

Trip Report — Texas Coast Migration Spectacle II 2025

April 19-25, 2025 with John Coons



We enjoyed terrific views of this Swainson's Warbler in full song in the Big Thicket area. This is a quite sought after species in the Southeast US. Photo by Len Sander

We enjoyed a wonderful week of spring migration on the Upper Texas Coast as well as finding a number of the breeding birds in the piney woods of east Texas. It was birdy every day, with always something new to keep us busy. We gathered on our first evening for dinner in Houston and went over the plan for the next days. The following morning, we were off after breakfast to Jones State Forest to track down Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. It took a little bit of following the calls before we had scope views at this rather rare specialty of the southeast US. A singing Summer

Tanager was in a nearby tree top and we had nice looks at Pine Warbler and a couple of tiny Brown-headed Nuthatches. We then headed west toward the Big Thicket area and made a stop near the Trinity River. Here we were treated to a dynamite view of a singing Swainson's Warbler soon after we had seen Northern Parula, Hooded Warbler, and Prothonotary Warblers. A Kentucky Warbler also made an appearance. After lunch on Easter Sunday, where kids were doing an egg hunt in parts of the restaurant, we had great views of a Prairie Warbler singing from the top of a shrub. A locally breeding Yellow-throated Vireo was just overhead. We made a stop at Steinhagen Lake near Jasper and had fabulous views of a Yellow-throated Warbler and more Prothonotarys, but the highlight here was a Swallow-tailed Kite that was flying back and forth over a wooded section of the lake. After getting situated at our motel, we did a Sunday dinner buffet where the choice of pies and various cakes was difficult.



No one ever gets tired of seeing male Painted Buntings. Len Sander caught this one on our last morning in the field.

The next morning, we were out for sunrise to find the quite local Bachman's Sparrow. We heard one singing just off the road right away and Emma spotted it perched in a shrub where we watched it for several minutes giving its beautiful song. We watched an American Kestrel after a fly-over of two Bald Eagles and a Pileated Woodpecker before heading back to the motel to pack up and head south. We stopped at Cattail Marsh at the edge of Beaumont where it was misty and windy. Good conditions for migrants to appear. Here we saw a good number of Purple Gallinules and got our first taste of several waterbirds. After lunch we detoured through some agricultural fields, stopping at a turf farm where we found at least 35 Buff-breasted Sandpipers and a couple of Upland Sandpipers. At a nearby wet field were our first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Swainson's Hawks. Whimbrels, and smaller shorebirds, including four White-rumped Sandpipers, while we

scoped a singing Dickcissel on a shrub top. We continued on to Winnie and checked in to our motel, dropped our luggage, and quickly headed to High Island to see how the weather conditions had influenced migration. We arrived at Boy Scout Woods to find lots of birders next to the field station. Lots of birds were in the pecan and mulberry trees and we spent a while seeing what was moving through. Cape May Warbler, quite uncommon here, was one of the first birds we saw, along with Blackpoll, Tennessee, and Black-throated Green warblers, and Scarlet and Summer tanagers. Finally entering Boy Scout Woods we saw Golden-winged Warbler, Blackburnian, Blue-winged, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, American Redstart, an Ovenbird at the water drip, and more tanagers and both Baltimore and Orchard orioles, Blue Grosbeak and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. The birding was very exciting.



We saw several Scissor-tailed Flycatchers during our time near the Coast but this one showed exceedingly well. Photo by Len Sander.

We headed to Anahuac NWR (now called Jocelyn Nungaray NWR) the next morning but stopped at some wet fields to scope shorebirds on the way. Here we had great views of King Rail right at the road edge. There were good number of Lesser and Greater yellowlegs for a close comparison, Willets, and Whimbrels. At the refuge we saw three baby Barn Owls under a roof with mom hiding from us. We did a drive around Shoveler Pond where we had looks at three Least Bitterns and several Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks along with Stilt Sandpipers, lots of dowitchers, more Lesser Yellowlegs, our first Gull-billed Terns, Crested Caracaras, Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, and an American Bittern. After lunch and a stop at the motel, we returned to High Island where the migrant activity from the previous day had obviously waned, but we did watch a rather rare Lawrence's Warbler bathing at the water drip. We headed to the rookery at Smith Woods where we enjoyed views of nesting Roseate Spoonbills, Great, Snowy, and Western Cattle-Egrets, along with Tricolored Herons and many Neotropic Cormorants. We spent some time just watching the interaction of the birds at the nests where many of the Great Egrets had young.



It was great to see and hear a group pf Bobolinks fly in to a field at Sabine Pass. This is a one of the later birds to appear on the Upper Texas Coast. Photo by C V Vick.

On Wednesday, we went down the Bolivar Peninsula for our first saltwater birding. At Rollover Pass we watched a “dancing” Reddish Egret, with lots of Black Skimmers on a sandbar and scores of Dunlin, Semipalmated Plovers, Marbled Godwits, American Oystercatchers, and Royal and Sandwich terns. We looked for a bit before we got a close Nelson’s Sparrow in the

saltmarsh. In a light rain, we stopped at the ferry landing where we spotted a quite rare Glaucous Gull that had been reported off and on for a few days. Our beach walk at Bolivar Flats was curtailed a bit by rain and wind, but we saw Wilson's and Piping plovers, and Brenda photographed a Snowy Plover. Lots of Least Terns were flying about with tiny fish in their bills. Again, after lunch we went back to High Island where the migration was slow but it ramped up around 4:00 pm when the birds crossing the Gulf arrived. We saw a surge in both Orchard and Baltimore orioles , Summer and Scarlet tanagers, and Eastern Kingbirds. We had nice looks at a couple of Yellow-billed Cuckoos before heading back to the motel in the late-afternoon.



Along the Coast we saw several Reddish Egrets. They were all the traditional blue-gray and reddish colors except this white morph individual. Photo by C V Vick.

On our final full day of birding, we drove east to Sabine Pass on the Sabine River which makes the border with Louisiana. We first stopped in some open fields where we saw and heard singing a group of about five Bobolinks, one of the wonderful birds of open pastures. We proceeded to Sabine Woods

which was going pretty good with migrants. We soon saw Magnolia Warbler, our first of a few Philadelphia Vireos, Golden-winged Warbler, a cooperative Ovenbird, and our first looks at calling White-winged Doves. We made the rounds of the woods a couple of times and stayed busy with the migrants before heading to Sea Rim State Park where we enjoyed a picnic lunch after first cruising the beach for more Wilson's and Piping plovers among the many shorebirds. We walked the boardwalk to see a couple of hundred American Avocets among a large number of Snowy Egrets. We went back to Sabine Woods for the afternoon fallout and we experienced a good pulse of newly arriving migrants around 2:00 pm. We headed out at 3:30 pm to get ahead of the construction traffic but still got caught in it for a spell. We got back to the motel to clean up before our last dinner together.



Yellow-throated Warblers had mostly passed through the migration traps near the Coast but we found this cooperative bird on its breeding grounds in the Big Thicket area. Photo by Len Sander.

On Friday, we packed up our van after breakfast and headed out into the rice fields hoping for a few new shorebirds. At a small bridge we had scope views of our first Cave Swallows perched right next to Cliff Swallows. A nearby singing Painted Bunting popped up in all its colors next to the road. Back into the piney woods, we made a stop and once again saw singing Northern Parula and Prothonotary Warbler on the breeding ground, just like we had started the first morning. We said our goodbyes at the hotel for some and the airport terminal for others. It was great fun birding with all of you in East Texas for a week and I hope we get together again.



A recurring theme was the size of the meal portions, but it was easy to overdo it with the dessert selection in Jasper. Photo by Mae Sander.

Mammals encountered during our trip included:

Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

Swamp Rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*)

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)

Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) a few were seen at the mouth of Galveston Bay

Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) Emma spotted one in a tree at Boy Scout Woods

A few of the herps we saw:

American Bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*)

Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*)

Speckled Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis holbrooki*)

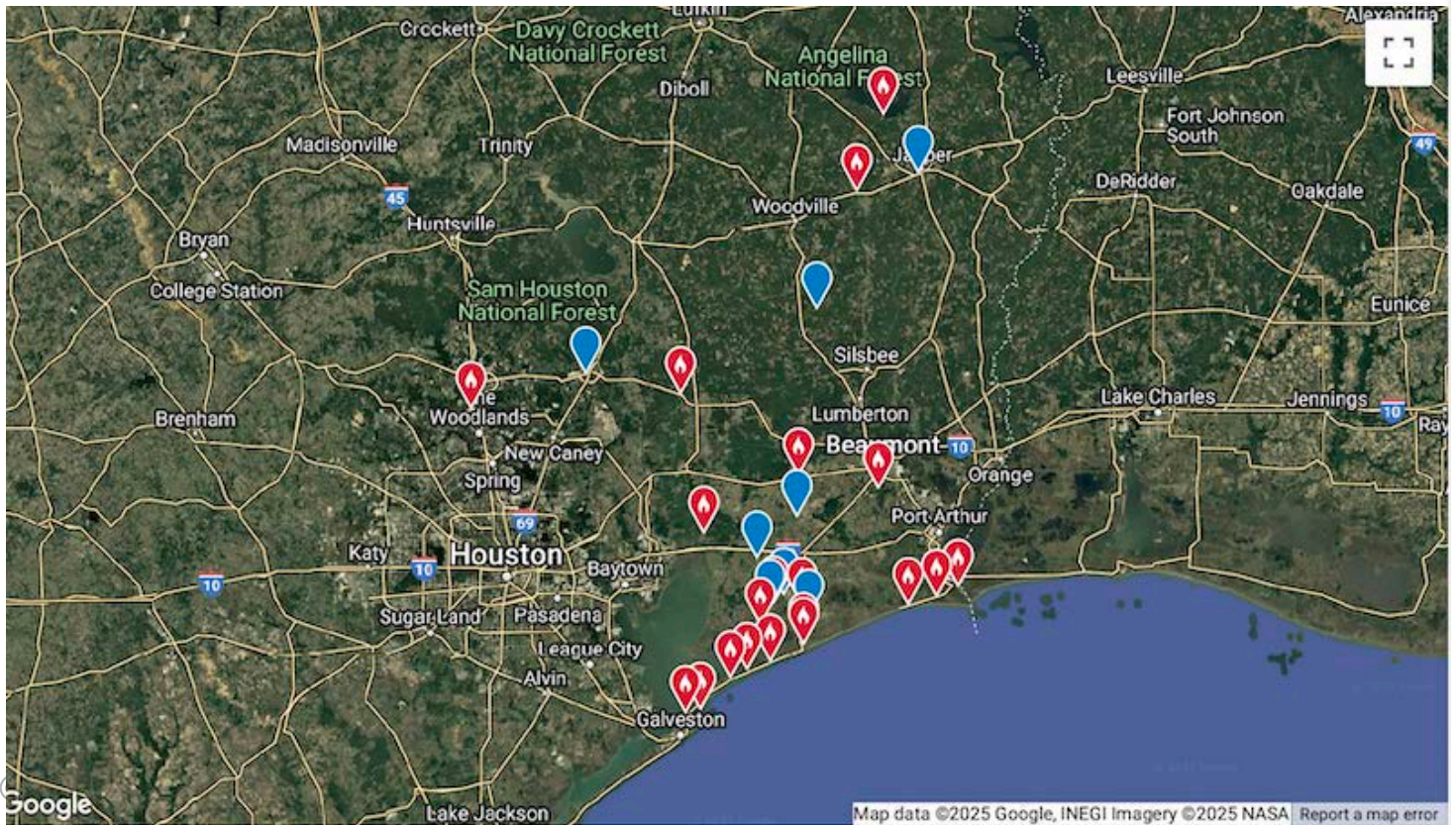
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/354507>

John Coons

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

20 – 25 Apr 2025 (6 days) Link-only



📍 Texas, United States

Chambers | Galveston | Hardin | Jasper | Jefferson | Liberty | Montgomery | Tyler

👤 John Coons














For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...

 186

 35

Species Observed








[Show all details](#)

46	Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	▶  7
21	Fulvous Whistling-Duck	▶  2
8	Blue-winged Teal	▶  3
8	Mottled Duck	▶  1
1	Lesser Scaup	▶  1
5	Rock Pigeon *	▶  1
2	Eurasian Collared-Dove *	▶  2
5	White-winged Dove	▶  3
16	Mourning Dove	▶  7
1	Greater Roadrunner	▶  1
10	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	▶  7
8	Common Nighthawk	▶  7
4	Chimney Swift	▶  2
9	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	▶  4
6	King Rail	▶  2
4	Clapper Rail	▶  3
4	Sora	▶  4
31	Common Gallinule	▶  5
41	American Coot	▶  2
26	Purple Gallinule	▶  4
157	Black-necked Stilt	▶  8

460	American Avocet	2
6	American Oystercatcher	2
49	Black-bellied Plover	3
21	Killdeer	8
36	Semipalmated Plover	4
3	Piping Plover	1
4	Wilson's Plover	2
1	Snowy Plover	1
2	Upland Sandpiper	1
71	Whimbrel	5
5	Marbled Godwit	1
4	Short-billed Dowitcher	2
143	Long-billed Dowitcher	8
1	Wilson's Phalarope	1
3	Spotted Sandpiper	2
1	Solitary Sandpiper	1
582	Lesser Yellowlegs	8
102	Willet	9
22	Greater Yellowlegs	3
16	Ruddy Turnstone	2
29	Stilt Sandpiper	2
44	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	1
750	Sanderling	2
194	Dunlin	3

4	White-rumped Sandpiper	▶  1
24	Least Sandpiper	▶  4
19	Pectoral Sandpiper	▶  3
3	Western Sandpiper	▶  1
1	Bonaparte's Gull	▶  1
166	Laughing Gull	▶  6
2	Ring-billed Gull	▶  2
2	American Herring Gull	▶  2
1	Glaucous Gull	▶  1
120	Black Skimmer	▶  2
73	Least Tern	▶  2
5	Gull-billed Tern	▶  3
400	Black Tern	▶  1
50	Forster's Tern	▶  5
94	Common Tern	▶  3
8	Sandwich Tern	▶  2
128	Royal Tern	▶  4
1	Anhinga	▶  1
1	Double-crested Cormorant	▶  1
94	Neotropic Cormorant	▶  8
34	White Ibis	▶  3
108	White-faced Ibis	▶  6
4	Roseate Spoonbill	▶  3

1	American Bittern	▶  1
6	Least Bittern	▶  2
3	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	▶  1
3	Black-crowned Night Heron	▶  2
13	Little Blue Heron	▶  4
8	Tricolored Heron	▶  5
3	Reddish Egret	▶  2
87	Snowy Egret	▶  7
11	Green Heron	▶  3
41	Western Cattle-Egret	▶  6
43	Great Egret	▶  9
6	Great Blue Heron	▶  4
46	Brown Pelican	▶  4
17	Black Vulture	▶  8
6	Turkey Vulture	▶  5
1	Osprey	▶  1
1	Swallow-tailed Kite	▶  1
1	Cooper's Hawk	▶  1
1	Bald Eagle	▶  1
2	Broad-winged Hawk	▶  1
1	Red-shouldered Hawk	▶  1
3	Swainson's Hawk	▶  2
4	American Barn Owl	▶  1

2	Belted Kingfisher	▶  1
13	Red-bellied Woodpecker	▶  8
4	Downy Woodpecker	▶  3
3	Red-cockaded Woodpecker	▶  1
4	Pileated Woodpecker	▶  3
2	Northern Flicker	▶  1
7	Crested Caracara	▶  4
1	American Kestrel	▶  1
1	Peregrine Falcon	▶  1
1	Eastern Wood-Pewee	▶  1
2	Acadian Flycatcher	▶  1
1	Great Crested Flycatcher	▶  1
1	Great Kiskadee	▶  1
21	Eastern Kingbird	▶  4
4	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	▶  3
11	White-eyed Vireo	▶  3
5	Yellow-throated Vireo	▶  3
3	Philadelphia Vireo	▶  1
2	Warbling Vireo	▶  2
15	Red-eyed Vireo	▶  7
1	Loggerhead Shrike	▶  1
19	Blue Jay	▶  9
8	American Crow	▶  4

1	Fish Crow	▶  1
7	Carolina Chickadee	▶  6
6	Tufted Titmouse	▶  4
71	Tree Swallow	▶  3
44	Purple Martin	▶  8
2	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	▶  1
107	Barn Swallow	▶  9
120	Cliff Swallow	▶  3
6	Cave Swallow	▶  1
4	Brown-headed Nuthatch	▶  1
4	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	▶  3
8	Sedge Wren	▶  4
11	Marsh Wren	▶  5
17	Carolina Wren	▶  8
21	European Starling *	▶  6
31	Gray Catbird	▶  7
1	Brown Thrasher	▶  1
24	Northern Mockingbird	▶  13
3	Eastern Bluebird	▶  1
1	Veery	▶  1
2	Swainson's Thrush	▶  2
5	Wood Thrush	▶  5
60	Cedar Waxwing	▶  4

1	House Sparrow *	▶  1
2	Bachman's Sparrow	▶  1
2	White-throated Sparrow	▶  2
22	Seaside Sparrow	▶  3
5	Nelson's Sparrow	▶  1
14	Savannah Sparrow	▶  4
1	Eastern Towhee	▶  1
2	Yellow-breasted Chat	▶  2
12	Bobolink	▶  2
5	Eastern Meadowlark	▶  2
52	Orchard Oriole	▶  8
24	Baltimore Oriole	▶  5
103	Red-winged Blackbird	▶  12
4	Brown-headed Cowbird	▶  4
6	Common Grackle	▶  2
22	Boat-tailed Grackle	▶  4
56	Great-tailed Grackle	▶  14
2	Ovenbird	▶  2
5	Northern Waterthrush	▶  4
3	Golden-winged Warbler	▶  2
1	Blue-winged Warbler	▶  1
7	Black-and-white Warbler	▶  3
6	Prothonotary Warbler	▶  6

2	Swainson's Warbler	▸  2
10	Tennessee Warbler	▸  4
2	Kentucky Warbler	▸  2
5	Common Yellowthroat	▸  4
10	Hooded Warbler	▸  5
7	American Redstart	▸  4
1	Cape May Warbler	▸  1
13	Northern Parula	▸  7
4	Magnolia Warbler	▸  2
2	Bay-breasted Warbler	▸  1
1	Blackburnian Warbler	▸  1
3	Yellow Warbler	▸  1
4	Chestnut-sided Warbler	▸  3
6	Blackpoll Warbler	▸  3
7	Pine Warbler	▸  2
2	Yellow-throated Warbler	▸  2
3	Prairie Warbler	▸  1
8	Black-throated Green Warbler	▸  3
15	Summer Tanager	▸  6
16	Scarlet Tanager	▸  5
37	Northern Cardinal	▸  13
25	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	▸  6
2	Blue Grosbeak	▸  1

35 Indigo Bunting

▶ 5

3 Painted Bunting

▶ 2

2 Dickcissel

▶ 2

HYBRIDS

1 Lawrence's Warbler (hybrid)

▶ 1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

760 Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher

▶ 4