

Texas Coast & Big Thicket | Trip Report

April 14 - 22, 2023 | by Pat Lueders



With guides Pat Lueders & Mason Flint and participants: Jayne, Gail, Marty, Bill, Thomas, Maryann, Lorna, Jack, Liz, Linda and Lisa



Fri., April 14

Arrivals in Houston | W.G. Jones State Forest

We all gathered at the Houston Airport and immediately went birding! We visited the W.G. Jones State Forest where we found four Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, a very special bird and our main target for this area, vocalizing and visiting their nest cavities. What a great beginning to our trip! We also had great looks at Red-headed Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Pine Warblers and a very cooperative Northern Mockingbird. We enjoyed a delicious welcome dinner and celebrated our exciting first day in Texas.

Sat., April 15

Travel to Jasper | Sam Houston National Forest Big Creek Scenic Area | Lake Livingston Dam Martin Dies State Park

We happily left the traffic of the Houston area and traveled northeast, birding our way to Jasper. Our first stop was the Sam Houston National Forest looking for nesting warblers. We had good looks at Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler and White-eyed Vireos, and heard Swainson's and Pine Warblers. A stop at the lovely Big Creek



Scenic Area was also fruitful with good looks at a Summer Tanager, Pileated Woodpecker and Louisiana Waterthrush. A stop at the Lake Livingston Dam before lunch provided good scope views of Forester's Terns, Neotropic Cormorant and many American White Pelicans, egrets and herons. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were perched on the fence with nesting Killdeer below them. After lunch at a colorful Tex-Mex restaurant, we visited the Martin Dies State Park and found many White Ibis, Bald Eagles, Ospreys and Anhingas. We checked into our hotel, went to a local bar-b-que spot for dinner and tallied the many species we had seen on this, our first full day of birding near the Big Thicket.

Sun., April 16 Martin Dies SP | Sandy Creek Park

We returned today to Martin Dies SP finding Great Crested Flycatchers, Summer Tanagers and breeding plumaged Black-throated Green Warblers. A big surprise was when Martin found a well-hidden Eastern Screech-Owl, difficult to even photograph! At the local Jasper Sandy Creek Park, a Red-shouldered Hawk posed for pictures and Black Vultures circled overhead. After lunch, we had additional looks at Brown-headed Nuthatches and a flock of Cedar Waxwings at lovely Boykin Springs in the Angelina National Forest with beautiful, picturesque waterfalls

Mon., April 17 Winnie | Big Thicket Pitcher Plant Trail | Sabine Woods

Working our way southwest to Winnie, our first stop today was the breathtaking Pitcher Plant Trail in Big Thicket National Park. This hike around the pitcher plants was productive, with good looks at Kentucky and Hooded Warblers, Northern Parula and a Carolina Wren. We drove to Sabine Woods after lunch, a famous warbler location, and saw 11 warbler species including Blue-winged, Prothonotary, Orange-crowned and Hooded as well as Blue Grosbeaks, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and a Crested Caracara. We hated to leave! We checked into our new hotel in Winnie and enjoyed a Tex-Mex meal at a local restaurant, celebrating another successful day of birding!

Tue., April 18 Rollover Pass | Tuna Road | High Island-Boy Scout Woods | Smith Oaks Sanctuary



We started the day at Rollover Pass, a well-known location for shorebirds and waders. Wow! Hundreds of birds were on the beach within a few yards of us including six species of terns, Black Skimmers, American Avocets, American Oystercatchers, Whimbrels, Marbled Godwits, Ruddy Turnstones, Dunlin and Willet. Seven Roseate Spoonbills flew by us, and it took over two hours to successfully pick through all of the species. Nearby, a drive down Tuna Road provided great looks at vocalizing Seaside Sparrows, Nelson's Sparrows, Clapper Rails and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. After lunch, we visited Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks Sanctuary, home to many nesting egrets, herons, cormorants and spoonbills. What a memorable spectacle of nature! While visiting the feeders at Katrina's Corner, a Swainson's Warbler briefly visited the water drip. What good luck! All agreed this was a day we would never forget!

Wed., April 19

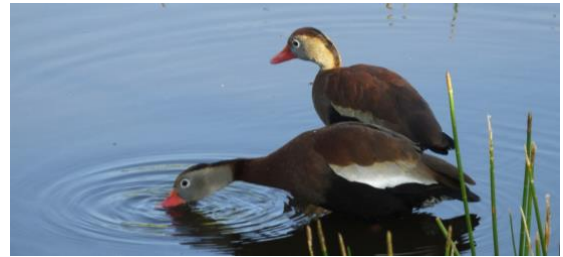
Rollover Pass | Gregory Park | Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary

This morning we returned to Rollover Pass to sort through the large variety of shorebirds and added Baird's Sandpiper, Tricolored Herons and Long-billed Dowitchers to our growing list. At Gregory Park, Eastern Meadowlarks, Solitary Sandpipers and a Loggerhead Shrike were spotted. After a seafood lunch, we visited Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary, one of the country's most important stopovers for migrating shorebirds to refuel. Again, hundreds of shorebirds were on the beach at close range, and we were excited to see Wilson's Plovers, Piping Plovers, Red Knot, White-tailed Kites and Reddish Egret. Wow, life sightings for many of the group!

Thu., April 20

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

Today we visited the world-famous Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. The wildlife drive provided many new species for the group including the beautiful Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Common and Purple Gallinules, Black-necked Stilts, Stilt Sandpipers and both Glossy and White-faced Ibises. All three grackle species and a Bronzed Cowbird were also seen. The day was perfect except for the wind, which unexpectedly blew Mason's scope off the boardwalk. With some ingenuity, it was fished from the few feet of marsh water and was thankfully unharmed! After dinner, we enjoyed filling out the checklist with all of our new species.



Fri., April 21

High Island-Smith Oaks Sanctuary | Port Bolivar Galveston-Lafitte's Cove

We left Winnie to move closer to Houston, stopping for the final time at Smith Oaks Sanctuary where we found a Least Bittern at the entrance to the boardwalk. Good looks at Black-and-white, Tennessee, Black-throated Green and Yellow Warblers were also available next to the Visitors Center. At the ferry landing, a pair of Crested Caracaras perched on the poles, and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were on the utility line. In Galveston, Lafitte's Cove provided a lovely walk along a pond and a forested area. Mottled Ducks along with both Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, were on the pond, and a fallout of 15+ Scarlet Tanagers was a surprising and glorious sight in the woods. Many Summer Tanagers and six warbler species were also found. We checked into our new hotel and prepared for our last day on the Texas Coast.

Sat., April 22

Brazos Bend State Park | Departures from Houston

All felt that one of the best locations was saved for last. Brazos Bend State Park was a beautiful combination of live oak woods with Spanish moss, wetlands and ponds. Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night-Herons were on the edges of the ponds. The most surprising addition were a pair of Limpkins, previously reported by birders, and an American Bittern feeding in the marsh. As we drove to the airport, we all agreed that this was a fabulous ending to a truly memorable week birding the Texas Coast!

Photos: W.G. Jones State Forest, Summer Tanager, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Roseate Spoonbill, Pitcher Plant (NJ Stock), Hooded Warbler, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Eastern Screech-Owl, Cedar Waxwing, American Oystercatcher, Clapper Rail, Roseate Spoonbill in flight, Black-and-white Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks