

Texas Coast & Big Thicket Species List | April 22-27, 2026 with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by guides Steve Shunk and Dave Mehlman, joined by TNC hosts Seth Blitch and Steve Sondheimer. Clients included Ann, Barbara, Bonnie, Carole, Diane, Dianne, Jane B., Jane T., John, Kathryn, Richard, and Russell.

Naturalist Journeys is pleased to occasionally partner with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to host its Legacy Journeys, on which they invite planned-giving donors to explore properties with significant conservation value and to learn about local TNC and other conservation efforts. This year, they joined us for spring migration on the Upper Texas Coast.

The annual spring migration on the Texas Coast draws birders from around the world to celebrate the arrival of long-distance neotropical migrants that cross the Gulf of Mexico on their routes to northern breeding grounds. We primarily explored the renowned migrant traps at High Island and the waterbird expanse at Bolivar Flats. Our tour also included some time in the Big Thicket, with its unique bottomland habitats that support a broad array of additional bird species, many of which breed here at the southwestern limits of their ranges.

Beyond the birds, this region of Texas hosts many other wild specialties, including such southeastern U.S. endemics as the Swamp Rabbit, American Alligator, and Northern Cottonmouth. We hiked among longleaf pine savannahs, oak mottes, and a carnivorous plant bog. And we explored the diverse wetland habitats on the west bank of the Brazos River, the longest river to flow entirely within Texas.

Below are summaries of the birds and other wildlife we encountered. Click the links for detailed lists and photos, and enjoy this vicarious dive into the wilds of East Texas.

THE BIRDS

Our birding adventures took us to some of the best regional hotspots. We did not encounter the inclement weather that might have triggered a big migrant 'fallout', but we still tallied 25 shorebird species—with a one-day high of 22—plus 15 warblers and 13 raptors, including baby Barn Owls and a rare pair of Burrowing Owls. Daily highlights included Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Boat-tailed Grackle, and Painted Bunting. One of the biggest treats of the trip was a single flock of more than 280 Buff-breasted Sandpipers. A Pileated Woodpecker gave us a very close encounter in the Big Thicket, and a bathing Cape May topped the warbler highlights.

Click the link below to access our master eBird trip report. Once you reach the report, you will first see the list of species we encountered, in taxonomic order. Clicking on the name of any species will take you to the eBird reference page for that bird. Clicking the green icons to the right will show you checklists from all the birding spots where we encountered each species; these listings link to the checklists themselves. Back on the main page, you can access the complete set of 22 checklists from the tour by clicking the blue box at the top, or by clicking "Show all details" in the top right corner.

[Texas Coast & Big Thicket | April 22-27, 2026 | eBird Trip Report](#)

And the non-avian highlights ...

COMMON CLASS NAME — # of species encountered

Species common name (*Genus species*)—# of days encountered

Locations and interesting notes; click the link at the bottom to reach Steve's iNaturalist images from the trip.

MAMMALS — 4

Mexican Long-nosed Armadillo (*Dasyops mexicanus*)—2?!

Once considered a subspecies of the Nine-banded Armadillo of South America, we unfortunately only saw this common species as roadkill.

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)—3

We found this common native squirrel in varied woodland habitats.

Swamp Rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*)—3

This chunky cottontail species is typically shy and nocturnal, but it is very accustomed to disturbance in local wetland habitats. We saw a few of them at High Island and Brazos Bend.

"Texas" White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus ssp. texanus*)—1

Seen only once, at Brazos Bend State Park

REPTILES — (6)

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)—4

This common, iconic, and all-but-endemic species of southeastern U.S. swamps is listed as "threatened due to similarity of appearance" with the endangered American Crocodile (Feel free to look up the explanation!). We saw many alligators along the coast and at Brazos Bend, including one roadkill north of High Island.

"Red-eared" Pond Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)—1

We recorded this incredibly common species on only one day, though we likely overlooked it on other days. The native range of this Pond Slider subspecies generally covers the south-central U.S., but its introduction around the globe has earned it the reputation as "The world's most problematic turtle." (Turtle Haven, CT, 2022)

American Softshell Turtle sp. (*Apalone sp.*)—1

Possibly Spiny Softshell (*A. spinifera*, possibly "Pallid" subsp., *A. s. pallida*) seen at High Island rookery.

Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*)—2

We saw this small native lizard at the Pitcher Plant Trail and at High Island. Indigenous populations are endemic to the eastern U.S., but humans have introduced the species to Caribbean and Pacific islands and California.

Common Five-lined Skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*)—2

We found this common and widespread eastern U.S. endemic at the Pitcher Plant Trail and at Tyrell Park in Beaumont.

Northern Cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*)—1

We had an amazing encounter with a cottonmouth at Lafitte's Cove Nature Preserve, south of Galveston. In the woodland habitat, we were drawn to a group of birders intently watching something at the small water feature. As we approached, we found this impressive pit viper swallowing an adult male Baltimore Oriole! The locals told us that the snake frequently hides in the water dish to catch unwary, thirsty birds. One of the world's only truly semiaquatic pit vipers (along with the Florida Cottonmouth), this southeastern U.S. endemic occurs only in the southern Mississippi drainage (generally south of Illinois) and along the southern Atlantic Coast.

OTHER NOTABLE FAUNA

We were not very diligent about keeping track of butterflies and other wild macro-critters, but a couple of species deserve special note.

Viceroy (*Limenitis Archippus*)—1

Brazos Bend State Park offered interesting habitat diversity to our journey, and it presented us with the butterfly that caught our attention the most. This Müllerian co-mimic of the Monarch is often misidentified, but we thankfully got a photo for confirmation.

Common Lovebug (*Plecia nearctica*)—7

None of us will forget the emergence of adult lovebugs that occurred during our trip. They were everywhere, including on our clothes, vehicles, and optics, often in swarms. Compounding the annoyance of their abundance was their delicacy; when you try to brush them off, they kind of fall apart! True to their name, most of them seemed to be pairs that were connected at the abdomens, happy—so to speak—to be making more lovebugs.

[Link to Steve's iNaturalist observations \(including the cottonmouth!\)](#)