



SPRINGTIME IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY 29 April – 4 May 2010

I grew up near Fort Worth. As an adolescent, I had little 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 soon discovered the Texas Hill Country, a region of extraordinary natural beauty and home to two very special endangered species: the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. After many subsequent visits, we are excited to share with you some world-class birding at the peak of nesting season. Join us in Texas this spring, and you too will want to return.

Your Host and Guide, Stephen Shunk

TOUR ITINERARY

Our 2010 Hill Country tour follows our April 23–28 tour to East Texas. Participants attending both tours should plan to arrive in Houston and depart San Antonio (with the option of departing from Houston after the Hill Country trip, albeit later on 5/4 than a San Antonio departure; more below).

Our tour route begins and ends in San Antonio, at the edge of the Edwards Plateau, also known as the Texas Hill Country. We will spend four full days and two half-days birding this diverse region, in search of the two very special endangered species: the Golden-cheeked Warbler and the Black-capped Vireo. Our daily itinerary will usually be driven by our efforts to see both species well, but along the way we will encounter many other southern specialties. Our cumulative Hill Country bird list at the end of this summary reflects the diversity of birds in and around the region.

Thursday, April 29 – Uvalde County

Meet at San Antonio International Airport at approximately 2:00 p.m. Curbside location(s) and time(s) will be determined closer to trip date, based on individual flight itineraries.

After departing San Antonio airport, we will head west along the southern edge of the Edwards Plateau, working our way into Uvalde County. Along the route we will likely see Swainson's Hawk, Black Vulture, Crested Caracara, Western Kingbird, and an abundance of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.

Our first official birding stop will land us at the Uvalde Fish Hatchery, where we will enjoy a nice juxtaposition of land and water birds. The ponds could produce Little Blue Heron, Solitary Sandpiper, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, and Blue-winged Teal, while the surrounding uplands may host Black Phoebe, Bell's Vireo, Painted Bunting, and Ladder-backed Woodpecker. Between the hatchery and Uvalde City Park, on the Leona River, we could also find Green Kingfisher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Black-crested Titmouse, and Clay-colored Sparrow.

Night in Uvalde

Friday, April 30 – Western Hill Country

Our first full day will take us near the western edge of the Edwards Plateau. Here we will explore the remote and spectacular Kickapoo Caverns State Park, with one of the

highest concentrations of nesting Black-capped Vireos throughout this endangered species' entire range. This spot will also likely produce an abundance of Bell's Vireo and Yellow-breasted Chat, plus White-eyed and Gray Vireos, Orchard and Scott's Orioles, Varied and Painted Buntings, and as many as 10 sparrow species. We will enjoy our first Cave Swallows here, as well as the ubiquitous Summer Tanager and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Zone-tailed Hawks occasionally soar with the vultures overhead.

We will escape the afternoon heat with a delightful birding stop at Fort Clark Springs, where we will bird beneath the riparian and oak canopy along Las Moras Creek. The wetlands and streamside support Yellow-throated Vireo, Green Kingfisher, Black Phoebe, and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, while the uplands feature Lark Sparrow, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and many possible migrant songbirds.

Night in Uvalde

Saturday, May 1 – Southern Hill Country

A brief morning stop at Cook's Slough in Uvalde could net us a Yellow-headed Blackbird or Couch's Kingbird, along with various marsh birds and waterfowl. We will then head into the heart of the Hill Country, where we will spend the rest of the morning in and around the town of Concan, along the crystal-clear Frio River. Productive feeding stations at Neal's Lodges can produce a taste of South Texas specialty birds, including Long-billed Thrasher, Brown-crested Flycatcher, and Olive Sparrow, along with Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Black-crested Titmouse, and Indigo and Painted Buntings. Here we will also look for our first Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo, with Yellow-throated Warbler, Green Kingfisher, and Red-shouldered Hawk along the river.

After lunch at Neal's Café, we will spend the afternoon birding at Garner State Park, upstream on the Frio. Here we will bird among the giant bald-cypress galleries for Yellow-throated Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Ringed Kingfisher. The juniper slopes above invite Golden-cheeked Warbler, and Canyon Wrens sing from the cliff faces.

Night in Leakey

Sunday, May 2 – Central Hill Country

After an early breakfast in town, we will head for Lost Maples Natural Area, one of the true gems of the Hill Country. Here, we will be surrounded by Golden-cheeked Warblers; but the habitat diversity here can produce an amazing array of birds, and the distractions will be many. Just a few of the anticipated songbirds may include Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Louisiana Waterthrush, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Western Scrub-Jay, and Scott's Oriole. We will also keep our radars on for Black-capped Vireo and the resident Zone-tailed Hawks, with Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds at the campground feeders.

We will enjoy an early dinner in the quaint town of Utopia, followed by some birding in town and along the Sabinal River. Here we can hope to see the town's resident Blue Jays, along with Eastern Bluebird, Blue Grosbeak and swarms of chattering Chimney Swifts.

Night in Leakey

Monday, May 3 – Northern Hill Country

Our final full day will take us into one of the strongholds of the Black-capped Vireo, the Kerr Wildlife Management Area. In some years, hundreds of these elusive little songsters

breed on the preserve. On our vireo quest we will also enjoy more nesting species of the Hill Country, including Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Warbling and Bell's Vireos, Golden-cheeked and Black-and-white Warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

After a mid-day break and early dinner in Leakey, we will head south to a private ranch downstream on the Frio River, where we will witness one of the greatest nature spectacles in the world: the evening fly-out of 10 million Mexican Free-tailed Bats from the Frio Bat Cave! Before the great bat exodus, we will enjoy swarms of Cave Swallows entering their lair for the evening, as well as a chorus of Rock, Bewick's, and Cactus Wrens, Canyon Towhee, Painted Bunting, Scott's Oriole, and Black-throated Sparrow. On our drive out, we will listen for Chuck-Wills-Widow, Common Poorwill, and Eastern Screech-Owl.

Night in Leakey

Tuesday, May 4 – Return to San Antonio

Our last day will take us east across the Edwards Plateau toward San Antonio, with a couple leisurely birding stops along the way. In addition to many of the birds above, we will enjoy more of the common species we have seen repeatedly on the trip, including White-eyed Vireo, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and the captivating Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.

We will return to San Antonio airport by noon, in time for 2 p.m. or later departures.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

Extensive birding experience is not required for this spring adventure. 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 new information and the challenges of searching for songbirds in the canopy and thickets. 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 often be several hours from any 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 diverse ability levels among 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 start birding early each morning, with breaks or meals in the heat of the day, and birding until sunset.

Depending on group size, we will either travel in a 15-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 van. If we use a large van, we will use a step stool for ease of entry.

This is a non-smoking tour. Whenever possible we 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.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and favorite field guide. If you have contemplated purchasing new binoculars, you will be glad you have them for this trip, but you should be very comfortable with their use before leaving home. You also may bring a spotting scope, although we usually have two spotting scopes available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning.

Biting insects do occur in some areas along our route, and we recommend that you take the proper precautions. The chance we will encounter enough mosquitoes to hinder the birding experience is small, but if we do, you may need chemical repellent or bug resistant clothing. You also should be prepared to protect yourself from the sun, as we will spend many hours outdoors on most days.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend each night in comfortable motels in Uvalde and Leakey. 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 due to the gender mix of the participants, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals from dinner on April 29 through lunch on May 4. 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 some lunches in restaurants and some in the field. We may also snack through lunch in anticipation of an early dinner.

In addition to restaurant meals, we will 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 San Antonio airport at approximately 2 p.m., Thursday, April 29. Specific pickup time and location will depend on individual itineraries. We will return to San Antonio no later than noon on Tuesday, May 4, to allow plenty of time for 2 p.m. or later departures. If you are also joining us in East Texas before the Hill Country tour, you have the option of departing from San Antonio on the schedule above or departing from Houston after 5 p.m. on the same day. You may need to spend the night in Houston that evening if you cannot get the itinerary you want with a departure after 5 p.m. If you need help with travel planning, or if you have difficulty meeting this schedule, please get in touch.

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcoholic beverages; five nights lodging; transportation from San Antonio; 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 \$95 deposit is required to hold your space, with the balance due 60 days prior to departure. If you register after March 10, the entire tour fee is due with your registration materials. We recommend that you purchase travel insurance. Please contact us directly about our refund policy.

PER PERSON *Single/Double occupancy*: \$1,740/\$1,500
DEPOSIT \$95
BALANCE DUE *February 29* \$1,645 /\$1,405

PARADISE BIRDING CONTACT INFORMATION

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Please contact us at any time with questions. We look forward to seeing you in Texas this spring!



Paradise Birding Bird List — Five years in the Texas Hill Country

Least Grebe	Northern Harrier	Eastern Screech-Owl
Pied-billed Grebe	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Great Horned Owl
Eared Grebe	Cooper's Hawk	Lesser Nighthawk
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	Harris's Hawk	Common Nighthawk
Wood Duck	Red-shouldered Hawk	Common Poorwill
Gadwall	Swainson's Hawk	Chuck-will's-widow
Mallard	Zone-tailed Hawk	Whip-poor-will
Mottled Duck	Red-tailed Hawk	Chimney Swift
Blue-winged Teal	Crested Caracara	Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Cinnamon Teal	American Kestrel	Black-chinned Hummingbird
Northern Shoveler	Merlin	Ringed Kingfisher
Northern Pintail	Peregrine Falcon	Green Kingfisher
Ring-necked Duck	Sora	Golden-fronted Woodpecker
Ruddy Duck	American Coot	Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Wild Turkey	Black-bellied Plover	Eastern Wood-Pewee
Northern Bobwhite	Semipalmated Plover	Acadian Flycatcher
Neotropic Cormorant	Killdeer	Black Phoebe
Double-crested Cormorant	Black-necked Stilt	Eastern Phoebe
Great Blue Heron	American Avocet	Say's Phoebe
Great Egret	Greater Yellowlegs	Vermilion Flycatcher
Snowy Egret	Lesser Yellowlegs	Ash-throated Flycatcher
Little Blue Heron	Solitary Sandpiper	Great-crested Flycatcher
Tricolored Heron	Spotted Sandpiper	Brown-crested Flycatcher
Cattle Egret	Least Sandpiper	Great Kiskadee
Green Heron	Rock Pigeon	Couch's Kingbird
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Eurasian Collared-Dove	Western Kingbird
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	White-winged Dove	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
White-faced Ibis	Mourning Dove	Loggerhead Shrike
Black Vulture	Inca Dove	White-eyed Vireo
Turkey Vulture	Common Ground-Dove	Bell's Vireo
Osprey	Greater Roadrunner	Black-capped Vireo
White-tailed Kite	Barn Owl	Gray Vireo

Yellow-throated Vireo	Summer Tanager
Blue-headed Vireo	Olive Sparrow
Hutton's Vireo	Spotted Towhee
Warbling Vireo	Canyon Towhee
Red-eyed Vireo	Cassin's Sparrow
Blue Jay	Rufous-crowned Sparrow
Western Scrub-Jay	Chipping Sparrow
Common Raven	Clay-colored Sparrow
Horned Lark	Field Sparrow
Purple Martin	Vesper Sparrow
No. Rough-winged Swallow	Lark Sparrow
Bank Swallow	Black-throated Sparrow
Cliff Swallow	Savannah Sparrow
Cave Swallow	Grasshopper Sparrow
Barn Swallow	Song Sparrow
Carolina Chickadee	Lincoln's Sparrow
Black-crested Titmouse	White-throated Sparrow
Verdin	White-crowned Sparrow
Bushtit	Northern Cardinal
Cactus Wren	Pyrrhuloxia
Rock Wren	Blue Grosbeak
Canyon Wren	Lazuli Bunting
Carolina Wren	Indigo Bunting
Bewick's Wren	Painted Bunting
House Wren	Dickcissel
Marsh Wren	Red-winged Blackbird
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Eastern Meadowlark
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	Brewer's Blackbird
Eastern Bluebird	Common Grackle
Hermit Thrush	Great-tailed Grackle
Northern Mockingbird	Bronzed Cowbird
Long-billed Thrasher	Brown-headed Cowbird
Curve-billed Thrasher	Orchard Oriole
European Starling	Hooded Oriole
Cedar Waxwing	Bullock's Oriole
Orange-crowned Warbler	Scott's Oriole
Nashville Warbler	House Finch
Northern Parula	Pine Siskin
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Lesser Goldfinch
Golden-cheeked Warbler	American Goldfinch
Black-throated Green Warbler	
Yellow-throated Warbler	
Black-and-white Warbler	
Louisiana Waterthrush	
Common Yellowthroat	
Wilson's Warbler	
Yellow-breasted Chat	
Rufous-capped Warbler	