

Spectacle I 2026

April 11-17, 2026 with John Coons & Alex Sundvall



Swainson's Warbler is one of the more sought-after warblers of East Texas. We had wonderful views of this bird singing in the Big Thicket area. Photo by Alex Sundvall.

We enjoyed a fun week of birding in the Piney Woods of East Texas and the Upper Texas Coast. Although we did not experience a fallout since the weather was too good, we did find a lot of birds during our days. On Saturday evening, we gathered for dinner at our motel near the Houston airport and went over the plan for the next couple of days. In the morning, we headed up to Jones State Forest and soon after arriving had nice looks at Red-cockaded Woodpeckers working on the trunks of the pines. We also enjoyed a Pileated and a couple of Red-headed Woodpeckers, one of the prettiest of all the woodpeckers. Another southeast US specialty, Brown-headed Nuthatch, showed well and we also saw Wood Ducks, a perched Great Horned Owl, Pine Warblers, and Eastern Bluebirds. Traveling east, we

made a stop near the Trinity River and had nice views of Prothonotary and Hooded warblers and Northern Parula. We headed on to Kountze, Texas, for lunch before some afternoon birding in the big thicket habitat north of town. We had great views of our main target, Swainson's Warbler, along the roadside, as well as a singing Prairie Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and a wonderful Barred Owl that swooped in and landed along a creek. Along the BA Steinhagen Lake we saw our first waterbirds which included Anhinga, Common Gallinule, Little Blue and Great Blue herons, and Great Egret. White-eyed Vireos and Carolina Chickadees also showed well here, as did our first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. After checking in to our motel in Jasper, we enjoyed the Sunday buffet at the Cedar Tree, which had desserts seemingly from the 60's.



At the Smith Oaks rookery at High Island, many Roseate Spoonbills were on nests with others still constructing. Alex Sundvall captured this individual in full breeding color carrying nesting material to the island.

After breakfast the next morning we made a short drive into the pine savanna habitat, where our goal was the quite local Bachman's Sparrow. We

heard a few from the road but eventually had to walk into the woods to get a look, where we spotted a singing male on a limb of a pine. We enjoyed its beautiful song for several minutes. On our drive out, Alex spotted a group of five migrating Mississippi Kites perched in a dead tree. We returned to our motel to checkout before making our way south toward the Texas Coast. We made a stop at Cattail Marsh near Beaumont, where we saw both Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling-ducks, Purple Gallinules, Soras, White and White-faced ibis, many Snowy Egrets, Fish Crow, Purple Martins, and we compared Boat-tailed and Great-tailed grackles. We headed to lunch, then made our way to our motel in Winnie for an early check-in before driving south to High Island and the migration woodlots. We found a number of new birds, but the highlight was a visit to the rookery at Smith Oaks where we had great views of nesting Great and Snowy egrets showing bright breeding colors on their bills, lores, and legs, many Tricolored Herons, Neotropic Cormorants, and the stars... Roseate Spoonbills showing their pink bodies with orange tails.



We found this Barred Owl after it swooped in along a stream in the bottomland bald cypress woodland in the Big Thicket area. Photo by John Coons.

On our first morning near the Texas Coast, we birded some wet fields for a few shorebirds, including a couple of Buff-breasted Sandpipers. We had a wonderful experience with a King Rail right next to the road. We then headed to Anahuac (now Jocelyn Nungaray) NWR where we spotted a wonderful American Bittern trying to hide in the reeds, a cooperative Sedge Wren, then a locally rare Least Grebe and lots of American Alligators sun bathing. At the refuge entrance, a family of Barn Owls showed well in the roof of the old visitor's center. A drive around the marshes and ponds at the refuge found a fair number of shorebirds, including Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Semipalmated Plovers, lots of Lesser Yellowlegs, fewer Greater Yellowlegs, many Stilt Sandpipers, Gull-billed and Forster's terns, a Least Bittern, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Crested Caracaras, and nesting Cliff Swallows, among others. We headed to lunch at a BBQ place and had

a siesta at the motel before heading back to High Island in the afternoon. There were more birds around than the previous day. We watched one of the drips, and Worm-eating, Tennessee, Prothonotary, and Blue-winged warblers all showed in just a couple of minutes. Both Scarlet and Summer tanagers and a fair number of Orchard Orioles showed well along with Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and a couple of Swainson's Thrushes that were even singing in the woods.



This American Oystercatcher was looking for a shellfish for lunch while perched on an old oyster bed in Galveston Bay. Photo by Alex Sundvall.

On Wednesday morning, we made our way through High Island on to the Bolivar Peninsula, with a stop at Rollover Pass, where we got our first real taste of coastal birds. Marbled Godwits, Willets, and Black Skimmers greeted us on the bay side of the pass as a Reddish Egret danced in the water. A fair number of Royal, Forster's, and Least terns were on the sandbar. We had a nice experience with a Clapper Rail that walked between clumps of reeds. Further down the peninsula we had nice views of both

Seaside Sparrow, a resident species, and a couple of wonderful Nelson's Sparrows that were lingering from the winter before heading back north. Then it was on to the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Driving along the beach, we had rather close views of Wilson's, Piping, and Snowy plovers amongst the Black-bellied Plovers. We walked the beach at the sanctuary where there were good numbers of Sanderlings, Dunlin, and Black and Least terns as well as Sandwich Terns, Ruddy Turnstones, and more Reddish Egrets. With the higher tide we went to a more inland tide pool and saw about 400 American Avocets. Some of us spotted a Bottle-nosed Dolphin at the entrance to Galveston Bay during a snack and pit stop. After lunch, we headed back up the peninsula and stopped at Rollover Pass again, where the lower tide was conducive to us seeing American Oystercatcher. We made our way back to High Island in hopes of afternoon arriving migrants. An Ovenbird and Kentucky Warbler came to the water drip, as did a brilliant male Painted Bunting and Northern Waterthrush. We encountered more orioles, tanagers, catbirds and Indigo Buntings here as well. A post dinner visit to Winnie's Dairy Queen was a big hit.



Nelson's Sparrows are uncommon wintering birds along the Upper Texas Coast in winter. A few stay into late-April, and we were fortunate to find a couple in the marshes of the Bolivar Peninsula. Photo by Alex Sundvall.

On Thursday we went east from Winnie through the edge of Port Arthur to the small town of Sabine Pass and Sabine Woods, which is owned by the Texas Ornithological Society. We spent a couple of hours walking the trails in the woods and found a fair number of migrants. We had our first seen Great Crested Flycatcher, as well as a Great Kiskadee that had been around here most of the spring. It spent most of its time in the treetops but we had a brief perched view and saw it fly a couple of times. This is the place to see White-winged Doves. We took a break and went down the coast to Sea Rim State Park where we checked the beach and saw more of the specialty plovers, Wilson's, Snowy, and Piping as well as Least, Western, and Semipalmated sandpipers. As we were preparing our picnic lunch and checking out the American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, and a pair of Mottled Ducks, an American Alligator slipped up a side channel of the tidal marsh and watched us intently from across the lawn. We returned to Sabine Woods after lunch to see if any birds were coming in from across the Gulf.

We had looks at Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Yellow-throated Warbler, more waterthrushes and Prothonotary Warbler, but our hopes for fallout was dashed by the southerly winds that were carrying the migrants further inland. We made our way back on a circuitous route to Winnie stopping to check a riparian area and to look for flooded rice fields on roads that are rarely checked.



We saw a few Prothonotary Warblers on the breeding grounds along streams and bogs in East Texas, as well migrants seen in the High Island area. Their brilliant yellow color really lit up the forest. Photo by Alex Sundvall.

On our final day, we packed up the van and headed to some pastures where we spent a bit of time watching and listening to displaying Upland Sandpipers, as well as a field with close to 100 Buff-breasted Sandpipers that were practicing their display they will need on their far north tundra breeding grounds, where a male shows his pale underwings to a female as he walks about. We headed to a canal bridge and saw a few Cave Swallows mixed in with Cliff Swallows and got some info on a wet muddy field not far away. We dashed there and found one of the best local shorebirds,

Hudsonian Godwit, with a handful of Hudsonian Whimbrels, 500 Lesser Yellowlegs and many Dunlin. We had to start making our way to the airport, so we headed off and made a pit stop at one of the few remaining Stuckey's, where Stephen could not resist getting us all donuts in celebration of all the birds and the roughly 15 different donuts shops we saw in East Texas. Getting back into the piney woods, we made one more birding stop at Lake Charlotte where we had one last look at a Northern Parula, a flock of Cedar Waxwings, and Alex spotted a rare inland Sandwich Tern and a flying Common Loon. We arrived with time to spare for flights and dropped a couple of us at the motel and the others at the airport terminals. It was great fun birding with all of you and seeing a bunch of cool birds on their way north and to experience a bit of East Texas culture along the way. Good birding, and Alex and I hope to see you again.



This family of young Barn Owls were curious as to what was going on below them while they peered out from the hole in the roof at the wildlife refuge. Photo by Alex Sundvall.

Mammals encountered on our Texas tour:

Swamp Rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*)

Marsh Rice Rat (*Oryzomys palustris*)

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)

Common Bottleose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

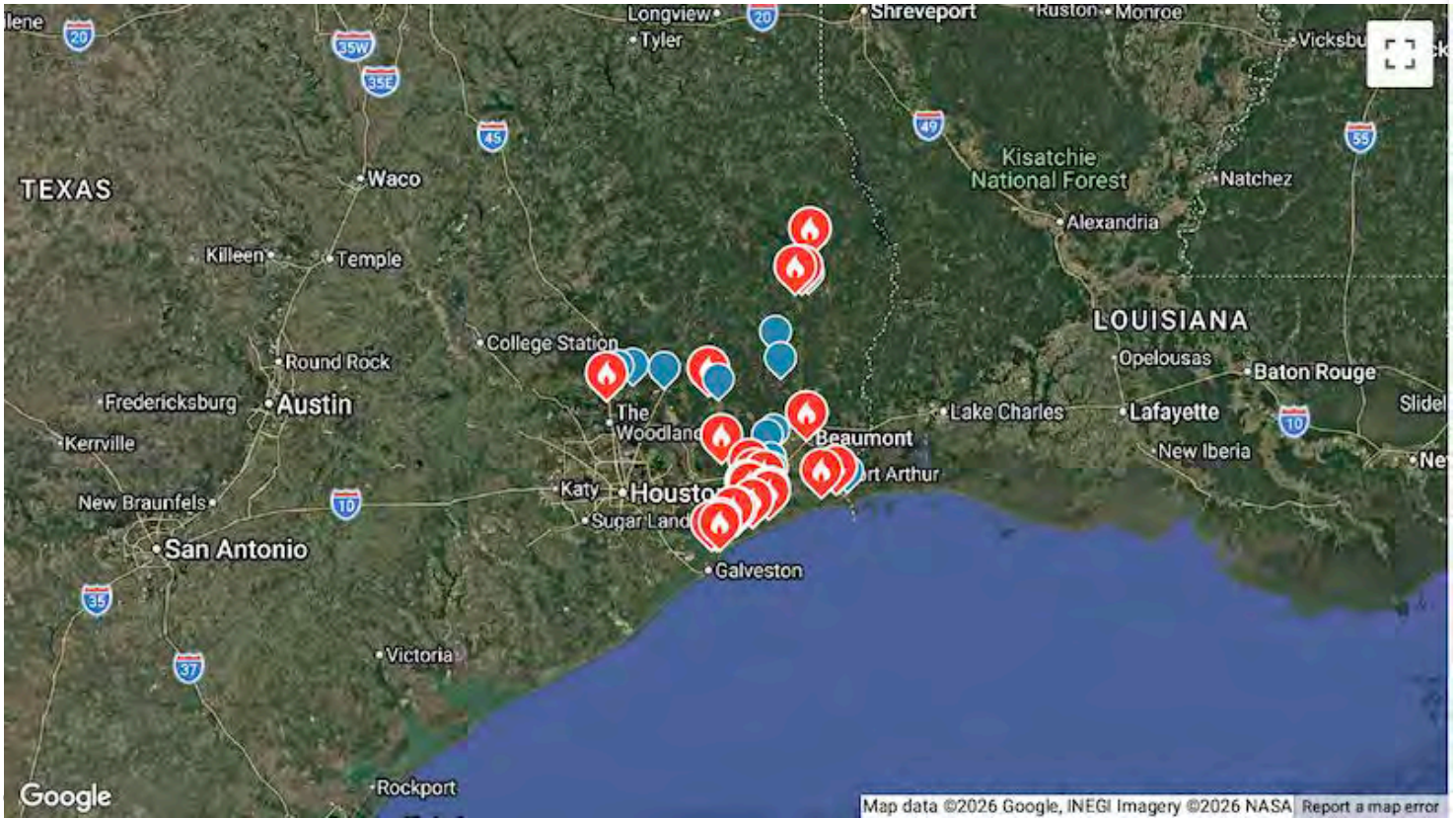
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/507743>

John Coons

Field Guides Birding Tours—Texas Coast Migration Spectacle I, 2026 (with John Coons & Alex Sundvall)



12 – 17 Apr 2026 (6 days) Link-only



Texas, United States

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

John Coons

183

Species Observed
























49
























Checklists
























Species Observed

Show all details
























- 265 **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna autumnalis* ▶ 11
- 54 **Fulvous Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor* ▶ 4
- 4 **Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa* ▶ 2
- 203 **Blue-winged Teal** *Spatula discors* ▶ 8
























4	Northern Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  1
2	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  2
9	Mottled Duck <i>Anas fulvigula</i>	▶  3
2	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  1
7	Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i> *	▶  3
18	Eurasian Collared-Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	▶  8
11	White-winged Dove <i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	▶  3
67	Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	▶  20
4	Yellow-billed Cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	▶  3
1	Common Nighthawk <i>Chordeiles minor</i>	▶  1
9	Chimney Swift <i>Chaetura pelagica</i>	▶  5
2	Ruby-throated Hummingbird <i>Archilochus colubris</i>	▶  2
5	King Rail <i>Rallus elegans</i>	▶  3
8	Clapper Rail <i>Rallus crepitans</i>	▶  5
4	Sora <i>Porzana carolina</i>	▶  1
99	Common Gallinule <i>Gallinula galeata</i>	▶  8
205	American Coot <i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  3
8	Purple Gallinule <i>Porphyrio martinica</i>	▶  6
159	Black-necked Stilt <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	▶  11
976	American Avocet <i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	▶  6
4	American Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus palliatus</i>	▶  3
56	Black-bellied Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	▶  7
18	Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  8
























29	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	▶  6
14	Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	▶  2
8	Wilson's Plover	<i>Anarhynchus wilsonia</i>	▶  2
7	Snowy Plover	<i>Anarhynchus nivosus</i>	▶  2
15	Upland Sandpiper	<i>Bartramia longicauda</i>	▶  1
137	Hudsonian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>	▶  10
1	Hudsonian Godwit	<i>Limosa haemastica</i>	▶  1
20	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	▶  5
40	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	▶  5
2069	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  9
1	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	▶  1
5	Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	▶  1
2	Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>	▶  2
2538	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	▶  12
131	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	▶  18
126	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  9
18	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  5
315	Stilt Sandpiper	<i>Calidris himantopus</i>	▶  4
80	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	<i>Calidris subruficollis</i>	▶  3
250	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶  2
780	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  7
72	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  6
12	Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	▶  1

2	Western Sandpiper <i>Calidris mauri</i>	▶  1
105	Semipalmated Sandpiper <i>Calidris pusilla</i>	▶  2
281	Laughing Gull <i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	▶  14
1	Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶  1
9	American Herring Gull <i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	▶  2
81	Black Skimmer <i>Rynchops niger</i>	▶  3
123	Least Tern <i>Sternula antillarum</i>	▶  4
14	Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	▶  7
3	Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶  2
32	Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	▶  3
70	Forster's Tern <i>Sterna forsteri</i>	▶  8
19	Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	▶  3
29	Sandwich Tern <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	▶  5
309	Royal Tern <i>Thalasseus maximus</i>	▶  7
1	Least Grebe <i>Tachybaptus dominicus</i>	▶  1
22	Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  3
1	Common Loon <i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  1
13	Anhinga <i>Anhinga anhinga</i>	▶  4
28	Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  6
201	Neotropic Cormorant <i>Nannopterum brasilianum</i>	▶  12
109	White Ibis <i>Eudocimus albus</i>	▶  12
1	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	▶  1
401	White-faced Ibis <i>Plegadis chihi</i>	▶  9

116	Roseate Spoonbill	<i>Platalea ajaja</i>	▶  7
1	American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	▶  1
1	Least Bittern	<i>Botaurus exilis</i>	▶  1
3	Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	▶  3
1	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  1
107	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	▶  12
75	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	▶  10
5	Reddish Egret	<i>Egretta rufescens</i>	▶  3
262	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	▶  13
12	Green Heron	<i>Butorides virescens</i>	▶  7
77	Western Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	▶  11
134	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  15
44	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶  8
37	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	▶  1
253	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	▶  8
206	Black Vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>	▶  13
180	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  13
4	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  4
1	White-tailed Kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	▶  1
7	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶  2
5	Mississippi Kite	<i>Ictinia mississippiensis</i>	▶  1
1	Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	▶  1
1	Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	▶  1

