coast. Expect temperatures in the 60s in the evening, with days ranging from the low-60s in the mornings to mid-80s F. An unexpected cold front or heat wave could find temperatures in the mid-40s in the early morning to the low 90s in the afternoon for a day. Rain showers and windy conditions are possible.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.

- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Bathroom stops at indoor restrooms will be made regularly; comfort stops in nature are also possible, should the need arise. At one of the woodlots there are only portable restrooms available that are regularly serviced.
- **OPTING OUT:** There may be some days where we make a stop at the motel during the day. On these occasions, participants may be able to opt out of the rest of the day's activities, however the main thrust of migration is usually in the afternoon. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations.

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 20-29, 2024.



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.



*We will visit the piney woods of East Texas in search of the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker and other upland species.
Photograph by Sam Wilson.*

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 DoubleTree 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 Winnie with afternoon birding in 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 Winnie.

Days 4-7, Tue-Fri. Coastal woodlots; Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge; Bolivar Flats; and rice fields. While we are based in Winnie, 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.



We'll have a chance to see the Tricolored Heron and other breeding birds when they are in high breeding plumage when we visit the rookery at High Island. Photograph by participant Dan Blower.

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, sometimes 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 Winnie.

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.

*"Tour leader **John Coons** was the best feature. His many years of experience leading tours in this part of Texas at this time of year meant that we did not miss anything! If John couldn't find it, it was not there." S.D., Texas Coast Migration Spectacle*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for John's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$2725 from Houston (Please plan to arrive and depart from Houston Intercontinental Airport—not Hobby)

DEPOSIT: \$275 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: October 16, 2023 (I); October 23, 2023 (II)

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$450

LIMIT: 7

All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one). Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Karen Turner. Karen 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 6:30 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 \$2725 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 \$450. 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, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$275** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by October 16, 2023 (Tour I) or October 23, 2023 (Tour II)**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 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 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation 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 that 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 airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. 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, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (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 information from us 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, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

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 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. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible 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.

5/23JC; 8/23peg