



TEXAS TOUR REPORT 2022

4 - 19 April 2022

BY MIKE WATSON

The Birdquest 2022 tour of the Lone Star State marked our first post-pandemic lockdown visit and produced a respectable total, despite facing some challenges including the opposite weather required to produce a good migration spectacle on the Gulf Coast, as well as the ongoing drought in the south and southwest of the state, which had caused a couple of important sites to be badly damaged by fire during the past year. Our journey began again in the military city, San Antonio, a short drive from the Gulf Coast. First port of call was the Aransas area where we had our best Trans-Caribbean migrant experience with four species of vireo: Red-eyed, Philadelphia, Yellow-throated and White-eyed and ten wood warblers including the place-named Nashville, Tennessee, and nearby Kentucky! Newly arrived, exhausted and therefore point blank Hooded and Black-and-White Warblers also delighted here. We picked up our first waterbirds in this area including Least Grebe, Mottled Duck, Clapper Rail, American Golden Plover, Long-billed Curlew and Pectoral Sandpiper and Seaside Sparrow of note. The focus of our visit to Aransas was to see the majestic Whooping Crane and our voyage into the many channels of the vast National Wildlife Refuge here aboard MV Skimmer with the legendary Captain Tommy Moore was the tour highlight, producing two family parties of these endangered birds. Most of the local wintering population had already left for their breeding grounds in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park following a prolonged period of warm southerly winds before our tour started so we were very relieved to connect with our biggest target having missed it last time. We also saw Black-crested Titmouse and Long-billed Thrasher – two of a quartet of regional specialities of southern Texas, found at the northern edge of their range at Aransas. Next stop on our tour of the largest state in the 'Lower 48' was the Lower Rio Grande Valley and down in the palms and subtropical woodland (well at a basketball court and a gas station actually) we saw the other two of the quartet: (the endangered) Red-crowned Parrot and Green Parakeet. Other birds of a southerly distribution, whose ranges just cross the Mexican border into the USA added to our list included Muscovy Duck, Plain Chachalaca, White-tailed and Grey Hawks, Red-billed Pigeon, White-tipped Dove, Ferruginous Pygmy and Elf Owls, Pauraque, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Aplomado Falcon (reintroduced here), Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Green Jay, Olive Sparrow, Altamira and Audubon's Orioles and Tropical Parula. Migrants were few here but included a flock of Upland Sandpipers by our vehicle on our private tour of the amazing King Ranch. Our only write-in of the tour was seen here, in the form of the introduced (but occurring not that far away in Mexico's Yucatan) White-fronted Amazon. This immigrant has not yet been admitted to the ABA list, but it is only a matter of time! Maybe the most beautiful American butterfly of all, Mexican Bluewing, also dazzled for some at Estero Llano Grande as it slipped through

the tropical zone there. Our timing on the Upper Texas Coast at High Island, one of world birding's true Meccas, was blighted by lovely weather and blasting southerly winds, which sent migrants sailing overhead and inland with no need to stop at the coast. Even on this date we could have seen 20 or so warbler species per day here given more conducive weather. The marshes, shores and flooded rice fields around Galveston Bay were productive as ever and produced Fulvous Whistling Duck, King Rail, Piping Plover, 93(!) Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Nelson's Sparrow and Boat-tailed Grackle. Every cloud has a silver lining and this time we had some time to enjoy the hustle and bustle of the Smith Oaks rookery (AKA heronry) at High Island, from the new eye-level canopy walkway. The lovely 'Pineywoods' of Angelina State Forest near Jasper were fabulous, and we had some great encounters among a list that included Mississippi Kite, Red-cockaded, Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine, Prairie, Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers and Bachman's Sparrow. Further west, the pretty Hill Country hosts another selection of regional specials and Golden-cheeked Warbler, and Black-capped Vireo were the highlights. It was so dry though with barely a roadside flower. Other birds of interest included Chuck-will's-widow. We also made our first visit to the awesome Rio Frio bat cave and witnessed the spectacle of the first half hour or so of millions of Mexican Free-tailed Bats leaving the small cave entrance as well as a much smaller number of Cave Swallows going in the opposite direction. Their exodus takes up to three hours at the peak of their season when they can number 10-12 million(!) animals. Even 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, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Painted Whitestart, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher and Crissal Thrasher were all added to our list. The mountains of this region also represent the most easterly US outpost of western species like Common Black Hawk, Acorn Woodpecker, American Grey Flycatcher, Pyrrhuloxia and Hepatic and Western Tanager. We also tallied an impressive five Zone-tailed hawks on this tour – we checked every TV (Turkey Vulture) for this sinister doppelganger and other interesting birds in this region included Band-tailed Pigeon and Townsend's Solitaire. A visit to Carolyn Ohl's Christmas Mountain Oasis feeding station was another highlight, adding Lucifer Sheartail and Lark and Varied Buntings amongst others. The Davis Mountains of West Texas produced the gorgeous Scott's Oriole and Phainopepla of note and the heart-breaking discovery of a freshly killed Mountain Lion on the road just outside Fort Davis. Finally, our last morning, spent in San Antonio was a mini-shorebird fest adding Baird's and White-rumped Sandpipers and Wilson's Phalarope and a last gasp Painted Bunting for those who had made a mistimed toilet visit at High Island! Non-avian highlights included some interesting mammals, terrific views of Nine-banded Armadillo (alive for once, twice and thrice!) at South Llano River and Rio Frio. Also, a live Northern Raccoon at High Island, several Kit Foxes and a herd of Collared Peccaries in the Davis Mountains and some great Bottlenose Dolphin action with Captain Tommy. However, maybe the most exciting of all was the enormous Western Diamondback Rattlesnake that Mike almost trod on, which proceeded to give some great views before it slunk away at South Llano River. 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' remains our premier US birding itinerary y'all.

We embarked on our 3800 miles birding road trip on a rainy morning in the military city of San Antonio, home of the Alamo, bound for Aransas. Typically, the first birds we saw as we headed for evening meal were a few high-flying birds – TVs (Turkey Vultures), these would be our companions throughout our journey, often tilting like paper planes expending as little energy as possible to change course as they used the wind to carry them on their way.

As we headed south next morning, our first birds started to appear along the way. Black and Turkey Vultures by the highway, Crested Caracaras patrolled the verges, a few Wild Turkeys stood by as Scissor-tailed Flycatchers perched on fences. These are all characteristic roadside birds of the far south. After a few hours we reached the humid coast with a brisk onshore breeze blowing from the warm Gulf of Mexico. This was the first time we had kicked the birding off here, choosing Goose Island State Park and Port Aransas to get things started. Goose Island is another neat and tidy state park, of which we have visited many over the years, complete with visitor trail maps and well-kept facilities. Although there was ultimately nothing we did not see elsewhere, it was a nice introduction to South Texas birding and delivered our first two of a quartet of widespread regional specialities, Black-crested Titmouse and Long-billed Thrasher. Exploring the marshes and the shores of the massive Aransas Bay American waterbirds of note included American Oystercatcher, Long-billed Curlew, Least and Western Sandpipers, Short and Long-billed Dowitchers, 'Western' Willets, Royal and Forster's Terns, Double-crested Cormorants, American White Ibis, Great Blue, Little Blue and Tricoloured Herons, Reddish Egret, American White and Brown Pelicans and Black Skimmer. Looking out into the mist of the bay this morning you would never know that it was not the open sea rather than protected by San Jose barrier island. A few passerines made their first appearances: Savannah and Lincoln's Sparrows and Northern Cardinals. There was another reason to start here, there had been no Whooping Crane sightings reported to eBird for five days, but this is where the last ones were seen. No luck today though and our hopes were low for this must-see bird, we were probably too late again, following the prolonged southerly winds, just like last time in 2017. After our first visit to the ubiquitous Subway fast-food joint, we took the 24 hours a day (free!) ferry to Port Aransas in search of migrants at a couple of minute postage-stamp-sized nature reserves. The first of these, Holt Paradise Pond is basically a small marsh with a boardwalk to a central pond, bordered by scattered willows and completely hemmed in on all sides by development. It is, however, an important sanctuary for tired migrants, freshly in-off the Gulf. We accessed the reserve via the rear car park of a restaurant and were immediately greeted by tired wood warblers! First, exhausted, point-blank Black-and-White Warblers, foraging in the bark of the ancient willow trees and then male Blue-winged, both male and female Hooded, Nashville and an outrageous Yellow-throated Warbler. The delightfully colourful little Northern Parula was also added to our lists. We had no idea at the time, but this was to be the closest we got to witnessing the excitement of a Gulf Coast warbler 'fall out'. In the surrounding trees a Couch's Kingbird and a Philadelphia Vireo were present and on tiny pond were Least Grebe, Green Heron, and Mottled Duck of note. Marsh Wrens skulked in the reeds and a gaudy Indigo Bunting appeared in the warblers' willow

tree. A stone's throw away from Paradise Pond is the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Centre, basically a small strip of trees and water features leading to a large brackish marsh with a huge boardwalk/watch tower. LTBC was great and added more passerine migrants in the form of Tennessee and Myrtle Warblers (the scruffiest of each sadly) but there were also smart Red-eyed, White-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos too. All new in-off and arriving in the small line of trees as we watched. An Ovenbird stalked around the base of some old tree roots and hid in plain sight among ivy leaves and a Gray Catbird also appeared out of nowhere. On the marsh a Clapper Rail in the scope was a good addition and new shorebirds included Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, American Golden Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Stilt and Pectoral Sandpipers. Western Sandpipers could be compared with their close Semipalmated relatives very nicely too. Nothing spectacular yet but a very nice introduction to Texas birding.

After breakfast, a stone's throw from our hotel, we slipped in a quick visit to another named nature reserve, Linda S. Castro in Fulton. Our first of many Black-chinned Hummingbirds buzzed around the feeders by a viewpoint over a picturesque little pond, surrounded by lovely live oak woodland. A couple of Pied-billed Grebes was on the pond itself and two Neotropic Cormorants in the overhanging trees were also new. Very showy Ladder-backed Woodpeckers gave us our first views for all, of this smart little 'pecker and a distant Bronzed Cowbird perched on an electricity wire. Migrant passerines were few, but a male Kentucky Warbler attended one of the drips on the edge of the woodland and a White-eyed Vireo quickly vanished into the shadows. Eventually the time came to board MV Skimmer, skippered by the legendary Captain Tommy Moore. It was great to travel with Captain Tommy again and he described how Skimmer survived the 2017 Category 4 Hurricane Harvey by being parked behind the hotel. Although it was blown onto its side the boat remained in good working order. With only a light breeze and no mist to speak of, conditions were very good for our search for the endangered Whooping Crane. We had pretty much resigned ourselves to missing it again, with no eBird sightings for a week and the blasting southerly winds, which had blown for over a fortnight. However, Tommy stunned us with news that he had seen one the previous day, obviously a late straggler, so we were back in with a chance. The best time to see them is just after Thanksgiving, when there are plenty of family groups around, encroaching on each other's feeding territory. However, combining them with Texas summer migrants we cannot visit too much earlier in April. We cruised out into the massive Aransas Bay, escorted by playful bottle-nosed dolphins, towards the barrier islands created to protect the shipping channel. We passed several interesting birds on the edge of the vast saltmarshes here adding Hudsonian Whimbrel, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Gull-billed and Caspian Terns, American Bittern, Western Osprey, as well as Vesper and Seaside Sparrows. Eventually three distant one-pixel white dots transformed into our main target, Whooping Crane! A family party, of mum, dad and last year's junior. Although these majestic birds remained distant owing to the shallow two feet deep lagoon between them and us, some nice 'scope views were had, and they looked pretty good as pinpricks of white in the vast saltmarsh landscape. A major relief too! Continuing along the edge of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge we spotted a second family party of cranes, but these were even more distant and remained pixel-birds. Five Common Goldeneyes flew by (a 'two stars' bird on this tour), a Clapper Rail swam across a small lagoon in the spartina and tiny rookery islets on the bay held our first Wilson's Plovers, as well as a throng of Great Blue Herons with Roseate Spoonbills, and a few Reddish Egrets. As we paused to watch the activity at the rookeries a tight flock of more than 20 prairie-bound Franklin's Gulls in smart breeding plumage, some even with a pink flush, headed north low over the water. A few Least Terns fed in the waist-high shallows nearby. A brackish lagoon on the way back held some shorebirds including Grey Plovers, Long-billed Curlews and a Marbled Godwit. Migrant Scissor-tailed Flycatchers adorned bushes passing Matagorda Island on our very extended cruise today before we headed back to port at Fulton. As we crossed a deeper channel four Common Loons, also in breeding dress were spotted. A cruise aboard Skimmer is a must-do excursion for any South Texas birding trip! After another Subway lunch we made our way south to the Rio Grande Valley, our base for the next few days. On the edge of another National Wildlife Reserve, Laguna Atascosa a roadside viewing area has been made available for a breeding pair of Aplomado Falcons. The sitting bird was an amorphous shape in the protected platform box but what was presumably the attendant male stood guard on the ground nearby. It was windy here! We saw it fly around a couple of times and perched on large yuccas, the presence of which is usually important to them, when they do not have a purpose-built nest box nearby that is. The falcons are part of the Peregrine Fund's programme to establish a minimum population of 60 pairs in South Texas and despite losing 30% of them to Hurricane Harvey in 2017 they are now well on their way towards this goal again. 500 nestlings have now been ringed since the scheme was drafted in 1990! We also saw our first White-tailed Hawk, a Northern Bobwhite ran across the track between the vehicles and at least 18 migrant Long-billed Curlews were in the surrounding fields. Loggerhead Shrike and Purple Martin were also new for the tour here. With time running short, I attempted a short cut to our next destination but ran into an impassable stretch of deep wet mud on the Old Port Isabel Road and had to turn back and go the long way around. OK so we will eat after the evening's birding then. Over a noisy basketball court in a park in the Brownsville hood, equally noisy groups of parrots gathered. However, on scrutiny the first were White-fronted Amazons, not the hope-for Red-crowned. An obvious artificial introduction their closest breeding areas are Mexico's Yucatan and west. Just a matter of time before they get added to the ABA list along with the many other feral Neotropical parrots already on it. Less obvious is Red-crowned Amazon, which is firmly established on the ABA list and is tricky to see in its core Mexican range. We were happy to see some fly into the pre-roost gathering, shout at their neighbours and then fly off somewhere to sleep. They are apparently unpopular here owing to their noisy habits. We had a lovely Mexican meal this evening at a family-run restaurant to add to the Borderland experience. Long after dark, we reached our final destination of the day, another neat and tidy military town, Harlingen, home of the annual Rio Grande Valley Bird Festival. The lower Rio Grande Valley 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. The vast King Ranch, located to the north of the town holds many of them, as well as a few special birds, very difficult to see elsewhere in the USA. It is also usually

a wonderful experience to be out in the endless pastures here, with patches of pretty, Live Oak woodland stretching all the way to Laguna Madre and the sea. Sadly, a wildfire at the end of March had destroyed 60,000 acres of habitat, much of this in the Norias Division. At 3340 square kilometres (1289 square miles) the King Ranch is the largest in the USA and it is bigger than the smallest state, Rhode Island and the European country of Luxembourg! It was established in 1853 by Captain Richard King, a confederate riverboat entrepreneur and became famous for its cattle and quarter horses. The nearby town of Kingsville is named after him and the ranch was featured in Edna Ferber's book 'Giant', later a film starring Rock Hudson, Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean. Ford have also used the ranch's famous running 'W' brand on several of their special edition pick-up trucks! Bird-wise it is famous as the most reliable US site for Ferruginous Pygmy Owl and Tropical Parula, both of which we enjoyed some nice views of this morning in the Live Oak woodland. At least one of the TPs showed some hybrid features though. Unfortunately, Sprague's Pipit, which winters here was a no-show, probably owing to the warm weather and southerlies? As we waited by the Norias Division entrance gate a pair of Hooded Orioles and a Loggerhead Shrike entertained us. We met our King Ranch guide Barbara and climbed aboard their trusty Chewy minibus for a guided whistle-stop tour of this special place. We also enjoyed some lovely views of migrant Upland Sandpipers, which appear among the flowers of the pastures around the ranch headquarters at this time of year. Green Jays and Great Kiskadees flew overhead, several Greater Roadrunners scuttled across the tracks ahead of us and a Summer Tanager was calling from the oaks around our lunch stop, one of the owning family's ranch buildings and there was an Eastern Screech Owl for some. We also had a gaudy yellow Audubon's Oriole flyby on the way back to the HQ. 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 the birding started well with a good selection of lower valley specials, including the already seen Long-billed Thrasher and Black-crested Titmouse. One of the main attractions at Estero is its day-roosting Pauraque. Thanks to the wonderful rangers, we had some great looks at one of these fine nightjars on the ground, 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. Also hiding in plain sight and impossible to find unless pointed out to us, an Eastern Screech Owl poked its head out of a nest hole. The birds here are of the form mccalli and with a different voice to nominate Eastern Screech Owl they may merit full species status. It was wise to keep a low profile as one of the breeding Great Horned Owls was still around this afternoon. The supporting cast around the lagoons and their surrounding small patches of woodland here was not bad either and included Plumed and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. The valley is known particularly for woodland birds and doves at Estero included White-tipped, Mourning and White-winged. Hummingbirds were in evidence with the sought-after Buff-bellied as well as Black-chinned and passage migrant Ruby-throated. Our first Golden-fronted Woodpeckers appeared, and we eventually tracked down Altamira Oriole as well, although Olive Sparrow and Clay-coloured Thrush eluded us in the afternoon heat. Swainson's Hawk high overhead was new for the tour, a Mexican Bluewing butterfly skipped through the dappled shade of the trees of the tropical zone for some and a handful of warblers included Nashville, Tennessee and Northern Parulas. Hispid Cotton Rat was a notable 'write-in' for this long-standing tour, under the bird feeders at the excellent new Indigo Blind. After yesterday's late finish I had to deliver an on-time evening meal today and decided against a detour into suburban Weslaco for Green Parakeet so, imagine my surprise when Alec called this bird while we were refilling at a gas station. Perched in full view of the pumps, awesome! Off to the steak house in Harlingen then. We needed to spend at least one day upriver, where some of the valley specials are easier to see. An early start saw us travelling for over an hour through the 'franchiseland' strip until the developments receded and ultimately disappeared. We started to see the first Chihuahuan Ravens here. Around two hours upriver below Falcon Dam is a great stretch of the Rio Grande with a reputation for some 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 and Ringed Kingfishers, as well the gorgeous nominate form of Audubon's Oriole. A male Common Yellowthroat was our first, Altamira Oriole also showed well on the river island, which is still in the USA and a cracking Gray Hawk perched up for us. Both Great Crested and Brown-crested Flycatchers were new and Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds were incredibly accommodating giving their very different calls. River traffic included a pair of each of the ABA-sought-after Red-billed Pigeon and Muscovy Duck, Western Ospreys (amongst a tally of four for the day!) and Gull-billed and Caspian Terns. I wondered in 2017 what effect Trump's wall might have on this lovely spot but thankfully it never got here. Let's hope he doesn't get in again and it never does! We spent a couple of hours at Saliñeno, essentially looking for the seedeater but as the temperature rose time was running out, so it was time to try somewhere else further upriver instead. Last time the San Ygnacio Seedeater Sanctuary, upriver from Zapata, rewarded us but no luck this time. Border Patrol soldiers said 'our NCO says you can't be here' so we were stuck with the small patch of cane grass at the sanctuary. At least an Olive Sparrow showed beautifully here but not much else apart from Yellow-breasted Chat and after some time passed, I decided on one last throw of the dice upriver at Laredo, where there had been regular sightings of the seedeater. Laredo was even hotter, which did us no favours and again no seedeater materialised along the Las Palmas Trail. A Black Phoebe along the stinking water treatment works outflow stream was our only one and a few Cave Swallows overhead were also new-for-the-tour. However, we had an important appointment this evening, so it was time to head back downstream. Bypassing the former valley hotspot of Falcon Dam State Dam, we stopped off again at both San Ygnacio and Salineño but still no seedeater. So, we hurried back to Bentsen State Park, where in the same telegraph pole as five years ago an Elf Owl appeared just after 8pm. Very nice! A Merlin and a couple of Chimney Swifts flew over here, Inca Dove was also added to our lists. It was here that we finally saw a section of Trump's Wall, a folly of monumental proportions. There was also another army Hummer here complete with under-employed soldiers. Probably the world's worst posting unless you're a birder of course! A big transfer day followed, north along the Gulf Coast, around Corpus Christi and through Houston to High Island. Located just to the east of Galveston Bay, it 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. Numerous land birds stop off here on migration and the marshes surrounding Galveston Bay, the shores of the Bolivar Peninsula and the irrigated fields to the north add further diversity. The 'island' is 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. Just like last time five years ago, southerly winds and clear skies were forecast to continue for a couple of days, however, there was some rain forecast on the horizon at 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. To cut a long story short, despite the rain, which did happen in the end, High Island was not at all kind to us this time. We still managed to cobble together an interesting list of birds, but migration was very slow thanks to the blasting southerlies sending the Trans-Caribbean migrants sailing overhead and inland. Our first afternoon spent in Boy Scout Woods, Hooks Woods and finally Smith Oaks added the gorgeous Blue-headed Vireo, Blue Jay, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren, Wood Thrush and a trio of new wood warblers – Worm-eating, Wilson's and Louisiana Waterthrush. The famous band stand at the Purkeys Pond water drip in Boy Scout Woods was quiet like never before and the warbler board was almost empty. We spent a little time looking for a Swainson's Warbler (a High Island rarity) in the tangled wood lot adjacent to Hooks Oaks to no avail.

The daily routine at High Island would start with a diner breakfast at the Gulfway Motel and then a quick look at the Purkeys Pond drip at Boy Scout Woods (our migration barometer) before exploring more widely. On our first full day we made our first visit to Anahuac National Wildlife Reserve. Along the way to Anahuac, we passed newly flooded rice fields on FM1985, which were covered with birds! The fields are usually flooded for a few days and form a temporary attraction to overflying migrant shorebirds. Among the busy flocks on the first field we checked, we were stunned to find a gathering of 41 Buff-breasted Sandpipers! I haven't seen a number like this at High Island before. There were also around 20 American Golden Plovers (a 'two stars' bird on this tour), 6 Grey Plovers, around 30 Hudsonian Whimbrels and 10 Pectoral Sandpipers of note. At Anahuac, unfortunately, the main feature, Shoveler Pond was drained and therefore not nearly as attractive as usual apart from alligators being much easier than usual to spot. There were over 50 hauled out in the crowded remaining drainage channels. No King Rail for us here this time but we had some nice looks at Fulvous Whistling Duck, which had hitherto been quite distant, and our first spin around the perimeter yielded three Soras among the zillions of Common Gallinules. A Wilson's Snipe was new-for-the-tour, as were Glossy and White-faced Ibises and Swamp Sparrow. Further out towards Frozen Point did not produce anything of note in the windy conditions. That strong southerly was still blowing. We stopped for a rare sit-down lunch in Crystal Beach at a cracking little Vietnamese family-run café before heading out onto the sand of Bolivar Flats. Another shorebird fest followed, with the delightful Piping and Snowy Plovers both added. The former included a colour-ringed bird from the Great Lakes project. We did not add any other waterbirds to the list here but had some lovely looks at some we had only seen distantly or in small numbers until now. Wilson's Plovers were breeding above the tideline in a roped-off area, with a few Horned Larks feeding nearby, and a tight flock of around 300 Least Terns took flight every now and again. Around 30 Marbled Godwits fed in the shallows of the ebbing tide. Clouds of Dunlins and Sanderling included some Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers and a tight group of larger waterbirds at the water's edge included Black Skimmers, Cabot's Terns and both Brown and American White Pelicans. There was apparently an Iceland Gull somewhere in this area, but we weren't able to pick it out among the many American Herring and Laughing Gulls. Our first Boat-tailed Grackles were also seen today, they replace Great-tailed along this part of the Gulf Coast. We finished our birding in the spartina on the inland side of the peninsula, with some great looks at the very heavily barred 'Eastern' Willet, which breeds here. Surely a future split? Nelson's Sparrow also put in an appearance while we were looking for Seaside Sparrow, for those who had missed out on the Skimmer boat trip. Thankfully, it also obliged nicely, singing in a sea of spartina grass. The next day followed more or less the same routine, with another visit to Anahuac and FM1985 on the way. It was interesting to see how much the flooded rice field had dried out since the previous day and the composition of birds was different too. There were now around 200 Pectoral Sandpipers and only four Buff-breasts remained. A close Solitary Sandpiper provided our best view so far of this one. The turnover of birds here is probably very high! Some more extensive exploration of Anahuac produced the desired King Rail, which crossed the track in front of the cars as well as a couple of Clappers further out towards the bay, creeping along a saltwater channel. They look very similar, and it's well known that the possibility of hybrids cannot be completely ruled out here so... A couple of Purple Gallinules were new-for-the-tour and the Sora count reached six as we spent more time looking for rails. A Least Bittern for some was also new. The woods of High Island were deathly quiet, although we did finally catch up with the long-staying Swainson's Warbler at Hooks Woods, brilliantly spotted by sharp-eyed John! Shame this is an easy warbler to see a little further north on the tour in the Pineywoods... or good for those who did not latch on to John's sighting.

Our hosts at the Gulfway surprised us with a pre-5am diner-cooked breakfast. Awesome! Just the start that we needed for an early trip to the Pineywoods of Angelina National Forest. The morning was overcast, with rain forecast by the afternoon but the cloud cover extended the bird activity well into the middle of the day. The airy understorey echoed to a chorus of Bachman's Sparrows and we eventually located one of these subtle beauties, delivering its lovely song from the back of a large pine. This is a Pineywoods speciality, whose range extends eastwards from Texas to Florida and north to Virginia, however, it is the near-threatened Red-cockaded Woodpecker, with a similar range, which is the flagship species of these forests. We managed to find a pair of these smart little woodpeckers without any difficulty this time in the same spot as five years ago (in 2017 they kept us waiting until midday!). There were plenty of other birds we needed to find in the lovely forest. Pine Warbler and Brown-headed Nuthatch were both easy here too. There were still plenty of

target birds to be seen in the forests and we explored a little more widely. Tufted Titmouse called but quickly disappeared, another pair of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers followed and then a massive dark shape crossed the forest track in front of us, like a missile – Pileated Woodpecker! We were treated to some more flyby views of this outsized black-and-white woodpecker. Leaving the mature trees behind we concentrated on some younger areas, where the hoped-for Prairie Warbler soon materialised. What a terrific little lemon-yellow wood warbler it is too, belting out its song from jack pines. More Pine Warblers were here as well, they are obviously not as concerned about the height of the trees as Prairie Warbler. Moving on, to nearby Martin Dies State Park, we very quickly added the outrageously yellow Prothonotary Warbler, which we read is named after the lawyers attached to the Byzantine court, who wore golden-yellow robes. It is almost always found near mosquito-infested woodland pools, although this year we were only mildly bothered by mosquitoes. Two very smart woodpeckers with red in their name appeared soon afterwards in the tall trees along the random forest drive we had chosen, Red-bellied and Red-headed and it was not long before we heard the distinctive whistling song of Swainson's Warbler. This forest-floor dweller thankfully usually sings above head-height in the lower canopy and was quite obliging once we had got in position. Mississippi Kite flew overhead here too. The clouds had continued to gather throughout the morning, and it was time to head back to the coast in case some migrants arrived this afternoon. We added the dreadfully dull Fish Crow at another Subway stop as the rain drops started to fall. In the end there was no fallout of wood warblers today even though there was a tremendous thunderstorm with sheets of lightning from around 4.30pm. The southerly wind was still blowing and undoing our efforts. We did see a couple of good birds from the bandstand in Boy Scout Woods – Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting! Unfortunately, a miss-timed bathroom visit caused some of our folks to miss the latter! The rain started to hammer down and rendered further birding futile, so we retired to the Gulfway for the day. There's always tomorrow we thought. We rose early and headed to the last chance saloon. What an anti-climax. Apart from a very smart male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, there was nothing doing at Boy Scout Woods in the way of migrants. We did have some great looks at Sedge Wren though, eventually and a couple of Swamp Sparrows too. It was time to leave High Island. We paused along the way at the rice fields but failed to find a Hudsonian Godwit again (there was one at Rollover Pass today but that was the only sighting during our stay). There was a large number of Buff-breasted Sandpipers again (52!) and smaller numbers of Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers. I wonder how many of these were new or just relocated from the fields we had seen them on a couple of days earlier? The journey passed without incident; we even did a pretty good job of getting across Houston's busy freeway system as we headed west for the Hill Country. The landscape became very noticeably drier, and we started to see junipers and oaks, the latter looking very brown this year in the drought. We finally reached our first port of call in the evening, South Llano River State Park. We love this place! A great network of blinds with feeding stations and drinking pools ensures plenty of bird activity even in the heat of the day. Our welcome bird this time was a turkey on the entrance road, fitting as it is the emblem of the state park here. Golden-cheeked Warbler was next, helpfully staked out by our Aussie advance party. They are not uncommon in the juniper forest in this area but it was good to have a bird on territory, which saved time. We all had some very nice looks at eye level at this delightful wood warbler, it was 'bird of the trip' last time, partly because it had kept us waiting. We also saw Black-capped Vireo, the other Hill Country special bird, not far away but not everyone got on it and it seemed to have other plans instead of showing itself to us. Don't worry, they are even easier to see than the warbler here.

We could wait until next morning. Beware hazards underfoot at South Llano! I almost trod on a magnificent Western Diamondback Rattlesnake, which helpfully reared up and hissed (as well as rattled its tail) at me. Scary but what an incredible creature. It slid away into the scrub, a reminder of what lurks in the shadows here. The second, much more common danger, is the Horse Crippler cactus, which also lies in wait in the grass, like a landmine with truly evil spines. It has quite a pretty flower though! Also here, particularly from the blinds were: Bewick's Wren; Black-throated, Lark, Field, White-crowned and Lincoln's Sparrows, Spotted Towhee and a very obliging Nine-banded Armadillo gorging itself on the bird seed. A great start in the Hill Country, leaving only a few gaps for the following day. We set about filling in the gaps in our list next morning, including better views of Black-capped Vireo for those who had not managed to get on it the previous day. Happily, we had some great close-ups of this one, singing its head off in small oaks up on the plateau above the valley at South Llano River. After this nice start we switched our attention to the blinds adding nice views of the more subtle Hutton's and Bell's Vireos, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay and White-throated Sparrow (a very bright breeding-plumaged bird). Yellow-breasted Chat and Summer Tanager were both pleasingly common in the valley. The temperature quickly rose again today and soon it was approaching 90 degrees so we tried another site on our way towards Concan, Lost Maples State Natural Area. This lovely park has much the same birds as South Llano River but it requires a bit more hiking and also attracts more visitors than South Llano River. In the heat of the afternoon, the hottest time of the day out here, there were a few interesting birds from the bird blind but we didn't add anything new. There was no reason to linger so we pressed on to Concan and an al fresco early evening meal at the rather lovely Hippy Chic River Shack. Our evening excursion was a visit to Rio Frio bat cave. We were unable to coincide with one of their organised viewings in 2017, so it was a great pleasure to be able to pay it a visit this year. As we waited for our guides to turn up roadside distractions included a pair of Vermillion Flycatchers and another armadillo, which trotted across an open area. The cave itself has a relatively small unimpressive entrance, accessed via a short walk uphill from their parking lot and entrance booth. As we neared the cave a small flock of Cave Swallows was wheeling around the entrance and as the sun set, they entered the cave, the night shift as the day shift started to emerge, an endless stream of Mexican Free-tailed Bats, flowing away into the clear night sky to the north in search of food. I have no idea how many we saw in the hour or so they were exiting the cave but at the peak of the season, a little later, their numbers are estimated at 10-12 million and they can take up to three hours to leave it. Canyon Wren sang by the cave entrance, like a Willow Warbler followed by the 'chay chay' of a Willow Tit and was quickly added to our list. As the entrance gate closed behind us, on the way out, we heard

a nightjar calling. This transpired to be a male Chuck-will's-widow, which proceeded to give some nice views in the spotlight including flashing its white outer tail feathers. I often wonder how such crazy onomatopoeic are arrived at! Even more bizarre alternatives have included 'chuckwuts-widow' and 'chip-fell-out-of-a-oak'! What a nice way to end today's birding, after which we continued to the small town of Uvalde for the night. We couldn't imagine the horror that would befall this place only a month later.

We continued west next morning, pausing at the impressive Seminole Canyon State Park, where we saw our first White-throated Swifts, zooming around over the canyon itself. We also saw our first Zone-tailed Hawk here, typically almost sneaking by among a flight of Turkey Vultures, and typically also side-on by the time we spotted it, so mostly rear-on as it drifted away. Seminole Canyon was inhabited from at least 12,000 years ago when the climate was more moderate than it is now and extinct species of elephant, camel, bison and horse roamed the plains. The rock art here is not properly understood and dates from around 5,000 years later, when the climate of this region was much more similar to the present day and the people living here gathered plants and hunted much smaller animals. We added Rock Wren to the list here, on the rim of the canyon as well as the stunning cucullatus race of Hooded Oriole and we had time to admire some impressive Octotillo Cacti growing on the canyon's rim. Our next stop to break the long journey was at the fascinating Judge Roy Bean Cactus Garden. 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. New birds here included Cactus Wren (a pair tending a nest in full view in a Cholla Cactus next to the Judge's bar!) and Verdin. Another Zone-tailed Hawk flew right over the cactus garden and away, again before we could get more than a side-on photo. A detour via the Rio Grande Overlook at Langtry did not produce anything in the heat of midday, not even the Rio Grande, hidden among the vegetation down there somewhere. Our planned lunch stop produced yet another Zone-tailed Hawk, near a nest site, amazingly our third of the day. I don't think we have done that before in Texas! Eventually we rolled up at the pretty Fort Davis State Park, where we added several new birds to our list: Acorn Woodpecker; Say's Phoebe; the stubby-billed Cassin's Kingbird; a sinister-looking Phainopepla; Lesser Goldfinch; lots of super-smart Audubon's Warblers, the rather underwhelming Orange-crowned Warbler and (at last!) the desert cardinal, Pyrrhuloxia. 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 another day in the Fort Davis State Park area, getting off to a very depressing start in finding a roadkill Mountain Lion at dawn not far from the park entrance. I saw what I thought was the back of a large dog as we drove past, but then a massive long tail. 'Oh no, I think I know what that was' and we turned around and went back and sure enough... Looking at the very short skid marks on the road, someone coming from the west had hit it but had not had much time to brake, either noticing it too late or maybe it had bounded into their path? Either way it was a poignant sight, with fluffy cottonwood seeds falling on its lifeless body like snow. A tragic end for such a beautiful animal. Our excursions in the bone-dry Davis Mountains today added American Grey Flycatcher (another dull bird of the west!), American Bushtit, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, Rufous-crowned Sparrow (another Cholla Cactus lover) and the stunning Bullock's Oriole, our last of the magnificent seven Texas orioles! New mammals included a small group of Collared Peccaries as well as Mule Deer. Evening spotlighting produced a Common Poorwill of note as well as a pretty Kit Fox. Despite much searching we couldn't find Montezuma Quail this time in the parched landscape, although it is still early for them (May is best) we ought to have squeezed one out. Park staff had not seen any for months apparently. Today's programme started with a couple of unwanted detours - do not trust your navigation app here with limited phone signal and tracks, which are not 'through roads' but the drives to gated and NRA signposted residences instead, 'I don't call 911' etc). Eventually we reached Carolyn Oh's superb Christmas Mountain Oasis feeding station. I was very relieved when we finally got on the right track to her property. The detour did produce a nice roadrunner for the first vehicle though. Again, it was easily the best feeding station 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. It is not every day you meet a lady who owns a mountain! 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 even saw them nectaring on nearby Octotillo Cacti, the first time I have seen that. FAB-U-LOUS! We also added the equally gorgeous Varied Bunting here, the first of the year no less, phew! Its usually favoured Golden Ball Lead Tree (*Leucaena refusa*), which had been in full flower last time hardly had any leaves and other noticeable signs of drought, included a profusion of Black-throated Sparrows. I do not recall seeing flocks of them before! No doubt attracted to the oasis owing to a dearth of food and water in the surrounding area. An off-course female Cinnamon Teal did its best to hide on the vegetation-less water tank and a very smart Green-tailed Towhee also visited the feeding station, mostly remaining under the surrounding bushes. A pair of Scaled Quails also delighted with several visits to the feeding area. Clay-coloured Sparrow was missing from South Llano River so it was a nice catch up here and Curve-billed Thrasher was nesting at the oasis and afforded several very nice views. Harris's Hawk also finally made it on to the trip list as one flew by Christmas Mountain, a terrific backdrop for a very familiar bird. Our final addition at Christmas Mountain was a rather drab female Lark Bunting, which briefly visited the water tank. Carolyn moved to Christmas Mountain in 1976 and planted her oasis in 1996. Within 20 years it became another world birding Mecca! I wonder how many birders

saw their lifer Lucifer Sheartail here. The afternoon was spent driving around the area in searing 105 degrees heat and unsurprisingly likely-looking spots did not produce much, save a nice Lazuli Bunting for some. We spent Easter in Alpine, the Sul Ross University town, gateway to Big Bend NP. 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.

The non-hiking part of the group explored the Alpine area with Carolyn next morning, where she owns another bird habitat, notably adding an awesome Common Black Hawk to the trip list as well as yet another Zone-tailed Hawk, Western Tanager and MacGillivray's Warbler. They also almost added Lesser Nighthawk as well, had it not been seen in the nightlights of a gas station by the hikers a few hours earlier! While the non-hikers were enjoying a comparative lie-in, the hikers were already halfway up a mountain, in the dark. At this time of year toiling uphill in the heat of the day is not a nice option and necessitates carrying even more water in an environment devoid of it. So up we went before dawn. Mexican Jays kept us company for much of the way, obviously in the hope of some trail food. A pair of Band-tailed Pigeons landed briefly in a nearby tree and a Zone-tailed Hawk carried nest material past a cliff face high above us. Eventually, as the sun peered over the mountain wall, the wavering trill of a Colima Warbler could be heard. It was not long before we located its maker, in exactly the same spot as our first of five years previously. This delightful little warbler, as its name suggests, is much easier to see in Mexico. Endemic to the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains of northeast Mexico, its breeding range only just creeps across the border into the USA in a couple of places, neither of which are easily accessed. Other treasures up here, way above the heat of the plains, among the Alligator Junipers, Bigtooth Maples and Graves Oaks, were Blue-throated Mountaingem (a much deeper buzzing hummingbird than the sheartail) and a Painted Whitestart. Other high-altitude additions included Cordilleran Flycatcher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, the elegant Townsend's Solitaire, Hermit Thrush and American Yellow Warbler. All too soon, however, it was time to head downhill as quickly as possible, pausing in what little shade there was to keep our temperatures down. On our descent we added the skulking Crissal Thrasher and a superb Broad-tailed Hummingbird, which impressed doing its rollercoaster display flight. After 16km and c1000m of ascent and descent, again we had drunk all of the four litres of water each we carried with us. At least we were around four kilos lighter by the time we staggered back to our vehicle. We had one full day left in which to return to Uvalde and do some birding along the way, so we returned via our favourite spot South Llano River, where we knew there was at least one Painted Bunting – we had missed it by minutes at the feeding station on each of our previous visits. This morning's weather was much more interesting, with mist over the escarpments and a threatening sky that the rising sun only just broke through. This is Cormac McCarthy (no) country described in his Borderland Trilogy. Every now again someone would be walking along the highway in the middle of nowhere, one guy was being frisked by a Border Patrol officer. It is a tough environment. South Llano River was very nice again but there was nothing new and certainly no catch-up Painted Bunting for those who had made the mis-timed visit to the WC at High Island! We had our best view of Sharp-shinned Hawk though. One perched on the cage full of Brown-headed Cowbirds, like looking through the window at a diner. Rain set in during a very overcast afternoon and that was it for the day. Our Last Chance Saloon enroute the airport in San Antonio was the excellent Mitchell Lake Audubon Center. We had some great looks at Dickcissel here last time, admittedly a few days later than 20 April. No luck with this one in 2022 but we racked up a nice list of birds, including a good number of shorebirds on the partly dried up lakes. Baird's and White-rumped Sandpipers were new-for-the-tour. Five of the former were feeding much higher up on the dry lakebed than the other shorebirds, ignoring the nice muddy pools. Two stunning Wilson's Phalaropes spun around among the numerous peeps, I recall my old friend Big Mike Wilson used to call them 'Aston Villas' on account of their claret and blue breeding plumage. A count of 25 Least Grebes was notable here, with a much smaller number of Pied-billed! There were few passerines on quite a windy day, the pick of which was a nice Indigo Bunting but just as we neared the parking lot and the last 50m or so of birding habitat, sharp-eyed Nick in the passenger seat spotted a bird with a red breast perched in a trackside copse. Quite an extraordinary bit of spotting and I don't think I can remember a buzzer-beater like this before on any of my tours. Sure enough, with a tiny bit of encouragement, in it came, a truly glowing male Painted Bunting. BAM! Plumage like no other bird on this trip, a ridiculous rainbow colour scheme. A lovely note to end on after the ups and downs we had been through on our own rollercoaster ride through the Lone Star State. Finally, I would like to thank our awesome group, who got along so well on our birding road trip. We had a lot of fun, saw a ton of birds as well as most of southern Texas! Y'all come back!

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

BIRDS

Black-bellied Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis*

Fulvous Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*

Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata*

Cinnamon Teal *Spatula cyanoptera*

Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors*

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Mottled Duck ♦ *Anas fulvigula*

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* 5 Aransas NWR

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Plain Chachalaca ♦ *Ortalis vetula* Noted at Estero Llano Grande SP & San Ygnacio

Scaled Quail ♦ *Callipepla squamata* 2 Christmas Mountain Oasis

Northern Bobwhite ♦ *Colinus virginianus* 1 Old Port Isabel Road, LRGV

Wild Turkey ♦ *Meleagris gallopavo*

Lesser Nighthawk *Chordeiles acutipennis*

Pauraque *Nyctidromus albicollis* 1 Estero Llano Grande SP

Common Poorwill ♦ *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii* 1 Davis Mountains SP

Chuck-will's-widow ♦ *Antrostomus carolinensis* 1 Rio Frio, Concan

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis*

Blue-throated Mountaingem ♦ (B-t Hummingbird) *Lampornis clemenciae* 2 West Texas Mountains

Lucifer Sheartail ♦ (L Hummingbird) *Calothorax lucifer* Christmas Mountain Oasis

Black-chinned Hummingbird *Archilochus alexandri*

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*

Broad-tailed Hummingbird ♦ *Selasphorus platycercus* 1 West Texas Mountains

Buff-bellied Hummingbird ♦ *Amazilia yucatanensis* 4 Estero Llano Grande SP

Greater Roadrunner ♦ *Geococcyx californianus* Total of 9 sightings

Rock Dove (introduced) *Columba livia*

Band-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas fasciata* 2 West Texas Mountains

Red-billed Pigeon ♦ *Patagioenas flavirostris* 2 Salineño, LRGV

Eurasian Collared Dove (introduced) *Streptopelia decaocto*

Inca Dove *Columbina inca*

Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina*

White-tipped Dove *Leptotila verreauxi*

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*

Clapper Rail *Rallus crepitans*

King Rail *Rallus elegans* Endemic. Anahuac NWR

Sora *Porzana carolina*

Common Gallinule (Laughing G) *Gallinula galeata*

American Coot *Fulica americana*

Purple Gallinule (American P G) *Porphyrio martinica*

Whooping Crane ♦ *Grus americana* Two family parties of 3, Aransas NWR from Skimmer

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus*

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola*

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia* 3 Aransas NWR & 3 Bolivar Flats

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*

Piping Plover ♦ *Charadrius melodus* c.15 Bolivar Flats

Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus* c.10 Bolivar Flats

Upland Sandpiper ♦ *Bartramia longicauda* 10 King Ranch, Norias Division

Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*

Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* 5 Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* 2 Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio

Buff-breasted Sandpiper ♦ *Calidris subruficollis* Total 97 west of H124, between Winnie & High Island

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* 2 Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

(Western) Willet *Tringa [semipalmata] inornata*

(Eastern) Willet *Tringa [semipalmata] semipalmata*

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* c.25 Aransas NWR

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus [fuscus] graellsii* 2 Aransas NWR

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*

Cabot's Tern *Thalasseus acufavidus*

Least Tern *Sternula antillarum*

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*

Common Loon (Great Northern Diver) *Gavia immer* 4 Aransas NWR from Skimmer

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga*

Neotropic Cormorant *Nannopterum brasilianum*

Double-crested Cormorant *Nannopterum auritum*

American White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja*

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* 1 Aransas NWR from Skimmer

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* Non-leader. 1 Anahuac NWR

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Yellow-crowned Night Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*

Great Egret (American G E) *Ardea [alba] egretta*

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens*

Tricolored Heron (Louisiana H) *Egretta tricolor*

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*

Mississippi Kite ♦ *Ictinia mississippiensis* 2 Martin Dies SP

Common Black Hawk *Buteogallus anthracinus* Non-leader. 1 Musquis Lake, Alpine (photo)

Harris's Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus* 1 Christmas Mountain Oasis

White-tailed Hawk *Geranoaetus albicaudatus* 5 LRGV

Grey Hawk *Buteo plagiatus* 1 Salineño, LRGV

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus*

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*

Zone-tailed Hawk *Buteo albonotatus* 5 sightings including carrying nesting material

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

American Barn Owl *Tyto furcata* 1 Brownville, LRGV

Elf Owl ♦ *Micrathene whitneyi* 1 Bentsen SP, LRGV

Ferruginous Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium brasilianum* 1 King Ranch, Norias Division

Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*

Eastern Screech Owl ♦ *Megascops asio* 1 Estero Llano Grande SP (ssp mcalli)

Green Kingfisher *Chloroceryle americana* 2 Salineño

Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata* 1 Salineño

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*

Red-headed Woodpecker ♦ *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* 2 Martin Dies SP

Acorn Woodpecker *Melanerpes formicivorus*

Golden-fronted Woodpecker *Melanerpes aurifrons*

Red-bellied Woodpecker ♦ *Melanerpes carolinus*

Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Dryobates scalaris*

Red-cockaded Woodpecker ♦ *Leuconotopicus borealis* Endemic. 4 sightings Angelina SF

Pileated Woodpecker ♦ *Dryocopus pileatus* 1 Angelina SF

Crested Caracara (Northern C C) *Caracara [plancus] cheriway*

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

Aplomado Falcon *Falco femoralis* 2 Laguna Atascosa NWR

Merlin *Falco columbarius* 1 Bentsen SP

White-fronted Amazon (introduced) *Amazona albifrons* 7 Brownsville, LRGV

Red-crowned Amazon ♦ (introduced) *Amazona viridigenalis* c.30 Brownsville, LRGV

Green Parakeet ♦ *Psittacara holochlorus* 2 Weslaco, LRGV

Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans* 1 Laredo, LRGV

Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya*

American Grey Flycatcher *Empidonax wrightii* Davis Mountains & Carolyn Ohl's Alpine habitat

Cordilleran Flycatcher *Empidonax occidentalis* West Texas Mountains

Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus obscurus*

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus*

Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus*

Couch's Kingbird ◊ *Tyrannus couchii*

Cassin's Kingbird *Tyrannus vociferans*

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus*

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens*

Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus*

Brown-crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus tyrannulus*

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*

Hutton's Vireo *Vireo huttoni* Lost Maples SNA

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius*

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*

Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii* 4 South Llano River SP

Black-capped Vireo ◊ *Vireo atricapilla* 7 South Llano River SP

Green Jay *Cyanocorax luxuosus*

Blue Jay ◊ *Cyanocitta cristata*

Mexican Jay ◊ (Grey-breasted J) *Aphelocoma wollweberi* c.40 West Texas Mountains

Woodhouse's Scrub Jay ◊ *Aphelocoma woodhouseii*

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Fish Crow ◊ *Corvus ossifragus* Endemic. 2 Woodville

Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax*

Chihuahuan Raven ◊ *Corvus cryptoleucus*

Phainopepla ◊ *Phainopepla nitens* 3 Davis Mountains

Tufted Titmouse ◊ *Baeolophus bicolor* Heard-only. Angelina SF

Black-crested Titmouse ◊ *Baeolophus atricristatus*

Carolina Chickadee ◊ *Poecile carolinensis* Endemic. 2 Angelina SF

Verdin *Auriparus flaviceps* 1 Langtry

Horned Lark (Shore L) *Eremophila alpestris* 2 Bolivar Flats

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

Purple Martin *Progne subis*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

American Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Cave Swallow ◊ *Petrochelidon fulva*

American Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus*

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Corthylio calendula*

Cactus Wren *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*

Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus*

Canyon Wren *Catherpes mexicanus*

Sedge Wren *Cistothorus stellaris*

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*

Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii*

Carolina Wren ◊ *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

House Wren (Northern H W) *Troglodytes [aedon] aedon*

Blue-grey Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea*

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher ◊ *Polioptila melanura*

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*

Brown-headed Nuthatch ◊ *Sitta pusilla* Endemic

Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

Brown Thrasher ◊ *Toxostoma rufum*

Long-billed Thrasher ◊ *Toxostoma longirostre*

Curve-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma curvirostre*

Crissal Thrasher ◊ *Toxostoma crissale*

Common Starling (introduced) *Sturnus vulgaris*

Townsend's Solitaire ◊ *Myadestes townsendi*

Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina*

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*

House Sparrow (introduced) *Passer domesticus*

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus*

Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria*

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*

Bachman's Sparrow ◊ *Peucaea aestivalis* Endemic. 1 seen plus 3 more heard-only Angelina SF

Olive Sparrow ◊ *Arremonops rufivirgatus* 1 San Ygnacio

Black-throated Sparrow *Amphispiza bilineata*

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*

Lark Bunting *Calamospiza melanocorys* 1 Christmas Mountain Oasis

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*

Clay-coloured Sparrow *Spizella pallida*

Field Sparrow ◊ *Spizella pusilla* common, South Llano River SP

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis* 1 Juniper Blind, South Llano River SP

Vesper Sparrow *Pooecetes gramineus*

Seaside Sparrow ♦ ***Ammospiza maritima*** Endemic. Singles Aransas NWR & Bolivar Peninsula

Nelson's Sparrow ♦ ***Ammospiza nelson*** 1 Bolivar Peninsula

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*

Swamp Sparrow ♦ ***Melospiza georgiana***

Canyon Towhee *Melospiza fusca*

Rufous-crowned Sparrow *Aimophila ruficeps*

Green-tailed Towhee ♦ ***Pipilo chlorurus*** Christmas Mountain Oasis

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus*

Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* Non-leader

Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens*

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*

Scott's Oriole *Icterus parisorum*

Audubon's Oriole ♦ ***Icterus graduacauda*** Singles at King Ranch, Norias Division & Salineño

Altamira Oriole ♦ ***Icterus gularis***

Bullock's Oriole *Icterus bullockii* 1 Davis Mountains SP

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*

Hooded Oriole *Icterus cucullatus*

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Bronzed Cowbird *Molothrus aeneus*

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*

Boat-tailed Grackle ♦ ***Quiscalus major*** Endemic

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum* 1 High Island

Louisiana Waterthrush ♦ ***Parkesia motacilla***

Blue-winged Warbler ♦ ***Vermivora cyanoptera*** 1 Port Aransas

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*

Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea* Martin Dies SP

Swainson's Warbler ♦ ***Limnithlypis swainsonii*** Singles Hook Oaks & singing at Martin Dies SP

Tennessee Warbler *Leiothlypis peregrina*

Orange-crowned Warbler *Leiothlypis celata*

Colima Warbler ♦ ***Leiothlypis crissalis*** 1 seen well plus 2 more heard-only West Texas Mountains

Nashville Warbler *Leiothlypis ruficapilla*

MacGillivray's Warbler *Geothlypis tolmiei* non-leader. 1 Carolyn Ohl's Alpine habitat

Kentucky Warbler *Geothlypis formosa*

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*

Hooded Warbler *Setophaga citrina*

Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*

Tropical Parula *Setophaga pitiayumi* 2 King Ranch, Norias Division, including 1 poss. hybrid

American Yellow Warbler *Setophaga aestiva*

Pine Warbler ◊ *Setophaga pinus* Common Angelina SF

Myrtle Warbler *Setophaga coronata*

Audubon's Warbler *Setophaga auduboni*

Yellow-throated Warbler ◊ *Setophaga dominica*

Prairie Warbler ◊ *Setophaga discolor* 2 seen well plus another heard-only Angelina SF

Golden-cheeked Warbler ◊ *Setophaga chrysoparia* 2 sightings South Llano River SP

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*

Painted Whitestart (P Redstart) *Myioborus pictus* 1 West Texas Mountains

Hepatic Tanager *Piranga hepatica* 1 Davis Mountains

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*

Western Tanager *Piranga ludoviciana* non-leader. Carolyn Ohl's Alpine habitat

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* Only 1 single sighting at High Island (male)!

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*

Pyrrhuloxia ◊ *Cardinalis sinuatus* 4 sightings Davis Mountains

Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* 3 High Island

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*

Lazuli Bunting *Passerina amoena* non-leader. 1 West Texas Mountains (photo)

Varied Bunting *Passerina versicolor* 1 Christmas Mountain Oasis

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris* Female, High Island & a male Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

MAMMALS

Virginia Opossum *Didelphis virginiana* 1 after dark at Rockport

Nine-banded Armadillo *Dasyurus novemcinctus* 2 sightings South Llano River SP & 1 Rio Frio

Grey Fox *Urocyon cinereoargenteus* Davis Mountains SP

Northern Raccoon (Common R) *Procyon lotor* Seen during daytime at High Island

Collared Peccary *Pecari tajacu* 5 Davis Mountains

Mountain Lion *Puma concolor* 1 freshly dead on the road Fort Davis SP

Wild Boar (introduced) *Sus scrofa*

Mule Deer *Odocoileus hemionus*

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus*

Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* c.15 Aransas

Black-tailed Jackrabbit *Lepus californicus*

Desert Cottontail *Sylvilagus audubonii*

Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus*

Coypu (Nutria) *Myocastor coypus* 3 Anahuac NWR

Rock Squirrel *Otospermophilus variegatus*

Eastern Gray Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Fox Squirrel *Sciurus niger*

Hispid Cotton Rat *Sigmodon hispidus* Estero Llano Grande SP, a 'write-in' for this long-established tour

Mexican Free-tailed Bat *Tadarida brasiliensis* Tens of thousands, Rio Frio Bat Cave, Concan



Piping Plover flock resting on the beach at Bolivar Flats (image by Mike Watson)



A lingering Whooping Crane family at Aransas NWR from Skimmer (image by Mike Watson)



Wilson's Plover on Bolivar Beach, there is some roped-off habitat reserved for it to nest in! (image by Mike Watson)



Western Willet at Aransas (image by Mike Watson)



Western Osprey with its breakfast to go at Aransas NWR (image by Mike Watson)



Western Diamondback Rattlesnake at South Llano River SP, a very impressive creature! (image by Mike Watson)



Sora at Anahuac NWR, one of many we saw there (image by Mike Watson)



Well, at least the trees are green now at South Llano River SP (image by Mike Watson)



This Tropical Parula at the King Ranch shows some minor hybrid features (image by Mike Watson)



Trump's Wall didn't quite cut Bentsen SP off from the rest of the country, thank goodness (image by Mike Watson)



One of at least 10 Upland Sandpipers that paused on their northward migration at the King Ranch (image by Mike Watson)



An inversion spills over the West Texas Mountains (image by Mike Watson)



Scaled Quail at Christmas Mountain Oasis (image by Mike Watson)



This male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was the only one seen on the 2022 tour!!! (image by Mike Watson)



Rock Squirrel, common in the high mountains (image by Mike Watson)



Mexican Free-tailed Bats cascade out of Rio Fro Bat Cave, Concan (image by Mike Watson)



Red-cockaded Woodpecker, no. #1 target of the pineywoods (image by Mike Watson)



One of few plants in flower in the desert this year, Rainbow Cactus (image by Mike Watson)



Olive Sparrow, San Ygnacio Seedeater Sanctuary (image by Mike Watson)



Marbled Godwit, Bolivar Peninsula (image by Mike Watson)



Hooded Warbler (female), Holt Paradise Pond (image by Mike Watson)



A flock of prairie-bound Franklin's Gulls zip by us at Aransas NWR (image by Mike Watson)



Clapper Rails in a tidal creek at Anahuac NWR (image by Mike Watson)



A male Audubon's Oriole singing by the Rio Grande at Salineño (image by Mike Watson)



Mexican Jay in the high mountains of West Texas (image by Mike Watson)



A tired Ovenbird rests in the leaf litter at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center



Pectoral Sandpiper at Mitchell Lake Audubon Birding Center (image by Mike Watson)



This roadkill Mountain Lion was a sad sight at Fort Davis (image by Mike Watson)



Horse-crippler Cactus, scattered around South Llano River SP like land mines (image by Mike Watson)



John and Joan enjoy the view at Fort Davis (image by Mike Watson)



Great-tailed Grackle, a ubiquitous and under-appreciated Texas bird (image by Mike Watson)



Golden-cheeked Warbler deep in Texas Hill Country (image by Mike Watson)



Claret cup Cactus, West Texas (image by Mike Watson)



Colima Warbler, no. #1 target bird in West Texas (image by Mike Watson)



One of the Hill Country duo of specialities, Black-capped Vireo (image by Mike Watson)



Black-and-white Warbler at Paradise Pond, Port Aransas (image by Mike Watson)



Black-necked Stilt, Anahuac NWR (image by Mike Watson)



A jewel of the high mountains of West Texas, Blue-throated Mountain gem (image by Mike Watson)



Carolyn Ohl's Christmas Mountain Oasis (image by Mike Watson)



A close-up view of an American Alligator at Anahuac NWR (image by Mike Watson)



The heavily-marked Eastern Willet, Bolivar Peninsula (image by Mike Watson)



Curve-billed Thrasher, Christmas Mountain Oasis (image by Mike Watson)



Comanche Country, Fort Davis, West Texas (image by Mike Watson)



Grey Catbird, Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center (image by Mike Watson)



Gulfway Motel, High Island (image by Mike Watson)



the closest oaks to the sea (image by Mike Watson)



Let's go surfing now! Long-billed Curlew at Bolivar Flats (image by Mike Watson)



A gorgeous Northern Parula at Holt Paradise Pond, Port Aransas (image by Mike Watson)



'No Country For Old Men', West Texas Borderlands landscape (image by Mike Watson)



Least Grebe, Holt Paradise Pond (image by Mike Watson)



A live oak-covered out-building at King Ranch (image by Mike Watson)



Nine-banded Armadillo, we enjoyed some great views on the 2022 tour, maybe owing to the drought? (image by Mike Watson)



Prairie Warbler Pineywoods habitat (image by Mike Watson)



Piping Plover plus Sanderling, Least Sandpiper, Snowy and Semi-palmated Plovers (image by Mike Watson)



Prairie Warbler in Angelina SF (image by Mike Watson)