



EAST TEXAS: Gulf Coast and Pineywoods 23–28 April 2010

I grew up near Fort Worth. As an adolescent, I had no real appreciation for Texas, and I vowed that, other than visiting my parents, I would have no reason to return. I was not a birder back then. In my adult years, when I started enjoying nature, my trips to Texas took on new meaning. Harris's Sparrows in winter and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in summer inspired me to return again and again. We have now visited nearly all corners of the state, with a special fondness for the eastern "red" woodpeckers: the Red-bellied, Red-headed, and Red-cockaded. We now visit the Pineywoods when the woodpeckers are drumming and combine the migration spectacle of High Island and the upper Texas Coast for a world-class birding vacation. Join us in Texas this spring, and you too will want to return.

Your Host and Lead Guide, Stephen Shunk

TOUR SUMMARY

Our basic tour route for 2010 begins and ends in the mega-metropolis of Houston. If you are combining this tour with our Hill Country tour (April 29–May 4) we will spend Wednesday night, 4/28, in San Antonio, and this will also be your preferred departure city. After our airport pickups in Houston, we quickly leave the city and enter rural East Texas.

We will spend our first couple nights in the tiny town of Winnie, just north of High Island, and the days here will be spent exploring the High Island sanctuaries and nearby coastline. We will hope for a southbound cold front to optimize the viewing opportunities of migrant songbirds. When these exhausted trans-gulf migrants hit a cold front, they will "crash" onto the first piece of land they see, and this is often High Island. More than 20 warbler species are possible, along with dozens of other songbirds, including vireos, orioles, tanagers, buntings, thrushes, and more. Migrating waterbirds take advantage of the long gulf coastline and the surrounding flats, and we could see more than 20 shorebird species, a few highlights being Hudsonian Godwit, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

After our experience at High Island, we will head north into the Texas Pineywoods. Here we will focus on seven species of resident woodpeckers, along with other specialty birds of the pine forests. The spunky little Red-cockaded Woodpecker will drive our itinerary, as we visit different sites in the mornings and evenings to observe this charismatic species. At these times of day, a given family group will leave from and return to its "cluster" of cavity trees, never quietly and always exhibiting a broad array of entertaining antics.

In addition to the Red-cockaded, we should see plenty of Red-headed Woodpeckers, and the forests support a number of unique songbird populations, which will easily distract us from our woodpecker watching. Nesting warblers include Hooded, Pine, Prairie, Kentucky, and Swainson's Warblers. We will seek out Bachman's Sparrow singing in the grassy forest understory and Brown-headed Nuthatch squeaking overhead. South of the pine forests, we will bird along the Neches River, once the realm of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. This area rarely hosts nesting Swallow-tailed Kite, and we should see plenty of migrating Mississippi Kites, along with Broad-winged Hawks and the resident Red-shouldered Hawks.

Our daily itinerary will depend on the weather and tides, as well as local bird reports and our success at finding certain species, but no matter where we are, we will delight in common species such as Northern Cardinal, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, Dickcissel, and Gray Catbird. In addition to the shorebirds of the High Island area, the region's fields, ponds and other water sources can host Roseate Spoonbill, Tricolored Heron, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, and Purple Gallinule.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

Extensive birding experience is not required for this tour. Birders with more advanced skills will be able to find and identify more of the anticipated species, while those with less experience will delight in the abundance of "life-birds" throughout the tour. This tour may even be fine for some beginners, but they should be prepared for the abundance of birds and new information. Your guide, Steve Shunk, is a patient, professional educator, and he will work diligently to help each participant learn bird songs and visual identification, as well as general natural and cultural history of the region.

This tour is for moderately active people in good health. Our guides are certified first aid providers, but we will usually be fairly close to urban medical facilities. Every day will involve considerable walking, and we may hike a total of two or three miles per day. Most individual walks will be short and at a "birdwatcher's pace," but a few routes may take us up steep hills or over rough terrain. We will do our best to cater each day's activities to the ability level of the group. Throughout the tour, we will bird mostly on foot, with very little of our birding to be conducted from the vehicle. To take advantage of cooler temperatures and the height of bird activity, we will usually start birding early each morning, with breaks or meals in the heat of the day, often birding until sunset.

Depending on group size, we will either travel in a large passenger van or a minivan. In either case, we will leave ample room for each guest to have his or her own window in the vehicle. If we use a large van, we will use a step stool for easy entry. This is a non-smoking tour. We will stay in non-smoking rooms and eat in non-smoking areas, but we cannot avoid exposure to cigarette smoke in all circumstances. Some restaurants in the region do not have non-smoking sections. Please be prepared for these factors and understand that we are guests in these rural communities. The delightful southern hospitality more than compensates for this minor discomfort.

We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group's needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone in the group gets their binoculars or scope on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photos. That said, you are welcome to haul along any camera gear you can tolerate carrying, and you might at least want a small camera to capture some of the region's scenic vistas.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Warm to hot temperatures and high humidity predominate in Texas, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience thunderstorms, light rain, fog, and extended periods of sun, all in one day. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other shelter, for a couple hours at a time.

Please pack conservatively to allow room for all our gear, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of conditions out-of-doors.

Biting insects do occur in some areas along our route, and we recommend that you take the proper precautions. Recent rains could cause us to encounter enough mosquitoes to add an additional level of challenge to the birding experience, and you may need chemical repellent or bug resistant clothing. You should also be prepared to protect yourself from the sun, as we will spend many hours outdoors on most days.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and favorite field guide. You also may bring a spotting scope, although we will have at least one scope available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend two nights in Winnie, and three nights in Jasper, all in comfortable motels. We will forward details on specific lodging facilities as we get closer to the tour date. If you are traveling with a birding partner or are willing to share a room with another birder, we will do our best to place you in a double room. Early registrants will be the first ones placed with available roommates. If we are not able to match you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals from dinner on April 23 through lunch on April 28. We will eat in restaurants that appeal to a wide variety of food preferences, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or rural community stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring foods that will meet your needs.

Most breakfasts will be held early to allow us an early start to our birding day. Some will be continental-style while others will be complete meals. We will eat most lunches in restaurants, and lunch will occasionally be our largest meal of the day. We may also snack through lunch in anticipation of an early dinner. In addition to restaurant meals, we provide food and beverages, with plenty of water, in the field. One of our goals is to keep you pleasantly fueled and hydrated to help you get the most of the long birding days. The survey included in your registration materials asks your dietary restrictions and preferences. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you on the road.

TRAVEL LOGISTICS & TOUR FEE

We will meet all participants at the Houston Hobby (or Houston Intercontinental, if necessary) at approximately 2:00 pm, Friday, April 23. Specific pickup time and location will depend on individual itineraries. We will return to Houston no later than noon on Tuesday, April 28, to allow plenty of time for 2 p.m. or later departures.

If you are joining us for the Texas Hill Country tour, April 29–May 4, you will want to schedule your departure out of San Antonio for 2 p.m. or later on May 4. If you need help with travel planning, we recommend DTR Travel of Colorado: <http://www.dtrtravel.com/>. Please tell them that you heard about their services from Paradise Birding.

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages; five nights lodging (a sixth night, Wednesday, 4/28, is also included if you are taking our Hill Country tour); transportation from Houston; fees, licenses and permits; service-related gratuities;

and the instruction and leadership of your guide(s). The fee does not include guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our service.

We are pleased to accept checks or credit cards (VISA or Mastercard). A non-refundable \$95 deposit is required to hold your space, with the balance due 60 days prior to departure. If you register after February 23, the entire tour fee is due with your registration materials. We recommend that you purchase travel insurance.

PER PERSON *Single occupancy:* \$1,740
Double occupancy: \$1,500
DEPOSIT: \$95
BALANCE DUE, February 23: \$1,645 single/\$1,405 double

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with a maximum of 7 participants on this tour.

REFUND POLICY: Your deposit is non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation more than 60 days prior to the tour, you will be refunded any payments above your deposit. If you cancel between 60 and 30 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 30 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour at any time in the future.

To pre-register for the tour, please complete the registration forms printable from our web site at <http://www.paradisebirding.com/09regforms.pdf> and return them with your non-refundable \$95 deposit. *We look forward to seeing you in Texas this spring!*

PARADISE BIRDING CONTACT INFORMATION

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