



Field Guides Tour Report
Spring in South Texas 2018

Mar 10, 2018 to Mar 18, 2018
Chris Benesh

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Whooping Cranes in flight over their winter home at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by guide Chris Benesh.

The Spring in South Texas 2018 tour was a big success, with some fine weather and a nice assortment of special birds. Highlights were weighted toward one end of the color spectrum with a male Blue Bunting at Quinta Mazatlan and a wonderful Purple Sandpiper at Point Comfort. We also had some wonderful White-collared Seedeaters, a great pair of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, and many, many more.

Thanks to all of you for joining me and making the trip the hit that it was. Good birding to all of you! — 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*)

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – We were fortunate to track down two birds at Estero Llano Grande.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – We had a flock of these fly overhead on the appropriately named Goose Island.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Spatula discors*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Spatula cyanoptera*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*)

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Wild ones are rare in the RGV but we did have a pair fly past us in Salineno.

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*)
BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows).

PLAIN CHACHALACA (*Ortalis vetula*) – Certainly one of the more iconic birds of the Rio Grande Valley and the northernmost member of the Cracidae family.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail).

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – Nice looks at some on the King Ranch.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies).

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – These were all around the King Ranch!

Gaviidae (Loons).

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Surprisingly few seen on this trip. We had one at Estero and another six at Santa Ana.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags).

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhinga (Anhingas).

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*) – Four seen at various locations.

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*) – Some stunning looks at this species near the coast in both dark and white color morphs.

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens*)

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

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Estero Llano Grande was the place for night herons!

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills).

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Four at Estero were the only ones seen.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*) – Some nice views of this colorful species near the coast.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures).

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey).

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – It was a good trip for this species with especially good looks at Estero.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – South Texas may be the best place on Earth to see this species.

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – We had several good looks, but the one seen on our way back to Corpus Christi was amazing!

GRAY HAWK (*Buteo plagiatus*) – Helen spotted the calling bird near the entrance to Bentsen and we had another one near Salineno.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*) – One was seen at the Santa Margarita Ranch.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – Two seen in flight in Kingsville on our way to dinner had eBird reviewers alerted.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Austin spotted the only one of the trip at Santa Ana.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).

SORA (*Porzana carolina*)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes).

SANDHILL CRANE (*Antigone canadensis*) – We had a lingering group fly past us on Goose Island.

WHOOPIING CRANE (*Grus americana*) – Close to forty of these magnificent birds were well seen on our boat trip with Tommy Moore aboard the Skimmer.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets).

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers).

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*)

WILSON'S PLOVER (*Charadrius wilsonia*) – We saw six of these hanging out on the mudflats at the Hwy 48 Shrimp Basin.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – We did pick up one near the Convention Center on South Padre Island.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

PURPLE SANDPIPER (*Calidris maritima*) – We were fortunate to relocate this rarity at Point Comfort.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

SEMPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Noteworthy, two seen along Holly Beach Road had wintered locally. Few of this species winter anywhere in the United States.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – At least six of these present at Holly Beach where they apparently overwintered. This species does not normally winter in the US.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – All of the Willets seen were Westerns. The Easterns were set to arrive any day and breed in the local marshes.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers).

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – We had a single breeding bird at the Brownsville Dump, but it flushed before we could really enjoy it.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

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

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – One adult was briefly seen at the Brownsville Dump before traffic stirred it off.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*) – Our only ones were at the Convention Center mudflats.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

RED-BILLED PIGEON (*Patagioenas flavirostris*) – After dipping on these in Salineno we had a terrific experience with them at the Santa Margarita Ranch where I estimated as many as sixteen!

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*)

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (MCCALL'S) (*Megascops asio mccallii*) – We had a great look at one in a nest box at Estero Llano Grande.

FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) – After a great deal of looking, we eventually connected with a pair of birds on the King Ranch. Such a treat to see this tiny owl.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON PAURAQUE (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – One of the most cryptic of species, we had good looks at a few at Estero.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*)

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*)

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – Seen on the King Ranch and again at Estero.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

RINGED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle torquata*) – It was a good trip for this species with several seen. The most impressive ones were seen from the Santa Margarita bluff.

