



*Field Guides Tour Report*

## South Texas Rarities 2017

Jan 14, 2017 to Jan 20, 2017

Chris Benesh

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



*Sunrise over the Dixieland Reservoir at the start of the tour. Photo by guide Chris Benesh.*

The 2017 South Texas Rarities Tour was a really pleasant experience. We had some decent weather and a nice variety of highlights along the way. We started things off in Harlingen, visiting a nearby reservoir before heading down to Brownsville and Sabal Palm Sanctuary. We then headed out to South Padre Island and searched some for falcons before heading back to Brownsville for the big evening parrot fly in at Oliveira Park.

The following day was spent birding at Estero Llano Grande where we saw quite a few things and spent time seeking out the stakeout Rose-throated Becard. In the afternoon we headed over to McAllen to take in the big parakeet roost and stare in awe at all of those grackles!

The next day saw us visiting Granjeno, the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse, Anzalduas Park, and the McAllen Nature Center. In the afternoon we headed back to Estero to see the becard.

Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge was our next morning's stop. We had a nice time walking trails there before beginning the drive upriver. After a nice lunch in Rio Grande City, we headed to Salineno to watch the feeders there and look over the river before heading on to Zapata.

We made a road trip up to Laredo to search for seedeaters and in the hope that the Amazon Kingfisher might have re-appeared. Alas, high water levels made conditions there unsuitable for the kingfisher, but we did come across seedeaters, orioles, as well as other kingfishers. In the afternoon, we had a birdy visit to the Zapata Library area with another seedeater and a drive to Las Palmas where Scaled Quail were the highlights.

After a final morning at Falcon State Park we headed back to Harlingen for our farewell and travel home. Thanks to all of you for making the trip such a joy to do. I hope to see you all on the trail again in the future. Good birding! -- Chris

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### 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

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## BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

**FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – One of the first birds of the trip, seen at the Dixieland Reservoir in Harlingen.

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – We had a flock of about 40 birds fly overhead at Estero Llano Grande.

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – About 24 of these flew over us at Estero.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – Some on our first day at Dixieland Reservoir.

**MALLARD (MEXICAN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) – We saw two of these in Laredo. Some authorities believe these warrant being considered a full species.

**MOTTLED DUCK** (*Anas fulvigula*)

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*)

**CINNAMON TEAL** (*Anas cyanoptera*) – A few seen on the big pond at ELG with the other teal.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

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

**REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*)

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*)

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*)

**HOODED MERGANSER** (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – We had one male at the Dixieland Reservoir on our first morning.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*) – Seen from the boardwalk on SPI.

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

**PLAIN CHACHALACA** (*Ortalis vetula*) – One of the iconic species of the Rio Grande Valley. Relatively quiet at this time of year.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

**SCALED QUAIL** (*Callipepla squamata*) – A great spot on our last full day near Las Palmas!

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**LEAST GREBE** (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Wonderful views of this tiny species with its glowing yellow eye.

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

**ANHINGA** (*Anhinga anhinga*) – Good views of this darter at the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse and at Estero Llano Grande.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

**BROWN PELICAN** (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Seen along the coast.

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*)

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Quite an impressive showing of this species at ELG (Alligator Pond).

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**WHITE IBIS** (*Eudocimus albus*)

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*)

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** (*Platalea ajaja*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – South Texas is an important wintering area for this species, and we had daily sightings of multiple birds.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**WHITE-TAILED KITE** (*Elanus leucurus*) – At least five individuals seen on the trip, a good showing for this elegant species.

**NORTHERN HARRIER (AMERICAN)** (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*) – This species may be split from the European Hen Harrier later this year. Stay tuned for any emerging details this July.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*)

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**HARRIS'S HAWK** (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – Perhaps no better place on Earth to see this species than southern Texas.

**WHITE-TAILED HAWK** (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – Though this species has a huge range through much of the Americas, its US range is restricted to southern Texas. We saw several.

**GRAY HAWK** (*Buteo plagiatus*) – This species is increasing in Texas (and Arizona). We connected with one by way of a dramatic flyby at Salineno.

**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (*Buteo lineatus*) – One seen at Anzalduas.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

**CLAPPER RAIL (GULF COAST)** (*Rallus crepitans saturatus*) [\*]

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – Glimpsed at Santa Ana NWR.

**COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*) – Another one split in recent years from the Common Moorhen, we saw (and heard) this species at the Convention Center boardwalk.

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

*Gruidae (Cranes)*

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Antigone canadensis*)

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*)

*Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)*

**AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus palliatus*) – Two of the these were at the wetlands along Hwy 48.

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**LONG-BILLED CURLEW** (*Numenius americanus*)

**MARbled GODWIT** (*Limosa fedoa*)

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

**STILT SANDPIPER** (*Calidris himantopus*) – Four of these were seen in flight at Santa Ana NWR.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*)

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A big flock of 25 were at Santa Ana NWR.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*)

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) – One was at Santa Ana NWR.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

**WILLET** (*Tringa semipalmata*) – This is another candidate for a split later this year. For the record, birds seen in on the Texas coast in winter should be Western Willets.

*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*) – Nice to see this species near the coast.

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*)

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*)

**BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*)

*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*) – Our first good looks were at Sabal Palm.

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*)

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**GREATER ROADRUNNER** (*Geococcyx californianus*)

*Tytonidae (Barn-Owls)*

**BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*) – We flushed one from some trees near Laredo.

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – One at Falcon State Park.

**BURROWING OWL** (*Athene cunicularia*) – One familiar bird near Granjeno.

*Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)*

**COMMON PAURAUQUE** (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – Great looks at roosting birds at ELG.

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*)

**BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus alexandri*)

**BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – Some fine looks at this species at ELG.

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**RINGED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle torquata*) – A few seen, but great looks in Laredo.

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

**GREEN KINGFISHER** (*Chloroceryle americana*) – Seen at Santa Ana and again in Laredo.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – One at the park in Laredo.

**LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides scalaris*)

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*) – As with Harris's Hawks, there is no place better than south Texas for this species.

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*)

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – One perched in a tree next to the road near Port Brownsville.

**APLOMADO FALCON** (*Falco femoralis*) – After some effort, we did manage to track down one.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – At least four different birds seen.

*Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)*

**MONK PARAKEET** (*Myiopsitta monachus*) – About ten or so at the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse site where this species is a breeder.

**WHITE-WINGED PARAKEET** (*Brotogeris versicolurus*) – A lone bird hanging out with all of the Green Parakeets in McAllen. [II]

**RED-CROWNED PARROT** (*Amazona viridigenalis*) – An impressive showing of this species at Oliveira Park in Brownsville.

**RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED)** (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*) – A fair number of these were also in the big parrot gathering at Oliveira Park.

**YELLOW-HEADED PARROT** (*Amazona oratrix*) – We had eight of these at Oliveira Park.

**WHITE-FRONTED PARROT** (*Amazona albifrons*) – A big flock of about forty plus was at Oliveira Park.

**GREEN PARAKEET** (*Psittacara holochlorus*) – More than 500 in McAllen and another 88 in Roma.

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANULET** (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – A furtive bird at EJG and a better showing one at Santa Ana.

**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*) – This is another species that is really expanding its range in south Texas.

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*)

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Always a crowd pleaser, we saw at least one on each day.

**GREAT KISKADEE** (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – Another iconic south Texas bird, seen daily.

**TROPICAL KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

**COUCH'S KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus couchii*)

*Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)*

**ROSE-THROATED BECARD** (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – After putting in a full day's worth of searching, it was nice to get it the following afternoon on our second attempt.

*Laniidae (Shrikes)*

**LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

*Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)*

**WHITE-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo griseus*)

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**GREEN JAY** (*Cyanocorax yncas*) – Another showy south Texas bird.

**CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN** (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) – A huge number in Laredo.

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Rare in winter, one was along the river in Salineno.

**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*) – Kitty spotted this species at Santa Ana.

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

**BEWICK'S WREN** (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

**CACTUS WREN** (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – Seen in our little desert roadside stop.

*Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)*

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

**BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila melanura*) – Great looks at this species along Hwy 83.

*Regulidae (Kinglets)*

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – Some at Anzalduas.

**CLAY-COLORED THRUSH** (*Turdus grayi*) – About five seen in total.

*Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)*

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

**LONG-BILLED THRASHER** (*Toxostoma longirostre*)

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*)

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

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

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*)

**SPRAGUE'S PIPIT** (*Anthus spragueii*) – Several seen in flight flushing out of the grasses near Anzalduas.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**OVENBIRD** (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – Good views of one visiting the drip puddles at ELG.

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

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*)

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*)

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*)

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*)

**TROPICAL PARULA** (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) – One of the highlights of our visit to EJJ was seeing this species bathing in a puddle.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – At Anzalduas.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – This is another species pair (this and Audubon's) that may be split later this year.

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

**YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER** (*Setophaga dominica*)

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*)

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*)

*Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)*

**WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER** (*Sporophila torqueola*) – We had good luck with this species seeing a couple of birds in Laredo and then seeing the bird that Barry spotted in Zapata!

*Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)*

**OLIVE SPARROW** (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*)

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*)

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*)

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella neglecta*)

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*)

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – One of the most impressive sights of the entire trip was seeing the many thousands amassing on wires before heading to their evening roost in McAllen.

**BRONZED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus aeneus*)

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

**ALTAMIRA ORIOLE** (*Icterus gularis*) – Some great views of this colorful species. One in Laredo was slightly out of range.

**AUDUBON'S ORIOLE** (*Icterus graduacauda*) – Barry spotted the stakeout bird for us in McAllen and then another in Laredo where we ended up seeing three.

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Local in the Rio Grande Valley, we had some at Anzalduas and the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse. Later one was in Zapata.

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*)

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

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

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## **MAMMALS**

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

**DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

**FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*)

**COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*)

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

**NILGAI** (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) – Barry spotted one along Hwy 100 while we were looking for falcons. [1]

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 181 bird taxa and 6 mammal taxa**