

# Trip Report — Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I 2025

April 12-18, 2025 with John Coons



We saw several Hooded Warblers during the week, both singing on the breeding grounds and as migrants in the coastal woodlots. Photo by Bill Thompson.

Springtime in East and Coastal Texas is always an exciting time of year. Birds are streaming in from parts south and heading north to the nearby piney woods, midwestern woodlands, spruce/fir forests of Canada, and the arctic. In our week of birding, we managed to get a good sampling of these migrants as they stopped off along the Texas Coast as well as seeing many breeding birds in East Texas.



The nearly golden-colored Prothonotary Warblers can really light up a shaded bottomland forest. We had a few singing birds in the Big Thicket area and saw as many as ten individuals as migrants in one morning at Sabine Woods. Photo by Bill Thompson.

After meeting up in the evening in Houston, we headed out our first morning to Jones State Forest where we found and had great views of the rare Red-cockaded Woodpecker along with another southeast US specialty, Brown-headed Nuthatch. We then headed east and further into the piney woods where we ended up finding and getting nice looks at singing Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and the very special Swainson's Warbler. All of these were recently arrived birds on their breeding grounds. After lunch we headed north toward Jasper with a few stops along the way, and a fantastic soaring Swallow-tailed Kite at the BA Steinhagen Lake.





We saw a beautiful sunrise on the coastal prairie where we walked about a mile to see the Amur Stonechat. Photo by John Coons.

The next day was full of varied habitats. We started just north of Jasper where we first heard, then scoped, a wonderful singing Bachman's Sparrow, one of the iconic birds of the pine/savanna habitat of the southeast. We watched this bird singing for several minutes. A stop along the roadside gave us great views of a Prairie Warbler before making a gas stop where we watched a Northern Mockingbird diving on a Red-shouldered Hawk that was perched on a powerline right in town. We found our first water birds at Cattail Marsh near Beaumont. Here, we encountered many Purple Gallinules, a distant Bald Eagle nest with a pair and young present, and both species of whistling-ducks. After lunch we made a stop at a turf farm where there was a rather close group of 15 Buff-breasted Sandpipers, with about 10 Upland Sandpipers and several Black-bellied Plovers. We did a quick check-in to our motel in Winnie, then headed south to High Island to see

what migrants were in. We stopped at both Boy Scout and Smith Oaks Woods where we found our first Scarlet and Summer tanagers, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Swainson's and Wood thrushes, grosbeaks, buntings, and Northern Waterthrush and Tennessee warblers.



A soaring Swallow-tailed Kite surprised us in the piney woods. Bill Thompson captured this great looking raptor right overhead.

The next morning, we birded the Bolivar Peninsula, essentially a barrier island of the Gulf of Mexico. There were a lot of shorebirds, gulls, and terns at Rollover Pass, where highlights were a large group of Black Skimmers, several Reddish Egrets, Dunlin in breeding plumage, Marbled Godwits, a pair of Wilson's Plovers, American Oystercatchers, and a great view of a confiding Clapper Rail. We then headed further down the peninsula and walked the beach at the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. This was great, with views of all of the single-banded plovers, Semipalmated, Piping, Snowy, and Wilson's. Black, Gull-billed, Sandwich, Caspian, Royal, Common, Forster's, and Least terns were all present. We headed back to High Island

after lunch and stopped for a pair of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and good views of Seaside Sparrows. Arriving at Boy Scout Woods, we found migration rather slow in the afternoon, so we headed to Smith Oaks and visited the Rookery where Great, Snowy, and Western Cattle-Egrets were all nesting along with many Neotropic Cormorants and exquisite Roseate Spoonbills. Additionally, we saw male and female Blue Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and a late remaining Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. We headed back to Winnie to clean up before going to dinner.



The rookery at Smith Woods at High Island afforded great views of several egrets, herons and these Roseate Spoonbills. We didn't see any young in the spoonbill nests but they were coming soon. Photo by Bill Thompson.

On Wednesday, we deviated from our normal birding at Anahuac NWR (now called Jocelyn Nangaray NWR) to have a chance to see the mega-rarity Amur Stonechat in a private part of the refuge. This wanderer from eastern Asia had been seen by birders for a few weeks, but only on a specially guided tour through The Friends of Anahuac to this restricted part of the refuge. We

joined several other birders at the refuge and walked about a mile along levees to a fallow rice field where we quickly had scope views of this bird. We spent about 20 minutes enjoying this rarity, along with a bonus American Bittern, before returning and visiting the public part of the refuge. After checking the marsh with more Fulvous and Black-bellied whistling-ducks, Stilt Sandpiper, many Dunlin and a Sora, we stopped at a woodlot that turned out to be great. We spent quite a bit of time here, seeing a number of migrant warblers coming to bathe at a water drip. These included Worm-eating, Prothonotary, Hooded, Yellow, Tennessee, Yellow-throated, Blue-winged, Black-and-white, Northern Parula, American Redstart, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Common Yellowthroat, as well as a White-tailed Kite flying over. We then headed to a well-earned lunch and a short break at the motel before returning to High Island for the afternoon arrivals. This visit turned out to be quite good with our first Magnolia, Blackpoll, and Black-throated Green warblers. Over at Smith Woods, we added a male Blackburnian Warbler, a bathing Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, more tanagers and orioles and a surprise Red-headed Woodpecker, which is quite rare in this coastal woodland.





We had several nice views of Worm-eating Warblers, a subtly beautiful warbler. Photo by Bill Thompson.

Thursday found us heading east near the Texas/Louisiana border to bird the Sabine Pass area, including the noted Sabine Woods. We saw Clapper Rail again, as well as flushing a couple of Least Bitterns in a large coastal marsh. Arriving at Sabine Woods, we were greeted by a good number of migrants. We had tremendous views of a Swainson's Warbler on the ground, along with as many as 10 Prothonotary Warblers, Ovenbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, and a Great Kiskadee that had been eluding many of the other birders there. Visiting Sea Rim State park for a picnic lunch, we checked out the beach for our best views of Sandwich Terns, and a swarm of American Avocets in a coastal pond. We returned to Sabine Woods after lunch where we enjoyed more of the colorful migrants, including Painted Bunting, before heading back to Winnie.

We had to pack up the next morning to head back to Houston, but we had a few stops in mind. Going back to the rice fields and pastures southwest of

Winnie, we had a great look at a King Rail that came out of the wet meadow as we were viewing shorebirds, which included another Buff-breasted and a few Pectoral sandpipers. We stopped at a bridge and eventually had views of a couple of Cave Swallows in comparison with the more common Cliff Swallows. A perched Bald Eagle on a power pole was at one of our last stops before making the drive to Houston.

During our trip we also got to experience the relaxed culture of east Texas. We had a chance to sample a diverse cuisine that all had one thing in common....huge portions. It was great fun birding with all of you and seeing the spectacle of migration.



We saw eight species of terns along the coast and in the marshes. Royal Terns were one of the most conspicuous and Bill Thompson got this great flight shot at Bolivar Flats.

Mammals encountered on our trip included:

Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

Swamp Rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*)



Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

A few of the herps we saw were:

American Bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*)

Chicken Turtle (*Deirochelys reticularis*)

Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*)

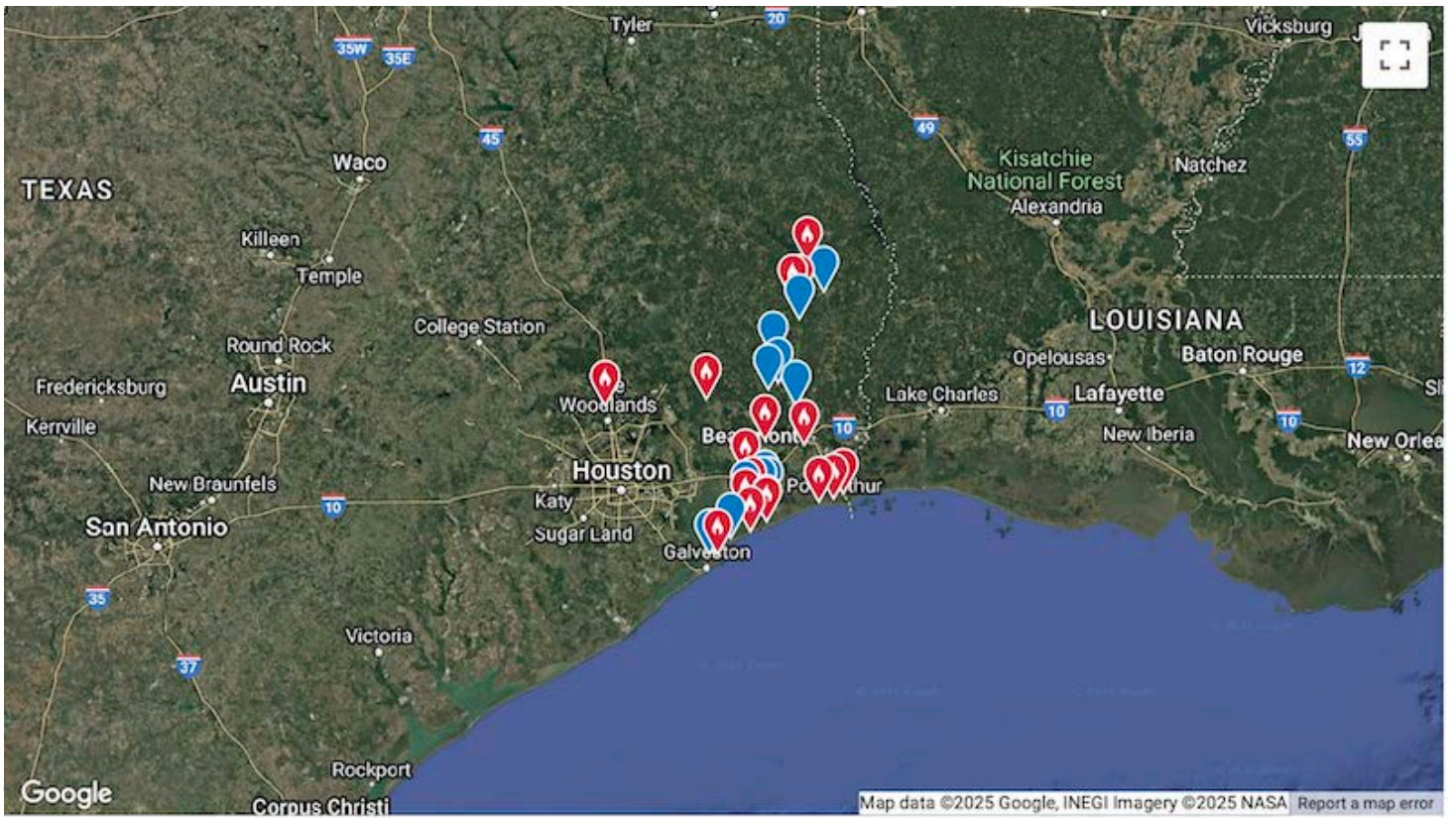
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this

link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/353616>

--John Coons

## Field Guides Birding Tours—Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I, 2025 (with John Coons)

13 – 18 Apr 2025 (6 days) Link-only



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 John Coons



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Species Observed






Show all details

74	Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	6
41	Fulvous Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	2
2	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>	1
28	Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discors</i>	5
6	Mottled Duck	<i>Anas fulvigula</i>	3
4	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	1
11	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	4
4	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	2
21	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	8
5	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	5
7	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>	5
1	King Rail	<i>Rallus elegans</i>	1
6	Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus crepitans</i>	4
2	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>	2
27	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>	5
49	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	4
13	Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinica</i>	3
104	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	7
435	American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	5
3	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>	1

















































119	<b>Black-bellied Plover</b>	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	▶  6
15	<b>Killdeer</b>	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  8
44	<b>Semipalmated Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	▶  4
2	<b>Piping Plover</b>	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	▶  1
9	<b>Wilson's Plover</b>	<i>Anarhynchus wilsonia</i>	▶  3
3	<b>Snowy Plover</b>	<i>Anarhynchus nivosus</i>	▶  1
12	<b>Upland Sandpiper</b>	<i>Bartramia longicauda</i>	▶  2
40	<b>Whimbrel</b>	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	▶  5
22	<b>Marbled Godwit</b>	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	▶  2
8	<b>Short-billed Dowitcher</b>	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	▶  4
54	<b>Long-billed Dowitcher</b>	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  4
97	<b>Lesser Yellowlegs</b>	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	▶  6
82	<b>Willet</b>	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	▶  8
5	<b>Greater Yellowlegs</b>	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  3
9	<b>Ruddy Turnstone</b>	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Stilt Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>	▶  2
16	<b>Buff-breasted Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris subruficollis</i>	▶  2
102	<b>Sanderling</b>	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶  3
248	<b>Dunlin</b>	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  4
20	<b>Least Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  3
3	<b>Pectoral Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Western Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Semipalmated Sandpiper</b>	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>	▶  1
358	<b>Laughing Gull</b>	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	▶  7
























2	<b>Ring-billed Gull</b>	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶  2
200	<b>Black Skimmer</b>	<i>Rynchops niger</i>	▶  1
10	<b>Least Tern</b>	<i>Sternula antillarum</i>	▶  2
4	<b>Gull-billed Tern</b>	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	▶  4
1	<b>Caspian Tern</b>	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶  1
35	<b>Black Tern</b>	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	▶  2
50	<b>Forster's Tern</b>	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	▶  5
36	<b>Common Tern</b>	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	▶  3
28	<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	▶  2
196	<b>Royal Tern</b>	<i>Thalasseus maximus</i>	▶  3
1	<b>Pied-billed Grebe</b>	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Anhinga</b>	<i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	▶  2
2	<b>Double-crested Cormorant</b>	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  1
76	<b>Neotropic Cormorant</b>	<i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>	▶  6
46	<b>White Ibis</b>	<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	▶  6
35	<b>White-faced Ibis</b>	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	▶  4
20	<b>Roseate Spoonbill</b>	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>	▶  3
1	<b>American Bittern</b>	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	▶  1
4	<b>Least Bittern</b>	<i>Botaurus exilis</i>	▶  2
3	<b>Yellow-crowned Night Heron</b>	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Black-crowned Night Heron</b>	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  2
4	<b>Little Blue Heron</b>	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	▶  4
26	<b>Tricolored Heron</b>	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	▶  5

7	<b>Reddish Egret</b>	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>	▶  2
25	<b>Snowy Egret</b>	<i>Egretta thula</i>	▶  7
3	<b>Green Heron</b>	<i>Butorides virescens</i>	▶  3
41	<b>Western Cattle-Egret</b>	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	▶  5
44	<b>Great Egret</b>	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  9
8	<b>Great Blue Heron</b>	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶  4
1	<b>American White Pelican</b>	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	▶  1
28	<b>Brown Pelican</b>	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	▶  3
7	<b>Black Vulture</b>	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	▶  5
22	<b>Turkey Vulture</b>	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  7
1	<b>Osprey</b>	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>White-tailed Kite</b>	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Swallow-tailed Kite</b>	<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Cooper's Hawk</b>	<i>Astur cooperii</i>	▶  1
4	<b>Bald Eagle</b>	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	▶  2
2	<b>Broad-winged Hawk</b>	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Red-shouldered Hawk</b>	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	▶  1
7	<b>Swainson's Hawk</b>	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	▶  3
5	<b>Belted Kingfisher</b>	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Yellow-bellied Sapsucker</b>	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>	▶  2
2	<b>Red-headed Woodpecker</b>	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	▶  2
5	<b>Red-bellied Woodpecker</b>	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Downy Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  2






2	<b>Red-cockaded Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryobates borealis</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Pileated Woodpecker</b>	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Northern Flicker</b>	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  1
3	<b>Crested Caracara</b>	<i>Caracara plancus</i>	▶  2
1	<b>American Kestrel</b>	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  1
5	<b>Eastern Wood-Pewee</b>	<i>Contopus virens</i>	▶  3
3	<b>Acadian Flycatcher</b>	<i>Empidonax virescens</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Great Crested Flycatcher</b>	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Great Kiskadee</b>	<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>	▶  1
13	<b>Eastern Kingbird</b>	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	▶  3
5	<b>Scissor-tailed Flycatcher</b>	<i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>	▶  3
20	<b>White-eyed Vireo</b>	<i>Vireo griseus</i>	▶  10
6	<b>Yellow-throated Vireo</b>	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	▶  4
13	<b>Red-eyed Vireo</b>	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	▶  7
2	<b>Loggerhead Shrike</b>	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  2
16	<b>Blue Jay</b>	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	▶  7
3	<b>American Crow</b>	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  1
4	<b>Fish Crow</b>	<i>Corvus ossifragus</i>	▶  3
1	<b>Carolina Chickadee</b>	<i>Poecile carolinensis</i>	▶  1
3	<b>Tufted Titmouse</b>	<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	▶  2
21	<b>Tree Swallow</b>	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  2
22	<b>Purple Martin</b>	<i>Progne subis</i>	▶  7
5	<b>Northern Rough-winged Swallow</b>	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	▶  2



48	<b>Barn Swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  8
275	<b>Cliff Swallow</b>	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Cave Swallow</b>	<i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>	▶  1
3	<b>Brown-headed Nuthatch</b>	<i>Sitta pusilla</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Blue-gray Gnatcatcher</b>	<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>	▶  1
10	<b>Sedge Wren</b>	<i>Cistothorus stellaris</i>	▶  5
4	<b>Marsh Wren</b>	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶  2
23	<b>Carolina Wren</b>	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	▶  9
5	<b>European Starling</b>	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  1
23	<b>Gray Catbird</b>	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	▶  7
2	<b>Brown Thrasher</b>	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	▶  2
29	<b>Northern Mockingbird</b>	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  11
5	<b>Eastern Bluebird</b>	<i>Sialia sialis</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Veery</b>	<i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	▶  1
6	<b>Swainson's Thrush</b>	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	▶  4
17	<b>Wood Thrush</b>	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	▶  8
1	<b>Amur Stonechat</b>	<i>Saxicola stejnegeri</i> ✓	▶  1
22	<b>Cedar Waxwing</b>	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	▶  1
4	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  1
3	<b>Bachman's Sparrow</b>	<i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>	▶  1
4	<b>Chipping Sparrow</b>	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶  1
7	<b>White-throated Sparrow</b>	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	▶  5
18	<b>Seaside Sparrow</b>	<i>Ammospiza maritima</i>	▶  2

9	<b>Savannah Sparrow</b>	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  2
1	<b>Lincoln's Sparrow</b>	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	▶  1
1	<b>Eastern Towhee</b>	<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Yellow-breasted Chat</b>	<i>Icteria virens</i>	▶  2
34	<b>Eastern Meadowlark</b>	<i>Sturnella magna</i>	▶  6
31	<b>Orchard Oriole</b>	<i>Icterus spurius</i>	▶  8
7	<b>Baltimore Oriole</b>	<i>Icterus galbula</i>	▶  2
129	<b>Red-winged Blackbird</b>	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	▶  10
16	<b>Brown-headed Cowbird</b>	<i>Molothrus ater</i>	▶  4
11	<b>Common Grackle</b>	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	▶  4
83	<b>Boat-tailed Grackle</b>	<i>Quiscalus major</i>	▶  6
151	<b>Great-tailed Grackle</b>	<i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	▶  19
1	<b>Ovenbird</b>	<i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>	▶  1
8	<b>Worm-eating Warbler</b>	<i>Helmitheros vermivorum</i>	▶  4
3	<b>Louisiana Waterthrush</b>	<i>Parkesia motacilla</i>	▶  3
9	<b>Northern Waterthrush</b>	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>	▶  6
7	<b>Blue-winged Warbler</b>	<i>Vermivora cyanoptera</i>	▶  3
8	<b>Black-and-white Warbler</b>	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	▶  5
24	<b>Prothonotary Warbler</b>	<i>Protonotaria citrea</i>	▶  5
3	<b>Swainson's Warbler</b>	<i>Limnithlypis swainsonii</i>	▶  3
10	<b>Tennessee Warbler</b>	<i>Leiothlypis peregrina</i>	▶  6
1	<b>Nashville Warbler</b>	<i>Leiothlypis ruficapilla</i>	▶  1
5	<b>Kentucky Warbler</b>	<i>Geothlypis formosa</i>	▶  5



7	<b>Common Yellowthroat</b>	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	▶  5
34	<b>Hooded Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga citrina</i>	▶  8
7	<b>American Redstart</b>	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	▶  5
11	<b>Northern Parula</b>	<i>Setophaga americana</i>	▶  6
1	<b>Magnolia Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga magnolia</i>	▶  1
2	<b>Blackburnian Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga fusca</i>	▶  2
4	<b>Yellow Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>	▶  4
2	<b>Blackpoll Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga striata</i>	▶  1
6	<b>Pine Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga pinus</i>	▶  3
4	<b>Yellow-rumped Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  2
3	<b>Yellow-throated Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>	▶  3
2	<b>Prairie Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>	▶  2
3	<b>Black-throated Green Warbler</b>	<i>Setophaga virens</i>	▶  3
10	<b>Summer Tanager</b>	<i>Piranga rubra</i>	▶  8
13	<b>Scarlet Tanager</b>	<i>Piranga olivacea</i>	▶  8
71	<b>Northern Cardinal</b>	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	▶  12
7	<b>Rose-breasted Grosbeak</b>	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>	▶  5
4	<b>Blue Grosbeak</b>	<i>Passerina caerulea</i>	▶  2
58	<b>Indigo Bunting</b>	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>	▶  8
2	<b>Painted Bunting</b>	<i>Passerina ciris</i>	▶  2

## ADDITIONAL TAXA

1	<b>King/Clapper Rail</b>	<i>Rallus elegans/crepitans</i>	▶  1
3	<b>Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher</b>	<i>Limnodromus griseus/scolopaceus</i>	▶  1