



SPRINGTIME IN SOUTH TEXAS: Lower Rio Grande Valley & South Coast 4–8 May 2009

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, since I started enjoying nature, my trips to Texas have taken on new meaning. Harris's Sparrows in winter and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in summer made the visits quite enjoyable, and even exciting. I could tolerate the Texas heat in exchange for some adventurous birding. Our first visit to the Lower Rio Grande Valley sealed the deal. My parents could now count on us visiting at least once a year, even two or three times. Many life birds later, we are thrilled to offer a South Texas itinerary to share this world-class birding at the onset of spring migration. Whatever your feelings about Texas, after one look at a Green Jay, you too will want to return.

Your Host and Guide, Stephen Shunk

TOUR SUMMARY

We are proud to offer our 2009 Rio Grande Valley tour in conjunction with the American Birding Association annual convention, scheduled for April 27–May 3 in Corpus Christi. Our tour will begin and end in Corpus. Participants not attending the convention should plan their round-trip flight through Corpus Christi; details follow on suggested flight itineraries.

Our tour route begins in Corpus Christi, where we will explore a couple very productive urban parks before heading south. Highlights here will include spring migrants looking for respite after crossing the Gulf of Mexico. Some of the anticipated birds include Orchard Oriole, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Scarlet Tanager, Philadelphia Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and a variety of warblers, flycatchers and other songbirds. We will also search for migrant species we are unlikely to see farther south or those at the southern end of their Texas range, including Barred Owl, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Great-crested Flycatcher, Carolina Chickadee, and Boat-tailed Grackle.

From Corpus Christi southward along the coast, we can see nearly every species of wading bird in North America, including Least Bittern, Roseate Spoonbill, and Reddish Egret (of both color phases). We will study up to nine species of terns and as many as seven rails, including King Rail and Purple Gallinule. Dense concentrations of migrant and nesting shorebirds may include Wilson's and Snowy Plovers, Hudsonian Godwit, Red Knot, and Upland and White-rumped Sandpipers.

But then the real prizes come in the subtropical habitats of the Rio Grande Valley, where we will sample species that reach their northern limits in the remnant riparian patches along the Rio Grande. We can expect such exciting birds as the Plain Chachalaca, Green Jay, Ringed Kingfisher, and Altamira Oriole, along with Groove-billed Ani, Great Kiskadee, and Couch's Kingbird. Up to seven dove species will include White-tipped Dove, and farther upstream, we will search for Hook-billed Kite, Brown Jay, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Audubon's Oriole, and White-collared Seedeater.

Throughout the tour we will stay alert for migrant songbirds, with a good chance to find more than 20 species of warblers, especially if we encounter a northern cold front on South Padre Island. Anywhere on the tour route, and in their appropriate habitats, we can also expect Black-crested Titmouse, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and Northern Cardinal, along with White-tailed Hawk, Red-crowned Parrot, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, and Long-billed Thrasher. Our route back to Corpus Christi could produce a few Hill Country and Brush Country inhabitants, such as Cave Swallow, Pyrrhuloxia, Harris's Hawk, Verdin, Painted Bunting, Black-throated Sparrow, and Black-tailed Gnatcatcher. See a complete bird list at the end of this summary.

TOUR ITINERARY

Monday, May 4 — morning birding in Corpus Christi followed by coastal birding on Baffin Bay; evening birding at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Night in Harlingen.

Tuesday, May 5 — morning birding at Audubon Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary; afternoon and evening birding between Brownsville and South Padre Island. Night in Harlingen.

Wednesday, May 6 — morning birding at Anzalduas County Park and Santa Ana NWR; afternoon and evening birding in urban McAllen and vicinity. Night in McAllen.

Thursday, May 7 — morning birding Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park; afternoon birding among rural McAllen sanctuaries; nocturnal birding at Bentsen. Night in McAllen.

Friday, May 8 — morning birding at Chapeno RV Park, Falcon State Park, and San Ygnacio Sanctuary; afternoon return to Corpus Christi. Final dinner and night in Corpus Christi.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

Extensive birding experience is not required for this 5-day 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 week. This tour may even be fine for some beginners, but they should be prepared for the abundance of new information. Your guides are patient, professional educators, with many years of birding experience. We 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, with very little birding to be conducted from the vehicle. Most individual walks will be short and at a “birdwatcher’s pace,” but a few routes may take us over rough terrain. To take advantage of moderate morning temperatures and the height of bird activity, we will start birding early each morning, often taking breaks in the heat of the day and then birding into sunset.

The group will travel in a large, comfortable 15-passenger van. We will remove the rear seat for gear storage before the tour, leaving ample room for two people per seat and a

maximum of seven guests. We will repeatedly enter and exit the van from an entrance that is high off the ground, although a step stool will be provided.

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 inconvenience.

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 bring along any camera you can tolerate carrying, and you might at least want to carry a small camera to capture images of the region's unique habitats.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Warm to hot temperatures and high humidity predominate in South Texas, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience thunderstorms, light rain, and extended periods of sun, and it may be quite windy along the coast. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other shelter, for up to two 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 outdoor conditions.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars, spotting scope, and favorite field guide. If you have contemplated purchasing new optics, you will be glad you have them for this trip; contact us if you would like recommendations on the latest available equipment. We also carry an extensive birding and natural history library for reference and learning.

Biting insects do occur in some areas along our route, and we recommend that you take the proper precautions. A few of our stops can host enough mosquitoes to hinder the birding experience, so you will need repellent or bug resistant clothing in order to enjoy the birds. You also should be prepared to protect yourself from the sun, as we will spend many hours outside on most days.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend each night in comfortable motels. If you are traveling with a birding partner and wish to share a room, we should be able to accommodate you at the *double-occupancy* rate. 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-occupancy* tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals from lunch on May 4 through dinner on May 8. 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 in local grocery stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring foods that will meet your restrictions.

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. Regardless of the breakfast meal served, we will ensure that coffee and tea are available for the earliest risers. We will eat some lunches in restaurants and some in the field. Restaurant lunches may be followed by a siesta at our motel or by a period of driving between birding sites, and they will often be our largest meal of the day. Dinners will be held at casual local eateries. They will often be held at dusk, which may be later than most of you are used to eating.

In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide food and beverages for snacks in the field. We will provide you with a water bottle and we will encourage you to drink lots of water during the trip. On some occasions, we may snack through lunch, reserving our largest meal for dinner. 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.

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks, and non-alcoholic beverages; five nights lodging; transportation from Corpus Christi; fees, licenses and permits; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guides. 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 only). A \$95 non-refundable deposit is required to hold your space, with the balance due 60 days prior to departure. We recommend that you purchase travel insurance. Please contact us directly about our refund policy.

<i>FEE PER PERSON:</i>	<i>Single/ Double \$1,850/1,630</i>
<i>DEPOSIT PER PERSON:</i>	<i>.....<u>\$95</u></i>
<i>BALANCE DUE March 4:</i>	<i>Single/ Double \$1,755/1,535</i>

PARADISE BIRDING CONTACT INFORMATION

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Please contact us at any time with questions, and we look forward to seeing you in South Texas this spring!

Paradise Birding Tour List: South Coast & Rio Grande Valley, 2003–2006

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Baird's Sandpiper
Fulvous Whistling-Duck	Cooper's Hawk	Pectoral Sandpiper
Muscovy Duck	Roadside Hawk	Dunlin
Gadwall	Gray Hawk	Stilt Sandpiper
American Wigeon	Harris's Hawk	Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Mallard	Red-shouldered Hawk	Short-billed Dowitcher
Mottled Duck	Broad-winged Hawk	Long-billed Dowitcher
Blue-winged Teal	Short-tailed Hawk	Wilson's Snipe
Cinnamon Teal	Swainson's Hawk	Wilson's Phalarope
Northern Shoveler	White-tailed Hawk	Laughing Gull
Redhead	"Fuertes" Red-tailed Hawk	Franklin's Gull
Greater Scaup	Northern Caracara	Ring-billed Gull
Lesser Scaup	American Kestrel	Herring Gull
Red-breasted Merganser	Merlin	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Ruddy Duck	Aplomado Falcon	Glaucous Gull
Plain Chachalaca	Clapper Rail	Gull-billed Tern
Scaled Quail	King Rail	Caspian Tern
Northern Bobwhite	Virginia Rail	Royal Tern
Least Grebe	Sora	Sandwich Tern
Pied-billed Grebe	Purple Gallinule	Common Tern
Eared Grebe	Common Moorhen	Forster's Tern
American White Pelican	American Coot	Least Tern
Brown Pelican	Black-bellied Plover	Black Skimmer
Neotropic Cormorant	American Golden-Plover	Rock Pigeon
Double-crested Cormorant	Snowy Plover	Red-billed Pigeon
Anhinga	Wilson's Plover	Eurasian Collared-Dove
Least Bittern	Semipalmated Plover	White-winged Dove
Great Blue Heron	Piping Plover	Mourning Dove
Great Egret	Killdeer	Inca Dove
Snowy Egret	American Oystercatcher	Common Ground-Dove
Little Blue Heron	Black-necked Stilt	White-tipped Dove
Tricolored Heron	American Avocet	Green Parakeet
Reddish Egret	Greater Yellowlegs	White-fronted Parrot
Cattle Egret	Lesser Yellowlegs	Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Green Heron	Solitary Sandpiper	Greater Roadrunner
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Willet	Groove-billed Ani
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	Spotted Sandpiper	Eastern Screech-Owl
White Ibis	Upland Sandpiper	Great Horned Owl
White-faced Ibis	Whimbrel	Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl
Roseate Spoonbill	Long-billed Curlew	Elf Owl
Black Vulture	Marbled Godwit	Short-eared Owl
Turkey Vulture	Ruddy Turnstone	Lesser Nighthawk
Osprey	Red Knot	Common Nighthawk
Hook-billed Kite	Sanderling	Common Parakeet
White-tailed Kite	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Chuck-will's-widow
Mississippi Kite	Western Sandpiper	Chimney Swift
Northern Harrier	Least Sandpiper	Buff-bellied Hummingbird

Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Black-chinned Hummingbird
Ringed Kingfisher
Belted Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
Golden-fronted Woodpecker
Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Acadian Flycatcher
Willow/Alder Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Vermilion Flycatcher
Ash-throated Flycatcher
Great-crested Flycatcher
Brown-crested Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Tropical Kingbird
Couch's Kingbird
Western Kingbird
Eastern Kingbird
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Rose-throated Becard
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Green Jay
Brown Jay
Chihuahuan Raven
Horned Lark
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
No. Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Cave Swallow
Barn Swallow
Black-crested Titmouse
Verdin
Cactus Wren
Carolina Wren
Bewick's Wren
House Wren
Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher
Veery
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
Clay-colored Robin
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Sage Thrasher
Long-billed Thrasher
Curve-billed Thrasher
European Starling
American Pipit
Blue-winged Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Northern Parula
Tropical Parula
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Cape May Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Worm-eating Warbler
Ovenbird
Louisiana Waterthrush
Kentucky Warbler
Mourning Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Canada Warbler
Yellow-breasted Chat
Gray-crowned Yellowthroat
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
White-collared Seedeater
Olive Sparrow
Cassin's Sparrow
Botteri's Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Black-throated Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow
Seaside Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Pyrrhuloxia
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Crimson-collared Grosbeak
Lazuli Bunting
Indigo Bunting
Painted Bunting
Dickcissel
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Great-tailed Grackle
Bronzed Cowbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Orchard Oriole
Hooded Oriole
Bullock's Oriole
Altamira Oriole
Audubon's Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
House Finch
"Black-backed" Lesser Goldfinch
House Sparrow

268 species