



Field Guides Tour Report
South Texas Rarities II 2013

Jan 25, 2013 to Jan 31, 2013
Chris Benesh & Lena Senko

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



Group having a picnic dinner along the Rio Grande. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

It was a pleasant week in south Texas during our Rio Grande Rarities tour. The one thing missing from the valley this year- rarities. But even so, we did manage to see quite a few cool things. The valley is also a great place for all of those Rio Grande specialties, and we had a great time with a lot of these. White-collared Seedeater, three species of kingfisher, Clay-colored Thrush, a huge flock of Green Parakeets, a Zone-tailed Hawk low overhead, along with Green Jay, Altamira Oriole, and Great Kiskadee.

Thanks to all of you for coming along. Lena and I had a great time birding with all of you and look forward to catching up with each of you again in future. Until then I wish you the best in birding.

--Chris (with Lena, who annotated the triplist).

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

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) – Beautiful looks at several birds perched up on a large branch in a pond at Santa Ana NWR.

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – One actively feeding individual at Santa Ana amused us with its lively foot-paddling.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

MOTTLED DUCK (*Anas fulvigula*)

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

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

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*)

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Two that showed up on the pond at Estero Llano Grande created a buzz for the staff there.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

PLAIN CHACHALACA (*Ortalis vetula*) – Several of these raucous, long-tailed cracids boldly showed off for us as they strolled beneath the feeders at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Most certainly one of the fluffiest and cutest birds on the trip! Great looks at Estero Llano Grande SP, as well as Santa Ana NWR.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – Two of these were hanging out among the other waterfowl at Santa Ana NWR.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Mighty good looks at a couple flying and floating about just outside the windows of our seafood lunch stop on South Padre Island.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

AMERICAN BITTERN (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – What a treat to have had this cryptic fellow cross the road in front of us at Santa Ana!

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*)

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – Those at South Padre Island offered the closest, most colorful looks.

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*)

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – These and their equally handsome cousins (below) made for festive, though chunky, tree decorations at Estero Llano Grande SP.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – We did see a Glossy-esque bird at Santa Ana NWR. It appeared mostly Glossy, but showed some clear reddish tones to the eye. This suggests that it might be a hybrid with White-faced.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Good numbers at Santa Ana NWR.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – Two fly-over birds seen from the van were an exciting evening treat on route to our hotel from Chapeno.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Common throughout, especially at Salineno, where we almost always saw them dining on fish.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – The hawk-watch platform at Santa Ana NWR provided us with a few looks at one distant, hovering bird.

NORTHERN HARRIER (AMERICAN) (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Several seen throughout the trip, with particularly excellent scope looks at a juvenile perched in a tree at Bentsen.

HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – This fairly common and colorful hawk gave us many enjoyable viewing opportunities.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*)

GRAY HAWK (*Buteo nitidus*) – Great scope looks at a couple perched at Salineno.

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albicaudatus*)

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*) – What a treat this striking, vulture-mimic raptor was at Anzalduas County Park!

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – Frequently seen along the roads and highways we traversed.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – This miniature falcon was a common sight, particularly on telephone wires.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

APLOMADO FALCON (*Falco femoralis*) – After several unsuccessful searches, we finally tracked down this special falcon along Rt. 100. He put on quite the hunting show, pursuing a passerine several hundred feet into the air until he was only a speck in the sky. Voted one of the highlights of the trip (naturally!).

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) [*****]

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) [*****]

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A group of these foraged among the semipalmateds on a sandy bank in South Padre Island.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – We enjoyed our looks at these exceptionally long-legged and sharp-looking waders at both South Padre Island and Santa Ana NWR.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularia*)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – An up-close-and-personal individual gave us great study looks at Estero Llano Grande SP and provided a great comparison with a nearby Spotted.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – A handful were hanging out at the spot where we saw our Aplomado Falcon.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Some were seen scuttling about on the sand spit at South Padre Island.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Dozens were feeding offshore at South Padre Island. In most seasons, the Short-billed prefers coastal habitats while the Long-billed prefers fresh-water habitats. Habitat preference, however, is not a reliable “field mark”, since in migration, both species occur side-by-side and in habitats where they are sometimes not expected.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – The pond by the visitor’s center at Estero Llano Grande SP had a few.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – Seen sleeping on a pond-log at Santa Ana NWR. This species nests in northern prairie wetlands and winters on South American salt lakes, so it was odd, but certainly nice, to see this individual where it was given the time of year.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – This is the common local breeding (and wintering) tern.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – These striking and strange-billed terns were snoozing on the sand at South Padre Island.

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*)

WHITE-TIPPED DOVE (*Leptotila verreauxi*) – We never did see the Red-billed Pigeon, but White-tipped Dove is another regional columbid specialty we were happy to bag.

Psittacidae (Parrots)

GREEN PARAKEET (*Aratinga holochlora*) – What a spectacle it was to see 350+ of these raucous, green jewels perched all over the lines on 10th Street in McAllen!

MITRED PARAKEET (*Aratinga mitrata*) – One Mitred Parakeet was hanging out with them, too, but this introduced species is not yet considered

“countable” by ABA standards.

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT (*Amazona albifrons*)

RED-CROWNED PARROT (*Amazona viridigenalis*) – Two individuals came into Oliviera Park in Brownsville with the setting sun, along with twelve White-fronted Parrots, two Red-lore Parrots, and one Green Parakeet.

RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED) (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*) – True to their name, two were seen running along the road to Laguna Atascosa NWR.

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (MCCALL'S) (*Megascops asio mecallii*) – We had our first look at this camouflaged cutie in Laguna Atascosa NWR, where it was expertly nestled against the bark of a dying tree. We saw our second screech of the trip asleep in a duck nest box at Estero Llano Grande SP.

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – One seen at the San Miguelito Ranch and another heard hooting across the river in the evening at Salineno.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON PAURAUQUE (*Nyctidromus albigollis*) – A highlight species for sure! Our looks at these curious caprimulgids roosting in the leaf litter were unsurpassable. We stared at and photographed three of them to our hearts' content at Estero Llano Grande SP.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – We saw three different individuals at the feeders at Estero Llano Grande SP. Chris filmed Lena dancing out the wing-shape difference between this species and the Black-chinned, though we never saw the latter for comparison.

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*)

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – Nice looks at this regional specialty!

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

RINGED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle torquata*) – At Salineno we had nice scope looks at a female perched over the river, followed by a fly-by male a minute later.

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

GREEN KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle americana*) – Great looks at a female at Estero Llano Grande SP.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes aurifrons*) – By far the most common woodpecker around.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – A female Yellow-shafted type at Salineno that has been sporadically reported this winter.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)

GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*) – Very few around this winter. We did run into one small group going to an evening roost south of Laguna Atascosa.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – Brief looks at one in the yard at Bentsen.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GREEN JAY (*Cyanocorax yncas*) – One cannot help but ogle at this vibrant tropical jay.

CHIHUAHUA RAVEN (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS) (*Petrochelidon fulva pallida*) – The predominant swallow species we encountered.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – One peanut butter-craving individual seen at the Salineno feeders on our last morning.

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Heard only at South Padre Island but later seen well, albeit briefly, at Bentsen.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulescens*) – Pleasantly encountered almost everywhere we went, often in the company of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – Several seen at San Miguelito Ranch.

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*) – Although it is a common Central American denizen, in the U.S. this species' range is limited only to south Texas (but is expanding). One briefly came to the feeders at Santa Ana NWR, but we had far better looks at the bold, bouncy individual out in the open at the feeders in Bentsen.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Apparently this bird is a great visual mimic as well; on different occasions we tried to make it into a catbird, a kestrel, and a meadowlark!

LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*) – A nice South Texas specialty whose bill, contrary to its name, isn't particularly long among the thrashers.

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – The most common wintering warbler in South Texas, aside from the Yellow-rumped.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – Two seen at Estero Llano Grande SP.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – The Myrtle subspecies was by far the most numerous.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – Our only encounter with an Audubon's was at Zapata Library Pond.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – Hip, hip, hurray! We initially had trouble locating this superb South Texas specialty, mostly due to the chilly, forceful winds that day. We dipped at the Las Palmas trail in Laredo but were rewarded after a thorough search of North Central Park, which revealed this trophy bird to the joy of many!

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*) – A subtle beauty of a sparrow, preferring dense undergrowth and avoiding birders. We all got great looks at Bentsen, though.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – A couple near Salineno.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Very common at San Miguelito Ranch.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – We couldn't have asked for more savory looks at this little desert gem!

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolnii*) – Behaving cryptically, this bird was seen only by a few, once at San Padre Island and again at Salineno.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – Wonderful views of several along the roads to/from Salineno.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – One female seen at Bentsen.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) – The most numerous of the two meadowlark species in South Texas.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Only one was seen on the last day, distinguished from its Eastern cousin by its call and by its paler, less contrasting head stripes and a yellow, not white, mandibular stripe, as well as less white in the tail.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Abundant as heck!

BRONZED COWBIRD (*Molothrus aeneus*) – Two seen feeding in the grass at Oliviera Park in Brownsville. One also seen at Salineno by some.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – A large flock flew over our heads at the entrance to San Miguelito Ranch.

ALTAMIRA ORIOLE (*Icterus gularis*) – A stunner of an oriole! Gorgeous.

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE (*Icterus graduacauda*) – Nice looks at this bright specialty at the Salineno feeders on our last morning.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – Our only sighting of them was at Anzalduas County Park, just before we were ushered out by Border Patrol

enforcing the park's unrealistically early closing.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Many at the feeders at Bentsen.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [\[1\]](#)

MAMMALS

NINE-BANDED ARMADILLO (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) – One seen exceptionally well (from the hawk watch tower by some) at Santa Ana NWR.

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

COLLARED PECCARY (*Tayassu tajacu*) – One suddenly bolted out of the woods in front of us and sprinted across the road at Bentsen, giving us a startle (and a whisk of its foul musk).

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

NILGAI (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) – The largest Asian antelope, native to India, but introduced in Texas for trophy hunting diversions. The two we saw at San Miguelito Ranch were quite the handsome surprise! [\[1\]](#)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 169 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa