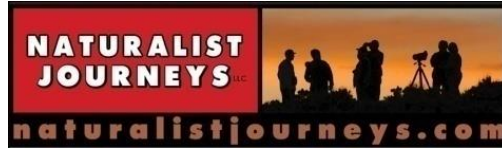


# South Texas Birding & Nature November 11-19, 2024 | Trip Report by Robert Gallardo



With Naturalist Journeys guides Bryan Calk and Robert Gallardo, and participants Sandy, Bob, Cliff, Dragus, Antonela, Peg, Sara, Julie, and Mark



One of the best places in the continental United States that exemplifies high levels of biodiversity is Texas. It lends this diversity to its proximity to Mexico, coupled with having extensive wetlands and other vast ecosystems. This trip was designed to explore several major habitats that include gulf prairies, marshes, and the scrub forests of the South Texas plains. We visited a nice selection of wildlife refuges, birding centers, state parks, and other natural areas. At these areas, we observed a wonderful assortment of birds, mammals, reptiles, butterflies, and plants. A total of 205 birds were observed, including local rarities such as Groove-billed Ani,

Western Tanager, Hermit Warbler, Swainson’s Thrush, and Iceland Gull. We also got great views of species such as Green Kingfisher, Least Bittern, Clapper Rail, Scaled Quail, and Audubon’s Oriole. Overall, the weather was very cooperative and the food exceptionally pleasing. Nine participants from all walks of life from all across the U.S. would enjoy exploring the south Texas landscapes with Bryan and Robert.



## **Mon., Nov. 11 Arrival in Corpus Christi | Rockport Wetlands**

Our meet-up plan at the Corpus Christi airport went smoothly and off we went. We headed out toward the Rockport area and shortly after crossing a bridge over the Nueces Bay we started bird watching. At a pullout spot we scanned the wetlands and began to see an assortment of shorebirds and waterfowl that included Long-billed Curlew, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Black-bellied Plover, and smaller sandpipers. These are great places to brush up on one’s shorebirds which are all in winter plumage. We would also start to get familiar with gulls such as Laughing, Ring-billed, and American Herring. Wader birds included the handsome White Ibis, Tricolored Heron, Great Egret, and Great Blue Heron. Osprey would be particularly common throughout much of the trip, especially the first three days. We would also see the first of several species of kingfishers of the trip, starting with the Belted.



We continued further up the coast to see what was stirring at the Cape Velero area. The scattered marshes and wetlands held more waders and shorebirds. Additional species we saw there included Mottled Duck, American Coot, Willet, Lesser Yellowlegs, Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, and Reddish Egret. A Bald Eagle was spotted lifting off in the distance and would be a good sighting for this trip. We saw our first Crested Caracara, American Kestrel, and Eastern Phoebe; all being species we would see many of during the trip. A small group of Eastern Meadowlarks was observed foraging on a lawn. As we left that area, a pair of Sandhill Cranes was spotted, tucked away in a nearby marsh.



We made one other stop before going to the hotel; the Rockport Tule Marsh. A Carolina Wren was chattering away deep in the brush, but there was also another special migrant there. Bryan heard a Winter Wren and we got in better positions to get brief looks as it popped in and out of the thick vegetation. The first Lincoln's Sparrow of the trip was also spotted. A pair of Orange-crowned Warblers and several Yellow-rumped Warblers also appeared. The trip was off to a wonderful start.

Just a short ways away was our hotel, and we got settled in. Before dinner, we had a more formal trip orientation and got to know each other a bit more. After doing the first day of the species checklist, we had a scrumptious dinner right across the street.

## **Tue. Nov. 12 Aransas Bay Boat Tour | Lamar & Goose Island**

Our first full day of the trip would be packed with birds and an activity that is often the highlight for many participants. Just across the street from our hotel, a boat (appropriately called the "Skimmer") was waiting for us. Another bird watching tour group would be joining us. We set out across the Aransas Bay Nat'l Wildlife Refuge. There was virtually no wind and it would warm up quickly, making it a very pleasant ride. Between Tommy (the boat captain) and the various guides, we started to pick out the birds quickly. In the distance, we saw large flocks of ducks and American White Pelicans that had all migrated from the north. Along a jetty we spotted a pair of the handsome American Oystercatcher and Long-billed Curlew. A cooperative Seaside Sparrow perched up in some low shrubs was spotted and would be the best look at this enigmatic bird. We saw the distinct Caspian Tern, as well as some Forster's Terns and several Sandwich Terns.

As we cruised along, Tommy was the first to spot the main target bird of the day; the Whooping Crane. By the 1940's, this species was on the brink of extinction. Habitat protection, coupled with education and captive breeding efforts, have brought current numbers up to around 800, but it still remains endangered. The first pair observed was a ways into the marsh and we hoped we'd see some a bit closer. With luck, we did find another pair much closer to the bays' edge. It was a Life bird for some participants and we were glad to see these early arrivals.

Tucked back in a little pond were four Hooded Mergansers, including a handsome male. Out in more open water we saw a small flock of the tiny Ruddy Duck, all in winter plumage. A female Northern Harrier was spotted soaring away in the distance. Several Reddish Egrets and Roseate Spoonbills were also seen. As we were heading



back, another guide spotted something that dove into the water. It turned out to be a Common Loon and we all got brief views as it kept diving and avoiding us. As we were pulling into the harbor, someone spotted a winter plumage Iceland Gull which was a good sighting for this area. Good thing someone knew the gulls!

We had lunch at a café then set out again to continue our search. Nearby, was the Lamar Peninsula and Goose Island State Park. At Big Tree we took a short walk to see what was stirring. In the oak trees we found Yellow-rumped Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, the latter two would seemingly be found together everywhere we went on the trip. A Carolina Wren sang to its heart content from deep within the bushes while Cardinals zipped back and forth. Many Red Admiral butterflies were basking in the sun. We continued on to a park in Rockport and found more Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Dunlin, and Ruddy Turnstone. A lone Spoonbill in a pond was joined by a White Ibis, making for a nice photo opportunity.

### **Wed. Nov. 13 Port Aransas Birding Center | Harlingen | Oliveira Park**

We packed up and started to make our way to another part of Texas further down the coast. But first, we stopped at the nearby Rockport Rookery along the beachfront. This is where hundreds of Great Blue Herons nest each year in the windblown trees. Some had already arrived to stake their claims. We got great looks at a pair of Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and a Black-crested Titmouse flitted in the woods.

We continued up the road a bit and did a quick ferry crossing. We arrived at the Turnbull Birding Center and found thousands of ducks on the main pond. The bulk of them were Redheads, but there were also Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, Northern Pintail, Mottled Duck, Lesser Scaup, and one Bufflehead. A lone Red-breasted Merganser was spotted amidst them. A gigantic alligator was resting, nearly in plain view, amidst the cattails. The loud clacking of two Clapper Rails below us caught our attention and we waited patiently to see if one would appear. Movement was spotted in the short rushes and then one suddenly appeared in plain view. How wonderful! Another skulker was also heard; a Sora. It also appeared as it foraged amidst the floating vegetation and even swam a bit. A small flock of the stately American White Pelicans was seen up close. By the parking lot we spotted a few warblers in the short tree line which included Northern Waterthrush, Tennessee, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-rumped, and a rare Bay-breasted. We made a short visit to a nearby jetty and saw more shorebirds, but also a bottlenose dolphin swimming in front of the bow of a giant cargo ship. Further up the highway we stopped to scope out an Aplomado Falcon that was perched in the shadow of a giant electric pole. Bryan gave a brief history of how this endangered bird was reintroduced to the area.



We got moving along a major highway and made a brief stop at a rest area. Other than a rest stop, we wanted to see Brewer's Blackbirds for the trip. Robert also spotted a Unicorn Mantis atop a small oak tree and we scoped it out. As we got closer to Harlingen, we took a small detour through some country roads. We spotted a White-tailed Kite sitting atop a utility pole. We reached some fenced lots that had warehouses and one had rusted pipes on the ground. A lone Burrowing Owl was there and was a Lifer for a couple of us.

We reached the hotel and quickly checked in as we were losing daylight. We were on a mission. We went to the Oliveira Park in Brownsville to see a roosting spectacle. Hundreds of Red-crowned Amazons, White-fronted Amazons, and small numbers of other species congregate there to roost. A single Yellow-headed Amazon stood out amidst all the other ones. All around, kids played soccer, seemingly used to this frenzy of birds. We returned to the hotel then went out dinner. At the restaurant, we saw our first Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks.

### **Thurs. Nov. 14 South Padre Island | Laguna Atascosa N.W.R.**

Another exciting day awaited us as we explored new territory. We drove out to South Padre Island to take a look at various points of interest. We stopped at a tidal flat adjacent to the convention center where we found large numbers of shorebirds. It took a lot of careful scrutinizing to discern between all the similar species, but we were able to pick out some Black-bellied Plovers, Piping and Semipalmated Plovers, Red Knot, Sanderlings, Marbled Godwit, Short-billed Dowitchers, Dunlin, and other species. Royal, Caspian, and Sandwich Terns were also present, along with a large group of the elegant Black Skimmers.

We went next door to the center and explored the small patches of forest as well as the elevated walkway over the mangrove estuary. We got brief looks at a lone Groove-billed Ani as well as a Ruby-throated and Buff-bellied Hummingbird. Near a water feature, some participants spotted a Magnolia Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Gray Catbird. Many species of wading birds were seen along the boardwalk, along with an immature Hooded Oriole. We continued over to the nearby Birding & Nature Center, a place that always produces great sightings. There, we also saw much waterfowl and wading birds. New for the trip were several Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, including a lovely adult. We walked slowly along the elevated boardwalk and found a female



Mangrove Yellow Warbler, a denizen that occurs only this habitat. The males have a bright Rufous-colored head. Continuing on, we found something we really wanted to see; a Least Bittern. It was foraging at the waters' edge amidst the thick cattails and we were afforded wonderful views. Topping off the visit there was a distant Purple Gallinule and a Peregrine Falcon perched high on a water tank. To end the morning, we visited a pair of woodlots managed by the Valley Land Fund. It was relatively quiet, but we did see a Rufous Hummingbird tucked back in the thickets and a lone female American Redstart.

After having a tasty lunch at a nearby café, we headed out for our next destination. As we were approaching the Laguna Atascosa N.W.R. visitor's center, we spotted a lone Greater Roadrunner and a handsome Harris's Hawk perched at eye level adjacent to the road. This is such a handsome bird of prey. Here we began to say 'goodbye' to the waders and shorebirds, to be replaced by inland valley birds. At the feeders everyone got their first good looks at the gaudy Green Jays. It would be difficult to get tired of them. A pair bathed at ground level at the water feature, their silhouettes reflecting off the water. Plain Chachalacas were everywhere. At a bird hide a few participants briefly saw a White-tipped Dove before it scurried away. A shy Olive Sparrow was also briefly seen. We would catch up to them later on. Our first Verdin was also spotted along a trail and we heard an Altamira Oriole singing in the distance. We were told that some Barn Owls were nesting in an artificial box just up the road so we went to check it out. Sure enough, through the bright daylight, we could barely see some faces inside the box. We continued on to the wild area of the reserve where we have driving access to a large portion through a locked gate. Not long after entering, we spotted a small herd of Nilgai, a large introduced mammal that is native to the Indian subcontinent. A Merlin was spotted soaring away, as well as a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher perched on a wire. A lone White-tailed Deer was foraging in a large meadow and another roadrunner was seen by our van. As we were leaving, a Mexican Long-nosed Armadillo was seen close to the road and allowed for a few pictures.

We made our way back to town and went out for a scrumptious dinner.

## **Fri. Nov. 15 Sabal Palm Sanctuary | Resaca de la Palma**

This morning we packed up our bags and went to the Sabal Palm Sanctuary that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border. There are rarely other visitors there and having the whole place to ourselves is quite nice. We were checking out the gardens there as birds were feeding in a fruiting hackberry tree. Along with cardinals and other species was a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak which was a good sighting. The majority of these birds are on



their wintering grounds in Latin America. Just down the path a bit was a very cooperative Long-billed Thrasher which readily revealed its stunning orange eyes. At the nearby fruit feeders were many Green Jays, but there were also two White-tipped Doves and everyone got great views. Further along, we started down a raised boardwalk. It didn't take long to run into a loose mixed flock of birds. We saw Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and numerous warblers including Nashville, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Black-throated Green, and Wilson's. Calling from deep within the woods was a Red-shouldered Hawk and it would remain hidden until a later date. We began to see more Ladder-backed Woodpeckers which would be a constant companion the remainder of the trip. A lone Blue-headed Vireo was another good sighting. We also saw several of the adorable Black-crested Titmice and would get more views at different areas. As we were inspecting a pond, two Gray Hawks lifted out of the trees and soared away. From a different vantage point, we also saw our first Least Grebe of the trip. On our way back to the parking lot we found a very cooperative Olive Sparrow which let us see all its pertinent markings. Another rarity was spotted, this time being a Swainson's Thrush, and was confirmed with a photo Bob had taken. Back at the parking lot Bryan found a Yellow-throated Warbler in a sabal palm. It was an excellent morning and we had one more stop before lunch.

A place that was made famous nationwide by a Hollywood movie was the Brownsville landfill which occasionally attracts rare species. We got checked in at the weigh station and parked off to one side where some ponds were located. We found American Avocet, Black-necked Stilts, and large numbers of Laughing Gulls. Out of the horde of these gulls Bryan picked out one Franklin's, representing the only sighting for the trip. Numerous duck species were milling about as well. Stilt Sandpipers were also seen, being new for the trip. A White-tailed Hawk landed on a distant utility pole after having caught some small prey item. After we had our fill at that spot, we drove up the hill to the main dump area hoping to see something new or exciting. Along with the trash, were thousands of Laughing Gulls. We left this 'aromatic' area en route to a more pleasant area for lunch.

After a tasty bistro lunch we continued our search. We headed to a nearby cemetery where we would search for a few more birds we hadn't seen yet. We walked slowly along, scanning all the Texas Ebony trees and found a lone male Lesser Goldfinch. Another Blue-headed Vireo was found, along with a White-eyed Vireo and more Black-crested Titmice. A Black-throated Green Warbler was spotted which is quite similar to another one we were searching for. Finally, the Hermit Warbler was spotted which may overwinter there and not in Mexico or Central America. We cruised around looking for another bird that was reported there and voila. A pair of Vermilion Flycatchers was found and our group of photographers had fun with them. After wrapping up there we headed out to yet another destination.



We reached the Resaca de la Palma State Park and walked around awhile to see what we could find. As with some afternoon bird watching elsewhere, it was fairly quiet but we did see more woodpeckers, caracaras, hawks, titmice, Long-billed Thrasher, jays, and a Black-and-white Warbler. We came across our first Texas Indigo Snake and it was a big one.

We returned to town, got checked in to the hotel, and got tidied up for a nice dinner. How often does one get to go bird watching at a landfill and cemetery in the same day?

## **Sat. Nov. 16 Santa Ana N.W.R. | Estero Llano Grande S.P.**

Today we headed out to visit two more well known sites and see more wildlife. Our first stop was the Santa Ana Nat'l Wildlife Refuge; an area full of small ponds and scrub forest. We saw many species of ducks and added Gadwall to the list. A pair of Common Paurques on day roosts was a hit with everyone. Their cryptic plumage renders them virtually invisible to all but the trained eyes. Tucked away, and sleeping, amidst the cattails were five Wilson's Snipe, and several White-faced Ibis were seen foraging. We got more good looks at Gray Hawk as well. A female Vermilion Flycatcher was spotted on a perch from which it sallied out for insects. We also got more looks at Olive Sparrows. Perhaps the best sighting of the morning was a Northern Beardless Tyrannulet; the smallest flycatcher in the U.S. We got great looks before it disappeared into the thickets.

It was close to lunchtime so we zipped over to a spot that was kind of new for this trip. Nana's Taqueria serves Mexican food with a twist in a setting of very colorful architecture. The lemonade drinks were topped with candies and every plate was delicious. A tall, colorfully painted wall made a bright backdrop for our group photo. We then continued over to another spot; the Estero Llano Grande State Park. Formerly a trailer park, this site was purchased by the state and converted into another worthwhile destination. We first scanned a wetland by the visitor center and saw a small assortment of waterfowl. Robert was trailing in the rear of the group with other participants when he spotted a second Texas Indigo Snake by a small pond. It looked like, and was laid out by, a piece of black plastic liner. We headed into the area where the trailers used to be located and found a Buff-bellied Hummingbird. There, exists a wide mix of assorted native and non-native flowering plants for hummingbirds. Someone working there saw us and asked if we wanted to see an owl. Of course! She pointed out a day roost of the McCall's race of an Eastern Screech-Owl. Since it was tucked so far back in the woods, it was resting in full view outside of the hollow. Through the scope we were afforded wonderful views. In the





meantime, she took Bryan to show him the day roosts of two Common Pauragues. We went and saw them too; adding to the number seen on the trip. As we were getting ready to leave, a few birds flew into a leafless tree and amongst them was a Western Tanager which is a good sighting for that area. A fruiting tree was attracting small numbers of Clay-colored Thrush; a species that used to be a rare sighting in the U.S.

We returned to the hotel then went out for another delightful dinner.

### **Sun. Nov. 17 Rio Grande | Falcon State Park | Rancho Lomitas**

We had an early breakfast then set out to a more remote area. Our destination was the Rio Grande itself, at a place called the Salineño Wildlife Preserve. We reached the river and began a leisurely walk along the shoreline in search of any specialties or species we may not have seen well previously. We were told by another bird watcher there that a Morrelet's Seedeater was seen the day before so we carefully scanned for this tiny seedeater. It never appeared but we did see a Ringed Kingfisher. There are only six species of kingfishers in the Americas, and this is the largest of them all. Great Kiskadees are particularly common in the region and we saw many today. A small flock of Double-crested and Neotropic Cormorants flew by overhead and we were able to get a good comparison between the two species. We also got better looks at Gray Hawk which is also fairly common in the region.

We walked over to the feeder station where volunteers live and work for part of the year. Some people were busy pulling up weeds and cleaning up after the previous growing season. We sat down in front of the feeders to watch the show. A very cooperative Ladder-backed Woodpecker landed nearby, allowing for great looks. A pair of White-tipped Doves snuck in by a feeder in the back. Green Jays were everywhere. Then something brilliant (other than the jays) appeared. It was an adult Altamira Oriole and it came in to indulge itself on the peanut butter mixture. Another special bird kept calling from within the thick vegetation and we waited patiently for it to appear. It was an Audubon's Oriole, and eventually it came in to feed, but only briefly. This is not a particularly easy bird to see so well in the area. All of the sudden there was a lot of squawking and commotion then all the birds disappeared in an instant. A Cooper's Hawk came zipping through, trying to catch a bird, and was gone. It didn't look like it caught anything. As we were getting ready to leave, a few participants saw a Pyrrhuloxia, a close relative of the Northern Cardinal.



We backtracked a little and made our way to Falcon State Park. We had lunch at a peaceful spot with benches and shade. In front of the parking lot was a well-maintained butterfly garden where we had our first chance of seeing a wide assortment of species. This year had been particularly good for butterflies with many rare species being reported in the valley. We saw Zebra and Julia heliconians, many species of Sulphurs, and various skippers. While we were busy looking at butterflies, others spotted two more roadrunners, Cactus Wren, Black-throated Sparrow, and another Pyrrhuloxia. We loaded up the vans and drove down to the lakeshore to see what was stirring. All we pretty much saw were five caracaras vying for the right to feed on large, dead fish. We headed out and backtracked along the main highway. We made a brief stop at the Roma Bluffs that overlooked the river and the border. Not seeing much there, we headed out once again. On our way to the next destination we spotted four Lark Buntings perched on a fence close to the dirt road. These birds had already reached their wintering grounds. We reached the Rancho Lomitas, a private holding in the middle of an area filled with dry scrub and different species of cacti. We were greeted by Anna then had a seat and let her do her thing. She threw out seed and called out to the semi-tame Scaled Quail. This year they were particularly shy and it took some time before they would come out of the thick vegetation. As soon as the 'brave' one ventured out, the others followed, and we were afforded nice views of this spectacular bird. Many Inca Doves were there as well. We went for a stroll and saw different species of cacti, a Long-billed Thrasher, and a lone American Pipit next to a pond.

We said 'bye' to Anna and continued on our way. We had dinner at a nearby town before returning to Alamo.

## **Mon. Nov. 18 Bentsen S.P. | National Butterfly Center**

We headed out for our last full day in Texas, but were sure to discover more species. Bryan spotted parrots on a wire by a housing tract so we stopped to see them. It was another flock of Red-crowned Parrots. As we headed west, it was getting cloudier and colder, and it was quite windy. So, we took a small detour to a nearby park called Anzalduas, located on the river border. We found a Black Phoebe and a group of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks resting amidst the cattails. In a large, grassy area we spotted many Eastern Meadowlarks and a large flock of American Pipits. Over by the raised road we found a male and female Northern Harrier soaring over a wetland. A pair of Northern Rough-winged Swallows and Caspian Tern passed by as well. As we were leaving, we spotted Two White-tailed Kites perched in an oak tree.



Located nearby is the Bentsen –Rio Grande State Park and it didn't take long to get there. The weather was improving which made for a more pleasant visit. After getting checked in, we spotted a rare winter visitor at the water feature; a Black-throated Gray Warbler. It was a Lifer for those who reside in the East. We walked into the park and saw several Blue Spiny Lizards on the wall by the gate. There were two particularly brightly colored males. Around some fruit feeders were many Plain Chachalacas just lounging around, waiting for fresh fruit. En route to the lagoon we saw more kinglets, warblers, woodpeckers, and gnatcatchers. We reached the lagoon and it didn't take long for Bryan to spot a Green Kingfisher tucked away in the reeds. It would be the best sighting of the day. Also spotted on the waters' surface was a Caribbean Yellowface, a beautiful blue-and-black damselfly with a yellow face. On the way back we saw another Altamira Oriole and near it an old nest. After returning to the visitor center we saw another Curve-billed Thrasher that foraged nearby in the underbrush. There were also some Wild Turkeys who managed to steal food from some hanging bird feeders. Just as we were pulling out of the parking lot, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was spotted on a tree low to the ground.

We had lunch at a nearby diner then resumed the days' activities. The National Butterfly Center was close by so it didn't take long to get there. After checking in, we drove straight back to the bird feeder station. Most everyone stayed there and saw another Audubon's Oriole then got captivated by a young Cooper's Hawk that decided it was going to bathe and just sit in the water feature. All other birds were obviously not keen on it being there and only one brave Kiskadee dared to take one swoop at it. We then went to the gardens by the main building to enjoy some butterflies. There, we were able to observe different species than those seen at Falcon State Park. We left the center and returned to the hotel for a brief rest. We then headed out to see another dusk spectacle. Centering around a busy shopping area, we witnessed thousands of birds that used the utility wires as a staging area before going to roost. We were there to see the Green Parakeets, which were far outnumbered by the tens of thousands of starlings, grackles, and Bronzed Cowbirds. The noise was almost deafening. After this dramatic display, we had our final dinner as a group.

## **Tue. Nov. 19 Edinburg Scenic Wetlands | Quinta Mazatlan | Departures**

Before the trip officially ended, we had a couple more places to visit. Before heading out, we did a recap of the trip and everyone shared their highlights. These trips mean something different for everyone and we were all satisfied with what we saw and the pleasant companionship. We reached the Edinburg World Birding Center,

and after checking in went straight back to the ponds and lagoon. Hundreds of birds were scattered around the main lagoon. There were many species of ducks, shorebirds, and waders. New for the list were several Black-crowned Night-Herons that were tucked away roosting in the trees. Behind us we heard a Green Kingfisher calling from a smaller pond. They are quite shy so we snuck over there and got brief views before it flew away to the far side. We then came across a loose mixed flock of birds and found another Nashville Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, and a Pine Warbler, the latter being new for the trip.

A few participants had an early departure so we made the first trip to the airport in McAllen. We said 'bye' to Bob, Sandy, Dragus, and Antonela, and hoped to see each other again someday. The rest of us went to the nearby Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center. We stopped by the main feeder area to see what was stirring. A very cooperative Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was there and was perching on the ground, exposing its yellow belly. A few Black-crested Titmouse and Clay-colored Thrushes were also present. As we were leaving, a Wood Thrush was spotted in the dense understory and would mark the 205<sup>th</sup> bird of the trip, a personal record for Bryan for this particular route.

We returned to the airport, bid everyone a farewell, and went our separate ways. This was Robert's last trip he would co-lead in the U.S.

### **Favorite Birds and Trip Highlights**

**Julie:** Crested Caracara, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Armadillo. Being at the border wall.

**Cliff:** Whooping Crane, Yellow-throated Warbler. Santa Ana and Sabal Palm were favorite places. Learning about habitat diversity in area. Seeing border wall.

**Bob:** Hermit Warbler, Cooper's Hawk bathing at the butterfly center. Going to Nat'l Butterfly Center. Learning about herps.

**Sandy:** Hermit Warbler, watching waders forage. Finding as many birds as possible. Learned that one's shadow can scare butterflies and explanation of plants and trees.

**Sara:** Least Bittern, Yellow-throated Warbler, Roadrunner, Long-billed Thrasher. Sabal Palm Sanctuary favorite place. Learned shorebirds seeing many species together.

**Dragus:** Really loved Texas. Garbage dump. Boat ride. Great guiding with Bryan. Seeing butterflies was a bonus.

**Antonela:** Nesting Barn Owls, hybrid oriole, Altamira Oriole. Good description of separating two species of cormorants. Spent time learning some bird songs. Sabal Palm Sanctuary favorite place and liked the parrot roost.

**Peg:** Pauraque, Hermit Warbler, Whooping Cranes. Photographing avocets. Really like the group. Learned that the Caribbean Yellowface was 'polyamorous.'

**Mark:** Whooping Cranes, Hermit Warbler. Liked the description of how to separate both species of cormorants in flight.

**Bryan:** Iceland Gull was #500 for his Texas list. Hermit Warbler, Pauraque, Audubon's Oriole. Indigo snakes and Caribbean Yellowface. Learned that Olive Sparrow postures and chatters with other sparrows.

**Robert:** Burrowing Owl a Lifer. Aransas boat ride. Enjoyed showing butterflies.

*Photo Credits: Group, Bryan Calk; Boats Scenic, Dragos Zanchi; Winter Wren, Bob Sipe; Long-billed Curlew, Clifford Drowley; Whooping Cranes, Bob Sipe; Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Sandy Sipe; Group, Group, Robert Gallardo; Coyotes, Burrowing Owl, Sandy Sipe; Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Bob Sipe; Lizard Lunch, Julie Hagan; Green Jay, Dragos Zanchi; Verdin, Julie Hagan; Plain Chachalaca, Bob Sipe; Bryan*

*with Indigo Snake, Sandy Sipe; Armadillo, Julie Hagan; Roseate Skimmer, Sandy Sipe; Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Robert Gallardo; Audubon's Oriole, Sandy Sipe; Pyrrhuloxia, Clifford Drowley; Zebra Longwing, Bob Sipe; Black-throated Sparrow, Shame Plant, Sandy Sipe; Striped Black Scorpion, Bob Sipe.*