

South Texas Birding & Nature | Species List

December 2 – 10, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by: guide and leader James P. Smith

With participants; Cecelia, Claire, Gene, Kathy, Lee, Linda and Ruth.

Summary: an extra-ordinary avian odyssey through the most bird-rich state in the US. We began our journey in the coastal bend region of Rockport/Fulton before traveling south to focus on the sub-tropical thorn-scrub and wetlands of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Not only were we blessed with nine days of wonderful weather, we just happened to be treated to an incredible array of rare birds; **Cattle Tyrant** (the first US record), **Gray-collared Becard** (3rd US record and 1st Texas record) and a **Roadside Hawk** (about the 12th US record) all came our way amid a selection of lesser rarities such as **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **American Flamingo**, **Golden-crowned Warbler** and **Tropical Parula**. Photogenic **Green Jays**, **Long-billed Thrashers** and **Altamira Orioles** dazzled at the numerous iconic birding centers along the route and we found most of the species closely associated with the Rio Grande Valley. The majestic **Whooping Crane**, one of the world's rarest, shared a meadow with **Sandhill Cranes** at Goose Island setting the precedent for a trip loaded with fantastic birds and wildlife experiences, all of which was shared with our cordial and highly motivated group. Thanks go to Cecelia, Claire, Gene, Kathy, Linda, Lee and Ruth for making this trip so enjoyable and exciting to lead.

HO = heard well enough to be counted as a heard-only observation

LO = leader-only observation

I = introduced

BIRDS (198) species of which three were heard-only and five were leader-only observations).

Ducks, Geese, and Swans: Anatidae (22)

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis*— fairly widespread seemingly at home in both natural and artificial wetlands. After a few flyover flocks near Rockport we all enjoyed really good scope views at the Los Fresnos Nature Park.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*— what a great experience to hear flocks of these beauties calling the through mist and low cloud at Salineño on the 9th, eventually getting eyes onto a flock of six heading east. Based on what we heard through the mist, the true number was probably close to 100 birds that morning.

Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*— an unexpected bonus when we spied c.130 feeding in a field at Raymondville as we sped south along Route 77.

Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* **(I)** — domestic/feral individuals, including some free-flyers popped up at a number of wetland sites throughout the trip. Alas, our vigil for truly wild birds at Salineño boat ramp on the 9th came up empty.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*— three flew up river at Salineño on the 9th - great spot and ID by Gene!

Gadwall *Anas strepera*— a freshwater dabbler seen very well at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th and on the river at Salineño on the 9th

American Wigeon *Anas americana*— up to 20 noted at South Padre Island on the 6th and on the Rio Grande at Salineño on the 9th

Mexican Duck *Anas diazi* – formerly lumped with Mallard but split in 2020. Very similar to the ‘Texas’ subspecies of Mottled Duck with which it sometimes interbreeds. However, with some caution we identified pairs at South Padre Island birding Center on the 6th and Estero Llano Grande on the 7th.

Mottled Duck *Anas fulvigula*— this dark ‘Mallard-type’ was noted at least four days though proved especially difficult to see really well. The best views came from Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th and South Padre Island on the 6th.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*— commonly encountered at wetlands throughout the trip with especially exquisite views at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th – a photographers delight!

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*— a bright male hidden among the Blue-winged Teals at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*— fairly common in shallow wetlands and noted on at least six days with extraordinary numbers (c.500) at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*— an elegant dabbling found in good numbers at various wetland sites on five days.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*—wonderful close views and photo opportunities of hundreds at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Redhead *Aythya americana*— common to abundant in certain spots such as Charlie’s Pasture/ Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center and South Padre Island, sometimes appearing in great rafts numbering several thousand birds - impressive to say the least!

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* (LO) — around a dozen way up river from Salineño boat ramp on the 9th

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*— found on two dates discreetly hidden among flocks of Redhead.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*— two sizeable flocks of 35 – 40 at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd and Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*— a couple of rafts numbering around a dozen birds in each were in Corpus Christi bay on the 3rd and viewed from Indian Point.

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*— a surprise immature on the San Benito wetlands on the 6th.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*— noticed on three dates, all of them in saltwater environments with the most (c.10) at South Padre Island on the 6th.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*— three at Charlie’s Pasture during the flamingo chase on the 2nd.

Guans and Chachalacas: Cracidae (1)

Plain Chachalaca *Ortalis vetula*— this sometimes noisy *cracid* showed well around the feeding stations at Resaca De La Palma, Frontera Audubon Thicket and Bentsen Rio Grande SP, and included a beautiful leucistic individual at the latter site.

New World Quail: Odontophoridae (1)

Scaled Quail *Callipepla squamata*— rich reward for the long off-road drive to Ranch Lomitas when we heard and then saw a tight flock of eight moving through the thorn-scrub behind the ranch.

Partridges, Pheasants, and Allies: Phasianidae (1)

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*— only seen at one site during the tour but goodness, did we have great views! A social group of nine wandered around Bentsen Rio Grande SP including the patio of the on-site café on the 8th.

Loons: Gaviidae (1)

Common Loon *Gavia immer*— Goose Island, Fulton Harbor and Indian Point all hosted non-breeding (basic) plumage individuals on the same day, Sunday the 3rd.

Grebes: Podicipedidae (2)

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus*— super views of this diminutive grebe carrying a fish on a small pond at

Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on the 5th, and another on the Rio Grande at Salineño on the 9th.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*— far more widespread than its smaller cousin, found on at least six dates with the most (15) at South Padre Island on the 6th.

Cormorants: Phalacrocoracidae (2)

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*— noted on at least five days including direct comparisons with Double-crested Cormorants at Charlie's Pasture on the 2nd and along the Rio Grande at Salineño boat ramp on the 9th

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*— observed daily in a variety of saltwater and freshwater habitats.

Anhinga: Anhingidae (1)

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga*— one in flight over Goose Island on the 3rd, and we had good views at Los Fresnos Nature Park on the 6th as well as tallying around a dozen resting at the edge of the Resaca at Bentsen Rio Grande State Park on the 8th.

Pelicans: Pelecanidae (2)

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*— wonderful views of this majestic pelican, highlighted by a large flock of c.300 wheeling and soaring on warm-air thermals over Los Fresnos Nature Park on the 6th as well as incredible close-ups at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*— restricted to coastal habitats, we had sensational views at Cos-Way on JFK Blvd near Corpus Christi, at South Padre Island and even resting on the pilings alongside the Port Aransas ferry crossing!

Hérons and Egrets: Ardeidae (12)

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus* (**LO**) – one seen leaving a small pond at San Benito wetlands when it flew low across the road and must have landed in a field of knee-high dry grass never to be seen again.

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis*— what a treat! Prolonged views of a male hunting from the base of the cattails, kindly pointed out to us by a British couple at the birding center on South Padre Island on the 6th.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*— seen on most days with a thin scatter of birds in both saltwater and freshwater environments.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*— fairly widespread with the most noted in the first days of the trip between Aransas Bay and Corpus Christi.

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*— similar in distribution to Great Egret but rather scarce.

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*— a nice range of plumages from dark adults through to blotchy or white immatures. Seen only in coastal areas on four dates.

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*— rather more widespread than Little Blue Heron with individuals being seen from Charlie's Pasture through to the Rio Grande at Salineño boat ramp on the 9th. Remarkable views from the boardwalk at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens*— perhaps the most animated member of the heron family, we thoroughly enjoyed watching both regular and white morphs 'dancing' in the shallows as they chased prey items in the saline flats at Charlie's Pasture, Indian Point and South Padre Island.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*— a single bird found by the Resaca at Los Fresnos Nature Park on the 6th.

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*— scarce, perhaps reflective of the winter season. Even so, we had extraordinary views of singles from the boardwalks at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center and South Padre Island. Noted on four days.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*— a cosmopolitan species found on at least five days after the first on Goose Island on Dec 3rd.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*— stellar views of this beautiful night-heron at the birding center on South Padre Island, and at Alligator Lake, Estero Llano Grande where as many as 18 were found roosting in the rank vegetation.

Ibis and Spoonbills: Threskiornithidae (3)

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*— easily found at wetland locations and even flying over urban areas on at least six days.

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*— a ‘late-in-the-day’ single at Charlie’s Pasture on the first evening, the only sighting of the tour.

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* – this majestic wading bird featured on five days of the trip with especially spectacular flocks flying over the ‘crane meadow’ at Goose Island on the 3rd and around 20 (!) near the H.E.B supermarket in Weslaco on the 7th.

FLAMINGOS: Phoenicopteridae (1)

American Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*— originating from the Yucatan Peninsula and displaced by Hurricane Idalia, three flamingoes was the prize for our long walk out to Charlie’s pasture on the first afternoon of the tour.

New World Vultures: Cathartidae (2)

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*— fairly common though less frequent than Turkey Vulture with sinister looking groups often gathered around roadkill.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*— daily fare throughout the tour with the most in the San Benito wetlands area on the afternoon of the 6th when about 60 were seen.

Osprey: Pandionidae (1)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*— common and easily seen in the Rockport/Fulton/Port Aransas area as well as South Padre Island and along certain portions of the Rio Grande.

Hawks, Eagles, and Kites: Accipitridae (11)

White-tailed Kite *Elanus leucurus*— great views of a pair hunting and quartering above Estero Llano Grande on the 7th, and an individual hovering over a meadow in perfect afternoon light near the National Butterfly Center, Mission on the 8th.

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*— harriers were noted on three days, all of them quartering in low lying coastal areas including Mustang Island, Charlie’s Pasture and South Padre Island.

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*— one appeared over the Rio Grande at Salineño boat ramp on the 9th

Cooper’s Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*— scarce, perhaps surprisingly so after a bold juvenile showed well around buildings at the Cattle Tyrant site in downtown Corpus on the 2nd. Another was seen stealthily slipping through the neighborhoods of Rockport/Fulton on the 3rd.

Harris’s Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus*— after the first sighting south of Sarita on the 4th, we came across this social raptor in singles and small groups throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley especially in the vicinity of Brownsville and Harlingen.

White-tailed Hawk *Geranoaetus albicaudatus*— a fabulous trip for observing this handsome and range restricted *buteo* found nowhere else in the US other than SE Texas. Mustang Island easily had the largest concentrations where we multiple pairs perched up on the giant utility poles. Observed on at least five days as far inland as San Benito.

Gray Hawk *Buteo plagiatus*— at least two pairs put on quite the show at Bentsen Rio Grande SP on the 8th and appeared to be engaged in courtship behavior. The next day we had another vocal pair along the Rio Grande at Salineño boat ramp.

Roadside Hawk *Rupornis magnirostris* – birders who routinely visit Central America will know this species well but with only a dozen US records to date (and all of them from Texas) this was easily one of the rarest species seen on the tour. Fortune came our way as an immature bird put on the most fabulous show at the end of the Ebony Trail, Resaca de La Palma on the 5th. Apparently it retreated just after our sighting and went unseen for the rest of the day, that's until we returned for a second helping in the evening! Again, it performed admirably before flying off to roost.

Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus*— after a couple of brief drive-by singles at Sarita and Resaca de La Palma, we had fabulous looks at a bold adult in the parking lot at Bentsen Rio Grande SP on the 8th followed by another crisply marked adult at Estero Llano Grande on the 10th.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* — a single immature dark morph spent some time soaring and drifting north in to Texas from Mexico. Very much a 'scope bird' and seen only from the famous hawk tower at Bentsen Rio Grande SP on the 8th

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*— found on most days of the trip, usually perched on fence posts or utility poles. Most were seen on the long travel day between Fulton and Brownsville when we tallied over 20 individuals.

Rails, Coots, and Allies: Rallidae (4)

Clapper Rail *Rallus crepitans*— at least one calling from Charlie's Pasture on the 2nd followed by incredible views of up to three below the boardwalk at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Virginia Rail *Rallus limicola*— one put in the briefest of appearances below the boardwalk at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata*— super views from the boardwalks at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th, and South Padre Island birding center on the 6th.

American Coot *Fulica americana*— up to a dozen at various wetlands from Port Aransas to the Rio Grande at Salineño.

Cranes: Gruidae (2)

Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis*— up to 26 sharing the same meadow as the Whooping Cranes at Goose Island on the 3rd, and a surprise flock of 24 arriving from Mexico and heading north over Bentsen Rio Grande SP on the 8th.

Whooping Crane *Grus americana*— after a fabulous lecture from outreach biologist Paityn Bower from the International Crane Foundation we headed over to Goose Island where we were treated to immaculate views of as many as 15 Whooping Cranes!

Stilts and Avocets: Recurvirostridae (2)

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*— this, perhaps the most elegant of shorebirds was found at Indian Point on the 3rd, Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th and South Padre Island on the 6th.

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*— small numbers (up to 10) amid the masses of shorebirds on the flats at Charlie's Pasture and Indian Point, all within the first three days of the trip.

Oystercatchers: Haematopodidae (1)

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*— fabulous views of two at Sunset Lake, Portland in late afternoon on the 3rd. Yet another highlight from a brilliant afternoon of shorebirding.

Plovers and Lapwings: Charadriidae (5)

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*— good views of non-breeding plumage birds on the mud flats at Indian Point and Sunset Lake on the 3rd plus a distant group on the mudflats at South Padre Island on the 6th.

Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus*— fabulous comparative views of this scarce plover right alongside

Semipalmated and Piping Plovers at Indian Point on the 3rd.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*— over 20 observed on the mudflats with other shorebirds at Indian Point on the 3rd.

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*— sensational views of up to half a dozen at Indian Point on the 3rd and distant scope views of a similar number on the tidal flats at South Padre Island on the 6th.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*— one heard calling from the ‘crane meadow’ at Goose Island on the 3rd and up to a dozen on the saltmarsh flats near Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Sandpipers and Allies: Scolopacidae (17)

Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*— exceptionally good looks at a confiding individual in the ‘crane meadow’ at Goose Island on the 3rd with more seen on the mud flats at Indian Point, Corpus Christi Bay on the 3rd.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*— noted in the early stages of the tour with exquisite views on the mudflats at Indian Point, Corpus Christi Bay on the 3rd.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* – we could hardly pass up the opportunity to view a species known to have the longest-distance non-stop bird migration, a journey of some 11-days and 13,560-kilometres! The finding of this bird at Sunset Lake, Portland was the grand finale to an exceptional afternoon of shorebirding along the edge of Corpus Christi Bay. This particular bird happened to be (about) the third individual Bar-tailed Godwit to be recorded in Texas.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*— strictly coastal with sightings coming from Fulton Harbor and Indian Point on the 3rd, and South Padre Island on the 6th.

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*— a party of four feeding with other shorebirds near the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th. An unexpected bonus just before we headed south.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* — found along the coast with small numbers at Indian Point and Sunset Lake on the afternoon of the 3rd and near the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center the following day.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*— nice views of several at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd and perhaps as many as 35 at Indian Point and Sunset Lake on the afternoon of the 3rd

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*— possibly overlooked, however we did have reasonable views at Indian Point and Sunset Lake on the afternoon of the 3rd and a fairly large flock mixed with other ‘peeps’ at Estero Llano Grande on the 7th.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*— about 25 foraging around the Black Skimmer flock at Indian Point on the 3rd.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*— at least three mixing with a flock of around 35 ‘peeps’ at Estero Llano Grande on the 7th.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*— small numbers scattered across the mudflats at Indian Point on the 3rd including some good, close-range views of several individuals.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*— excellent close comparative views of one feeding with several Short-billed Dowitchers at Indian Point on the 3rd.

Wilson’s Snipe *Gallinago delicata*— a single flying at dusk at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd on the way back from the flamingo chase.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*— a wide scatter of four singles during the tour, most of them at inland sites aside from a well-photographed individual at Goose Island on the 3rd.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*— seen on five days at inshore and freshwater habitats including the first few at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*— two or three confiding individuals at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd with others seen at Indian Point and Sunset Lake on the 3rd and South Padre Island on the 6th.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*— two at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd and three at Indian Point on the 3rd ended up being the only sightings for the tour.

Gulls and Terns: Laridae (8)

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*— very common in coastal waters and easily the most abundant gull of the trip but almost absent from the inland hotspots aside from a dozen or so flying up and down the river at Salineño on the 9th

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*— quite scarce being noted on five days though we did come across a flock of 45 resting on mudflats at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* — up to 10 seen in the coastal spots during the first three days but apparently absent along the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Iceland (Thayer's) Gull *Larus glaucooides thayeri* – wonderful views of an adult with Herring and Laughing Gulls at Cos-Way along the JFK Blvd near Corpus Christi on the 2nd. Iceland Gulls, *kumlieni* or *thayeri*, are scarce in coastal Texas and this bird was on the way to our hotel in Fulton so we could hardly pass on the opportunity. For gull fanatics this was just about as fine an example of an adult 'Thayer's Gull' that anyone could wish to see.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*— the largest member of the tern family showed well at sites such as the JFK Blvd wetlands, Indian Point, South Padre Island and inland along the river at Salineño on the 9th

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*— this delightful *sterna* was found in four coastal spots with some of the best views coming from the boardwalks at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th and South Padre Island on the 6th.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*— a close relative of the Caspian Tern, sometimes with opportunities to study them alongside each other at sites such as Indian Point, South Padre Island. Strictly coastal, we did not see this species inland.

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*— a beautiful flock of around 25 at rest and occasionally wheeling and swirling around at the mudflats at Indian Point on the 3rd.

Pigeons and Doves: Columbidae (7)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*— noticed in built-up areas throughout the trip with 60 – 110 noted on most days.

Red-billed Pigeon *Patagioenas flavirostris*— we had great fortune with this species along the Rio Grande at Salineño on the 9th with two or three seen in flight and perched up on the Mexico side of the Rio Grande. Very much a range-restricted species in the US being found only in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto (I)* — this well-established introduced species was noted on four days, usually in small groups near habitation.

Inca Dove *Columbina inca*— a most attractive small dove plentiful around the feeding stations at Resaca de La Palma, Frontera Audubon and the National Butterfly Center in Mission.

White-tipped Dove *Leptotila verreauxi*— a shy ground-dwelling species with a deep, resonant voice most easily seen around feeders at Resaca de La Palma, Frontera Audubon and Bentsen Rio Grande SP.

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*— seen daily perhaps due to its habitat of perching openly on wires or in leafless trees when the characteristic white wing panel could be seen. Usually found in small numbers but notably common around Salineño on the 9th when at least 35 were counted.

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*— seen daily though generally unobtrusive, birds often flushing during our walks such as the long beach walk at Indian Point or by the fallow fields at San Benito. Also found around feeders.

Cuckoos and Allies: Cuculidae (1)

Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus*— after a very brief single sprinting across the dirt roads near Rancho Lomitas, Gene spotted a much more cooperative bird teed-up on a fence post on "Sparrows nest Street" on the outskirts of Rio Grande City. No tour to Texas would be complete without a roadrunner.....

Owls: Strigidae (2)

Eastern Screech-Owl *Megascops asio*— beautiful views of the McCall's subspecies at the National Butterfly

Center on the 8th. This bird was resting in an open cavity right above one of the main walkways. The *mccallii* subspecies is intriguing since it only occurs in a gray morph and the vocal range does not include the descending whinny so characteristic of the Northern subspecies. A resident of south-central Texas and parts of northern Mexico, *maccalli* may yet prove to be a species in its own right.

Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*— this perky little owl decided to make its winter home on an upended concrete pipe at the side of a very busy road in San Benito, and we had beautiful views on the 6th.

Nightjars: Caprimulgidae (1)

Common Pauraque *Nyctidromus albicollis*— remarkable views of single at rest only inches from the footpath by Alligator Lake, Estero Llano Grande on the 7th. A photogenic individual to say the least and totally unfazed by birder attention.

Hummingbirds: Trochilidae (3)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*— one appeared, albeit briefly, at the feeders of Estero Llano Grande on the 7th with another at Bentsen Rio Grande SP the following day.

Black-chinned Hummingbird *Archilochus alexandri*— an immature showed pretty well at Estero Llano Grande on the 7th, with even better views of up to three on the 8th at Bentsen Rio Grande SP, including a nice male.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird *Amazilia yucatanensis*— another key species and, from a US perspective, restricted entirely to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. After a couple of brief individuals at Estero Llano Grande and Hugh Ramsey Nature Park we enjoyed multiple close views around the water features and feeders at the National Butterfly Center on the 8th.

Kingfishers: Alcedinidae (3)

Ringed Kingfisher *Megaceryle torquata*— a real beast of a kingfisher, we enjoyed views at least two along the Rio Grande at Salineño on the 9th.

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*— easily the most widespread of the three kingfisher species and found on at least five days.

Green Kingfisher *Chloroceryle americana*— nice scope views of singles at Bentsen Rio Grande SP on the 8th and at Salineño on the 9th, plus a leader-only sighting from Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on the 5th.

Woodpeckers: Picidae (3)

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*— close views of a juvenile around the parking lot at the World Birding Center, South Padre Island on the 6th.

Golden-fronted Woodpecker *Melanerpes aurifrons* – widespread and seemingly at home in urban areas - we even found a pair in the palms by the Cattle Tyrant site in downtown Corpus Christi on the 2nd.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Picoides scalaris*— seen on at least six days though often well-hidden in Live Oaks and/or thorn-scrub thickets. Most easily viewed at the birding centers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley at spots such as Estero Llano Grande.

Falcons and Caracaras: Falconidae (5)

Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway*— after a single at Charlie's Pasture on the 2nd this interesting species proved to be increasingly common the further south and west we went. For example, five were foraging in a plowed field close to the Burrowing Owl site in San Benito on the 6th.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*— found every day on roadside wires or fences but often skittish and difficult to see well. At least 15 counted during the 'travel day' from Fulton Harbor to Brownsville on the 4th.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*— a single bolted past Alligator Lake with stopping. Estero Llano Grande on the 7th.

Plomado Falcon *Falco femoralis*— much desired and highly prized, this species cropped up early in the trip when we had stellar views of a pair in perfect light perched on a utility pole on Mustang Island.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*— unforgettable views of a huge female actively plucking a Feral Rock Pigeon out of the air as we waited patiently for the Cattle Tyrant to appear in downtown Corpus Christi on the 2nd . Other Peregrines were seen on the 5th and the 8th.

Parrots: Psittacidae (4)

Red-crowned Parrot *Amazona viridigenalis*— Oliveira Park in Brownsville set the scene for an impressive pre-roost gathering of this and at least two other species of *Amazona*. They appeared late in the day but once arrived the screeching, squawking flocks was something to behold! Numbers were difficult to estimate but at least 300 parrots were present many of which were Red-crowned.

Green Parakeet *Psittacara holochlorus* (LO) — a chance encounter at the El Tigre gas station, Rio Grande City as four flew around screeching just after first light.

Red-lored Parrot *Amazona autumnalis* (I) – plentiful in the Oliveira Park parrot roost, Brownsville, most of them being of the yellow-cheeked form helping to separate them from Red-Crowned Parrots. This species is not ABA countable at this time.

White-fronted Parrot *Amazona albifrons* (I) – about 30 arrived in Oliveira Park before the main masses of Red-crowned and Red-lored Parrots and they even appeared to keep themselves separate from the two larger species. As with Red-lored Parrot not ABA countable, but nice to see all the same.

Tyrant Flycatchers: Tyrannidae (11)

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet *Camptostoma imberbe*— a banner day for this feisty little flycatcher at Bentsen Rio Grande State Park on the 8th. We saw two very well and heard another in dense mesquite scrub.

Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus* (HO) — two or three calling giving ‘whit’ notes off the Ebony trail at Resaca De La Palma on the 7th.

Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans*— nice views of one foraging above a drain at Estero Llano Grande on the 7th and another (briefly) by the cattle pond at Rancho Lomitas on the 9th.

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*— quite widespread though thinly distributed and noted on seven days after the first at the Big Tree on Goose Island on the 3rd.

Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus*— a flurry of sightings on Dec 6th after Gene spotted the first across the street from Los Fresnos Nature Park with others found at South Padre Island and San Bentio Wetlands – not too shabby!

Brown-crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus tyrannulus* (HO) – a single delivering its unique call notes at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th. This species did appear in the local RBA at the time of our visit.

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus*— a spectacular flycatcher synonymous with the tropics and a key element to our time in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. We saw and heard them each day after the first at Resaca de La Palma especially at Los Fresnos Nature Park with about 10 performing on the 6th.

Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus*— quite a few individuals confirmed by diagnostic calls at; South Padre Island, San Benito Wetlands, Oliveira Park in Brownsville, the National Butterfly Center and even by the annex at the Alamo Inn!

Couch’s Kingbird *Tyrannus couchii*— a party of four seen and heard calling in a sleepy Fulton neighborhood on the morning of the 3rd. We would have stopped for better views but had an appointment with Whooping Cranes about five minutes up the road!

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus*— first spotted by Gene, we enjoyed prolonged scope views of an individual replete with long tail feathers, foraging in and over a meadow at San Benito wetlands on the 6th. And there was a brief roadside sighting in Mission after we returned from the National Butterfly Center on the 8th.

Cattle Tyrant *Machetornis rixosa* – a tyrant chase in Corpus Christi on the first afternoon was not to be missed. After all we were so close and getting to the ‘hotspot’ involved the smallest of detours. It was truly worth it. After an anxious wait, Kathy suddenly spotted the tyrant perched on a street light after which the bird dropped down to a dumpster and duly began wolfing down flies with gusto. It was something to behold. The first Cattle

Tyrant ever to be recorded in the US snapping up flies from the top of a dumpster seemingly unconcerned by an audience of thrilled birders surrounding it. Just ten minutes' drive from the Corpus Christi airport, the Cattle Tyrant kick-started the tour in the most fabulous manner.

Becards and Tityras: Tityridae (2)

Rose-throated Becard *Pachyramphus aglaiae*— a most sought-after species, a female showed very well though rather briefly close to the main Visitor Center at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

Gray-collared Becard *Pachyramphus major*— a 'mega' in truest sense of the word. Originally found in late November it was more than lucky to have this bird (a first-year male) hanging around into early December and overlapping with our tour dates. It wasn't easy to track down and near pandemonium ensued when a cry of "BIRD!!" came from behind the main Visitor Center at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th. The becard was moving around with a small feeding flock somewhat awkwardly hidden behind the main birding blinds at the center. Despite the crush of bodies and the genuine enthusiasm of fellow birders, most of our party got to see the becard. Thought to be an altitudinal migrant, it's an uncommon bird anywhere, even in its native range of Mexico and north Central America. This particular individual was the first for Texas and only the third in the US, the other two records coming from Southern Arizona.

Shrikes: Laniidae (1)

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*— excellent views at Charlie's Pasture in the early portion of the trip as well as others at Port Aransas and Mustang Island. Puzzlingly scarce or absent during our time in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Vireos: Vireonidae (2)

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*— very much a denizen of dense thickets and thorn-scrub and devilishly difficult to see. Eventually we had reasonable views at a number of locales along the Lower Rio Grande. Far more often heard than seen though.

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius*— super views of one around the water features at the National Butterfly Center on the 8th.

Crows and Jays: Corvidae (1)

Green Jay *Cyanocorax yncas*— a group of these stunning jays came early in the trip as far north as Robstown! Ruth came across a feeding flock right behind the Nueces Café and from that moment on this beauty proved to be a daily feature of our time in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Chickadees and Titmice: Paridae (1)

Black-crested Titmouse *Baeolophus atricristatus*— this amazing titmouse proved to be quite common amid feeding flocks from the Sarita Rest Area southwards. Found at least five days especially around feeders.

Penduline Tits: Remizidae (1)

Verdin *Auriparus flaviceps*— heard at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th and two seen very well at Bentsen Rio Grande Valley on the 8th.

Wrens: Troglodytidae (6)

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*— widespread though far more often heard than seen. Noted on at least seven days.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes hiemalis* (LO) — one heard calling the classic 'double chip' notes at Hugh Ramsey Park Nature Park near Harlingen on the 5th. It was close to grebe pond but by the time we'd gathered as a group the little devil had fallen.

Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*— one heard ‘chattering’ from the undergrowth at Charlie’s Pasture on the 2nd and another similarly vocal bird in coastal scrub at Indian Point on the 3rd. The latter showed very well to the group.

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*— two or three individuals seen from the boardwalk at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th and another heard in the cattails by the river at Salineño on the 9th.

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*— rather tricky to see well with the exception of about four at Los Fresnos Nature Park vocalizing right in front of the group on the 6th.

Bewick’s Wren *Thryomanes bewickii* (HO) – one singing (but not showing) around the entrance gate to Salineño Wildlife Preserve on the 9th.

Gnatcatchers: Polioptilidae (1)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea*— most often in mixed feeding flocks amid thickets and thorn-scrub in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Kinglets: Regulidae (2)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*— one, perhaps two, feeding around the Amber Grove picnic area at Bentsen Rio Grande State Park on the 8th.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*— this feisty little sprite was seen and heard almost daily in a variety of habitats ranging from Live Oak woods to thickets and thorn-scrub with up to a dozen noted on some days.

Thrushes: Turdidae (1)

Clay-colored Thrush *Turdus grayi*— the one and only thrush species seen on the tour. Though not especially rare, most birds were shy and furtive but Resaca de La Palma, Frontera Audubon and Hugh Ramsey Nature Park were all good places to catch up with this Rio Grande specialty.

Mockingbirds and Thrashers: Mimidae (4)

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*— the cat-like mews calls betrayed the presence of a single at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on the 5th

Curve-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma curvirostre*— the first at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on the 5th was followed by others at Estero Llano Grande and Rancho Lomitas.

Long-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma longirostre*— one of the specialties of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and a species that showed particularly well on this trip with daily sightings after our first at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th. Most often heard singing from dense thickets and scrub.

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*— though never really numerous we came across this widespread species on every day of the tour where it appeared equally at home in urban and rural areas.

Starlings and Mynas: Sturnidae (1)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*— difficult to miss in urban areas but also found mixed with some of the blackbird flocks in spots such as Goose Island and Progresso.

Pipits and Wagtails: Motacillidae (1)

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens*— though far from satisfactory in terms of views, one called as it flew north over Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

New World Warblers: Parulidae (11)

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*— patience was required (and rewarded!) at the water features of Resaca De La Palma and the National Butterfly Center. Both proved to be key spots for seeing this tiny feathered Zebra.

Tennessee Warbler *Leiothlypis peregrina* - a brief appearance from a single at the birding blind at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata*— a wonderful sequence of daily sightings after Gene spotted the first near The Big Tree on Goose Island on the 3rd. Almost prolific around the feeders and water features at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

Nashville Warbler *Oreothlypis ruficapilla*— another warbler attracted to the water features at both Resaca De La Palma and the National Butterfly Center where we saw the species very well on the 5th and the 8th.

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*— yellowthroats were found on just two days of the trip though we did have good views of up to five from the boardwalk at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th.

Tropical Parula *Setophaga pitiayumi*— a pair of closely associated with an exceptionally fast moving feeding flock at Los Fresnos Nature Park on the 6th. Claire spotted the male first and from that moment on we did our best to track them eventually securing decent views.

Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus*— a handsome cooperative male popped into view with a small feeding flock at Estero Llano Grande on the final morning of the tour.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*— plentiful in a variety of habitats and seen on most days of the trip.

Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens*— nice views of a single feeding over the pathway at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on the 5th.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*— a nice sequence of sightings four days in a row, all of them in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, including about five at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

Golden-crowned Warbler *Basileuterus culicivorus* – we really hit the jackpot with this bright but decidedly skulking warbler with reasonable views at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on the 5th, and point-blank views at Frontera Audubon Thicket on the 7th. Not especially easy to see in its Central American breeding range so to have two individuals within one Texas tour was almost too good to be true!

New World Sparrows: Emberizidae (7)

Cassin's Sparrow *Peucaea cassinii*— prolonged views of one perched up in a small, spindly mesquite near Salineño boat ramp on the 9th

Olive Sparrow *Arremonops rufivirgatus*— very much a key species for a visit to the Lower Rio Grande, we had fine views of this furtive sparrow at several nature parks and birding centers on at least three dates.

Vesper Sparrow *Poocetes gramineus*— by pure chance we stumbled across a small feeding flock along the approach road to Rancho Lomitas on the 9th.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*— scarce with a tiny handful seen in saltmarsh habitat at Charlie's Pasture on the 2nd and Indian Point on the 3rd. However, we did have good views of one perched on a fence near the National Butterfly Center on the 8th.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* (**LO**) — one appeared briefly in overgrown grasses by the famed Cattle Tyrant dumpster on Dec 2nd. At that point it was hard to imagine it would be the only Song Sparrow of the trip!

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*— one showed very well at the feeders and water features of the National Butterfly Center on the 8th.

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*— though tricky to get good views of we found them at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center on the 4th and by the Resaca at Los Fresnos Nature Park on the 6th.

Cardinals, Grosbeaks, and Allies: Cardinalidae (4)

Western Tanager – Gene first spotted one perched high and distantly off the Ebony Trail at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th. Numbers were difficult to assess in what may have been a pre-roost gathering due to distance but photos revealed at least three, perhaps as many as five individuals including two males. This species was mentioned almost daily in the local RBA.

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*— a single first heard and then seen (briefly) at Salineño boat ramp on the 9th

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*— frequent throughout the trip, most of them favoring thickets and thorn-scrub.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*— one seen and heard all-too-briefly over the parking lot at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

Orioles and Blackbirds: Icteridae (9)

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*— a commonly encountered *icterid* found in a variety of habitats ranging from wetlands to interior feeders such as those at Frontera Audubon in Weslaco.

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*— found around grasslands or at the edge of saltmarsh at least five days including about a dozen in the fields by San Benito wetlands on the 6th.

Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*— close views of a fairly large flock mixed with other blackbirds at the Sarita Rest Area on the 4th.

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*— one perched up in the Live Oaks at the Sarita Rest Area on the 4th. Uncommon in southern Texas and a really great spot by Kathy!

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*— ubiquitous. Seen in numbers everyday though scarce west of Rio Grande City. A spectacular roost of several thousand developed close to home directly across the highway from our lodging at the Courtyard Marriott in Brownsville.

Bronzed Cowbird *Molothrus aeneus*— two males strutting around on a roadside curb at the Sarita Rest Area on the 4th

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*— found on just two dates; about five with Red-winged Blackbirds on Goose Island on the 3rd and at least one with Brewer's Blackbirds at the Sarita Rest Area on the 4th.

Altamira Oriole *Icterus gularis*— impossible to tire of these stunners, the largest and arguably the brightest of the orioles in the Rio Grande Valley. A wonderful sequence of daily sightings after the first half-dozen or so at Resaca de la Palma on the 5th.

Audubon's Oriole *Icterus graduacauda*— the deliberate, fluty song of this species was heard so well at Salineño on the 9th it seemed imperceptible that actual views would be missed and yet, despite giving it our best, we never managed to see one.

Finches: Fringillidae (2)

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus*— small numbers found around the entrance to Bensten Rio Grande SP on the 8th and close to the annex building of the Alamo Inn on the 9th and 10th.

Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria*— about three including a dapper male, all coming to the water features on a hot afternoon at the National Butterfly Center on the 8th.

Old World Sparrows: Passeridae (1)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*— no trip to Texas would be complete without good old *Passer domesticus*. They were found daily from Corpus Christi onwards where they shared the palms and parking lots of downtown with none other than one **Cattle Tyrant**.

MAMMALS (7 species recorded):

Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus*— seen at Estero Llano Grande State Park, Bentsen and Rancho Lomitas.

Eastern Fox Squirrel *Sciurus niger* — found near the oaks and feeders at the preserves in the Lower Rio Grande as well as in the Live Oak neighborhoods around Rockport/Fulton.

Collared Peccary *Tayassu tajacu*— just the one seen, near the parking lot at Resaca De La Palma on the 5th.

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus*— some close individuals by the road at Goose Island on the 3rd though not seen thereafter.

Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*— in the shallows off Goose Island and Fulton Harbor and even at the ferry crossing in Port Aransas!

Northern Raccoon *Procyon lotor* – a small family group raided the feeders at Resaca de La Palma late on the 5th.
Coyote *Canis latrans* – not seen but howling groups most certainly heard at Charlie's Pasture on the 2nd and Salineno on the 9th.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (5 species recorded):

American Alligator *Alligator mississippiensis*— Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center hosted a sleepy female of monstrous proportions on the 4th with others seen at South Padre Island and Estero Llano Grande.

Red-eared Slider *Trachemys scripta*—seen at several bodies of water during the week.

Texas Spiny Lizard *Sceloporus olivaceus*— quite plentiful at Bentsen Rio Grande SP.

Brown Anole *Anolis sagrei*— one observed at close range at Los Fresnos Nature Park on the 6th.

Common Spotted Whiptail *Aspidoscelis gularis*— at Ranch Lomitas on the 9th.

BUTTERFLIES

Monarch, Viceroy, Queen, Mexican Yellow, Painted Lady, Pygmy Blue, Southern Dogface and American Snout were among the species identified, most of them in the Rio Grande Valley especially, perhaps quite naturally at the National Butterfly Center in Mission.