

ITINERARY
South Texas Rarities
January 9 - 17, 2027



White-tailed Hawk is a specialty of the South Texas grasslands. These beautiful raptors have a distinctive silhouette, with long wings that extend past the tail when they are perched. Photograph by guide Alex Sundvall.

We include here information for those interested in the 2027 Field Guides South Texas Rarities 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 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

The subtropical habitats along the lower Rio Grande are like a part of Mexico north of the border. Biogeographically, this region represents the northernmost extension of the Tamaulipan Biotic Province. The bird life of South Texas is thus characteristic of northeastern Mexico; within the United States, many resident species and Mexican vagrants are known only from South Texas. For this reason, South Texas has become a "must" for every North American birder.

The first couple days of the tour will be dedicated to exploring the areas around Corpus Christi, with a highlight being a boat trip into the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in search of Whooping Cranes. These endangered cranes have bounced back from a population low of just 21 individuals back in the 1940s. The birds here belong to the Wood Buffalo flock, the only truly wild and self-sustaining population of Whooping Cranes left. Other birds we hope to see on this portion of the tour include Boat-tailed Grackle, Seaside Sparrow, Clapper Rail, Snowy and Wilson's Plovers, Sprague's

Pipit, Burrowing Owl, Mountain Plovers, and even Aplomado Falcons. If we are lucky, we may also encounter Monk Parakeets, now established in the city. We will also of course chase after any rarities that might be in the area; in recent years this has included Cattle Tyrant, Red-footed Booby, and American Flamingo, amongst others.

We operate our South Texas Rarities tours in mid-winter, when conditions are most likely to produce the unpredictable vagrants that spice up an already extremely rich resident avifauna. Normal post-breeding dispersal and irregular movements driven by environmental stress (such as climatic extremes and food shortages) combine to make winter the most exciting season in South Texas. One can never be sure what species may turn up next. One season may bring a scattering of Masked Ducks and Northern Jacanas, as in 1993. Another may produce species never before recorded north of the Mexican border, as in 1990 when North America's first Masked Tityra, White-throated Thrush, and Yellow-faced Grassquit were found in the area.



*The Brown Jay just reaches the US in South Texas. They were absent for a few years, but have recently been seen again
Photograph by guide Alex Sundvall.*

During six days of birding along the lower Rio Grande, we'll look for all the specialties for which South Texas is famous, from such common birds as the striking Great Kiskadee to outstanding rarities like the Hook-billed Kite. About forty species of essentially Mexican birds occur regularly along the Rio Grande, with additional irregular vagrants appearing from time to time. Residents include Least Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant, White-tailed Kite, White-tailed and Harris's hawks, Crested Caracara, Plain Chachalaca, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Green Jay, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed Thrasher, Tropical Parula, Olive Sparrow, Morelet's Seedeater (recently split from White-collared Seedeater), and Altamira and Audubon's orioles. In past years, rarities have included Roadside, Short-tailed, and Crane hawks, Green-breasted Mango, Green Violet-ear, Golden-crowned Warbler, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, and Blue Bunting, with notable recent highlights including Black-vented Oriole and Brown Jay (2012), Gray-crowned Yellowthroat (2015), Northern Jacana (2016), Bat Falcon and Social Flycatcher (2021), and an exceptional 2024 season featuring Bare-throated Tiger-Heron, Roadside Hawk, Gray-collared Becard, Rose-throated Becard, Golden-crowned Warbler, and Crimson-collared Grosbeak!

During the last few decades, an average of one species per year new to the ABA Area list has been added from the region. Combined with large numbers of wintering waterfowl, sparrows, warblers, raptors, and coastal birds, this makes for a winter birding adventure of major proportions.

Special Note: Recent trends in South Texas bird populations include a decline in overwintering Tropical Parulas, though sightings have become more regular in recent years after a low point in 2013. Hook-billed Kite has also declined since major flooding in 2010, and while still possible, is far from guaranteed. Lastly, Muscovy Duck sightings along the Rio Grande have all but dried up, likely due to increased border patrol presence there, though occasional records still occur.

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 2-3 miles per day), some of it on paved roads, some on gravel or dirt roads, and some on trails with no significant obstacles.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We will likely stand for long periods to observe birds. We cover some ground on this tour, and some days will feature fairly long (1-2-hour) periods of time in the vans. There will be some roadside birding, with much getting in and out of vans.
- **PACE:** Early mornings (6:00-6:30 a.m.); both morning and afternoon birding sessions, with occasional afternoon breaks or travel time.
- **WEATHER:** South Texas winter weather is normally pleasant, with temperatures ranging from the low 50s to the high 60s degrees F. Rain showers and windy conditions are possible, and the rare “blue norther” cold front could bring nighttime temperatures into the 40s or lower.
- **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.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. 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.

About the Birding Areas



Coastal Areas—The offshore barrier islands are long, narrow sandbars with tall dunes and grassy rear-dune meadows. Shallow lagoons are found between the islands and the mainland. The ponds, marshes, and mudflats around these lagoons are home to a wealth of water and marsh birds including Reddish, Snowy, and Great egrets, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons, Tricolored, Great Blue, and Little Blue herons, White and White-faced ibises, beautiful Roseate Spoonbills, and in the marshes, Least bitterns, Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows (scarce), Boat-tailed Grackle, and Sedge Wren. Shorebirds, both resident and migrant, range from the large, showy American Oystercatcher and Long-billed Curlew to the endangered Piping Plover. About thirty species can be expected at this time of year. Terns likewise are very diverse, with Royal, Sandwich, Caspian, Gull-billed, and Forster's terns

regular. For such a southern location gulls are surprisingly varied as well, with hundreds of Laughing Gulls, Herring and Ring-billed gulls likely.



A highlight of the tour will be a boat trip to the Aransas Wildlife Refuge to see the incredible Whooping Cranes in their winter home. Photograph by guide Alex Sundvall.

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge—A visit to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge offers the opportunity to observe the endangered Whooping Crane on its primary wintering grounds. Access is typically by boat through the surrounding bays, where these tall, striking birds may be seen along with a variety of waterfowl and other coastal species.

Semi-arid Brushlands—Between the coastal savannas and the subtropical woodlands along the lower Rio Grande lies a broad, level to gently rolling plain covered—in its original state—with low, dense thorny brushlands. The bird life of these brushlands is similar to that of much of the arid Southwest, with such species as Greater Roadrunner, Scaled Quail (here occurring with Northern Bobwhite), Harris’s Hawk, Chihuahuan Raven, Bewick’s and Cactus wrens, Curve-billed Thrasher, Verdin, Pyrrhuloxia, and Black-throated and Cassin’s sparrows. Other species of interest that live in or migrate through this habitat include Cave Swallow, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, wintering Green-tailed Towhee, and Hooded Oriole.

Rio Grande Riparian Woodlands—Along the lower Rio Grande from near its mouth upstream almost to Laredo (about 250 air miles) are taller, lush woodlands composed of a mixture of subtropical and temperate trees. These woodlands have mostly been cleared for a variety of irrigated crops (sugar cane, citrus fruits, cotton, winter vegetables, and small grains) upstream to about Roma, where the flood plain narrows to a mere strip along the immediate river bank. Relatively small but important fragments of this unique habitat are preserved in Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, and other, locally run reserves. These areas are famous among birders for the wealth of Neotropical species that are resident or have straggled up from Mexico from time to time. A complete list would run to fifty or so species, but the regulars include Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Neotropic Cormorant, Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Common Pauraque, Gray Hawk, Hook-billed Kite (increasingly rare), White-tailed Kite, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Great Kiskadee, Couch’s and Tropical kingbirds, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Clay-colored Thrush, Olive Sparrow, and the gorgeous Altamira and Audubon’s orioles.

Border Wall Update—For those concerned about the recent news from South Texas, the Border Wall has been in the news frequently, with quite a bit of information circulating through social media and in the press. We suspect that a lot of you are wondering just how a border wall might affect birding in south Texas. The potential loss of habitat and access to birding sites has caused a great deal of concern among naturalists and conservationists working and living in the area. Field Guides has been offering tours to Big Bend and the lower Rio Grande Valley for thirty-five years and knows these areas exceptionally well.

Without question, some specific areas would be impacted, but even with a border wall under construction, the overall birding experience should be only minimally impacted. Why is that? As it turns out, many of the most productive birding

sites are north of the proposed wall. It is possible to observe most of the specialty birds of the region without setting eyes on the Rio Grande. Mind you, it would be a shame not to take in the river view as part of the south Texas birding experience, and it will likely remain a feature of our tours to the region.



*Evidence of the tropical nature of South Texas is the presence of a large roost of Red-Crowned Parrots in Brownsville.
Photograph by guide Alex Sundvall.*

Itinerary for South Texas Rarities

Day 1, Sat, 9 Jan. Rockport. You will be met at the Corpus Christi airport (the airport closest to Rockport) just outside the baggage claim area at 3:00 p.m. by your guide. We will drive the thirty miles to Rockport with a few roadside stops for birds, arriving there about 5:30 p.m. You'll want to have your binoculars available for the drive, but travel clothing will be fine as we will only make brief stops at a few roadside areas. Your guide will have a telescope if needed, so you won't have to unpack yours if you bring one. Night in Rockport.

Day 2, Sun, 10 Jan. Rockport. This morning we'll take a boat trip to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to see the magnificent Whooping Cranes and a great variety of other wading, shore, and water birds. The boat has enclosed seating with adequate visibility if the weather is not pleasant for being on deck. We will be in protected waters of the bay system, and the entire trip should be quite smooth. Only those extremely susceptible to motion sickness will need to take precautions. Clothing requirements will vary with the weather, but generally a light jacket or heavy shirt should be sufficient in case of cool breezes off the water. After returning to the dock we'll have lunch and drive northward to the refuge and vicinity to seek other species of interest. Comfortable walking shoes will be adequate. Night in Rockport.

Days 3-4, Mon-Tue, 11-12 Jan. Harlingen, Brownsville, and the coastal plain. Our focus in this area will depend on any rarities that may be present and will likely include searches for Aplomado Falcon, Groove-billed Ani, and various waterbirds, in addition to visiting a large evening parrot roost in Brownsville. Nights in Harlingen.

Days 5-6, Wed-Thu, 13-14 Jan. Lower Rio Grande Valley. Our schedule over the next couple of days is flexible. South Texas now hosts a great variety of tiny and not so tiny refuges that hold a number of South Texas specialties. We'll adopt a wait and see attitude to decide which sites allow us to maximize our birding returns and provide us with the potential of

seeing the greatest assortment of valley specialties as well as any real rarities that might be overwintering here. From our base in Mission, we are located close to a number of exciting areas. Nights in Mission.

Day 7, Fri, 15 Jan. Falcon Dam area. We'll head off for the area of the Rio Grande below Falcon Dam, about an hour's drive upriver, where we will spend most of the day seeking species that do not normally range down along the lower Rio Grande, such as Audubon's Oriole. Planned birding stops over the next couple of days will include a search for the diminutive Morelet's Seedeater along the Rio Grande in Zapata or further upstream. Night in Rio Grande City.

Day 8, Sat, 16 Jan. Falcon Dam area. We'll have another day to explore the Falcon area, focusing on those species that are still eluding us. In addition to the birds already mentioned, this area is quite good for western desert species like Cactus Wren, Verdin, Scaled Quail, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Ash-throated Flycatcher. Night in Rio Grande City.

Day 9, Sun, 17 Jan. Flights home from Corpus Christi. We will depart early this morning, with our destination determined by whatever species we are still lacking. Later in the morning we will proceed to Corpus Christi, where we will plan to arrive at the airport by 1:00 p.m. **Please schedule homebound flights no earlier than 2:00 p.m.**

About Your Guide

Alex Sundvall is a proud Minnesota native and has truly loved birds all his life. At the young age of five, he took a field trip with his kindergarten class to their local Nature Center and learned all about birds. At the end of the trip, the class got to watch staff release a Dark-eyed Junco they had been rehabilitating, and from that moment he was hooked! With the help of his very supportive and encouraging parents, he learned everything he could about birds and birding. Even as a child, whenever anyone asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would always reply: "I'm going to be an ornithologist!"

This love of birds and nature has followed him throughout his life. He graduated from the University of Minnesota's College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Sciences with a degree in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology with a double minor in Forest Ecosystem Management and Conservation; and Environmental Sciences, Policy, and Management. In 2016, Alex received the Young Birder Award from the Minnesota Ornithologists Union, and he has served as an alternate on his State's Bird Records Committee.

Growing up in Minnesota, Alex developed a passion for studying bird migration. In the past he has worked as both a Counter and Count Interpreter at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, MN. Even now, in his free time he'll often drive somewhere, post up for the day, and just count migrating birds as they pass by.

In recent years, Alex has led numerous tours across the US and beyond -- from the deserts and sky islands of the Southwest to the hallowed shores of Attu, Alaska, and everything in between. He loves teaching people about birds and showing them all that nature has to offer!

*"I really enjoyed **Alex**. His ability to get onto various birds and ensure that all group members were able to get on them as well was greatly appreciated." R.S., Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country*

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

Financial Information

FEE: \$3,995 per person from Corpus Christi

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$625

DEPOSIT: \$400 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: July 13, 2026

LIMIT: 7

Other Things You Need to Know

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

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: This tour begins and ends in Corpus Christi, TX (Corpus Christi International Airport, CRP).

Arrival: Corpus Christi (CRP) on January 9, in time for a 3:00 PM meeting at the airport.

Departure: Corpus Christi (CRP) on January 17, after 2:00 PM.

Please wait to purchase airline tickets until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate. At that time, we'll be glad to assist with your flight arrangements at no service fee.

DOCUMENTS: A valid photo ID (such as a [REAL ID](#)-compliant U.S. driver's license or passport) is required of all passengers boarding domestic flights within the U.S. Non-US citizens should consult the consulates of each destination for current entry requirements.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$3,995 for one person in double occupancy from Corpus Christi. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 8, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 9, 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 the tour, 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 is \$400 for those requesting a single room. 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 electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please send your deposit of \$400 per person; see fieldguides.com/payment-options/ for our Payment Options.

Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or by July 13, 2026. 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 full 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 full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. 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 purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to

illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

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.

3/24 CDB; 12/24; 4/26mz,peg