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

GREEN KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle americana*) – We had a single bird at Lions Shelly Park and another at Estero.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*) – South Texas is THE place to see caracara!

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One went ripping past us on the boat trip.

APLOMADO FALCON (*Falco femoralis*) – It took some searching, but we connected with this species along Hwy 100.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

WHITE-WINGED PARAKEET (*Brotogeris versicolurus*) – This non-countable bird was still hanging with the parakeet flock in McAllen. [I]

RED-CROWNED PARROT (*Amazona viridigenalis*)

YELLOW-HEADED PARROT (*Amazona oratrix*) [II]

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT (*Amazona albifrons*) [II]

GREEN PARAKEET (*Psittacara holochlorus*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANULET (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – Good look at this species on the King Ranch after a fair bit of searching.

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – We saw a single bird hanging out at the Bentsen Headquarters.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – A few of these stunning birds seen.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)

GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – One of the iconic birds of the Rio Grande Valley. We sure had our fill of these terrific birds.

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*)

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – Our first ones were at the King Ranch and wonderfully plentiful by the tours' end.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO (*Vireo flavifrons*) – One was at the Sheepshead migration spot.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GREEN JAY (*Cyanocorax yncas*) – Another one of the great iconic south Texas birds.

CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – One was along the Rio Grande.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS) (*Petrochelidon fulva pallida*) – We saw the birds nesting at the entrance to Bentsen.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits).

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens).

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – A singing bird at the Santa Margarita Ranch was a nice find, being scarce in the area.

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 connected with one in the desert near Chapeno.

Regulidae (Kinglets).

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – One at Lions Shelly Park and another pair on the King Ranch.

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*) – It took forever to connect with this species for some reason, but we ended up seeing at least three up river near Salineno.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers).

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – One was at the Convention Center.

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – No shortage of the state bird of Texas.

Sturnidae (Starlings).

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [II]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits).

SPRAGUE'S PIPIT (*Anthus spragueii*) – We had great looks at one in the pipit field on the King Ranch with Jim.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings).

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – We had three briefly at Lions Shelly.

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia motacilla*) – A few good looks at migrants.

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

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

HOODED WARBLER (*Setophaga citrina*) – A single stunning male was on South Padre Island.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*)

TROPICAL PARULA (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) – We had a female type bird that Javi had found on South Padre Island and a second stunning male singing at Santa Ana!

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

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

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

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*)

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies).

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – We had as many as four birds at Salineno, and another pair in Zapata.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows).

CASSIN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea cassinii*)

SEASIDE SPARROW (*Ammodramus maritimus*) [*]

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) [*]

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – Many great looks at this stunning species.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*)

LARK BUNTING (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – We came across a bunch of these near Falcon Heights.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – One was present at Lion Shelly Park.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies).

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*)

BLUE BUNTING (MIDDLE AMERICA) (*Cyanocompsa parellina beneplacita*) – The rarity of the trip was this male spending time at Quinta Mazatlan.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

HOODED ORIOLE (*Icterus cucullatus*) – Birds in the valley are quite orange in color.

ALTAMIRA ORIOLE (*Icterus gularis*) – Our first were at Bentsen and another pair of birds in Salineno.

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE (*Icterus graduacauda*) – We had a cooperative pair at the King Ranch and then another at the Santa Margarita Ranch.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

BRONZED COWBIRD (*Molothrus aeneus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – We had a couple of these at the King Ranch.

BOAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus major*) – One was seen on our boat trip and then we had about 100 or so in the town of Tivoli.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Seeing many thousands of these on the wires in McAllen is quite a sight!

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – We had four of these at Starr County Park.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*Tursiops truncatus*)

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

WILD BOAR (*Sus scrofa*) [I]

COLLARED PECCARY (*Tayassu tajacu*)

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

NILGAI (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) [I]

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 210 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa