



South Texas - Rio Grande Valley: Photo-Friendly Birding

April 8 - 15, 2021

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with 3 participants:

Niki, Dina & Jay

List compiled by GREG SMITH



Summary: This tour was going to try a little later in spring than most other tours to this part of Texas. It was birding and it was photography, and every season has specialties in both respects. The tour was going to take advantage of the various habitats of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the nesting residents and migrants that were making their way north. It is all about timing when it comes to nesting, so the right time for the photography of birds would be during nest construction and when the young have hatched. If the birds are incubating, they very are quiet and not moving around very much. But when the young hatch, they are calling, foraging, and being very interactive vocally. For some of the nesting species like kingfishers, they were still incubating and very hard to find. For other species like Green Jay, they were out and about actively foraging. For birds migrating north from Central and South America, coastal landing sites after a night of migration over the Gulf of Mexico were filled with numerous species of birds. And all of these birds were hungry, thirsty and tired, so all you had to do was sit and let them move out in front of you. For migration, it always seems to be later is better...

Anatidae: Ducks and Geese (12)

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis* (5)— The second most common duck we saw on our tour after Blue-winged Teal.

Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata* — Three males and a female were seen flying overhead near the McAllen waterworks.

Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors* — In most large bodies of water on most every outing.

Cinnamon Teal *Spatula cyanoptera* — Seen at only two locations Estero Llano Grande and Santa Ana NWR and no more than 2-3 birds at either location.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* — Uncommon and limited in freshwater wetlands.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* — Only seen in small numbers (2-3 pairs) at three different locations.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana* — Only seen on one day, as most had headed north.

Mottled Duck *Anas fulvigula* — This is the most common resident dabbling of South Texas, present at most wetland sites.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca* — We saw only three of this species, and that was with a lot of effort.

Redhead *Aythya americana* — Over 80% of the world's Redheads winter on South Texas and Tamaulipas bays, we were only able to find one drake.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* — Again, another solo sighting for the entire trip, near the South Padre Convention Center.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* — At three locations, and only in small numbers

Cracidae: Guans and Chachalacas (1)

Plain Chachalaca *Ortalis vetula* — Close views of many of these birds at any of the refuges that had bird feeders.

Odontophoridae: New World Quails (1)

Scaled Quail *Callipepla squamata* — The feeders at Rancho Lomitas is the only place we got to see these classy looking quail. And given that it was nesting season, we felt lucky getting to about eight of these.

Podicipedidae: Grebes (2)

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus* — Present at most freshwater wetlands., but not in large numbers.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* — Common and widespread in most freshwater wetlands.

Columbidae: Pigeons and Doves (7)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* — Common in urban areas and around large farm buildings.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* — Small numbers throughout the Rio Grande Valley, most all of the time around structures.

Inca Dove *Columbina inca* — Sporadic sightings of small groups or single pairs, usually in less urban areas..

Common Ground-Dove *Columbina passerine* — Few and far between, and never sitting still for any length of time.

White-tipped Dove *Leptotila verreauxi* — Fairly common in wooded areas of the Valley, and solo individuals usually seen at feeders

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica* — Sporadic at best, and surprisingly uncommon.

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* — Ubiquitous in in the Rio Grande Valley.

Cuculidae: Cuckoos (1)

Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus* -We heard a few and saw only one, at Rancho Lomitas.

Trochilidae: Hummingbirds (2)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris* — We had quite a few in the flowering trees around the SPI Convention Center.

Buff-bellied Hummingbird *Amazilia yucatanensis* — Best views were at the feeders at Estero Llano Grande.

Railidae: Rails & Allies (3)

Sora *Porzana Carolina* – Wonderful views of foraging individuals in the open at the SPI Convention Center.

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata* — Seen at just about any reed-fringed freshwater wetlands.

American Coot *Fulica americana* — Ubiquitous in both freshwater and coastal habitats.

Recurvirostridae: Stilts and Avocets (2)

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus* — Frequent, but in very small numbers at both fresh and coastal wetlands.

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana* — We probably only saw five individuals, but those five were in stunning alternate plumage.

Charadriidae: Plovers and Lapwings (4)

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* — We only got to see two, but we saw them very well.

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia* — Only a couple of these, and at the same location on Highway 4.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius melodus* — Most had left this part of the coast, hence we only saw one.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* — Not in large numbers, but seen in most wetland areas, and some farmland.

Scolopacidae: Sandpipers and Allies (18)

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* – A few along the coast were probably heading north within days

Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus* — We had two very small groups on the Old Port Isabel Road fields.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa* — Our only sighting of these handsome shorebirds was a group of 15 or so on the Zapata flats.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* — Only two birds were seen, and both were singles out on SPI.

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris Himantopus* – Small flocks were out at the Space X launch pad on Boca Chica.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* — Not numerous but there were always one or two on sandy beaches along the coast.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* — We saw a total of three birds on the tour.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* — The most numerous small peep on the coastal flats and the freshwater wetlands at Estero Llano Grande.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* – Only saw one, and that was right at our feet on the SPI boardwalk.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* — A few on the sandy beaches at the South Padre Island Convention Center flats.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* — Flocks along the coast and at a couple of the freshwater wetlands

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* — Uncommon at best, only id'ed by call

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* — Only saw one and that was at Estero Llano Grande.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* — We only saw two or three of these, and all were on resacas.

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* — We saw two different individuals, both at Santa Ana NWR.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* — Most had already left for the far north, but we did see a half dozen on the tour.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata* — We saw one mostly unbarred Western individual, and a number of Easterns that had just arrived on their nesting sites from further south.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* — More common than the Greater Yellowlegs, but still not numerous.

Laridae: Gulls and Terns (10)

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla* — Everywhere along the coast and a few lingering birds inland.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* — A couple of individuals were along the coast.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* — We saw one sub-adult out along the water's edge on Boca Chica.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* — On the sand flats next to the SPI Convention Center and scattered sightings along other parts of the coast.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* — Seen along the Rio Grande and at a few coastal sites.

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* — Not common at most of the sites we visited, but there were a few at some at Delta Lake.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* — Common on sandy beaches along the coast, with some concentrations at the South Padre Convention Center.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* — We had at least eight with other resting terns on the sand north of the SPI Convention Center.

Least Tern *Sterna antillarum* — A couple of small flocks were mixed in the terns on SPI.

Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger* — A large flock was roosting on the sand flats next to the SPI Convention Center.

Anhingidae: Anhingas (1)

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga* — Seen twice, and both times were along a resaca.

Phalacrocoracidae: Cormorants (2)

Neotropic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax brasilianus* — The common cormorant, and widespread, mostly in freshwater habitats.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* — Mostly seen out along the coast, but not in large numbers.

Pelecanidae: Pelicans (2)

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* — Our best view was a flock of about 125 birds flying in a "V" and heading north.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis* — Common whenever we traveling along the coast.

Ardeidae: Herons and Egrets (10)

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis* — Amle doing a food exchange with his mate on SPI gave us some wonderful looks.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* — Individuals were at just about all wetlands on our tour route.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* — By no means common away from any of its nesting rookeries.

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula* — the most numerous of all the herons at the wetlands we visited.

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea* — ones or twos at Port Aransas Wetlands, Santa Ana & Estero Llano Grande.

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor* — small numbers in both fresh and saltwater habitats.

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens* — We had great views of both dark and white morphs, including some with nuptial fluorescent-pink bills.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* — our only sightings were at a shopping mall in downtown Alamo (!) and of birds coming into roost at Edinburg Wetlands.

Green Heron *Butorides virescens* — Not too many, but easily found and seen at the Edinburg Wetlands

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* — A solo bird was seen in the early morning at Santa Ana NWR. While not rare, most adults were likely on eggs.

Threskiornithidae: Ibis and Spoonbills (3)

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* — Very uncommon at this time of year with nesting ongoing.

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi* — Our only sightings were at Santa Ana NWR.

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* — We only saw a single bird out on SPI, as nesting season was in full swing.

Cathartidae: New World Vultures (2)

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus* — Widespread, and not nearly as common as its larger brethren.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* — Everywhere, there seemed to be resident birds along with large numbers of migrants moving north.

Pandionidae: Osprey (1)

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* — Not common, but seen daily along the coast and at larger inland wetlands.

Accipitridae: Hawks, Kites, and Eagles (9)

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* — Single birds seen hunting low over fields on only two occasions.

Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus* — Accipiters were almost non-existent, but we did have an immature Cooper's chasing an immature Sharpie.

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii* — As above with the Sharp-shinned.

Harris's Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus* — The most common raptor (and best looking...) observed throughout the Valley and on the wildlife refuges.

White-tailed Hawk *Geranoaetus albicaudatus* — Best looks at this snake-eating species were along the Old Port Isabel Road.

Gray Hawk *Buteo plagiatus* — A nesting bird at the NABA site was the only individual seen on the trip.

Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus* — We were extremely fortunate to walk into Santa Ana NWR early in the morning where a large congregation of migrating birds had set down the night before.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni* — A couple of small groups & numerous individuals seen in the Valley.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* — Several seen of the typical western and eastern birds. Some with almost unmarked underparts were of the local resident race fuertesi.

Alcedinidae: Kingfishers (1)

Green Kingfisher *Chloroceryle americana* — We only saw one kingfisher species for the entire tour, most likely because birds were on eggs. And our sighting of this species was a brief flyby.

Picidae: Woodpeckers (4)

Golden-fronted Woodpecker *Melanerpes aurifrons* — Very common in all wooded and suburban habitats.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius* — A leftover wintering bird was at Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Picoides scalaris* — Less frequently encountered than Golden-fronted Woodpecker, but in a wider range of habitats, including mesquite scrub.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* — Seen only twice, and both times it was along the edges of resacas.

Falconidae: Falcons and Caracaras (4)

Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* — Frequently seen, but mostly in the more arid areas with plenty of grassland habitat.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* — We a few individuals of this wintering raptor in the Valley.

Aplomado Falcon *Falco femoralis* — We had a distant look of an individual perched on a nesting platform along Old Port Isabel Road.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* — Only one was seen, and it was perched on the water tank above the SPI Convention Center.

Parrots: Psittacidae (2)

Red-crowned Parrot *Amazona viridigenalis* — An unforgettable experience was the sight (and sound!) of at least 200 parrots, mostly Red-crowned Parrot, flying in at dusk to roost in the trees at Oliveira Park in Brownsville.

White-fronted Parrots *Amazona albifrons* - At Oliveira Park we had at least thirty birds with one pair copulating on an eucalyptus branch.

Tyrannidae: Tyrant Flycatchers (7)

Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans* — One seen foraging along the resaca nearby our dinner location at Lola's in Brownsville.

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Ptychocephalus rubinus* — A calling bird was seen in the drier areas of Delta Lake

Brown-crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus tyrannulus* — A pair were seen interacting and calling at Estero Llano Grande.

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus* — Seen just about everywhere in the Valley, usually near some type of water body.

Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus* — We came across kingbirds in most places we visited in the Valley and were easy to identify with their song.

Couch's Kingbird *Tyrannus couchii* — Easily located and identified by call and bill shape.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus* — Small groups of migrants were foraging as they moved north.

Vireonidae: Vireos (2)

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus* — Mostly heard out on SPI, but one outstanding look at in a leafless tree along the boardwalk at SPI's Convention Center.

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus* — Not common but seen quite well in the flowering trees at the SPI Convention Center.

Laniidae: Shrikes (1)

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus* — Seen in numerous locations in non-developed inland areas.

Corvidae: Jays and Crows (2)

Green Jay *Cyanocorax yncas* — Very nice close views at feeding stations, with the best at Laguna Atascosa.

Chihuahuan Raven *Corvus cryptoleucus* — Not easy to find, apparently because of extant nesting. But we did find one at Rancho Lomita that gave us some good looks.

Paridae: Tits and Chickadees (1)

Black-crested Titmouse *Baeolophus atricristatus* — in all wooded habitats throughout South Texas, more often noticed by song than by being seen.

Hirundinidae: Swallows and Martins (5)

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* — Not frequently encountered on the tour.

Purple Martin *Progne subis* — Regularly seen, especially where folks had martin houses set up.

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor* — Small flocks were observed moving north?

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* — Just a few individuals, and not in flocks. Maybe nesting birds.

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva* — Mostly seen where there were nesting colonies under culverts, Bentsen-Rio Grande SP.

Polioptilidae: Gnatcatchers (1)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Polioptila caerulea* — Seen sporadically in woodlands, with the best view at Estero Llano Grande.

Troglodytidae: Wrens (4)

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris* — An apparent migrant along the boardwalk on SPI, that was apparently very tired, as it sat on a pile of reeds at our feet looing disheveled and preening quietly.

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus* — A pair gave us great looks foraging just on the other side of the canal at Santa Ana NWR.

Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii* — We found these birds, primarily because they sounded so different from what a west coast bird sounds like.

Cactus Wren *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* — We heard these birds at the feeders at Rancho Lomitas and only had fleeting glimpses.

Sturnidae: Starlings (1)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* — No flocks of this species, just pairs perched near nest cavities in poles.

Mimidae: Mockingbirds (4)

Curve-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma curvirostre* — Observed in drier areas with our best look at a bird in the NABA center.

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum* — Seen and heard out at Laguna Atascosa NWR.

Long-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma longirostre* — Observed and heard at multiple locations in the Valley., with best looks at Laguna Atascosa NWR.

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* — Very common and widespread throughout all of the South Texas sites we visited.

Turdidae: Thrushes (2)

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* — A couple of individuals out in the area in the vegetated middle of the SPI Convention Center parking lot.

Veery *Catharus fuscescens* — Our only sighting was of a bird in the understory near the SPI Convention Center's water feature.

Passeridae: Old World Sparrows (1)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* — Common around homes, McDonalds and feeding stations.

Emberizidae: Sparrows (8)

Cassin's Sparrow *Peucaea cassinii* — We had them singing and displaying on the Old Port Isabel Road.

Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum* — Wonderful looks at two different birds on the road out Rancho Lomitas.

Olive Sparrow *Arremonops rufivirgatus* — A common, but somewhat secretive bird in the Valley.

Black-throated Sparrow *Amphispiza bilineata* (HO) — We heard this species at Rancho Lomitas, but it was being a little on the shy side.

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* — Scattered in the grain fields to the NE of McAllen.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* — The most frequently encountered sparrow both near the ocean and out around the inland grassy fields.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* — Certainly not common but seen well in the mudflats adjacent to the SPI Convention Center.

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* — A fairly common migrant with our best views at the SPI Convention Center.

Icteridae: Blackbirds and Orioles (8)

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna* — Sitting right outside our vehicle window and singing away on the beach.

Hooded Oriole *Icterus cucullatus* — Quite common as migrant out on SPI and at Santa Ana NWR.

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius* — We had at least a half dozen in the flowering trees at the SPI Convention Center.

Altamira Oriole *Icterus gularis* — Excellent photo ops of this stunning oriole at Santa Ana NWR.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus* — Pretty common and widespread.

Bronzed Cowbird *Molothrus aeneus* — Scattered, but our best sighting was a male with three females at Laguna Atascosa NWR.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater* — Only seen foraging with a flock of Indigo Buntings on SPI.

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus* — Everywhere!

Parulidae: Wood-Warblers (12)

Louisiana Waterthrush *Parkesia motacilla* — Great looks out on SPI in the same leafless shrub where we had the White-eyed Vireo.

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* — Great looks of a at Edinburg Wetlands.

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata* — the second most frequent warbler we came across in the Valley.

Nashville Warbler *Oreothlypis ruficapilla* — We had a few of these at the SPI Convention Center.

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas* — Seen around the freshwater wetlands at South Padre and Santa Ana NWR

Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrinia* — A very confiding male working the flowering trees at the SPI Convention Center.

Northern Parula *Setophaga americana* — We had both a male and a female out on SPI.

Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor* — Two different individuals wagging their tails out in front of the convention center.

Tennessee Warbler *Leiothlypis peregrina* — Plenty of these sharper-in-spring-than-in-fall birds out on SPI.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata* — Only saw about a dozen of these mountain minions, and the males were sporting some fine spring colors.

Hooded Warbler *Setophaga citrina* — Amazing, we saw three of these birds, all females.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla* — Definitely heard more than seen in the flowering shrubs at the Convention center.

Cardinalidae: Grosbeaks and Buntings (7)

Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra* — Best look was out at SPI at the convention center. It was a quick look though.

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis* — Common and widespread throughout South Texas, especially in the NWR's.

Pyrrhuloxia *Cardinalis sinuatus* — Great views of this gaudy gray and pink species on the road to Rancho Lomitas.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* — Only two, the best being a very accommodating female at the SPI Convention Center.

Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* — One and only one, and it was the first bird at the convention center after getting out of the car on the 15th.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina yanea* — That flock of 10 birds at the convention center was pretty cool.

Painted Bunting *Passerina cirius* — First male was at the Santa Ana NWR, while the second male was out at the convention center.

MAMMALS (5 species recorded):

Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus* — A very common species in most areas of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as we birded around.

Eastern Fox Squirrel *Sciurus niger* — In the mesquite bosques along the river and in other well forested areas.

Mexican Ground Squirrel *Ictidomys mexicanus* — Uncommon at best and found mostly in the more arid regions of the valley.

Collared Peccary *Tayassu tajacu* - Seen a couple of times, but the best looks were at Santa Ana NWR.

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus* — Scattered sightings, usually small family groups in an open clearing.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS (9 species recorded):

American Alligator *Alligator mississippiensis* – We had a few moving around on the surface of Laguna Atascosa.

Red-eared Slider *Trachemys scripta* – Seemed to be that most common turtle we saw on our tour.

Texas Cooter *Pseudemys texana* – We saw a few of these with the best sighting being of a female excavating a nest burrow.

Texas Spiny Softshell *Apalone spinifera emoryi* - Only one place we saw these and that was at the resaca near our dinner spot in Brownsville.

Brown Anole *Anolis sagrei* – A non-native that was common in trees and shrubs with a well-developed understory.

Green Anole *Anolis carolinensis* – The native Anole was seen in more urban settings than rural.

Blue Spiny Lizard *Sceloporus cyanogenys* – Not seen more than a couple of times on the tour with the best looks at Santa Ana NWR.

Rose-bellied Lizard *Sceloporus variabilis* – Very common in the understory of mesquite bosques.

Laredo Whiptail *Aspidoscelis laredoensis* – Numerous whiptail species are in Texas, but the only one we were able to definitely identify was this one. Very common at Santa Ana NWR.