



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Texas' Big Bend & Hill Country 2013**

Apr 20, 2013 to Apr 29, 2013  
Chris Benesh

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*The marvelous Chisos Mountains as seen from just outside of the basin. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)*

This year's "Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country" tour was successful despite an ongoing drought that has brought little rain to the area in the past few years. Particularly hard hit were the Davis Mountains, where things are still slowly recovering from the 2011 fire. We started off in San Antonio and headed west to Del Rio. Our first morning birding there was fantastic, with lots of migrants and breeders. Among the many highlights was a male White-collared Seedeater and several Olive Sparrows and Long-billed Thrashers. We then headed west to Big Bend National Park, where we spent the next few nights at the Chisos Mountain Lodge.

The drought was evident here too, and Blue Creek Canyon was as quiet as I've ever seen. Still, we saw some good birds and the scenery was fantastic. Our visit to Rio Grande Village was fruitful, though it took most of the day to get a good view of the nesting black-hawks there. The hike up the Pinnacles Trail to Boot Spring was scenic as well, and we saw some nice things on the way up. Again, activity was a bit subdued due to the drought. Colima Warblers were somewhat elusive, though we did eventually track one down that we could see tucked high in the canopy over the trail behind Boot Spring. We all breathed a sigh of relief. Still more relief came when two Black-capped Vireos showed up in the basin that we were able to spot teed up in a bush.

Driving north, we paid a visit to the Christmas Mountains Oasis which was great for birds and a thirsty Coachwhip Snake. Highlights were Lucifer Hummingbird and a Western Screech-Owl. Thanks to Carolyn for her hospitality. Then we were off to the Davis Mountains, where quail searching proved fruitless, though we had a fantastic Common Poorwill and a flyover of the International Space Station as an added bonus.

Lake Balmorhea was pleasant with grebes and shorebirds to keep us entertained for a while. Then we headed to the Hill Country. As the miles rolled by, we could see the landscape changing, becoming more hilly and green. From our comfortable digs in Utopia we explored some of the best that the region has to offer. Lost Maples SNA was great, and the views of Golden-cheeked Warbler there were fantastic. There were lots of other goodies too. The following day, we headed to Chalk Bluff Park to track down a Rufous-capped Warbler. We got more than we bargained for there, for not only was there the elusive Rufous-capped, but there was a crazy hybrid bird that gave us some great opportunities for study. This apparent hybrid Rufous-capped X Common Yellowthroat is an otherwise unknown combination. We also had good looks at Green and Ringed kingfishers while at the park, making for a great day! But...the best was yet to come with an evening visit to the Frio Bat Cave, where we saw the spectacle of thousands (millions) of bats leaving the mouth of the cave, and then had great looks at a Chuck-will's-widow that flew past us. And icing on the cake came in the way of a hooting Barred Owl as we returned to our rooms in Utopia. Perfection!

Thanks to all of you for coming along and making this such a great trip. It was a real treat birding with you and I look forward to the next opportunity!

-- Chris

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**KEYS FOR THIS LIST**

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

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**BIRDS**

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*)

**MALLARD (NORTHERN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*)

**MALLARD (MEXICAN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*)

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*)

**CINNAMON TEAL** (*Anas cyanoptera*)

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

*Odontophoridae (New World Quail)*

**SCALED QUAIL** (*Callipepla squamata*)

**NORTHERN BOBWHITE** (*Colinus virginianus*)

*Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)*

**WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

*Podicipedidae (Grebes)*

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

**CLARK'S GREBE** (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)

*Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

*Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)*

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*)

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*)

**SNOWY EGRET** (*Egretta thula*)

**LITTLE BLUE HERON** (*Egretta caerulea*)

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*)

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*)

*Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)*

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*)

*Cathartidae (New World Vultures)*

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

*Pandionidae (Osprey)*

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*)

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*)

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**COMMON BLACK-HAWK** (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) – It took some time, but we eventually got great views in the afternoon when the male returned. We actually got to see him bring some material to the nest.

**HARRIS'S HAWK** (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

**GRAY HAWK** (*Buteo plagiatus*) – Note the change in scientific name owing to a split this past year.

**SWAINSON'S HAWK** (*Buteo swainsoni*)

**ZONE-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo albonotatus*) – Great looks at this species at Lost Maples.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**SNOWY PLOVER** (*Charadrius nivosus*)

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*)

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularia*)

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*)

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*)

**WHIMBREL (AMERICAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – One at Lake Balmorhea was out of place.

**WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*)

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*)

**WILSON'S PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus tricolor*)

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*)

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*)

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [I]

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) [I]

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*)

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

**INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*)

**COMMON GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina passerina*)

**WHITE-TIPPED DOVE (WHITE-TIPPED)** (*Leptotila verreauxi angelica*) [\*]

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus americanus*)

**GREATER ROADRUNNER** (*Geococcyx californianus*)

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**WESTERN SCREECH-OWL** (*Megascops kennicottii*) – Thanks to Carolyn Ohl for showing us her owl.

**EASTERN SCREECH-OWL** (*Megascops asio*) – We located this one in the trees at our lodge in Utopia.

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – Sid spotted this one.

**BARRED OWL** (*Strix varia*) – A great finale to the trip was this guy hooting it up in Utopia.

*Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)*

**LESSER NIGHTHAWK** (*Chordeiles acutipennis*)

**COMMON POORWILL** (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*) – Great views of one in the Davis Mountains.

**CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW** (*Antrostomus carolinensis*) – Impressive in size and voice.

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*)

**WHITE-THROATED SWIFT** (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**BLUE-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Lampornis clemenciae*) – The best views were at the feeders above the lodge.

**LUCIFER HUMMINGBIRD** (*Calothorax lucifer*) – A female seen in Blue Creek Canyon and a molting male at the Christmas Mountain Oasis.

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – We did eventually connect with one.

**BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus alexandri*)

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**RINGED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle torquata*) – Great repeated flybys of this impressive bird - this one a male.

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

**GREEN KINGFISHER** (*Chloroceryle americana*) – We did eventually get good looks at a female.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**ACORN WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

**GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

**LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides scalaris*)

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*)

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*)

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*)

**ACADIAN FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax virescens*)  
**LEAST FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax minimus*)  
**DUSKY FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax oberholseri*)  
**CORDILLERAN FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax occidentalis*)  
**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*)  
**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*)  
**SAY'S PHOEBE** (*Sayornis saya*) – Probably one of the most memorable birds of the trip because of its nest right at the restaurant in the Chisos Mountains.

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)  
**ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)  
**GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus crinitus*) [\*]  
**BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)  
**GREAT KISKADEE** (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)  
**COUCH'S KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus couchii*)  
**CASSIN'S KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus vociferans*)  
**WESTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus verticalis*)  
**SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER** (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

*Laniidae (Shrikes)*

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

*Vireonidae (Vireos)*

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*)  
**BELL'S VIREO** (*Vireo bellii*)  
**BLACK-CAPPED VIREO** (*Vireo atricapilla*)  
**YELLOW-THROATED VIREO** (*Vireo flavifrons*)  
**PLUMBEOUS VIREO** (*Vireo plumbeus*)  
**CASSIN'S VIREO** (*Vireo cassinii*)  
**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** (*Vireo solitarius*)  
**HUTTON'S VIREO** (*Vireo huttoni*)  
**RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*)

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**WESTERN SCRUB-JAY** (*Aphelocoma californica*) – It was a bit unusual to see this species at BBNP, though there were apparently a few around this winter. Ours was in Blue Creek Canyon.  
**MEXICAN JAY** (*Aphelocoma wollweberi*)  
**CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN** (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)  
**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*)

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)  
**PURPLE MARTIN** (*Progne subis*)  
**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*)  
**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*)  
**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)  
**CAVE SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon fulva*)

*Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)*

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*)  
**BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

*Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)*

**VERDIN** (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

*Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)*

**BUSHTIT** (*Psaltriparus minimus*)

*Troglodytidae (Wrens)*

**ROCK WREN** (*Salpinctes obsoletus*)  
**CANYON WREN** (*Catherpes mexicanus*)  
**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*)  
**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)  
**BEWICK'S WREN** (*Thryomanes bewickii*)  
**CACTUS WREN** (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)

*Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)*

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Polioptila caerulea*)  
**BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER** (*Polioptila melanura*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*)

**WESTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia mexicana*)

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*) [\*]

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*)

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

**LONG-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma longirostre*) – Great views of several in Del Rio.

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

**CRISSAL THRASHER** (*Toxostoma crissale*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*)

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

Ptilonotidae (Silky-flycatchers)

**PHAINOPEPLA** (*Phainopepla nitens*) – We followed one around in Blue Creek Canyon this trip.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia motacilla*) – Good views of one foraging at Lost Maples.

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – One at the roadside rest area on Hwy 90. A bit of a surprise there.

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) [\*]

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*)

**COLIMA WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis crissalis*) – It took some work, but we came away successful in our quest.

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*)

**MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER** (*Geothlypis tolmiei*)

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) [\*]

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*)

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S)** (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*)

**YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER** (*Setophaga dominica*)

**TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga townsendi*)

**GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER** (*Setophaga chrysoparia*) – Another of the highly sought after species on this trip. We were not disappointed with great looks at several at Lost Maples.

**RUFUS-CAPPED WARBLER (NORTH MEXICO)** (*Basileuterus rufifrons jouyi*) – Depending on one's perspective, this was either very interesting, frustrating, or a bit of both. Some of us saw the mostly silent Rufous-capped Warbler hanging out near the boat ramp area. He sang a couple of times unseen in the morning, and then some of us saw it midday. The second bird was singing its head off, but turns out to have been a hybrid warbler - but a really cool hybrid. It is apparently a hybrid with a Common Yellowthroat. You can read more about it at my blog: <http://www.chrisbenesh.com/currents/2013/05/01/a-presumptive-rufous-capped-warbler-x-common-yellowthroat-hybrid-at-chalk-bluff-park-texas/>

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*)

**PAINTED REDSTART** (*Myioborus pictus*) – We eventually got good views of this species at Boot Springs. Not very vocal this year.

**YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** (*Icteria virens*) – This colorful species was all over Del Rio and also along the banks of the Rio Grande in BBNP.

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

**WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (WHITE-COLLARED)** (*Sporophila torqueola sharpei*) – Continuing in the area where they were first discovered last year, we had a territorial young male.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**OLIVE SPARROW** (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*)

**GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo chlorurus*)

**SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*)

**RUFUS-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Aimophila ruficeps*)

**CANYON TOWHEE** (*Melospiza fusca*)

**CASSIN'S SPARROW** (*Peucaea cassinii*)

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**CLAY-COLORED SPARROW** (*Spizella pallida*) – Abundant in the Hill Country.

**FIELD SPARROW** (*Spizella pusilla*)

**BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW** (*Spizella atrogularis*) – At the last minute we heard one singing in the basin above us. And thanks to Mary Lou's great spotting, we scoped it and had some good views!

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Poocetes gramineus*)

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*)

**BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

**LARK BUNTING** (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – Some nice looks at this species first off at Panther Junction.

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolnii*)

**WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia albicollis*)

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**HEPATIC TANAGER** (*Piranga flava*)

**SUMMER TANAGER** (*Piranga rubra*)

**WESTERN TANAGER** (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)

**ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – A few males at Lost Maples were an unexpected treat.

**BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)

**BLUE GROSBEAK** (*Passerina caerulea*)

**LAZULI BUNTING** (*Passerina amoena*)

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*)

**VARIED BUNTING** (*Passerina versicolor*)

**PAINTED BUNTING** (*Passerina ciris*) – Some super views of this super species.

**DICKCISSEL** (*Spiza americana*) – Great to see this species singing it up in the Hill Country.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*) – One of the pale Lillian's type on our way to the Davis Mountains.

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

**COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

**BRONZED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus aeneus*)

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

**ORCHARD ORIOLE** (*Icterus spurius*)

**HOODED ORIOLE** (*Icterus cucullatus*)

**BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** (*Icterus bullockii*)

**SCOTT'S ORIOLE** (*Icterus parisorum*) – Some remarkable birds in the Chisos Mountains. What a song!

*Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)*

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*)

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*)

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

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## MAMMALS

**BRAZILIAN FREE-TAILED BAT** (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) – No one can forget the spectacle of seeing so many departing the Frio Bat Cave.

**NINE-BANDED ARMADILLO** (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

**DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

**BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus californicus*)

**ROCK SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus variegatus*)

**FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*)

**NUTRIA** (*Myocastor coypus*) [I]

**GRAY FOX** (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

**COLLARED PECCARY** (*Tayassu tajacu*)

**SPOTTED DEER** (*Axis axis*) [I]

**MULE DEER** (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

**PRONGHORN** (*Antilocapra americana*)

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 214 bird taxa and 14 mammal taxa**