



SPRING IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

29 April–5 May, 2018

\$1,890 double/\$2,190 single

*Includes 2 guides and a
maximum of 6 tour participants.*

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. I 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 onset of nesting season in the most beautiful corner of the Lone Star State. Join us in the Hill Country this spring, and you too will want to return!

*Your Host and Lead Guide,
Stephen Shunk*

TOUR ITINERARY

NOTE: Our 2018 Hill Country tour follows our April 22–28 tour to the Rio Grande Valley. Participants attending both tours will get dinner and an extra night of lodging in between the tours at no extra charge.

Our tour begins and ends in San Antonio, at the edge of the Edwards Plateau, also known as the Texas Hill Country. We will spend five full days and two half-days birding this diverse region, with an amazing array of breeding birds and two key 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.

As a bonus to the 'regular' Hill Country birds, we should see several species associated with South Texas. Just a few of these include Couch's Kingbird, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Green Jay, Olive Sparrow, and Long-billed Thrasher. In addition to the warbler & vireo show and the South Texas bonus birds, we will enjoy several other stars of the Hill Country, such as Zone-tailed Hawk, Green Kingfisher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Cave Swallow, Summer Tanager, Painted Bunting, and an abundance of Yellow-breasted Chats.

The itinerary described below may be adjusted based on several factors, including weather conditions, local bird reports, and our success at finding certain species.

Sunday, April 29—San Antonio to Brackettville

Meet at San Antonio International Airport at approximately 2 p.m. After leaving the airport, we will head west along the southern edge of the Edwards Plateau, working our way into Uvalde County.



Black-capped
Vireo

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 Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Bell's Vireo, Bullock's Oriole, and Dickcissel. Between the hatchery and Uvalde City Park, on the Leona River, we might also find Green Kingfisher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Black-crested Titmouse, or Clay-colored Sparrow.

We will continue east to Brackettville, where we will spend our first two nights in the lovely, rustic enclave of Fort Clark Springs.



Painted Bunting

Monday, 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 breeding range. This spot will also likely produce an abundance of Bell's Vireo and Yellow-breasted Chat, plus White-eyed Vireo, Orchard and Scott's Orioles, Painted Bunting, as many as 10 sparrow species, and possibly a Gray Vireo or Varied Bunting. 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.

After a picnic lunch at Kickapoo, we will escape the afternoon heat with some delightful birding at Fort Clark Springs, where we will walk beneath the riparian 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 Ft. Clark Springs*

Tuesday, May 1—Southern Hill Country

A morning stop at Chalk Bluff Park along the Nueces (pron. "new-ACE-iz") River should produce Green and Ringed Kingfishers and Golden-fronted Woodpecker, along with various songbirds found at the scrubby fringes of the Hill Country, including possible Pyrrhuloxia and White-tipped Dove. 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. The productive feeding stations at Neal's Lodges can produce a taste of South Texas, 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 and Green Kingfisher 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, while Canyon Wrens sing from the cliff faces. *Night in Leakey*

Wednesday, May 2—Central Hill Country

After an early breakfast in Leakey, 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, although the habitat diversity at Lost Maples can produce an amazing array of birds, and the distractions will be many. Just a few of the possible songbirds may include Red-eyed Vireo, Acadian Flycatcher, Louisiana Waterthrush, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Western Scrub-Jay, and Scott's Oriole.

A hike to the rim of the canyon may produce Black-capped Vireo or resident Zone-tailed Hawk, with Black-chinned and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds possible 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 Couch's Kingbird, Blue Grosbeak and swarms of chattering Chimney Swifts. *Night in Leakey*

Thursday, May 3—Northern Hill Country

Our next full day will take us into another stronghold of the Black-capped Vireo, the Kerr Wildlife Management Area. In most years, dozens of these skulking 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, Hutton's, and Bell's vireos, Golden-cheeked and Black-and-white Warblers, and just in case you aren't tired of them yet, more Yellow-breasted Chats.



After lunch in the tiny town of Hunt, we will bird our way upstream along the Guadalupe River, with a several productive birding stops searching for Northern Bobwhite, Greater Roadrunner, Vermilion Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, and a host of sparrow species. A couple of stops along the upper Frio River will eventually land us back in Leakey. *Night in Leakey*.

Friday, May 4—Central Hill Country

Our final full day will take us back to Concan to bird along the Frio River and in and around the properties of Neal's Lodges. The feeding stations here typically give us excellent looks at Black-crested Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and "Black-backed" Lesser Goldfinch. Black-chinned Hummingbirds will buzz into the hummer feeders, and we should find Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Green Kingfisher along the river. In some years, Tropical Parula or Rufous-capped Warbler breed here.

After dinner at Neal's, 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, the second largest bat cave in the world! 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, Canyon, Bewick's, and Cactus Wrens, Canyon Towhee, Painted Bunting, Scott's Oriole, and the handsome Black-throated Sparrow. On our drive out after sunset we will listen for Chuck-Wills-Widow, Common Poorwill, and Eastern Screech-Owl. *Night in Leakey*

Saturday, May 5—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 always captivating Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.

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

TOUR STYLE & PACE

Most of our Hill Country birding will take us along the trails of local parks, although we may stop on our travel routes to safely observe raptors or other specialty birds from the vehicle or roadside. Every day will involve considerable walking, and we may hike a total of three miles per day. Some of our individual hikes will involve short but relatively steep climbs, but all routes are well-maintained. Regardless of the route difficulty, we will always move at a “birdwatcher’s pace,” and having two guides will allow us to split the group between those with differing ability levels.

Birding in the Hill Country is mostly about finding and observing songbirds, which can be challenging for new birders. Those of you with more advanced skills will be able to find and identify more of the anticipated species, while those with less experience will still delight in the abundance of “life-birds” throughout the tour. This tour may even be fine for some beginners, but you should be prepared for the abundance of new information and the challenge of searching for elusive songbirds in the canopy and thickets. Your lead guide, Steve Shunk, is a patient and seasoned interpreter. He and his partner will work diligently to help each participant learn bird sounds and visual identification, as well as general natural 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. We will do our best to cater each day’s activities to the diverse ability levels among the group. 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, often birding until sunset.

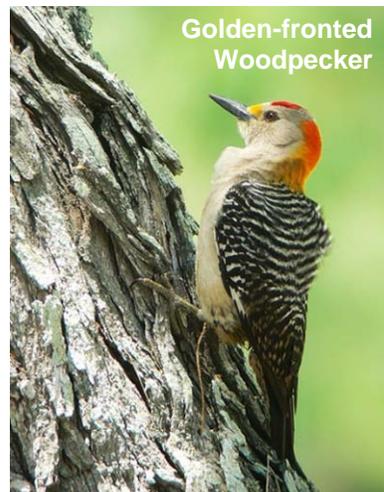
Depending on group size, we will either travel in a 15-passenger van or a minivan. In either case, there will be ample room for each guest to have his or her own window in the van. If we use a large van, we will use a step stool for ease of entry. This is a non-smoking tour. Whenever possible we stay in non-smoking rooms and eat in non-smoking areas, but we cannot avoid exposure to cigarette smoke in all circumstances.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

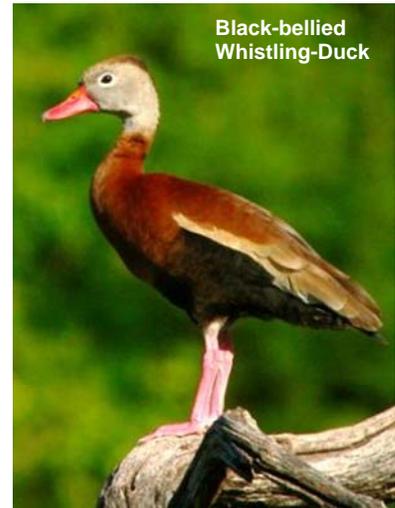
Warm to hot temperatures and high humidity predominate in late spring in central Texas, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience thunderstorms, light rain, fog, and extended periods of sun, all in the same day. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other 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 outdoor conditions.

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. We will always stay out of tall grasses to avoid chiggers, especially in wet areas. You also should be prepared to protect yourself from the sun, as we will spend many hours outdoors on most days.

We recommend that you use mid-sized or larger binoculars, ideally those with at least a 32 mm objective lens. You may bring a spotting scope, although the woodland birding is not terribly conducive to scope viewing. Your guides will carry at least one spotting scope for the group to share. You may bring a favorite field guide, but we will also provide an extensive birding and nature library.



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 a small camera will help you remember the wildflowers and scenic vistas.



LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend each night in comfortable motels in Ft. Clark Springs 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. 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 5. We will eat in restaurants that appeal to those with 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 this possibility you may wish to bring foods that will meet your needs.

Most breakfasts will be held early to allow an early start to our birding day. Some may be continental-style and others will be complete meals, with the local specialties of breakfast tacos or a good traditional southern breakfast. We will eat some lunches in restaurants and some in the field. Those of you who have birded with us before know that we appreciate good food. However, options are a bit limited in rural Texas, so keep your expectations simple, especially at dinner.

In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide food and beverages, with plenty of water, in the field. You should bring a refillable water bottle. 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

We will meet all participants at the San Antonio airport at approximately 2 p.m. on April 29. Specific pickup time and location will depend on individual itineraries. We will return to San Antonio no later than noon on May 5, to allow plenty of time for 2 p.m. or later departures.

If you are also joining us in the Rio Grande Valley, before the Hill Country tour, you will travel with us from McAllen to San Antonio on Saturday, April 28, and we will enjoy dinner and night in San Antonio between the two trips. If you need help with travel planning, or if you have difficulty meeting this schedule, please get in touch.

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks and non-alcohol beverages; six 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.

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with 2 guides and a maximum of 6 participants on this tour.

2018 TOUR FEE: \$1,890 double /\$2,190 single
DEPOSIT \$500
BALANCE DUE January 29 \$1,390 double/\$1,690 single

REFUND POLICY: Once we confirm the tour has reached the minimum registration, \$100 of your deposit becomes non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation for a confirmed tour more than 90 days prior to the start, you will be refunded .any payments over the \$100 retained from your deposit. If you cancel 89–45 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of all fees paid. If you cancel less than 45 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 in the future. If we cancel the trip for any reason, all payments will be refunded, including the \$100 retained from your deposit.

To register for the tour, please complete the attached registration forms and return them with your \$500 deposit. If you register after January 29, the entire tour fee is due with your registration materials. We are pleased to accept checks or credit cards.

We look forward to seeing you in Texas this spring!

PARADISE BIRDING CONTACT INFORMATION

Stephen Shunk 541-408-1753
P.O. Box 547 steve@paradisebirding.com
Sisters, OR 97759



Rose Vervain



Flyout at the Frio Bat Cave



Paradise Birding Tour Confirmation and Registration

Greetings! This form will confirm your registration on the following tour:

TITLE: _____ **DATE(S):** _____

Please complete and return to the address below, along with either your \$500 deposit (includes nonrefundable \$100) or the complete tour fee. If you have already paid your deposit, your balance is due 90 days prior to the tour for domestic, 120 days for international tours. For your convenience, we happily accept VISA, Mastercard and American Express. Please also complete the Liability Waiver found on page two. THANK YOU!

Full Name: _____ Nickname (if any): _____

Mailing Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Sex: _____ Birth date: _____ Height: _____ Weight: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Alt. Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Paradise Birding T-shirt preference; please circle your size and color. We'll do our best to accommodate you!

Size: Small—Medium—Large—Extra Large—XX Large | **Color:** Unisex (Blue—Green) or Ladies (Lavender—Yellow)

Would you like to receive periodic emailed updates & birding tips from Paradise Birding? Yes_ No _

Please tell us how you first heard about this Paradise Birding tour: _____

Roommate preference: *(If you will travel with a birding partner and wish to share a room, or if you are willing to share a room with another birder of the same sex, please indicate this here. If we are unable to match you with another birder, or where only single rooms are available, you will responsible for the single tour fee.)*

Dietary Preferences: *(Drink & food preferences. Please be specific. Our tours are often in remote regions without a wide variety of food choices, so we do our shopping for snacks and picnic lunches in advance. Also list any food allergies or dietary restrictions.)*

Medical Information: *(Please alert us to any medical or physical conditions that may affect you or your group's activities on an outdoor tour in remote locations; include any history of heart trouble, asthma, diabetes or epilepsy, as well as environmental and medication allergies. Please also include current prescription medications being taken. Use the back of this page or another sheet if necessary. NOTE: Anyone with an existing or potentially serious medical condition should consult a physician before participating in any outdoor or travel adventure.*

Emergency Contact: *(Please include detailed contact information for the person or persons we should contact in case of an emergency.)*

Name(s) and relationship(s) to you: _____

Contact number(s): _____

Credit Card #: _____ Expiration Date: _____ or Check #: _____

Signature: _____ Charge/Check Amount: \$ _____

Paradise Birding LLC | Stephen Shunk, Owner & Lead Guide

P.O. Box 547 | Sisters, OR 97759 | PH: 541-408-1753 | E-MAIL: steve@paradisebirding.com



HIKING AND BIRD WATCHING PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT and RELEASE and ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RISK

In consideration of the services of PARADISE BIRDING LLC, their officers, agents, employees, volunteers, advertisers, and stock holders, and all other persons or entities associated with this business (hereinafter collectively referred to as PARADISE BIRDING LLC) I agree as follows:

Although PARADISE BIRDING LLC has taken reasonable steps to provide you with appropriate equipment and skilled guides so you can enjoy an activity for which you may not be skilled, we wish to remind you this activity is not without risk. Certain risks cannot be eliminated without destroying the unique character of this activity. The same elements that contribute to the unique character of this activity can be causes of loss or damage to your equipment or accidental injury, illness, or in extreme cases, permanent trauma, paralysis, or death. We do not want to frighten you or reduce your enthusiasm for this activity, but we do think it is important for you to know in advance what to expect and that you be informed of the inherent risks. The following describes some, but not all, of those risks:

- 1.) Accidents can occur on land. You could slip or fall during a hike, causing damage to equipment, personal injury, or even death. You could also otherwise be injured while hiking or visiting other land-based phenomena.
- 2.) You could suffer injuries or trauma during the land and air transportation portions of the trip, in vehicles or aircraft.
- 3.) Exposure to the natural elements can be uncomfortable or harmful. You should be aware that this exposure could cause hypothermia, sunburn, illness from drinking water or food, and/or dehydration.
- 4.) You will be staying at accommodations not owned or operated by PARADISE BIRDING LLC. You could suffer injury, damage to equipment, trauma, or even death while staying at these places.
- 5.) Errors on the part of PARADISE BIRDING LLC and its employees, including insufficient instruction or assistance.

I am aware that this birding tour, including related transportation and activities, entails risks of injury or death to myself. I understand the description of these risks is not complete and that other unknown or unanticipated risks may result in injury or death. I agree to assume responsibility for the risks identified herein and other risks inherent to a birding trip. My participation in this activity is purely voluntary and I elect to participate in spite of the risks.

I certify that I am fully capable of participating in this activity. Therefore, I assume full responsibility for myself, including my minor children, for bodily injury, death, and loss of personal property and expenses thereof as a result of those inherent risks and dangers and of my negligence in participating in this activity.

I agree that if any portion of this agreement is found to be void or unenforceable, the remaining portions shall remain in full force and effect. In the event that I file a lawsuit against PARADISE BIRDING LLC, I agree to do so solely in the state of Oregon, and I further agree that the substantive law of that state shall apply in that action without regard to the conflict of law rules of that state.

I have read, understood, and accepted the terms and conditions stated herein and acknowledge that this agreement shall be effective and binding upon myself, my heirs, assigns, personal representatives and estate for all members of my family including any minors accompanying me. I acknowledge I am not relying on any oral, written, or visual representations or statements made by PARADISE BIRDING LLC, including those made in its brochure and other promotional material, to induce me to go on the birding tour. I also acknowledge that in any and all promotional material the use of the word "safe," "safe as possible," or the like does not mean, imply or suggest that this trip is without risk. I have also read and agree to comply with the PARADISE BIRDING LLC cancellation policy.

Photographic Release: PARADISE BIRDING LLC reserves the right to take photographs or film records of any PARADISE BIRDING LLC tour, program, or activity, and each trip member hereby agrees that PARADISE BIRDING LLC may use such photographs or film records for promotional, commercial, or any other marketing purposes, including Internet use.

Name (please print): _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

If under 18, parent or guardian signature: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Cell/Primary Phone: _____ Alt. Phone: _____

Name of Trip: _____ Trip Date: _____

Paradise Birding LLC | Stephen Shunk, Owner & Lead Guide

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