

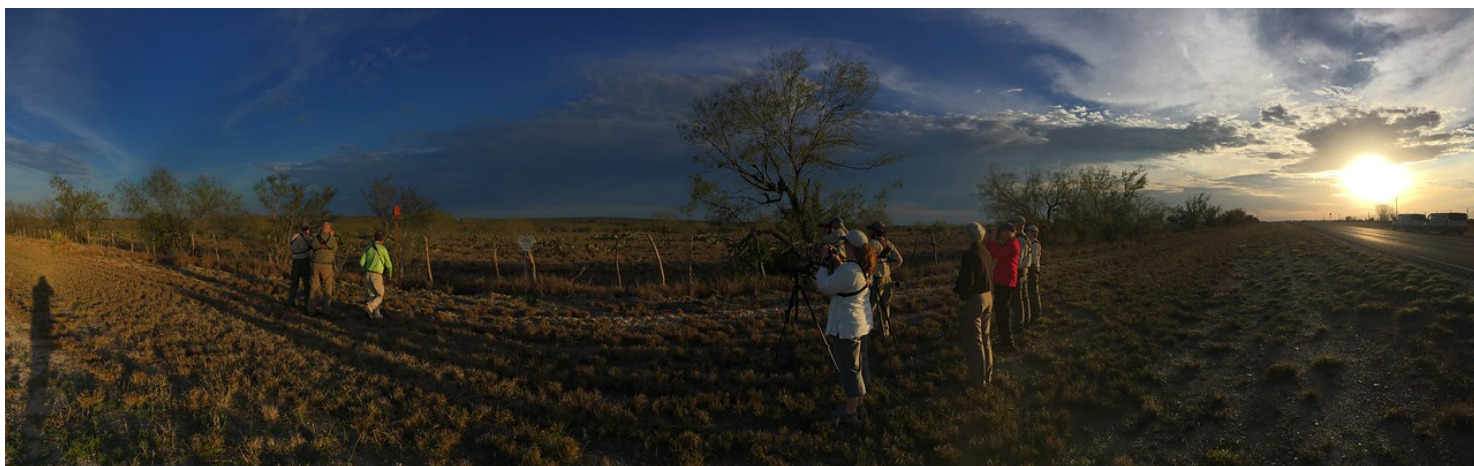


Field Guides Tour Report

South Texas Rarities (a tour for Maine Audubon) 2018

Jan 27, 2018 to Feb 2, 2018
Doug Gochfeld & Doug Hitchcox

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



The group squeezing out every last specialty bird we can before the sun sets on our evening near Salineño. Photo by guide Doug Hitchcox.

This was the inaugural tour of the partnership between Field Guides and Maine Audubon, and what a place to start! The Rio Grande Valley is one of the most iconic birding destinations in the United States, with a great mix of migrants from the north, regional specialties, and a slew of charismatic Mexican species whose ranges just barely make it across the river and into Texas. We were treated to overall good weather, especially when compared with the rest of the atypically frigid winter the valley has been experiencing. A big rainstorm passed the day before the tour started, and the strong winds at the bottom of a big cold front held off until the very last morning of the tour, as we headed to the airport.

We started in Harlingen, a great jumping off point for the birding sites at the coast and around Brownsville. The first morning of the tour found us way down on the southern border, south even of Brownsville, at Sabal Palm Sanctuary. Here we got our first taste of some of the Mexican species that barely get into the US, with Altamira Orioles, saturated with a brighter version of orange than the fruit on which they were feeding, already on station when we got to the feeders. Under and around them were Green Jays and White-tipped Dove doing their thing in plain sight, apparently oblivious to our presence. We took a short jaunt on the trails, netting us Long-billed Thrasher, great views of Olive Sparrow, a few other odds and ends and our first Least Grebes, and only Ring-necked Duck, of the trip. After we were done with Sabal Palm it was onto Port Isabel and the coast. Aplomado Falcons have been exceedingly difficult to find this year, and we couldn't find them in any of our stops around Old Port Isabel Road or rt. 100, though we had our first experiences with Eastern Meadowlarks, Long-billed Curlews and some displaying White-tailed Hawks. From here we shot out to the coast (via a great seafood lunch!), going directly to the famous South Padre Island Convention Center. Though passerines were fairly thin on the ground (except for Marsh Wren!), waterbirds put on a fantastic showing — in addition to the big masses of shorebirds on the coastal mudflats, we had spectacular views of Roseate Spoonbill, Black-necked Stilts, Tricolored Heron, and even a Sora. We then headed back towards Brownsville, with a couple of brief stops for more shorebirds and waders, picking up a large flock of American Avocets, some more Western Willets, and point blank views of Reddish Egret, and American Oystercatcher. Our dusk destination in Brownsville was Oliveira Park where we bore witness to a spectacle of parrots that was a true barrage on the senses, with several hundred birds of four species swirling around over us in waves and making an awe-inspiring cacophony. Just as we thought they were settling in for the night and quieting down, a harebrained young Cooper's Hawk decided to take a plunge towards them, and the tree they were in erupted in an explosion of noise and feathers that none of us will soon forget (The Cooper's Hawk quickly realized it had made a terrible mistake, and flew away in the opposite direction empty-handed).

We started off day two with a last minute audible, by heading to a private yard that had just had an Allen's Hummingbird banded the day before. Though the yard was still chilly and cool during our early morning visit, we saw a couple of hummingbirds, including a *Selasphorus*. Though we weren't 100% sure of the specific identification of our bird, it was later identified as one of the two Allen's Hummingbirds that were visiting the yard. After a short time in the yard we headed to one of the real jewels of the valley, Estero Llano Grande State Park. The avian diversity at Estero is always top-notch, as our morning here re-enforced. From high flying goose skeins (containing three species!) and migrant warblers, to our first Anhingas and Neotropical Cormorants, Pauraques and Cave Swallows, to waterbirds in the canal and on the ponds, and a stunningly pale Great Horned Owl, Estero filled up the box score (read: the checklist). From there we headed down to Progreso Lakes, where we had a very productive stop at a local birder's residence where we gawked at a huge spectacle of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, and then some nearby grain elevators that produced dozens each of Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Bronzed Cowbirds. Lunch at the Blue Onion was the cherry on top (of the chocolate cake) of what was already a fine morning. We then headed to Mission, checking into the hotel and then heading down for a late afternoon stop at Anzalduas, where we tracked down several Sprague's Pipits, and many Western Meadowlarks. As a bonus, while we were in the process of getting ushered out because the park was closing, amid a large flock of meadowlarks alongside the road was a surprise Scissor-tailed Flycatcher! We drove around the streets of McAllen looking for Green Parakeets, but the roost didn't materialize as it normally does, and we only saw them briefly flying over a couple of times.

Our primary focus of the third day was to find the two rarest birds currently present in the valley: Blue Bunting and Rose-throated Becard. We knew that with a little luck we could get both of these headliners in the morning, but our luck amounted to much more than just a little. Quinta Mazatlán was our first stop of the day, and it was a dandy. We set up shop at the feeding station at the amphitheater, and watched as more than a dozen Great Kiskadees swarmed down from the treetops to the newly replenished food, in the company of Long-billed Thrasher, Inca and White-tipped doves and more. Couch's Kingbirds and Tropical Kingbirds were putting on fantastic side-by-side displays with lots of vocalizations for a very instructive comparison. Then, at 8:41 AM, the male Blue Bunting came in and put on a splendid show for almost twenty minutes, giving mind-blowing views as it alternated between the ground and the log feeders. We rounded out our visit at Quinta with a quick walk on the trails and then were off to the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, another legendary birding location, and one of the pieces of property that is under threat from the potential border wall being bandied about. Our quarry here was Rose-throated Becard, and we connected with it almost immediately upon our entry into the main part of the park, thanks to seeing its shadow moving across the road in front of us! It gave us some fabulous views for twenty minutes, and we were able to get several other groups of birders who were searching for it onto the bird, allowing us to share this gem with a pile of other delighted birders. We explored the trails and towers of Santa Ana, looking out over Mexico, and also seeing many waterbirds and even running into the Becard once more before we left. From Santa Ana we made our way to a great Tex-Mex lunch in Alamo via some local roads that produced our only Burrowing Owl of the tour. From Alamo, we headed up to our final birding stop of the chock full day, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands. Edinburg closed out our day on a high note, with an unexpected Black-throated Gray Warbler, a fantastic comparison of the two species of cormorants, and our main target, Green Kingfisher.

Day four saw us at yet another nationally famous birding site at dawn: Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park. We had a great feeder experience, including a cacophony of Plain Chachalacas (that's really what a flock of Chachalacas should be known as- a cacophony of chachalacas has a good ring to it, doesn't it?), and great views of Altamira Orioles and Green Jays. A walk to the river and into the park produced great views of our first Vermilion Flycatcher, and then we loaded up and headed up valley. We stopped at Salineño for yet another spectacular feeder experience, this one producing Audubon's and Hooded orioles, the former making an eleventh hour appearance at point blank range. We then had a very well timed pit stop down at the river which produced a great, close, Gray Hawk courtesy of Ken and Joe's scouting. We rounded out our day with some roadside birding for Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Lark Buntings, Cactus Wren, and Cassin's Sparrow before heading to Zapata, our home for the next two nights.

Our penultimate day dawned sunny and blue, and we started off back at Salineño, where we saw perhaps the entire state's supply of White-winged Doves, in addition to some other odds and ends like Swamp Sparrow and Marsh Wren. We then headed over to Falcon State Park, stopping briefly on the way for a flock of Lark Buntings, and Lark and Clay-colored sparrows. Falcon was notable mostly for the marshmallow brigade—the troop of Orange-crowned Warblers that were coming in to a feeder setup to tear into some marshmallows that were impaled on branches for them. This was a life experience for every person in the group! Greater Roadrunner was a nice pickup before we left the park. Heading over to Zapata via a nearby park produced Black-throated Sparrow, and a couple of very skulky Bewick's Wrens. At Zapata, we got our most important up-valley target: White-collared Seedeater, in addition to another Black-throated Gray Warbler, Audubon's Oriole, and surprise flyover Zone-tailed Hawk. Our final true birding stop up valley was the San Ygnacio dump, which was actually chock full of birds, including about 60 Chihuahuan Ravens, over a hundred Crested Caracaras, exceptionally cooperative Cassin's Sparrows, and absurdly showy Greater Roadrunners, running across what else but a road!

For the final morning we blasted back down the valley before sunrise to give the falcon-that-shall-not-be-named another crack. While none of them played ball, we did add a flock of Sandhill Cranes and a nicely perched White-tailed Hawk that gave great scope views. As time ran out we headed over to McAllen and Harlingen to say our sad goodbyes after a wonderful week of birding down in the valley.

It was a truly fantastic tour, with great experience after great experience after great experience, in large part because of all of you! It would be hard to envision a more congenial and enjoyable group to travel with, and Doug H. and I were tickled pink that you chose to spend the week in our company. Here's to you all, and here's to the birds of the Rio Grande Valley! Until we see you in the field again, be it in Maine or somewhere in the big birding-verse beyond!

-Doug Gochfeld

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*) – We had a tremendous experience in Dan Jones' yard at Progreso Lakes, where over three thousand (!!!) of these charismatic tree ducks were massed on the narrow lake.

SNOW GOOSE (*Anser caerulescens*) – In mixed flocks flying over Estero early on day two. A very high proportion of these birds were dark morphs, also known as "Blue Geese."

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Anser rossii*) – We picked out a couple of these diminutive white geese mixed into some of the flyover flocks of Snow Geese at Estero, where we got to compare their shorter wings and neck, and faster flapping directly to their larger cousins.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – A few were in the first couple of goose flocks early at Estero.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*) – Fairly common on appropriate bodies of water.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Spatula cyanoptera*) – The best views of this eye-candy duck were at Estero Llano Grande and Santa Ana.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – Widespread.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – The highest concentration of these was on the pond at Sabal Palm on the first morning.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*) – Scattered in just a couple of locations, including at South Padre.

MOTTLED DUCK (*Anas fulvigula*) – Fairly common and widespread.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Common.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Common and widespread.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – A female at Sabal Palm and hordes around the Lower Laguna Madre at South Padre.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A lone female on the pond at Sabal Palm was our only one of the tour.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – Several spots, including many on the river at Anzalduas.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – In the canal at Estero.

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

PLAIN CHACHALACA (*Ortalis vetula*) – What a funky dinosaur! We had an especially great experience with them at Bentsen, where there was a Chachalaca orchestra surrounding us as we entered the park gates, and they were running and "flying" all over the trees around the feeders along the entrance road. This experience was one of the factors that led Calien to tab this as one of her top three birds of the tour.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – Some great looks at their wonderfully intricate plumage behind the feeders at Salineño. Because of the stellar looks we had of this species, and its continuing wild occurrence down here, while they decline elsewhere, this was selected as one of the birds of the tour by both HB and Trudy!

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Great views repeatedly.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Quite a few through the first four days of the tour.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – We saw these all over, especially in the vicinity of the river, and often times in direct comparison with their Double-crested cousins, allowing for a really good appreciation of just how puny these lil' guys are in comparison.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – A familiar face for all of us, and seen on each of the first five days of the tour.

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – Really good views at the back of Alligator Lake at Estero Llano Grande,

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Any day you see these battleships of the sky soaring around is a good day, and indeed we saw these every day, so that tells you what kind of a tour it was!

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Saltwater only, so only on day one around South Padre and the Lower Laguna Madre.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Present throughout.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – Present throughout in appropriate habitat.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Present throughout in appropriate habitat.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Just on day one at the South Padre Convention Center.

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*) – We saw the artist formerly known as Louisiana Heron on several days, with stunning views at the Convention Center.

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*) – Good views at the convention center, and stunningly good views at the boat ramp along Rt. 48 heading down to Brownsville.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Surprisingly we only saw this species on two days. It seems strange that this species not more widespread throughout the valley.

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*) – One skulking around in the shade of some reeds from the boardwalk at the Convention Center.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Highest numbers were seen at Estero, and actually only seen on two days.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Estero provided us with some stellar views of adults of this species.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*) – Each of the first three days.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – Spectacular point blank views of this show-stopper from the boardwalk at the Convention Center.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*) – We missed it on day three- though there were no complaints voiced about that.

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Luckily we had none of the unforgivable oversights that plagued us with the last species, as we picked up these majestic beasts on every single day of the tour.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Every day, including many sitting on the ground in the fields in the Port Isabel and Brownsville areas, which was a contextual shock for most of the northeasterners that are used to seeing the perched up only on high poles or platforms.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – This graceful raptor was seen on each of the first four days of the tour. A real stately beauty.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*) – Fairly common in appropriate habitat, only in the lower valley.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – A couple of brief flybys, including one over the canal dike at Estero.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Scattered around, especially in areas with some human habitation. The most memorable encounter was the foolhardy one that took a dive at the parrot roost at Oliveira, which made John select that as one of his top moments of the tour.

HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – These very social hawks were seen on every day of the tour, and we got an exceptional point-blank look at one shortly after we arrived at Estero.

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – A beautiful and graceful raptor that we ran into on all but one day of the tour. We even had them in numbers all the way up valley at the San Ygnacio dump, including multiple very interestingly plumaged immatures.

GRAY HAWK (*Buteo plagiatus*) – A great eleventh hour find by Joe and Ken as they looked for some privacy on a side track at Salineño on our afternoon visit there. This adult gave a stupendous flyby in immaculate light, and it caught everyone so unawares that it got away un-photographed.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – This one was heard only at Santa Ana. [*]

ZONE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albonotatus*) – A very serendipitous appearance by one overhead at the Zapata library was our only sighting of this low density and difficult-to-find species.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Fairly common, especially along roadsides.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) – A great close look at one of these smart looking rails from the boardwalk at the Convention Center on South Padre.

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – South Padre was the best look, but we also saw them at Bentsen.

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Every full birding day netted us at least one coot.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Antigone canadensis*) – A last second pickup as we approached Port Isabel at breakneck speed on our final morning. A flock of about 13 flew over the road heading north, but angled alongside the road just enough so that they were still visible when we pulled off for an unrelated rest stop a minute or two later.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – The most impressive aggregation by far was at Santa Ana, where there were over a hundred adjacent to the blind.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – A flock of almost exactly 100 were at the boat ramp when we stopped there on our way to Brownsville on our first afternoon together.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A couple of these were at the boat ramp on the way to Brownsville.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – A few out on the salt flats off the Convention Center.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – We heard these at the Convention Center and at Holly Beach. [*]

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – A couple of places on day one.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – Saw some of these really nicely on the first and last days, in the Port Isabel region.

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*) – A good tour for this freshwater obligate calidrid. We saw them each of the first three days, at Holly Beach, Estero Llano Grande (the canal along the southern border), and Santa Ana.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Mudflats off the South Padre Convention Center.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – Mudflats off the South Padre Convention Center.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – A giant flock at the boat ramp off rt. 48, and then a bunch more on the canal behind Estero.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Just a couple around Holly Beach. The wind was such that the shorebirds were concentrated far on the other side of the playa, and we couldn't parse through them with any accuracy.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Some of the ones off the Convention Center were assumed to be this (salt water, short, kinked, bill), and then we heard one calling as it flew in at Holly Beach as high tide approached.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Holly Beach, Santa Ana. We even got to study the white underwing coverts (the leading edge of the underwing, near the axillaries) which are an underutilized field mark that differentiates these guys from the last species.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Present throughout.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Here and there.

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – Several each out on the mudflats at the Convention Center, and then again from the boat ramp on the way down to Brownsville. This larger, paler gray, longer-billed "subspecies" of Willet is ripe for the splitting, so keep an eye out on taxonomy rearrangements going forward.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Holly Beach, Santa Ana.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – Around Port Isabel and South Padre Island, and then we saw one waaayyy up-river at Falcon Lake.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – In several places near South Padre, and then a few days later way up valley at Falcon Lake.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – An interesting looking immature was at the lagoon at the Convention Center.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – We got a fantastic show of the foraging behavior of this unique tern, as they swooped down over the mostly dry coastal prairie of Old Port Isabel Road, nabbing insects.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – Flybys at South Padre and then at up-river at Salineño.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Fairly common on the coast.

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*) – A couple of nice flocks around the Convention Center.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*) – Convention Center mudflats.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Present. [I]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – First and last days, but we miraculously didn't have them for most of the middle of the tour. [I]

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*) – Scattered in a few places, with good views at the feeders at Quinta.

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina*) – Most people saw this short-tailed small dove at Estero, and Doug and HB had another one shoot across the canal at Bentsen a couple of days later as their reward for walking back to the VC rather than taking the tram.

WHITE-TIPPED DOVE (*Leptotila verreauxi*) – Each of the first four days, and almost without exception at feeders. This is an especially shy forest floor denizen, and without the aid of bird feeders would be very difficult to get good views of. Luckily for us, the lower valley is inundated with feeding stations!

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaidura asiatica*) – Abundant, especially at Salineño, where the trees were swarming with them on our second visit.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Every day.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*) – Good views at Falcon, and then spectacular views at the San Ygnacio dump. Woody and Ken chose this iconic species of the US desert as one of their top three birds of the trip, largely on the strength of this latter experience.

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – A great experience with an exceedingly pale individual, likely of the southwestern desert subspecies, at Estero Llano Grande SP.

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – This bird, found shortly after we left Santa Ana, made for a fantastic finale of our big morning of vagrants!

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON PAURAUQUE (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – Great views of this cryptic nightjar on the ground near the trail at Estero (and some even got to see a second one bizarrely waddling off into the woods here). We also picked one up the very next day just as we left Quinta Mazatlan. What a weird and wonderful creature!

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – One of the more common hummingbirds at feeders in the valley, we saw this species at Sabal Palm, in Harlingen, and at Bentsen.

ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus sasin*) – A surprise add-on to the tour route was a hummingbird feeder at a private residence in Harlingen which had just had an Allen's Hummingbird banded the day before. We saw one male selasphorus hummingbird which, upon photo review, turned out indeed to be one of two Allen's Hummingbirds visiting the residence. This range restricted California breeder is a really good bird for Texas!

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – Very good close views at Quinta Mazatlan.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

RINGED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle torquata*) – Giving it's loud machine-gun rattle as it flew over the blind at Santa Ana.

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Seen on half the days.

GREEN KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle americana*) – We had to wait until we got to Edinburg Scenic Wetlands before we finally encountered one of these, but once there we got some quality views of this small but saucy kingfisher.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes aurifrons*) – Every full birding day of the tour.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – We ran into these once we started to get a bit farther up the valley and away from the coast, with our first hit of this widespread sapsucker coming at Quinta Mazatlan.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*) – Widespread through the tour route, and encountered every full day of birding.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – Common, and in some places truly abundant. There was a truly astonishing concentration of them at the dump at San Ygnacio.

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Common.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Those in Doug's vehicle saw one of these often crepuscular killers as we drove around McAllen looking for Parakeets at dusk.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – A couple over the first two days.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

RED-CROWNED PARROT (*Amazona viridigenalis*) – What a fantastic experience with these at their big roost at Oliveira Park in Brownsville! This is the primary species in this mixed-species roosting area, and it's even possible that some are of wild ancestry. We then saw some the next morning just as we arrived at the parking lot at Estero Llano Grande SP.

RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED) (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*) – A few of these big guys with the blue eye patches were in with the large ruckus of parrots at Oliveira.

YELLOW-HEADED PARROT (*Amazona oratrix*) – These were the first parrots that we saw really well and close during our evening trip to Oliveira. A couple flew in calling and perched in the tree right above our heads.

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT (*Amazona albifrons*) – A surprisingly large group of these, which are on the smaller end of the spectrum of Amazona parrots. They have a really distinctive white fore-crown, and we could pick it out on wires hundreds of meters away. Perhaps over thirty of these were at the parrot roost, and these seemed to somewhat segregate out into a pure species group.

GREEN PARAKEET (*Psittacara holochlorus*) – A few in flight in McAllen, but then much better views the next morning at Quinta Mazatlan.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – We started with a pair nesting in the culvert over the canal at Bentsen. They become more common as you go up-valley, heading west towards their range. We had another especially good look at the Zapata library.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Widespread.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – We completed the hat trick of phoebes on this tour along the entrance road to the San Ygnacio dump on our final full day of birding.

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – We saw a goodly number of these during the last couple of days of the tour, and they increased in frequency as we got farther up-valley. This eye-poppingly red species was cooperative to boot, and this surely was one of the reasons that it made John's list of top three birds.

GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – A big, in-your-face flycatcher. They were great at several feeding stations including Salineño, but they were particularly absurd at Quinta Mazatlan, where we had 15 in view at any one time, and at least 8 at once on the feeder setup itself.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – The most common of our yellow-bellied kingbirds. We heard them calling on many occasions, in addition to seeing many silent ones which were likely this species. It was even a lifer for Doug H.!

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*) – Another good regional specialty, we had this species in direct comparison with its very similar-looking cousin (Tropical Kingbird) at Quinta Mazatlan. We had another very confiding one at the pond next to the Zapata library.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – A nice last second pickup at Anzalduas as we got ushered out of the park at closing time. It was mixed into the large flock of Western Meadowlarks in the field along the exit road. This was one of Sue's top three birds of the tour, and with great reason-what a bird!

Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)

ROSE-THROATED BECARD (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – Certainly one of the highlights of the tour. This species is usually very difficult to find, especially as a vagrant, but we had exceptional luck, seeing it within five minutes of being on the trails at Santa Ana, and it gave us a show at close range for more than twenty minutes, even allowing us to alert two other groups of birders to come and share in our good fortune.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Widespread, with many seen during our drives.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – A few seen and heard during the second half of the week.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – These were seen almost exclusively up-valley.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GREEN JAY (*Cyanocorax yncas*) – What a fantastic bird! Surely one of the most iconic birds of the Rio Grande Valley, with more shades of greens and blues that you could wrap your head around. These charismatic corvids put on a truly splendid show for us in multiple locations, and Kathy and Ken both selected them as one of their top three birds of the tour.

CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) – We picked up these on the last day, and in a big way, at the San Ygnacio dump.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A flock flying over the fields outside Santa Ana as we started our Burrowing Owl search were the only ones of the tour.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Picked up on the second to last morning of the tour, at Salineño.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – The most common and widespread swallow on our route.

CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS) (*Petrochelidon fulva pallida*) – A lifer for several folks, we saw these buffy throated and buffy rumped swallows very well on multiple occasions, the first of which was at Estero Llano Grande SP.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*) – Common, especially around feeder areas.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*) – They were especially abundant around the trails at Santa Ana.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Heard more often than seen, but seen several times as well.

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Heard only along Old Port Isabel Road on the first morning, but the windy conditions eliminated any already slim chance we had of laying eyes on this secretive species. [*]

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Good looks at the two extreme ends of the tour route: South Padre Island and Salineño.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – A common song in the valley, and even seen a few times.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Essentially heard only, in multiple locations, though we saw some movement in the bushes as one flitted around calling at Starr County Park. [*]

CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*) – Excellent views along the roadside bunting and sparrow stop in Starr County.

Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila caerulea*) – Every day. Common.

BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila melanura*) – We got this desert specialist gnatcatcher along the back road just north of Salineño, and then saw it again the next day at nearby Starr County Park.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – We saw these charming munchkins of the passerine world on every full birding day of the tour.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

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

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*) – Excellent views of this somewhat tropical thrush at Quinta Mazatlan.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – A couple flying over the lead van on the final morning as we blasted towards the coast.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) – Seen very well on several occasions, and heard frequently.

LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*) – We did eventually get some good views of this often frustrating species. They were coming to the feeders at Quinta, which substantially simplified getting good views.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – The state bird of Texas, and with good reason- they are everywhere!

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Every day, yay! [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – Calling flyovers on three days, sometimes low enough to see the details on fairly well.

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) – Our late afternoon trip to Anzalduas eventually made good on reasonable views of this sneaky savanna slinker.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Several around the feeders at Quinta Mazatlan.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – A couple of individuals at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Absolutely abundant, but the most memorable were certainly the marshmallow gang at the feeding station at the Falcon Lake SP campground.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – Seen briefly on a couple of occasions, the first of which was a brief view at Estero.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Several days, and common around rank vegetation on wetland edges.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – This is the go-to taxon of Yellow-rumped Warbler in the lower part of the valley, which makes sense given that it is an eastern species.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – It was the default Yellow-rumped Warbler once we got up to Zapata, but we also had a surprise one farther southeast at Quinta Mazatlan that ended up showing quite well.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – This handsome denizen of the west made appearances at both Edinburg and the trail behind the Zapata Library, much to everyone's delight.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – A brief view in the tropical zone at Estero Llano Grande.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – There was one chipping away at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, but we never tracked it down amid the flurry of other songbirds there.

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – Score! We got an exceptionally cooperative and inquisitive female at the Zapata Library almost immediately upon our arrival. The only place this species occurs in the USA is along Rio Grande, and it is very sparsely distributed, sometimes being virtually impossible to track down.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows)

CASSIN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea cassinii*) – Great views along the roadside near Salineño, and then stellar views at point blank range at the San Ygnacio dump.

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*) – Seen on several occasions, including away from feeders on our first morning at Sabal Palm. It's often quite shy away from feeders, so it was a real treat to see it well "in the wild."

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Anzalduas.

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*) – We had views of a couple mixed into the sparrow and lark flocks along route 2098 during our second roadside stop there.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – We were first teased by its distinctive mechanical song at Falcon Lake SP. We then moved onto to Starr County Park, where we got excellent looks at this, one of the most sharply dressed of all the sparrows.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – A bunch along the road along Rt. 2098 during our second encounter with flocks of sparrows there.

LARK BUNTING (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – They're winterers down here- during the breeding season they're range restricted denizens of the great plains. We got some good looks at a couple dozen of them, including some transitioning males, along the roads northwest of Salineño.

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – Mixed into the Lark Bunting flocks during our first roadside encounter with that species.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Encountered every day, but usually in small numbers. By far the most widespread sparrow on the tour.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*) – This shy species breeds in the taiga and boreal forests of the north and then winters mostly from the southern US southwards, where they become even shyer and harder to get prolonged looks at. We did well with them though, and everyone saw the species well across several observations.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Our only one of these was a bird calling during our second morning at Salineño, and it eventually popped out of its reedy hideaway and checked us out from an open perch.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – A surprise drop-in at the trees over the feeders at Quinta Mazatlan, this female or young male was one of those "you had to be there" birds, disappearing as suddenly as it first appeared.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Fairly widespread, though not densely distributed.

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – This desert cardinal put on a great show at the feeding station at Falcon Lake SP.

BLUE BUNTING (*Cyanocompsa parellina*) – Whoa, what a stunner! A fantastic encounter with this Mexican vagrant at the feeders at Quinta Mazatlan. We didn't have to wait very long for it to appear, and once it did we got a good mix of it foraging in the bushes and on the ground, and gorging itself on the copious seed on the feeder logs. This was one of Calien's top three birds of the tour.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – A nice surprise was a small flock of these at the campground at Bentsen.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – We had over 60 of these striking icterids alongside the road at Progreso!

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – These tend to form much larger flocks than Eastern Meadowlarks, and also to be in shorter, pure grass, than their more well-marked eastern cousins. Our big hit of these came at Anzalduas, where there was a big flock of over forty individuals roving around the fields.

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) – Some good singing birds and individuals perching up on fenceposts in the Port Isabel region.

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – Our sole individual of the tour was an immature bird at the feeders at Salineño.

ALTAMIRA ORIOLE (*Icterus gularis*) – We saw them in many places in the valley, but the best studies and highest numbers, by far, were at the feeders at Salineño and Bentsen.

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE (*Icterus graduacauda*) – A fantastic experience with a male at the Salineño feeders. Then we were surprised by one the next day at the Zapata library! The male that made an eleventh hour appearance at the feeders was such a great up-close view that it made the top three lists of both Woody and John.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common and widespread.

BRONZED COWBIRD (*Molothrus aeneus*) – Progreso produced more than 40.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – In several places, with the highest numbers coming at Progreso.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – We might've seen one or two or two million during our stay here. All times of day and night, and the big flocks stay awake and vocal around parking lots at night.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Our sole individual was a beautiful singing male at the Zapata library. Surprisingly sparse in this region!

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*) – Edinburg Scenic Wetlands.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – A flock foraging in some roadside sunflowers along Border Road near the Burrowing Owl.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Try as we might, we ended up failing to miss this species. [I]

MAMMALS

VIRGINIA OPOSSUM (*Didelphis virginianus*) – We saw one of these lumbering across the field behind the hotel in Mission when we went back after dark to look for Jackrabbits!

BRAZILIAN FREE-TAILED BAT (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) – Around a hundred of these emerged from under the eaves of one of the buildings in Oliveira Park as we were observing the parrot roost.

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – A couple of these were seen in various places along the roads.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – A few folks came down to twitch a couple of these long-eared bunny wabbits out in the field behind the hotel in Mission after we had initially dipped them a short time before.

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – Fairly common and widespread throughout.

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*) – A gluttonous one of these masked bandits lumbered up to the feeders at Quinta early in the morning, before the Blue Bunting had even had a chance to get it's fair share!

COLLARED PECCARY (*Tayassu tajacu*) – Several spots briefly, including Santa Ana, Falcon, and Bentsen.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Between Zapata and San Ygnacio.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 188 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa