



Field Guides Tour Report
South Texas Rarities 2015

Jan 17, 2015 to Jan 23, 2015
Chris Benesh

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



Green Jays are perhaps the most iconic bird of the Rio Grande Valley. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

The first of the 2015 Rio Grande Rarities tours can be best summed up as doing the best with what we had! Nature dealt us a heavy weather hand, with some very cold, windy, and occasionally wet conditions. Yet in spite of those conditions we saw a great assortment of the many special birds that make up the Rio Grande Valley birding experience, from Green Jays and Great Kiskadees to Altamira Orioles and more.

Thanks to each of you for coming along and making for an enjoyable experience!

--Chris

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*)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – A pair of green-headed Mallards were along the river at Salineno. This type of Mallard is rare anywhere in south Texas.

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*) – We saw more than 600 off of South Padre Island.
RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)
LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)
RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

PLAIN CHACHALACA (*Ortalis vetula*) – Great views of this distinctive valley bird.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Great views beginning with those at Sabal Palms.
PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

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*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)
GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)
SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)
LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*)
TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*)
REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*)
CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)
YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)
TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Great looks at the birds at Estero Llano Grande near the levee.
NORTHERN HARRIER (AMERICAN) (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*)
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)
COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)
HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)
WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*)
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*)
BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*)
GRAY HAWK (*Buteo plagiatus*)
ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*)
RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – A couple of nice views of this species, including one swimming across a pond at Santa Ana.
COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)
AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A handsome pair of birds were at South Padre Island.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – A few of these at SPI.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*) – A couple of these seen from the levee at Estero.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

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*) – A lone bird sitting out with all of the other terns at SPI.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Perhaps 150 at the convention center on SPI.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [H]

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

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*)

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina*)

WHITE-TIPPED DOVE (*Leptotila verreauxi*)

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*)

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*)

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (MCCALL'S) (*Megascops asio mcallii*) – Nice views of birds at Estero and Salineno.

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) [*]

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – Rare in the Rio Grande Valley, we saw three at a traditional site.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON PAURAQUE (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – What amazing cryptic coloration that allows them to be invisible in plain sight.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*)

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

RINGED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle torquata*) – Great looks at one at Estero and another flying around the river at Salineno.

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

GREEN KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle americana*) – A good tour for this species with a total of four seen.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

APLOMADO FALCON (*Falco femoralis*) – Good scope views of this attractive raptor.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

RED-CROWNED PARROT (*Amazona viridigenalis*) – Quite a spectacle seeing so many of these coming to roost at Oliviera Park in Brownsville. My estimate was 180 birds.

RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED) (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*) – There were about eight of these in with the others at Oliviera.

YELLOW-HEADED PARROT (*Amazona oratrix*) – At least six of these at Oliviera.

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT (*Amazona albifrons*) – The flock of White-fronteds is getting large. We saw about 40 birds coming to roost at Oliviera.

GREEN PARAKEET (*Psittacara holochlorus*) – A bird flock of approximately 500 birds going to roost in McAllen was quite a sight!

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – Quick view of one at Estero.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Always a treat to see these colorful flycatchers.

DUSKY-CAPPED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tuberculifer*) – Some decent views of this shy stakeout at the Sabal Palm Sanctuary.

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*) – Quick look for a couple of us of this species at Resaca de la Palma.

GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – Such an iconic valley bird. They put on quite a show at the feeders in Salineno.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*) – These were around in decent numbers this winter.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – We encountered one in La Joya. Rare in the winter time.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GREEN JAY (*Cyanocorax yncas*) – Wow, what an amazing looking bird. We were entertained by them at various spots in the valley.

CHIHUAHUA RAVEN (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS) (*Petrochelidon fulva pallida*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) **[*]**

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*)

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*) – Quick look at one at Estero and then great looks at two at Quinta Mazatlan.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – The American Robin at Estero was locally more notable than the Clay-colored.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

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

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) [*****]

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – This was the best we could do in the parula department, despite several attempts.

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

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

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (*Setophaga dominica*)

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – Super views of a male in Zapata. We could hear the female calling nearby.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*)

CASSIN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea cassinii*) – Great looks at one responsive bird near Zapata!

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*) – Nice looks at one in the sparrow flock at Anzalduas.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*)

WESTERN TANAGER (*Piranga ludoviciana*)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – Carol spotted this one for us at Laguna Atascosa.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – Good looks at several at Salineno.

ALTAMIRA ORIOLE (*Icterus gularis*) – Stunning birds seen super well at Salineno.

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE (*Icterus graduacauda*) – We had to wait for a while, but once I sacrificed myself, the pair came in to the feeders at Salineno.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) [*****]

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

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

MAMMALS

NINE-BANDED ARMADILLO (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

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

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*)

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 172 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa