

Trip Report — South Texas Rarities 2025

January 11-19, 2025 with Chris Benesh & Alex Sundvall



We had a fabulous morning on Aransas Bay with great views of Whooping Crane, such as this Alex Sundvall image.

Our 2025 South Texas Rarities tour began with a meetup in Corpus Christi on Friday afternoon. We headed into downtown to track down the celebrity Cattle Tyrant that has been spending the past couple of years at this location. This species is largely South American and likely arrived in Corpus Christi by means of riding aboard a shipping vessel. We then headed to Indian Point where we had a nice mix of waterbirds and shorebirds. Then it was on to Rockport/Fulton for the night.

The next day was our boat trip on the Skimmer with Tommy Moore and his mate Kyle. What a terrific morning we had. The Whooping Cranes were in

fine form. We saw a bunch of them and we had a lot of calling and flying around on top of the excellent ground views. A nice mix of other species. A flight of Roseate Spoonbills was memorable. Kyle spotted a fantastic Merlin that showed well for us. After the boat trip we headed to lunch with a great assortment of birds right outside the restaurant. More fabulous spoonbills here. We ultimately headed north toward Tivoli, and saw White-tailed Hawk and White-tailed Kites along the way. In Tivoli we found a big flock of Boattailed Grackles at the southern edge of their range.



After a lot of searching, we finally connected with a Morelet's Seedeater in Fronton. Photo by Alex Sundvall.

Day three began in Fulton, and we headed off toward Port Aransas, taking a very short ferry ride to Port A. Not too much going on at the jetty so we headed down Mustang Island. Along the way we stopped to take in two beautiful Aplomado Falcons on hacking platforms. Then on to the JFK Causeway toward Corpus Christi where we had an Iceland Gull (Thayer's) and some great looks at Piping, Semipalmated, and Snowy plovers. Then it was on to the Chapman Ranch where we spotted some Mountain Plovers and also had great views of a couple of Sprague's Pipits. A Say's Phoebe was another nice treat there. After a lunch in Corpus Christi, we headed down to Harlingen to check in to our next motel and then headed to Brownsville for the rest of the afternoon. A brief visit to the Buena Vista Cemetery produced a few warblers (including Hermit) and a Vermilion Flycatcher. Also, our first Tropical Kingbirds. Then it was on to Oliveira Park for parrots. Along the way we found a group of Green Parakeets. Then at the park we were treated to great views of Red-crowned Amazons, and also many White-fronted Amazons, and a pair of Yellow-headed Amazons. Then it was off to dinner and back for checklist.

Day four was a cold one that turned into a cold and wet one. The kind of day you would spend by a cozy fire. We headed over to the Laguna Vista Nature Trail where we spent some time at blind #3. While the advertised celebrity did not appear, there were introductions to a few of the south Texas specialties. Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow were among those. On our way out of the park, Alex spotted a Groove-billed Ani that showed pretty well for us. Then it was on to the Texas 48 Shrimp Basin Bridge for some Black Skimmers and a few shorebirds. We then headed back to Oliveira Park to try for the Grace's Warbler which we connected with, along with our first Hooded Oriole of the trip. We then visited the UTRGV Brownsville Campus and did some birding around the resaca there. There were a couple of Anhingas. We eventually finished up the day with a brief visit to La Feria Nature Center. Here there were a few new ducks for us including Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback, Bluewinged Teal, and looks at Black Phoebe, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Whitetailed Kite. Not too bad for a day most would not have gone birding.



The Santa Margarita Ranch was a host to a few species rarely seen in the United States. This Brown Jay visited us soon after we arrived there. Photo by Chris Benesh.

Day five started off in misty rain in Harlingen. We headed west toward Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Once we stepped out of the van, the action picked up. A Blue-headed Vireo, Black-and-White Warbler, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers started things off. An Altamira Oriole sang, Green Jays shot past us. The helpful staff there put out food and the birds came rushing in. Great Kiskadee abounded, and in no time the celebrity Rose-throated Becard put in an appearance. It wasn't a brief one either. It stuck around the Visitors Center the entire time we were at the refuge. There were Clay-colored Thrushes, Plain Chachalacas, Altamira Orioles and more. We took a walk out to the Pintail Lakes complex. Because of the recent rains, we were introduced to the caliche soils that create sticky mud when wet. As we walked out to the end of the trail, we alternately grew inches taller, only to shrink again whenever a mass of mud dislodged from the bottoms of our shoes. But it was worth some of the nice birds seen on the walk. A male Cinnamon Teal, Vermilion Flycatchers, and Least Grebes. We had a family of Red-shouldered Hawks and our first Harris's Hawk of the trip. Then it was on to lunch and then Estero Llano Grande in the afternoon. The Tropical Zone was good for Pauraques. We found six sitting in one area at the end of the road. A thermal scope helped to find the last four of these. We then headed over to Alligator Lake where there was another up-close Pauraque. Lots of handsome Yellowcrowned Night-Herons and a Black-crowned entertained us there. Then it was on to Mission for the night.



The star of the evening visit to the Santa Margarita Ranch was this Mottled Owl, the first of this species to be seen alive in the United States. Photo by Chris Benesh.

Day six started off with a visit to a small lake called Lakeview Drive Ponds where we had a Ross's Goose and some Stilt Sandpipers. Then it was on to Bentsen Rio Grande State Park. A really fun show at the nature center with Plain Chachalacas stealing the show. Some great perched Harris's Hawks and six Gray Hawks seen interacting with one another. We also had our first really good looks at Verdin here. Then after lunch we headed over to the National Butterfly Center where we caught the 1:30 pm feeding. A really nice mix of birds with some Wild Turkeys as well. After this we walked over to see a roosting Eastern Screech-Owl. Before heading to the hotel, we made one last stop in Hidalgo to see some Monk Parakeets that nest in the area.

Day seven began with an early start, headed off to meet guide Simon Kiacz for a visit to the Santa Margarita Ranch. We met just outside of the imposing border wall and headed in through a controlled access gate. The birding there was really great. We started off at the bluff and we treated to nice scope views of both Green and Ringed kingfishers. After some time there, we had a snack break and then headed to the wooded part of the ranch. Here we had great looks at Brown Jays, Green Jays, Altamira, Hooded, and Audubon's orioles, and many others. We saw another sleepy Eastern Screech-Owl poking its head out of its roost hole. We then got some take away Mexican food in Salineño and headed to the preserve to picnic and watch feeders for a while. Then we headed to Fronton where after a bit of searching, we finally connected with a female Morelet's Seedeater. Then it was back to Rio Grande City for the night and a nice meal at Caro's.

The first part of day eight was a potential clean-up day. We headed back to Bentsen Rio Grande State Park in the hopes that the warm weather might encourage the Hook-billed Kites to fly. No luck there, but we saw lots of other birds lifting off from the hawk platform. We then took some time off before our extended night trip to Santa Margarita Ranch. That trip started with some more time at the feeders with a few Brown Jays attending. Then we waited for it to get dark, listening to the trills of Eastern Screech-Owl and a couple of singing Pauraques. Soon the star of the evening began calling, a female Mottled Owl. She was coy and mostly stayed out of view. Just when it seemed like she was not going to show, she appeared somewhat briefly in the spotlights. Thanks to Simon and Zach for their efforts to make it materialize. This is the first live Mottled Owl found in the United States, so a very significant record. We took a bit of time to enjoy the night sky (taking a peak at M31 in Andromeda) and black light a few glowing striped bark scorpions. Then in was off to bed for the night. Because of the late evening, we decided to have our final meal be a sit-down breakfast. Then we started our drive back to Corpus Christi where it all began. Along the drive we encountered several big flocks of Lark Buntings, our final new bird of the trip.

Alex and I want to thank you all for coming along on our South Texas Rarities tour. A great group made for a great trip, despite some rainy and cold, windy weather at points in the trip. Good birding and adventuring to all of you! We hope we can bird together again at some point in the future.

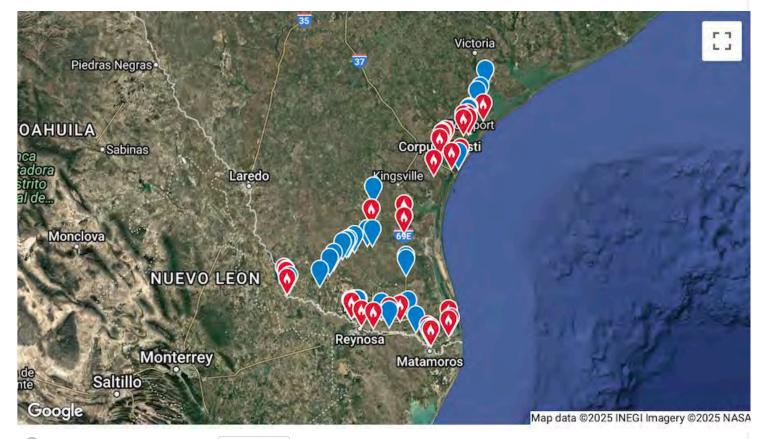
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: https://ebird.org/tripreport/319617

Chris Benesh



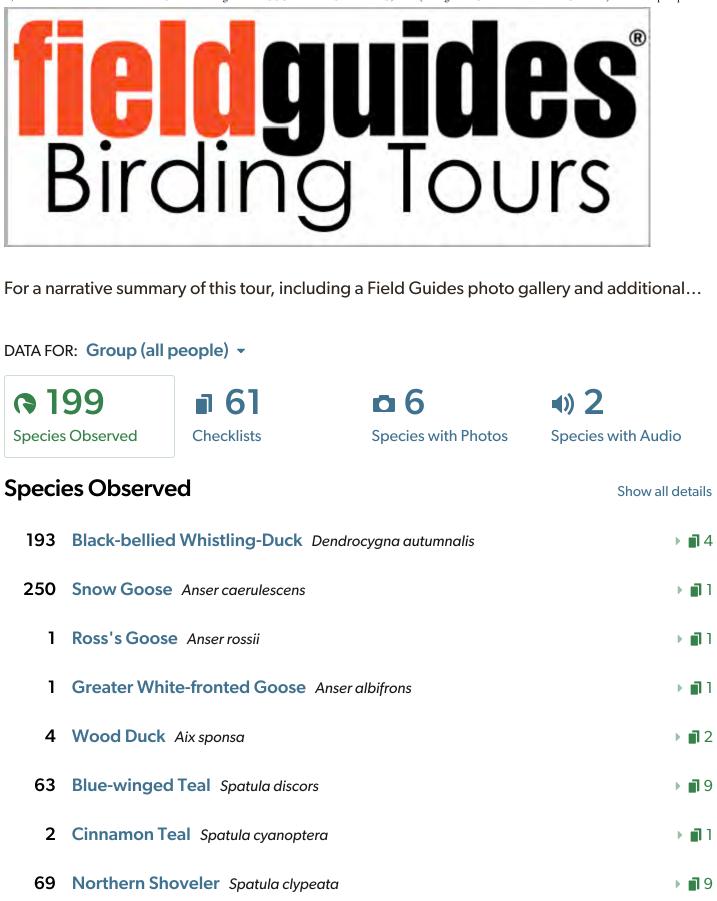
Field Guides Birding Tours -- SOUTH TEXAS RARITIES, 2025 (with guides Chris Benesh & Alex Sundvall)

11 – 19 Jan 2025 (9 days) Link-only



S Mexico | United States | Subregions

- Chris Benesh, Alex Sundvall, fgi Triplists



140 Gadwall Mareca strepera

▶ **1**5

84	American Wigeon Mareca americana	Þ 👖 5
4	Mallard Anas platyrhynchos	▶ ∎ 2
23	Mottled Duck Anas fulvigula	▶ 🖪 6
236	Northern Pintail Anas acuta	▶ 🖪 7
46	Green-winged Teal Anas crecca	Þ 🖪 5
2	Canvasback Aythya valisineria	• 🖬 1
1301	Redhead Aythya americana	Þ 🖪 3
5	Ring-necked Duck Aythya collaris	▶ 🖪 2
2	Greater Scaup Aythya marila	• 🖬 1
157	Lesser Scaup Aythya affinis	▶ 🖪 7
12	Black Scoter Melanitta americana	• 🖬 1
47	Bufflehead Bucephala albeola	▶ 🖪 6
4	Common Goldeneye Bucephala clangula	▶ 🖪 2
112	Ruddy Duck Oxyura jamaicensis	Þ 🖪 3
166	Plain Chachalaca Ortalis vetula	▶ 🖪 8
16	Scaled Quail Callipepla squamata) 🗐 1
45	Wild Turkey Meleagris gallopavo	▶ 🖪 5
84	Rock Pigeon Columba livia *	▶ 🖪 9
24	Eurasian Collared-Dove Streptopelia decaocto 🜸	▶ 🖪 8
49	Inca Dove Columbina inca	▶ 🖪 6

32	White-tipped Dove Leptotila verreauxi	Þ 🖪 9
43	White-winged Dove Zenaida asiatica	> 📑 11
62	Mourning Dove Zenaida macroura	► 🔳 18
1	Groove-billed Ani Crotophaga sulcirostris) 📑 1
2	Greater Roadrunner Geococcyx californianus	▶ ∎ 2
11	Common Pauraque Nyctidromus albicollis	▶ ∎ 2
5	Ruby-throated Hummingbird Archilochus colubris	► 1 3
5	Black-chinned Hummingbird Archilochus alexandri	▶ ∎ 4
1	Anna's Hummingbird Calypte anna	• 🗐 1
4	Buff-bellied Hummingbird Amazilia yucatanensis	► 1 3
3	Sora Porzana carolina	▶ ∎ 2
306	American Coot Fulica americana	▶ ∎ 4
2	Sandhill Crane Antigone canadensis) 🖬 1
20	Whooping Crane Grus americana	211
68	Black-necked Stilt Himantopus mexicanus	► 🖬 5
72	American Avocet Recurvirostra americana	► 1 3
3	American Oystercatcher Haematopus palliatus	• 🗐 1
28	Black-bellied Plover Pluvialis squatarola	▶ ∎ 4
31	Killdeer Charadrius vociferus	▶ 🖬 7
42	Semipalmated Plover Charadrius semipalmatus	▶ 🖪 3

11	Piping Plover Charadrius melodus	▶ 📲 2
40	Mountain Plover Anarhynchus montanus	• 💼 1
3	Snowy Plover Anarhynchus nivosus	Þ 🛯 2
24	Long-billed Curlew Numenius americanus	▶ 🖪 6
13	Marbled Godwit Limosa fedoa	Þ 🖪 2
10	Long-billed Dowitcher Limnodromus scolopaceus	▶ 🖪 4
5	Wilson's Snipe Gallinago delicata	Þ 🖪 3
17	Spotted Sandpiper Actitis macularius	Þ 🖪 7
58	Lesser Yellowlegs Tringa flavipes	▶ ∎ 6
82	Willet Tringa semipalmata	▶ ∎ 6
42	Greater Yellowlegs Tringa melanoleuca	▶ ∎ 5
23	Ruddy Turnstone Arenaria interpres	▶ ∎ 4
20	Stilt Sandpiper Calidris himantopus	• 🖪 1
32	Sanderling Calidris alba	▶ ∎ 3
195	Dunlin Calidris alpina) 🖪 3
123	Least Sandpiper Calidris minutilla	Þ 🖪 9
200	Western Sandpiper Calidris mauri	▶ ∎ 2
903	Laughing Gull Leucophaeus atricilla	Þ 🖪 8
114	Ring-billed Gull Larus delawarensis	Þ 🖪 7
38	American Herring Gull Larus smithsonianus	▶ ∎ 2

7	Lesser Black-backed Gull Larus fuscus	Þ 🖪 1 🗐 2
1	Iceland Gull Larus glaucoides) 📑 1
80	Black Skimmer Rynchops niger) 📑 I
1	Gull-billed Tern Gelochelidon nilotica) 📑 (
35	Caspian Tern Hydroprogne caspia	▶ 🖬 4
38	Forster's Tern Sterna forsteri	► 1 3
28	Royal Tern Thalasseus maximus	▶ ∎ 2
9	Least Grebe Tachybaptus dominicus	▶ ∎ 2
14	Pied-billed Grebe Podilymbus podiceps	Þ 🔳 5
10	Common Loon Gavia immer) 📑 (
20	Anhinga Anhinga anhinga	▶ 🖪 6
196	Double-crested Cormorant Nannopterum auritum) 📑 🗎
131	Neotropic Cormorant Nannopterum brasilianum	▶ 🖪 8
68	White Ibis Eudocimus albus	▶ 🖪 4
2	White-faced Ibis Plegadis chihi	► 1 2
45	Roseate Spoonbill Platalea ajaja	▶ 🖪 8
12	Yellow-crowned Night Heron Nyctanassa violacea) 📑 l
1	Black-crowned Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax) 🖬 1
5	Little Blue Heron Egretta caerulea	▶ ∎ 4
18	Tricolored Heron Egretta tricolor	▶ 🖪 6

7	Reddish Egret Egretta rufescens	▶ 🖪 5
92	Snowy Egret Egretta thula	13
33	Western Cattle-Egret Ardea ibis	▶ ∎ 4
78	Great Egret Ardea alba) 📑 17
79	Great Blue Heron Ardea herodias	> 💼 11
163	American White Pelican Pelecanus erythrorhynchos) 📑 10
63	Brown Pelican Pelecanus occidentalis	▶ 🖪 7
104	Black Vulture Coragyps atratus) 🖪 13
572	Turkey Vulture Cathartes aura	23
47	Osprey Pandion haliaetus	▶ ∎ 15
4	White-tailed Kite Elanus leucurus	► 🖪 3
4	Sharp-shinned Hawk Accipiter striatus	▶ ∎ 4
7	Cooper's Hawk Astur cooperii	▶ 🖪 5
8	Northern Harrier Circus hudsonius	▶ 🖪 6
1	Bald Eagle Haliaeetus leucocephalus	• 🗐 1
12	Harris's Hawk Parabuteo unicinctus	► 🖪 5
16	White-tailed Hawk Geranoaetus albicaudatus	• 🗊 11
24	Gray Hawk Buteo plagiatus	► 🖪 5
18	Red-shouldered Hawk Buteo lineatus	▶ 🖪 6
1	Zone-tailed Hawk Buteo albonotatus	• 🖬 1

11	Red-tailed Hawk Buteo jamaicensis	Þ 🖪 9
1	American Barn Owl Tyto furcata) 📄 🗎
8	Eastern Screech-Owl Megascops asio	► 1 3
2	Great Horned Owl Bubo virginianus	▶ ∎ 2
1	Mottled Owl Strix virgata	▶ 🗖 2 📑 1
8	Ringed Kingfisher Megaceryle torquata	▶ 🖪 3
13	Belted Kingfisher Megaceryle alcyon	10
7	Green Kingfisher Chloroceryle americana	▶ ∎ 3
58	Golden-fronted Woodpecker Melanerpes aurifrons	16
37	Ladder-backed Woodpecker Dryobates scalaris) 🖬 🕅
76	Crested Caracara Caracara plancus	▶ ∎ 22
27	American Kestrel Falco sparverius	► 🖬 17
27 4	American Kestrel Falco sparverius Merlin Falco columbarius	 17 17 14
		_
4	Merlin Falco columbarius	Þ 🖪 1 📑 4
4 2	Merlin Falco columbarius Aplomado Falcon Falco femoralis	▶ 🖪 1 📲 4 ▶ 📲 2
4 2 3	Merlin Falco columbarius Aplomado Falcon Falco femoralis Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus	 1 1 4 1 2 3
4 2 3 6	Merlin Falco columbarius Aplomado Falcon Falco femoralis Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus Monk Parakeet Myiopsitta monachus *	▶ 💌 1 🖬 4 ▶ 💼 2 ▶ 💼 3 ▶ 💼 1
4 2 3 6 152	Merlin Falco columbarius Aplomado Falcon Falco femoralis Peregrine Falcon Falco peregrinus Monk Parakeet Myiopsitta monachus * Red-crowned Amazon Amazona viridigenalis *	 <p< th=""></p<>

7	Black Phoebe Sayornis nigricans	▶ 🖪 6
25	Eastern Phoebe Sayornis phoebe	▶ 🖪 12
1	Say's Phoebe Sayornis saya	► m 1
4	Vermilion Flycatcher Pyrocephalus rubinus	► ∎ 3
109	Great Kiskadee Pitangus sulphuratus	► 🖪 16
12	Tropical Kingbird Tyrannus melancholicus	▶ 🔳 8
2	Couch's Kingbird Tyrannus couchii	▶ 🗖 1 📄 2
14	White-eyed Vireo griseus	▶ 🖪 6
1	Blue-headed Vireo solitarius) 🖬 1
28	Loggerhead Shrike Lanius Iudovicianus	► 1 16
13	Brown Jay Cyanocorax morio	► 1 3
140	Green Jay Cyanocorax yncas	▶ 📑 14
63	Black-crested Titmouse Baeolophus atricristatus	► 🖪 13
19	Verdin Auriparus flaviceps	► 🖪 6
10	Horned Lark Eremophila alpestris) 🖬 1
22	Cave Swallow Petrochelidon fulva	▶ 🖪 6
35	Ruby-crowned Kinglet Corthylio calendula	► 🔳 10
78	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher Polioptila caerulea) 🖬 11
8	Northern House Wren Troglodytes aedon) ∎ 1
12	Carolina Wren Thryothorus Iudovicianus	▶ 🖪 6

6	Bewick's Wren Thryomanes bewickii	Import
2	Cactus Wren Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus	▶ ∎ 2
1238	European Starling Sturnus vulgaris 🛞	15
3	Curve-billed Thrasher Toxostoma curvirostre	Þ 🖪 3
31	Long-billed Thrasher Toxostoma longirostre	▶ 🖪 8
85	Northern Mockingbird Mimus polyglottos	▶ ∎ 24
1	Eastern Bluebird Sialia sialis	• 🚮 1
2	Hermit Thrush Catharus guttatus	Þ 🖪 2
18	Clay-colored Thrush Turdus grayi	▶ 🖪 7
150	House Sparrow Passer domesticus *) 🖪 13
16	American Pipit Anthus rubescens	▶ ∎ 4
3	Sprague's Pipit Anthus spragueii	• 🚮 1
5	Lesser Goldfinch Spinus psaltria	Þ 🖬 2
13	American Goldfinch Spinus tristis	Þ 🖬 2
48	Olive Sparrow Arremonops rufivirgatus	Þ 🖪 9
20	Black-throated Sparrow Amphispiza bilineata	Þ 🖬 2
210	Lark Bunting Calamospiza melanocorys	► 🖪 5
9	Savannah Sparrow Passerculus sandwichensis	Þ 🖪 3
1	Song Sparrow Melospiza melodia	• 🚮 1
11	Lincoln's Sparrow Melospiza lincolnii	Þ 🖪 7

1	Swamp Sparrow Melospiza georgiana	► 📲 1
16	Western Meadowlark Sturnella neglecta	Þ 👖 5
17	Eastern Meadowlark Sturnella magna	▶ ∎ 4
2	Hooded Oriole Icterus cucullatus	▶ ∎ 2
30	Altamira Oriole Icterus gularis	▶ 🖪 8
12	Audubon's Oriole Icterus graduacauda	▶ 🖪 6
169	Red-winged Blackbird Agelaius phoeniceus	▶ ∎ 12
6	Bronzed Cowbird Molothrus aeneus) 📑 🗎
155	Brown-headed Cowbird Molothrus ater	▶ ∎ 2
20	Brewer's Blackbird Euphagus cyanocephalus) 📑 1
75	Boat-tailed Grackle Quiscalus major	
	Boat-tailed Grackle Quiscalus major Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus	▶ 🖪 1 📑 1 ▶ 📑 34
10,571		
10,571	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus	▶ 🖪 34
10,571 1	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla	▶ ∎ 34 ▶ ∎ 1
10,571 1 1	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla Black-and-white Warbler Mniotilta varia	 34 1 1
10,571 1 1 87	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla Black-and-white Warbler Mniotilta varia Orange-crowned Warbler Leiothlypis celata	 34 1 1 14
10,571 1 1 87 2	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla Black-and-white Warbler Mniotilta varia Orange-crowned Warbler Leiothlypis celata Nashville Warbler Leiothlypis ruficapilla	 34 1 1 14 2
10,571 1 1 87 2 31	Great-tailed Grackle Quiscalus mexicanus Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla Black-and-white Warbler Mniotilta varia Orange-crowned Warbler Leiothlypis celata Nashville Warbler Leiothlypis ruficapilla Common Yellowthroat Geothlypis trichas	 34 11 11 14 2 9

1	Grace's Warbler Setophaga graciae	► ∎ 1
1	Hermit Warbler Setophaga occidentalis) 📑 l
2	Black-throated Green Warbler Setophaga virens	▶ ∎ 2
3	Wilson's Warbler Cardellina pusilla	▶ 🖪 3
1	Summer Tanager Piranga rubra) 📑 l
122	Northern Cardinal Cardinalis cardinalis	► 🖪 15
11	Pyrrhuloxia Cardinalis sinuatus	► 1 2
4	Morelet's Seedeater Sporophila morelleti	► 1 2
EXOTIC:	PROVISIONAL	
55	White-fronted Amazon Amazona albifrons 🜸	• 🗐 1
1	Cattle Tyrant Machetornis rixosa 🛞	▶ 🗖 2 📑 1
EXOTIC:	ESCAPEE	
6	Muscovy Duck Cairina moschata 😵	▶ ∎ 2
2	Yellow-headed Amazon Amazona oratrix 😵) 📑 l
HYBRIDS	5	
2	Altamira x Audubon's Oriole (hybrid) Icterus gularis x graduacauda	▶ ∎ 2
ADDITIC	DNAL TAXA	
2	Mexican/Mottled Duck Anas diazi/fulvigula	• 💼 1
6	Anas sp. Anas sp.	▶ ∎ 2
1500	duck sp. Anatidae (duck sp.)) 📑 I
100	Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitcher Limnodromus griseus/scolopaceus	► 1 2

- 1 Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk Accipiter striatus/Astur cooperii
- 1 Western/Eastern Meadowlark Sturnella neglecta/magna

• 🖬 1

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