



*Golden-cheeked Warbler in Ashe Juniper, South Llano River State Park (Mike Watson).*

# TEXAS

**11 – 26 APRIL 2017**

**LEADER: MIKE WATSON.**

Our latest tour of the Lone Star State produced a very respectable total of 306 bird species, including 65 Birdquest 'diamond' species (regional endemics or specialities) and 37 species of American wood warblers! Amongst these were some of the USA's most sought-after birds. Our journey started down in the palms and subtropical woodland of the Lower Rio Grande Valley with a quartet of Northeast Mexican regional endemics - Red-crowned Parrot, Green Parakeet, Black-crested Titmouse and Long-billed Thrasher. Other birds of a southerly distribution, whose ranges just cross the Mexican border into the USA included Plain Chachalaca, Least Grebe, Zone-tailed, White-tailed and Grey Hawks, Red-billed Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, Elf Owl, Pauraque, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Aplomado Falcon (reintroduced here), Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Green Jay, Clay-coloured Thrush, Altamira and Audubon's Orioles and White-collared Seedeater. On the Upper Texas Coast we were lucky to experience a 'fall out' of Trans-Caribbean migrant passerines right at the end of our stay at High Island, one of world birding's true Meccas, where a sparkling line-up of 20 species of wood warblers included two Ceruleans. The marshes and shores around Galveston Bay held Fulvous Whistling Duck, King Rail, Piping Plover, Hudsonian Godwit and Upland Sandpiper. We even managed a 'write-in' to this very long-established tour here in the form of a Long-tailed Duck. While dodging thunderstorms in the



*Greater Roadrunner, Davis Mountains (Mike Watson).*

lovely Pineywoods of Angelina State Forest near Jasper, we enjoyed some great encounters with Red-cockaded and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine, Prairie, Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chat and Bachman's Sparrow. In the west of the state, the pretty Hill Country hosts another selection of regional specials and Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo were the highlights here. Further west in the Trans Pecos, 'mountain island' forest habitat allows more Mexican birds to extend their range into the USA and the delightful Colima Warbler, Mexican Jay, Blue-throated Mountaingem, Painted Whitestart, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Crissal Thrasher and Black-chinned Sparrow were all added to our list. The mountains of this region also represent the most easterly US outpost of western species like Acorn Woodpecker, American Grey Flycatcher, Western Bluebird and Hepatic Tanager. A visit to Carolyn Ohl's Christmas Mountain Oasis feeding station was another highlight, adding Lucifer Sheartail, Virginia's Warbler and Varied Bunting amongst others. We saw some other interesting western warblers on their northward migration in the mountains such as Hermit, Townsend's and Wilson's. Finally the Davis Mountains of West Texas produced the desired Montezuma Quail and Phainopepla of particular note. The only blot on our copybook was the earlier than usual northbound departure of the wintering Whooping Cranes, which had left Aransas NWR before our tour started. With a long and varied bird list, wonderful scenery, good accommodations and roads, tasty food and a very pleasant climate a spring tour of the 'big state' is our premier US birding itinerary.

We embarked on our birding road trip on a rainy morning in the military city of San Antonio, home of the Alamo, bound for the Lower Rio Grande, known here simply as 'the valley'. As we headed south, the rainstorms gradually began to clear and our first birds started to appear along the way. Black and Turkey Vultures and Harris's Hawks were drying out by the highway, Crested Caracaras patrolled the verges, a couple of Wild Turkeys stood by as Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Loggerhead Shrikes perched on fences. These are all characteristic roadside birds of the south. We reached another neat and tidy military town, Harlingen, home of the annual Rio Grande Valley Bird Festival, just before lunchtime, where, after a very quick spin around the airport looking, unsuccessfully, for Bronzed Cowbird (although we did see our first of very many Golden-fronted Woodpeckers here), we checked into our hotel and prepared for our first proper exploration of the valley. The lower Rio Grande has many excellent birding sites and, faced with a long list of birds seen nowhere else in the USA, it is often difficult to know where to start. Just to the west of Harlingen is Estero Llano Grande ('Large Plain') World Birding Center, which is an excellent reserve featuring some small lagoons fringed by woodland. We always see a lot of good stuff here and it is as good a place to start as any but not before we had a quick lunch at the



*Pauraque, Estero Llano Grande World Birding Center (Mike Watson).*

really excellent Nana's Taqueria, famed for its delicious Mexican food and homemade lemonade! We weren't disappointed and the tacos were particularly good. Just as we were getting up to leave a flight of around 270 American White Pelicans passed over. A magnificent sight! The birding kicked off here really well too with a very good selection of lower valley specials, including Long-billed Thrasher and Black-crested Titmouse. One of the main attractions at Estero is its day-roosting Pauraques. They hardly seem to move more than a few metres from one year to the next and we had some great looks at one of these fine nightjars on the ground at point blank range, just keeping its eye open a fraction should we get too close. As with many birds down here, it is widely distributed and very common in the Neotropics but its range only just creeps across the border into the USA in the lower valley. Nearby, an Eastern Screech Owl poked its head out of a nest box. The birds here are of the form *mccalli* and with a different voice to nominate Eastern Screech Owl they may merit full species status. The supporting cast around the lagoons and their surrounding small patches of woodland here was not bad either and included Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Mottled Duck, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teals, Plain Chachalaca, Least Grebe (we missed this one somehow last time), Yellow-crowned Night, Green and Tricoloured Herons, Common Gallinule, American Coot, Black-necked Stilt, Killdeer, Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper and an amazing 105 Stilt Sandpipers. A large and menacing American Alligator slumbered nearby.

The valley is known particularly for woodland birds and doves at Estero included Common Ground, White-tipped, Mourning and White-winged. A male Black-chinned Hummingbird was around the feeders at the center as were Buff-bellied Hummingbirds. Green Jays appeared briefly, a Ladder-backed Woodpecker perched up obligingly and Great Kiskadee also showed up. Eventually we managed some brief views of a Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, which had built a nest in the 'tropical zone' of the reserve but was 'untickable' by our standards. Two Tropical Kingbirds that helpfully called from the trees above us at the center were the only ones of the tour, hereafter and elsewhere we only saw Couch's Kingbirds. A couple of Purple Martins were flying around the lagoon by the center. Curve-billed Thrashers were alongside their long-billed cousins and in the late afternoon sunshine a Clay-coloured Robin delivered its lovely blackbird-like song. A young male Hooded Oriole was the first of ultimately seven oriole species seen on the tour and the first of very many Northern Cardinals in Texas lit up the dark shadows of the woodland. Finally another 'McCall's' Eastern Screech Owl was poking its head out of its hole only a few metres from the tyrannulet nest, a great end to our first session.



*(McCall's) Eastern Screech Owl, Estero Llano Grande World Birding Center (Mike Watson).*

A couple of parrot stops whilst heading west through the continuous ribbon development of the valley were fruitless but we did have some great views of Black-tailed Jackrabbit in Weslaco. Our final port of call was Bentsen Rio Grande State Park, where we had a date with an owl. We missed Elf Owl last time and it can be a tricky bird to find in southern Texas, unless of course you know of an occupied nest hole. We gathered around a particular electricity pole, with an old Golden-fronted Woodpecker hole near the top and right on cue, just before eight o'clock, the tiny little Elf Owl stuck its head out and then sat at the entrance of the hole for a good ten minutes or more as the evening light grew dim, before silently disappearing into the darkness. Not a bad first day with one of the tough birds seen already. A couple of birders also here with Geordie accents turned out to be old friend Paul Stewart and his brother. We were to cross paths with them numerous times later on our travels in Texas. Mambo's Mexican seafood restaurant was fortunately still open on our return journey along the valley strip and the temperature gauge on the car read 82 degrees at 9.30pm. It was lovely to be back in warmer climes after Ladakh and then Colorado in quick succession!

Next morning saw us back at Estero at dawn where we eventually managed some very nice views of the Northern Beardless Tyrannulet. Nothing much going for this drab tyrant flycatcher except a nice piping song and it was a good ABA lifer for all. Its sleepy Eastern Screech Owl neighbour was still slumbering in its hole, Brown-crested Flycatcher and Rose-breasted Grosbeak were new for us here and the feeding area in the tropical zone produced some nice views of White-tipped Dove and Green Jays... in contrast to the previous day. Early spring in the valley can be an exciting migration spectacle and just down the road from Estero is a large turf farm. We took a while to work out where the shorebirds were hanging out but were eventually rewarded with a total of 36 Upland Sandpipers, including one fairly close bird in a small alfalfa grass patch, away from the rest of the flocks for some reason. Most of the Uplands pushed off north quickly though. Around 20 Least Sandpipers and eight Pectoral Sandpipers were in muddy puddles along the access tracks and we had our first meeting with the ubiquitous Border Patrol here. A few Horned Larks, Eastern Meadowlarks and Savannah Sparrows were also around the fields in this area.

In mid morning we rolled up at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, with its smart visitor's centre and excellent watchtower. Bronzed Cowbird was in the car park here and as soon as we crossed the levee and entered the reserve proper we had some very nice looks at another valley special, Olive Sparrow. We were hoping for one of the Hook-billed Kites, suspected to be breeding here this year, to show but for once they did not, maybe



*Shorebirds at Progresso Farms, Upland Sandpiper (above) and Pectoral Sandpiper (Mike Watson).*



*Swainson's Hawks dropping in to woodland behind the National Butterfly Center at Mission (Mike Watson).*

owing to some dipstick in a small aerobatic aircraft flying up and down their favoured area. Incredible that someone should be tolerated doing this over a NWR. Anyway, we did see some other good birds though like Grey Hawk, White-tailed Kite, Harris's Hawk, a few Broad-winged Hawks, Peregrine and Altamira Oriole but there was no mass lift-off from the woodland this morning. A small flock of c.10 American Golden Plovers also flew over. On the return to the centre along the trail we saw another Northern Beardless Tyrannulet (you wait ages for one and...) and our first White-eyed Vireo. Then we reacquainted ourselves with Subway's menu and headed further west up the valley towards Bentsen.

Sadly the weather was closing in here and (from a butterflying point of view) we made what was probably the worst ever visit to the excellent National Butterfly Center at Mission. Massive dark thunderclouds loomed and the rain was soon hammering down so we took refuge in the center until the storm cleared. Picking our way through sticky mud we took a walk around the center's plot of land to the levee behind seeing a few good birds – they are also attracted to the flowering plants established here for the butterflies (we only saw a few hardy Monarchs). A pair of Northern Bobwhites unusually afforded some nice views on the ground, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was also new for the tour as were two Black Phoebes catching insects in one of the covered gardens, before moving to more typical habitat along the levee. As more storm clouds gathered raptors started to appear, crossing the Rio Grande from the south, hundreds of Turkey Vultures were accompanied by around 300 Broad-winged Hawks and 80 Swainson's Hawks, some of which pitched into nearby woods or simply stood in roadside fields in preparation for the next downpour. Another incredibly gaudy Altamira Oriole sat up nicely, as did three Bullock's Orioles, adding a splash of colour to the landscape and back in urban McAllen we finally caught up with one of our two parrot targets in the form of Green Parakeet. This was one of the quartet of northeastern Mexican regional endemic birds we were targeting in the valley on this tour. Sadly they are most easily seen in high streets as they gather on power cables before going to roost in the evening. Not the prettiest location, this group was outside an interesting-looking comic shop of all things. There appeared to be two families, having a dispute, which added a little to the sighting. As yet more anvil-headed storm clouds loomed we decided to call it a day and head back to Harlingen to a great steak house.

Around two hours upriver, below Falcon Dam, is a great stretch of the Rio Grande with a reputation for many of the cross-border special birds we were hoping for. Starting on the riverbank at pretty Saliñeno, Mexico just a short swim away, we added Green Kingfisher as well as a pair of the gorgeous nominate form of Audubon's



*Green Parakeets at McAllen (above) and Black Phoebe, National Butterfly Center (Mike Watson).*



*White-collared Seedeater, San Ygnacio (Mike Watson).*

Oriole. A pair of Altamira Orioles was building a nest over the trail and other riverbank passerines like Verdin and Summer Tanager showed up but no White-collared Seedeater yet. River traffic included the ABA-sought-after Red-billed Pigeon as well as Western Cattle and Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Heron, Western Ospreys (amongst a tally of nine for the day!) and both Gull-billed and Caspian Terns. I wonder what impact Trump's wall is going to have here. The best birding is right along the river so I imagine the new wall will devastate most of this picturesque area. Better go sooner rather than later if you want to bird the Rio Grande in its present state. We spent several hours at Saliñeno essentially looking for the seedeater but as the temperature rose time was running out so I decided to try somewhere else further upriver instead.

Fortunately we had another hot tip from our Geordie friends and within a few minutes of our arrival at the San Ygnacio Seedeater Sanctuary, upriver from Zapata, we got lucky with a male White-collared Seedeater perched up in the cane grass from the rickety viewing platform there. You can see from the photo that it was rather a scruffy little individual and only vaguely resembles the illustration in Sibley but it was a big relief to find this must-see valley special. It also did some of its piping song for us before it flew off. Phew! Also here in the midday heat were Brown-crested Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat and Indigo Bunting. After this success we headed off for lunch at the nearest Subway in Zapata. We also scored with a couple of raptors on our hit list near Zapata, an immature Zone-tailed Hawk, which dropped out of the sky like a stone onto something in the roadside verge before floating off to the shade of a nearby bush, looking so much like a Turkey Vulture. At last I had seen how they ambush prey, by 'passing in the crowds' of relatively harmless TVs. The second, a White-tailed Hawk, was also over the road a little further on, looking very smart indeed soaring in a blue sky.

A big disappointment followed. We paid our entry fees to Falcon Dam State Park, looking forward to the excellent feeding station there. Sadly it has been abandoned and is now full of undergrowth with absolutely no birds. The once equally excellent butterfly garden is going the same way and does not look to be watered anymore. We still saw a few species there including Gulf (*Agraulis vanillae*) and Variegated Fritillaries (*Euptoieta claudia*), Laviana White-skipper (*Heliopetes laviana*) and Lyside Sulphur (*Kricogonia lyside*) but little else. A few Pyrrhuloxias just about made the detour worthwhile so we pressed on to Chapeño, another once excellent site below Falcon Dam. It probably wasn't the best time of day to do it justice and we saw next to nothing from the weird campsite there. Further downstream, Roma Bluffs, another World Birding Center site, could only muster a fly-by Common Ground Dove and it was more interesting watching the Mexicans just a few metres across



*Altamira Oriole and a picturesque side channel of the Rio Grande at Saliñeno (Mike Watson)*



*Gulf Fritillary, Falcon Dam SP (Mike Watson)*



*Reddish Egret (white morph), South Padre Island (Mike Watson).*

the Rio Grande below us zooming up and down on jet skis and generally having a party. A large 'Welcome to Mexico' sign hung over the bridge over the river. In contrast you could hear a pin drop on the deadly quiet US side of the border.

We ended the day in suburban McAllen again looking for parrots. To cut a long story short we eventually found some Red-crowned Parrots next to the fire station but they were only present quite briefly, flying in from somewhere else before moving on again. This is another pre-roost gathering spot. Also in this rather well-heeled residential area around 300 Cedar Waxwings were gathering and other birds of note included Plain Chachalaca, Purple Martin and three Green Parakeets that flew over. It was a relief to find the remaining parrot at the last attempt and our evening was more relaxed as a result.

Our final morning in the valley was spent at the coast. South Padre Island or SPI as it is simply known locally was almost totally devoid of passerine migrants in sunny weather and clear skies and the handful of tiny Valley Land Fund wood lots on the island were virtually empty with only a couple of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. In contrast the Birding Center boardwalk was very birdy, albeit with waterbirds. Around the various lagoons were Pied-billed Grebe, American White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Least Bittern, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Green Heron, Western Cattle Egret, Great Blue Heron, Great, Reddish (two, one a white morph doing its crazy feeding dance) and Snowy Egrets, Tricoloured Heron, Little Blue Heron (white morph), Neotropic Cormorant, Clapper Rail (three), Sora (five), Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Western Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Least, White-rumped (two), Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers, Black Skimmer, Gull-billed, Caspian, Royal and Least Terns, Common Yellowthroat and White-throated Sparrow and we enjoyed point blank views of some of these habituated birds. Three Western Ospreys were logged here along with a Peregrine keeping watch from a nearby water tower. The tidal mud flats held Grey (or Black-bellied) and Wilson's Plovers and Short-billed Dowitcher of note.

Leaving SPI we crossed back over the longest bridge in Texas to the mainland and cruised some of the many back roads and rough tracks in the Laguna Atascosa/Buena Vista/Port Isabel areas. The highlight was a pair of gorgeous Aplomado Falcons along the old Port Isabel Road that allowed some very close views (and they were un-ringed too, which always looks nicer and also makes them at least second generation products of the reintroduction scheme in that area, however, they are already considered 'countable' for listing purposes by



*Tricoloured Heron (above) and Yellow-crowned Night Heron at SPI (Mike Watson).*



*Plomado Falcon, Old Port Isabel Road (Mike Watson).*

the ABA!). We also found an excellent pair of Greater Roadrunners near Laguna Atascosa that allowed some very close views and the third major highlight was a Crested Caracara and some Black Vultures trying to find a way into the carcass of a dead armadillo, front or rear entrance, take your pick.

We still had time for one more stop in the valley so we called in at Sabal Palms Sanctuary. This place has the grandest visitor center of any reserve I have visited anywhere in the world, a magnificent plantation house dating back to 1892 and complete with furnishings and antiques. The woodland and lagoons here are also very pretty and are an excellent remnant of the Sabal Palm-dominated woodland that covered swathes of the lower valley when the first Europeans reached here. We were after Ringed Kingfisher, which is particularly easy to see here and it took only a few seconds to spot one from the first blind we stopped at. We also added the noisy Carolina Wren. Also here were an impressive eight Least Grebes, a drake Redhead, two Plain Chachalacas and three Little Blue Herons. The feeding station and bird blind were quite productive with our first Northern Waterthrush, as well as Green Jay, Black-crested Titmouse and Olive Sparrow. Well it must be time for another Subway lunch and then hit the highway and head north to Fulton.

Our visit to the enormous Aransas NWR marked the low point of the tour. We knew that sightings of the wintering Whooping Cranes from there had already dried up with their absence from recent eBird checklists. Their departure was confirmed by staff at the visitor center. They had left the refuge a week earlier, while we were still in Colorado. We didn't linger long as a result and after a quick look from the world's most robust viewing tower and a spin around one of the drives we made tracks for High Island. Our only live Raccoon of the tour ran across the road here and a Common Loon was on the lagoon from the watch tower.

High Island, located just to the east of Galveston Bay is one of world birding's true Meccas. A premier US migration hotspot akin to Magee Marsh in Ohio, Point Pelee in Ontario and Cape May in New Jersey. However, in terms of diversity it is hard to beat in spring. As well as potentially around 30 species of wood warblers numerous other land birds stop off here in migration, the marshes surrounding Galveston Bay, the shores of the Bolivar Peninsula and the irrigated fields to the north add further diversity. The 'island' is actually a salt dome around six miles in diameter rising to a height of 38 feet above the surrounding countryside and significantly the highest ground along the coast from Mobile, Alabama to the Yucatan Peninsula. Southerly winds and clear skies were forecast to continue for a couple of days, however, there was some rain forecast on the horizon at



*Northern Crested Caracara & Turkey Vulture and below, Sabal Palms Sanctuary Visitor Center (Mike Watson).*



*Boy Scout Woods, High Island (Mike Watson).*

the end of our stay, albeit still with southerly winds helping to propel migrants overhead and inland before they make landfall. The distance across the Gulf of Mexico from the Yucatan Peninsula is around 600 miles and takes about 20 hours for passerines to cross so birds that start at nightfall arrive at High Island in the afternoon of the next day. That is when birders hope for rain and preferably northerly winds. We paused for a while on FM1985, checking the fields along the farm road and although we failed to find any significant shorebirds we did manage around 200 Long-billed Dowitchers, 200 Hudsonian Whimbrels and 50 Dunlin of note before we crossed the channel to High Island.

There are various wood lots on High Island preserved as bird sanctuaries and the most famous of all is Boy Scout Woods, owned by Houston Audubon Society (H.A.S.). Although many of its huge live oaks were felled by Hurricane Ike in 2008, it still has some large trees in the northern section and pulls in migrant land birds. The water drip by Purkey's Pond near the H.A.S. stall is overlooked by a viewing 'grandstand' and this remains the best single place in Boy Scout as everything seems to pay it a visit eventually. We bought our legendary H.A.S. High Island patches (the rare Blue-winged X Golden-winged back-cross 'Lawrence's' Warbler this year) and as well as a couple of short walks on the trails, we spent much of our first afternoon at the grandstand and were treated to some nice looks at such as Yellow-throated and Blue-headed Vireos, Grey Catbird, Brown Thrasher and Grey-cheeked Thrush. A handful of wood warblers included Northern Waterthrush, Blue-winged, Black-and-White and Hooded Warblers, American Redstart, American Yellow and Blackpoll Warblers but all either high in the canopy or deep in the shadows. An Orchard Oriole was new for the tour as was Scarlet Tanager. A few Summer Tanagers and Indigo Buntings were also around but it was quiet by High Island's very high standards.

Smith Oaks is another Houston Audubon Sanctuary. The first section of the 177 acres sanctuary was purchased as recently as 1987 and it is centred on the former home of George and Charlotte Smith, who acquired the property in 1879 and, amongst other things, sunk several water wells. The water was sold as 'High Island Mineral Springs Water', which could '*cure Brights Disease, liver and kidney troubles, Catarrh – the cause of consumption, Asthma, Hay Fever, restore hair on bald heads and remove dandruff on the scalp and all the pimples and blotches from the face*'. I wonder how much of it someone would drink before they realized this was not true? The Smiths' home was dismantled in 1985 and the sanctuary is now the premier migrant spot on High Island. Migrants arriving in the afternoon tend to work their way across the island and end up in the



*Long-tailed Duck (female), Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary.*

very large live oaks here just before the start of the marshes and flat lands to the north. After a diner breakfast, which was livened up by a flock of Cedar Waxwings landing in the trees of a yard across the road, we had a walk around both Smith Oaks and Boy Scout Woods but things were very quiet indeed with only Blue Jay and White-throated Sparrow to show for our efforts. Tropical Birding's Iain Campbell said '*there are no birds here*' and in High Island terms he was right so I decided that today must be a day to catch up with some waterbirds then.

We spent the rest of the day just down the road on the Bolivar Peninsula, starting at Rollover Pass. The tide was fairly high here and birds were tightly packed on the small islets on the inland side of the pass. A raft of c.200 Red-breasted Mergansers was just offshore and Brown Pelicans, both Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, a Wilson's Plover, Gull-billed, Cabot's (split from Sandwich), Royal, Least, Forster's and American Black Terns and Black Skimmers were notable here. Towards the end of the peninsula we managed to dodge the worst of the massive traffic jam for the Galveston ferry and cruised along Frenchtown Road past some excellent lagoons, which afforded point blank views of Short-billed Dowitchers (of the pale orange Prairie-breeding form *hendersoni*), Hudsonian Whimbrels and Ruddy Turnstones. Local breeding Eastern Willets were also here and allowed a good comparison with their more poorly marked, leggy Western relatives. The Least Terns here were particularly obliging diving in a channel just by the road. In fact many waterbirds in Texas appear to be virtually habituated. A Yellow-crowned Night Heron posed in a ditch next to the vehicle and a Roseate Spoonbill simply stood in the middle of the road until we were very close.

However, the best waterbird spectacle by far was at Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary, where the onshore wind had led to a semi-permanent high tide gathering. The water is so shallow here and the tidal range so small that an onshore wind keeps the water pushed up against the shore. A group of around 25 Lesser Scaup was close offshore just beyond the surf, several lovely Piping Plovers were amongst the Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings and Least Terns along the rather muddy beach, where the long-staying female Long-tailed Duck waddled out of the water. A scarce bird in Texas this was easily the furthest south I have ever seen one anywhere in the world. It looked in a bad way, constantly preening but I was happy to see that it was still present some weeks later so presumably it is OK? A throng of waterbirds on the shore here included hundreds of American Avocets, some sweep feeding in the surf on the beach, riding the waves like phalaropes. There were also Marbled Godwits, Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers and hundreds of Dunlins but the US birders



*Greater Yellowlegs, Rollover Pass (above) and 'Prairie' Short-billed Dowitcher, Frenchtown Road (Mike Watson).*



*Eastern Willet (above) and Hudsonian Whimbrel, Frenchtown Road (Mike Watson).*



*Piping Plover (above) and American Avocet, Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Sanctuary (Mike Watson).*



*Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Angelina National Forest (Mike Watson).*

were more interested in the ten or so Red Knots amongst them, some in faded red breeding plumage. A stop on one of the back roads on the peninsula quickly produced the desired pair of saltmarsh-loving sparrows, Seaside Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrow. We also got some nice looks at Boat-tailed Grackles, at the edge of their range here. After lunch at the good ole Tiki bar and grill we left the Bolivar Peninsula (pronounced Boliver as in Oliver Cromwell) and returned to High Island where a few migrants had arrived in the afternoon and things picked up a little at the grandstand with Veery, Wood Thrush and Tennessee and Kentucky Warblers, meanwhile Grey-cheeked Thrushes had increased to three. We had filled many of our waterbird gaps so not a bad day but the lack of landbird migrants was a worry as time was running out.

We spent the next day far inland. Getting up well before dawn we drove northeast past Port Arthur and Beaumont to Jasper and the Pineywoods of Angelina National Forest. The morning started off misty and efforts to locate our main target here, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, were unsuccessful. Fortunately there were plenty of other birds we needed to find in the lovely forest. Pine Warbler and Brown-headed Nuthatch were both very easy, the warbler already had begging fledged juveniles in tow! Still no woodpeckers but we could hear the beautiful and distinctive song of Bachman's Sparrow. For some reason they were not at all obliging to start with today but after some considerable time we all got a good look at this lovely ginger Pineywoods speciality, whose range pretty much matches the woodpecker, eastwards from Texas to Florida and north to Virginia. Later we saw a sparrow that sat up nicely for prolonged views for all as they usually do. Continuing our search for the woodpecker a noisy Tufted Titmouse was a welcome distraction and one of the nest holes we checked had a Southern Flying Squirrel poking its head out of the hole, a nice bonus! Eventually, returning to our original nest colony site a pair of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers flew in to check us out and allowed some great views in the nearby Longleaf Pine trees. Phew! At last! That was not a bird I wanted to leave behind! At around 1% of its former population its present numbers are severely reduced so it is definitely one to watch. However, it was now after 1pm and we still had another five target birds to find.

Moving on to Martin Dies Jr. State Park I wondered if it was named after a Martin who died as a result of an allergic reaction to mosquito bites? They were really terrible here, the only place in Texas we experienced such a savaging. I picked up another around 100 bites to go with my 100+ chigger bites on each leg from the long grass of the valley! The birding was pretty tough as a result of having a swarm of mozzies attacking your face all the time as well as being the middle of the day and we only heard Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers



*Prairie Warbler, Sandy Creek SP and Pineywoods habitat in Angelina National Forest (Mike Watson).*



*Hudsonian Godwits, FM1941 north of Anahuac NWR (Mike Watson).*

before we were beaten back to the vehicle. I will be very happy if I do not need to return to this place! We also added the super smart Red-headed Woodpecker here, a pair working on a tall dead snag. To add insult to injury the storm clouds, which had been building for the last couple of hours were now starting to thunder. We beat a hasty retreat and headed for another site for the warblers, Sandy Creek State Park. The rain was still lashing down as we arrived but soon gave way to a pleasant sunny evening. We were delighted to find Prairie Warblers already in song, sitting up on young pine trees. Maybe my favourite of all the wood warblers and you hardly ever see this one on migration, they rarely stop off at High Island for instance. Also singing here were Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo Bunting and its larger lookalike, the lovely Blue Grosbeak. That only left the two warblers. So one by one it was then. Prothonotary Warbler gave itself up quickly and we were soon treated to some nice views of this bright yellow jewel in a small flooded area of forest by the roadside. By contrast, Swainson's is a real shadow-dweller and took a bit more effort before we could watch one foraging in the leaf litter under the tangled understory of the forest. We even had time to pause in Lumberton for Fish Crow on the way back to High Island but what a grim way to end a successful day after those lovely wood warblers!

Our last full day at High Island and our wood warbler list was still minute but at least it was now raining so there was still some hope. The rain was due to ease in the afternoon so it was back to waterbirds again this morning. We cruised the farm roads again to the north of Anahuac NWR, FM1985, South Pear Orchard Road and FM1941 to be precise. There were a lot of shorebirds scattered over the now partly flooded fields but fewer whimbrels today. Highlights included Wilson's Snipe, American Golden Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper and very happily two Hudsonian Godwits on a remote flooded field off FM1941. Not in the best plumage but starting to acquire some red feathers on their bellies. They fed for a while near our vehicle before moving away to a more distant flood. We also logged another 20 Upland Sandpipers, in a grassy pasture off FM1985. Both Clapper and King Rails were much in evidence today in the roadside ditches, rain always seems to bring them out into the open. Eastern Kingbirds had started to appear on the fence wires.

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge itself was also very birdy. We quickly added (American) Purple Gallinule and Fulvous Whistling Duck at Shoveler Pond followed by seven Least Bitterns 'showing well' after the rain had gone. We also saw plenty of Sora, Clapper and King Rails including a family of the latter with small chicks. The verges of the driving routes had been mown recently no doubt creating a temporary feeding bonanza for them. I've never seen so many rails at one location before. There was only one planned rail walk at Anahuac



*(American) Purple Gallinule, High Island (Mike Watson).*

this year and it fell while we were still in Colorado, so no Yellow Rail this time. It is quite a nasty experience for the rails so it was not missed. We drove as far as just before Frozen Point seeing some more interesting birds like Solitary Sandpiper, Swamp and Seaside Sparrows plus Sedge Wren. Orchard Orioles and more Eastern Kingbirds were conspicuous on the fence wires again – a big arrival of migrants was obviously taking place. As the weather was showing signs of clearing we returned to High Island in the hope of a grand finale to rescue our ailing wood warbler list.

What a grand finale it was too! The first port of call is always the H.A.S. stall and the noticeboard at Boy Scout Woods and this was mildly disappointing. Nothing much had happened yet despite the rain, however, there was still time for a 'fall out' so we headed out on the trails. Gradually migrants started to appear including Yellow-billed Cuckoo, multiple Scarlet Tanagers and Indigo Buntings, soaking wet and sat out in the open trying to dry out. This was a sign that birds were arriving, so far so good then. After a false start at Hook Woods, where we hardly saw a single bird we put all our chips on Smith Oaks, which had been quite good in the evening for others in the preceding days, despite the less than optimal weather conditions. Smith Oaks started well with similar birds to those we had seen in Boy Scout Woods, in fact maybe exactly the same birds moving across the island? This session at Smith Oaks was undoubtedly the most exciting of the whole tour, watching passerine migrants appearing seemingly out of the sky. The live oaks were where most of the warbler action was and we added nine wood warblers missing from our list – Worm-eating Warbler, Northern Parula and Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Yellow-throated and Black-throated Green Warblers plus a Cape May Warbler for Keith only...and best of all Cerulean Warbler (sadly 'only' a female but we were happy to take it)! Watching these little gems lighting up live oaks like Christmas decorations is one of the ornithological wonders of the world. We tallied a total of eighteen species of warblers today, much more like it for High Island! Red-eyed Vireos, Baltimore and more Orchard Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings were the back up to this impressive wood warbler line-up. The only negative was that in view of the low light levels on a dull afternoon with thunder in the air I didn't manage a single worthwhile photo to document the amazing spectacle. Sometimes observation is enough though! Our last sighting of the day was maybe the most bizarre, an American Purple Gallinule stood motionless on someone's lawn. Sam Woods tells me that they occur here as migrants so it was most likely exhausted after crossing the gulf and grounded by the rain. It didn't look in a good way and we left it where it stood.



*Black-capped Vireo, South Llano River State Park (Mike Watson).*

A good number of warbler species remained in Smith Oaks the next morning and we added Ovenbird, Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers to our High Island haul. Ironic after the effort we put in for the latter two in the Pineywoods, they are both scarce at High Island. However, overall numbers were down today and it seemed that many of yesterday's birds had departed. It would have been such a shame to miss a 'fall-out' like this, *the* genuine High Island experience. We were very relieved and thankful for this good luck. Just before lunchtime we set off on another long road journey, out west this time to the Hill Country. As we left Houston, and then San Antonio behind, the landscape changed to beautiful rolling limestone hills clad in live oaks and Ashe Junipers. We stayed overnight at Kerrville, enjoying an excellent evening out. The slightly sloshed owner of the establishment swung by and grabbed a bottle of wine off the shelf and went to drink it outside. Drinking on the streets here is not only legal but apparently encouraged!!!

Sadly we don't have time for boozing sessions on tour and we were on our way again way before dawn, this time driving further west to Junction, where we visited the excellent South Llano River State Park, another tip from our Geordie friends. Unfortunately they got the hide wrong for the two special birds here. We sat in Lora's blind all morning and despite an excellent tally of new species including Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Bewick's Wren, Orange-crowned, Nashville and MacGillivray's Warbler and Lincoln's, White-crowned, Chipping, Field, Clay-coloured, Lark, Black-throated and Cassin's Sparrows as well as Spotted Towhee and Painted Bunting there was no sign of Black-capped Vireo or Golden-cheeked Warbler coming to the water features. In fact both had visited the Agarita Blind instead this morning. We switched hides early enough to have some great views of the vireo only a few metres away but no sign of the warbler. A hike up the Fawn Trail, whose trailhead is near the Agarita Blind, produced another pair of vireos in live oaks higher up but again no sign of the warbler. Also here were Vermilion Flycatcher and Bald Eagle (our only one of the tour). We had two more shots at *the* warbler if necessary so no matter but it is always frustrating to miss an important bird like this. I was kicking myself for the lazy tactic of sitting in the blind instead of simply hiking the trails as we would have done without prior information but we had at least filled some other potentially tricky gaps in our wish list. Notwithstanding this is a superb state park and deserving of more attention. They are investing in their bird blinds and making an effort to attract more visiting birders so good luck to them! After lunch we headed further west and made a short stop at the Fort Lancaster overlook. Established in 1855 the fort briefly provided protection to the wagon trains on the San Antonio – El Paso road and saw several skirmishes with Apaches before it was abandoned in 1873-4. Typically a Zone-tailed Hawk almost sneaked past us here disguised as a TV and I am still waiting



*Colima Warbler in a Gray Oak (Mike Watson).*

for a close head-on view! Bewick's Wren and Black-throated Sparrow were singing here but nothing else was happening so we drove past the Sul Ross University town of Alpine. Sul Ross (real name Lawrence Sullivan Ross) is one of the most fascinating characters in the history of Texas. He was a former Texas Ranger, and officer in the Confederate forces and rose to the rank of Brigadier General in the Civil War. He survived 135 engagements with Union forces, his horse was shot from under him five times yet he remained uninjured and he was still only 26 years old when the Confederacy surrendered in Jackson, Mississippi in 1865, while he was on leave! As a Texas Ranger he is attributed to have rescued the white, kidnapped mother of Comanche chief Quanah Parker, Cynthia Ann Parker, at the Battle of Pease River, killing his father, Chief Peta Nocona in the process. In an earlier engagement Ross had been shot in the shoulder with an arrow and through the chest with a rifle but survived. After the civil war he became a sheriff and then a politician, serving as governor of Texas for two terms. He died in 1891, after a very eventful life, aged only 59.

Then came the big day in more ways than one. Our earliest start, longest hike, hottest day and probably the most exciting selection of birds. The nine hours hiking in the mountains without access to water was unfortunately only for those of a certain fitness level. We set off at an unearthly hour on empty roads, except for some Black-tailed Jackrabbits and a Great Horned Owl that flew into the side of the vehicle (fortunately only a glancing blow and it disappeared off into the night). We set out uphill well before dawn, a relentless climb up one million switchbacks to the sound of Mexican Whip-poor-wills singing. We had to make do with only hearing them but we were soon seeing other birds in the half-light as we gained height, like the noisy Mexican Jay and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. Eventually we reached woodland just below the mountain summit where the predominantly pine forest lower down gave way to more oaks. We quickly located a pair of Colima Warblers here by their sharp contact calls, they weren't singing and we enjoyed some nice close views albeit in rather blue early morning light. We had some great looks at their white spectacles, yellow vents and subtle chestnut caps. It takes some considerable time for the sun to top the walls of the pinnacles here. Endemic to the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains of northeast of Mexico, the breeding range of Colima Warblers only just creeps across the border into the USA in a couple of places, neither of which are easily accessed. As we continued further, a Canyon Wren was singing above us from a precipitous cliff face.



*Colima Warbler in a Graves Oak (Mike Watson).*



*Painted Whitestart (Mike Watson).*

We hiked through the most beautiful forest filled with oaks, pines and the amazing Alligator or Checkerbark Juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*), with pin-pricks of red here and there, the flowers of Claret Cup Cacti (*Echinocereus coccineus*). We saw our first Acorn Woodpeckers here and a blood-orange Hepatic Tanager was singing its simple, thrush-like song. Colima Warbler is *the* bird everyone wants to see but there are some other special Mexican birds here too. The first one of these we caught up with was Blue-throated Mountaingem, another mountain specialist with a beautiful name and a simple piping song. Its navy blue metallic throat feathers shone in the sun. We could also hear its whirring wings as it buzzed another couple of rivals. There was still some water trapped in the deeper pools here and there, the muddy edges of which attracted spectacular butterflies like Arizona Sister (*Adelpha euladia*) and Two-tailed Swallowtail (*Papilio multicaudata*). Nearby a Golden-banded Skipper (*Autochon cellus*) visited the flowers of Alpine Cancer-root, (*Conopholis alpina*), which flourishes on the shady slopes, it is a parasitic flower lacking chlorophyll, similar to Old World Toothwort (*Lathraea* sp.). The same pine tree, which was frequented by the mountaingems, was also visited by Townsend's and Hermit Warblers. Both migrant western warblers passing through on their way north, the latter a rarity in Texas and a write-in for the tour. Another western wood warbler, Wilson's was much more common and conspicuous here but no less flashy!

The next cross-border special we found here was Painted Whitestart. We enjoyed a pair and then a singing male a little further on, all allowing some very nice views, a truly stunning little wood warbler! Vireos were represented here by Hutton's, another super showy little bird singing its head off and flycatchers by Ash-throated. All too soon it was time to start winding our way back down. We heard a Colima Warbler and saw another in trailside oaks, including catching and eating a large insect and raising its crest. Fantastic stuff! It certainly makes me want to explore some mountains south of the border now. Apart from a stop for Crissal Thrasher and Black-chinned Sparrow, both of which quickly obliged, the walk out was uneventful except for a lot of swearing about how long it took. We finally walked back to the vehicle and hooked up with the rest of the folks who had stayed down, seeing some lower altitude birds like Scott's Oriole and Cactus Wren. An Audubon's Warbler sought shade in a nearby tree as we left. The car's temperature gauge read 102 degrees Fahrenheit and after 16km and c1000m of ascent and descent, no wonder I had drunk all of the three litres of water I carried up.



*Acorn Woodpecker and Blue-throated Mountain-gem (Mike Watson).*



*Arizona Sister in Bigtooth Maple (above) and Alpine Cancer-root (Mike Watson).*



*Varied Bunting, Christmas Mountain Oasis (Mike Watson).*

Today's programme started with a visit to Carolyn Ohl's superb Christmas Mountain Oasis feeding station, easily the best one we visited on the tour and in a delightful location in the shadow of her mountain of the same name, yes, she owns that as well as part of her private nature reserve. As soon as we arrived we were greeted by the main attraction, the delightful Lucifer Sheartail, buzzing around the feeders, sometimes only a few centimetres from our faces, the males flashing their gorgeous magenta bibs. Christmas Mountain is *the* location in the USA for this diminutive Mexican hummer! We also added the equally gorgeous Varied Bunting here, a singing male regularly visiting the feeders. Its favourite tree, a stunning yellow-flowered Golden Ball Lead Tree (*Leucaena refusa*) also briefly hosted a migrant Virginia's Warbler towards the end of our visit. Apart from its yellow breast this one superficially resembles Colima Warbler. A very smart Green-tailed Towhee also visited the feeding station, mostly remaining under the surrounding bushes and a Greater Roadrunner was sitting on its big untidy nest. Our final addition at Christmas Mountain was the rather drab Brewer's Sparrow, which briefly visited the feeding station and took a drink in the water tank. This sparrow of the western deserts is definitely a candidate for North America's least inspiring bird. We had seen a couple of Scaled Quails in the desert on the way to the oasis, as well as a pair of Greater Roadrunners and there was another pair of quails at the oasis itself. There were plenty of other interesting species at CMO this morning including: Cassin's Kingbird; American Bushtit; Curve-billed Thrasher; Audubon's and Wilson's Warblers; Bullock's Oriole; Chipping, Clay-coloured and Black-throated Sparrows; Spotted and Canyon Towhees and Pyrrhuloxia. Carolyn moved to Christmas Mountain in 1976 and planted her oasis in 1996. Within 20 years it has become another world birding Mecca! I wonder how many birders saw their lifer Lucifer Sheartail here? Just as we were leaving, a massive Texas Brown Tarantula (*Aphonopelma hentzi*) was spotted by Dave, crawling across the entrance to Carolyn's water tank.

This morning we had an authentic American diner experience and yet another excellent breakfast! We visited the Chihuahuan Desert Institute, where we walked around the planted area looking at some of the lovely native desert plants and shrubs there as well as a brand spanking new bird feeding (and drinking) station, complete with a smart brand new blind. Although it has only been established for a couple of weeks it is already pulling in birds such as Chipping, Lark and Black-throated Sparrows (and maybe one day Montezuma Quail, which is seen on the property regularly?). We also saw another Cactus Wren here, watched in the shade of a mining exhibit bashing up a small lizard it had caught. An obliging Mexican Ground Squirrel was also near the mining exhibit and, later, a small group of Pronghorn Antelopes was resting in a roadside pasture. The afternoon saw



*Texas Brown Tarantula and Christmas Mountain Oasis (Mike Watson).*



*Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Davis Mountains State Park (Mike Watson).*

us arrive at our next accommodation, the historic Indian Lodge in Davis Mountains State Park, a charismatic and delightful whitewashed adobe building built in the 1930s, with a stunning view down the valley over the park. A quick look at the bird feeders produced western birds typical of the park including Scott's Oriole and Black-headed Grosbeak. A Kit Fox loitered near the lodge before disappearing into the darkness. This evening we had some good luck in spotting a Common Poorwill, which obliged by landing in front of our vehicle. Less fortunate was the impatient dipstick in the car behind us who tried to run it over, happily without success. One of Fort Davis's most famous visitors was the last Comanche War Chief Quanah Parker, who stayed at the Lempert Hotel (now the 'Veranda') here in 1884, when he visited the region to collect peyote cacti from Mitre Peak (peyote is a small button-shaped spineless cactus, known for its psychoactive properties and was used in ritualistic ceremonies by native Americans).

We spent the whole morning in the state park and the adjacent primitive area and eventually caught up with the much sought-after Montezuma Quail. In fact it almost took Dave's nose off as it broke cover. He had a great view! The rest of us had varying views of it in flight and then on the ground as it scuttled into cover and simply vanished. I suspect it made another move from the area it ran into without us seeing in which direction it went. Covered in stripes with a hyper-distinctive head pattern it was obviously a male. Black-chinned Hummingbird was very common in the park and Acorn Woodpeckers appeared to have taken over its telegraph poles, their heads poking out of holes therein. Also here were Cassin's Kingbird, Woodhouses's Scrub Jay, Black-crested Titmouse, American Bushtit, Cactus, Rock, Canyon and Bewick's Wrens, Audubon's and Wilson's Warblers, Scott's Oriole, Chipping, Vesper, Lark, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Canyon Towhee, Hepatic and Summer Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeak. We also added Pine Siskin to our triplist. Although dotted with camping areas the state park is a haven for birds, no doubt aided by its excellent bird feeding stations viewed by some comfortable blinds.

After lunch we headed further west into the rolling hills picking up a roadside male Phainopepla (get in!) whilst reversing to check a Vermillion Flycatcher near Limpia Crossing, however, it soon moved on, flashing its white wing patches. Our destination this afternoon was eBird hotspot 'Lawrence E Wood Picnic Area', which lived up to its billing, producing more interesting western birds including American Grey Flycatcher, Western Bluebird, Hutton's Vireo, *nelsoni* form White-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush and Hepatic Tanager. A walk around the Madera Canyon loop trail was utterly pointless in the afternoon heat, most birds were in the shade of the picnic



*Mural depicting James Dean in the film 'Giant' in Alpine and Davis Mountains SP (below, Mike Watson).*



*Hooded Oriole (ssp sennetti), Judge Roy Bean Cactus Museum, Langtry (Mike Watson).*

area lower down. Night-birding was also fruitless this evening. We hadn't checked another well recorded eBird hotspot yet, Limpia Crossing, which is a residential area set in some very nice habitat. Cruising around here produced our best roadrunner encounter of the tour (pictured on page 2), in lovely early morning sunshine and suitably running along the road towards us. After so many great encounters, it was no wonder that this species did so well in the 'bird of the trip' contest.

We had some miles to cover to get to Uvalde by evening and we made fast progress through the lovely, rolling Chihuahuan desert landscape. We stopped for a small flock of Lark Buntings by the roadside, near Marathon - another welcome addition to our list. We also stopped for a while at the Judge Roy Bean Cactus Museum in Langtry. Phantly Roy Bean, Jr. (1825-1903) was an eccentric saloonkeeper and Justice of the Peace who called himself "The Law West of the Pecos". We learned that *'Bean relied on a single law book, the 1879 edition of the 'Revised Statutes of Texas', which he rarely referred to. Langtry did not have a jail, so all cases were settled by fines. Bean refused to send the state any part of the fines, but instead kept all of the money. In most cases, the fines were made for the exact amount on the accused's person.'* The bar is still intact and was named "The Jersey Lily" after English actress Lily Langtree (after whom the small town is also named). Bean was infatuated with her and bizarrely she visited the area after his death. The cactus garden is also an eBird hotspot and produced some nice views of Hooded Oriole, Cactus Wren as well as a Greater Roadrunner and a fly-by Zone-tailed Hawk. We were running out of targets in this area now and it was time to return to the Hill Country. A late afternoon look around the Cook's Slough Reserve at Uvalde did not produce much of note apart from Nashville Warbler, Lark and Olive Sparrows (the latter carrying food) and Blue Grosbeak. Jack's Steakhouse was very good this evening!

Although well out of our way, at least we had a very good idea of where we were going to find our most glaring omission, Golden-cheeked Warbler, at South Llano River so, after a painful early start, we drove north, back to Junction. I should not have worried. Within a few minutes of reaching predominantly Ashe Juniper habitat we saw one. We even had time to go back and persuade our cameramen to come and see it. What a terrific little bird it is too. Restricted in range to being a Texas breeding endemic, an eye-catching brightly coloured wood warbler in a lovely location and perfect low angle early morning sunshine, who could wish for more? Added to this an air of anticipation and concern we might miss it somehow and coming late in the tour, close to the vote and no wonder it was a clear winner in the 'bird of the trip' contest! So ironic that back in the bird blind, what



*The Jersey Lilly Bar at Judge Roy Bean Cactus Museum, Langtry (Mike Watson).*



*Painted Bunting, South Llano River State Park (Mike Watson).*

should appear at the birdbath but another Golden-cheeked Warbler of course? We also saw another couple of Black-capped Vireos here, one at the birdbath and it or another singing from nearby trees along the trail early in the morning. We had more or less the same species as before here including some lovely views for all of a young male Vermilion Flycatcher and at least six Painted Buntings. We also had time today to check the Acorn Hide, where a Bell's Vireo was sitting on a nest.

The afternoon delivered our final and 37th wood warbler species of the tour in the form of Louisiana Water-thrush, bathing in a limestone stream at the picturesque Lost Maples State Park. We didn't look for or hear Black-capped Vireo or Golden-cheeked Warbler, which also breed here but we did manage to add Carolina Chickadee and to see some favourites again like Carolina Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow and Blue Grosbeak. The songs of Red-eyed Vireos rang out in the lovely maple-dominated limestone woodland, together with Hutton's and White-eyed Vireos on our last afternoon of the tour, our time in Texas was coming to an end. We made a final stop this afternoon at Utopia Park where Belted Kingfisher and a very showing Carolina Wren were highlights but there was no sign of Barred Owl unfortunately. Another minor disappointment (as we were predominantly birders on this tour) was the lack of an open evening at the Rio Frio bat cave while we were in range this time. Back to Jack's then, a worthy spot for our final evening of the tour and a great bird to celebrate. They even had Key Lime Pie on the menu!

Once we had cleared the San Antone rush hour traffic we rolled up at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center on the outskirts of the city on a warm and sunny morning. Quite a contrast to when we left here at the start of the tour. We tried the walking trail to no avail until we reached the grassland restoration area not far from the visitor center. The distinctive songs of Dickcissels, singing from the tops of small trees could be heard here, a rather late addition to our list, I had expected to see it long before now but it was better later rather than never. Very smart too. We drove the extensive tracks around the deep algae filled lagoons here adding Eared Grebe to the trip list and also a contentious Muscovy Duck. Probably an escape but fairly close to the border after blasting southerly winds, so who knows? Also here were nesting Green Herons, American White Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Ash-throated and Brown-crested Flycatchers and some lovely views of Scissor-tailed, Long-billed Thrasher and a couple of Nashville Warblers. That's it!



*Lost Maples State Natural Area (Mike Watson).*

Thanks are due to our keen and optimistic group, without whom all of this would not have been possible nor as much fun. Y'all come back to Texas! [For those who had to put up with me for a whole month, our combined Colorado and Texas lists came to 393 species, not a bad tally and a great kick start to an ABA list!]

**BIRD OF THE TOUR (AS VOTED FOR BY THE GROUP)**

1. Golden-cheeked Warbler
2. Greater Roadrunner
3. Lucifer Hummingbird
4. Blackburnian Warbler
5. Yellow-billed Cuckoo



*Lucifer Sheartail, Christmas Mountain Oasis (Mike Watson).*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). IOC World Bird Names. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species). Conservation threat categories and information are taken from Threatened Birds of the World, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

E = Endangered, V = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient.

- Black-bellied Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna autumnalis* First recorded Weslaco. Common in RGV and on the coast.
- Fulvous Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor* c20 at Shoveler Pond, Anahuac NWR was the only record.
- Muscovy Duck** *Cairina moschata* One at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center but it may have been of captive origin.
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera* c10 at Estero Llano Grande WBC and 5 at SPI.
- Mottled Duck** ◊ *Anas fulvigula* Sightings RGV and Upper Coast after the first at Estero Llano Grande. Ssp *maculosa*.
- Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* c15 at Estero Llano Grande WBC were the first of c95 logged.
- Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* c5 at Estero Llano Grande WBC and two drakes at Anahuac NWR.
- Redhead** *Aythya Americana* A drake at Sabal Palms Sanctuary was the only sighting.
- Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* c25 at Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Sanctuary was the only record.
- Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* A female at Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Sanctuary was a write-in for this tour. **VU**
- Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* c200 were at Rollover Pass on the Bolivar Peninsula.
- Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis* One drake on a farm pond in the Davis Mountains. Ssp *rubida*.
- Plain Chachalaca** ◊ *Ortalis vetula* Two at Estero Llano Grande WBC. Total c30 logged in the Lower RGV. Ssp *mccalli*.



Least Bittern, Anahuac NWR (Mike Watson).

- Scaled Quail  $\diamond$  *Callipepla squamata* Four at Christmas Mountain and two in Alpine. Ssp *castanogastris*.  
Northern Bobwhite  $\diamond$  *Colinus virginianus* Two on the ground at the National Butterfly Center, Mission. Ssp *texasus*.  
Montezuma Quail  $\diamond$  *Cyrtonyx montezumae* A male at Davis Mountains SP. **NT**  
Wild Turkey  $\diamond$  *Meleagris gallopavo* Two on the interstate S of Corpus Christi were the first of 20. Ssp *intermedia*.  
Common Loon (Common L, G N Diver) *Gavia immer* One at Aransas NWR was in non-breeding plumage.  
Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus* One at Estero Llano Grande WBC and eight at Sabal Palms Sanctuary.  
Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* Two at SPI and c20 at Anahuac NWR.  
Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis* Six at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center. Ssp *californicus*.  
American White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* One SPI, 28 Aransas NWR, c10 Bolivar and c20 in the Anahuac area.  
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Two at Anahuac NWR.  
White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi* One at Estero Llano Grande WBC was followed by another c20 tallied.  
Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* 11 SPI, c10 Aransas NWR, two Bolivar Peninsula & four at or near Anahuac NWR.  
Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* Three SPI and seven at Anahuac NWR.  
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* First noted SPI, followed by another eight. Ssp *hoacti*.  
Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea* Two Estero Llano Grande WBC then another six.  
Green Heron *Butorides virescens* One at Estero Llano Grande WBC first followed by another 10. See note.  
Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Fairly common throughout after the first at Estero Llano Grande WBC. See note.  
Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* A scatter of sightings after the first three at Bentsen Rio Grande SP. Ssp *wardi*.  
Great Egret (American G E) *Ardea [alba] egretta* A scatter of sightings after the first at Estero. See note.  
Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens* Two at SPI (one white morph) and four Bolivar Peninsula. **NT**  
Tricolored Heron (Louisiana H) *Egretta tricolor* One Estero, four SPI, six Aransas and c10 Bolivar Peninsula.  
Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* One Saliñeno (dark), one SPI (white) and three near Laguna Atascosa.  
Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* Three Estero Llano Grande WBC and another c120 logged elsewhere.  
American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* c270 Weslaco, one Bentsen, c20 Bolivar and c60 Mitchell Lake.  
Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* Four at SPI then c230 in the Bolivar Peninsula area. Ssp *carolinensis*.  
Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* One Falcon Dam followed by another c50 logged. Ssp *mexicanus*.  
Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* c20 at SPI were the first of c60 logged. Ssp *floridanus*.  
Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* Six north at Santa Ana NWR, one at Chapeño and three Mitchell Lake. Ssp *leucogaster*.  
Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* Very common with some large passage noted after the first at Estero. Ssp uncertain.  
Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* Small numbers throughout after the first at Estero Llano Grande WBC.



*Sora, Anahuac NWR (Mike Watson).*

- Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* 12 logged in the RGV and three on the Upper Coast. Ssp *carolinensis*. See note.
- White-tailed Kite** *Elanus leucurus* One McAllen, one Santa Ana NWR and one Bolivar Peninsula. ssp *majusculus*.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk** *Accipiter striatus* Three logged in the Lower RGV and one at Fort Davis. Ssp uncertain.
- Cooper's Hawk** *Accipiter cooperii* Two in the Lower RGV and two Davis Mountains.
- Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius* Singles at Anahuac NWR and Bolivar Peninsula were the only records. See note.
- Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* One at South Llano River SP. Ssp *leucocephalus*.
- Harris's Hawk** *Parabuteo unicinctus* 17 logged in the Lower RGV and one in Hill Country.
- White-tailed Hawk** *Geranoaetus albicaudatus* Singles nr Zapata, one Port Isabel & three King Ranch. ssp *hypospodius*.
- Grey Hawk** *Buteo plagiatus* An adult at Santa Ana NWR.
- Broad-winged Hawk** *Buteo platypterus* 200+ Lower RGV, three Martin Dies Jr. SP and one High Island was unusual.
- Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni* c90 noted Lower RGV and four on passage High Island – Hill Country.
- Zone-tailed Hawk** *Buteo albonotatus* Singles near Zapata, Fort Lancaster and Langtry.
- Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis* Two Lower RGV and 25 logged from the Hill Country westwards. Ssp *borealis*.
- Clapper Rail** *Rallus crepitans* Three at SPI, one Bolivar Peninsula & common Anahuac NWR. Ssp *saturatus*. See note.
- King Rail** *Rallus elegans* Several sightings around Anahuac NWR.
- Sora** *Porzana carolina* Five SPI and c15 Anahuac NWR. **NT**
- Purple Gallinule (American P G)** *Porphyrio martinica* 12 Anahuac NWR and one exhausted migrant at High Island.
- Common Gallinule (Laughing G)** *Gallinula galeata* One at Estero followed by another c40. Ssp *cahinnans*. See note.
- American Coot** *Fulica americana* One at Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by another c70.
- Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus* Five Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by another c35. See note.
- American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana* c500 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Sanctuary.
- American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* c10 over Santa Ana NWR and three along South Pear Orchard Road.
- Grey Plover (Black-bellied P)** *Pluvialis squatarola* Six at SPI then maximum c100 Bolivar Flats.
- Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus* c200 north of Anahuac NWR.
- Wilson's Plover** *Charadrius wilsonia* Singles SPI and Bolivar Peninsula a poor showing. What happened to them?
- Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferous* Small numbers throughout.
- Piping Plover** ♦ *Charadrius melodus* c20 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary. **NT**
- Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata* One north of Anahuac NWR. See note.
- Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* Two SPI and c300 Bolivar Peninsula. Ssp *hendersoni*.
- Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* c50 Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by another c700.



White-rumped Sandpiper, SPI (Mike Watson).

- Hudsonian Godwit  $\diamond$  *Limosa haemastica* Two off FM1941 north of Anahuac NWR.
- Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa* c20 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary.
- Whimbrel (Hudsonian W) *Numenius [phaeopus] hudsonicus* c480 logged in the Bolivar/Anahuac area. See note.
- Upland Sandpiper  $\diamond$  *Bartramia longicauda* 36 at Progreso Farms, Lower RGV and c20 FM1985 north of Anahuac.
- Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* One Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by c80 logged.
- Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* Six SPI followed by c55 logged.
- Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* Two Anahuac NWR. Ssp uncertain.
- Western Willet *Tringa [semipalmata] inornata* c15 SPI were followed by c120 in the Bolivar/Anahuac area. See note
- Eastern Willet *Tringa [semipalmata] semipalmata* c30 Bolivar Peninsula and eight Anahuac NWR. See note.
- Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* Two Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by another seven elsewhere.
- Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* c25 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary. Ssp *morinella*.
- Red Knot *Calidris canutus* c10 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary. Ssp *rufa*. **NT**
- Sanderling *Calidris alba* c80 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary. Ssp *rubida*.
- Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* c100 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary. **NT**
- Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* c10 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary.
- Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* c50 Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by another c160 logged.
- White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* Two SPI and one South Pear Orchard Road.
- Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* One Estero Llano Grande WBC, eight Progreso Farms and two SPI.
- Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Max c400 Anahuac area. Ssp *hudsonia*.
- Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* 105 counted at Estero Llano Grande WBC plus singles SPI and FM1985.
- Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger* c10 SPI and c300 Bolivar Peninsula.
- Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla* Very common along the coast. ssp *megalopterus*.
- Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* c50 Bolivar Peninsula.
- American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* c15 Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary. See note.
- Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Three Salifeno, 4 SPI & c45 on the Upper Coast. Ssp *aranea*.
- Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Three Salifeno and four SPI were the only records.
- Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* Five SPI then c800 Bolivar Peninsula.
- Cabot's Tern *Thalasseus acutiflavus* One SPI for Dave and c40 Bolivar Peninsula. See note.
- Least Tern *Sternula antillarum* c15 SPI and c100 Bolivar Peninsula. See note.
- Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* c40 Bolivar Peninsula.



Yellow-billed Cuckoo drying out after the rain at High Island (Mike Watson),

- Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* c50 Bolivar Peninsula. Ssp *surinamensis*. See note.
- Rock Dove (introduced)** *Columba livia* Scattered sightings in the Lower RGV.
- Band-tailed Pigeon** *Patagioenas fasciata* Two in the western mountains.
- Red-billed Pigeon** ◊ *Patagioenas flavirostris* One flew upriver at Saliñeno.
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* Six at Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by a small scatter.
- Inca Dove** *Columbina inca* Two Santa Ana NWR were followed by another eight in the valley and six at Lost Maples SNA.
- Common Ground Dove** *Columbina passerine* Singles at Estero Llano Grande WBC and Roma Bluffs WBC.
- White-tipped Dove** *Leptotila verreauxi* Up to 5 Estero, 14 RGV and 1 Lost Maples SNA. Ssp *angelica*.
- Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura* A scatter of sightings. Ssp *carolinensis*.
- White-winged Dove** *Zenaida asiatica* Common in the south and west from Estero Llano Grande WBC onwards.
- Greater Roadrunner** ◊ *Geococcyx californianus* Two Laguna Atascosa, Lower RGV followed by another six in the west.
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo** ◊ *Coccyzus americanus* Up to six at High Island.
- American Barn Owl** *Tyto furcata* One seen at the Gulfway Motel, High Island. Ssp *pratincola*. See note. (LO)
- Eastern Screech Owl** ◊ *Megascops asio* Two at Estero Llano Grande WBC. Ssp *mccalli*.
- Great Horned Owl** *Bubo virginianus* One in the western mountains.
- Elf Owl** ◊ *Micrathene whitneyi* One in its nest hole Bentsen Rio Grande SP. Ssp *idonea*.
- Lesser Nighthawk** *Chordeiles acutipennis*/**Common Nighthawk** *Chordeiles minor* One Alpine – Terlingua.
- Pauraque** *Nyctidromus albicollis* Two Estero, one Bentsen and two Santa Ana NWR. Ssp *merrilli*.
- Common Poorwill** ◊ *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii* One Davis Mountains SP.
- Mexican Whip-poor-will** ◊ *Antrostomus arizonae* Two heard in the western mountains. See note. (H)
- Chimney Swift** *Chaetura pelagica* Two McAllen followed by another 18 logged. **NT**
- White-throated Swift** *Aeronautes saxatalis* c50 in the western mountains and four Christmas Mountain.
- Buff-bellied Hummingbird** ◊ *Amazilia yucatanensis* Five Estero and one Sabal Palms. Ssp *chalconota*.
- Blue-throated Mountaingem** ◊ (B-t Hummingbird) *Lampornis clemenciae* 3 western mountains. Ssp *phasmosus*.
- Lucifer Sheartail** ◊ (L Hummingbird) *Calothorax Lucifer* Six Christmas Mountain Oasis.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird** *Archilochus colubris* One National Butterfly Center, two SPI and c15 High Island.
- Black-chinned Hummingbird** *Archilochus alexandri* One Estero Llano Grande WBC was followed by a scatter of c60.
- Green Kingfisher** *Chloroceryle Americana* A pair at Saliñeno. Ssp *septentrionalis*.
- Ringed Kingfisher** *Megaceryle torquata* One Sabal Palms Sanctuary.
- Belted Kingfisher** *Megaceryle alcyon* Five between the valley and Aransas, one High Island and one Utopia Park.



Green Kingfisher, Saliñeno (Mike Watson).

**Red-headed Woodpecker** ◊ *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* two Martin Dies Jr Sp and three Sandy Creek SP. NT  
**Acorn Woodpecker** *Melanerpes formicivorus* 20 logged in the western mountains.  
**Golden-fronted Woodpecker** *Melanerpes aurifrons* Very common in the Lower RGV and Hill Country.  
**Ladder-backed Woodpecker** *Dryobates scalaris* One Estero followed by another 10 logged. Ssp *cactophilus*.  
**Red-cockaded Woodpecker** ◊ *Leuconotopicus borealis* Two Angelina NF.  
**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus* Three, golden shafted, Sandy Creek SP.  
**Northern Crested Caracara** *Caracara cheriway* 30 logged after the first on the interstate S of Corpus Christi. See note.  
**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius* One Lower RGV and six in the west, a poor showing.  
**Aplomado Falcon** *Falco femoralis* An unringed pair on the Old Port Isabel Road. Ssp *septentrionalis*.  
**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* Singles Santa Ana NWR and SPI plus heard at Christmas Mtn. Ssp *anatum*.  
**Red-crowned Amazon** ◊ (introduced?) *Amazona viridigenalis* Seven in McAllen.  
**Green Parakeet** ◊ *Psittacara holochlorus* Two Weslaco and 18 in McAllen on two separate visits.  
**Northern Beardless Tyrannulet** *Camptostoma imberbe* One Estero Llano Grande WBC & another Santa Ana NWR.  
**Eastern Phoebe** *Sayornis phoebe* One Anahuac NWR.  
**Black Phoebe** *Sayornis nigricans* Two National Butterfly Center, Mission.  
**Say's Phoebe** *Sayornis saya* One Fort Lancaster then another 13 in the west.  
**Eastern Wood Pewee** *Contopus virens* One Anahuac NWR.  
**Least Flycatcher** *Empidonax minimus* One High Island.  
**American Grey Flycatcher** *Empidonax wrightii* Pair at Lawrence E Wood Picnic Area, Davis Mountains.  
**Vermilion Flycatcher** *Pyrocephalus rubinus* Up to two South Llano River SP & Davis Mountains. Ssp *mexicanus*.  
**Great Kiskadee** *Pitangus sulphuratus* One Estero Llano Grande WBC and another 11 in the valley.  
**Tropical Kingbird** *Tyrannus melancholicus* Two at Estero Llano Grande WBC. Ssp *satrapa*.  
**Couch's Kingbird** ◊ *Tyrannus couchii* Two at Estero Llano Grande WBC then another 27 noted.  
**Cassin's Kingbird** *Tyrannus vociferans* Five noted in the Davis Mountains. Ssp *vociferans*.  
**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** *Tyrannus forficatus* c100 noted throughout the tour, a delightful roadside bird!  
**Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus* c30 logged at Anahuac/High Island after the first on South Pear Orchard Road.  
**Ash-throated Flycatcher** *Myiarchus cinerascens* Six noted in the western mountains.  
**Great Crested Flycatcher** *Myiarchus crinitus* One National Butterfly Center, Mission.  
**Brown-crested Flycatcher** *Myiarchus tyrannulus* Singles Estero, San Ygnacio and Mitchell Lake. Ssp *cooperi*.  
**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus* A total of eight logged the first south of Corpus Christi. Ssp *migrans*.



Mexican Jay (Mike Watson).

- White-eyed Vireo** *Vireo griseus* The first singing at Santa Ana (Ssp *micrus*) followed by another 12 (Ssp *griseus*).
- Bell's Vireo** ◇ *Vireo bellii* One on a nest at South Llano River SP. Ssp *medius*. NT
- Black-capped Vireo** ◇ *Vireo atricapilla* Three and two on successive visits to South Llano River SP. **VU**
- Yellow-throated Vireo** *Vireo flavifrons* Only one, at High Island.
- Blue-headed Vireo** *Vireo solitarius* Only one, at High Island. Ssp uncertain. See note.
- Hutton's Vireo** *Vireo huttoni* Two in the western mountains and one Lost Maples. Ssp *carolinea*.
- Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus* c10 at High Island and three seen and another three heard singing at Lost Maples.
- Green Jay** *Cyanocorax luxuosus* c20 noted in the Lower RGV. Ssp *glaucescens*.
- Blue Jay** ◇ *Cyanocitta cristata* Up to six daily at High Island plus two in the Pineywoods.
- Mexican Jay** ◇ (Grey-breasted J) *Aphelocoma wollweberi* c20 Big Bend NP. Ssp *arizonae*.
- Woodhouse's Scrub Jay** ◇ *Aphelocoma woodhouseii* One at South Llano then another nine. Ssp *texana*. See note.
- American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos* Small numbers between San Antonio and the valley. Scarce.
- Fish Crow** ◇ *Corvus ossifragus* Two roadside birds at Lumberton.
- Chihuahuan Raven** ◇ *Corvus cryptoleucus* Nine logged in the west plus another five unidentified ravens.
- Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum* c300 at McAllen and c100 High Island.
- Phainopepla** ◇ *Phainopepla nitens* Male near Limpia Crossing, Davis Mountains.
- Tufted Titmouse** ◇ *Baeolophus bicolor* One very noisy bird in the Pineywoods of Angelina NF.
- Black-crested Titmouse** ◇ *Baeolophus atricristatus* Four at Estero followed by another 56. Ssp *paloduro*. See note.
- Carolina Chickadee** ◇ *Poecile carolinensis* One at Lost Maples. Ssp *atricapilloides*.
- Verdin** *Auriparus flaviceps* Three at Saliñeno and one Mitchell Lake Audubon Center. Ssp *ornatus*.
- Horned Lark (Shore L)** *Eremophila alpestris* Eleven LGV and two Bolivar Peninsula. Ssp *giraudi*.
- Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)** *Riparia riparia* One Saliñeno.
- Purple Martin** *Progne subis* Two Estero Llano Grande WBC followed by another c40 logged.
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* Two Saliñeno and three High Island. See note.
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* Common throughout. Ssp *erythrogaster*.
- American Cliff Swallow** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* Common, nesting under highway bridges. SSp *ganieri*.
- Cave Swallow** ◇ *Petrochelidon fulva* A couple of colonies in the Hill Country near Kerrville. Ssp *pallida*.
- American Bushtit** *Psaltriparus minimus* Two Christmas Mountain followed by another 12 logged. Ssp *dimorphicus*.
- Cactus Wren** *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* The first at Chisos Basin followed by another four. Ssp *couesi*.
- Rock Wren** *Salpinctes obsoletus* Four noted in the western mountains.



*Cactus Wren, Davis Mountains SP (Mike Watson).*

- Canyon Wren** *Catherpes mexicanus* Eight logged in the western mountains and three Lost Maples.
- Sedge Wren** *Cistothorus stellaris* Two singing Anahuac NWR. See note.
- Bewick's Wren** *Thryomanes bewickii* Five at South Llano River SP and common west of there.
- Carolina Wren** ◇ *Thryothorus ludovicianus* Singles Sabal Palms Sanctuary, Lost Maples and Utopia Park.
- Blue-grey Gnatcatcher** *Poliophtila caerulea* Three High Island and 12 logged in the west.
- Black-tailed Gnatcatcher** ◇ *Poliophtila melanura* Six in the western mountains.
- Brown-headed Nuthatch** ◇ *Sitta pusilla* Seven Angelina SF.
- White-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta carolinensis* Six logged in the western mountains. Ssp *nelsoni*. See note.
- Grey Catbird** *Dumetella carolinensis* Up to six High Island.
- Northern Mockingbird** *Mimus polyglottos* Very common throughout the tour from day one.
- Brown Thrasher** ◇ *Toxostoma rufum* Three sightings at High Island.
- Long-billed Thrasher** ◇ *Toxostoma longirostre* Two Estero, followed by seven RGV & one Mitchell Lake. Ssp *sennetti*.
- Curve-billed Thrasher** *Toxostoma curvirostre* Three Estero followed by another six. Ssp *oberholsei*.
- Crissal Thrasher** ◇ *Toxostoma crissale* A pair in the western mountains.
- Common Starling (European S)** *Sturnus vulgaris* Common.
- Western Bluebird** *Sialia mexicana* Three Lawrence E Wood Picnic Area, Davis Mountains. Ssp *bairdi*.
- Veery** *Catharus fuscescens* Two High Island. Ssp uncertain.
- Grey-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus* Five High Island.
- Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus* One for Keith only at High Island. Ssp uncertain. (NL)
- Hermit Thrush** *Catharus guttatus* Four logged in the western mountains. Ssp *polionotus*.
- Wood Thrush** *Hylocichla mustelina* Eight sightings at High Island. **NT**
- Clay-colored Thrush (C-c Robin)** *Turdus grayi* One singing at Estero Llano Grande WBC. Ssp *tamaulipensis*.
- House Sparrow (introduced)** *Passer domesticus* A few noted throughout.
- House Finch** *Haemorhous mexicanus* One Martin Dies Jr. SP but common west of Kerrville.
- Lesser Goldfinch** *Spinus psaltria* Three at Estero Llano Grande WBC, another three RGV but common in Hill Country.
- Pine Siskin** *Spinus pinus* Six Davis Mountains SP.
- Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapilla* One High Island. Ssp uncertain.
- Worm-eating Warbler** *Helmitheros vermivorum* Three High Island.
- Louisiana Waterthrush** ◇ *Parkesia motacilla* One Lost Maples. SNA
- Northern Waterthrush** *Parkesia noveboracensis* One Sabal Palms Sanctuary and four sightings High Island.



Hermit Warbler (Mike Watson).

- Blue-winged Warbler** *Vermivora cyanoptera* Three sightings at High Island including one singing male.
- Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia* 17 logged at High Island plus singles South Llano River SP and Lost Maples.
- Prothonotary Warbler** *Protonotaria citrea* Heard Martin Dies Jr SP, two seen Sandy Creek SP and one High Island.
- Swainson's Warbler** *Limnithlypis swainsonii* Heard Martin Dies Jr, one seen Sandy Creek and one High Island.
- Tennessee Warbler** *Leiothlypis peregrine* 15 logged High Island.
- Orange-crowned Warbler** *Leiothlypis celata* c10 South Llano River SP. Ssp *orestera*.
- Colima Warbler** *Leiothlypis crissalis* Two pairs seen and another heard in the western mountains.
- Nashville Warbler** *Leiothlypis ruficapilla* Up to four South Llano River SP and four thereafter in the west.
- Virginia's Warbler** *Leiothlypis virginiae* One Christmas Mountain Oasis was a nice surprise.
- MacGillivray's Warbler** *Geothlypis tolmiei* One South Llano River SP. Ssp uncertain.
- Kentucky Warbler** *Geothlypis formosa* Four sightings High Island.
- Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* Four SPI (Ssp *insperata*), also Anahuac NWR, High Island & Christmas Mtn.
- Hooded Warbler** *Setophaga citrine* Five sightings High Island (one female).
- American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla* Five sightings High Island (all males).
- Cape May Warbler** *Setophaga tigrina* A male for Keith only at High Island (NL).
- Cerulean Warbler** *Setophaga cerulean* A male and female at High Island.
- Northern Parula** *Setophaga americana* Four at High Island.
- Bay-breasted Warbler** *Setophaga castanea* A male at High Island.
- Blackburnian Warbler** *Setophaga fusca* A male at High Island.
- American Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga aestiva* Five males High Island. Eastern Ssp *ammicola* or *aestiva*. See note.
- Chestnut-sided Warbler** *Setophaga pensylvanica* A male at High Island.
- Blackpoll Warbler** *Setophaga striata* Three males at High island.
- Pine Warbler** *Setophaga pinus* Six plus another four heard only in Angelina SF.
- Audubon's Warbler** *Setophaga auduboni* Six Christmas Mountain and seven in the western mountains. See note.
- Yellow-throated Warbler** *Setophaga dominica* One High Island. Ssp uncertain.
- Prairie Warbler** *Setophaga discolor* Five singing at Sandy Creek SP.
- Townsend's Warbler** *Setophaga townsendi* Two logged in the western mountains.
- Hermit Warbler** *Setophaga occidentalis* A male in the western mountains. A write-in!
- Golden-cheeked Warbler** *Setophaga chrysoparia* Two seen South Llano River SP. **EN**
- Black-throated Green Warbler** *Setophaga virens* A male at High Island.



Wilson's Warbler, (Mike Watson).

**Wilson's Warbler** *Cardellina pusilla* Eleven logged in the western mountains. Ssp *pileolata* or *chryseola*.  
**Painted Whitestart (P Redstart)** *Myioborus pictus* A pair and a singing male in the western mountains.  
**Yellow-breasted Chat** *Icteria virens* One San Ygancio, RGV, three Sandy Creek SP and two South Llano River SP.  
**Eastern Meadowlark** *Sturnella magna* c10 Progresso Farms, Lower RGV and another seven logged. Ssp *hoopesi*.  
**Scott's Oriole** *Icterus parisorum* 13 logged in the western mountains and one Lost Maples SNA.  
**Audubon's Oriole** ◇ *Icterus graduacauda* A pair at Saliñeno. Ssp *auduboni*.  
**Altamira Oriole** ◇ *Icterus gularis* Singles Santa Ana NWR, National Butterfly Center and three Saliñeno. Ssp *mentalis*.  
**Bullock's Oriole** *Icterus bullockii* Three National Butterfly Center & singles Saliñeno & Christmas Mountain. See note  
**Baltimore Oriole** *Icterus galbula* Three at High Island. See note.  
**Hooded Oriole** *Icterus cucullatus* Singles Estero, Sabal Palms, South Llano and pair Judge Roy Bean. Ssp *sennetti*.  
**Orchard Oriole** *Icterus spurius* Eleven logged at High Island/Anahuac NWR.  
**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus* Small numbers throughout. Ssp *megapotamus* S TX/*littoralis* E TX.  
**Bronzed Cowbird** *Molothrus aeneus* A total of 25 logged after the first at Sana Ana NWR.  
**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater* Small numbers noted after the first on the Bolivar Peninsula.  
**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula* Small numbers noted, the first San Antonio to the valley. Ssp *stonei*.  
**Boat-tailed Grackle** ◇ *Quiscalus major* c20 noted in the Bolivar Peninsula/Anahuac area.  
**Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* Abundant except for the west where absent. Ssp *prosopidicola*.  
**Lark Bunting** *Calamospiza melanocorys* A flock of five near Marathon.  
**Lincoln's Sparrow** *Melospiza lincolnii* Three South Llano Grande and one Lost Maples SNA. Ssp uncertain.  
**Swamp Sparrow** ◇ *Melospiza georgiana* Three Anahuac NWR. Ssp *morinella*.  
**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys* Maximum c.20 Christmas Mountain Oasis. Ssp *morinella*.  
**White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis* Singles at SPI and High Island.  
**Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis* Six Progresso Fms, c10 Bolivar Pen. & c25 Anahuac. Ssp uncertain.  
**Seaside Sparrow** ◇ *Ammodramus maritimus* Three Bolivar Peninsula and four Anahuac NWR. Ssp *sennetti*.  
**Nelson's Sparrow** ◇ *Ammodramus nelson* One Bob's Road, Bolivar Peninsula. Ssp *virgatus*.  
**Chipping Sparrow** *Spizella passerine* Common Hill Country where max. c20 Davis Mountains SP. Ssp uncertain.  
**Field Sparrow** ◇ *Spizella pusilla* Four South Llano River SP.  
**Black-chinned Sparrow** ◇ *Spizella atrogularis* One in the western mountains. Ssp *evura*.  
**Clay-colored Sparrow** *Spizella pallida* Up to four South Llano River SP and eight Lost Maples SNA.  
**Brewer's Sparrow** ◇ *Spizella breweri* One Christmas Mountain Oasis.



Clay-colored Sparrow, South Llano River SP (Mike Watson).

- Vesper Sparrow** *Pooecetes gramineus* One Montezuma Trail, Davis Mountains SP. Ssp uncertain.
- Lark Sparrow** *Chondestes grammacus* Common in the west where maximum c10 Cook's Slough.
- Black-throated Sparrow** *Amphispiza bilineata* Three at South Llano River SP, followed by another c25.
- Cassin's Sparrow** *Peucaea cassinii* Four at South Llano River SP.
- Bachman's Sparrow** ◊ *Peucaea aestivalis* Two seen plus two heard only Angelina SF. Ssp *illinoensis*. **NT**
- Rufous-crowned Sparrow** *Aimophila ruficeps* Eight logged western mountains & one Lost Maples. Ssp *eremoeca*.
- Green-tailed Towhee** ◊ *Pipilo chlorurus* One Christmas Mountain Oasis.
- Spotted Towhee** *Pipilo maculatus* Four Christmas Mtn and three in the western mountains. Ssp *gaigei*. See note.
- Canyon Towhee** *Melospiza fusca* Fourteen logged in the Davis Mountains. Ssp *texana*. See note.
- Olive Sparrow** ◊ *Arremonops rufivirgatus* 11 RGV after the first at Santa Ana plus one Cook's Slough carrying food.
- White-collared Seedeater** *Sporophila torqueola* One male San Ygnacio Seedeater Sanctuary. Ssp *sharpei*.
- Hepatic Tanager** *Piranga hepatica* One singing Boot Canyon and four Davis Mountains. Ssp *dextra*.
- Summer Tanager** *Piranga rubra* One Salifeno, four High Is (Ssp *rubra*), two South Llano and ten thereafter. Ssp *cooperi*.
- Scarlet Tanager** *Piranga olivacea* c30 sightings High Island.
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus* Three RGV after the first at Estero plus c20 at High Island.
- Black-headed Grosbeak** *Pheucticus melanocephalus* Six sightings in the Davis Mountains.
- Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* Common after the first at Estero Llano Grande WBC. Ssp *magnirostris*.
- Pyrrhuloxia** ◊ *Cardinalis sinuatus* Three Falcon Dam, three Big Bend NP and two Christmas Mountain.
- Dickcissel** ◊ *Spiza americana* Three singing at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center.
- Blue Grosbeak** *Passerina caerulea* Singles Sandy Creek SP, Cook's Slough and Lost Maples SNA.
- Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* One San Ygnacio, two Sabal Palm Sanctuary and c30 sightings at High Island.
- Varied Bunting** *Passerina versicolor* One singing at Christmas Mountain Oasis.
- Painted Bunting** *Passerina ciris* Up to six at South Llano River SP, some singing. Ssp *pallidior*. **NT**



Mexican Ground Squirrel, Chihuahuan Desert Institute (Mike Watson).

#### Mammals

**Nine-banded Armadillo** *Dasyus novemcinctus* Several dead inc. Laguna Atascosa eaten by a caracara. (DEAD)

**Black-tailed Jackrabbit** *Lepus californicus* The first at Weslaco was followed by another three sightings.

**Desert Cottontail** *Sylvilagus audubonii* A couple of roadside sightings in the west.

**Eastern Cottontail** *Sylvilagus floridanus* Common in the east, around High Island in particular.

**Eastern Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis* c20 logged after the first at High Island.

**Eastern Fox Squirrel** *Sciurus niger* Three noted Lower RGV and four in the Hill Country.

**Mexican Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus mexicanus* One at the Chihuahuan Desert Institute.

**Spotted Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus spilosoma* One at Falcon Dam SP.

**Variegated Ground Squirrel (Rock S)** *Spermophilus variegatus* Six noted in the western mountains.

**Southern Flying Squirrel** *Glaucomys volans* One poking its head out of a woodpecker hole in Angelina SF.

**Kit Fox** *Vulpes macrotis* One at Davis Mountains SP.

**Striped Skunk** *Mephitis mephitis* Numerous dead road casualties throughout but no live ones seen. (DEAD)

**American Porcupine** *Erethizon dorsatum* One dead on the road near South Llano River SP. (DEAD)

**Northern Raccoon (Common R)** *Procyon lotor* Numerous dead throughout and one alive at Aransas NWR.

**Collared Peccary** *Dicotyles tajacu* A herd of c15 east of Del Rio in the west.

**Pronghorn (P Antelope)** *Antilocapra Americana* Six near Fort Davis and one dead by the road near Uvalde.

**White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus* Sightings throughout with c50 logged.



Least Tern, Bolivar Flats H.A.S. Shorebird Sanctuary (Mike Watson).

## TAXONOMIC NOTES

**Green Heron** *Butorides virescens* Some authors lump this species in Striated (or Green-backed) Heron *B. striatus*.

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Many authors lump Eastern Cattle Egret *B. coromandus* in this species using the Cattle Egret for the enlarged species.

**(American) Great Egret** *Egretta [alba] americana* The IOC simply refer to this species as Great Egret, but there are suggestions that the species may in the future be divided into three allopatric species: American Great Egret *E. americana*, Common Great Egret *E. alba* and Eastern Great Egret *E. modesta*.

**Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* Many authors lump Eastern Osprey *P. cristatus* in this species, using the name Osprey *P. haliaetus* for the enlarged species. The form concerned may be further split off in the future as American Osprey *P. carolinensis*.

**Northern (or American) Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* Many authors lump this species in Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus* of the Old World, using the name Northern Harrier (in the New World) or Hen Harrier (in the Old World) for the enlarged species.

**Clapper Rail** *Rallus crepitans* Most authors lump this species (along with Ridgway's Rail *R. obsoletus* of the Southwest USA and Western Mexico) in Mangrove Rail *R. longirostris*, using the name Clapper Rail for the enlarged species.

**Common (or Laughing) Gallinule** *Gallinula galeata* Many authors lump this species in Common Moorhen *G. chloropus*, which is now restricted to the Old World. The name Common Gallinule (in the New World) or Common Moorhen (in the Old World) was used for the enlarged species.

**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus* This species is sometimes lumped in Black-winged Stilt *H. himantopus*.

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata* Some authors lump this species in the Old World Common Snipe *G. gallinago*.

**(Hudsonian) Whimbrel** *Numerius [phaeopus] hudsonicus* The IOC include this form in Whimbrel *N. phaeopus* but have a proposal to split Whimbrel into Eurasian Whimbrel *N. phaeopus* and Hudsonian Whimbrel *N. hudsonicus*.

**Eastern Willet** *Tringa [semipalmata] semipalmata* & **Western Willet** *Tringa [semipalmata] inornata* The IOC currently treat these two forms as conspecific under the name Willet. The two forms differ not only in size, plumage, and voice, but also in their timing and route of migration and timing of moult. The two forms also differ in their North American breeding grounds, with western birds nesting on the interior western prairie grasslands and eastern birds only in Atlantic coast salt marshes.

**American Herring Gull** *Larus smithsonianus* This species was formerly lumped (along with various other allospecies) in European Herring Gull *L. argentus*.

**Cabot's Tern** *Sterna acufflavida* Some authors lump this species in Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis* of the Old World, but recent genetic studies have shown that the North American form *acufflavida* is best treated as a separate species (including Cayenne Tern *S. a. eurygnatha* of Central and South America).

**Least Tern** *Sterna antillarum* This species was formerly lumped in Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* The New World form *surinamensis* (the form possible on this tour) may in the future be split off as a separate species.

**American Barn Owl** *Tyto furcata* Many authors lump Eastern Barn Owl *T. delicatula* into *Tyto alba*, using the name Barn Owl for the enlarged species.

**Mexican Whip-poor-will** *Caprimulgus arizonae* Many authors lump this species in Northern Whip-poor-will *C. vociferus* using the name Whip-poor-will for the enlarged species.

**Northern Crested-Caracara** *Caracara cheriway* Some authors lump this species (along with the extinct Guadeloupe Caracara *C. lutosus*) in Southern Crested-Caracara (Southern Caracara) *C. plancus*, using the name Crested Caracara for the enlarged species.

**Blue-headed Vireo** *Vireo solitarius* Plumbeous and Cassin's Vireos were formerly lumped in Blue-headed Vireo with the name Solitary Vireo being used for the combined species.

**Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay** *Aphelocoma woodhouseii* This species (along with California Scrub-Jay *A. californica*, Island Scrub-Jay *A. insularis* and Sumichrast's Scrub-Jay *A. sumichrasti* of Mexico) was formerly lumped in Florida Scrub-Jay *A. coerulescens*, with the name Scrub Jay being used for the enlarged species. Prior to the most recent split, *woodhouseii* and *sumichrasti* were included with *californica* under the name Western Scrub-Jay.

**Black-crested Titmouse** *Baeolophus atricristatus* Some authors lump this species in Tufted Titmouse *B. bicolor*.

**Horned (or Shore) Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* This widespread and variable species may well comprise of several related species, and recent studies have suggested a multiple-split is likely in the near future.

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* This species was formerly lumped in Southern Rough-winged Swallow *S. ruficollis*, with the name Rough-winged Swallow being used for the enlarged species.

**Sedge Wren** *Cistothorus platensis* This widespread and variable species may well comprise of several related species, and recent studies have suggested a multiple-split is likely in the near future.

**White-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta carolinensis* Some authors have proposed splitting this species into four closely related but geographically separated species. The form possible on this tour is the eastern nominate form *carolinensis*, which would retain the name White-breasted Nuthatch *S. carolinensis*.

**Audubon's Warbler** *Dendroica auduboni* Some authors lump Audubon's Warbler in Myrtle Warbler using the name Yellow-rumped Warbler for the enlarged species.

**Bullock's Oriole** *Icterus bullockii* & **Baltimore Oriole** *Icterus galbula* Some authors lump Bullock's Oriole (along with Black-backed (or Abeille's) Oriole *I. abeillei* (of Mexico) in Baltimore Oriole, with the name Northern Oriole being used for the enlarged species.

**Spotted Towhee** *Pipilo maculatus* Formerly, Spotted Towhee was lumped in Eastern Towhee, with the name Rufous-sided Towhee being used for the enlarged species.

**Canyon Towhee** *Pipilo fuscus* California Towhee *P. crissalis* was formerly lumped in this species with the name Brown Towhee being used for the enlarged species.