2	Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  2
4	American Barn Owl <i>Tyto furcata</i>	▶  2
1	Great Horned Owl <i>Bubo virginianus</i>	▶  1
1	Barred Owl <i>Strix varia</i>	▶  1
2	Belted Kingfisher <i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>	▶  2
2	Red-headed Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	▶  1
8	Red-bellied Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	▶  7
12	Downy Woodpecker <i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  7
2	Red-cockaded Woodpecker <i>Leuconotopicus borealis</i>	▶  1
4	Pileated Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	▶  4
1	Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  1
13	Crested Caracara <i>Caracara plancus</i>	▶  7
2	American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  2
1	Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	▶  1
1	Eastern Wood-Pewee <i>Contopus virens</i>	▶  1
4	Great Crested Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	▶  3
2	Great Kiskadee <i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>	▶  2
26	Eastern Kingbird <i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	▶  11
9	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher <i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>	▶  6
16	White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>	▶  7
6	Blue-headed Vireo <i>Vireo solitarius</i>	▶  4
7	Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	▶  5
10	Loggerhead Shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  7

37	Blue Jay <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	▶  12
10	American Crow <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  5
1	Fish Crow <i>Corvus ossifragus</i>	▶  1
12	Carolina Chickadee <i>Poecile carolinensis</i>	▶  5
10	Tufted Titmouse <i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	▶  4
79	Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  12
78	Purple Martin <i>Progne subis</i>	▶  13
4	Northern Rough-winged Swallow <i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	▶  1
72	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  16
92	Cliff Swallow <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	▶  6
4	Cave Swallow <i>Petrochelidon fulva</i>	▶  1
1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  1
8	Brown-headed Nuthatch <i>Sitta pusilla</i>	▶  2
1	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Poliopitila caerulea</i>	▶  1
5	Northern House Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶  3
12	Sedge Wren <i>Cistothorus stellaris</i>	▶  6
18	Marsh Wren <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶  6
30	Carolina Wren <i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	▶  14
54	European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  10
19	Gray Catbird <i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	▶  7
1	Brown Thrasher <i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	▶  1
45	Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  24
7	Eastern Bluebird <i>Sialia sialis</i>	▶  3

5	Swainson's Thrush <i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	▶  5
4	Wood Thrush <i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	▶  2
1	American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  1
201	Cedar Waxwing <i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	▶  5
2	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  1
1	House Finch <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶  1
5	Bachman's Sparrow <i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>	▶  1
8	Seaside Sparrow <i>Ammospiza maritima</i>	▶  1
2	Nelson's Sparrow <i>Ammospiza nelsoni</i>	▶  1
24	Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  5
2	Eastern Towhee <i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	▶  1
2	Yellow-breasted Chat <i>Icteria virens</i>	▶  2
30	Eastern Meadowlark <i>Sturnella magna</i>	▶  11
40	Orchard Oriole <i>Icterus spurius</i>	▶  10
287	Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	▶  21
114	Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	▶  10
54	Common Grackle <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	▶  12
200	Boat-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus major</i>	▶  13
122	Great-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	▶  19
1	Ovenbird <i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>	▶  1
2	Worm-eating Warbler <i>Helminthos vermivorum</i>	▶  2
6	Northern Waterthrush <i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>	▶  5
1	Blue-winged Warbler <i>Vermivora cyanoptera</i>	▶  1

2	Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilta varia</i>	▶ 1
11	Prothonotary Warbler <i>Protonotaria citrea</i>	▶ 5
1	Swainson's Warbler <i>Limnothlypis swainsonii</i>	▶ 1
2	Tennessee Warbler <i>Leiothlypis peregrina</i>	▶ 2
2	Kentucky Warbler <i>Geothlypis formosa</i>	▶ 2
18	Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	▶ 7
11	Hooded Warbler <i>Setophaga citrina</i>	▶ 6
9	Northern Parula <i>Setophaga americana</i>	▶ 5
1	Northern Yellow Warbler <i>Setophaga aestiva</i>	▶ 1
7	Pine Warbler <i>Setophaga pinus</i>	▶ 2
3	Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶ 2
4	Yellow-throated Warbler <i>Setophaga dominica</i>	▶ 3
2	Prairie Warbler <i>Setophaga discolor</i>	▶ 1
21	Summer Tanager <i>Piranga rubra</i>	▶ 8
5	Scarlet Tanager <i>Piranga olivacea</i>	▶ 1
77	Northern Cardinal <i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	▶ 21
27	Indigo Bunting <i>Passerina cyanea</i>	▶ 13
1	Painted Bunting <i>Passerina ciris</i>	▶ 1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

1502	Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus griseus/scolopaceus</i>	▶ 4
500	Lesser/Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa flavipes/melanoleuca</i>	▶ 1
100	Western/Semipalmated Sandpiper <i>Calidris mauri/pusilla</i>	▶ 1
4000	shorebird sp. <i>Charadriiformes sp. (shorebird sp.)</i>	▶ 2
11	Glossy/White-faced Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus/chihi</i>	▶ 2