

Field Guides Tour Report
SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS

Mar 24, 2012 to Apr 1, 2012
Chris Benesh



Though usually considered to have been introduced, Green Parakeets might possibly have arrived in Texas naturally, as their normal range in Mexico takes them to within 150 miles of the US border. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

The 2012 Spring in South Texas trip was another fantastic one. It was on the warm side throughout, but it was also less windy than it can be at times. We started off in the Rockport area with a boat trip to see the endangered Whooping Crane. We ended up seeing about twenty in total. There were some other highlights on the trip, including an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull, Wilson's Plover, nesting American Oystercatchers, breeding herons, and some Boat-tailed Grackles! In the afternoon, we decided to head up to Tivoli to make it a three grackle day. On our way up, we came upon a handsome Rough-legged Hawk, quite a rarity this far south. We also saw some Carolina Chickadees near the southern edge of their range.

We then headed south to the lower Rio Grande Valley. A visit to the San Miguelito Ranch produced a handsome Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, and we enjoyed scope views of a handsome Aplomado Falcon later the same day near Port Isabel. Then it was time to seek out parrots in Brownsville. Fort Brown produced lots of Green Parakeets and later we found a large flock of Red-crowned Parrots in a Brownsville neighborhood. A visit to Sabal Palms was productive, with Green Kingfisher and plenty of Least Grebes being highlights.

Our next stop was McAllen, where we spent a couple of days tracking down valley specialties. One of the first was an attractive female Crimson-collared Grosbeak in Pharr. This species has become almost an annual visitor in recent years. Estero Llano Grande produced a number of new and wonderful things, including our first Clay-colored Thrush and a female Rose-throated Becard. A Ringed Kingfisher was another highlight. Our final morning in the lower valley was spent hawk-watching at Bentsen Rio Grande State Park. We experienced a good flight of Broad-wings, Swainson's, and a trickle of other raptors. But topping the highlights of the morning was a male Hook-billed Kite that was flight-displaying as we looked on!

Then it was time to head upriver to Zapata, our base for the last couple of nights. It was time to fill in holes, and track down the remaining valley specialties. There were many, but none more exciting than the up-close and personal Red-billed Pigeons feeding in a small fruiting tree near Falcon Heights. A run up to Laredo also got us the coveted White-collared Seedeater.

Thanks to all of you for making this trip such a success. It was a treat to go birding with you and I look forward to the next opportunity.

--Chris

For more information about this tour, including future departures, visit our website at **www.fieldguides.com**. And to see this same triplist online, go to **<http://www.fieldguides.com/triplists/stx12LIST.pdf>** and you will find the list in its entirety.

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*)

MUSCOVY DUCK (*Cairina moschata*) – A quick look at one as we arrived in Chapeno.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (MEXICAN) (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*)

MOTTLED DUCK (*Anas fulvigula*)

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

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

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*)

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

PLAIN CHACHALACA (*Oreortyx vetula*)

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Good numbers in the valley this year. We had some wonderful sightings, beginning with those at Sabal Palms.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*)

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*)

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*)

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*)

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

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

HOOK-BILLED KITE (HOOK-BILLED) (*Chondrohierax uncinatus uncinatus*) – We were fortunate to see a male at Bentsen as part of the big hawk flight morning.

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*)

NORTHERN HARRIER (AMERICAN) (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*)

GRAY HAWK (*Buteo nitidus*) – Nice view of this species perched at Anzalduas and one in flight at Bentsen later the same morning.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*)

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo albicaudatus*)

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – One spotted north of Rockport generated some excitement and eventually some wonderful views as it sailed right over the highway. Turns out it had been present all winter. D'oh!

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

APLOMADO FALCON (*Falco femoralis*) – Thanks to Bernie for spotting this handsome falcon for us near Port Isabel.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)



One of a small flock of Red-billed Pigeons that gave us super views in the Rio Grande Valley. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

Gruidae (Cranes)

WHOOPING CRANE (*Grus americana*) – Thanks to the crew of the Skimmer we had great looks at 20 or so Whoopers, some quite close! Still one of the rarest birds on Earth.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – A fair number of migrants seen along the coast.

WILSON'S PLOVER (*Charadrius wilsonia*)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*)

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – A few pink individuals seen at the Brownsville Dump.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – Three different birds seen, including an adult while aboard the Skimmer.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – A second cycle bird at the Brownsville Dump was new for a few folks. A rare bird this far south.

LEAST TERN (*Sternula antillarum*)

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)



A rare and local resident of the Rio Grande Valley, White-collared Seedeater is always a good find here. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

RED-BILLED PIGEON (*Patagioenas flavirostris*) – Terrific views of a few feeding in a fruiting tree at Falcon (Starr) County Park.

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

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*)

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*)

COMMON GROUND-DOVE (*Columbina passerina*)

WHITE-TIPPED DOVE (*Leptotila verreauxi*)

Psittacidae (Parrots)

GREEN PARAKEET (*Aratinga holochlora*) – Hundreds seen in Brownsville near Ft. Brown. What a great sight!

RED-CROWNED PARROT (*Amazona viridigenalis*) – After some searching, we tracked down a flock of 30 that had descended into a Brownsville yard. Also present in the flock was a single Red-ored (Yellow-cheeked) Parrot.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*)

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (MCCALL'S) (*Megascops asio mccallii*) – Thanks to Bill and Cliff for showing us one at Estero Llano Grande SP.

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*)

FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) – Great looks at one at the San Miguelito Ranch!

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON PAURAQUE (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – Nice views of at least four at Estero Llano Grande before the big storm hit.

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*)

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*)

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*)

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

RINGED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle torquata*) – Seeing these large kingfishers flying high overhead is always an impressive sight.

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

GREEN KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle americana*) – Great looks at Sabal Palms and another at Bentsen.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – Thanks to Bentsen park staff, we had good scope views of a nesting pair.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus crinitus*)

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus tyrannulus*)

GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*) – A pair at Ft. Brown.

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*)

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*)

Tityridae (Tityras and Allies)

ROSE-THROATED BECARD (*Pachyramphus aglaiae*) – A lucky find, that most were able to see well before it took off.

It was spotting sitting next to our first Clay-colored Thrush (Robin).

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GREEN JAY (*Cyanocorax yncas*)

CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

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

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Seen right at the southern edge of their range in Tivoli and Goose Island.

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

CACTUS WREN (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) [*]

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – An Eastern type.

Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLACK-TAILED GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila melanura*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*)

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)



Though considered a Mexican endemic, the Crimson-collared Grosbeak is almost an annual vagrant in Texas. Still, we were very fortunate to see this mega-tick, a female, after it had been missing for several weeks! (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) [*]
NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)
LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*)
CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*)

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

HOODED WARBLER (*Setophaga citrina*)

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

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

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

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – We were fortunate to connect with this species in Laredo this year.

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*)

CASSIN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea cassinii*)

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*)

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – Nice look at a singing bird on the Salineno-Chapeno road.

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*)

CRIMSON-COLLARED GROSBEAK (*Rhodothraupis celaeno*) – We were really fortunate to encounter this female bird at Allan William's place in Pharr. We were the first to see it in almost three weeks!

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – Nice looks at some in big blackbird flocks near the Progreso Lakes.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Seeing these in Tivoli near the southern end of their range made for a three grackle day!

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

- BRONZED COWBIRD** (Molothrus aeneus)
- BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (Molothrus ater)
- HOODED ORIOLE** (Icterus cucullatus)
- BULLOCK'S ORIOLE** (Icterus bullockii)
- ALTAMIRA ORIOLE** (Icterus gularis)
- AUDUBON'S ORIOLE** (Icterus graduacauda) [*]
- BALTIMORE ORIOLE** (Icterus galbula)

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

- HOUSE FINCH** (Carpodacus mexicanus)
- LESSER GOLDFINCH** (Spinus psaltria)
- AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (Spinus tristis)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

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

MAMMALS

- EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (Sylvilagus floridanus)
- DESERT COTTONTAIL** (Sylvilagus audubonii)
- FOX SQUIRREL** (Sciurus niger)
- BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (Tursiops truncatus)
- WHITE-TAILED DEER** (Odocoileus virginianus)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 205 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa