

Texas



USA



16th to 22nd April, 2005



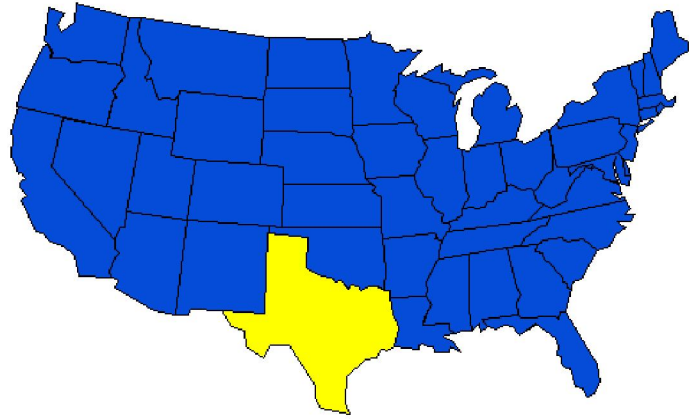
Saturday, 16 th	Lake Corpus Christi Farm Road 70 (FM70) Dick Kleberg park Kaufer-Hubert memorial park Hawk Alley Route 77 to Harlingen	7:00 – 9:00 9:00 – 11:30 13:00 – 15:00 15:30 – 16:30 17:00 – 18:00 18:00 – 19:30
Sunday, 17 th	Laguna Atascosa South Padre Island Convention Centre Sabal Palms Brownsville	7:00 – 12:30 13:30 – 16:15 17:00 - 17:30 18:00 – 19:45
Monday, 18 th	Santa Ana Bentsen	7:00 – 14:30 16:00 – 19:15
Tuesday, 19 th	Salineño Chapeño Falcon dam area	7:30 – 10:00 10:30 – 13:00 14:00 – 16:00
Wednesday, 20 th	Lost Maples Kerr Wildlife Management Area	7:20 – 13:00 14:00 – 15:30
Thursday, 21 st	High Island Bolivar Peninsular Anahuac	7:00 – 11:00 11:00 – 15:00 16:00 – 20:00
Friday, 22 nd	WG Jones State Forest	7:15 – 12:15

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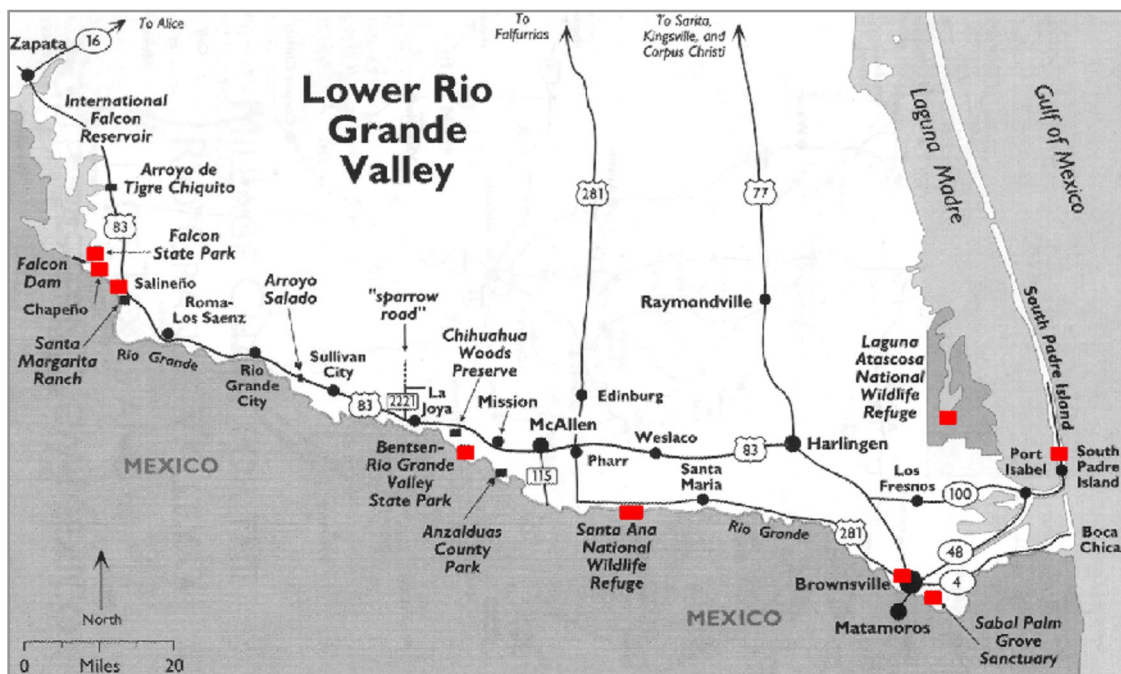
Introduction

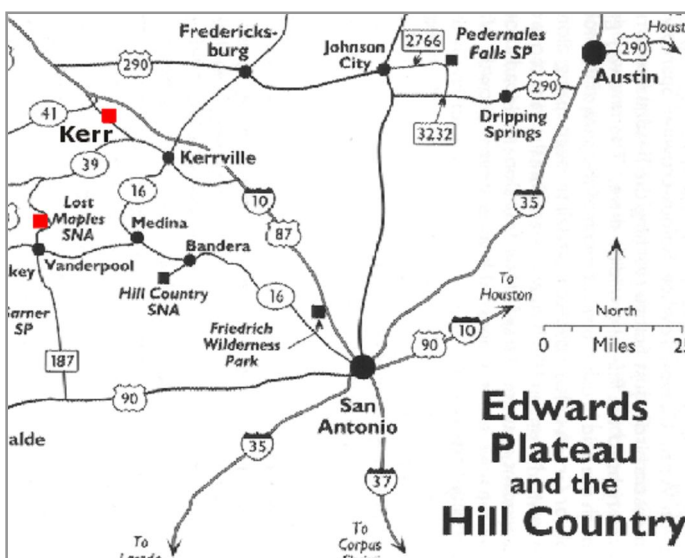
They weren't kidding – Texas is HUGE. It is the largest US state (bar Alaska), which makes covering it very difficult. On the other hand, it has a very rich avifauna, and since our birding in the past has covered Arizona in the West, and the East coast down to Florida, some more specialist birds, notably a Mexican influence in the South-west. So the decision was how to get the best out of a week long trip, since some reports recommend up to 3 weeks – and that's just to do the



coastal area and Rio Grande valley (I'm not sure what the rest of the state is like for variety of birds). There's no doubt that we couldn't even consider the Big Bend extension, so we focused on the Texan Coastal Birding Trail, which extends a short distance up the Rio Grande Valley, before shooting off to the Edward's Plateau a little to the North-east ("little" entailing 4 hours of travel).

Most birding trips do a clockwise loop when covering Texas. This is probably because they follow the directions in the two Lane guides available (see below). Not wanting to upset the apple cart, we did the same thing – it makes life an awful lot easier. The initial itinerary was going to begin with a few hours in Jones State Park, only 20 miles from the airport, on the first afternoon, after landing, stay in a prebooked hotel near to High





Island to cover that the next day, and then trek to the South-west for the rest of the week. Air France and a delayed connecting flight from Newcastle put paid to that idea, since we missed the Houston flight, and were delayed for 24 hours. Undaunted, we walked out from the Paris Campanile hotel which had been provided for us by Air France, and in a three hour sortie found a handful of Green Woodpeckers, singing Blackcaps & Chiffchaffs, and a couple of flyover Ring-necked Parakeets. Once in Texas, we set off straight to the South-west, and returned to High Island on the last full day.

When looking at more details of the planned itinerary, we obviously wanted as much variety as possible. The High Island and Bolivar peninsular area near to Houston offers a good chance of migrants and waders, and has a more eastern feel. Once in the South-west, we looked for a mix of coastal birds and Mexican specialities – Laguna Atascosa and Santa Ana are the pick of the birding areas here. Since we were less bothered with listing than sitting back and enjoying the birding that was on offer, we didn't put much importance on Brownsville, and even the outside possibility of Whooping Cranes (we were there at the end of their likely wintering times and had less time due to the loss of a day) was bypassed. Edward's' Plateau is very good for a new mix of interior birds, including the speciality Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. These are worth the journey alone!

Travel and accommodation

There are direct flights to Houston from the UK, but we chose Air France due to a reasonable cost including take off from our local airport at Newcastle. Houston is undoubtedly the best gateway into the state – other international airports are a slog further North. We had also prebooked the car hire from home (the company used Alamo). This was very easy and painless, apart from the operator at the desk suggesting that they had no 4 doors (as we had booked), but that he could provide a 4 door in the

next size up for a “special price”. When I suggested to him that we didn’t need a larger car (only 2 in the party), but did need a 4 door (for photographing from the same side when using the car as a hide) he astonishingly managed to find us the elusive car as booked.

As mentioned, the distances covered are huge, such as 5 hours from the airport to Corpus Christi area, 4 hours from the Rio Grande valley (Chapeño) to Edward’s Plateau, and 5 hours from Edward’s Plateau to East of Houston. Some good maps show distances between points, which is indispensable. We weren’t sure exactly where we would be from one day to the next, so booked the hotels as we travelled. Rooms were quite cheap, especially when shared between 2 people, and this varied from between \$35 and \$70 depending on where we stayed. In addition, the dollar was at \$1.86 to the £1, so we got even better value. Generally, being cheapskates, we found it useful to look either for Motel 6 or Super 8, or small independent Motels. Some areas are better served than others, and some tips are:

- **High Island** – there are a couple of hotels within the vicinity of the reserve, but it is probably just as easy to stay at Winnie, which is only 20 miles to the North, and has numerous budget chains;
- **Lake Corpus Christi** – 2 small independent motels in the nearby town of Mathis, but they are busy;
- **Harlingen** – as a treat, this was the only 2 night stay in one hotel, since the town is near to South Padre Island, Laguna Atascosa, Brownsville, and Santa Ana. Most of the budget chains are on the South side of town (next to the Business 77 road);
- **Lower Rio Grande Valley** – we stayed the night between Bentsen and Salineno. A larger town such as McAllen was needed for accommodation;
- **Edward’s Plateau** – apart from Neal’s Lodge, Kerrville is the nearest place with a concentration of hotels (conveniently just off the Interstate 10). It is about 50 minutes drive to Lost Maples)

Timing and Weather

There is no ideal time, although the Spring and Autumn migration periods are probably best. In Spring, March can offer a good mix of wintering birds and early migrants, with higher numbers of migrants appearing in mid April to May. We tried to get the balance right by choosing mid-April.

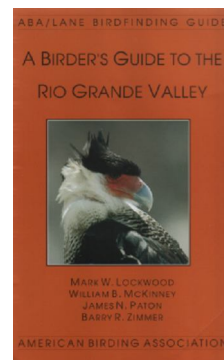
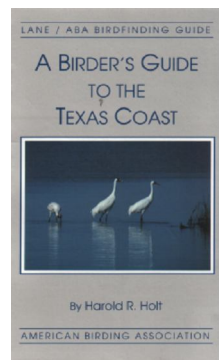
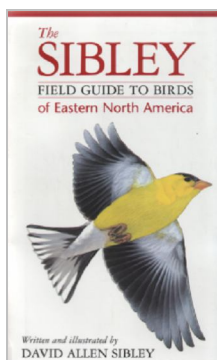
Even at this time of year, the sun can be hot, although there was only one day when we felt uncomfortably so, and this was when we were searching for rattlesnakes in the open at Chapeño. Sun screen is a necessity, but it can be comfortably temperate a lot of the time. We had expected some rain, and did experience a drizzle while at Santa Ana, and again two days later at Edward’s Plateau (this being a higher altitude, it is also a lot cooler than at the coast). Insect repellent is essential – mosquitoes and smaller chigger types of biting insects can be a pest.

References

Probably one of the best all in field guides is “The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America” (David Sibley, published by Knopf), since it is compact enough to carry, inexpensive, but covers all of the birds likely to be seen.

For site maps, directions, and information, the Lane guides are as usual second to

none. Two are needed for the trip itinerary that we covered: “A Birders Guide to the

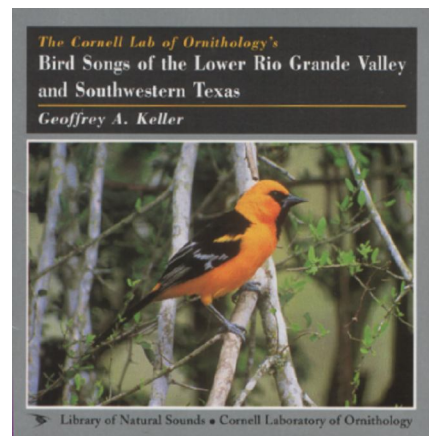
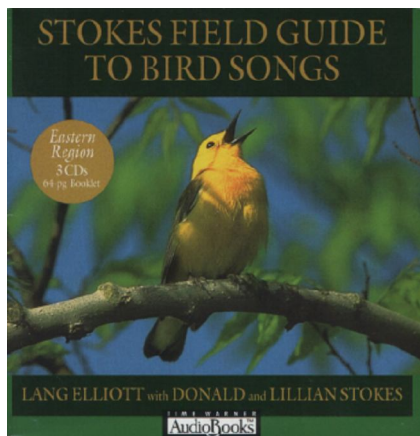


Texas Coast” (Harold Holt) and “A Birders Guide to the Rio Grande Valley” (Mark Lockwood et al), both published by the American Birding Association. The map we used was obtained from the Texas Department of Transportation (www.TravelTex.com) – “Texas Official Travel Map”. It is good for travel over some distances, and the Lane guides then give site direction details.

Another resource which is useful is the CD Bird Song guide. 2 would be needed to cover the area:

“Bird Songs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Southwestern Texas” (Geoffrey Keller, published by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at www.birds.cornell.edu)

“Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs – Eastern Region” (Lang Elliott et al, published by Time Warner Audiobooks)



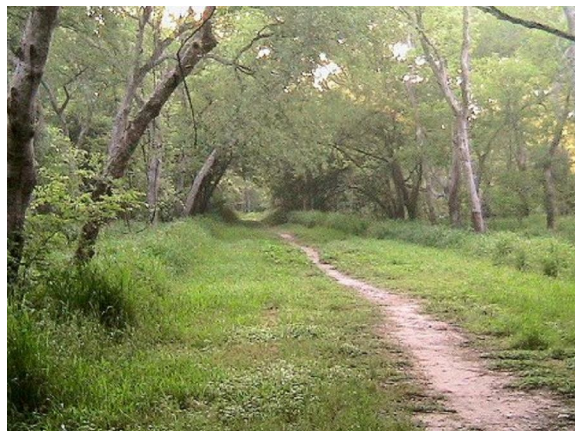
Sites

Lake Corpus Christi

(Day 1)

After landing more or less on time, give or take half an hour, we eventually struggled through the queues for immigration, and drove a leisurely 6 hours to find the last room of the two motels in the small town of Mathis near to Lake Corpus Christi, ideally placed for the first full days birding. The journey should have taken much less time, but we spent almost 3 hours crawling around the outskirts of Houston on a packed Friday afternoon. The choice (!!) of motel was excellent, and as usual after a western bound flight to the States, we were awake and up by 5am (it didn't become properly light until after 7am).

We easily found the 10 minute route to Lake Corpus Christi, parked the car, and took one of the tracks through the dense cottonwoods to the base of the dam. There seemed to be copious numbers of birds calling within this environment, and we did see a few Northern Cardinals on the wires as the sun rose. These proved to be not only the most common bird, but also the most common mimic of other species, with a variety of calls usually turning out to be these. Just after our first critters of the day – 3 to 4 White-tailed Deer crisscrossing the



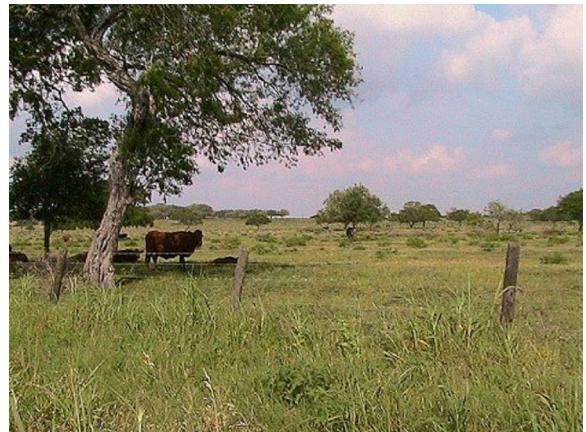
tracks in front of us – we managed to pin down our first tick of the trip, an elusive Black-crested Titmouse amongst the continuing calls of Cardinals.

We eventually arrived at the base of the dam, along with a few fishermen also enjoying their own definition of Saturday morning recreation. The dam couldn't be approached due to an intervening fence, but was festooned with numerous Black Vultures, intermingled with the odd Turkey Vulture, and hundreds of Cliff Swallows, which were not only common over the woodland, but also the concrete of the dam structures. This was the site of the second critter of the day, a Raccoon sniffing around a small pond within the forest. At the base of the dam, in the gushing outfall, were a couple of wading Snowy Egrets and a pair of basking Double-crested Cormorants. We had a good look at these through the telescope, not only to look at the angle of the gular pouch, but also the breeding tufts at the side of the head. As we retreated from this area, we picked up a drumming Ladder-backed Woodpecker, which was found with a female at very close quarters. They were quite happy to sit in front of us, taking turns at the top of the bare tree. We continued our return to the car, with yet more Cardinals, and overhead many small flocks of ibis spp. We also had at least 3 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks over here. Back at the car park, a singing White-eyed Vireo remained elusive, despite its noisy song. An additional Ladder-backed Woodpecker flew over and landed in the trees on the opposite side of the road.



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Farm Road 70



We decided to vary our habitat by ignoring the trails on the opposite side of the dam, and found Farm Road 70 a mile or two down the road, which was bounded by much more open countryside. This was an excellent choice, and led to a greater variety in the morning's birds. Almost as soon as we left the Lake Corpus Christi side road, we came across Red-bellied Woodpecker, Bronzed Cowbird, and Lark Sparrow within half a mile or so, perched on telegraph wires next to the road. After a short distance, we turned South on to FM70, which is 4-5 miles of almost straight tarmac passing through open farmland, being predominantly grassland grazed by cattle in many cases. It was here that we had our first sightings of the hugely impressive Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, some of which could be approached very closely in the car. This was also a prime spot for sparrows, and although Clay-coloured & Dickcissel were hoped for, there was ample recompense in the form of numerous Lark Sparrows, and some small flocks of Savannah Sparrows, the latter of which were presumably passing through. We also started to pick up Crested Caracaras here, with a singleton perched briefly directly above the car, but most

overhead demonstrating their strangely characteristic silhouette. This rolling open grassland was a habitat that we hadn't experienced before, and was very enjoyable.

At the end of this road, we made a short left to look at the enclosed and private Wright ranch, which is reputed to hold a few basking alligators. It is unfortunately next to a very busy road, with heavy traffic passing regularly, and additionally didn't seem to harbour any alligators. However, there was an unexpected colony of Great Egrets, in bold and brilliant breeding plumage, incorporating quite a few Roseate Spoonbills, which also appeared to be resident. Around the edge of the shores were a couple of Green Herons and a sunning Anhinga. This small enclosed lake is also supposed to be a good spot for Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, and we did locate a couple to the rear (this was in addition to more seen flying around the Lake Corpus Christi area earlier). Perhaps they are easier to see than we had previously suspected.

Dick Kleberg park



After finding Kingsville, and more importantly the local branch of Chilli's serving up our first half rack of ribs for the trip, we made our way to Dick Kleberg park. This wasn't the type of park that we had expected, being more of a recreational area in a vast acreage as is the American way – open fields and sports courts. Next to the car park is an extensive playground for the kids, but just beyond this is the elongated lagoon which is bounded on the eastern edge by the aforementioned swings and things, and on the western side by some seemingly inaccessible woodland. We started off by walking towards the bridge at the North end of the lake, which is reputed to hold nesting Cave Swallows. We didn't see any around the structure, but small numbers were over the water – at first a little more distant, but eventually flying ever closer showing diagnostic pale throats. First water birds were small groups of Blue-winged Teal, but we also found a handful of waders. In addition to 3 Black-necked Stilts was a group of peeps - 4 Least & 1 Western Sandpipers.

On the shoreline, a breeding plumaged Spotted Sandpiper seemed to be approaching us, but must have eventually taken the safe option and flew to the small mud bank in the centre of the lagoon. We searched through the trees on the eastern edge of the lake quite extensively. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were very obvious, but most common birds were probably Northern Mockingbirds, and Ladder-backed & Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, with Lark Sparrows regularly appearing. Early on, a Belted Kingfisher flew past and seemed to land near to our position, but must have disappeared below the tree line. We were a little surprised to see terns passing through, at first 3 Gull-billed Terns, followed by 4-5 fishing Least Terns. Additional flycatchers were a pair of Great Kiskadees which were possibly nest building in the park, and Ash-throated Flycatcher. All in all, this was a nice little stop for the birds, but perhaps not quite as aesthetically pleasing as the Farm Road earlier in the day.

Kaufer-Hubert memorial park

This place turned out to be principally an RV hook-up, where the locals pass the time

by parking their huge Recreational Vehicles, and eating monstrous BBQ's while talking loudly. This resulted in the promised bushy tracts being a lot smaller than expected, only turning up single Curve-billed Thrasher as we were leaving, and fleeting glimpses of Green Jay. The strength of this locality lies in the wader watching, and this mainly centres around a couple of lagoons with a central shingle bank between. We spent most of the time watching the smaller lagoon between the road and the sea, since the birds were a lot closer here – a definite benefit in the increasingly stronger onshore wind. Amongst the most common of the waders were unexpected Hudsonian Godwits (almost three figures), as well as numerous Least Sandpipers containing the odd Western Sandpiper and at least half a dozen Baird's Sandpipers. Smaller numbers of other species included full summer Long-billed Dowitcher, 2 American Avocets, and single Wilson's Plover. An American White Pelican which had been swimming on the landward lagoon decided to impress with flight views as it flew past us, almost sharing the same air space as a fishing Royal Tern. As we had approached this area, an Osprey flew over with a large recently caught fish.



Hawk Alley



Next on the itinerary was to be FM285, which has been renamed as Hawk Alley, to look for raptors, but we searched for some of the chicken farms as we left Kaufer-Hubert memorial park, where chicken carcasses are put out and attract various raptors. We did find one of the farms, but their worth at the time we went past seemed to be much exaggerated with no sign of any raptors. Peak time is more likely to be during the morning. However, Hawk Alley lived up to its name and reputation, where we found all, or almost all, of the expected birds of prey. The scenery was again a little different from what we had

expected. It was described as arid, but we found vast ranches of pasture land on one side of the road, which was very open, and reasonably open low woodland on the opposite side. After 3 Red-tailed & 2 Swainson's Hawks, we did eventually stumble across a pair of hunting Harris' Hawks. They kept themselves low over the treeline, but did pop up above the horizon on occasion. Next on the menu was Crested Caracara. The first ones were in the air, before finding one on a telegraph pole, and eventually one feeding on a carcass at the side of the road. It looked quite comical, trying to avoid the heavy lorries passing by, even more so when the carcass turned out to be a discarded bread crust. To complete the set, we found a few White-tailed Hawks further on, all soaring and from a distance, until one landed on a bare tree about 400 metres away on the pasture land.

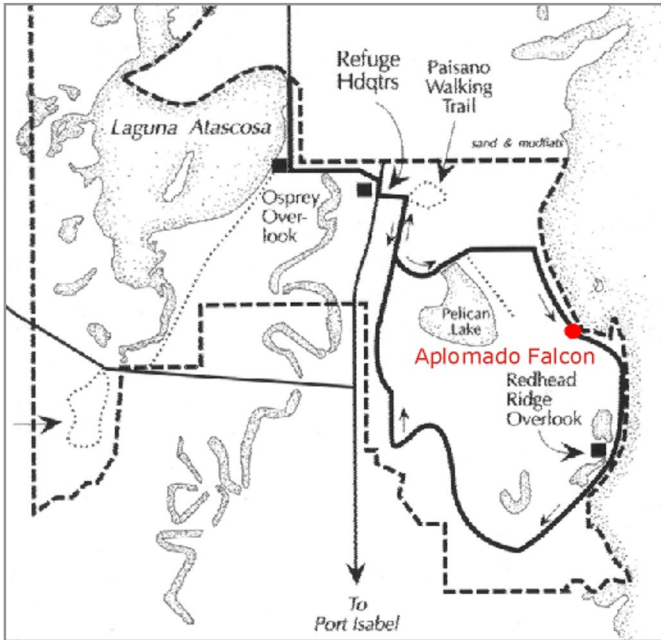
Route 77

Last journey of the day was down Route 77 all the way to the overnight stay at Harlingen. Overall, this proved as good as, if not better than, Hawk Alley. The information was that birds of prey and other specialities can be seen at the oak stands on the journey South. We didn't formally stop at any of these, mainly because we saw plenty as we drove along the highway. We passed at least half a dozen Harris' Hawks - most of these were perched on telegraph wires. In addition, we saw a couple of White-

tailed Hawks, and the last of these was also perched right next to the road. Ringtail Northern Harrier was added to the raptor list as it was hunting on the central reservation. Crested Caracaras were quite common as we neared our destination, with at least 10-12 birds.

Laguna Atascosa

(Day 2)



The morning started well, when, with light still only half decent, we were approaching the reserve on some of the long rough roads when we came across a pair of Harris' Hawks perched on a telegraph pole, followed shortly by an Osprey. This

seemed to be a favoured spot for Red-winged Blackbirds, which had kept their heads down on the trip so far. Once at the end of this drive, we turned left for the 3 mile road to the visitor centre. Even this was good for birds. The wires on the left hand side harboured species such as Harris' Hawk, Couch's Kingbird, Bronzed & Brown-headed Cowbirds, and rifling their way over the road in front of us, Greater Roadrunner and a number of Plain Chachalacas.

At the visitor centre, the latter were even more common, more noisy, and more approachable. We spent a small amount of time in the hide behind the visitor centre, before paying our \$3 entry fee in the envelopes provided, since the centre didn't open until 10am on a Sunday. The hide was excellent for close views of Green Jay, Chachalaca, and White-tipped Dove, all of which were numerous. This was also the case at the larger area with no blind nearer the main building – the smell was also more potent here!



We then drove around Bayside Drive, starting at the Paisano trail. This is a 1½-2 mile walk, which is initially straight, and then ends in a loop. The strange thing about this walk is that it is almost all tarmacked, yet bounded on both sides by thick thorny scrub and bushes. We had hoped for rattlesnake here, but the optimism proved unfounded. Birds weren't particularly common, although the ones that we did see were worthwhile. We reacquainted ourselves with Verdin, eventually being quite close, as we returned to the car, but perhaps best for us were our first Long-billed Thrashers. The first 2 ran quickly across the track some way ahead, but we then found 2 singing birds, one perched in the open. Also along here were more woodpeckers, as well as fairly common Bewick's Wren with at least 4 seen, and many more heard singing.



The Laguna Atascosa reserve area is huge, and this is demonstrated by the 15 mile loop drive completed after trekking the Paisano Trail. This passes through a few different types of habitat, mostly open low cut grassland and scrub, and bounds the Laguna Madre, which is sheltered from the Gulf. As was becoming the norm, there were plenty of Mockingbirds and Cowbirds, but we had hoped to see one or two raptors. After stopping off at the first Laguna Madre overlook, which was quiet apart from a couple of Little Blue Herons, we continued on our way, and found a tatty looking Osprey on the saltmarsh. It posed for some time before we picked up a pair of Shorelarks wading through the nearby tussocks of grass. Another 100 metres on, and a smaller raptor landed in a lone bush next to the road – a beautiful Aplomado Falcon, unfortunately with leg irons, perched directly above us! It seemed fearless, and we studied it for some time from the car. Not too much else was added on the loop, apart from an impressive circling White-tailed Hawk against the greying skies, and a flock of 17 Hudsonian Whimbrels. On leaving the drive to cross to the visitor centre, we had stunning views of a Greater Roadrunner, initially on the roadside verge, and then on the adjacent signpost.

Back at the visitor centre, we looked again at the bathing areas, but were then informed about a Screech Owl nest on the Kiskadee Trail. We had walked this trail earlier, with little luck, but we went back again, found the dead tree as described, which contained what was probably the deserted nest, but no sign of any owls. We did have reasonable views of a pair of Ash-throated Flycatchers. Another snippet of information was the possible location of a regular large snake and alligators. Although we couldn't locate these, we did drive past some pools full of waders on either side of Lakeside Drive, containing some Stilt Sandpipers in non breeding plumage and a group of colourful Long-billed Dowitchers amongst others.

South Padre Island Convention Centre – “The Boardwalk”

After crossing the causeway to South Padre Island, which is a couple of miles of concrete bridge over the Laguna Madre, we travelled the four miles North along Padre Boulevard bounded by endless characterless hotels, shops, etc, until we finally reached what must be the most hideously coloured convention centre in the world, in its garish yellow and blue – it just can't be missed! It also has a surprising amount of quality birding on offer. They have recently constructed a small copse of trees next to the main buildings for migrant warblers. We didn't find any – still no wood warblers on the trip –

but we did locate a lone female (Ruby-throated) Hummingbird. However, the strength of this place lies in the marsh, which the boardwalk trisects.



The boardwalk itself consists of one long stretch to a shaded area just in the sea, which is bounded on either side by slightly drier marsh, and a more interesting angular section which crossed a wetter reed section, and again ends in cover. Perhaps we were a little too late in the season for the variety of potential rails, but we did pick up at least 4 Soras, all very close. This proximity was the same for all other birds seen here. Perhaps the most stimulating of all were 2 male and 2 female Least Bitterns, one of the former didn't look at all well, with what looked like a broken lower mandible, and strained attempts at feeding. Purple Gallinule also appeared, and one or 2 waders dropped in, including a Pectoral Sandpiper and 2 Lesser Yellowlegs. A second Pec was on the long boardwalk in the saline part of the marsh, along with a small group of Least Sandpipers. Passing here was a least 1 Black Skimmer and a flock of Brown Pelicans. A lone singing male Marsh Wren was only feet away from us, and quite loud, but only stepped into the limelight occasionally. The first warblers of the trip were seen – 4 male Common Yellowthroats – but perhaps the best bird in terms of rarity was the last to be seen. A vireo from the main boardwalk showed very pale and indistinctly marked head, bright green back, and yellow flanks – a Yellow-green Vireo. They do occur here, but only scarcely, not usually venturing across the Rio Grande from Mexico.

Brownesville

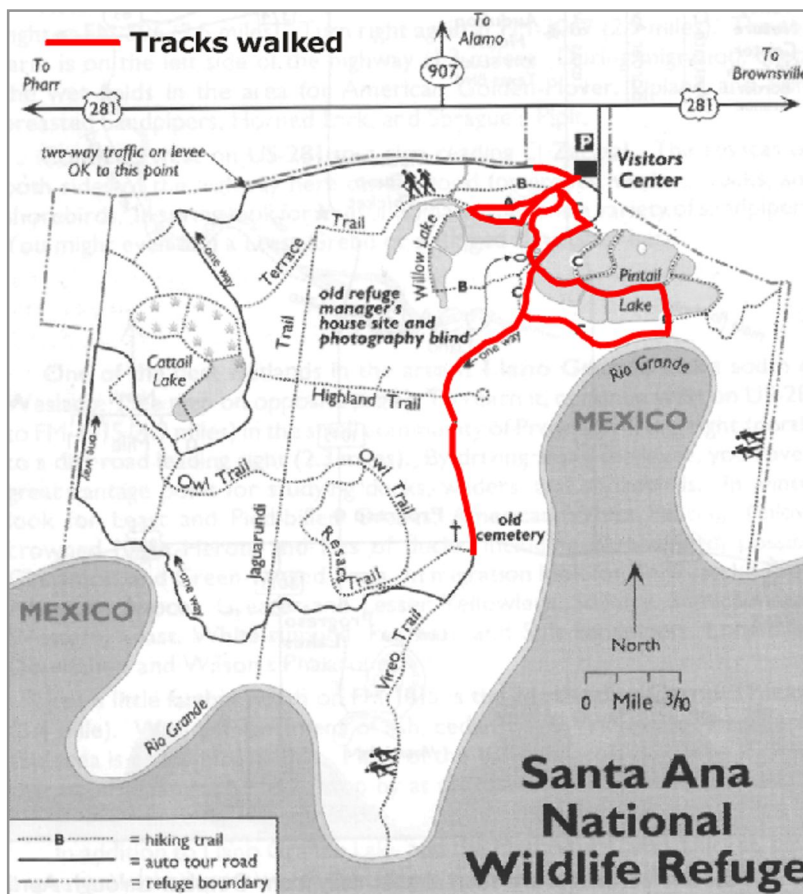
Last stop of the day was supposed to be Sabal Palm Grove, but by the time we arrived, the whole place was shut. Almost death was threatened to anybody venturing past the gates beyond the magic time. We did spend a short time around the sunflower fields, and found a male Blue Grosbeak and a flock of 6 Common Nighthawks looking to be passing over on migration. Before leaving, Couch's Kingbird was perched above on telegraph wires, chased off by a Golden-fronted Woodpecker, both then to be replaced by a pair of Hooded Orioles.



We decided against searching for ticks such as Tamaulipas Crow and Parrots, so headed instead for an area next to the State Farm office in Brownsville. This was supposed to hold both Tropical & Couch's Kingbird, as well as the potential of various waterbirds. We found the place in no time, and the manicured lagoon, with suburban residentia one side, and a golf course on the other. We did see a group of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at close quarters, as well as a pair of Neotropic Cormorants perched on one of the dead trees. The lake didn't hold much else of interest, but we were enthused by a flock of parakeets overhead, and decided to track down their destination anyway. We found the road junction where they were supposed to appear on an evening to roost, which apparently is mainly in the winter, and were happily told by some of the residents that indeed some "beautiful parrots" had been and gone half an hour ago. We started to search the vicinity, and heard some calling overhead, before turning round to see a Red-fronted Parrot on the wires. The Mexican residents had boarded their huge RV to drive the 20 metres to find us and show us the parrots, but we were already on the way back to their houses to find about 10 Green Parakeets and a single Red-fronted Parrot feeding in the fruit tree alongside the road. While we watched, the parakeets left, to be replaced by more Red-fronted Parrots a few minutes later. Both species in this part of the country are of dubious origin, despite them nesting in Mexico. At first this seemed to be more than tentative, and their credentials seemed fine, but doubts did creep in when one of the parrots was found to have a creamy white patch over the top of the bill.

Santa Ana

(Day 3)



As we arrived at the Santa Ana refuge, this was the first time that any rain had been falling, so as soon as we got out of the car, it was on with the macs and the mosquito repellent. The refuge office didn't open until 8am, and we arrived just after 7, so we did the ¾ hour walk around the short loop A trail, which included an overlook on to Willow Pond. We had hoped for potential Green Kingfisher here, but the lagoon is well vegetated, and the views from the 2 hides quite limited, so all we ended up with were a few Least Grebes and some Moorhen and Coot. The rain started to ease up as we proceeded, which had been quiet, and very enclosed, being surrounded by thick woodland. As we

approached the half way mark, some high pitched chipping calls which were difficult to pinpoint at first turned out to be a pair of Olive Sparrows. They were keeping to the undergrowth at first, but did make their way on to the path in front of us. As we continued, bird calls increased (when they could be heard over Chachalacas), and towards the end of the trail, one was pinned down as Long-billed Thrasher directly above us.



By 8am we had paid our \$8 fee, and the park assistant gave us some tips on where to look for some target species. As we exited the office, the single hummingbird feeder had a brief visit from Buff-bellied Hummingbird. After leaving here and crossing the imminent bridge, we turned to the right and followed the levy, which bordered a concreted stream. This had apparently been very good through the week for cuckoos, orioles and raptors. We walked a couple of hundred meters to an opening in the trees, which we had been told would be the best spot. We didn't catch up with any of the species mentioned, but did see at least 3 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, a couple of pairs of Couch's Kingbirds, and a single Eastern Kingbird.

We then decided to walk the road loop for a short distance along to C trail. Apparently, the only days that cars are allowed to drive the loop are Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but this might also result in many birds being missed. After a short distance, we came to the intersection of B and C trails, with a small pool nearby, which yielded Clay-coloured Robin. This is apparently one of the more difficult species to see in the States. Just after this, at the actual intersection of the paths, was a small patch of more open woodland, and this proved an excellent spot for bird parties. We first picked up singing Tropical Parula, which is what stopped us from our wandering, but did put us on to a party of Black-throated Green & Nashville Warblers, along with singles of Painted & Indigo Buntings before the Parula was located. Continuing on, we made a mistake by ignoring the short cut off on to C trail, and walking further along the loop drive, which would have been an eventual 7 mile walk around the reserve. We thankfully realised this after about a mile, and returned to C trail. This part of the trail was again well wooded, but we were rewarded almost immediately with Swainson's Thrush. We were by now specifically looking for tracks to the right to see the Rio Grande river, which we did find, but the view was quite limited, and the hoped for Green Kingfishers would have needed some luck to be seen. Apparently river trips along here almost guarantee sightings! We



eventually came across the larger lagoons, which were open and all full of water. Birds were only in small numbers – Blue-winged Teals, Black-necked Stilts, Lesser Yellowlegs, and single White Ibis. This was almost the end of the C trail, although the intersection with B trail again proved to be reasonable for warblers – not quite as many this time, but some superb male Nashville Warblers as well as Tennessee, and perhaps the most obliging Black-crested Titmouse yet. This was also one of the best places to see the already common Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, with at last 4 birds displaying constantly.

Back at the visitor centre, we decided to take a break and watch the hummingbird feeder. Buff-bellied Hummingbird alighted within 5 minutes, and obligingly perched to the

rear for a short time. While watching this, a male Kentucky Warbler was found more or less at our feet, slowly walking and feeding in the undergrowth. Our luck was in – this was one of the only warblers we had missed out on 10 years ago at Point Pelee in Canada, and one of the first we had seen here. It remained skulking around the same patch for 5-10 minutes, and when we tried for closer views, we picked up a couple of Hooded Warblers also feeding on the ground around the hummingbird feeder.

Bentsen



When we arrived at the gates at Bentsen, we found that all had changed with the park. What was once a popular RV site for sporting Americans was now closed to all traffic, with a metal gate across the park entrance. However, we were fortunate that one of the park staff pulled up next to us, and pointed out a new visitor centre on the other side of the levy, and explained that the park was now closed to all recreation apart from watching wildlife, with vehicles banned to protect the natural environment. So we paid the \$5 each entrance fee, and caught the last tram to the centre of the park. It's likely that this tram normally ferries lazy birders around the whole of the track, since he went very slowly, stopping at times until we let him know that we wanted to go straight to the lagoon area.

We alighted at Green Jay blind, which was next to what had been the epicentre of the RV hookup area. After going briefly into the blind, where there was very little action, we wandered amongst the now spring cleaned parking lots. Amongst many grackles and White-winged Doves were our first Inca Doves of the trip. Then after one or two Green Jays, we found a pair of Altimira Orioles, which were feeding in the trees above, and seemed not at all bothered by our presence. After gorging on these for 15 minutes, we approached the Kingfisher Overlook which is next to a large curved lake ("Resaca"). This housed at least a dozen Least Grebes, and 4-5 Pied-billed Grebes, one of which had a juvenile in tow. While watching these, a Green Kingfisher appeared about 30 metres away, and just before diving to catch a fish, flew a little way further up. We chanced our arm, and relocated the bird almost straight away, finding the bird just beyond our position behind the shoreline trees.

On the way back to the overlook, we found a feeding Long-billed Thrasher, which was particularly keen to dig around in one small dirt patch under the trees. Spurred on by the earlier views of Green Kingfisher, we returned again to Kingfisher Overlook, and reward was at hand with not one, but two Kingfishers, one flying directly past and in front of us, while the second had returned to the former perch. A pair of Pied-billed Grebes also put on a bit of a display directly in front of us, in the shallow water below the concrete wall. One could even be made out chasing fish underwater, some of which subsequently tried evading capture by skimming out of the water. We decided to walk slowly back to the car, and thought that the day's birding had finished, when a pair of Clay-coloured Robins flew into the tree above us, and started to pluck away at the berries. On the way back to the car, we did see a few raptors, with only Swainson's Hawk identified, but the most prolific beasts were mosquitoes, which would have been more of a burden but for the invaluable "Off" spray.

Salineño*(Day 4)*

There were already 3 American birders on the banks of the Rio Grande by the time we parked the car. We had an interesting chat with them, since they were part of a South Texas bird race lasting the whole week (one of 3 teams which would travel almost 2000 miles chasing after up to 350 species). The winners get to choose a charity for the money pot, and the team we met have raised around \$70000 in past years. The mornings birding began on a small muddy promontory into the river, with good views upstream. We had singing Altamira Oriole in front of us as we stepped over the water to the promontory, in

a small copse adjacent to the river. The same copse had a very approachable Ladder-backed Woodpecker excavating a hole on a small dead tree. A pair of Least Grebes swam around along the nearby shore, possibly nesting in the limited floating vegetation. Upriver, we had at least two sightings of Ringed Kingfisher, but one of the least expected was a pair of wild Muscovy Ducks over, with a third landing on the river 5 minutes later. Shortly after, we also had Red-billed Pigeon over, which the Americans got very excited about, and 3 perched on the opposite bank shortly after. They had told us of singing Audubon's Oriole about 500m downriver – we tried for the bird ourselves but drew a blank. Small recompense was good views of a close Red-billed Pigeon.

Chapeño

This is an odd little place, lying only a couple of miles North of Salineño, and at the end of the mile or two of track from the main highway, after picking up Scaled Quail, we came to a few buildings at the terminus. There was already a group of American birders present, and we picked up a couple of Brown Jays around the feeding area as we left the car. There is an entrance fee of \$3 per person, which is payable at the prefabricated office. We parked our bodies in a position to see the feeding area, and 2-3 Brown Jays came back regularly. Also from here were 1-2 stunning Hooded Orioles, and plenty of Great Kiskadees. We had been told that the short walk down to



the river could be productive for Audubon's Oriole. After descending the path to the feeding area, we came across a small cultivated patch of land with picnic tables and sawn off logs where fruit is put out for the birds. This was good for Cowbirds, Black-crested Titmouse, Green Jays, Cardinals, Red-winged Blackbirds, and a rather inquisitive Mexican Squirrel. No sign of Audubon's Orioles, but we did pick up a Ringed Kingfisher perched on the opposite bank of the river about 100m away.

Falcon

On the way to Falcon State Park, we stopped off at the intersection with the 2098, looking for sparrows (in particular Cassin's). We quickly found a Cactus Wren building a nest. Sparrows were present, but almost exclusively Lark Sparrow. One likely looking suspect, which was shorter tailed and more compact than the Lark Sparrows may have been Cassin's, but it didn't call and wasn't seen well enough for diagnosis. On the other side of the road, we found another sparrow, which proved to be Clay-coloured. Hooded Orioles occasionally flew over the road here.



We arrived at the State Park, and paid the \$3 entrance fee. As we drove towards the camping area, reputed to be the best place for birds, we passed some “watch for snakes” signs, which heightened the sense of anticipation, since we were also hopeful of finding rattlesnakes during our trip. The campsite was reasonably small, and for this time of the day, despite the heat, did have one or two birds including approachable Curve-billed Thrashers, Song Sparrow, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Bewick’s Wren. We opted for a walk through the brushy area on a well made path, mainly to look for snakes. Temperature by now was high, with the habitat dry and arid. Predictably, no snakes were found, and the birdlife was quiet, although we did find a very close Greater Roadrunner in the undergrowth at the start of the trek. Back at the car, which we had parked under a tree for shade, was a Curve-billed Thrasher, which had a nest directly above our parking slot.

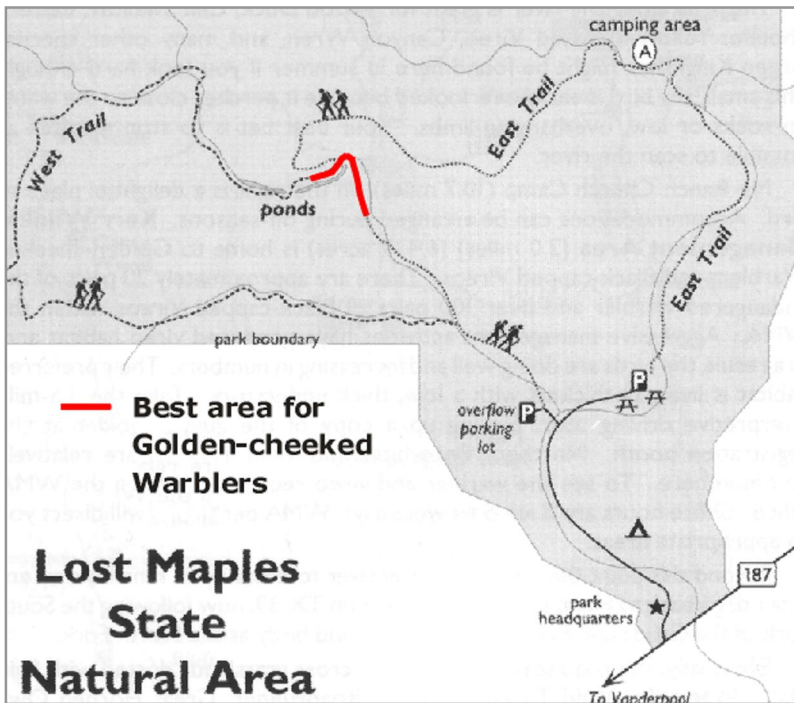
From Falcon State Park, we were going to head to the track below Falcon Dam, and the spillway, but found a locked gate barring our path, and a pair of nervous immigration officers watching our moves. We had a word with them, to be informed that the route was no longer open to the public. He did say we could have gone over the dam to look down, and then come back through immigration, but felt this would not be worth the effort. However, on the way to the locked gate, we saw a male American Kestrel on the telegraph wires next to the track. Since we were going to set off early for the long journey to Edward’s Plateau, we spent the last 50 minutes or so back at the junction with the 2098, looking for sparrows again. It seemed even hotter than before, which may have explained the poorer bird activity, but we did add Song Sparrow to the birds of this small section. There wasn’t even any sign of life back at the Cactus Wren nest.

Lost Maples

(Day 5)



After a night in Kerrville, we made the 50 miles trip through surprisingly hilly roads, with the drizzly rain falling, to Lost Maples State Park. We bypassed the office, which was



closed at this time, and found the car park a little further along. Once out of the car, we were surrounded by tree clad hills, with a stream running through the centre. This immediately proved to be a good spot for sparrows. 3 small birds which flew into a tree proved to be Clay-coloured Sparrows, only occasionally showing the distinctive grey neck collar, a single Lincoln's Sparrow was in a separate bush moments later, and Chipping Sparrow in front of us. A small passerine singing on the wires in the early light threw us initially, but was a poorly marked Indigo Bunting. A

more brash looking Blue Grosbeak 50m away put it to shame. First job of the morning was to look for Golden-cheeked Warblers, one of the specialities of the Edward's Plateau. This is supposedly a prime spot to find them, so we took the East Trail towards the ponds. We had studied their call, so listened carefully, but it took almost half of the walk to pick up the first bird. It also took around half an hour to obtain 3 half decent views of it. About another 100m along, we were looking up at Gnatcatchers, when another Golden-cheeked Warbler appeared. Although at the top of the canopy, it provided a better look at the species, especially when it started to sing. A little further down, just short of the ponds, we were almost thrown by a singing Louisiana Waterthrush, about 40 feet up at the apex of a dead tree. We hadn't expected them to sing so high up, but it did give good views, including distinctive features from Northern Waterthrush.

We eventually reached the pond, which was a good birding spot, kicked off by a Green Kingfisher almost as soon as we looked down on to the pond itself. The less dense spacing of the trees here was better for flycatchers and other small passerines. Only 1 of the flycatchers was seen well enough for identification – an Eastern Phoebe. This was the site for another Golden-cheeked Warbler, right above our heads in much smaller trees. We were even treated with an even better look at a group of up to 3 Carolina Wrens. White-eyed & Red-eyed Vireos sang well here. We headed a little way beyond the pond, and before turning back, found the 4th Golden-cheeked Warbler of the morning, and Yellow-throated Vireo. Within the pond itself, in the water vegetation near to the shore, was an impassive Diamond-backed Water-Snake. Just as we left the pond, we found another group of Clay-coloured Sparrows, which were proving to be quite common, and added to an earlier Grasshopper Sparrow along the trail. About half way back, we passed under a rocky cut in the trail, which had loudly singing Canyon Wren, which flew across the trail. This led to the first Eastern Wood-pewees of the day, along with more Orange-crowned & Nashville Warblers. Finally, at the end of this trail were 2 male Summer Tanagers. These were almost overlooked – after so many cardinals, a flash of red was becoming commonplace.

After returning to the car, we had to go back to the centre to pay the entrance fee, since they don't seem to open until 10am. As we pulled up, there was a lot of bird activity in front of the main building, due to the presence of hummingbird and seed feeders. This small area was a hive of activity for many species, particularly impressive being a few Black-chinned Hummingbirds with occasional Ruby-throat amongst them, not only feeding, but having the odd mid air squabble as well. On the seed feeders were House Finches and Chipping Sparrow, along with the occasional Clay-coloured Sparrow,

but patience was rewarded with male Indigo & Painted Buntings. An Eastern Phoebe nearby had a nest under the eaves of the visitor centre. A nice end to an excellent park.

Kerr Wildlife Management Area

Lost Maples does have a few pairs of Black-capped Vireos, but a much better site is Kerr Wildlife Management Area, which is just under an hour away. It is purported to have had up to 100 pairs on the reserve. We were disappointed on arrival to find a turkey shoot in progress, which means absolutely no birding within their vicinity (possibly to avoid us strangling them), but we were quickly told by a fellow manning the shooting stand that we only had to drive a mile or so further down on to Schumacher Road, and then $\frac{3}{4}$ miles up this track to the old windmill for one of the best locations for the vireos. The drizzle had begun again, so we weren't too optimistic, but we parked next to the windmill, and within 5 minutes had pinpointed a singing male, generally deep within its bush of choice. Having had half reasonable views of this stunning bird, we walked a little way back down the track and eventually located another 4 birds (3 singing, 1 with a second bird). Apart from our target bird, there was very little activity, apart from Summer Tanager, Cerulean Warbler, Bewick's Wren, and small numbers of Black-crested Titmice. Satiated with both of the Edward's Plateau specialities, we set off for a celebratory rack of ribs and glass of beer, before the long journey to the other side of Houston for High Island the next morning.



High Island

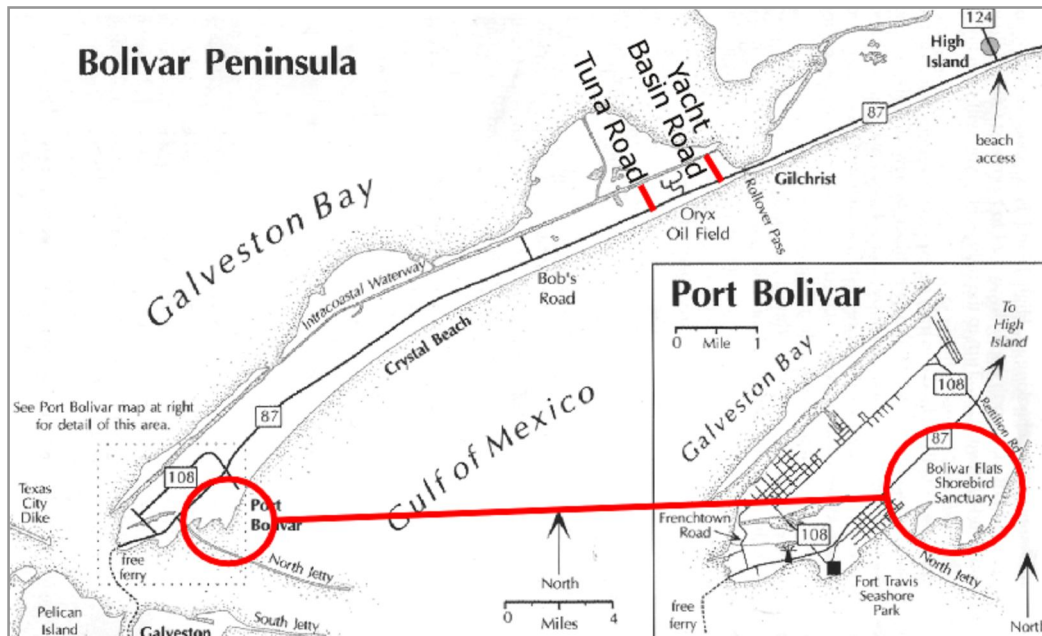
(Day 6)



On the journey down from Lost Maples the previous evening, we had fingers crossed for poor weather, but it had looked almost dry and windless through the night. In addition, as we approached High Island, there was a mist, but only restricted to the ground, which probably indicated very calm conditions overnight. Perhaps a good blow from the North with rain to bring down some migrants was too much to hope for. We spent a few hours in Boy Scouts Woods, bypassing the first seated area overlooking Perkey's Pond, and stumbled straight away on Wood Thrush and Brown Thrasher. Exploring the woods further, we found a good vantage point over somebody's garden, which contained a large berry tree attracting a number of commoner species: a pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks; a handful of Cedar Waxwings; Blue Jay; and Grey Catbirds. The darker and more enclosed parts of the reserve were quiet, until we came across an opening overlooking Prothonotary Pond, where a Green Heron was perched for a short time. The first of a handful of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds was also here, presumably

passing through on migration. Further walking and we crossed the boardwalk to the decking in the centre of the pond, and stayed there for a little while. Purple Gallinule and Moorhen were on the pond, with plenty of singing Red-winged Blackbirds throughout, and a Downy Woodpecker over. Back to the woods, still quiet, and we entered the photography hide. This was well set up, with a couple of dripping taps in front of small openings in the linen walls. We watched for a while and picked up a couple of Grey Catbirds and male Hooded Warbler. A short walk around the woods again before returning to Perkey's Pond found a male Common Yellowthroat, and female Orchard Oriole over the pond. These were also obvious in front of the entrance, on small bushes dotting the gardens, and a male Common Grackle proved to be the only one of the trip.

Bolivar Peninsular



We left High Island and joined the coastal road which ran South along the Bolivar Peninsular, where the importance of the reserve could be seen by looking back at the tree oasis on an otherwise flat and uninviting landscape for tired migrants. We drove to Rollover Pass to briefly look for seabirds, and then on to Yacht Basin Road. This track is supposedly good for sparrows, particularly in Winter, and we were looking specifically for Seaside Sparrow. We missed out on these here, only seeing Savannah Sparrows. The road did turn out to be a Mecca for Clapper Rails. In the ditches either side of the road, and the adjoining marsh, we saw at least 4 birds, which even crossed the road in front of the car, and many more calling nearby from the vegetation. Just before the houses at the end, we turned right on to the short dirt track to follow some Savannah Sparrows more

closely, and added Eastern Meadowlark and Indigo Bunting. The houses themselves harboured a small pond, with upright posts in the centre – a perched Belted Kingfisher was on one of these.

We had more luck with Seaside Sparrows 3 miles further down the peninsular on Tuna Road. We had been looking for the Oryx oilfield, and found Tuna Road instead. The first birds we came across were Hudsonian Whimbrel and 3 breeding plumaged Short-billed Dowitchers next to the road. We went all the (short) way to the end, where we met the intercoastal canal, and on turning came across another Clapper Rail. Almost at the end of the road again, and we at last chanced upon a couple of singing Seaside Sparrows, about 50m into the marsh.

Bolivar Flats

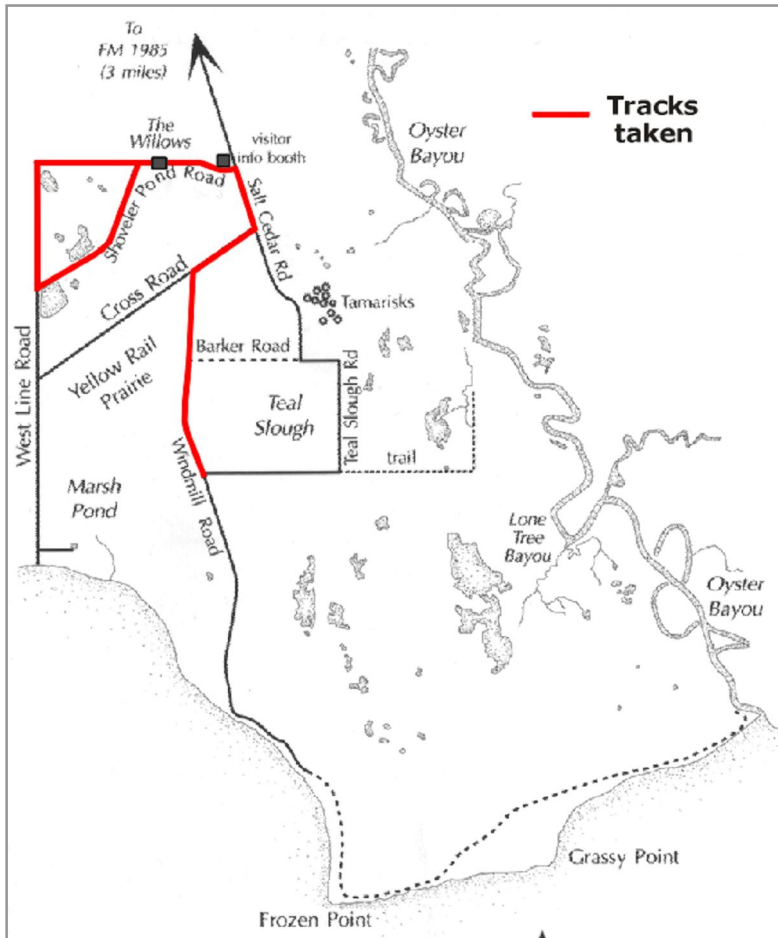
Next on the agenda was some wader and gull watching, and this spot is reputedly the best in the state for this activity. We made our way almost to the end of the peninsular, turning left to find the road to the beach. Once there, we crossed the hard sand to the car park area. Although cars can only go so far up to the Audubon fence, the rest of the beach can be walked. It's a fairly long expanse of sand, bounded at the back by low coastal scrub and saltmarsh. Winter is likely to be the best time to visit, with large flocks of waders reported, but we did see a small variety including Sanderling, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Least Sandpiper, and Wilson's Plover. The main interest thus lay in the gulls, and one or two herons. Within the former, were mainly Laughing Gulls, the odd American Herring Gull, and numerous terns consisting of Caspian, Sandwich, Forster's, & Least Terns. The latter had a small nesting colony to the rear of the beach, which was sensibly fenced off. There were only a handful of herons, with singles of Reddish Egret, Great Egret, and Great Blue Heron. The heron put on a display of how to swallow an outsized fish, when it caught one that seemed far too large, and also stuck to its lower mandible. After a little thought and a wade into the shallow edges, it made short work of its monster catch.



Anahuac



After scoffing a delicious brisket burrito, we had about 4 hours of light left. The plan was to visit Anahuac for an hour or two, and then complete the day at High Island to hopefully look for warblers that might have dropped in later that day. This plan was scotched when we arrived at Anahuac, because the potential of the place looked huge when we looked at the notice board, and also the Willows within the reserve had been



very poor this year for warblers due to the settled weather, and this may have been mirrored at High Island. Over the next 4 hours, before leaving at dark, this was undoubtedly the best decision. We took some time to drive the 2½ miles around Shoveler Pond. This had some small areas of open water, but is mainly reeded with an overgrowth of lilies on the rest of the water. There is an almost continuous gap of about 5m around the edge of the pond (covered with lilies), and this is where the potential for bitterns and rails lay. We had been told that a pair of King Rails were breeding around here, but without an exact location, possibly to reduce general local disturbance, so we scoured more or less every inch along the way. We were rewarded with very close views of male and female

Least Bittern on the initial part of the drive, as well as numerous Eastern Kingbirds, and of course the ubiquitous Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds. There was also a constant singing from Marsh Wrens, although very few gave anything more than short glimpses. Meanwhile, overhead, we saw 2's and 3's of Fulvous Whistling-Duck quite regularly. Half way around, there was a short boardwalk into the marsh, where we had an almost fully visible Marsh Wren, and American Bittern briefly over the reeds.

Back on the track and on the last straight stretch, we picked up a very close and almost immobile American Bittern. A little further, and only about 100m from the end of the loop, we saw a small black chick making its way over the lilies, and consequently one of the parent King Rails. On and off, this gave stunning views over about 15 minutes.

Time was pushing on, and we decided on 7 mile long Windmill Road. This drive started off with the first of numerous Orchard Orioles and a singing Common Yellowthroat. There were also plenty of Savannah Sparrows throughout, and at the end of the drive (we only completed about half) we came across the first of 3 hawking Lesser Nighthawks. Turning the car round, we quickly located singing Sedge Wrens, which with patience approached the parked car. Behind these, one of the Nighthawks had landed on a fence post, backed by the song of Eastern Meadowlark. Almost back to the visitor centre, and a Raccoon was tentatively feeding in the roadside ditch. Female Northern Harrier quartered the marshes to our left. As the light faded, we could make out Greater Yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper on a small pond just opposite the main building. Just as we about to exit this superb reserve, a Barn Owl was spotted flapping in the wind on a tree.

WG Jones State Forest

(Day 7)

Red-cockaded Woodpeckers are (or were until the subsequent news of Ivory-billed Woodpecker returning from the dead) the most endangered woodpecker in the USA. This forest is one of the better locations to see them, since it contains numerous active clusters in a small area. We had 5 hours on the last morning before returning to the airport, so decided to give them a try. When we arrived, we headed straight for People's



Road, where we had been told of an active cluster. We gave this about an hour without any luck, apart from a single Downy Woodpecker next to the private ranch, along with female Indigo Bunting and Carolina Chickadee. We decided to find a member of the park staff for more information, which was at first closed, but returned after a hapless search down the privately owned Jones Road where we found one of the staff. It transpired that one of the best clusters was directly behind the office on the loop trail, and also the discouraging news that they were usually most active late in the

day. Perhaps the one day delay of the trip due to our missed connection in Paris, where we had planned a late afternoon visit had we been on time, might now be proving costly. However, we started well around the office, with family parties of Eastern Bluebird, and Brown-headed Nuthatch above, with quite a number of Pine Warblers singing.

We then started on the loop, just after seeing Red-headed Woodpecker from the office clearing, which was replaced by a pair of American Kestrels (the female with a lizard). We walked some way along the loop, and added more Red-headed Woodpeckers and a singing Yellow-breasted Chat, but time was pressing on, so we started on the return leg. After a short way, our path was crossed by a stunning Coral Snake. We watched it from only about 15 feet, until it disappeared into the leaf litter. We decided that this would more than make up for our lack of rattlesnake, and even Red-cockaded Woodpeckers if they continued to be elusive. Barely 5 minutes later, in a pool to the left of the track, we found another snake, this one much larger and almost totally dark, which the park staff named as Water Mocassin. Almost back at the office, we tried a slightly different track, where we found yet another pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers excavating a hole in a dead tree above, but this was only a prelude to finding our main quarry – a Red-cockaded Woodpecker using an active nest. We had seen the hole, but were told that these trees were marked with a green band, which this one lacked. The bird then obliged by flying around us, regularly landing on nearby trees. Unbelievably, we found a second bird minutes later. This was to be the last species seen on the trip. Not a bad ending!



SPECIES SEEN

Least Grebe

Tachybaptus dominicus

This species only reaches the States in southwestern Texas, and wasn't quite as difficult to find as we had expected. We saw them at 3 sites – Santa Ana, Bentsen and Salineño, in different habitats. They were quite numerous at Bentsen, with 11 birds on the Resaca (oxbow lake) from Kingfisher overlook. They were in the company of some Pied-billed Grebes, where the much smaller size could be seen. At Salineño, a pair of birds were claiming territory on the fast flowing Rio Grande river, not too many feet away from our shoreline lookout position. Willow Pond at Santa Ana held a pair of birds when we first arrived

Pied-billed Grebe

Podilymbus podiceps

These were seen at 2 sites, both on standing water. A group of 3 was on the lake at Dick Kleberg park. At Bentsen, 5 birds were on the Resaca from Kingfisher overlook. One pair had a very small chick in tow, while another had a territory directly below the observation point, and could often be seen swimming underwater chasing fish



American White Pelican

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos

Two separate birds were at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park, one on the salt lagoon on the land side of the road, and the other flying past us towards the sea. Only other sighting was of a line of 6 birds flying along the Bolivar peninsular

Brown Pelican

Pelecanus occidentalis

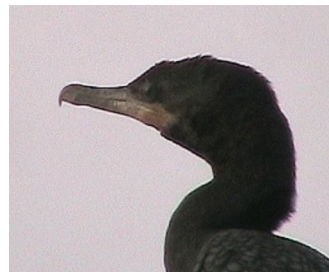
Easily the most common pelican, but only seen at 2 coastal sites: ~60 were on the landward side of South Padre Island, with the largest groups either on posts next to the causeway or in lines of feeding parties; ~30 were resting on the Bolivar Flats



Double-crested Cormorant

Phalacrocorax auritus

3 resting below the dam at Lake Corpus Christi; ~60 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; ~10 on the Wright Ranch lake; ~20 at Bolivar Flats



Neotropic Cormorant

Phalacrocorax brasilianus

Only a handful were seen at 2 sites: 3 birds were very close at the lake next to the State Farm office at Brownsville; 3 at Bentsen

Anhinga

Anhinga anhinga

3 on the Wright Ranch lake; 2 at Lake Corpus Christi; 2 at Bentsen

Great Egret

Ardea alba

Seen on most days (apart from in the Edward's Plateau area) in small numbers, apart from day 1, when ~40 were present throughout the day

Reddish Egret

Egretta rufescens

Of the two birds seen on South Padre Island, 1 was a white phase bird, the other the normal dark colour. Another of the latter phase birds was on the Bolivar Flats

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

Surprisingly few seen, with singles at Lake Corpus Christi and Bolivar Flats (the latter catching and eventually managing to swallow a huge fish from the shallows next to the beach), and 4 at various sites on the second day



Tricoloured Heron

Egretta tricolor

At this time of the year, the plumes of this bird make it a very attractive and slightly built species. The most interesting bird was a very close individual at the sea end of the boardwalk of the South Padre Island Convention Centre, which was seen to catch a fish. After some juggling, it swallowed the fish, which could be seen clearly wriggling half way down the narrow neck of the bird. Others were: 3 on South Padre Island; 1 at Brownsville; 1 at Bentsen; 6 during day 6 around High Island area

Little Blue Heron

Egretta caerulea

1 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 2 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 on South Padre Island; 4 on day 6

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

2 below the dam at Lake Corpus Christi; 1 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 2 on day 6

Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

Seen every day apart from the last morning of day 7 in varying numbers. Most were on day 6 with ~100

Green Heron

Butorides virescens

2 on the lake at the Wright ranch; 1 at Bentsen on the resaca; 1 on Prothonotary Pond at High Island

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

A group of 4 flew downriver at Salineño; 5 at Anahuac, including one group of 4

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax violacea

Surprisingly only 1 seen – a very close bird which stood almost motionless for some time below the boardwalk at the South Padre Island Convention Centre



Least Bittern

Ixobrychus exilis

This stunning little bird was seen very well at both the boardwalk of South Padre Island Convention Centre (2 males & 2 females), and also Anahuac (also 2 males & 2 females). None of the birds seemed to be paired. One of the males at the boardwalk looked seriously sick, with glazed eyes and a crooked lower mandible, although it did seem to be making an effort to feed



American Bittern

Botaurus lentiginosus

2 birds seen at Anahuac on the loop drive around Shoveler Pond. The first was only

briefly in flight from the boardwalk. The second was motionless just the other side of the trackside vegetation for some time, before slowly moving off into the denser areas



White Ibis

Eudocimus albus

2 in the boardwalk marshes at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 3 at Santa Ana; 1 at Salineño; 3 at Anahuac; 2 at High Island

White-faced Ibis

Plegadis chihi

Many dark ibises were seen, but none closely enough to distinguish from the unlikely Glossy Ibis (even though the latter are now annual, the numbers seen would indicate that all, or almost all, were White-faced)

Roseate Spoonbill

Platalea ajaja

A bit of a surprise was finding a nesting colony of at least 25 birds inland on the lake at the Wright ranch, West of Corpus Christi. They were amongst a colony of Great Egrets

Fulvous Whistling-Duck

Dendrocygna bicolor

Only seen at Anahuac (~20). They are very distinctive in flight, with rufous body and unmarked dark wings, which is just as well since all were seen flying

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck

Dendrocygna autumnalis

Quite a common duck: 5 at Lake Corpus Christi; 2 at the Wright Ranch; 5 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 20 at the South Padre Island Convention Centre; 15 around Brownsville (including 4 on the shore of the lake at the State Farm office); 8 at Santa Ana; 2 over WG Jones State Forest

Muscovy Duck

Cairina moschata

Despite our familiarity with this common farmyard duck, it is quite a difficult bird to see, having increased in small numbers as a result of successful breeding using nest boxes in Mexico. It is also a black duck with the only white being on the wings when truly wild. We saw 2 over our heads at Salineño, with a third swimming across the Rio Grande upriver from our lookout position

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Only 2 definite birds of this species seen at Lake Corpus Christi

Mottled Duck

Anas fulvigula

Again, there were probably more than the 3 at South Padre Island Convention Centre, 3 at Salineño, and 8 at Anahuac, but not all were closely checked for separation from Mexican Mallard

Blue-winged Teal

Anas discors

The commonest duck seen: ~10 on the Wright Ranch lake; ~10 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; ~10 at Dick Kleberg park; 6 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; ~20 on Pintail Lake and Willow Pond at Santa Ana; ~50 at Anahuac

Northern Shoveler

Anas clypeata

4 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 1 at Santa Ana

Black Vulture

Coragyps atratus

These were quite common and seen on 5 of the 7 days. Most birds were around the dam at Lake Corpus Christi

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura

By far the most common bird of prey, seen on every day with anywhere between a small amount of birds and an abundance on other days

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

1 over with fish at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 3 at Laguna Atascosa, including 1 resting on the shore; 2 over South Padre Island Convention Centre; 2 over Bolivar Flats

White-tailed Kite

Elanus leucurus

First 3 were along Hawk Alley; 3 along route 77 towards Harlingen; 1 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 in the Brownsville area; 2 along Bolivar Flats peninsular

Northern Harrier*Circus cyaneus*

2 female ringtails seen: 1 along route 77, and the other hunting over the reedbeds at Anahuac

Cooper's Hawk*Accipiter cooperii*

1 only circling in the general vicinity of the Wright Ranch

Harris' Hawk*Parabuteo unicinctus*

This was a species that we had missed out on in Arizona, and despite its common position as a falconry bird in the UK, were keen to see it in the wild. We had thought that they would be difficult to find, and so were pleased at seeing our first two skimming the treetops along Hawk Alley, with a 3rd bird perched on telegraph wires next to the highway. However, they proved an easy bird both to find and to approach (in the car) with some more or less directly above us on wires. 3 at Hawk Alley; 6 along Route 77; 7 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 at Santa Ana; 10 between Salineño and Falcon Dam; 1 at Lost Maples

**Red-shouldered Hawk***Buteo lineatus*

The only bird seen was an individual perched on a telegraph wire on the outskirts of Houston (next to the Business 80) after leaving the airport

Swainson's Hawk*Buteo swainsoni*

A regularly seen *Buteo*, and they have a very distinctive flight shape, with rather pointed wings and longish tail. All the birds that we saw were light phase. 4 along Hawk Alley; 4 along Route 77; 1 at Laguna Atascosa; 6 at Bentsen (including 4 together at one time); 8 between Salineño and Chapeño; 1 in the Lost Maples area

White-tailed Hawk*Buteo albicaudatus*

Another distinctive *Buteo* in flight, with the adults having a very short white tail, and the overall bird looking very light. 3 along Hawk Alley (including 1 perched near to the highway); 2 along Route 77; 1 circling over the car at Laguna Atascosa

Red-tailed Hawk*Buteo jamaicensis*

Only seen on the first day, between Lake Corpus Christi and Harlingen on Route 77, with 3 over the lake itself, and another 3 along the main highway

Crested Caracara*Caracara cheriway*

Some of the birds seen were very obliging, such as the 1 along Hawk Alley which had found a road kill (bravely attacking the remains of a bread bun), and was quite happy to let us watch it from the car on the other side of the road, and the two on low trees in the Wright Ranch area. Despite our impression that these were widespread and easy to see, they were only recorded on 3 days of the trip: 5 along Hawk Alley; 10 along Route 77; 8 at Laguna Atascosa, and 4 between Salineño and Chapeño

**American Kestrel***Falco sparverius*

A male was above us on telegraph wires when we failed to find a non-existent track to the base of Falcon Dam (the border guards were watching us watching the birds at the time), and a pair of birds were on a dead tree, supplanting a Red-headed Woodpecker, from the main office of WG Jones State Forest. The female was clutching on to a lizard at the time

Aplomado Falcon*Falco femoralis*

These birds were only very rare vagrants from the North-east of Mexico until 20 years ago. This was when a reintroduction scheme was begun, initially at the King Ranch further North, but within the last 10 years, many have been released into the Laguna Atascosa reserve. The bird we saw was banded, so its origin could not be in dispute (as

with its “tickability”), but the views we got on the 15 mile loop drive at Laguna Atascosa were sublime, with the bird perched in a bush directly above us.



Plain Chachalaca

Ortalis vetula

When in the right habitat, this bird is difficult to miss, not just because of its size and approachability, but it is also one of the noisiest species in the region. After the first party passed in front of the car on the 3 mile approach drive to Laguna Atascosa visitor centre, they seemed almost everywhere around the centre itself, including the bathing area in front of the hides. ~50 were seen over the whole of the reserve. They do tend to keep to the bushy and treed areas. The only other place we saw them was the lower Rio Grande valley, with ~50 at Santa Ana, and 6 at Bentsen

Wild Turkey

Meleagris gallopavo

A group of ~20 birds were in a field next to Route 77 on the late afternoon journey to Harlingen

Northern Bobwhite

Colinus virginianus

Only 1 seen briefly – a dapper bird around 100m from the car on the loop drive at Laguna Atascosa

Clapper Rail

Rallus longirostris

We had been looking forward to the boardwalk at South Padre Island Convention Centre for some time, not least of which was the fact that it had a reputation for a good variety of rails in good view. While the birding there was still hugely enjoyable, we failed to see either of the two large rails. This was surprising, since we saw plenty of Soras, and others had seen Virginia Rail (both predominantly winter visitors). The two larger rails are supposed to breed along the South Texas coast. We needn't have worried, since we saw and heard at least 10 birds along the drainage ditches and marshes bounding Yacht Basin road along the Bolivar Flats peninsular. Many of these were very close, including one that ambled over the road in front of the car, and 3 calling at once from one small area. To complete, another bird was close to along Tuna Road, which is a little further down from Yacht Basin Road



King Rail

Rallus elegans

No such luck with King Rail (as compared with Clapper Rail) on the Bolivar Flats peninsular, but we did catch up with the bird at Anahuac. We had been told of a breeding pair on arrival but the directions given were (quite rightly) rather vague – somewhere on the 2½ mile Shoveler Pond loop. We had almost completed the drive when we spotted a small black chick wandering over the water vegetation, with a parent in attendance seconds later. A second bird was heard calling from the reeds opposite

Sora

Porzana carolina

The lack of other rails below the boardwalk at South Padre Island Convention Centre was more than made up by 4 dapper birds of this species. As expected, very close views could be had from above, with no notice taken of our presence



Purple Gallinule

Porphyrio martinica

Only 3 seen: 1 along the reed edges from the boardwalk at South Padre Island Convention Centre; and 2 between the reeds at Anahuac

Common Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

~10 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 5 at both Santa Ana and Bentsen

American Coot

Fulica americana

6 at Santa Ana; 2 at Salineño; 6 at Anahuac

Black-necked Stilt

Himantopus mexicanus

3 at Dick Kleberg park; 5 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 3 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 3 at Laguna Atascosa; 5 at Santa Ana



American Avocet

Recurvirostra americana

2 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 1 from Rollover Pass at Bolivar Flats peninsular

Grey Plover

Pluvialis squatarola

All birds seen were in almost full breeding plumage: 3 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 1 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 on Bolivar Flats

Wilson's Plover

Charadrius wilsonia

1 among the wader flock at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; a pair which may have been defending a nesting territory in the Least Tern colony on Bolivar Flats

Killdeer

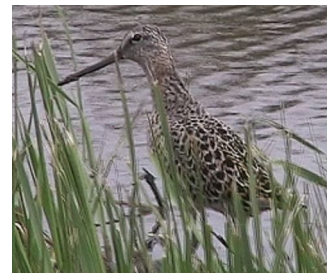
Charadrius vociferus

2 at Dick Kleberg park; 10 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 1 at Bentsen; 2 at Falcon Dam; 2 at Anahuac; 1 on Bolivar Flats

Short-billed Dowitcher

Limnodromus griseus

A group of 3 birds was in the drainage ditch next to the track on Tuna Road, along the Bolivar Peninsular



Long-billed Dowitcher

Limnodromus scolopaceus

All the birds seen were fortunately in full summer plumage and seen well, so could be identified as this species, although the bill lengths could be seen to be varied (not a good identification feature): 1 among the wader flock at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 12 on the pools at Laguna Atascosa; ~50 on Swallow Pond at Anahuac

Hudsonian Godwit

Limosa haemastica

As with the dowitchers, all the birds seen were in full summer plumage. All ~60 seen were on the pools with other waders on the seaward side of the road at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

17 birds of the dark rumped "Hudsonian Whimbrel" were in a line flying over Laguna Atascosa, with a further single bird on the Bolivar Flats

Long-billed Curlew*Numenius americanus*

Only 1 seen at Laguna Atascosa

Spotted Sandpiper*Actitis macularia*

All seen were in smart full breeding plumage and on their own at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park, Farm Office lake at Brownsville, Santa Ana, and Salineño

**Solitary Sandpiper***Tringa solitaria*

The solitary individual (no pun intended) was found with the Greater Yellowlegs just before sunset at Anahuac, on a small pond near to the entrance

Greater Yellowlegs*Tringa melanoleuca*

The single bird seen was in a small pool next to the entrance of Anahuac, and was found at twilight as we were leaving the reserve

Willet*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*

6 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 6 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; ~20 on Bolivar Flats

**Lesser Yellowlegs***Tringa flavipes*

This wader is very common throughout: 10 on a pond half way along FM70; ~20 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; ~20 at Laguna Atascosa; 3 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 10 at Santa Ana; ~20 around Anahuac

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres*

6 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 3 at Bolivar Flats

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

3 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; ~200 on the shoreline at Bolivar Flats

Western Sandpiper*Calidris mauri*

1 at Dick Kleberg park with 5 Least Sandpipers; 3 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park amongst a large feeding wader flock

Least Sandpiper*Calidris minutilla*

5 at Dick Kleberg park; ~60 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park amongst a large flock of feeding waders; 10 from the boardwalk at South Padre Island Convention Centre

Baird's Sandpiper*Calidris bairdii*

6 were in the flock of feeding waders on the seaward side of the road at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park

Pectoral Sandpiper*Calidris melanotos*

1 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 2 at South Padre Island Convention Centre (1 below the boardwalk on the marsh, the other in the saltmarsh along the shore)

**Dunlin***Calidris alpina*

1 on the Bolivar Flats

Stilt Sandpiper

Calidris himantopus

We were pleased to see the 6 on the freshwater pool at Laguna Atascosa, as they were also amongst the closest waders to the car, but a little disappointed that they were still in non-breeding plumage.

Ring-billed Gull

Larus delawarensis

3 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park

American Herring Gull

Larus smithsonianus

10 of various ages (from 1st winter to adult) among the gulls and terns on Bolivar Flats



Laughing Gull

Larus atricilla

A very common gull, particularly in sites near to the coast

Least Tern

Sternula antillarum

6 flew over the lagoon at Dick Kleberg park; ~15 flying around Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; 2 at Laguna Atascosa; and the closest birds in a fenced off breeding colony on Bolivar Flats



Gull-billed Tern

Gelochelidon nilotica

2 over the lagoon at Dick Kleberg park; 2 on the beach at Laguna Atascosa; 5 on South Padre Island

Caspian Tern

Hydroprogne caspia

After a single bird over the water flying past South Padre Island Convention Centre, all the other birds seen totalled ~35, resting in the gull and tern flock on Bolivar Flats. Some had paired up and a few of these were mating



Forster's Tern

Sterna forsteri

~25 in the gull and tern flock on the beach at Bolivar Flats



Royal Tern

Sterna maxima

1 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park; ~20 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 5 at Laguna Atascosa, 3 at Anahuac

Sandwich Tern*Sterna sandvicensis*

~20 in the gull and tern flock on Bolivar Flats

Black Skimmer*Rynchops niger*

The only birds seen were resting amongst Laughing Gulls, with ~20 at the South Padre Island end of the causeway, and another ~20 on the beach in front of the South Padre Island Convention Centre. A single bird flew past the boardwalk at the Centre

Red-billed Pigeon*Patagioenas flavirostris*

Another species at the edge of its range in this part of the States, which can be the only reason why it is sought after. It is fairly plain, although can show an almost attractive sheen in good light, and the red bill is actually mostly yellow. They are also a little shy, so we were pleased to see a single bird flying over us at Salineño, followed by 3 perched together in a dead tree on the opposite bank of the Rio Grande, and a final bird fairly close to again perched at the top of a tree

Mourning Dove*Zenaida macroura*

Extremely common throughout

White-winged Dove*Zenaida asiatica*

Quite common, and seen every day except the last morning in the WG Jones State Forest, with a maximum of ~50 on the first day

Common Ground-Dove*Columbina passerina*

All birds were seen flying; 2 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 at Chapeño

Inca Dove*Columbina inca*

6 around the old camping area at Bentsen; 6 at Chapeño; 3 near the entrance to High Island

White-tipped Dove*Leptotila verreauxi*

There were ~50 of these predominantly pot-bellied ground dwelling birds at Laguna Atascosa, with a good number visiting the artificial water holes in front of the hides. In addition, we saw ~15 at Bentsen and 6 at Salineño

**Green Parakeet***Aratinga holochlora*

Due to the contentious origin of this species and also Red-crowned Parrot, we didn't go out of our way to find them. However, the closure of Sabal Palms at 17:00 had left us with some spare time before sunset, and we also saw what were probably a small group of these birds flying over the State Farm office in Brownsville. We were encouraged to at least have a quick look at the known wintering site at the junction of Honeydale Road and Los Ebanos Boulevard. When we arrived, some of the locals happily told us of the appearance of parrots half an hour earlier, just outside their houses, which had subsequently left. We searched the area for 10 minutes, and spotted one of the parrots behind us, which then flew in the direction of the flavoured tree. When we arrived back, there was a mixed flock of parrots and ~10 Green Parakeets

Red-crowned Parrot*Amazona viridigenalis*

As above with the Green Parakeets, a late search at the known wintering site in the North of Brownsville found a mixed party of ~10 of these and also Green Parakeets. Their origin was even more in question when one of the parrots could be seen to be of a different species (dirty white/yellow above the bill and no red crown)



Greater Roadrunner

Geococcyx californianus

Always a pleasure to see this unique and quirky bird, 1 ran across the drive to the visitor centre at Laguna Atascosa. What may have been the same bird was basking next to the same stretch of road when we exited the 15 mile loop drive, and eventually stood on the nearby sign before disappearing. Another bird crossed the track around Santa Ana, with the last bird seen sneaking around the scrub only a metre or two away from us while we were looking rattlesnakes at Bentsen

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

The single bird seen was the last of the day at Anahuac, flapping around in the wind at the top of a tree next to the entrance

Barred Owl

Strix varia

The only sighting of this species was a strange one – a bird perched on one of the crash barriers in the central reservation of the Interstate 77 at dusk when travelling from the airport on the first evening

Lesser Nighthawk

Chordeiles acutipennis

1 was perched on a fencepost in the fading light at Anahuac as we were leaving, and this and another 2 birds were then flying up and down the track, often over the car

Common Nighthawk

Chordeiles minor

Even though Sabal Palms reserve was closed when we arrived (with the less than welcoming message that trespassers would be prosecuted after opening hours), we still walked around the outside of the track a little way, and saw what was presumably a migrating party of 6 moving through overhead

Chimney Swift

Chaetura pelagica

1 at Hawk Alley; 6 along Route 77; 1 at Laguna Atascosa; 6 at Bentsen

Buff-bellied Hummingbird

Amazilia yucatanensis

This is predominantly a Mexican species, with the best spot in Texas reputed to be the feeders at Santa Ana. On our trip, this proved to be the case. There is a hummingbird feeder situated directly in front of the seat at the visitor centre reception, and this did indeed form a magnet for 3 of these hummers. They generally only landed and fed on the feeder for a matter of seconds, but one of the birds was a little more obliging and landed a metre or two to the rear



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris

A female hummingbird, which was presumed to be of this species, landed on the newly created warbler bushes in front of the "whale wall" at South Padre Island Convention Centre. At Santa Ana, we had 2 males which landed briefly along the dyke, as well as 3 females, whose flight action separated them from Black-chinned. At Lost Maples, 2 female Ruby-throats were among the more abundant Black-chinned, and ~8 (a mix of males and females) were at High Island

Black-chinned Hummingbird

Archilochus alexandri

The only location that we saw these was at Lost Maples, and this on the hummingbird feeder at the visitor centre. The males were quite easy to discern in good light, but all those identified also showed the characteristic tail bobbing while hovering. In addition, the whistle of the males wings could occasionally be heard on flypast



Belted Kingfisher

Megasceryle alcyon

Only 2 seen – the first was seen briefly flying over the lake at Dick Kleberg park. The

second much more satisfying, since it was perched on a large post at the end of Yacht Basin Road

Ringed Kingfisher

Megaceryle torquatus

As with Belted, only 2 seen, both at Salineño. The first was perched about 100 metres distant on the other side of the Rio Grande, but we had excellent views through the telescope. The second was a more distant bird, flying over the water upriver from our position

Green Kingfisher

Chloroceryle americana

We had previously only seen this species briefly in Trinidad, when one flew in front of the boat we were travelling in. The views we had from Kingfisher Overlook at Bentsen were thus hugely satisfying. The first bird was inadvertently disturbed from a perch directly in front of the overlook, but only flew a short way along and landed in view. We were able to relocate it from the shore, where it was only about 20 metres distant. We then realised there were 2 birds when 1 flew past us, with another in the distance. A third bird was seen on the pond at Lost Maples, where it briefly landed opposite us



Red-headed Woodpecker

Melanerpes erythrocephalus

We didn't see too many woodpeckers at WG Jones State Forest, but of those seen, this was the most numerous, with 2 separate pairs making nest holes in dead trees, and a fifth on its own when we first arrived – at the top of a dead tree to the near to the office (and subsequently replaced by a pair of American Kestrels)

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Melanerpes carolinus

We may have seen more than the single bird along the side of road before the junction with Farm Road 70, just after leaving Lake Corpus Christi, but all other birds of the this type seemed to be Golden-fronted

Golden-fronted Woodpecker

Melanerpes aurifrons

Over the whole week, this was by far the most common woodpecker, but was only seen on the first 4 days (~30 on the first 3 days, and ~15 between Salineño and Chapeño on day 4). They could be approached quite closely



Ladder-backed Woodpecker

Picoides scalaris

These were seen on the first 5 days of the trip, with the first pair amongst the first birds of the day, sharing a dead tree near to the dam at Lake Corpus Christi, and a third bird on the opposite side of the road to the parked car. Subsequent birds were: 1 along Farm Road 70; 1 at Dick Kleberg park; 1 at Sabal Palms; 3 at Santa Ana; 4 between Salineño and Chapeño, and the last at Lost Maples. They could generally be seen at very close quarters, even when on foot



Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Picoides borealis

Even though the distribution of this species is over much of the South and East of the States, its particular habitat requirements mean that its numbers are declining, and seeing it is a challenge bearing in mind the threatened status. WG Jones State Forest is one of the better locations in Texas to see them, with quite a few marked clusters. The park staff tend to mark the trees with green rings around the base, and surround the entrance hole with metal to deter Pileated Woodpeckers from evicting the rightful tenants. We spent 3 hours searching the more active clusters behind the headquarters before finally locating one eventually not far from the start of the track. Another was then found a short distance further back



Downy Woodpecker

Picoides pubescens

1 over the marsh at High Island, and 2 at WG Jones State Forest

Eastern Wood-Pewee

Contopus virens

These were more often heard than seen, but we did eventually pin 3 birds down in the woods of Lost Maples

Great Kiskadee

Pitangus sulphuratus

2 at Dick Kleberg park; 2 at the lake behind the State Farm office in Brownsville; 10 at Santa Ana; 6 at Bentsen; 4 at Salineño; 6 at Chapeño; 2 at Falcon Dam

Tropical Kingbird

Tyrannus melancholicus

Only one definite bird – at the lake behind the State Farm office in Brownsville

Couch's Kingbird

Tyrannus couchii

Both noisy and commonly seen. The short stout bill (as compared with the longer bill of Tropical Kingbird) could be easily seen on most: 1 at Sabal Palms; 1 at Laguna Atascosa; ~20 at Santa Ana; ~10 at Bentsen; ~40 in the Salineño to Chapeño area; 6 at Lost Maples



Eastern Kingbird

Tyrannus tyrannus

After a single bird in trees behind the visitor centre at Santa Ana, we had to wait until the end of the week at Anahuac before we saw a number of birds. ~15 were in the reeds surrounding Shoveler Pond and the bushes along the track to the South

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

Tyrannus forficatus

Another species that we had only seen once before – a poorly marked individual at the end of our Mexican sojourn 5 years earlier. The abundance and beauty of these birds was well worth waiting for, from the first couple of birds that we saw from the car shortly after leaving the airport



(and still within the Houston city area) to the last ones on the journey from San Antonio to Houston on day 6. In addition, they could be very approachable, usually by using the car as a hide, but even on foot. Maximum number was ~50 on the first day, minimum 4 between Salineño and Chapeño. Other days found between 10-30

Ash-throated Flycatcher

Myiarchus cinerascens

All *Myiarchus* flycatchers were checked (for Brown-crested & Great-crested), but all turned out to be the rather common Ash-throated: 1 at Dick Kleberg park; 2 at Laguna Atascosa; ~20 at Santa Ana; 6 at Bentsen; 1 at Salineño; 1 at Chapeño; 2 at Lost Maples



Shorelark

Eremophila alpestris

2 birds were on the exposed salt marsh on the 15 mile drive at Laguna Atascosa, and another 2 were feeding amongst the Least Tern colony at Bolivar Flats

Purple Martin

Progne subis

2 Farm Road 70; 2 at Laguna Atascosa; 4 at Santa Ana; 6 at Salineño; 2 at High Island

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Stelgidopteryx serripennis

~50 birds were over the Rio Grande at Santa Ana

Barn Swallow*Hirundo rustica*

Common

Cliff Swallow*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Literally hundreds of birds were seen on some days – they seem to have taken to the artificial nest sites that have been provided, secondarily as road bridges, throughout the state

Cave Swallow*Petrochelidon fulva*

This is another of the predominantly Mexican species that sneaks into Texas, and when good views are had, can be reliably separated from Cliff Swallow. We saw ~20 birds at Dick Kleberg park, and 6 at Bentsen. We probably saw a lot more, but it would have taken time to split all the Cliff & Cave Swallows seen

Cedar Waxwing*Bombycilla cedrorum*

~10 feeding on a berry tree adjacent to High Island reserve

Cactus Wren*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*

A single bird was seen singing briefly near to the Rio Grande at Salineño. The best, and only other, site that we saw them was at Falcon Dam, where the drier and more arid conditions were much more to their liking. We even found a pair of birds building a nest here

**Canyon Wren***Catherpes mexicanus*

The only bird seen, at Lost Maples, was first picked up on song. It was singing between small bushes at the top of a small cliff within the woods, half way along the track to the pond. After locating the bird, it flew down past us and showed briefly, still singing, next to the stream

Carolina Wren*Thryothorus ludovicianus*

As with Canyon Wren, the only location that we saw this species was at Lost Maples. 2 birds were very close to us in low bushes adjacent to the pond. The first bird found was singing quite happily only metres away from where we stood

**Bewick's Wren***Thryomanes bewickii*

2 at Laguna Atascosa; 1 at Falcon dam; 1 at Lost Maples

House Wren*Troglodytes aedon*

1 at Laguna Atascosa; 1 at Santa Ana; 1 at Lost Maples

Sedge Wren*Cistothorus platensis*

These birds are much drabber than Marsh Wrens, and both were seen at Anahuac. However, they were in totally different habitats – the 3 Sedge Wrens were in low bushes and grasses along the long track to the South within the reserve, and were picked up on song. They tended to be quite elusive, seen only briefly on occasion, but patience was eventually rewarded with good close views

Marsh Wren*Cistothorus palustris*

A single bird was seen from the boardwalk at South Padre Island Convention Centre. Despite the fact that it was only a few feet from us and singing, it was very difficult to see, although we did locate the bird on occasions. The main site for this species was at Anahuac, where copious birds could be heard singing from the reeds. Only one was seen half decently, although others were glimpsed on our slow drive around the Shoveler Pond

Grey Catbird*Dumetella carolinensis*

Only seen at High Island. Despite the weather being against decent migration, these seemed to be spread through the reserve, with at least 10 birds seen (assuming they were migrating, which is likely)

Northern Mockingbird*Mimus polyglottos*

Very common throughout

**Brown Thrasher***Toxostoma rufum*

2 birds were seen at High Island

Long-billed Thrasher*Toxostoma longirostre*

The breeding ranges of these two very similar Thrashers (the other being Brown) tend generally not to cross, although when seen even half reasonably, the more grey-brown back and clean black on white striping of Long-billed is fairly easy to identify. Most of the birds seen were singing, and this is a treat to hear. 4 were at Laguna Atascosa; 5 at Santa Ana; 1 at Bentsen; and 1 at Falcon Dam

**Curve-billed Thrasher***Toxostoma curvirostre*

The best find was perhaps the bird sitting on a nest directly above where we had parked the car at Falcon Dam. A total of 4 were seen here, as well as 1 at Kaufer-Hubert memorial park, and 2 at Laguna Atascosa

Eastern Bluebird*Sialia sialis*

2 pairs were at WG Jones State Forest, both in the vicinity of the park office, with at least 4 immature birds with them

Swainson's Thrush*Catharus ustulatus*

A single bird was seen briefly at Santa Ana

Clay-coloured Robin*Turdus grayi*

This is another of the Mexican species that barely pops its claws into the States by the odd bird being found in Texas. While not exactly a rarity, we found a bird singing above a pool within the forest at Santa Ana. 2 more birds were found at Bentsen. We had also been told of a bird visiting the drinking pools at the visitor centre of Laguna Atascosa

American Robin*Turdus migratorius*

1 only seen at High Island

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher*Poliptila caerulea*

~12 at Lost Maples; 6 at Kerr Wildlife Management Area; 1 at WG Jones State Forest

Black-crested Titmouse*Baeolophus atricristatus*

Although very similar to Tufted Titmouse, the black crest on all the birds that we saw was quite obvious: 1 at Laguna Atascosa; 6 at Lost Maples; 2 at Bentsen; 2 at Chapeño; 10 at Lost Maples; 4 at Kerr Wildlife Management Area



Tufted Titmouse

Baeolophus bicolor

1 of this previous superspecies (with Black-crested Titmouse) at WG Jones State Forest

Carolina Chickadee

Poecile carolinensis

1 at Lost Maples; 3 at WG Jones State Forest

Brown-headed Nuthatch

Sitta pusilla

Having seen Pygmy Nuthatch previously in California and Arizona, it is probably a saving grace that there is no range overlap between these two species, since they look very similar in the field. WG Jones State Forest is supposed to host quite a large population of these birds, but we only saw 2, both near to the park office

Verdin

Auriparus flaviceps

2 on one of the walks around Laguna Atascosa, and 2 at Falcon Dam. Both were in a very dry and arid habitat



Loggerhead Shrike

Lanius ludovicianus

These were very commonly seen on the first two days, and became less obvious after this, with only 2 in the between Salineño and Chapeño, with 2 in the High Island to Anahuac area

Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

~6 were at High Island, and ~20 at WG Jones State Forest

Green Jay

Cyanocorax yncas

These stunning birds proved to much easier to see than on previous trips to the West of the country and to Mexico. Following singles at Dick Kleberg park and Kaufer-Hubert memorial park, the place to see these in any number and close to was at Laguna Atascosa, where they regularly came to drink at the man made pools in front of the hides. Additional birds were ~10 at Santa Ana; 6 at Bentsen; 4 at Salineño; 4 at Chapeño (the latter site also finding close birds coming to food put out by the owners)



Brown Jay

Cyanocorax morio

Chapeño is reputed to be one of the best places in the state, and in fact the States, to see this bird, due in part to the feeding by the owners. On parking the car, we saw 2 birds visiting the feeding area in front of the windowed hide. Some patience found 3 regularly returning birds here. We also found an additional 2 birds lower down, visiting feeders next to the Rio Grande

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

Fairly common from Lake Corpus Christi to Harlingen, as well as in the lower Rio Grande valley from Brownsville to Chapeño

Common Raven

Corvus corax

Singles at Laguna Atascosa and Lost Maples

European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Common

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

Common

White-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo griseus</i>
1 singing bird at Laguna Atascosa, and 4 at Lost Maples	
Black-capped Vireo	<i>Vireo atricapilla</i>
This is arguably one of the most attractive of vireos, with the white eye mask contrasting sharply with the black hood. It also has very particular habitat requirements, and this limited breeding range within the state (to the Edward's Plateau). This makes a 4 hour journey from both the Rio Grande valley and Houston well worth while, to look for these and Golden-cheeked Warblers. One of the best (but not only) places to see them is Kerr Wildlife Management Area. There was a turkey shoot on when we arrived, but we were advised that many birds resided up Schumacher Road, only about 1 mile down from the main entrance. It was also drizzling with rain – omens weren't good. However, it only took us about an hour to see a total of 5 birds, at the top of the track near to the disused windmill. Listening for their song is a must – all were seen only after hearing them	
Yellow-throated Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>
1 at Lost Maples	
Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>
2 separate birds at Santa Ana	
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
1 at Santa Ana, and 2 singing birds at Lost Maples	
Yellow-green Vireo	<i>Vireo flavoviridis</i>
Judging by the reaction of the American bird race members when we informed them that we had seen this species, it ranks amongst the rarest of those species seen during the week. Odd individuals are known to occur in the far South-west, often in the Brownsville and South Padre Island area, and it was at the latter that we saw our bird. Flying into a lone bush next to the longer boardwalk for a short time, the bland facial markings, greenish back, and lemon yellow flanks were quite obvious	
House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>
Only 4 seen – 2 males and 2 females – on the feeders at Lost Maples	
American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>
2 at Santa Ana and a male at Salineño	
Tennessee Warbler	<i>Vermivora peregrina</i>
3 seen at Santa Ana	
Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Vermivora celata</i>
They were only seen at Lost Maples, but were the most common wood warbler there, with total sightings of around 8 birds	
Nashville Warbler	<i>Vermivora ruficapilla</i>
The most regularly seen of the wood warblers, although still in relatively small numbers: 2 males and 4 females at Santa Ana, mostly around the confluence of the tracks A and B; 2 at Salineño; 3 at Lost Maples	
Tropical Parula	<i>Parula pitiayumi</i>
Despite the fact that the breeding range of Northern Parula falls into much of eastern Texas, with the migrating range covering the rest, the only Parula that we saw was a singing Tropical Parula, in the canopy of trees in Santa Ana, around the confluence of tracks A and B	
Golden-cheeked Warbler	<i>Dendroica chrysoparia</i>
This species is the only true endemic that we saw, since its entire breeding range is within the Edward's Plateau of central Texas. Along with Black-capped Vireo, it thus also provides a very valid reason for diverting to this area to look for both birds. There are quite a few sites to see this species in its restricted breeding range, but Lost Maples is reputed to be one of the most reliable, with numbers into 3 figures. It is also a good site for other birds as well. We were told that they could be seen on the East trail, and it took us until over half of this was covered to find our first bird. Of the 5 seen, probably the best spot for close views and also reliability was in the area adjacent to the pond	



Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens*

2 at Santa Ana

Pine Warbler *Dendroica pinus*

2 were seen at WG Jones State Forest, but many more were heard there while looking for woodpeckers

Louisiana Waterthrush *Seiurus motacilla*

Although we had seen many Northern Waterthrushes on our travels, this species had managed to elude us until we visited Lost Maples. Following the loud song of an unfamiliar bird, we found a male at the very top of a bare tree, about 20 metres high. Showing the characteristics of Louisiana well, it eventually flew down to sing next to the stream below

Kentucky Warbler *Oporornis formosus*

As with Louisiana Waterthrush, this species had also managed to elude us over the years (including a trip to Point Pelee in Canada where we missed it despite seeing 34 other wood warblers). Its appearance was still a surprise – we had been walking Santa Ana for 6-7 hours, and were resting in front of the hummingbird feeders at the visitor centre, when a striking male appeared at the base of the low bushes in front of us. It continued to disappear and reappear for around 10 minutes, somehow managing to hide despite its proximity

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

4 at South Padre Island Convention Centre; 1 at Santa Ana; 1 at High Island

Hooded Warbler *Wilsonia citrina*

The female seen, and seen well, at Santa Ana was found near the visitor centre due to our continued searching for the Kentucky Warbler. It also favoured the ground for feeding, but was happier to let us watch it in less dense cover. The male at High Island very briefly visited one of the artificial water holes in front of the photographic hide

**Yellow-breasted Chat** *Icteria virens*

1 male singing at WG Jones State Forest

Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*

Singles of male and female at High Island

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

Lost Maples was the only site for these, with at least 3 separate males and a single female

Olive Sparrow *Arremonops rufivirgatus*

These understated sparrows are usually easier to hear than to see. When we first entered the woods of Santa Ana, we heard a high pitched "chipping" call that sounded like a cross between a wood warbler and a hummingbird. Since we couldn't find the perpetrator at eye level, where the call seemed to come from, we looked down to find a couple of Olive Sparrows in and out of view amongst the leaf litter. We eventually saw ~8 in the reserve, with a further 2 at Salineño

**Chipping Sparrow** *Spizella passerina*

Not perhaps as commonly seen as expected, the best place to see them was at Lost Maples. After one or two birds in the trees next to the pond, around half a dozen were visiting the feeders at the visitor centre. The only other bird was one at Salineño the previous day

Clay-coloured Sparrow

Spizella pallida

As with Chipping Sparrow, all but one of these were seen at Lost Maples. They did briefly visit the feeders, but most of the ~20 were in a small flock near to the pond. 3 had also been seen at the start of the day, in trees next to the beginning of the east trail. A single bird had been at Falcon the previous day

Lark Sparrow

Chondestes grammacus

These were surprisingly common, and seen on every one of the first 5 days. They were also fairly evenly distributed throughout the South-west of the state. 40+ were in the Lake Corpus Christi to Kingsville area; ~20 around Laguna Atascosa and South Padre Island Convention Centre; only 2 at Santa Ana; common but not counted in the Salineño to Chapeño area; 2 at Lost Maples; 2 at Kerr Wildlife Management Area



Savannah Sparrow

Passerculus sandwichensis

Good numbers of these were passing through, with flocks of 6 and ~12 along FM70 on the first day; singles at Laguna Atascosa and South Padre Island Convention Centre; and ~30 spread throughout Anahuac

Seaside Sparrow

Ammodramus maritimus

After failing to find any of these along the supposed reliable Yacht Basin road, we tried Tuna Road a little further down the Bolivar peninsular, and found 2 singing birds in the low marshy grass

Grasshopper Sparrow

Ammodramus savannarum

A single bird seen early on at Lost Maples

Song Sparrow

Melospiza melodia

2 at Salineño and 1 at Falcon Dam

Lincoln's Sparrow

Melospiza lincolnii

A single bird was feeding in low grass at the start of the East trail, Lost Maples

Northern Cardinal

Cardinalis cardinalis

As usual with Cardinal, they could be quite common and were seen on every day: ~20 at Lake Corpus Christi; 2 at Laguna Atascosa; 2 at Santa Ana; 6 at Salineño and Chapeño; 4 at Lost Maples; 12 in the High Island area; 6 at WG Jones State Forest



Pyrrhuloxia

Cardinalis sinuatus

Only 3 seen, all singing males, with 2 at Salineño, and 1 at Falcon Dam

Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Pheucticus ludovicianus

2 males and 2 females at High Island

Indigo Bunting

Passerina cyanea

A female was at WG Jones State Forest on the last day, but all other birds seen were males: 1 at Santa Ana at the confluence of trails A and B; 2 at Lost Maples, including a very close bird on the feeders briefly; 1 at Bolivar Flats; 1 at Anahuac



Painted Bunting

Passerina ciris

2 males were seen, 1 in a small party of mixed passerines passing through the meeting area of trails A and B at Santa Ana, the second much closer on the feeder briefly at Lost Maples



Blue Grosbeak

Passerina caerulea

All birds seen were males: 2 at Laguna Atascosa; 1 at Sabal Palms; 1 at Chapeño; 2 at Lost Maples

Red-winged Blackbird

Agelaius phoeniceus

Very common, but not seen on every day, being absent on the Edward's Plateau and WG Jones State Forest



Eastern Meadowlark

Sturnella magna

5 of what were only presumably this species were seen on the first day, but with definite Easterns at Laguna Atascosa (1) and Anahuac (8)

Boat-tailed Grackle

Quiscalus major

Great-tailed Grackles had been checked sporadically throughout the week for this species, which can be told apart in Texas by the dark eye of Boat-tailed (white in Great-tailed and the Florida race of Boat-tailed). It was only at Anahuac that we had our only definite Boat-tailed Grackles, where they were quite common



Common Grackle

Quiscalus quiscula

The only one seen was on one of the lawns in front of the entrance to High Island. The race in this part of the States has a much browner back, which contrasts sharply with the shiny black head, than more eastern birds

Great-tailed Grackle

Quiscalus mexicanus

Extremely common throughout



Bronzed Cowbird

Molothrus aeneus

These far surpassed Brown-headed Cowbird as the most common cowbird, and were seen in good numbers on each of the first 4 days, being seemingly absent away from the South-west

Brown-headed Cowbird

Molothrus ater

Fairly common from Lake Corpus Christi to Kingsville; small numbers at Laguna Atascosa, and ~8 at Chapeño



Altamira Oriole

Icterus gularis

Small numbers were seen in the Lower Rio Grande valley, with the first being a pair at Bentsen. 5 more were seen on the following day, with 3 at Salineño, and 2 at Chapeño, visiting the lower feeding area next to the river

Hooded Oriole

Icterus cucullatus

1 along Route 77 on the first day, when we had stopped to observe a flock of turkeys; a pair on the telegraph wires at Sabal Palms; 4 at Chapeño; 2 at Falcon Dam; and 2 while looking for Cassin's Sparrow near to Falcon

Baltimore Oriole

Icterus galbula

1 at Anahuac, and 1 at High Island

Bullock's Oriole

Icterus bullockii

The only 1 seen was at Dick Kleberg park



Orchard Oriole

Icterus spurius

1 at Laguna Atascosa; ~10 at High Island; ~20 at Anahuac

TOTAL SPECIES = 204