



Field Guides Tour Report
South Texas Rarities 2018

Jan 13, 2018 to Jan 19, 2018
Chris Benesh

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



A south Texas sky churning with Turkey Vultures in the late afternoon. Photo by guide Chris Benesh.

This year's Rio Grande Rarities tour will be remembered perhaps best by the unseasonably cold temperatures that swept through the Rio Grande Valley that week. Temperatures were seldom about 45 degrees. But that didn't stop us from seeing some wonderful birds. While there were not too many rarities about, we did eventually track down the Blue Bunting that had been hanging out at Estero Llano Grande. And while not a rarity in the true sense for South Texas, we did have some great looks at the sometimes difficult White-collared Seedeaters in Salineno and Zapata. There were more expected species that enamored us including Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Harris's Hawk, Audubon's Oriole, Great Kiskadee, Green Kingfisher, Gull-billed Tern, Pauraque, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, and White-tailed Kite.

Thanks to all of you for coming out and making for a great south Texas experience. It was a treat see old friends again and make some new ones. — 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*)

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*)

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Spatula cyanoptera*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*)

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*)

MALLARD (MEXICAN) (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*)

MOTTLED DUCK (*Anas fulvigula*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

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

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

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 (*Oreortyx pictus*) – The northernmost member of the cracid family, we enjoyed some great views of this species, especially at Quinta Mazatlan and Bentsen.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail).

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – A few encounters including our last near Salineno, where a covey walked down a side road in the open and approached us closely before realizing we were there.

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Our smallest grebe, we saw our first ones at Sabal Palm.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags).

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas).

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – Once again, Alligator Lake at Estero was the place to see this species well.

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*) – Several of each night heron were hanging out at Alligator Lake at Estero.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills).

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – A handful of these attractive waterbirds seen.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures).

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey).

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – South Texas is an excellent place for this species and we saw many over the course of the tour.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – Seen on a few days with wonderful looks at Estero.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – A very attractive hawk with a vast range that just barely pokes into the US in south Texas.

GRAY HAWK (*Buteo plagiatus*) – Good looks at this species in Rio Grande City.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*)

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).

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

SORA (*Porzana carolina*)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets).

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers).

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

WILSON'S PLOVER (*Charadrius wilsonia*) – Nice studies of this species at the boat launch area on Hwy 48.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – A few of these were on the mudflats near the SPI convention center.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

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*) – Well seen on SPI and along Hwy 48.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Always a treat to see this peculiar species.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [**I**]

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

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*) – Several good views of cold, uncomfortable birds at Falcon State Park.

Strigidae (Owls).

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (MCCALL'S) (*Megascops asio mcallii*) – Nice view of a bird roosting near the butterfly garden at Estero.

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – Two heard hooting at Sabal Palm. [*****]

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies).

COMMON PAURAQUE (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – Some great looks at one at Estero. Laura Paulson showed us another one at Santa Ana the next day, and finally we flushed one at Falcon State Park.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds).

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*)

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*)

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – Not very common though we did see it on three different dates.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers).

RINGED KINGFISHER (Megaceryle torquata) – We had a female at Progresso Lake (thanks to Dan) and another the following day.

BELTED KINGFISHER (Megaceryle alcyon)

GREEN KINGFISHER (Chloroceryle americana) – We saw a pair of birds along the ditch at Estero Llano Grande and a male at Santa Ana NWR.

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (Melanerpes aurifrons)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (Sphyrapicus varius) – We had a female at Bentsen on our final morning.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (Picoides scalaris)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

CRESTED CARACARA (Caracara cheriway) – Some great views of this species.

AMERICAN KESTREL (Falco sparverius)

APLOMADO FALCON (Falco femoralis) – While it took a great deal of effort as most were being uncooperative no-shows, we locked on to one during our last hour of birding on the final day. A definite crowd-pleaser.

PEREGRINE FALCON (Falco peregrinus)

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots).

MONK PARAKEET (Myiopsitta monachus) – One was hanging out with the Green Parakeets. [I]

WHITE-WINGED PARAKEET (Brotogeris versicolurus) – A lone individual hanging out with the Greens in McAllen. [I]

RED-CROWNED PARROT (Amazona viridigenalis) – A big flight of these were seen coming in to Oliveira Park in Brownsville.

RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED) (Amazona autumnalis autumnalis) [I]

YELLOW-HEADED PARROT (Amazona oratrix) – My favorite of the parrots in the valley. [I]

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT (Amazona albifrons) [I]

GREEN PARAKEET (Psittacara holochlorus) – An impressive sight seeing so many together in McAllen.

MITRED PARAKEET (Psittacara mitratus) – We had good views of this one which may be only a half Mitred according to some. [I]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).

NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET (Camptostoma imberbe) – A pair of these were quietly moving around with the mixed flock in the parking lot at Bentsen RG State Park.

BLACK PHOEBE (Sayornis nigricans) – Seen at Anzalduas and Salineno.

EASTERN PHOEBE (Sayornis phoebe)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (Pyrocephalus rubinus) – A couple of handsome birds seen at Anzalduas.

GREAT KISKADEE (Pitangus sulphuratus) – Great views of this iconic south Texas species.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (Tyrannus melancholicus) – We were able to see and more importantly hear several of these.

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (Tyrannus couchii) – Less common than Tropical at this season, we did see and hear a few individuals.

Laniidae (Shrikes).

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (Lanius ludovicianus) – Quite a few of these winter in the Rio Grande Valley and Heidi was there spotting most of them for us.

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) – One of the real iconic birds of the Rio Grande Valley.

CHIHUAHUA RAVEN (Corvus cryptoleucus)

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

TREE SWALLOW (Tachycineta bicolor) – Small numbers seen over Estero Llano Grande and Progresso Lakes.

CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS) (Petrochelidon fulva pallida) – Good flight views of this species over Estero Llano Grande.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (Baeolophus atricristatus) – A fairly common flock species down in the valley.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits).

VERDIN (Auriparus flaviceps) [*]

Troglodytidae (Wrens).

HOUSE WREN (Troglodytes aedon)

MARSH WREN (Cistothorus palustris)

CAROLINA WREN (Thryothorus ludovicianus)

BEWICK'S WREN (Thryomanes bewickii)

CACTUS WREN (Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers).

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (Poliophtila caerulea)

BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER (Poliophtila melanura) – We ran into a fairly cooperative pair in the desert near Salineno.

Regulidae (Kinglets).

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – There was one wintering at Quinta Mazatlan.

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*) – This species has increased in numbers in the valley in recent years. There were several at Quinta Mazatlan alone.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – One was visiting the water feature at the convention center on SPI.

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – A few seen. These are the paler eastern birds.

LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*) – We eventually had some great looks at this species, especially at Quinta Mazatlan.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [H]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) – We spotted a couple of these in the short grass at Anzalduas.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

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

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – The most abundant wintering warbler in the valley.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

TROPICAL PARULA (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) – Frustrating, but some of the group managed to see this scarce species in a small mixed flock at Estero Llano Grande.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – A few seen here and there.

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

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (*Setophaga dominica*)

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – One was at Quinta Mazatlan.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – We had a really handsome male in Zapata and a pair of birds at Salineno the following morning.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows)

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*) – We eventually had great looks at this somewhat secretive species.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*) – A couple of these were with Chipping Sparrows near Falcon.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – Quite a few were showing well at Falcon State Park.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

LARK BUNTING (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – We lucked into a flock of some 40 birds near Falcon on our last full day.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – We had a single nominate type (dark lored) at Falcon State Park.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – This was another species that was quite plentiful once we got to Salineno and Falcon.

BLUE BUNTING (*Cyanocompsa parellina*) – The rarest bird of the trip, but also one of the most difficult to see well in the dense foliage. In the end, most got identifiable views.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – There was a brown one seen.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – A pretty good blackbird show near the grain silos in Progreso.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Tough to identify these at this time of year, we did have a few solids ones near Falcon.

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) – Nice to hear this species singing in the prairie grasses near Port Isabel.

ALTAMIRA ORIOLE (*Icterus gularis*) – We bumped into a few pairs of this species, but it is not too common anymore.

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE (*Icterus graduacauda*) – Great looks at a pair of birds that showed up along the trail in Salineno.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

BRONZED COWBIRD (*Molothrus aeneus*) – A few in with all of the other blackbirds in Progreso.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – An adult bird hanging out at a feeder at Estero Llano Grande was the first record for the park!

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Impressive to see them on wires by the thousands just before heading off to roost in the evenings!

MAMMALS

NINE-BANDED ARMADILLO (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) – We had great looks at at least three different animals at Sabal Palm and Bentsen.

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)

GRAY FOX (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) – A terrific look at one that was hanging out along the entrance road into Salineno.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

COLLARED PECCARY (*Tayassu tajacu*) – Good studies of this species at Falcon State Park where they seemed pretty tame.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

NILGAI (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) – Some great looks of this introduced antelope south of Port Isabel. [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 183 bird taxa and 10 mammal taxa